

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses wait in a court room in Moscow, Russia, on Thursday. Russia's Supreme Court has banned the Jehovah's Witnesses from operating in the country, accepting a request from the justice ministry that the religious organization be considered an extremist group.

AP photo by Ivan Sekretarev



Jehovah's Witnesses banned in Russia

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia's Supreme Court on Thursday banned Jehovah's Witnesses from operating anywhere in the country, accepting a request from the justice ministry that the religious organization be considered an extremist group.

The court ordered the closure of the group's Russian headquarters and its 395 local chapters, as well as the seizure of its property.

The Interfax news agency on Thursday quoted Justice Ministry attorney Svetlana Borisova in court as saying that Jehovah's Witnesses pose a threat to Russians.

"They pose a threat to the rights of citizens, public order and public security," she told

the court.

Borisova also said Jehovah's Witnesses' opposition to blood transfusions violates Russian health care laws.

Yaroslav Sivulsky, a spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, said in a statement they are "greatly disappointed by this development and deeply concerned about how this will affect our religious activity."

Jehovah's Witnesses said they would appeal the ruling.

Jehovah's Witnesses claim more than 170,000 adherents in Russia. The group has come under increasing pressure over the past year, including a ban on distributing literature deemed to

violate Russia's anti-extremism laws.

Human Rights Watch criticized Thursday's decision as an impediment to religious freedom in Russia.

"The Supreme Court's ruling to shut down the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia is a terrible blow to freedom of religion and association in Russia," said Rachel Denber, deputy Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

The rights group also expressed concern that if the ruling takes effect, Jehovah's Witnesses could face criminal prosecution and punishment ranging from fines to prison time.

Church pastor where 9 were killed blasts political ad

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — The pastor of a South Carolina church where nine black members were killed in a racist attack said Thursday that a political ad calling politicians weak and panicked for taking down the Confederate flag after the massacre was distasteful.

"The events of a racist committing murder is something that never should be utilized to advance someone's political career," Emanuel AME Pastor Eric Manning said.

Sheri Few, a Republican running for an open U.S. house seat in the northern part of South Carolina, released the ad on the internet Wednesday. In it, she stands in front of an American flag with a semi-au-

tomatic assault weapon.

"Weak politicians are too quick to blame a horrible tragedy on a flag, or a gun or even free speech. And that's how bad laws are made," Few said in the ad.

Manning said Few needs to remove the ad immediately.

"We lived the events of June 17, 2015, and now someone wants to utilize our pain for their political gain. There's just no call for that. I think it is distasteful, to be very candid and direct," Manning said.

Few is one of seven candidates running for the GOP nomination to replace Republican Mick Mulvaney, who left the U.S. House earlier this year to become director of the Office of Management and

Budget.

Few said the ad will start running this weekend on cable channels in the district centered south of Charlotte, North Carolina.

Dylann Roof entered Emanuel AME and sat through Wednesday night Bible study for 45 minutes before opening fire during the closing prayer. He has been sentenced to death by a jury who found him guilty of federal hate crimes.

Few pointed out she never mentions the church specifically in her ad.

"I am a Christian. I love those people," Few said. "That's why I support the death penalty for that sick, deranged man. And I hope a liberal judge doesn't get in the way."

Presbyterian Preschool in Pendleton sets open house, registration

PENDLETON — Registration for the 2017-18 school year at the Presbyterian Preschool is coming up.

Families interested in finding out more about the preschool are invited to attend an open house Tuesday, April 25 from 3-5 p.m. or Thursday, April 27 from 5-7 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church, 201 S.W. Dorion Ave.,

Pendleton.

Preschool classes for 3-year-olds are held Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9-11:30 a.m., and kids 4 and 5 meet Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 9 a.m. to noon. To be eligible, children must be 3 or 4 by Sept. 1, 2017.

Registration is Monday, May 1 at 6:30 p.m. at the church. There is

a \$50 non-refundable fee.

The curriculum is based on social development and creative skills with a foundation in reading and writing readiness. Children are encouraged to make discoveries about themselves, new friends and to participate in muscle development.

For more information, call 541-276-7681.

President Carter, am I a Christian?

