Report by Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine to the Russian Orthodox Church Bishops' Council (November 29-December 2, 2017)

His Beatitude Onufry, Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine, made a report at the Russian Orthodox Church Bishops' Council (November 29 – December 2, 2017).

Your Holiness,

Your Eminences and Graces:

By God's mercy, in the period since the previous Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, in the unity of the episcopate, clergy, monastics and laity, has continued to fulfill her God-commanded salvific service. In spite of the complexities conditioned by the continued armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the attempts of some forces to provoke inter-confessional confrontation, our holy Church is performing her salvific mission.

We humbly thank God our Creator for the sorrows and trials with which He visits us and which testify that God's love does not reject us, sinful, but mercifully offers us opportunities for our growth in Christian virtues.

In performing the feat of our personal spiritual purification within our power, we pray for the reconciliation of the warring parties, help the needy and call our whole society to a spiritual and moral renewal.

Statistical data and major events in the life of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) consists of 53 dioceses in which service is performed by 85 hierarchs: 52 diocesan and 33 auxiliary ones. Seven archpastors are retired. In the inter-council period, there were 5 episcopal consecrations in the UOC. The episcopate has been replenished by 4 vicars of the Metropolia of Kiev and a vicar of the diocese of Chernovtsy and Bukovina.

In connection with the renaming of the city of Dneprodzerzhinsk into the city of Kameskoye, the diocese of Dneprodzerzhinsk has changed its name to Kamenskaya diocese and the title of the ruling bishop from 'Bishop of Dneprodzerzhinsk' to 'Bishop of Kamenkoye and Tarichanka'.

In 2017, retired Metropolitan Nifont (Solodukha), Metropolitan Iriney (Semko) of Nezhin and Priluki and Archbishop Nikolay (Grokh) of Belogorodka, vicar of the Metropolia of Kiev, passed away in the Lord. May the Lord give rest to their souls in the dwellings of the righteous!

At present, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church numbers 12 069 parishes. Serving in them are 12 283 clergy including 11 312 priests and 971 deacons. In Ukraine there are 251 acting monasteries. Obedience in the holy monasteries is exercised by 4 412 monastics including 1685 monks and novices and 2727 nuns and novices. In 17 theological institutions of our Church there are 1429 students at the daytime department.

In the period under review, by the decision of the UOC Holy Synod, monk Ioann the Athonite (Syshensky) was canonized. Now included in the rank of locally venerated saints within the diocese of Kiev are Metropolitan Ioanniky of Kiev and Galich (Rudnev) and the Ven. Vassian the Blind (Balashevich). Also glorified for local veneration within the diocese of Kiev is the newly revealed Vladimirskaya-Tithe Icon of the Mother of God.

Among the major decisions of the UOC Holy Synod are the following:

1) In 2016, a law was adopted in Ukraine ‘On the Establishment of the Institute of Tutorship of Orphans and Children Deprived of Parental Care’. The UOC, stressing the importance and topicality of the work with orphans and children deprived of parental care, responded to this initiative with the aim to give spiritual support to orphans and children deprived of parental care. At present, work is carried out to prepare a Church Conception of Tutorship of Orphans and Children Deprived of Parental Care.

2) Considering the importance of cooperation between the UOC and the Ukrainian Armed Forces, the Education Committee has developed a course for the spiritual and pastoral care of Ukrainian servicemen, taking into consideration local specifics. The new course is published with the title “Spiritual-Pastoral Care of Servicemen and Chaplaincy Service”; it has been already introduced in the curricula of our theological schools. The aim of the course is to introduce students of the UOC theological schools with army chaplaincy service studies to the army chaplaincy service, hospital chaplaincy service and prison chaplaincy service.

It should be noted that in the inter-council period, the life of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has been filled with many important events.

