His Holiness Patriarch Kirill meets with President of Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Mr. Franklin Graham



On 5 March 2019, at the Patriarchal and Synodal residence in St. Daniel's Monastery in Moscow, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with Mr. Franklin Graham, President of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

Taking part in the meeting were also Mr. Viktor Hamm, vice president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association; Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations; and Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), DECR vice-chairman.

As His Holiness Patriarch Kirill noted, Mr. Graham's father, Billy Graham – founder of the Evangelistic Association – visited Russia in the Soviet times, a difficult period in the relationships between the USSR

and the USA. “Dr. Billy Graham was a friend of the Russian Orthodox Church. We have very good memories of him. Once again we express to you our condolences over his death,” His Holiness said to Mr. Franklin Graham.

“Yesterday you visited our Theological Institute of Postgraduate Studies, where a round-table conference took place, dedicated to the peace-making role of Christians in the global and regional conflicts today,” Patriarch Kirill continued, emphasizing that the more complicated a political context is the greater responsibility believers ought to shoulder, taking an active position, engaging in the life of society and achieving improvements.

The Primate of the Russian Church also raised a problem of religious and moral values in present-day society that cannot but concern Christians. “The commitment to the Christian understanding of marriage, family, sacredness of human life from the moment of conception – such principled and firm position shared by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and by you personally receives support from the Russian Orthodox Church,” His Holiness said.

As Patriarch Kirill pointed out with regret, one of the major problems facing the Russian society and tackled by the Russian Orthodox Church is the problem of abortions.

“In 2016 we initiated a signature gathering campaign, demanding to exclude abortions from the mandatory medical insurance system. It turns out that pro-lifers, which are great many, help paying for these procedures by their taxes. This petition was signed by over a million people in our country,” Patriarch Kirill said.

According to His Holiness, the Russian Orthodox Church is actively endorsing all the measures aimed at reducing a number of abortions in the country. “Representatives of our Church act as consultants in the institutions, to which women apply for having abortions. When it is possible, our consultants (mostly women) meet with the women who want to have an abortion before they take the final decision,” the Primate of the Russian Church added.

Patriarch Kirill mentioned with gratitude the joint work of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association aimed at rendering humanitarian aid to refugees from Ukraine, saying, “In 2015 we carried out a joint project, delivering humanitarian aid to the people affected by the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. A large number of humanitarian kits were received, and we distributed them among the needy.”

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church thanked Mr. Franklin Graham for organizing the World Summit in Defense of Persecuted Christians in Washington in 2017. “Like my meeting with Pope

Francis in February 2016, the Summit drew the world community's attention to the problem of persecution of Christians," His Holiness emphasized.

Patriarch Kirill also raised an issue of rendering humanitarian aid to the people of Syria. "In April 2017, with my blessing, an Interreligious Working Group for Rendering Humanitarian Aid to the Population of Syria under the Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations of the President of the Russian Federation was established. It consists of both Christians and Muslims. The aid is distributed at churches and mosques by the Christians and Muslims of Syria and Russia."

According to Patriarch Kirill, the Russian Orthodox Church has accumulated the unique resource of trust-based relations with representatives of the Syrian authorities and the Russian servicemen in Syria, which allows it to carry out most efficiently the targeted humanitarian activities. His Holiness expressed his conviction that the Russian Orthodox Church and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association that has a vast experience in rendering aid to Christians in various regions could in future combine their efforts and implement some joint projects in the Middle East.

Mr. Franklin Graham thanked His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia for the meeting and congratulated him on the 10th anniversary of enthronement.

Mr. Graham expressed his support for the pro-life position of the Russian Orthodox Church and called abortions one of the major sins of today's world.

Speaking about various spheres of inter-Christian cooperation, Mr. Franklin Graham mentioned the necessity of concerted efforts in rendering aid to refugees from Syria. "Yesterday we had a discussion with His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion. We discussed how we can cooperate, we discussed Syria, what programs we can work out together to help the children affected by the war in Syria. We have experience in this and different areas. We know what to do," Mr. Graham said.

The President of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association also put forward a proposal to hold the next Summit in Defense of Persecuted Christians in Moscow. As Mr. Graham noted, although the Summit that took place in Washington was very successful, the problem of persecution of Christians is still on the agenda.

DECR Communication Service

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