Conference of bishops of frontier dioceses of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus

On February 2, 2015, with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, the 3d conference of bishops of the Russian Orthodox dioceses located in the Ukrainian-Russian-Byelorussia frontier area took place at the Church of Christ the Saviour.

The first conference of bishops in the frontier dioceses of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus took place on February 3, 2011, on the sidelines of the ROC Bishops' Council.

The second conference of this kind took place on February 4, 2013, in Moscow, and later the Coordinating Committee of Dioceses in the Russian-Ukrainian-Byelorussian frontier area took place on April 19, 2013, in Belgorod. It was held with the blessing of Patriarch Kirill and chaired by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk.

The third conference on frontier cooperation was attended by His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the department for external church relations, and archpastors from the frontier dioceses of the three countries.

In his report, Metropolitan Hilarion summed up the inter-diocesan cooperation in the frontier area during 2013 and 2014. The meeting also considered prospects for continuing this cooperation in the difficult situation of armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine. 'Some dioceses of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church located in the frontier areas have become an arena for fighting. Every day civilians are killed, churches are shelled. It is our common pain and common tragedy', he said.

According to Metropolitan Hilarion, in spite of the fact that the year 2014 has introduced serious corrections to the frontier cooperation program, it is still vital. 'We all grieve over the distress that Ukraine experienced and is still experiencing, above all over people's deaths. And still our frontier cooperation has continued in this unfavorable situation', he said.

He emphasized that 'special mention should be made of the efforts of the clergy who risk their lives in transporting humanitarian aid to the armed conflict zone, distributing it to civilians, women, old people and children, often deprived of any livelihood'.

The DECR chairman also drew the bishops' attention to children and youth projects, with some of them implemented by the frontier dioceses for the last two years: 'I should think that in the present situation, it

is the development of projects with participation of children and youth that appears to be the most promising after the humanitarian efforts in the frontier inter-diocesan cooperation'.

Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine, in his address, stressed that 'the bonds of love and prayer' between the frontier dioceses remain the same, and 'the sin of schism has failed to break and destroy them. He also asked all those present to keep praying that 'the Lord may give peace to the Ukrainian land'.

Bishop Panteleimon of Orekhovo-Zuevo, head of the department for charity and social service, spoke about the realization of the church-wide program for support to Ukrainian refugees and further steps for providing humanitarian aid for civilian victims of the hostilities.

The participants in the meeting exchanged opinions about ways of developing cooperation between the frontier dioceses.

DECR Communication Service

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