Resolutions of the Holy Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church (29th November – 2nd December 2017)

The document was adopted by the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, which took place on 29th November – 2nd December 2017.

1. The Holy Bishops' Council sends up its prayer of thanksgiving to our Lord God Almighty, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit glorified in the Holy Trinity, for all the good things he has sent down upon the Russian Orthodox Church.
2. The fundamental task of the Church in the world is to bring people to Christ through the dissemination of the Gospel word. The members of the Council support the call of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia to all those who proclaim the Word of God, to bear in mind that the foundation stone of the Church's preaching since the times of the apostles and to the end of the age is the joyful news of the salvation of the human person brought by the Lord Jesus Christ through his suffering, death on the cross and glorious resurrection. Inextricably linked to the preaching of the Gospel is the main cause to which every clergyman is called – the reverential celebration of the great Mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ.
3. The past century revealed to the world the unchanging nature of the truth witnessed in the Old Testament that without fidelity to God genuine prosperity for society cannot ever be, while if people reject God then this will bring adversities, the consequences of which may be overcome by the action of Divine Providence in response to sincere faith and confessing it with courage, as well as prayer.The members of the Holy Bishops' Council send up praise to the host of new martyrs and confessors of the Church of Russia, through whose intercession the revival of the Church became possible at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century.With the host of new martyrs and confessors the Church glorifies the Imperial Passion-bearers. The Church commission, jointly with the state investigation bodies, to this day is undertaking painstaking work in identifying the "Yekaterinburg remains." Having listened to a detailed report on this topic, the Council expresses the hope that in good time the aforementioned research will come to a conclusion. The resolution of the Bishops' Council of 2016 still retains its power: "The decision to recognize or not recognize the 'Yekaterinburg remains' as the holy relics of the Imperial Passion-bearers may be taken by the Bishops' Council at the suggestion of the Holy Synod, proceeding from the evaluations of the final materials of a thorough expert investigation which are to be published beforehand for public discussion" (Paragraph 10 of the Resolutions of the Bishops' Council of 2016).
4. In the year of the one hundredth anniversary of the Holy Council of 1917-1918 which restored the Office of Patriarchate, the Fullness of the Russian Orthodox Church with thanksgiving recalls its labours and sends up special prayers to the Holy Bishop Tikhon who headed this Council, who by being elected to the Patriarchal Throne by Divine Providence, did everything that was possible to preserve the unity of the Russian Orthodox Church in the first years of persecution. The Bishops' Council welcomes the work on the compete edition of the materials of the Local Council of 1917-19181, which require a thorough and thoughtful study.

General Issues of Church Governance

5. The Holy Bishops' Council approves the work of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and the Holy Synod and confirms the decisions taken by the Holy Synod in the inter-Council period. The activities of the Supreme Church Council, the Synodal institutions and commissions for this period are also approved.
6. The Bishops' Council confirms the decisions of the Holy Synod on the formation of the Kaliningrad, Kostroma and Mariy metropolia, as well as on the institution of the following dioceses: Birsk, Vanino, Volzhsk, Vorkuta, Galich, Zlatoust, Plesetsk, Roslavl, Syzran and Chernyakhovsk.
7. The Council introduced changes to the Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church, stressing the special status of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the administrative centre of which is located in Kiev.
8. The Council confirms the following documents:
    a. The Provisions for monasteries and monks and nuns of the Russian Orthodox Church, developed throughout the course of a number of years by the Inter-Council Presence. Diocesan bishops are to guarantee that the monks and nuns of their dioceses are to get acquainted with this document and, in interacting with the Synodal Department for Monasteries and Monasticism, ensure that the directions in it are obeyed.
    b. The document "The Canonical Aspects of Church Marriage," also developed by the Inter-Council Presence. Diocesan bishops are entrusted with publishing the necessary decrees so that the norms in the documents are fulfilled in the dioceses under their care.
    c. A new redaction of the Provisions for Awards in the Russian Orthodox Church.
9. Noting that the dioceses within one region that have been organized into metropolias have undergone this transformation successfully, the Bishops' Council calls upon the bishops of the metropolias to further active and closer cooperation, while observing both the canonical prerogatives of each bishop as well as the leading and coordinating roles of heads of the metropolias. The Holy Synod is entrusted with examining the possibility of adding clarifications in the Provisions on the metropolias and, when the corresponding conclusions have been made, to formulate and confirm them.
10. The process of introducing into the deaneries and large parishes the positions of assistants to the deans and rectors for mission, religious education, youth work and charity, as well as the creation of a system for studying aimed at the holders of these positions is developing on the whole successfully, and these positions have in the main been filled. At the same time, the Council notes that the work of assistants to the deans ought not to be viewed as something secondary, even when combined with other duties. The assistants to the deans ought to have the appropriate education, either as a full time student or extra-mural, which in particular may be obtained in centres for preparing church specialists that are now opening in many dioceses. The Education Committee, together with these institutions, is to continue work in forming this system of education.

