

## **Court hearing of Bishop Joanikije and priests who participated in procession to be held June 19 in Montenegro**



The court hearing in the case of His Grace Bishop Joanikije of Budimlja and Nikšić of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro and eight priests of his diocese will be held June 19 in the city of Nikšić, reports the [Metropolis of Montenegro](#).

The clerics are accused of violating article 287 of the Montenegrin criminal code on violations of measures against the spread of infectious diseases. Bp. Joanikije is the first Serbian hierarch of the 21st century to be arrested in Montenegro, the Metropolis highlights.

The indictment states that on May 12, the day of the feast of St. Basil of Ostrog, they “gathered on Sako Petrovic Square together with citizens, and then held a

religious ceremony outside of a religious object—a cross procession along the streets of the city of Nikšić, acting contrary to the instructions of the Ministry of Health for preventing the spread of a dangerous infectious disease.”

However, as the Metropolis’ report clarifies, the gathering of the faithful was not organized by the Church, but rather was a spontaneous manifestation of their faith and love for St. Basil.

Bp. Joanikije and the priests will be present at the first hearing to answer the charges. If found guilty, they face a fine or imprisonment for up to one year.

His Grace was detained on May 12 for 3 days along with the priests of his diocese following the procession in honor of St. Basil, who is especially revered by the Serbian Orthodox faithful. The arrest sparked a wave of protests throughout the country, with believers taking to the streets to express their disagreement with the arbitrariness of the authorities.

There were demonstrations in many cities, and there were incidents where the police used physical force and even tear gas against the protesting faithful.

Upon his release, Bp. Joanikije was festively greeted by hundreds of believers in the city of Berane.

[Source](#)