



## Round table on inter-confessional exchange of experience in social ministry takes place at Department for External Church Relations



On 26 January 2018, a round table on Social Ministry of Religious Communities – Inter-Confessional Exchange of Experience was held at the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations within the framework of the 26<sup>th</sup> International Christmas Educational Readings. Taking part in the discussion were some 40 clergymen and laypeople from various dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as representatives of the Catholic and Protestant communities and governmental and non-governmental church organizations.

Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov), DECR secretary for inter-Christian relations, acted as moderator of the meeting. In his opening address he noted the importance of round-table discussions on inter-confessional cooperation, held annually at the DECR premises during the Christmas Readings. He emphasized that the practical interaction in social sphere was an important item on the agenda of inter-Christian relations, as evidenced by the Declaration signed at the meeting of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow

and All Russia and Pope Francis in Havana, as well as by cooperation within the Christian Inter-Confessional Consultative Committee and by certain spheres of the Orthodox-Protestant cooperation. "It is symbolic that such meetings take place in the beginning of the year, for they set the tone of our cooperation," Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov) said.

Ms Margarita Nelyubova, DECR staff member, told all those present about a working group established to coordinate cooperation between the Orthodox and the Catholics in the spirit of the Havana Declaration. The group that includes representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the *Kirche In Not* Charity Foundation, has two priority areas in its work: the implementation of joint projects aimed at rendering aid to the Christians in the Middle East and tackling the problems pertaining to the family and family values.

As for the second area, much attention is devoted to rendering assistance to pregnant women in crisis and women with children in critical situations. In 2016-2017, the Humanitarian Assistance Centre was built in Moscow, in which some 1000 families with children received humanitarian support in June-December 2017. In August 2017, the Motherhood and Childhood Assistance Centre opened in Stavropol at the Cathedral of the Holy Transfiguration. In the Nizhny Novgorod region, support was provided to the Family Assistance Centre 'Being A Mother,' where women with children live.

In January 2017, a training seminar on anti-abortion counseling took place in Moscow, having become a notable example of inter-confessional cooperation. The Italian specialists shared with the Russian psychologists (the Orthodox and Catholics from various cities and towns) their methods of counseling.

On 1 September 2017, a seminar on theological approach to the problems of addiction from the perspective of the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches was held at the 'Mary the Queen of Apostles' higher Catholic seminary in St. Petersburg. Taking part in the meeting were representatives of the St. Petersburg metropolia of the Russian Orthodox Church, faculty and students of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy, and experts from Italy and Portugal in rehabilitation of drug addicts. As the result of the seminar, an inter-confessional expert group was set up with the view of developing programmes for the Orthodox and the Catholic theological schools, aimed at treating drug-addicted people.

Mr. Peter Humeniuk, representative of the *Kirche In Not* Foundation, reminded all those present about the well-established traditions of cooperation between the Foundation and the Russian Orthodox Church, and noted that the historic meeting in Havana had given rise to new forms of interaction.

Focusing on the topic of Orthodox-Catholic cooperation in the spirit of the Havana Declaration, Ms Giovanna Parravicini, representative of the Christian Russia Foundation (Italy) told about the initiatives

aimed at discussing the most topical problems of today's world and exchanging experience in social work. In October 2016, an International Conference on 'Unexpected Gift of Mercy. Migration Processes: Risk of Fundamentalism or Indifference?' took place in Milan, Italy. The second part of the conference was held in Moscow within the framework of the Pokrov Meetings.

Ms Margarita Nelyubova informed the participants in the meeting about the preparations for the 6<sup>th</sup> Eastern Europe and Central Asia AIDS Conference that will be held in Moscow on 18-20 April 2018.

Presented at the round table were practical projects in church social ministry. Ms Olga Yegorova, senior nurse at the Visiting Nurse Service of St. Demetrius Sisterhood, head of the Resource Centre of Palliative Care, presented four guidelines on nursing patients after stroke. Ms Maria Ilchenko ('Live Now' Foundation) explained the basic principles of music therapy and told how it is used in medical and social care institutions.

*DECR Communication Service*

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