Holy Synod takes decisions on external church activities

During its session held on 21 October 2016 and chaired by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church considered a number of issues pertaining to the external church relations.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill told the participants in the session about the visit of His Beatitude Metropolitan Rastislav of the Czech Lands and Slovakia to the Russian Orthodox Church held on August 26-September 2, 2016. At the meeting, which took place in the Patriarchal residence at St. Daniel's monastery, the Primates discussed bilateral relations and issues of general Orthodox nature. On August 28, the feast day of the Assumption of the Most Holy Mother of God, they celebrated Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral of the Assumption at the Moscow Kremlin.

Members of the Holy Synod thanked God for the celebration and brotherly meetings of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church with His Beatitude Rastislav and noted the importance of the visit for the strengthening of relations between the two Churches.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill told the participants about his visit to the Sourozh diocese held on 14-18 October 2016 and timed to the 300th anniversary of the Russian Orthodox Church's presence on the British Isles. His Holiness was accompanied by an official delegation which included Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR); Archbishop Mark of Berlin, Germany and Great Britain; Bishop Sergy of Solnechnogorsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Administrative Secretariat; Bishop Antony of Bogorodsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Administration for Institutions Abroad; and Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), DECR vice-chairman.

During the visit, His Holiness consecrated the Cathedral of the Dormition after the reconstruction, visited the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) where he was presented with the RGS membership card, attended the reception given on the occasion of the 3000th anniversary of the Russian Orthodox Church's presence on the British Isles, met with His Holiness Patriarch Irinej of Serbia, blessed a headstone at the grave of Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh and celebrated a litiya, visited the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Great Britain, met with Queen Elizabeth II at the Buckingham Palace and with Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby at the Lambeth Palace.

With gratitude to God members of the Holy Synod noted a special importance of the presence of the

Russian Orthodox Church on the British Isles during 300 years, underscored the significance of the development of the inter-church and inter-Christian relations and of the position of the Russian Orthodox Church on the cooperation with the Church of England presented by the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia during his visit to the United Kingdom.

His Holiness presented a detailed report on the celebration of the millennium of Russian monasticism on the Holy Mount Athos and of the 150th anniversary of St. Silouan of Athos and on the visit of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church and his suite to the Holy Mountain.

The Holy Synod resolved to thank His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and the Holy Mount Athos Kinot for an opportunity accorded to many Russian Orthodox to venerate the holy sites of the Holy Mountain. Members of the Synod noted fruitful cooperation of the Church, state and society in holding jubilee celebration and thanked members of the Organizing Committee which was headed by Metropolitan Hilarion.

The DECR chairman reported on his visits to the Republic of Slovenia in July, to the Republic of Serbia in August, and to Italy in September where he took part in the 14th plenary session of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. During his visit to Italy, Metropolitan Hilarion met with Pope Francis. They discussed the development of relations between the two Churches after the meeting of Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis last February and noted positive dynamics in cooperation on a number of issues discussed in Cuba. Metropolitan Hilarion informed the Pope of the deep concern of the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church for the aggressive attacks of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and explained the Moscow Patriarchate's position according to which the ecclesiological and canonical consequences of the Unia should be considered at the next stage of the Orthodox-Catholic theological dialogue. Also considered should be the principle of interaction of conciliarity and primacy in the Orthodox Church and in the Roman Catholic Church in the second millennium.

The same problem was discussed at Metropolitan Hilarion's meetings with Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State; Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity; and Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches. Attention at these meetings was also paid to the aid to the suffering Christians in the Middle East.

Members of the Synod approved the position of the Russian Orthodox Church at the 14th plenary session of the Joint Commission.

The DECR chairman presented a report on the 10th meeting of the Joint Russian-Iranian Commission

for Dialogue ‘Orthodoxy-Islam.’ The participants discussed the theory and practice of interreligious dialogue and understanding of the lasting and just peace, the protection of religious minorities in the Middle East and North Africa and academic and cultural cooperation. A joint communiqué was issued.

Metropolitan Hilarion also reported on his participation in the 5th International Humanitarian Forum in Baku at which he spoke about the role of interreligious dialogue in society, the threats of extremism and terrorism and their prevention.

The Holy Synod took certain decisions on the archpastoral care for the Moscow Patriarchate’s parishes in the South East and East Asia, and on the dioceses of Argentina and South America, Berlin and Germany, Brussels and Belgium, the Hague and the Netherlands, Korsun, and also the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem.

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