



DECR chairman's birthday message to Patriarch Neophytos of Bulgaria

The chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR), Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, has sent a congratulatory message to the Primate of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church on the occasion of his 70th birthday. Below is the text of the message.

Your Holiness,

I would like to wholeheartedly congratulate you on your 70th birthday.

Your journey to this significant life borderline reflects the contemporary history of Bulgarian Orthodoxy full of trials. Having entered the field of service of the Holy Church at the hard times of the domination of godless power, you overcame with dignity the hardships of the theomachistic period and the trouble of schism that followed, inspiring your flock for the feat of preserving faithfulness to the canonical Church and reviving church life.

The divine Chief Pastor Christ was pleased to ordain that you *win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus* (Phil. 3:14). He entrusted to Your Holiness the spiritual care of the whole Bulgarian Orthodox Church, adorning her old Patriarchal throne with your numerous gifts and charging Your Holiness with wise guidance of the verbal flock gathered together and preserved through the efforts of your late predecessors, their Holinesses Patriarchs Cyril and Maxim of Bulgaria.

By your paternal love and inspiring primatial word you teach pastors with humbleness and wisdom to *be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood* (Acts 20:28). You take care of the development of theological education in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and in extending her mission in today's Bulgarian society.

For the years of your service at the Bulgarian Patriarchal Throne, you have done very much to deepen traditionally fraternal relations between our two Churches and the peoples under their pastoral care. After your election to the Patriarchal office, you have been a guest of the Russian Orthodox Church on several occasions. Your Holiness has made a weighty contribution to inter-Orthodox dialogue. We highly appreciate the support that you give to the canonical Orthodoxy in Ukraine and your efforts to continue good traditions of inter-church cooperation, especially in the sphere of students' exchange and

development of Orthodox pilgrimage. I would like to express special gratitude to Your Holiness for your paternal attention to and care of the Sofia Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Today I join all those who lift up prayers for the health of Your Holiness, prayerfully wishing you peace, beneficial strengthening of our physical and mental resources and spiritual joy in the Lord Jesus Christ and His inexhaustible help in your efforts for the good of your God-loving flock.

With respectful love in the Lord,

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk

Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations

Moscow Patriarchate

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