Patriarch Kirill to celebrate in the church of the Holy Trinity in Antarctica

On February 17, 2016, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia will visit the Bellingshausen Station on Waterloo Island.

The plane carrying the patriarch and his party took off after 7 o'clock in the morning, local time, from Punta Arenas, Chile, where it stopped for service on its way from Paraguay. It is the southernmost city on the South American continent and the departure point for expeditions for Antarctica.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church will visit the station at the invitation of polar explorers. He will celebrate the Liturgy at the Orthodox church of the Holy Trinity, the only stationary church in Antarctica.

After the service, Patriarch Kirill will have a talk with polar explorers.

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'Bellingshausen' is the Soviet-Russian Antarctic station on the King George (Waterloo) Island. It is named after Faddey Bellingshausen (1778-1852), a Russian seafarer, admiral and the discoverer of Antarctica. It was founded by the Soviet Antarctic Expedition on February 22, 1968. It is the northernmost, that is, the closest to the equator, Russian Antarctic station. As of 2015, there are eight year-round and five seasonal specialists working at it.

The Chilean Antarctic expedition 'Frei' (Presidente Eduardo Frei Montalva) is located in the immediate vicinity of the Bellingshausen Station.

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The idea to build a permanent church in Antarctica was put forward in the 1990s by the head of the Russian Antarctic Expedition (RAE), Valery Lukin and the captain of the Metelitsa women's team, Valentina Kuznetsova. It was supported by His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II. The Church in Antarctica Foundation was established at the same time.

The church was designed by Svetlana Rybak and constructed by Alexander Schmidt. It was built of cedar and larch logs by a team of carpenters from Gorno-Altaysk at the Kyzyl-Ozek village. The building was let ‘settle down’ for a year; then it was disassembled and transported by trucks to Kaliningrad and from it to Antarctica, where it was re-assembled by an 8-member team of within 60 days. The wooden carved iconostasis was made by masters from Dmitrov near Moscow. A small residential house was built close by for the clergy.

The seat of the future church was blessed in January 2002. The church itself was consecrated and dedicated to the Holy Trinity on February 15, 2004, by the abbot of the St. Sergius Monastery of the Holy Trinity Bishop Feognost of Sergiev Posad together with clergy and in the presence of pilgrims and benefactors. The church of the Holy Trinity is the only church acting on permanent basis in Antarctica.

Hieromonk Kallistrat (Romanenko), now Bishop of Gorno-Altaysk and Chemal, who was at that time a monk of the St. Sergius of the Trinity, was the first rector of the Antarctic church. He spent over a year on the island and left for Russia in March 2005.

Since that time, the Monastery’s monks, just as the researchers, have relieved one another every year. The duties of a priest include the pastoral care of the staff of the Russian and other nearby stations, including the commemoration of the 64 Russian polar explorers who died researching Antarctica.

Patriarchal Press Service

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Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/49725/