His Holiness Patriarch Kirill chairs joint session of the Holy Synod and the Supreme Church Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, first in a hundred years

On the 25th of December 2019, in the Red Hall of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, a joint session of the Holy Synod and the Supreme Church Council of the Russian Orthodox Church began under the chairmanship of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church delivered an opening address, noting, in particular, the importance of this session in the history of church governing institutions:

> “We are opening a joint session of the Holy Synod and the Supreme Church Council of the Russian Orthodox Church.
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> “I would like to say a few words about the historical examples that provide a basis for the establishment of working bodies of church governance with the view of addressing pressing problems.
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> “As for the recently recreated Supreme Church Council, its history goes back to the previous century. The Supreme Church Council headed by the Patriarch was established by the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church on the 7th of December 1917. The Supreme Church Council was to tackle various ecclesiosocial, economic, financial, school and educational issues, so that the Holy Synod could deal not with the “horizontal” agenda, but with the “vertical” one, that is, resolve theological and canonical matters, as well as such issues as canonization of saints, opening of churches and monasteries, etc.
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> “Such was the agenda set forth by the Local Council of our Church in 1917, and, indeed, the Supreme Church Council began to function. At the post-Council time there appeared a practice of holding joint meetings of the two institutions – the Holy Synod and the Supreme Church Council – but the tradition stopped suddenly on the 20th of November 1920, when the last joint meeting took place, and after the death of Patriarch Tikhon the Supreme Church Council did not convene.

> “In 2009 we set about forming new Synodal departments and were faced with a task of creating a body for discussing the agenda common for all the Synodal institutions. With the view of coordinating the work of the Synodal bodies we started holding meetings of their heads. Several such meetings took place, and in 2011 the Synod and then, in February 2011, the Bishops’ Council decided “to give to the meeting of the heads of the Synodal institutions the proper status with the name ‘Supreme Church Council’.”
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> “In other words, the Supreme Church Council established by the Bishops’ Council in 2011, undoubtedly, differed from the Supreme Church Council of the time of His Holiness Patriarch Tikhon. However, the Supreme Church Council was entrusted with the tasks, many of which were on the agenda of the Supreme Church Council under Patriarch Tikhon. On the 14th of April 2011, in the Red Hall of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, the Supreme Church Council held its first session.
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> “Today is an important event in the history of church governing institutions. On the threshold of the centenary of the last joint meeting of the Holy Synod and the Supreme Church Council we are holding the first joint session, reviving the tradition severed by the troubled 20th century.”

The joint session of the two bodies of supreme church governance was organized for the first time in a hundred years with the view of resolving ecclesiocanonical problems, addressing issues of church governance and efficient planning, and considering annual reports of the Synodal institutions.

On the 26th of December, at the Patriarchal and Synodal residence in St. Daniel’s Monastery in Moscow, the Holy Synod will continue its work.

The permanent members of the Holy Synod are: Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine; Metropolitan Juvenaly of Krutitsy and Kolomna; Metropolitan Vladimir of Kishinev and All Moldova; Metropolitan Alexander of Astana and Kazakhstan, head of the Metropolitan area in the Republic of Kazakhstan; Metropolitan Vikenty of Tashkent and Uzbekistan, head of the Metropolitan area of Central Asia; Metropolitan Varsonofy of St. Petersburg and Ladoga; Metropolitan Pavel of Minsk and Zaslavl, Patriarchal Exarch of All Belarus; Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department for External Church Relations, and Metropolitan Dionisy of Voskresensk, chancellor of the Moscow Patriarchate. Invited to take part in the winter session (September – February) were Metropolitan Kornily of Arkhangelsk and Kholmogory, Metropolitan Grigory of Chelyabinsk and Miass, Metropolitan Dimitry of Chita and Petrovsk-Zabaykalsky, Bishop Ignaty of Vyborg and Priozersk, and Bishop Mathew of Sourozh.

The Supreme Church Council consists of: Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the

Department for External Church Relations; Metropolitan Dionisy of Voskresensk, chancellor of the Moscow Patriarchate; Metropolitan Clement of Kaluga and Borovsk, chairman of the Publishing Council of the Russian Orthodox Church; Metropolitan Ioann of Belgorod and Stary Oskol, chairman of the Synodal Department for Mission; Metropolitan Merkury of Rostov and Novocherkassk, chairman of the Synodal Department for Religious Education and Catechization; Metropolitan Kirill of Stavropol and Nevinnomyssk, chairman of the Synodal Department for Relations with the Cossacks; Metropolitan Ignaty of Vologda and Kirillov, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Finance and Economic Administration; Metropolitan Mitrofan of Murmansk and Monchegorsk, chairman of the Patriarchal Commission for Physical Culture and Sport; Metropolitan Tikhon of Pskov and Porkhov, chairman of the Patriarchal Council for Culture; Metropolitan Antony of Korsun and Western Europe, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Administration for Institutions Abroad; Archbishop Feognost of Kashira, chairman of the Synodal Department for Monasteries and Monasticism; Bishop Irinarkh of Krasnogorsk, head of the Synodal Department for Prison Ministry; Bishop Panteleimon of Orekhovo-Zuevo, chairman of the Synodal Department for Church Charity and Social Ministry; Bishop Foma of Pavlovsky Posad, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Administrative Secretariat; Bishop Serafim of Istra, chairman of the Synodal Department for Youth Affairs; Bishop Stefan of Klin, chairman of the Synodal Department for Cooperation with the Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies; Archpriest Maxim Kozlov, chairman of the Education Committee of the Russian Orthodox Church; Archpriest Dimitry Smirnov, chairman of the Patriarchal Commission for Family and Protection of Motherhood; and Mr. Vladimir Legoida, chairman of the Synodal Department for Church's Relations with Society and Mass Media.

Invited to the joint session were also: Bishop Nikolai of Balashikha, head and editor-in-chief of the Moscow Patriarchate's Publishing House; Bishop Foma of Bronnitsy, first deputy chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Finance and Economic Administration; Bishop Savva of Zelenograd, deputy chancellor of the Moscow Patriarchate; Hegumeness Ksenia (Chernega), head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Legal Administration; and Mr. Aleksandr Schipkov, first deputy chairman of the Synodal Department for Church's Relations with Society and Mass Media.

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