# Message of the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to the Episcopate, Clergy, Monastics and Laity on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Bishops' Council of Kharkov

*At its meeting on May 17, 2017, the Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church adopted the following Message on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Council of Kharkov:*

Your Eminences and Your Graces,

Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters:

This year the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with a feeling of special spiritual enthusiasm celebrates the 25th anniversary of the Bishops' Council of Kharkov, which took place on May 27-28, 1992. It was a decisive event in the modern history of Orthodoxy in Ukraine, and we humbly thank God for His great mercies and blessings, which He gave and gives to His Holy Church throughout her historical life in our land.

Already in the apostolic times all the disputable matters in the Church were always settled in Councils in the spirit commanded by the God of love. Synodality is the basis of church order, a visible manifestation of the union of the faithful in Jesus Christ and their unity in the Holy Spirit. As Holy Scriptures shows, many of those who came to believe were one in heart and mind (cf. Acts 4:32). Synodality is unity in diversity, which enables each member of the Church to remain oneself but not to close on oneself. In the Church there can be no authoritarian dictators, nor anarchy or chaos, which contradicts her divine nature. The synodal form of church governance is God-established way enabling the people of God to overcome all the obstacles encountered on their journey to the Heavenly Home.

The 1992 Bishops' Council of Kharkov is a powerful manifestation of synodality of our Church. It became a response to the challenges arisen before Orthodoxy in the independent Ukrainian State. At the turn of the year 1991, a conflict situation developed in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, conditioned by the desire of the then Primate, Metropolitan Philaret (Denisenko) to define personally the further way of the Church's development and to impose peremptorily his will upon others. In spring 1992, when Metropolitan Philaret openly embarked on the path of church schism and violated the canonical foundations of church life, the Ukrainian episcopate resolutely came out against this danger, showing real pastoral concern for the future of the Holy Church at a hard crucial turning point.

On May 27, 1992, seventeen out of twenty ruling bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church came to Kharkov for a Bishops' Council. Two bishops out of those who were unable to come to the Council for valid reasons informed it about their full support for the Council's decisions. Having considered the complicated situation, which arose within the Church, the Council members, refusing to compromise their conscience before the challenges of this world, decided to displace Metropolitan Philaret from the office of Primate and to suspend his ministry. At the same time, the Council elected Metropolitan Vladimir (Sabodan) as Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Strengthened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the fathers of the Bishops' Council of Kharkov brought into effect the words of the Saviour: *The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep* (Jn. 10:11). The Most Reverend Archpastors fearlessly reconfirmed the unity of the people of God with the World Orthodoxy, safeguarded the principle of synodality and laid an unshakable foundation for performing their salvific mission in the territory of Ukraine.

The validity of the actions of the Bishops' Council of Kharkov was attested to on the pan-Orthodox level. The Primates of all the Local Orthodox Churches recognized His Beatitude as lawfully elected Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine. For twenty-two years His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir headed our Holy Church. Under him the number of monasteries increased from 32 to 228, the number of theological schools from 4 to 17. A number of synodal institutions were established to supervise various spheres of church life. Actually, the missionary and social work of the Church was set going from scratch; hundreds of printed periodicals and TV, radio and internet projects were founded.

His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir became one of the spiritual leaders of the Ukrainian people. His love of the Motherland commanded respect among both ordinary people and officials. Metropolitan Vladimir's services to the Ukrainian people were acknowledged by the title of Hero of Ukraine granted him in 2011.

Today the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is the largest confession in Ukraine. It unites people of various ethnic backgrounds, various political preferences and various cultures, really showing that in the Kingdom of God *there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all* (Col. 3:11). Our Church is represented in all the regions in Ukraine. And even in the regions, which temporarily are not controlled by the Ukrainian government, it continues to perform its salvific service. Regrettably, some politicians seek to interfere in church affairs. Thus, recently the Orthodox public was stirred up by the possibility that the Ukrainian Parliament may adopt several anti-church bills, among them Bill No. 4511 on a special status of religious organizations whose governing centers are located in the state recognized by the Ukrainian Supreme Rada as aggressor state. On May 18, 2017, throughout Ukraine tens of thousands of the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church prayerfully asked the legislators to listen to the voice of the Church and to disallow religious

enmity, discrimination and violation of the freedom of conscience and faith in the country. We once again stress that the governing center of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is independent in her governance and order according to her Statute, is located in Kiev. It is in Kiev that all decisions concerning the work of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are made. Don't call us 'the Moscow Church' only because we keep the millennium-long spiritual tradition that goes back to the baptism of Kievan Rus' in the blessed waters of the Dnieper and unites millions of believers who live today in Moscow and Minsk and Kishinev and in many other cities and countries throughout the world.

We stress again and again that the constitutional principle of separation of Church and State need to be observed. Their cooperation in various spheres of public life should by no means turn into the subjugation of church institutions by the state. The attempts to create a state Church in Ukraine should be stopped. All the churches and religious communities should be equal before the state and should perform their service freely.

Regrettably, we have to state with pain once again the existence of the problem of church schism in Ukraine, which tears up the unity of the mysterious Body of Christ. It is possible to overcome a church schism only through open and sincere dialogue However, in the situation of open aggression on the part of the 'Kiev Patriarchate', dialogue has become impossible. As a first step towards it, forcible actions and aggressive rhetoric should be rejected. All the illegally captured church property should be returned to its lawful owners. It is only after concrete actions confirming peaceful intentions and declaration are made that we can speak about the beginning of real dialogue.

Our Lord Jesus Christ calls His true followers to peace and love: *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another* (Jn. 13:35). Whatever trial may fall upon our Church, we should always cherish our church and civic peace and peace in our souls. We should lift up sincere prayers for our offenders so that the Lord may open a way to reconciliation and accord.

Cordially greeting the episcopate, clergy, monastics and all the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church on the occasion of the significant anniversary, we prayerfully wish them to stand in the purity of confessing the Orthodox faith and in the just cause of safeguarding the canonicity of our Church, to render tireless service of God and salvation of human souls and spiritual prosperity of our Ukrainian state and our people.

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all* (2 Cor. 13:14).

On behalf of the Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church,

**+ Onufriy**

**Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine**

**Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church**

---

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/48439/