



## Easter liturgy celebrated in Harbin after long interruption

[gallery]

Over one hundred Russian compatriots came to the church of the Protecting Veil in Harbin, China, on Easter Day, April 4, 2010, for the Easter matins and liturgy. Most of them made confession and took communion.

Divine services were resumed at this church in 1986 after they had to be interrupted during 'the Cultural Revolution'. However, since the parish rector, Father Gregory Zhu Shipu of the Chinese Autonomous Orthodox Church died in 2000, the Orthodox community in Harbin was left without pastoral care and only the lay rite had to be used to carry out services.

The problem of observance for Russians who live in Harbin and assistance to the community of the Protecting Veil was repeatedly discussed in the dialogue between the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations and the Chinese State Directorate for Religious Affairs. This problem was considered in particular in the talk between DECR Chairman Archbishop (now Metropolitan) Hilarion of Volokolams and leaders of the Heilongjiang Province and Harbin Administrations for Religious Affairs on 19 November 2009 during the visit to China by a delegation of the Russian Presidential Council for Cooperation with Religious Organizations and the Department for External Church Relations led by His Eminence Hilarion. During that visit, His Eminence Hilarion came to the church of the Protecting Veil to meet with its parishioners.

The Heilongjiang Province Administration for Religious Affairs has granted a request from Orthodox Russians living in Harbin, supported by the Russian General Consulate in Shenyang, and has given permission for an Easter service at the church. It was celebrated by Hieromonk Stephan Igumnov who came to China with the blessing of Metropolitan Hilarion. D. Petrovsky and Ms. D. Kochkina of the DECR, came to Harbin to help him with conducting the service. Among those who walked in the Easter procession with the cross was Ms. Liubov Shitova, warden of the Chinese Orthodox community in Harbin. The Paschal Message of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia was read out during the Divine Liturgy.

An icon of our Saviour was presented to the church and accepted by Ms. Shitova. All the worshippers were given icons of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father Stephan conveyed to the Harbin administration for religious affairs a message of gratitude from the DECR chairman, Metropolitan Hilarion, for the assistance it had given to the parish.

After the Easter repast, Father Stephan and Orthodox compatriots visited the city cemetery in Harbin. They laid flowers at the memorial to Soviet soldiers and sang the troparion of the Resurrection. Then they said the lity for the dead according to the Easter rite and sang Easter hymns at the graves of Orthodox clergy.

Later that day, Mr. Petrovsky met with inspector Van Jangmin of the State Directorate for Religious Affairs and Yan Haisin, head of the Harbin administrations for religious affairs, to discuss problems involved in normalizing the status of Orthodoxy in China.

In the evening, the local administration for religious affairs gave a reception in honour of the DECR workers and Orthodox Russians in Harbin. During the reception, which was held in a festive and friendly atmosphere, it was noted that the service became a significant event in the life of the Orthodox community in Harbin and a contribution to the development of relations between Russia and China in the humanitarian sphere. Ms. Van Jangmin recalled with warmth her participation in the meetings of the State Directorate for Religious Affairs leaders with Patriarch Kirill who showed a special concern for the fate of Orthodox in China. Mr. Sergey Yeremin of the Orthodox community in Harbin expressed hope that Orthodox services would be held in the city on a regular basis.

Easter services were held this year in other cities in China as well. At the church of the Dormition in the territory of the Russian embassy in Beijing, the celebrations were led by Hegumen Melety Sokolov, assistant rector of Moscow Theological Academy, at the Russian General Consulate Rev. Alexy Kiselevich, at the Ukrainian embassy Archimandrite Kirill Govorun, vice-chairman of the ROC Education Committee. Holy Week and Easter services were also held in Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Shenzhen.

*DECR Communication Service*