News

Family members wait to enter an event with Pope Francis at the government-run Reception a

Family members wait to enter an event with Pope Francis at the government-run Reception and Identification Center for refugees in Mytilene, Greece, Dec. 5, 2021. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

by Associated Press

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NICOSIA, CYPRUS — The head of Cyprus' Orthodox Christian Church said Sunday that he will suspend a dozen priests from his diocese because they refused to heed his call to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

Archbishop Chrystostomos II told state broadcaster CyBC that most of the priests are also theologians who have swayed some of the faithful not to get vaccinated. The archbishop called the insubordination "unheard of" and warned that the suspensions could be extended to six months or lead to the priests being defrocked.

He suggested that some of the unvaccinated priests may be emboldened to defy him because of his frail health.

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Archbishop Chrysostomos has been vocal in his support for vaccinations for all the faithful and the Church's highest decision making body, the Holy Synod, has issued a clear appeal in favor of vaccination.

COVID-19 infections in Cyprus have in recent weeks tapered off, but remain high. The number of hospitalized coronavirus patients also remains high, but health authorities say the system is coping.

January recorded the second-highest number of virus-related deaths per month in Cyprus since the start of the pandemic.