    The Synodal institutions are entrusted with ensuring that the directors of the diocesan departments receive the proper education for this, as well as organizational skills, in order to, among other things, coordinate the work of the assistants to the dean. This study is to be of a short period and done by correspondence courses, taking into account how busy the aforementioned directors may be. Moreover, it would be of benefit if the chairmen of the Synodal institutions were to hold regular online conferences with the directors of the corresponding diocesan institutions.
11. The Holy Council considers essential further efforts on the part of diocesan bishops for taking measures in the dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church delineated in the Provision on the material and social support of priests, church ministers and workers of religious organizations of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as their family members, affirmed by the Episcopal Council of 2013, including through the establishment and proper work of the diocesan trustee commissions. Moreover, when a priest or deacon is appointed to a place of service, the number

of people in his family should also be taken into account when considering his renumeration.

12. We are satisfied with the development of Church life in the churches and monasteries of the Russian Orthodox Church in the far abroad. In the year of the tenth anniversary of the restoration of unity with the Russian Church Outside of Russia, in sending up thanks to the Lord for the mercy he has bestowed, the members of the Holy Council consider it necessary to make additional efforts for bringing canonical order into the dioceses and parishes of the Russian Church overseas.
13. The members of the Council consider it necessary to continue work in organizing the Sofrino church goods factory to interact with the dioceses by taking into account the decisions already made.

The Mission of the Church in the Modern-Day World

14. The Council turns to the youth with the Gospel message and considers church work with the youth as a priority task today facing bishops and clerics. Achievements in the sphere of mission among the youth that have taken place in recent years require development. It is necessary to continue to search for beneficial forms of mission among young people and their activity in the Church by taking into account the heterogeneity of youth who have differing attitudes towards the Church, who have different educations and upbringings, and who belong to different social layers and groups. In using whatever methods of working with young people, including those borrowed from secular practice, it is important not to forget the main goal facing the pastor or other church labourers when communicating with young men and women: their being made part of the disciples of Christ. Among the priority tasks is concern for student youth.Noting with satisfaction that youth councils have been instituted in many dioceses, the Council believes it expedient to develop this practice, while understanding that, in accordance with local conditions, there can be set up youth councils common for all dioceses of a single metropolia. It is also beneficial to hold annual youth congresses at the level of the dioceses or metropolias and in the future regular convocations of church-wide youth congresses.The Council members pay attention to the importance of sufficient financial support for youth projects by taking into account the possibilities of each diocese and parish.
15. The concern expressed by the Bishops' Council of 2016 regarding the organization of missionary activity (see Paragraph 15 of the Resolutions of the Council of 2016) remains. The Holy Council reminds all that the main goal of mission is the bringing of people to Christ. For this it is essential to be "all things to all men" (1 Cor 9.22), that is, to use for each audience a language of preaching the Word of God that it can understand, as well as opening up to the world without transgressing the boundaries of the acceptable.
    The basic directions of missionary work requiring the most attention are catechism before and after baptism, the enlightenment of those who, although baptized, have not become fully-fledged members of the Church, as well as of those who, while not being baptized, belong to peoples who have historically been Orthodox. Moreover, included in missionary work is counteracting the sectarian and neo-pagan threats. Finally, in some regions missionary work of the dioceses can also be aimed at the pastoral spiritual care of local minority nationalities. The Holy Synod is entrusted with taking active measure for revitalizing mission at a church-wide, diocesan and parish level.
16. The Council approves the religious and educational work with the Cossack community at the church-wide level and in the dioceses.
17. A special type of missionary service is the witness to the world of the Gospel and the life of the Church through the media. The members of the Council note the positive results in fulfilling the directions of the Bishops' Council of 2013 on supplying the media expanse with "accurate information on church ministry, at the centre of which is the preaching of Christ and the pastoral