Christians celebrated Easter last Sunday. But wait — do we really think Jesus literally rose from the dead?

I asked questions like that in a Christmas Day column, interviewing the Rev. Tim Keller, a prominent evangelical pastor. In this, the second of an occasional series, I decided to quiz former President Jimmy Carter. He's a longtime Sunday school teacher and born-again evangelical but of a more liberal bent than Keller. Here's our email conversation, edited for clarity.

ME: How literally do you take the Bible, including miracles like the Resurrection?

CARTER: Having a scientific background, I do not believe in a six-day creation of the world that occurred in 4004 B.C., stars falling on the earth, that kind of thing. I accept the overall message of the Bible as true, and also accept miracles described in the New Testament, including the virgin birth and the Resurrection.

Q: With Easter having arrived, let me push you on the Resurrection. If you heard a report today from the Middle East of a man brought back to life after an execution, I doubt you'd believe it even if there were eyewitnesses. So why believe ancient accounts written years after the events?

A: I would be skeptical of a report like you describe. My belief in the resurrection of Jesus comes from my Christian faith, and not from any need for scientific proof. I derive a great personal benefit from the totality of this belief, which comes naturally to me.

Q: What about someone like me whose faith is in the Sermon on the Mount, who aspires to follow Jesus' teachings, but is skeptical that he was born of a virgin, walked on water, multiplied loaves and fishes or had a physical resurrection? Am I a Christian, President Carter?

A: I do not judge whether someone else is a Christian. Jesus said, "Judge not ..." I try to apply the teachings of Jesus in my own life, often without success.

Q: How can I reconcile my admiration for the message of Jesus, all about inclusion, with a church history that is often about exclusion?

A: As St. Paul said to the Galatians in 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." In His day, Jesus broke down walls of separation and superiority among people. Those (mostly men) who practice superiority and exclusion contradict my interpretations of the life and teachings of Jesus, which exemplified peace, love, compassion, humility, forgiveness and sacrificial love.

Q: Do you sometimes struggle with doubts about faith?



NICHOLAS KRISTOF
Comment

A: Yes, but eventually I decide what I believe, as an integral part of my existence and a guide for my life. This is based on what I consider to be the perfect life and example of Jesus.

Q: I think of you as an evangelical, but evangelicalism implies belief in inerrancy of Scripture. Do you share that, and if so, how do you account for contradictions within the Gospels?

A: I look on the contradictions among the Gospel writers as a sign of authenticity, based on their different life experiences, contacts with Jesus and each other. If the earlier authors of the Bible had been creating an artificial document, they would have eliminated disparities. I try to absorb the essence and meaning of the teachings of Jesus Christ, primarily as explained in the letters written by Paul to the early churches. When there are apparent discrepancies, I make a decision on what to believe, respecting the equal status and rights of all people.

Q: One of my problems with evangelicalism is that it normally argues that one can be saved only through a personal relationship with Jesus, which seems to consign Gandhi to hell. Do you believe that?

A: I do not feel qualified to make a judgment. I am inclined to give him (or others) the benefit of any doubt.

Q: Do you pray daily, and if so, do you believe in the efficacy of prayer in a miracle kind of way, or in a psychologically-this-helps-me-deal-with-the-world kind of way?

A: I pray often during each day, and believe in the efficacy of prayer in both ways. In my weekly Bible lessons, I teach that our Creator God is available at any moment to any of us, for guidance, solace, forgiveness or to meet our other needs. My general attitude is of thanksgiving and joy.

Q: Skeptics have noted that when prayers are "answered," there is usually an alternative explanation. But an amputee can pray for a new leg, and a new leg never grows back. Isn't that a reason to believe that prayer helps internally, but doesn't access miracles?

A: It is usually impossible to convince skeptics. For me, prayer helps internally, as a private conversation with my creator, who knows everything and can do anything. If I were an amputee, my prayer would be to help me make the best of my condition, to be a good follower of the perfect example set by Jesus Christ and to be thankful for life, freedom and opportunities to be a blessing to others. We are monitoring the status of cancer in my liver and brain, and my prayers are similar to this.

Nicholas Kristof grew up on a sheep and cherry farm in Yamhill. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1990 and 2006.

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