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Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, speaks at an event in Athens, Greece on May 8, 2025. (AP photo/Petros Giannakouris, File)

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Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the spiritual leader of Eastern Orthodox Christians, is making his first visit in four years to the United States, where he was scheduled to meet Monday afternoon (Sept. 15) with President Donald Trump and receive honors for his environmental advocacy.

Bartholomew arrived in Washington Sunday (Sept. 14) and is scheduled to make various U.S. appearances through Sept. 25.

Bartholomew is considered first among equals among Orthodox patriarchs because of his role as patriarch of Constantinople, the ancient capital city now known as Istanbul in Turkey. That role gives him prominence, but not the power of a pope, in a church with various self-governing jurisdictions. He oversees the small Orthodox population in mostly Muslim Turkey. He also oversees some communities abroad, such as the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and some smaller U.S. jurisdictions.

Known as the "green patriarch," Bartholomew is scheduled to receive the prestigious Templeton Prize on Sept. 24 in New York. It honors achievements in the areas of science, spirituality and human purpose. Bartholomew has been a strong advocate for environmental protection and has decried pollution, deforestation and other "ecological sin," according to the John Templeton Foundation.

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His meeting with Trump could broach political issues. Bartholomew is a strong supporter of Ukraine and recognized an independent Orthodox jurisdiction there in 2019, leading the Russian Orthodox Church to declare that the communion between it and Constantinople is broken. Bartholomew has also sharply criticized Moscow Patriarch Kirill's blessing of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Another potential topic for discussion may be the status of Christians in Turkey. The Orthodox church has long called for the reopening of a seminary closed by the Turkish government in 1971 and has lamented the conversion of Byzantine-era

churches into mosques.

Bartholomew is scheduled to attend separate events in his honor, hosted by the Turkish and Greek ambassadors to the U.S. His visit also includes various other public events, including visits to Orthodox churches in the Washington and New York areas.

When he last visited the United States in 2021, he met with then-President Joe Biden and discussed issues such as climate change and religious liberty. During that visit, the patriarch also received medical treatment for a clogged artery after earlier being hospitalized.

The estimated 200 million Eastern Orthodox believers comprise the second-largest Christian communion, behind Roman Catholics.