DECR chairman's message of greetings to the 24th International Academic Conference on Gospel and Mission According to St. Paul

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations, sent a message of greetings to Metropolitan Panteleimon of Veroia, Naousa and Campania and to the organizers and participants in the 24th International Academic Conference on Gospel and Mission According to St. Paul, which took place on June 26-29, 2018, in Veria, Greece, The message, read out at the opening of the forum by Archbishop Tikhon of Podolsk, administrator of the Diocese of Berlin and Germany, states:

Your Eminence Panteleimon,
Your Eminences,
Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

With a blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, I am glad to convey His Holiness's greetings to the organizers and participants in the academic conference held annually in old Veria, which was illuminated by the light of the Gospel of Christ also through the evangelical efforts of the holy first-hierarchical apostle Paul.

For almost a quarter of a century now that the annual conference considers important topics of Christian life in the light of the teaching and ministry of the Apostle of the Gentiles, who *laboured more abundantly than they all* (1 Cor. 15:10), in the preaching of Christ. The Pauline God-inspired epistles, which preserve the precious testimonies of his missionary feat with all its inherent hardships and troubles, are for us a very precious guidance in fulfilling the commandments of Christ: *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*(Mt. 28:19-20), The call contained in these words means that mission is inherent in the very nature of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, which accomplishes in history the economy of our salvation, *that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life* (Jn. 3:16).

In history, the methods of preaching the gospel would change depending on the specific circumstances of place and time. Today, they have peculiarities of their own as well. For instance, in many places in which Christianity has been present for centuries, nowadays there is an urgent need for new

evangelization. In a situation of increasing conflicst on social, ethnic and religious grounds, the testimony that reconciliation between people of different ethnic backgrounds, ages and social groups is possible becomes a significant part of Orthodox mission.

The power and stringency of our witness to Christ depends on the authenticity of the life of Christians *in pureness, in knowledge, in longsuffering, in kindness, in the Holy Ghost, in love unfeigned* (Cor. 2, 6:6). The sign of the Christian order of life is the preservation of the God-commanded unity of the disciples of Christ: *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another* (Jn. 13:35). Without love and unanimity our preaching will have no power and become *as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal* (1 Cor. 13:1). Addressing the treasury of St. Paul'sspiritual heritage, we will search for answers to the present-day challenges of church unity.

But may the God of all grace strengthen, settle us (1 Pet. 5:10) in the preaching of the Gospel *to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people* (Rev. 14:6).

I convey to the participants in the conference His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia's wishes of fruitful work and blessed success in your work.

With love in the Lord,

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk
Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations
Moscow Patriarchate

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