



## **A Russian Orthodox church consecrated in Havana**

The Church of Our Lady of Kazan was consecrated on 19 October 2008 by Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, head of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations, who was assisted by Archbishop Mark of Hust and Vinogradov, Archbishop Pavel of Ryazan and Kasimov and Bishop Yevtikhy of Domodedovo.

Mr. Raul Castro, Head of the State of Cuba, attended the service.

Among those present were also a Russian State Duma delegation led by Ms. L. Slizka, Duma Deputy Speaker, Russian Ambassador in Cuba M. Kamynin, Havana City Historian Eusebio Leal, Russian diplomats and their families as well as numerous Russian compatriots.

Speaking before the service, Mr. Leal stressed that there were now two symbols of Russian-Cuban friendship in Havana – a monument to internationalist soldiers and a Russian Orthodox church built to symbolize the two nations' mutual love. He made a special mention of the fact that it took 33 months to build the church according to the number of years in Christ's life on earth. 'The construction is completed today, and it is a great day for the people of Cuba', he said.

Then Metropolitan Kirill addressed the congregation with archpastoral words, saying in particular, 'It is a great day today. Years and decades will pass but this magnificent and beautiful church will remind people of what has been accomplished by our generation, what the Cuban political leaders and the people of Cuba have done in response to the love and sacrifice that two generations of our people showed freely and joyfully in order to maintain the spirit of freedom and independence. Thank you for remembering it'.

The DECR chairman shared his remembrances of the meeting he had with the legendary Cuban leader Fidel Castro four years ago, saying, 'I was humanly struck by his reaction to our proposal for building a church in Havana. He did not just agreed but did it with great joy'.

Citing Fidel Castro who said that 'we will build a monument', His Eminence Kirill underscored that the church of Our Lady of Kazan built in Havana was already a monument to those who spared no effort to develop bilateral friendly relations. 'This church will inspire many people back in Russia. We will continue doing what our forefathers did, that is, to support the people of Cuba with sincerity and love', the metropolitan said, adding that the church of Our Lady of Kazan was a little part of Holy Russia in Cuba.

He cordially thanked the head of the state of Cuba and the people of Cuba, noting that Cuba was not a rich country and was facing many economic problems. 'It is even more impressive that the people of Cuba have used their own funds to build a Russian church in Havana', he said and underlined that it was a unique case. 'This gesture touches the heart of the Russian people and will never be forgotten'.

His Eminence imparted that His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia regretted that he could not officiate at the consecration of the church of Our Lady of Kazan in Havana. The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church asked him to convey sincere gratitude and expressions of deep respect to Fidel Castro and the present head of the state of Cuba, President General Raul Castro.

Patriarch Alexy conferred church awards on many of those who worked to build the church. Some of them were presented with their awards before the Great Consecration began. Among those who received awards 'in recognition of their support for the construction of the Church of Our Lady of Kazan in Havana' were C. Diego Beglio, head of the department for religion under the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, who was awarded the Order of St. Euphrosinia of Moscow, Third Class, and Havana City Historian E. Leal, who received the Order of St. Daniel of Moscow, Third Class.

*DECR Communication Service*

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