



## **DECR representatives share in celebrations marking centenary of Catholic cathedral in Moscow**

On December 25, 2011, Cardinal Jozef Tomko, who was Pro-Prefect of the Congregation for the **Evangelization of Peoples** from 1985 to 2001, celebrated the festive Mass as a legate of Pope Benedict XVI of Rome at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception on the occasion of the centenary of this church. Among his concelebrants were Archbishop Paul Pezzi, ordinary of the archdiocese of the Mother of God in Moscow, Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz of Minsk and Mogilev, Bishop Joseph Werth, ordinary of the diocese of the Holy Transfiguration in Novosibirsk, Bishop Kirill Klimovich, ordinary of the diocese of St. Joseph in Irkutsk, Bishop Vladislav Blin of Vitebsk, Bishop Tadeusz Pikus, representative of the Polish Bishops' Conference, Bishop Richard Stika of Knoxville, USA, and numerous clergy.

From the Russian Orthodox Church there were Archpriest Dimitry Sizonenko, Department for External Church Relations (DECR) secretary for inter-Christian relations, and Deacon Alexy Dikarev, staff member of the DECR. Among the guests were also ambassadors of Italy, Poland and Colombia.

In his sermon Cardinal Tomko spoke about the dramatic history of the cathedral and called the faithful to a truly spiritual life so that they may be worthy of the regenerated church and may themselves become churches of the Holy Spirit. In extending a special welcome to the Russian Church representative, the cardinal stressed the urgent need for the Catholic and Orthodox Christians to maintain cooperation so that their witness to Christian values may become more convincing to the world. In conclusion of the Mass, the papal envoy gave the congregation the apostolic blessing of Pope Benedict XVI.

Archpriest Dimitry Sizonenko greeted the congregation on behalf of Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations. He reminded the worshippers that the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Moscow shared in the tragic history of the country in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the godless power subjected to severe persecution both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Russia. The feat performed by the new martyrs and confessors brings the two Churches closer to each other, and considerable progress has been made in their inter-church relations in the last decades, he said. He also expressed hope for further development of the Orthodox-Catholic dialogue.

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The construction of the Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception began in 1899 and was

completed 12 years later. It was designed by Tomasz Bohdanowicz-Dworzecki, an architect of Polish origin. The church was consecrated in December 1911. It functioned till July 1936 when it was confiscated by the authorities.

Until 1956 it was used as a hostel and later, after a fire and reconstruction, as a scientific research facility. In 1976 the Moscow city authorities planned to turn it into an organ music hall. This idea never materialized.

In January 1990, a group of Moscow Catholics founded a Community of the Immaculate Conception, and in December 1990, the first Mass was celebrated at the church's stairs. It was only in 1995 that the church was finally returned to the Catholics.

After a thorough overhaul in which the floors dividing the building into four storeys were destroyed, the church was consecrated anew by Cardinal Angelo Sodano in December 1999.

After an archdiocese of the Mother of God was established in Moscow in February 2002, the church of the Immaculate Conception became the archdiocese's cathedral. Along with Russian, the celebrations in the cathedral are conducted in Polish, English, Spanish and Korean. Besides, the liturgy according to the Armenian rite is celebrated in it on Sundays.

*DECR Communication Service*

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