Thus, in 2016, there was a church-wide celebration marking the millennium of the Old Russian monasticism on Holy Mount Athos. As part of the celebrations, a UOC official delegation led by the Primate was on a visit to Holy Mount Athos from June 21 to 23. During the visit, a cave church was

consecrated in Xilourgou hermitage at the Athonite Monastery of St. Panteleimon, dedicated to the founder of monasticism in Old Russia, St. Anthony of the Caves. The celebrations were crowned with solemn divine services in Kiev on the commemoration day of the Holy Prince Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles on July 27 and 28. They were celebrated on the St. Vladimir Hill and in the square at the Dormition Cathedral of the Kiev Laura of the Caves. During the Divine Liturgy, the Ven. Ioann of Svyatogosk (Vyshensky) was canonized, who had been ranked as a saint of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

A special mention should be made of the already traditional thousands-strong Procession with the Cross and with a prayer for peace in Ukraine. Thus, from July 3 to 27, 2016, the All-Ukraine Peace Procession with the Cross with love and prayer for Ukraine took place, carrying the most venerated Icons of Our Lady of Pochaev and of Our Lady of Svyatogorsk. This precession united Ukraine in prayer since it began almost concurrently from the Svyatogorsk Monastery in eastern Ukraine and from Pochaev Monastery in western Ukraine. The marchers walked about 1200 km through the 12 dioceses of our Church. According to estimates, at various parts of the way some 500 thousand people took part in it.

The eastern and western parts of the All-Ukraine procession united on the St. Vladimir Hill in Kiev on July 27, 2016, to move further on along the central streets to the Kiev Laura of the Caves for solemn divine services. In Kiev alone over 80 thousand people took part in it and some 20 thousand people met it at the Laura. Along with the Pachaev and Svyatogorsk Icons of the Mother of God, people brought other venerated miracle-working icons to the Laura from various parts of Ukraine.

Among significant events in 2017 were the celebrations devoted to the 25th anniversary of the UOC Bishops' Council of Kharkov, which elected in 1992 Metropolitan Vladimir (Sabodan) as Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine. On May 27 and 28, 2017, festive divine services took place in Kharkov and Kiev. On May 27, a meeting of the UOC Holy Synod was held in the Monastery of the Protecting Veil at the historic building in Kharkov, in which the Bishops' Council of Kharkov took place in 1992. The Holy Synod stressed the historic significance of the Bishops' Council of Kharkov and the timeliness and importance of its decisions. It also noted the courage and steadfastness of the hierarchs who attended the council and preserved by the conciliar reason the principles of conciliarity and canonicity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In addition, the Synod sent a message to the episcopate, clergy, monastics and laity stressing the important role played by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in preserving and consolidating the unity of the Ukrainian society – a society that consists of people of various ethnic backgrounds and political views.

In June-July 2017, as part of the celebrations devoted to the 25th anniversary of the Bishops' Council of Kharkov, all the UOC dioceses held thousands-strong processions with the cross. They were accompanied with newly revealed Ukrainian shrines, the living testimonies to the grace-giving nature of

our Church. On July 17, on the eve of the commemoration day of St. Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles, participants of the procession came to Kiev for the traditional thanksgiving on St. Vladimir Hill and to the Kiev Laura of the Caves. That procession was special in that among its participants were numerous pilgrims from the near- and far-abroad countries. According to estimates, some 100 thousand people took part in it in Kiev.

Despite the treats, obstacles, harassments and the downright lie of the mass media, the processions with the cross with prayer for Ukraine have become a priceless experience and unique example of the devotional unity of Orthodox Ukrainians from all the regions of the country.

Ukrainian Orthodox Church and Ukrainian society

Since 2014 the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine has not abated. For the time of the confrontation, tens of thousands of people, among them civilians and even children, have been killed. Many have remained orphans forever without breadwinners and means of support and have become forced migrants.

Five UOC dioceses still remain in the hostilities zone (those of Donetsk, Gorlovka, Severodvinsk, Lugansk and Rovno). The episcopate, clergy and monastics of these dioceses deserve words of special gratitude for their selfless service and lay people for their firm commitment to the Orthodox faith and preservation of church unity.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church keeps on calling upon all to peace and accord, consistently upholding the sovereignty, independence and integrity of the Ukrainian State. In all the UOC churches and monasteries, during all divine services, prayers are lifted up for peace in Ukraine. Our Church has always stressed that we stand apart from politics and help all who need our aid, first of all, the wounded, forced migrants and civilians in the conflict zone. It has already begun to bring good fruits. We firmly believe that, through the intercession of the Most Holy Mother of God and all the saints who have shown forth in our land, the conflict will soon come to an end and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church will become a force capable, with the help of the Holy Spirit, of reconciling and uniting the divided Ukrainian society.