response to the challenges of the modern-day world" (Paragraph 43 of the Resolutions of the Council of 2013). In continuing to develop the organizational and technological basis of media work, it is essential to concentrate our basic efforts on the content side of media activity. Expressing satisfaction at the high-quality coverage of church charity activities, the Council believes it important that information on other forms of ministry to people undertaken in the dioceses and in the parishes should be disseminated both in the corresponding regions and on a nation-wide level.Both social networks and other means of internet communication and other such forms of personal contact are becoming ever more widespread. These instruments and their use for preaching to people require special attention and a special approach which, in particular, often presupposes personal communication. The task posed by previous Councils of ensuring a qualitative mission in the social networks (see Paragraph 44 of the Resolutions of the Bishops' Council of 2013, Paragraph 20 of the Resolutions of the Bishops' Council of 2016) are still awaiting their implementation.The Council calls upon pastors and laity active in the media expanse to be more attentive to their own words, to show openness and sensitivity in both the traditional media and, in particular, in social networks to avoid aggressive rhetoric and familiarity, and direct their efforts at a convincing witness to Christ.

18. The members of the Council express their gratitude to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia under whose ceaseless care there have occurred successful transformations in church social and charity ministry. The Council thanks also all church social workers. It is important henceforth to maintain the high level of church-wide, diocesan, parish and monastic charity ministry.

    Acts of charity, without substituting the "good part" (Lk 10.42) of a Christian's prayer practice, ought to be accomplished by every faithful member of the Church who cares for his own salvation and wants to hear the words of the Lord: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt 25.34).

Religious Education and Theology

19. We are satisfied at the profound changes in the sphere of religious education which have opened up the possibility for the academies and seminaries to be raised up to qualitatively new level.

    The Holy Council supports the list of priority tasks proposed by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill in the sphere of religious education. These include: the completion of the plan for seminaries to go over to a single study plan of a bachelor's degree and the development of master's programmes; the creation of a system of correspondence course study; the continuation of work on writing modern textbooks for seminaries; the introduction of a new standard for the study of choir directors. The gradual transfer to the formation of teaching corporations of all academies and seminaries on a full-time paid basis, which presupposes a variety of work on the part of each teacher, is to guarantee a qualitatively new level of work with students. This will also be enabled by the development of professional communities of teachers of academies and seminaries. Finally, the Education Committee ought to continue its work on maintaining the unity of the educational expanse of the Russian Orthodox Church.We are to strive for the gradual state accreditation of religious educational institutions in those countries where the law allows for this possibility. The Council approves the transformation of the religious schools into centres preparing church specialists in the sphere of catechism, social work, mission, and youth work with a shortened theological programme allowing graduates the possibility of ordination to the rank of deacon, if there are no canonical impediments, or joining a seminary, graduation from which is the condition for the ordination to the priesthood.Documents approved by the Holy Council aimed at guarantying norms established by earlier Councils concerning educational qualifications and professional development are to be observed obligatorily.

