



## Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk begins his pilgrimage to Mount Athos



On 11 December 2017, with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, the chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, arrived on Mount Athos.

The DECR chairman is accompanied on his pilgrimage by Rev. Dimitry Ageyev, cleric of the Moscow Church of the 'Joy of All Who Sorrow' Icon of the Mother of God; DECR staff members, Rev. Anatoly Churyakov and Mr. Alexander Yershov; and a group of the Orthodox laypeople.

Upon his arrival, Metropolitan Hilarion visited the Xenophontos Monastery. At the monastery's Church of the Great Martyr George the Victory-Bearer, a moleben was celebrated, after which Archimandrite Alexius, abbot of the monastery, warmly greeted the DECR chairman.

Responding to the greetings, Metropolitan Hilarion said in particular,

“I am happy to step across the threshold of this holy abode and see you once again, all-honourable Father Hegumen and all the honourable brethren. We highly appreciate the good relations between the Xenophontos Monastery and the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as the fraternal relations between your holy abode and the Monastery of St. Panteleimon.

“I would like to cordially greet you with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of your ordination and to thank you for your labours in taking spiritual care of this holy brotherhood.

“I would also like to note your firm position concerning the defense of canonical Orthodoxy in Ukraine. The situation of the canonical Church there causes us particular pain, as it is being subjected to attacks by both schismatics, the Uniates, and the Ukrainian government. That is why we ask for your holy prayers and for the prayers of your holy brethren for the Russian Orthodox Church and for its integral part – the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is suffering now.”

Later that day the DECR chairman visited the Skete of St. Andrew the First-Called and the Vatopedi Monastery.

At the Vatopedi Monastery, the pilgrims prayed at the evening service, which was followed by a brotherly repast. Archimandrite Ephraim, abbot of the abode, warmly greeted Metropolitan Hilarion and expressed his wholehearted support for the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church led by His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine.

Metropolitan Hilarion told all those present about the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church that had completed its work a short while ago and that had gathered together some four hundred archpastors from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan and other republics of the Central Asia, as well as from the Baltic countries and from the diaspora.

“Read out during the Council was a letter from the former Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev, who had created a schism a quarter of a century ago and who had led it 20 years ago,” the DECR chairman also said, “In his letter, written on a paper without a letterhead and signed without any titles, he asked the episcopate of the Russian Orthodox Church for forgiveness. In response to his request we appointed a commission for dialogue with the Ukrainian schismatics. However, the next day Philaret gave a press conference, during which he practically disavowed everything he had written in that letter. However, our commission exists. I am its chairman, and it also consists of three hierarchs from Ukraine and several clerics. I do not know whether these negotiations will lead to something or not, whether they will begin or not. Yet, it

seems that something stirred within the soul of the leader of the schism; he is 88 years old. And we responded to that stir of his soul.”

With gratitude Metropolitan Hilarion noted the unwavering support that the abbot and the brethren of the Vatopedi Monastery render to the canonical Church in Ukraine.

The Russian hierarch expressed his condolences to Archimandrite Ephraim over the death of his mother.

To conclude his speech, Metropolitan Hilarion wished the abbot good health, longevity, and God’s help in his service. “I wish all the brethren of this holy abode God’s help in their monastic deeds. May the Most Holy Theotokos shield you from evil by her precious omophorion,” the archpastor added.

*DECR Communication Service*

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