



## Holy Synod takes decisions on external church activities

During its session held on 24 December 2015, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church considered a number of issues concerning the external church relations.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia told the participants in the meeting about the celebrations held in the year 2015 to mark the millennium of the demise of the Holy Prince Vladimir, Equal-to-the-Apostles. In compliance with the decision of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of 20 January 2014, the Organizing Committee for the celebration of the millennium of the demise of St Vladimir was established under the chairmanship of Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk. In 2015, the large-scale celebrations took place in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and other countries.

The celebrations held in Moscow on 26-28 July 2015, brought together many hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church and delegations of the Local Orthodox Churches, which included Metropolitan Apostolos of Milet (Church of Constantinople); Metropolitan Nikodemos of Memphis (Church of Alexandria); Metropolitan Nifon of Philippopolis (Church of Antioch); Metropolitan Timotheos of Bostra (Church of Jerusalem); Bishop Vakhtang of Nikortsminda (Church of Georgia); Metropolitan Amfilohije of Montenegro and Primorje (Church of Serbia); Metropolitan Nifon of *Târgoviște* (Church of Romania); Metropolitan Dometian of Vidin (Church of Bulgaria); Bishop Nektarios of Arsinoë (Church of Cyprus); Metropolitan Amvrosios of Kalavryta (Church of Greece); Bishop Naphanael of Amantia (Church of Albania); Bishop George of Siemiatycze (Church of Poland); Archbishop Juraj of Michalovce and Košice (Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia); and Archbishop Irénée of Ottawa and Canada (Orthodox Church in America).

On 20-22 June 2015, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia led the celebrations, commemorating the Holy Prince Vladimir, in the Republic of Belarus. The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church officiated at the Divine Liturgy in the Cathedral of the Resurrection in Brest in concelebration of numerous hierarchs of the Byelorussian Exarchate and ordained members of the Patriarchal delegation and of the delegation of the Polish Orthodox Church.

On 28 July 2015, commemoration day of the Holy Prince Vladimir, Equal-to-the-Apostles, His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine officiated at the Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral of the Dormition of the Kiev Laura of the Caves. Concelebrating with Metropolitan Onufry were representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, and the Polish Orthodox Church, as well as hierarchs and clergy of all dioceses of the

Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The celebrations marking the millennium of the demise of the Holy Prince Vladimir were also organized in Jackson, New Jersey, USA. Metropolitan Hilarion of Eastern America and New York officiated at the Divine Services there on 25-26 July 2015.

In compliance with the decision of the Council of Bishops of the Polish Orthodox Church, the celebrations commemorating the Holy Prince Vladimir were held in the town of Krynica-Zdrój on July 28. The celebrations were led by His Beatitude Metropolitan Sawa of Warsaw and All Poland.

The Orthodox Church in America held celebrations at St Vladimir's Theological Seminary from October 31, to November 1. His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon of All America and Canada officiated at the Divine Liturgy in the Seminary's Three Hierarchs Chapel.

During the whole year of 2015, with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, permanent members of the Holy Synod led celebrations commemorating the Holy Prince Vladimir in various metropolias of the Russian Orthodox Church. For instance, on 27-29 March 2015, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk visited the metropolia of Tatarstan, where he officiated at the Divine Services and took part at a conference at the Kazan Federal University. On 24-26 September 2015, during his visit to the metropolia of Priamurie, the DECR chairman officiated at the Divine Services, led a round table at the Khabarovsk Theological Seminary, met with the Governor of the Khabarovsk Krai, took part in a conference on Moral and Ethic Values as Means of Education in Interethnic Educational Environment (On Continuity of Traditions Established by Holy Prince Vladimir); met with the Board of Rectors of the Khabarovsk Krai Universities, and opened an exhibition 'Creativity and Orthodoxy,' dedicated to the millennium of the blessed demise of St Vladimir. On 26-28 September 2015, Metropolitan Hilarion was on a visit to the metropolia of Primorye, where he, among other things, led the presentation of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill's book 'Holy Prince Vladimir: Rus's Choice of Civilization.'

In 2015, the Administration of the Moscow Patriarchate for Institutions Abroad, in cooperation with the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo), organized about 150 events, marking the millennium of the demise of the Baptist of Russia, in 54 countries where Russian people reside, as well as some 50 events in the CIS and Baltic countries.

The members of the Holy Synod heard a report by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, about a meeting of the Special Inter-Orthodox Committee established at the suggestion of His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople with the consent

of the Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches in order to work out a draft variant of procedure rules of the Pan-Orthodox Council.

With the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and Russia, a delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church, led by the DECR chairman, took part in the session of the Special Inter-Orthodox Committee which took place in Athens on 16-18 December 2015. The work of the Committee aimed at working out the draft variant of the procedure rules of the Pan-Orthodox Council was suspended on the third day of the meeting, since it was impossible to reach the consensus.

During his visit to Athens, Metropolitan Hilarion met with His Beatitude Archbishop Hieronymos of Athens and All Greece. The participants in the meeting discussed various issues on the pan-Orthodox agenda.

The Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church expressed its approval for the position, taken by the ROC's delegation at the session of the Special Inter-Orthodox Committee, and stated that discussions concerning the procedure rules of the Pan-Orthodox Council had led to certain insurmountable difficulties. The members of the Holy Synod expressed their concern over the fact that the correspondence between the Primates of the Churches of Constantinople and Russia has not so far led to an agreement on some important issues of the preparation of the Pan-Orthodox Council.

As was reported earlier, the Holy Synod at its session on 22 October 2015 (minutes 71) instructed the Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission to make further examination of the draft document taking into consideration the discussion at the 5<sup>th</sup> Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference and to present conclusions at the next meeting of the Holy Synod.

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the DECR and of the Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission also reported on the results of studying the document entitled 'Mission of the Orthodox Church in the Modern World' that was considered by the 5<sup>th</sup> Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference in Chambesy, Switzerland, in October 2015, and on the proposals of the Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission on the refinement of the document.

At its session on December 24 the Synod resolved to endorse proposals of the Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission pertaining to the mentioned document and to consider consensus on its sections a *sine qua non* condition for advance approval in the process of preparation for the Pan-Orthodox Council.

In compliance with the decision of the Holy Synod of 22 October 2015 (minutes 73), a meeting of the Joint Commission of the Russian and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches on the canonization of Archbishop

Seraphim (Sobolev) of Boguchary took place in Sofia in December 2015.

Reports on the nation-wide veneration of Archbishop Seraphim of Bulgaria were heard, and documented testimonies of numerous miracles performed through Archbishop Seraphim's prayers and his theological works were considered. The participants stated that there were no obstacles to canonization of Archbishop Seraphim.

The Synod thanked God for fruitful cooperation between the Russian and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches in the study of life and work of Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev) of Boguchary and decided to present the matter of his canonization to the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Council, which is due to take place in Moscow on February 2-3, 2016, will consider drafts of the Council's rules of procedure, agenda and programme, composition of its credential, editorial and tallying commissions, and a candidate for Council's secretary. The members of the Synod also considered the composition of the Council's Presidium. According to the Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church (chapter 3, p.7), the members of the Holy Synod comprise the Presidium. Taking into account the importance of participation of primates of the autonomous and self-governing parts of the Moscow Patriarchate in the guidance of the Council's work, it was resolved to include Metropolitan Daniel of Tokyo and All Japan, Metropolitan Hilarion of Eastern America and New York, Metropolitan Alexander of Riga and All Latvia and Metropolitan Kornily of Tallin and All Estonia in the Presidium as members of the Holy Synod during the Council.

For the optimization of work and higher efficiency of the Synodal institutions' activity, the Synod resolved to establish the Synodal Department for Church-Society and Media Relations by amalgamation of the Synodal Church-Society Department and the Synodal Information Department with the transfer of certain functions to the Press Office of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia and to the Department for External Church Relations (inter-religious dialogue).

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk was appointed representative of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Interreligious Council of Russia.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill reported on the 5<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Compatriots Living Abroad that was held at Moscow World Trade Centre on November 5-6, 2015, and gathered some four hundred people from almost one hundred countries of the world.

Attending the opening were His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia; Russian President Vladimir Putin; chair of the Federation Council Valentina Matvienko; and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Taking part in the Congress were also Russian bishops and clerics performing their ministry abroad.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church greeted the participants. Discussed were such issues as spiritual space of historical Rus', protection of the legal rights and interests of compatriots living abroad, and strengthening their relations with the Motherland.

The Holy Synod considered the development of cooperation of the Russian Orthodox Church with the state authorities in its canonical territory important for the strengthening of spiritual and cultural relations with the diaspora.

Metropolitan Hilarion reported on the inclusion of the martyred priest Maxim Sandovich canonized by the Polish Orthodox Church in 1994 to the church calendar of the Russian Orthodox Church. His name was included in the church calendars of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia in 1996 and of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in 2001, 2006 and 2012 as a locally venerated saint.

The Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, with gratitude to the Lord, resolved to include the name of the martyred priest Maxim in its church calendar and commemorate him on August 24/September 6.

Metropolitan Hilarion reported on the Joint Conference of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany dedicated to the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War, noting the tragic experience of Russia, Germany and other countries, and called to use this experience in the settlement of conflict situations and solution of the problems facing the modern world. After the conference the participants visited the Dachau memorial museum and paid the tribute to the memory of all people martyred there.

The participants in the Synod's session discussed the renaming of the established in 2008 Orthodox theological seminary in Paris and, taking into consideration its conceptual differences from the theological seminaries of the Russian Orthodox Church, decided to call it the St. Genevieve of Paris Religious and Educational Centre of the Korsun diocese and allow it to use the word 'seminary' in the territory of the countries in which this word is customary for the institutions of this kind.

The Holy Synod took certain decisions on the dioceses and parishes abroad. Two new parishes, one of St. Seraphim of Sarov in Montgeron, France, and another of the "Swift to Hearken' icon of the Mother of God in Vilaseca, Spain, were admitted to the Korsun diocese.