20. Upon hearing information on the work on the contemporary catechesis of the Russian Orthodox Church begun by the decision of the Bishops' Council of 2008 (Resolutions of 27th June 2008 on the issues of the inner life and external activity of the Russian Orthodox Church), the members of the Council express gratitude to the Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission for the many years of hard work that theologians of the Russian Orthodox Church have put in. In view of the significant volume of preparatory material the Council has approved the proposal to publish it as three separate documents: 1. The Basics of Orthodox Teaching; 2. The Basics of Canonical Order and the Liturgical Life of the Orthodox Church; 3. The Basics of Orthodox Moral Teaching. This is to be published by the Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission after the necessary amendments have been made.
21. The Bishops' Council values highly the provisions of Russian and Ukrainian laws which allow for theological degrees to be bestowed which are recognized by the state.
    In the favourable conditions that have been set up, it is necessary to consolidate efforts in developing theological scholarship by organizing and coordinating research activity in educational institutions and scholarly centres of the Russian Orthodox Church. It is necessary also to intensify cooperation with the theological departments of secular institutes of higher learning.
22. The Council notes that the interaction of the metropolias and, where possible, the dioceses with secular institutes of higher learning presupposes an active dialogue with the professorial and teachers' bodies of such institutes.
23. Having discussed the peculiarities of the work of the Sunday schools, the teaching to children the basics of the faith and leading them into a life in God, the members of the Council support the idea of the Supreme Church Council on the need to search for forms of this teaching which correspond to the perceptions of today's children. This idea ought to be taken into account when compiling study materials for Sunday schools. A separate approach is needed for adolescents. It would be useful for the dioceses or parishes to set up institutions for pre-school (kindergartens) in places where it is possible under local conditions by taking into account the staff and material support required.
24. The Holy Council expresses its concern that the foundational theological courses for monks and nuns of the Russian Orthodox Church have not yet been organized on a systematic basis (see Paragraph 26 of the Resolutions of the Bishops' Council of 2013). The Synodal Department for Monasteries and Monasticism is, in the near future, to take steps to rectify this situation.

The Church, State and Society

25. We are satisfied with the high level of Church-state mutual interaction in the majority of countries located within the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Council considers it important to support or to institute in all of these countries a full public dialogue with the participation of religious organizations of the Russian Orthodox Church aimed at achieving peace, mutual understanding and accord among peoples and nations.
26. The members of the Council note the positive results of the dialogue between the state and the traditional religions of Russia and their joint efforts aimed at resolving issues on the inclusion of religious educational institutions in the educational system with the status of institute of higher learning, the restoration of historical monuments and architecture which is the property of religious communities, the defense of the rights, feelings and interests of the faithful from insult.The Council positively evaluates the work in organizing in the Russian Federation the institution of paid chaplains in the military, as well as in penitentiary institutions.In evaluating positively the efforts of the authorities of the Russian Federation in the sphere of defending motherhood and childhood, the Holy Council expresses concern that the position of the Church, aimed at the averting of abortions, their removal from the system of social medical insurance

does not meet with full understanding among the authorities, in whose competence lies the adoption of such decisions. Further discussion by the Church and the state of socially important legislative initiatives aimed at the resolution of the issue of abortion, has principle meaning and possesses great potential in the cause of strengthening the institution of the family, public morality and the state as a whole.

