



## **Representatives of Catholic Church familiarize themselves with work of Synodal Department for Charity**



From August 25 to September 3 the Ss Cyril and Methodius Institute of Post-Graduate Studies together with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity is conducting the annual Summer Institute for representatives of the Roman Catholic Church. The project is called to strengthen relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in the area of academic and humanitarian cooperation. As part of the Institute's work, the attendees meet with heads and representatives of the Church's synodal departments and visit theological schools of the Moscow Patriarchate.

On August 29, twelve participants in the Summer Institute visited the synodal department for charity and Miloserdie (Mercy), a humanitarian center for expecting women in crisis and families in need and extended families, and Home for Mom, a crisis center.

In the Soviet period, the charitable work of the Russian Orthodox Church was officially prohibited, and it

was only in 1991 that the Church returned an opportunity to engage in social service without obstruction, Rev. Alexander Alyoshin, head of the synodal department for charity, reminded the guests.

He also told them about the basic areas of church social service. In Russia today, there are 400 sisterhoods of mercy and over 400 church projects for aid to the disabled. In 63 Orthodox churches and communities, work is carried out with the deaf and the blind deaf. In total, there are over 4000 church social projects, including rehabilitation centers for drug addicts and alcoholics, orphanages and alms-houses, asylums and charity buses for the homeless. The idea of aid to the homeless is popularized by the annual motor rally called Hope organized by the synodal department for charity. To help prevent alcoholism and popularize temperance the Church initiated the renewal of the feast of the All-Russia Temperance Day, the father said.

‘It was the Church that opened the first orphanage for children with numerous serious development disorders – the St. Sophia Orphanage in Moscow’, Father Alexander said, ‘During fires in 2010 in Russia, a group of church aid in emergencies became one of the major coordinator of aid to burnt down persons’.

The representatives of the Roman Catholic Church also visited the Miloserdie center for expecting women in crisis and extended families. This center was opened in June to become a new, 27<sup>th</sup> project of the Miloserdie Orthodox service.

‘The space here is organized so that one could easily select the necessary things, try them on and simply have some tea in a cozy domestic atmosphere’, said Maria Studenikina, head of the humanitarian center and the Home for Mom crisis center. ‘There are situations when the life of a child is made equal to the price of a package of buck-wheat or a package of diapers. For this reason we must not just to try to dissuade a woman from abortion but also to provide her with all the necessary things – a pram, a small bed, hygienic things, medicines, foodstuffs and clothes for the baby and for the mom’. In total, 115 church humanitarian aid centers have been established in Russia and it is planned to open 14 more centers by the end of 2017’, Maria Studenikina said.

The guests were introduced to the Save Life program realized by the For Life movement with the support of the synodal department for charity. It makes it possible to finance the work of a psychologist or a social worker in maternity clinics and to organize socio-psychological assistance to women who are going to have an abortion. For two years and a half the program managed to save the lives of some 7000 children.

Along with humanitarian centers, the Church opens asylums for expecting women and mothers with children. Today there are 51 orphanages in Russia, with 50 of them being opened for the last six years.

The participants in the Summer Institute visited one of them, Home for Mom in Moscow. The center intended for 10 women with children accommodates 7 mothers today. 'Our charges do everything themselves: cooking, cleaning the rooms, doing laundry, looking after the little ones, and if a young mother does not know how to do something, she will be taught here', Maria explained, 'We explain straight away that it is not a sanatorium or a holiday home here but rather a crisis center, and one, with the help of our teachers, psychologists and social workers, has to try to overcome the crisis and learn to live on one's own'. In the Home for Mom, women receive secondary vocational education, which will help them in the future to stand on their own feet.

In the Roman Catholic Church, much attention is given to the protection of the life of unborn children, Father Hyacinthe Destivelle of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, noted in his turn. One of the Joint Declaration signed by Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis in 2016 in Havana calls to respect the inalienable right to life. 'Millions are denied the very right to be born into the world' states Par. 21 of this document reminding of the 'the immutability of Christian moral principles, based on respect for the dignity of the individual called into being according to the Creator's plan'.

*Press Service of the Synodal Department for Charity*

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