



Patriarch Kirill sends congratulations to newly-elected head of Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia has sent a congratulatory message to the Primate of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, Archbishop Dr. Kari Mäkinen of Turku and Finland. This message was read out by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, during the grand reception at Turku on June 5. Below is the text of the message.

Dear Brother,

I cordially congratulate you on the assumption of the office of Head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. It is a significant event not only for the Lutherans in Finland and other countries, but also for the Russian Orthodox Church, which has ages-old relations with the Finnish people.

The Finns first came in touch with Orthodoxy as far back as the 11th century when trade relations began between Novgorod and northern countries. Later the spiritual influence of Orthodoxy spread to eastern Finland through the missionary service of monks from the Valamo and Konevets monasteries. It was thanks to them that a considerable number of people in that land embraced Orthodox Christianity and adhere to it to this day. At the same time, a great role in the history of Finland was played by the work of the Lutheran Church, which helped to establish Finnish alphabet and develop the national culture of the Finns. Over one thousand years, Christianity in your lands has shared equally the Western and Eastern spiritual traditions, thus effecting profound mutual understanding between our nations.

In the years when the atheistic ideology dominated in Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church enjoyed the fraternal support of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Representatives of your Church were among the first of those Western Christians who visited Moscow in 1954. Contacts between the Russian Orthodox Church and religious organizations abroad helped in the situation of official atheism to defend the right of believers to religious life. In 1970, a theological dialogue began between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland to continue to this day. We remember with gratitude the names of those who exerted so much effort to organize those meeting, among them first of all, Archbishop Martti Simojoki of Turku and All Finland and Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad and Novgorod.

The theological conversations between our two Churches constitute a precious experience of Christian fellowship. They are notable for mutual openness and keen analysis of both theological issues and problems of church life. During these meetings we have also discussed socially significant themes which are of concern to both ordinary believers and politicians.

In recent years we have often discussed morality and respect for human rights. Freedom, this most important gift of God to human beings, is sometimes understood as a possibility for a life indulgent towards any desires including sinful ones. A distorted understanding of freedom seems to be accepted today by some Christian communities, which leads to new schisms in the Christian world and a great detriment to the common Christian witness. We rejoice in the fact that the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland still remains in solidarity with the Orthodox believers in their rejection of such distortions. I pray that our two Churches may continue to be allies in this respect. I hope that together we will defend Christian values in face of the secular society.

May the Light of the gospel's virtues burn brightly in our hearts to illumine this world and bring to it the good news of Christ the Saviour, truth, love and peace. May the enlighteners of our nations – Heinrich of Finland, Eric of Sweden and St. Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles – be a good example for us.

From my heart I wish you good health, inexhaustible energy and fruitful work in the important office of Head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

'And the God of love and peace will be with you' (2 Cor. 13:11).

With love in the Lord,

+ Kirill

Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia

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