Patriarch Kirill meets with heads of Christian Churches in Finland

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On June 13, 2012, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with Archbishop Leo of Karelia and All (Finnish Autonomous Orthodox Church), Archbishop Kari Mäkinen of Turku, primate of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland and Bishop Teemu Sippo of Helsinki (Roman Catholic Church).

Present at the meeting were also Finland's ambassador to Russia Hannu Himanen, Rev. Dr. Kimmo Karijainen, director for international relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland, and Mr. Tuomo Pesonen, director of the information service of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland.

Present from the Russian Orthodox Church were DECR Chairman Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for inter-Orthodox relations, Archpriest Sergiy Zvonarev, DECR secretary for the far abroad, Archpriest Dimitry Sizonenko, DECR acting secretary for inter-Christian relations, and Archpriest Victor Liutik, Moscow Patriarchate representative in Finland.

In the beginning of the meeting, Archbishop Leo greeted Patriarch Kirill on behalf of the heads of the three traditional Christian Churches in Finland and conveyed him a written invitation to come to Finland for an official visit.

Patriarch Kirill, on his part, noted that relation between the Russian Church and Christian communities in Finland were an example of friendship and good-neighbourly cooperation for several decades.

During the meeting, the need for active cooperation for strengthening the religious factor in public and international life was pointed out. They also discussed prospects for further development of inter-church relations in social service, organization of pilgrimages and pastoral care of Russian visitors to Finland.

Among the issues discussed was also the attitude of the Evangelical Lutheran Church to the problem of sexual minorities and the practice of prayer for persons living in the so-called 'same-sex unions'.

In this connection, His Holiness Kirill stressed that the Orthodox Church strongly adheres to the moral teaching presented in Scriptures. If during a confession a person repents of a sin, the Church, according to the Saviour's commandment, forgives him or her 'up to seventy times seven' (Mt. 18:21-22). The

forgiveness however does not mean justification; for the Church ought to awaken a person's conscience, not to justify his or her sin. Homosexual relations are sinful and for this reason the Church cannot bless them.

'Justification of sin by a Christian community means a loss of its own identity. The authority of the Church cannot be used to justify a sin. She is called to witness with prophetic voice to the Truth of God. In today's world, there are forces who wish that the Church should adhere to political correctness, but we should take the path of witness to the Christian truth to the end, as our fathers did in the hard post-revolutionary time, when the communist power offered them an opportunity to join the so-called 'Red Church' in exchange for their survival. Some accepted it but most of the people did not. Thousands of martyrs and confessors of the faith chose the terrible path of suffering', Patriarch Kirill said.

As a result of the discussion, it was pointed to the need to clarify the stand taken by the Evangelical Lutheran Church on this issue within the framework of inter-church talks. On this will depend the opportunity to continue the bilateral dialogue.

In conclusion of the talk, Patriarch Kirill expressed the conviction that the visit of the heads of the three Churches would contribute to the further development of good relations between our countries and peoples.

DECR Communication Service

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