



## **Estonian Orthodox Christian Church issues statement in response to amendments to the Churches and congregations act**



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On April 9, 2025, the Riigikogu (Estonian Parliament) adopted amendments to the Churches and Congregations Act, which directly target the Estonian Orthodox Christian Church and the Pühtitsa Monastery. In a press release published on the website of the Estonian Orthodox Church, the following was stated:

"Great Lent is drawing to a close, and Holy Week is approaching. Once again, we Christians are given the opportunity to relive what happened in Bethany, Gethsemane, and Golgotha 2,000 years ago, as we enter the most sacred time of the church year. Let us reflect on all that happened to Christ and follow Him in our lives here and now. Let us take time to walk with Christ through His sufferings, which we commemorate in our services, so that we may also partake in the joy of the Resurrection.

On April 9, the Riigikogu passed amendments to the Churches and Congregations Act, which directly affect all of us. Although laws should be universal, it is clear that in this case, we are dealing with legislation specifically aimed against the Estonian Orthodox Christian Church and the Pühtitsa Monastery. Despite the fact that we have always been a law-abiding Church, complying with all laws of the Republic of Estonia and contributing to the well-being of Estonian society, it was deemed necessary to amend the law.

Over the past six months, following the political statement by the Minister of the Interior in the Riigikogu, there has been no substantive discussion. Instead of direct dialogue, we have witnessed a carefully prepared and communications-expert-coordinated media campaign, featuring articles that predominantly present the arguments of one side, as well as subjective opinions of experts and theologians representing the state or another Orthodox Church. This has inevitably influenced the mood and attitudes of our parishioners toward the situation.

The positions voiced during the reading of the law either pointed to restrictions on religious freedom or failed to recognize them, instead appealing to security concerns. We still believe this directly limits our freedom of religion. We will ask the President and the Chancellor of Justice to evaluate this matter and will appeal to international organizations, as religious freedom is universal and touches upon global principles.

The amendments adopted today were an expected outcome, given the entire process. However, this does not mean we will abandon our rights and principles. We will continue our ministry in our parishes. If we entrust ourselves to the Lord and seek His will in our lives without grumbling or despair, He will not leave us without His help and will guide us through all trials."

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