I would like to say a few words about the charitable and social work of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The synodal department for socio-humanitarian issues and the UOC dioceses raised and sent to the hostilities zone about 600 tons of humanitarian aid. In addition, we continue cooperation with international and Ukrainian charities. Thus, since February 2015 the Mission of Charity humanitarian program has been implemented to give targeted aid to people in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions through Orthodox church communities. It includes the following: urgent spiritual help to civilians in eastern Ukraine, raising humanitarian aid and its designated delivery to victims and organizing and running humanitarian aid centers, storages and soup kitchens.

Along with the material aid we also give pastoral care. In the UOC dioceses there are centers of spiritual support and rehabilitation of participants in military actions for the work for their psychological rehabilitation.

The peacemaking work of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is also manifested through assistance in liberation of military captives in the territories not under the Ukrainian control. In the recent time, despite great difficulties, several servicemen have been set free through the efforts of the UOC. On December 18, 2016, through the personal assistance of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, Ukrainian serviceman Taras Kolodiya, who had been in captivity since 2014, was handed over. In this connection, on behalf of the whole UOC and on my own behalf and on behalf of the mothers of liberated Ukrainian servicemen, I would like to thank Your Holiness for your participation in this process, which is very difficult but very important for us.

To our profound regret, the schism in Ukrainian Orthodoxy remains unhealed. The complicated socio-political situation in our country has led to an aggravation in the relations between our Church and those who have deviated to the schism. Some unscrupulous politicians play on it and artificially enkindle the fire of mutual enmity between the Orthodox faithful, while gaining political dividends. We remind and ask them with love to stop intruding into the Church with their ideas, even if they seem to them to be bright and noble, because the Church lives by the ideas of Christ, not the ideas of humans. Ideas, or as we call them in the theological language, the commandments of Christ are above and better than the brightest human commandments; for the former bear life, while the latter death.

Regrettably, we are heard by few but we do not despair and say, for we know, that we, priests, will be judged by God for our speaking about it or our failure to speak, while politicians for harkening to what they were reminded of or their failure to hearken to it.

In recent times, the religious situation of the diocese of Ivano-Frankovsk has worsened. Since October 2017, in this diocese some representatives of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, who claimed to be chaplains of this Church, used violence to take away churches from our communities.

Thus, on October 17, the UGCC representatives cut off the locks of the UOC church of the Annunciation in the city of Kolomya, Ivano-Frankovsk region, and with the support of paramilitary groups made an attempt to capture the church in a raid. After that the church was sealed. On October 4, the Ivano-Frankovsk administrative court absolved our community, establishing the fact of the legality of our community’s use of the church of the Annunciation.

However, on October 22, unknown people in balaclavas led by clergymen claiming to be the UGCC

chaplains used violence to block the way for the Annunciation church parishioners to come to their church and to conduct a prayer service in it. The video recording published by the diocese of Ivano-Frankovsk registered that our parishioners were outraged and even beat up. One of the active organizers of the lawless actions, UGCC chaplain Nikolay Medinskiy, struck the Orthodox with his fists, calling the UOC faithful ‘biomass’ and ‘Moscow pigs’. A similar tragedy has happened to some more churches.

In spite of this, the episcopate, clergy and laity of our Church in all the problem regions continue keeping the purity of the holy Orthodox faith and standing on the truly gospel’s position and not to repaying evil with evil.

It should be noted that in many settlements religious communities deprived of their churches have started building new churches. This good initiative has become possible thanks to the Drop of Peace action initiated by the Favor charity and blessed by the UOC Holy Synod. As of today, 3 new churches have been built in the regions of Rovno, Volhyn and Ternopol. Funds are being raised for some more churches and several churches are being built in the problem regions in western Ukraine.

All the above-mentioned difficulties do not prevent the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from remaining the largest confession in Ukraine uniting people of various ethnic backgrounds, political views and cultures. However, in the recent time some public political forces have become active in their attempt to discredit the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the eyes of the Ukrainian society, trading on what they call its ‘dependent’ status. They ignore the special status of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church conditioned by the Resolution of the 1990 Bishops’ Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, while referring to the present Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church in force. Therefore today, to avoid any further speculations aimed to undermine the authority of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the eyes of millions of Ukrainians, it appears necessary to underscore the special status of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church by singling it out in the Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In the Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church in force, the status of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is fixed in Par. 18, Chapter XI, entitled ‘Self-Governed Churches’.

