



## **Patriarch Kirill opens 20th International Christmas Readings**

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The 20th International Educational Christmas Readings were opened on January 23, 2012, at Gostiny Dvor, Moscow. Its theme is Education and Morality: Concern of the Church, Society and State.

Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia presided over the opening ceremony and the first plenary session and gave an opening address.

The presidium of the Readings included Metropolitan Christopher of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, who came for the Readings at the invitation of Patriarch Kirill, several high-ranking church officials, Ms Valentina Matvienko, chair of the Council of the Federation, several governmental officials, and president of the Russian Academy of Education, N. Nikandrov.

The opening was attended by bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church, representatives of other Local Orthodox Churches and numerous representatives of governmental bodies and public organizations.

Metropolitan Merkury of Rostov and Novocherkassk read out a message from President Dmitry Medvedev, who wrote in particular, 'The theme of this jubilee Readings, 'Education and Morality: Concern of the Church, Society and State', is of great importance for the present and future of Russia. The tasks of the development of our country require that continuous attention should be given to the education and formation of the younger generation in the spirit of respect for moral values and patriotic ideas. It is a basis for the consolidation of civic peace and inter-ethnic accord, and it is extremely important here to broaden cooperation between state, public and religious organizations'.

Among the speakers at the opening were Metropolitan Christopher, Ms. Matvienko, Moscow Mayor Deputy A. Gorbenko and Deputy Minister of Education M. Dulinov.

Metropolitan Christopher spoke on the peculiarities of religious education in Czechia and Slovakia. While in the Czech Republic religious instruction is not compulsory, in Slovakia schoolchildren are taught the religious basics of their faith, though they can study the secular ethics instead if they wish. While in Czechia parents do not show great interest in this subject, in Slovakia most people confess Christianity and all the churches registered there use the opportunity to give religious instruction in public schools using a curriculum developed by the Metropolitan's Council and certified by the state. In

kindergartens, religious instruction is given by professional teachers authorized by their ruling bishop to carry out 'canonical mission'. The teaching is organized under the Law on the Freedom of Religion, the Statute of the Church and Religious Organizations and the agreement on religious education and formation between the Republic of Slovakia and registered churches and religious organizations.

He also said his Church gives religious teachers professional training and advancement in close cooperation with the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of the University of Presov. This training is financed by the state. Educational aids are published by the Ministry of Education.

Patriarch Kirill decorated N. Nikandrov with the Order of St. Daniel of Moscow in acknowledgement of his services in introducing the teaching of Basics of Orthodox Culture in secondary school.

This was followed by the awarding of prize-winners of the national contest for the best works in pedagogy and work with children and youth 'For the Teacher's Moral Feat'. This annual contest is conducted by the Ministry of Education and Science together with the ROC Department for Religious Education and Catechism and supported by Presidential Envoys in federal regions.

Among those awarded was S. Naumov, minister of education of the Nizhny Novgorod Region. He was decorated with the Medal of St. Macarius, Metropolitan of Moscow and All Russia, for his outstanding contribution to the development of Orthodox education.

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, delivered a key paper on Moral Values and the Future of Humanity.

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