Statement by Communication Service of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations regarding the decision of the Church of England to allow women to serve as bishops

At the session that took place on the 14th of July 2014, the General Synod of the Church of England made a decision allowing women to serve as bishops. The Communication Service of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations is authorized to make the following statement in this regard:

The Russian Orthodox Church has been alarmed and disappointed to learn about the decision of the Church of England to admit women to the episcopate, since the centuries-old relationships between our two Churches had shown possibilities for the Orthodox to recognize the existence of apostolic succession in Anglicanism. As far back as the 19th century, the Anglicans, members of the Eastern Church Association, sought "mutual recognition" of orders between the Orthodox and the Anglican Churches and believed that "both Churches preserved the apostolic continuity and true faith in the Saviour and should accept each other in the full communion of prayers and sacraments."

The decision to ordain women, which the Church of England took in 1992, damaged the relationships between our Churches, and the introduction of female bishops has eliminated even a theoretical possibility for the Orthodox to recognize the existence of apostolic succession in the Anglican hierarchy.

Such practice contradicts the centuries-old church tradition going back to the early Christian community. In the Christian tradition, bishops have always been regarded as direct spiritual successors of the apostles, from whom they received special grace to guide the people of God and special responsibility to protect the purity of faith, to be symbols and guarantors of the unity of the Church. The consecration of women bishops runs counter to the mode of life of the Saviour Himself and the holy apostles, as well as to the practice of the Early Church.
In our opinion, it was not a theological necessity or issues of church practice that determined the decision of the General Synod of the Church of England, but an effort to comply with the secular idea of gender equality in all spheres of life and the increasing role of women in the British society. The secularization of Christianity will alienate many faithful who, living in the modern unstable world, try to find spiritual support in the unshakable gospel's and apostolic traditions established by Eternal and Immutable God.

The Russian Orthodox Church regrets to state that the decision allowing the elevation of women to episcopal dignity impedes considerably the dialogue between the Orthodox and the Anglicans, which has developed for many decades, and contributes for further deepening of divisions in the Christian world as a whole.

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