



DECR chairman begins his visit to Finland

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, arrived in Finland on 5 June 2010, with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, to attend the enthronement of the newly-elected head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, Archbishop Kari Mäkinen of Turku and Finland. Metropolitan Hilarion is accompanied by a delegation including Hegumen Philip Riabykh, DECR vice-chairman, Rev. Dimitry Sizonenko, DECR acting secretary for inter-Christian relations, and Hierodeacon Ioann Kopeikin, an assistant to the DECR chairman.

At the airport in Helsinki, the Russian Church delegation was met by Archpriest Victor Liutik, rector of the Parish of the Protecting Veil in Helsinki, Hegumen Nikita Dobronravov, rector of the Parish of the Dormition at the Russian General Consulate in Turku, Archpriest Nikolay Voskoboinikov, rector of St. Nicholas's in Helsinki, and Sister Maria Dyba. The welcoming party also included Rev. Timo Rosquist of the ELCF international relations department.

Upon his arrival in Turku, the historical capital of Finland, Metropolitan Hilarion met with Archbishop Kari Mäkinen. He congratulated the archbishop on his election and thanked him for inviting a delegation of the Moscow Patriarchate for the enthronement ceremony.

Metropolitan Hilarion also spoke about prospects for the theological dialogue conducted by the two Churches since 1970. Another round of the conversations is to take place in 2011 under the theme 'Church as Community: Christian Identity and Church Membership'. It is planned to discuss the role of Christians in modern society and their response to the rapid secularization of public life. 'Many Protestant communities are engaged in not so much real preaching of Christian values amidst the secular society as adjusting to its standards', he said, adding, 'The liberalization of moral norms has been vividly manifested, among other things, in the blessing of the so-called same-sex unions and in ordination of open homosexuals as priests and bishops. For this reason we have had to sustain our relations with the Episcopal Church in the USA and the Lutheran Church of Sweden. I hope that the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland will continue sharing with the Orthodox the negative attitude to such practices, which is called downright sinful by the Bible. It is desirable that the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland should remain allies in these issues'.

Commenting on the recent episcopal consecration of a first woman as bishop of Helsinki, the DECR chairman remarked that this event unfortunately increased the gap between the two Churches. He said, 'In her relations with non-Orthodox Christian communities, the Orthodox Church sets off those which

have preserved the continuity of episcopal consecrations from apostolic times. In this case, the 'ordination' of women can be viewed as wrongful doings of bishops, who nevertheless preserve a certain linkage with holy apostles. The practice of granting episcopal dignity to women disrupts this precious link completely. We know only too well from Holy Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church that the Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples elected only men to priesthood, and for this reason we have no right to violate God's rule either today or in the future'.

Metropolitan Hilarion emphasized that only common commitment to the biblical moral values and rules would make it possible to develop cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland on various international platforms in general and in the work of the High-Level Religious Leaders Group in Partnership with UNESCO, in particular.

In the course of the meeting, Metropolitan Hilarion thanked the ELCF leadership for their long-standing support of the Moscow Patriarchate's effort to take pastoral care of its faithful in Finland. In stressing the need to observe the Finnish laws, he made a special mention of the sympathy the Finnish Lutherans showed for the fate of Russian citizen Irina Antonova and expressed hope for their further help to the Russian woman who found herself in a difficult life situation.

DECR Communication Service

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