



In this Sunday, Aug. 22, 2021 photo, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, the spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, leads a Mass at the St. Sofia Cathedral in Kyiv, Ukraine. (AP Photo/Efrem Lukatsky)

by The Associated Press

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The spiritual leader of the world's 200 million Eastern Orthodox Christians was hospitalized Sunday in Washington on the first full day of a [planned 12-day U.S. visit](#) and will stay overnight, the [Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America](#) said.

The archdiocese said Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew was preparing to leave for a service at the [Cathedral of Saint Sophia](#) in the nation's capital when he felt unwell “due to the long flight and full schedule of events upon arrival.”

“His doctor advised him to rest and out an abundance of caution” go to George Washington University Hospital “for observation,” according to the archdiocese, Later Sunday, it said the patriarch “is feeling well” and was expected to be released Monday.

Bartholomew, 81, has a broad agenda spanning religious, political and environmental issues. His schedule includes a meeting Monday with President Joe Biden and various ceremonial and interfaith gatherings.

The patriarch is considered first among equals in the Eastern Orthodox hierarchy, which gives him prominence but not the power of a Catholic pope.

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Making the latest of several trips to the country during his 30 years in office, Bartholomew is expected to address concerns ranging from a pending restructuring of the American church to his church’s status in his homeland, Turkey.

Bartholomew is scheduled to receive an honorary degree from the University of Notre Dame on Thursday in an event highlighting efforts to improve Orthodox-Catholic ties, centuries after the two churches broke decisively in 1054 amid disputes over theology and papal claims of supremacy.

Just as his influence is limited in Turkey, it is also limited in the Eastern Orthodox communion, rooted in Eastern Europe and the Middle East with a worldwide diaspora. Large portions of the communion are in national churches that are independently governed, with the ecumenical patriarch having only symbolic prominence, though he does directly oversee Greek Orthodox and some other jurisdictions.

The Russian Orthodox Church, with about 100 million adherents, has in particular asserted its independence and influence and rejected Bartholomew’s 2019 recognition of the independence of Orthodox churches in Ukraine, where Moscow’s patriarch still claims sovereignty.

In addition to his scheduled meetings with top U.S. officials, Bartholomew also plans to hold a ceremonial door-opening at [St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine in New York City](#), which was built to replace a parish church destroyed during the 9/11 attacks, and to memorialize those killed at the nearby World Trade Center.

A 2017 Pew Research Center report found that there were about 200 million Eastern Orthodox worldwide. It reported about 1.8 million Orthodox in the United States, with nearly half of those Greek Orthodox.