Russian compatriots are commemorated in the Philippines



The compatriots who found refuge on the Island of Tubabao in 1949-51 were commemorated in the Philippines on 15-18 November 2015. The Russian refugees came from China under the guidance of Bishop John of Shanghai.

Taking part in the commemorative events were descendants of the Russian refugees from China who are living in the USA and Australia, including Ms Natalia Sabelnik, chair of the Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots in the USA who lived on the Island of Tubabao with her parents in her early childhood.

Ms Natalia Sabelnik and Ms Tatiana Tabolina of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology Russian Academy of Sciences highlighted the Russian presence on Tubabao in their reports.

On November 16, with the blessing of Bishop Sergy of Solnechnogorsk, hegumen Pavel (Khokhlov), a cleric of the angel in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, celebrated a requiem service at the graves of the compatriots died on Tubabao and buried at the cemetery of the city of Guayan. Singing was the

choir of the St. John the Baptist church in Berkley, California, USA, conducted by Nicholas Masenkov, who was educated by Archbishop John in Shanghai.

That same day a meeting with the teachers and pupils of the secondary school on Tubabao took place. A prayer service was celebrated, after which small icons were distributed with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

On November 17, representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church took part in the opening of the memorial complex dedicated to the Russian presence on Tubabao. The complex consists of three steles with memorial plaques from the Russian Embassy in Manila, from the representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in the Philippines, and from the President Elpidio Quirino Foundation. President Quirino was the sixth president of the Philippines who gave refuge to the Russian immigrants from China in 1949. Depicted at the third plaque are St. John of Shanghai and President Quirino.

All residents of the island came to the opening ceremony. The elderly people recalled the Russians' presence with profound respect.

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The change of political situation in China in 1948 made many Russian emigrants who lived in Beijing, Tianjin, Qingdao, Hankou and other cities to come over to Shanghai. The UN International Refugee Organization, which helped the Russian with their move to Shanghai, asked the governments of certain countries to give temporary refuge to the Russian emigrants. The only country that responded to the request was the Philippines, which gave the Russian refugees an uninhabited part of the small island of Tubabao for temporary settlement.

The evacuation lasted from January to May of 1949. Some 5,500 men, women and children, mostly Russians, were evacuated from Shanghai to Tubabao by sea and by air.

There were tent churches of Archangel Michael and of St. Seraphim of Sarov in the large tent camp. The Cathedral of the Most Holy Theotokos was rebuilt with the Philippines authorities' permission from the former American chapel outside the camp. Bishop John (Maximovich) of Shanghai came to the island in April 1949 and stayed for three months. Later, he went to the USA, where he managed to arrange the move of many Russian refugees from Tubabao to other countries. Over the next three years, the refugees were resettled in the USA, Australia and Latin America countries. The last group of emigrants left the camp in 1953, and it was closed.

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