Taking into account that this Paragraph 18, Chapter XI of the ROC Statute does not fully reflect the Resolution of the 1990 Bishops’ Council of the Russian Orthodox Church on granting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church independence and self-governance we move to make the following amendments to the ROC Statute in force:

1. To single out Par. 18, Chapter XI ‘Self-Governed Churches’ in the Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church into a separate Chapter of the ROC Statute under the title ‘The Ukrainian

Orthodox Church' and put it after Chapter IX 'The Church Court'.

The point is that according to the Resolution of the 2000 Jubilee Bishops' Council on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Pars 4, 8 and 9 of Chapter VIII of the Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church adopted in 2000 do not concern the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In the present ROC Statute these are Pars 4, 8 and 9 of Chapter XI. According to this 'Resolution', the matters envisioned by these paragraphs (election of the Primate, formation and elimination of dioceses, as well as election of hierarchs) the Ukrainian Orthodox Church should be guided by the norms of the 1990 Deed of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.

Moreover, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is not indicated in the list of self-governed Church in Par. 16 Chapter XI the ROC Statute in force (indicated in it are the Latvian Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Church of Moldova and the Estonian Orthodox Church).

Thus, due to the above-mentioned reasons which single out the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as self-governed and autonomous Churches indicated in the ROC Statute as parts of the Moscow Patriarchate and in connection with the indication in the ROC Statute of the special status of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with 'the rights of broad autonomy" (Par. 18 Chapter XI), it is deemed appropriate to single to allocate a separate chapter for the UOC in the ROC Statute.

2. The proposed Chapter entitled 'The Ukrainian Orthodox Church' should include the following provisions:

1) The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is granted independence and self-governance according to the Resolution of the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church which took place on October 25-27, 1990.

2) The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is an independent and self-governed Church with broad autonomy rights.

3) In her life and work the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is guided by the Resolution of the 1990 Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the 1990 Deed of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia and the Statute on the governance of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Considering the special importance of this matter for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, we ask Your Holiness and the Council of the Most Reverend Archpastors to support this initiative and introduce the paragraphs proposed above into the Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian State

The relations between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian State can be described as delicate.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church as part of the All-Ukraine Council of Churches and Religious Organizations maintains cooperation with various branches and bodies of state power in matters such as the settling of problems concerning the work of religious organizations. In particular, as of today, the Ukrainian Supreme Rada has 12 bills concerning public morality and work of religious organizations. Among them we can describe the following bills as positive: No. 6747 (on the rights of a doctor to refuse to administer an abortion for the dictate of conscience; No. 6696 (on the repeal of demands of compulsory re-registration of religious organizations as a condition for the preservation of its non-profit nature) and No. 6642 (on the simplification of official registration for religious organizations).

Among the negative bills are the following: No. 4128 (on religious communities' change of subordination); No. 4511 (on establishment of the special status for religious organizations) and No. 5309 (on the designation of religious organizations included in the structure of a religious organization whose leading center is located in a state recognized as aggressor state). These bills have not been subjected to a public discussion and are discriminatory, for they essentially restrict the rights of religious organizations and provide for interference in their work. Moreover, some of them have been subjected to expertise according to which they contradict international law norms and the Ukrainian Constitution.

Due to the discriminatory nature of these bills towards the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the possibility of their adoption has caused a serious concern among the faithful of our Church. We have received over three hundred thousand signatures in defense of the UOC. In our Church a prayer vigil was conducted and deputies were asked not to adopt the anti-church Bills No. 4128 and No. 4511. These bills, if adopted, would legitimize the pattern of capturing the UOC churches in raids, violate the principle of autonomy and the right to freedom of faith and lead to the discrimination of Ukrainian believers on religious grounds. On the same day, an appeal was sent to the deputies asking them to refuse to adopt these discriminatory bills.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church has repeatedly pointed to the danger of these bills as not only anti-church but also anti-state ones, and their adoption may lead to religious strife, bloodshed on religious grounds, discrimination and violation of freedom of conscience and faith.

