

Russian Baptists mourn death of Orthodox leader

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MOSCOW (ABP) — A Russian Baptist leader praised Patriarch Alexey II of the Russian Orthodox Church, who died Dec. 5, as a creator of "peace and consensus" during the post-communist and post-Soviet years in Russia.

The Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists [posted](#) a letter of condolence on its website within hours of the 79-year-old patriarch's death.

Yuri Sipko, the union's president, praised Alexey for his "massive, unifying role in the creation of peace and consensus during the travail of Russian society in the 1990s."

Voice of reconciliation

"In those days, the voice of the Russian Orthodox Church was a voice of reconciliation and hope," Sipko wrote. "We prize highly the courage and resolution which Patriarch Alexey II demonstrated during the formation of the New Russia."

Vitaly Vlasenko, the RUECB's director of external church relations, met with Alexey on numerous occasions. He praised his late colleague's efforts to further inter-confessional dialogue. Alexey was instrumental in fostering Orthodox-Baptist dialogue, which included two theological consultations in 2006 and 2007.

"The patriarch had a very elegant and warm style," Vlasenko said. "He always spoke to us kindly and remembered us Baptists very well. We felt like the Christian wisdom of the ages emanated from him. We hope very much that his successor will continue down the road of understanding

between our two churches — the route which Alexey himself had embarked upon."

Consulted with BWA

During a visit to Russia and Georgia in June, Neville Callam, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, also met with the patriarch, who [called](#) for continued consultation between the two groups on common moral values.

"We look forward to strong ties of friendship between you and the Baptists of this great country as we seek faithfulness in God in the face of the monster of secularism and the terror of sin," Callam told the Orthodox leader. "We are committed to spreading the good news of Jesus Christ, the hope of the world."

News reports did not indicate the cause of Alexey's death. His funeral, scheduled for Dec. 9, will be attended by Russian dignitaries including President Dimitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.