Divine Liturgy celebrated at the Church of the Intercession in Harbin

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On 11 April 2010, St. Thomas Sunday, the Revd. Michael Van Tsuanshen, a clergyman of the Chinese Autonomous Orthodox Church, who lives in retirement in Shanghai, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Church of the Intercession in Harbin for the Orthodox community with the permission of the state authorities.

Fr. Michael Van was ordained priest by Bishop Simeon (Du) of Shanghai in 1958. Fr. Michael, 86, was assisted by a reader, Papias Fu Silian, a pupil of the head of the 20th Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in China, Archbishop Viktor (Svyatin) of Peking. Fu Silian studied at the Moscow Theological seminary several years ago.

Some fifty Orthodox citizens of China prayed at the Divine service as well as the Russians who reside or stay in Harbin. Many of them received Holy Communion. The procession of the cross around the church was held after the service that was celebrated in the Church Slavonic language; certain prayers were read in Chinese. Fr. Michael read out Paschal greetings in Chinese. The name of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia was proclaimed during the service. He will take direct canonical care for the flock until a Primate of the Chinese Autonomous Orthodox Church is elected.

The Divine Liturgy is the first service celebrated by a Chinese cleric in Harbin after the demise of the last rector of the Church of the Intercession, the Revd. Gregory Shipu in 2000.

On 4 April 2010, the Feast of the Resurrection, Paschal Matins and Liturgy were celebrated at the Church of the Intercession in Harbin. More than 100 compatriots prayed, many of them confessing and partaking of the Holy Mysteries of Christ. With the permission of the Department for religious affairs of the province and at the request of the Orthodox Russian citizens living in Harbin, Paschal divine service was celebrated at the Church of the Intercession by a staff member of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov) who arrived in China with the blessing of Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, the DECR Chairman.

For ten years, the Orthodox believes living in Harbin, including Russian compatriots united in the "Russian Club of Harbin," have tried to obtain permission for divine services. This matter was discussed by the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations and the State Administration for Religious Affairs of the People's Republic of China, and also at the talk of Archbishop (now

Metropolitan) Hilarion of Volokolamsk with the leaders of the administrations for religious affairs of the province and the city of Harbin on 19 November 2009 during the visit of the delegation of the Presidential Council for Interaction with Religious Associations and the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations to the People's Republic of China.

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