DECR chairman visits the Church of the Intercession in Harbin

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Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow patriarchate department for external church relations, who is on a visit to China at the invitation of the Chinese State Administration for Religious Affairs, visited on 19 November 2009 the Church of the Intercession in Harbin.

He was welcomed at the gates by the warden of the church and the Orthodox faithful in Harbin.

The Church of the Intercession is the only Orthodox church in the city. In former time there were over twenty Orthodox churches there. Most of the churches and monasteries in Harbin were destroyed during the 1966-1976 'Cultural Revolution'. Divine services in the Church of the Intercession were resumed in 1986. Rev. George Chu Shippu took pastoral care of this parish of the Chinese autonomous Orthodox Church until his death in 2000. Left without a pastor, the faithful still assemble on Sundays for prayer. They asked for Archbishop Hilarion's blessing with tears in their eyes.

In the presence of leaders of the regional and municipal Administrations for Religious Affairs, the DECR chairman addressed the faithful to discuss their current needs. In spite of a support given to the church by the Harbin Administration for Religious Affairs, the church looks dilapidated. Archbishop Hilarion expressed the readiness of the Russian Orthodox Church to give the necessary help with the restoration of the church. He stressed the importance of regular common prayer. The problem of possible pastoral care for the community will be dealt with in the dialogue with Chinese state bodies and in accordance with the Chinese law.

Addressing the community, Archbishop Hilarion reminded them that 'many believe wrongly that the Church is needed only for meeting people's religious needs. The Church is needed first of all to make people better, as coming in contact with the upper world through prayer and church sacraments, we are themselves transformed, thus transforming the world, making it better and kinder'.

'We should remember that God is omnipresent and dwells even there where some believe He is absent. Christians are called to bear witness to the divine presence everywhere. Let us work with ardent prayer and patience so that your church community may find a priest for itself and regular services may be celebrated', he concluded.

DECR Communication Service

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