His Holiness Patriarch Kirill: The main task of the Church is not to fill children's mind with vast knowledge, but to help them enter into its life

One of the topics raised by the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church in his address at the Bishops' Council that began its work on 29 November 2017 at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, was religious education, and Sunday schools in particular.

Over the past few years, the topic of Sunday schools was frequently discussed at the meetings of the Supreme Church Council, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill said, noting that the earlier approaches had been reviewed considerably. As far back as 2012, the first Standard of Sunday Schools Educational Activities was adopted. Based on it, in 2015-2017 the assessment of Sunday schools was carried out in Russia, and their register was drawn up.

"The main task of the Church is not to fill children's mind with vast knowledge, but to help them enter into its life, find their place in it, acquaint them with the Holy Scripture and Tradition, and with the liturgical life," His Holiness added. Meanwhile, he noted, until recently the Sunday schools were guided in their work by the standards of pre-revolutionary parochial schools and by the contemporary system of education.

"Some pupils might like the school-like approach, yet many find it burdensome," Patriarch Kirill said, "Such pupils lose motivation to go to a Sunday school, for they only see in it a copy of their usual school, with the only difference that taught here are not algebra, physics or biology, but Church Slavonic language and church history."

The Primate of the Russian Church pointed out that as the result of discussion, the Supreme Church Council had made a decision that along with usual school-like approach, parishes needed come up with other methods of organizing Sunday schools, which would help children learn the basics of the faith. The Standard, adopted earlier, was reviewed, and the Synodal Department for Religious Education and Catechization set about tackling the new task.

His Holiness expressed his wish that the accent in promoting religious education might be put not so much on making regulations but rather on fulfilling the task in dioceses and parishes with the assistance from the central church institutions.

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