It is gratifying to note that in his 2017 message to the Supreme Rada concerning the bills, the President of Ukraine gave assurances that he would not sign off a bill that proposes that the Church should negotiate clerical nominations with state bodies.

It could not but raised concern that the Ukrainian Supreme Rada adopted on June 16, 2016, Resolution No. 4793 ‘On the Supreme Rada’s appeal to Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople to grant autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine’. In their turn, the episcopate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church appealed to the chairman of the Ukrainian Supreme Rada and to the Supreme Rada members to stop interfering in the internal affairs of the Church since their appeal was a violation of the Ukrainian legislation according to which Church is separated from State and State from Church.

The problem of refusal to register the religious organizations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church remains one of the acute ones. From December 2014 to May 2015, the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture was presented with 13 statutes for registration: 3 statutes of diocesan administrations, 2 statutes of synodal departments and 8 statutes of monasteries. Oral remarks made by the Ministry representatives were taken into account and the statutes were amended in good time till June 15, 2015. However, the statutes have not been registered as yet.

The Ministry of Culture states again that the statutes of the UOC religious organizations are not registered because they do not correspond to the legislation. Our repeated requests to present their remarks in oral or written form, in the form of a document signed by an official have been ignored by the Ministry.

The failure to register the statutes has led to the violation of rights of religious organizations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. As a result they are deprived of an opportunity to carry out soundly their stated work. In this connection, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church had to appeal to court to defend their rights. The lawsuit continues but we trust and hope that, as Wise Solomon said, this too shall pass.

The positive points in the legislative work should be noted as well. They primarily concern the licensing and accreditation of educational programs for the Theology specialty and establishment of a process of the recognition of higher theological education certificates and academic degrees and ranks issued by higher theological education institutions. A positive evaluation should also be made of the Supreme Rada’s adoption of Law No. 1667, providing for a change of the Ukrainian Tax Code as it concerns the removal of inaccuracies with regard to the preservation of non-commercial status for religious organizations. According to this law, religious organizations can in future too use donations for charitable work, humanitarian aid and other work provided by the law for religious organizations without the threat of losing the status of non-profit organization.

It should also be stated that by the Ukrainian Constitutional Court decision of September 8, 2016, the demand of Part 5 Chapter 21 of the Ukrainian Law ‘On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations’ that local authorities should be notified in advance of the conduct of public worship

services, religious rites, ceremonies and processions' was recognized as unconstitutional.

Therefore, despite some problems and challenges, which face the Ukrainian Church today in her relations with state power in Ukraine, today there is a whole number of positive tendencies, for which we thank God.

It is necessary to highlight another important issue, which has caused concern among many faithful in our Church for the last few years. It is a concern over the introduction of biometric passports in Ukraine and the absence of any alternative for obtaining a Ukrainian passport but only with the help of a contactless electronic medium (chip). In this connection, numerous appeals are coming to the Holy Synod and the Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from Ukrainian citizens expressing their deep concern over this matter. In the last half a year, the number of such appeals has considerably increased.

In their numerous appeals the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church express reluctance to obtain a passport in the form of a card containing a contactless electronic medium.

The Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has repeatedly appealed to the supreme state authority asking to consider the need for the principle of voluntariness and alternativeness in adopting any identifiers providing for an opportunity for choosing the traditional methods of personal identification.

In response to the appeals of the UOC Holy Synod, the Ukrainian Migration Service sent a clarification on the introduction of Ukrainian civic passports containing electronic chips. Thus, the letter notes that paper passports of all kinds will be valid until their expiration date but if new passports are received from the age of 14 or if a prolonged passport is lost, state bodies will issue only plastic cards with an electronic medium. So, according to this clarification, an alternative for believers who do not wish to accept the electronic identity document is not envisioned.

Conclusion

Such has been the life of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the period after the previous Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church. In spite of the continued socio-political upheavals in our country, there are many positive factors in the life of our Holy Church: new saints are glorified; new monastic cloisters are opening; new churches are being built, ordinations to holy orders are accomplished. All this shows that our Holy Church fortified and guided by the grace of the Holy Spirit is alive and with humble gratitude to her Creator and Head continues to carry her earthly cross.

Bishops' Council information service

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