



On St Nicholas Day, DECR chairman celebrates at Sofia Representation of Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia



On December 19, 2014, the commemoration day of St Nicholas, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations, during his visit to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Russian Cathedral of St Nicholas in Sofia.

Praying in the sanctuary was His Holiness Patriarch Neophyte of Bulgaria. Among the congregation was Russia's Ambassador Yu. Isakov.

After the Prayer of Fervent Supplication, the congregation prayed for peace in Ukraine.

After the Dismissal, Patriarch Neophyte addressed the congregation. He greeted Metropolitan Hilarion as a hard worker for the development of inter-Orthodox relations. 'Today, when we are marking the centenary of the Grand Consecration of St Nicholas's, I am glad to share this joy with you and attest

together with you to our unity in the Lord', he said. He presented Metropolitan Hilarion with a bishop's crosier, a replica of the medieval crosier of the Archdiocese of Ohrid.

Speaking in response, Metropolitan Hilarion noted the excellent work carried out to restore the cathedral to its original magnificence. He also spoke about the tragic events one hundred years ago when World War I took a heavy toll in both Russia and Bulgaria. 'We lift up a prayer for those who gave their lives for the faith and the homeland, saying, 'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends' (Jn. 15:13).

'We should remember the lessons of long standing. No problem can ever be solved through military or political confrontation... Today we should not create problems but learn to solve them only through negotiations. Our holy Churches are doing everything to persuade those in power to settle all the accumulated problems by peaceful means', he said.

He asked Patriarch Neophyte to pray for His Holiness Patriarch Kirill in his very difficult service as patriarch not only for Russia but also Ukraine and a number of other countries, and for the Russian Church, 'which always will be with the Bulgarian Church and the Russian people will always be with the devoted Bulgarian people'.

As a token of the service concluding the whole succession of celebrations devoted to the centenary of the Grand Consecration of St Nicholas's, Metropolitan Hilarion presented the church with an icon of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The rector of the cathedral, Archimandrite Philip (Vasiltsev), in his speech thanked the Bulgarian Church and Bulgarian people for the attention and love to the Russian Church. He noted that the celebrations showed that the Russian church in Sofia became an integral part of Bulgaria's spiritual life, while Archbishop Seraphim, who had served in it for 30 years, became an integral part of the spiritual image of the Orthodox Bulgarian.

After the presentation of awards to those who worked to restore the cathedral, the congregation lifted up a prayer for the repose of the soul of Archbishop Seraphim, at his grave in the crypt.

During the tea party that followed, Metropolitan Hilarion was presented with a commendation 'in recognition of the zealous inter-church and archpastoral work and exceptional achievements in the modern composer's creative work'.

