An Orthodox church consecrated in the territory of Russian embassy in Beijing

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An Orthodox church was consecrated in the territory of the Russian embassy in Beijing, People's Republic of China, on 13 October 2009. It is dedicated to the Assumption of the Most Holy Mother of God.

With the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, the consecration was celebrated by Bishop Mark of Yegoryevsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate secretariat for Russian Orthodox Church institutions abroad.

According to a report from the Parish of the Assumption to the DECR communication service, the celebration was attended by the embassy official and staff as well as representatives of the Russian trade representation in China, their family members and Orthodox believers residing in Beijing.

The Church of the Assumption was built in the territory of the Russian Orthodox Mission in Beijing in 1903 with the blessing of the head of the 18th Mission, Bishop Innokenty (Figurovsky) of Beijing. Earlier there was a Church of the Assumption in the North Town Residence in Beijing on the spot where the first Orthodox church to appear in China, St. Nicholas's, used to be. It was built by the Albasians, a Russian group who had settled there in 1685, and was destroyed by an earthquake in August 1730.

The restored church, dedicated to the Assumption, was consecrated in August 1732. That church existed for 168 years and was destroyed, just as other facilities in the Russian Orthodox Mission, during the Boxer Rebellion in June 1900. In 1904, a Church of All Saints was built on the same spot. It was destroyed in 1957. At present, this historic place in the Russian embassy's park is marked with a reverence cross, which was erected in April 2007.

The reconstructed Church of the Assumption was originally to serve as a temporary refectory church. Built with compositional laconism and simplicity, it was a truly temporary church, although it managed to survive other, more architecturally sophisticated church buildings in the Russian Orthodox Mission in Beijing. The use of simple architectural forms pointed to a desire to build in the first place a stone prayer house for current needs, without waiting for the construction of churches in classical Orthodox architectural style.

In the church, there was an icon of St. Nicholas the Wonder-worker, which was brought by the

Albasians from Russia in 1685, and icons of St. Protomartyrs Demetrius of Thessaloniki and Panteleimon the Healer.

For over 50 years in the 20th century, the Church of the Assumption and other churches of the Mission took pastoral care of the Orthodox believers from among the Chinese and the Russians who lived in Beijing or used to come to the city for a stay. In 1954, the Russian Orthodox Mission was closed and in May 1956 all the Russian clergy led by Archbishop Victor (Svyatin) of Beijing left for Russia. A Chinese Autonomous Orthodox Church was founded in China with Bishop Basil (Shuang) as its head, while the territory of the Mission was transferred to the Soviet Union for building an embassy compound. In the course of the construction many buildings were demolished, including the Church of All Saints. The Church of the Assumption was converted into a garage. The Church of St. Innocent of Irkutsk was used as a reception hall.

In 1996, after a 40-year interval, regular Orthodox divine services were resumed through the efforts of Father Dionisy Pozdnyaev and with the support of Ambassador Rogachev. The services were conducted in St. Innocent's, which was large enough to accommodate 300 worshippers, the number of parishioners who came to church for Easter and Christmas.

In 2002, the Orthodox residents in Beijing set up an initiative group with the aim to restore the Church of the Assumption. This group appealed to the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations and received support. Thanks to the joint efforts of the DECR and the Russian Foreign Ministry, it was decided to revive the Church of the Assumption. Mr. Putin gave a special attention to the restoration, raising this problem with his Chinese counterparts at the request of the late Patriarch Alexy II. After negotiations with the Chinese side, it became possible to begin the reconstruction work in the territory of the embassy.

The designers of the museum church in Beijing used as basis the structure of the former Church of the Assumption. At the same time, they took into account the fact that it had been built as a simplified temporary church. For instance, it had no sanctuary apse. Therefore, the architects had to restore the former outline of the church, but to do it taking into account the requirements of church architecture.

The designing, reconstruction and beatification works were carried out by the DABOR architect's office directed by Mr. D. Borunov. The designers did not seek to recreate the historical pattern but tried to use it as the basis for a new church building with all the traditions and canons of church construction observed.

The major construction works were carried out by Chinese contractors supported technically by the Russian Stroimaterialintorg company, which has a considerable experience in restoration of

architectural monuments in New York, Vienna, Belgrade and other cities.

The reconstruction work proper began in June 2008 to last till June 2009. The restored church is a two-storey building, with the first floor used for a museum of the Russian Orthodox Mission in Beijing and a parish library.

Funds for making and installing an altar were collected by Orthodox believers in Russia, China, Ukraine, the USA, France and Estonia. The relics of the Holy Martyr Ioann of Riga were placed in the alter base made by Chinese craftsmen of the best Sichuan marble.

There are six bells in the church's belfry, produced in 2008 by the Moscow-based Society of Old Russian Musical Culture.

The territory adjacent to the church has been beautified with a fountain, benches, flowers and trees.

Previously an unobtrusive corner of the embassy used for household needs, it is now a beautiful place with an Orthodox museum-church in the center, a visible monument to the toil of many generations of Russian missionaries.

As Russian-Chinese cooperation is growing, the number of Russians coming to Beijing to live, to study or to work is increasing. Many of them need pastoral care and come to replenish the Orthodox community in Beijing. Its activity is becoming ever more manifold and rich from year to year. Along with church services, especially crowded during the Nativity of Christ and the Holy Pascha, the parish runs a Sunday school for children and adults and an Orthodox library and carries out charity events and other projects.

DECR Communication Service

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