27. The Holy Council expresses its deep concern at the facts of churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church being seized, as well as the attempts to discriminate against her on the legislative and administrative level. The Council calls upon the fullness of the Church to pray ardently for the people of Ukraine and for the spiritual fortification of all the faithful children of the canonical Church of Ukraine.The Bishops' Council calls upon the world community to help in establishing a lasting and just peace in the land of Ukraine. The Council approves the efforts of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry in freeing prisoners of war and calls upon people to pray for the "deliverance of captives."The Council expresses its gratitude to His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine, the episcopate, clergy and faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church for their labours in establishing social unity in the country, the overcoming of the harsh consequences of fratricidal confrontation, as well as the peace-making efforts and charitable aid to the peaceful population on the territory of regions which have suffered from the armed conflict.
28. The Bishops' Council with satisfaction notes the constant high level of Church-state interaction in Belorussia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as the positive changes occurring in this sphere from the time of the Episcopal Council of 2013 in the Kyrgyz Republic and Turkmenistan.
29. The Council shares the concerns of the Orthodox faithful of Moldova at the growing tendency concerning the application of provisions of the law on equality adopted in 2012. The members of the Council call upon the authorities of Moldova to listen to the weighty position of the Orthodox Church of Moldova and the opinion of a significant part of society on this issue and to take all possible measures to abolish or revise the provisions of this law. We are concerned at the growing tendency of imposing upon Moldovan society ideas and customs alien to the traditionally Orthodox worldview of the people of Moldova.
30. The members of the Council express the hope that cooperation between Church and state in Kazakhstan will develop further.
31. In noting the good Church-state relationship on the whole in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, the members of the Bishops' Council express concerns in relation to the continuing attempts of Latvian and Estonian lawmakers to review traditional values, including those in the sphere of the family and morality.
32. The members of the Holy Council with thanksgiving to the Lord note the steady development of the Japanese Autonomous Orthodox Church and her successes in continuing the labours of the Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Nicholas of Japan.
33. The Holy Council stresses that the variety of languages, cultures and traditions of the peoples in the countries of the canonical presence of the Russian Orthodox Church have always served the cause of their mutual enrichment. The Church calls upon the state authorities of various countries on the basis of the tradition accumulated over the centuries of harmonizing international and interreligious relations, to speak out together against the negative tendencies capable of causing division and sowing enmity among the peoples.The legislative initiatives adopted in many countries aimed at widening the possibilities of teaching the basics of the history of religious traditions in secular institutions of higher learning are capable of positively influencing social life and becoming one of the deciding factors in averting religious radicalism and extremism.
34. The members of the Council affirm the relevance of the position of the Church at the 2013 Bishops' Council on the issues of personal identification and the use of personal data. The Council calls upon the authorities to adhere to the principle of free choice in giving identification

numbers, which presupposes the possibility of a choice of traditional methods of identifying a person and not allow peoples' rights to be trampled down if they refuse to use electronic means of identification.

35. The Council considers it relevant to hold a discussion on art as organized within the framework of the Inter-Council Presence. Taking into account that the nature of creativity presupposes the freedom to interpret a work of art and in greeting creativity inspired by religious themes, the Bishops' Council at the same time stresses that what is sacred for many people ought never to be the object of mockery or provocations.The members of the Bishops' Council invite cultural figures to an open and mutually respectful dialogue with representatives of the Church.
36. The Bishops' Council approves the measures taken by the Holy Synod on preserving architectural monuments and works of church art which are used by or are the property of the Church. Bishops, rectors, abbots and abbesses ought to remember the responsibility which they bear for these monuments before the state and the Church. Also the decisions of the Holy Synod aimed at guaranteeing a high quality standard of church construction are approved.

External Church Relations

37. The Bishops' Council approves the external activities of the Russian Orthodox Church as executed by His Holiness the Patriarch and the Holy Synod in conjunction with the Department for External Church Relations and aimed primarily as strengthening the unity of the Holy Church, the development of fraternal relations with the Local Orthodox Churches, as well as collaboration with other Christian confessions in protecting the values of Christian morality and combatting socially dangerous vices, the opposing of discrimination and persecution of Christians, dialogue with representatives of other religious traditions that helps oppose extremism, terrorism, the defamation of religion, xenophobia and other socially dangerous vices, manifestations of intolerance, and support the protection of holy sites and places of religious worship, and peace and harmony in society.
38. The Bishops' Council approves the evaluation of the Council of First Hierarchs and bishops of ten Local Orthodox Churches which took place on the island of Crete from 18th to 26th June 2016 which is contained in the decision of the Holy Synod of 15th June 2016 (Journal no.48). This Council cannot be viewed as Ecumenical, and the decisions taken at it cannot be viewed as binding for the entire Orthodox Church since in the absence of the agreement of a number of Local autocephalous Orthodox Churches on holding the Council at a time early agreed upon the principle of consensus was violated. At the same time, we ought to recognize the Council on Crete as a significant event in the history of the Orthodox Church.
39. An analysis of the documents of the Council of Crete entrusted by the Holy Synod to the Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission has shown that some of them contain unclear and ambiguous formulations, which does not allow us to consider them exemplary expressions of the truths of the Orthodox faith and the Church's Tradition. This is especially true of the document on "The Relationships of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world," which was not signed by two thirds of the members of the delegation of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as by individual bishops of a number of other Local Churches which took part in the work of the Council on Crete, which testifies to a significant difference in opinion in relation to this document even among the participants of the Council of Crete.
40. The members of the Council note the ambiguous attitude towards the Council which took place on Crete among the family of the Local Orthodox Churches, noting the commentaries of the Holy Synods of the Patriarchates of Antioch (27th June 2016), Bulgaria (15th November 2016) and Georgia (22nd December 2016) which expressed a critical attitude towards the Council of Crete. Also, hierarchs of a number of other Local Churches and the Holy Koinotita and the monasteries of Mount Athos have also given detailed commentaries on the documents of the Council of Crete

and its method of adopting decisions.

41. The Holy Council expresses the belief that the preservation and strengthening of the unity of the Holy Orthodox Church, independent of its position on the Council of Crete, is the common task of all the Local autocephalous Orthodox Churches, both those which took part in the Council on Crete as well as of those which abstained from taking part in it. The bolstering of inter-Orthodox cooperation acquires special importance in this regard.
42. In recognizing the historical nature of the meeting which took place in Havana between His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and Pope Francis, the Episcopal Council notes its importance in the cause of uniting efforts in defense of Christians who are subjected to persecution in the Middle East and Africa. These labours answer the call of the Bishops' Council of 2016 to "do all that is possible so that the genocide that has been unfurled against Christians comes to an end," while "2016 became a year of special efforts undertaken in this direction" (see Paragraph 9 of the Resolutions of the Bishops' Council of 2016). The joint declaration of Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis made its contribution in achieving a ceasefire in Syria and thereby helped to save the lives of thousands of people. The Council expresses satisfaction that the call in Havana to the international community to undertake efforts in defense of the Christians of the Middle East was heard throughout wider public and political circles.
43. The Council notes the importance of the provisions of the Havana declaration concerning the continuing conflict in the land of Ukraine and the relevance of its call to all social forces of Ukraine "to work towards social harmony, to refrain from taking part in the confrontation, and to not support any further development of the conflict." The members of the Bishops' Council express the hope that this call will be heard by all sides of the civil confrontation in the land of Ukraine.
44. The Bishops' Council recognizes the special importance of the provisions of the joint declaration that Unia is not a means of attaining unity among Churches and that in Orthodox-Catholic relations proselytism is unacceptable in all of its manifestations. The members of the Council, in expressing the hope that this declaration will be put into practice, at the same time bear witness to the continuing aggressive actions of the Greek Catholics in relation to the Orthodox.
45. The Holy Council values highly the agreement reached in Havana on the bringing to Russia of the relics of St. Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia and Wonderworker, which are located in Bari. The arrival of these holy relics in Moscow and St. Petersburg in May to July of 2017 was an event of great spiritual significance for the faithful of the Russian Orthodox Church.

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46. The members of the Holy Bishops' Council, which gathered in Moscow from the 29th November to the 2nd December of 2017, give thanks to God for the joy of communion he has granted to them and bear witness to the unity of the Russian Orthodox Church, and call upon all her faithful to preserve peace in Christ, brotherly love and the increase of labours to the glory of the name of the Lord.

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/47917/