



His Holiness Patriarch Kirill meets with members of Commission for Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church



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On September 20, His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, met at the Cathedral Church of Christ the Saviour with members of the Commission for Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church, which is holding its session in Russia.

Among the participants in the meeting from the Russian Orthodox Church were Hieromonk Stephen (Igumnov), DECR secretary for inter-Christian relations, and S. G. Alferov, DECR, a member of the Commission.

The meeting was co-chaired by Metropolitan Serapion of Los Angeles, Coptic Church, who attended the meeting online. Present at the meeting were Bishop Cyril, secretary of the Commission, dean of the

Ss Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria Seminary; Hieromonk Dawoud El Antony, representative of the Coptic Church in Russia; Dr Anton Milad, Patriarchal adviser; Ms Barbara Soliman, head of the Patriarchal department for church projects; and Dr Iskhak Ibrahim Agban, general secretary of the Institute of Coptic Studies.

‘We cherish the longstanding good and friendly relations that tie our two Churches, and, certainly, the ages-old friendship between the peoples of Egypt and Russia’, Patriarch Kirill said welcoming the delegation of the Coptic Church, ‘Now we are going through a special history of international relations, which in many cases are breaking, becoming more strained and burdened with conflicts. However, we should thank the Lord for the relations between our Churches as well as our countries, Russia and Egypt, which are invariably good and lasting’.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church stressed that in recent years, the development of her relations with Churches in Africa became one of the priorities of the Moscow Patriarchate’s external work. His Holiness recalled that in December 2021 the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church established the Patriarchal Exarchate for Africa, which has created an additional potent base for developing cooperation with the Coptic Church in the continent.

He thanked the representatives of the Coptic Church for the help it gives to the pastoral care for Russian compatriots residing in Cairo and Hurgada, especially for providing a church compound in the Egypt’s capital city. ‘I am aware of a similar need of the Moscow community of the Coptic Church. Therefore, I have decided to transfer to you for your free use a building in the Yakimanka district in the historic center of Moscow’, he said.

Speaking about the bilateral development of relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church, His Holiness pointed to the successful work of the Commission for Bilateral Dialogue, which, in the last eight years since its establishment, managed to implement a great number of significant initiatives in various areas.

‘I would like to make a special mention of the project for annual reciprocal monastic delegations. They include abbots and abbesses of the largest and most venerated monasteries of our Church. We can see how these trips help more and more Orthodox Russians to learn about the life of Egyptian Christians, how they take a liking to the Egyptian Christianity through communication with representatives of our Church. And we, too, are ready to continue hosting pilgrim groups from your Church who wish to visit Russia’, His Holiness said.

The Primate stressed the importance of cooperation between the units of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Coptic Church that work in the mass media.

In recent years, Russian camera crews made several trips to Egypt in order to develop documentary TV projects about the holy places and life of the Coptic Church and her new martyrs who suffered martyrdom and showed an example of sanctity', he said, 'The fact that they become widely known to our faithful is an important factor helping to foster sympathy, trust and love between the faithful of our two Churches. On our part, we are ready to host similar groups from Egypt who could produce footage about the life of the Russian Orthodox Church'.

His Holiness made a positive assessment of the exchange of experience accumulated by ecclesial specialists working in the social sphere as well as the development of interaction between the two Churches in academic cooperation. At present, a multitude of initiatives are being implemented in students and professors exchanges, common participation in issue conferences and contacts on the level of library stocks and schools for precentors and icon-painters.

'Our theological schools are ready to continue enrolling students from the Coptic Church' His Holiness said, 'It is known that a considerable number of students from Egypt, with Copts among them, are studying in Russian secular high education institutes. They also study in our universities. There are in total about 700 young Egyptian Christians who study today in various educational institutions of the Russian Federation'.

His Holiness noted that each Coptic student who comes to Russia needs to feel care on the part of the Russian Orthodox Church, 'In this connection, I have instructed local dioceses to invite them to meet with their ruling bishops and to get them to take part in youth activities. This year, there have been a great number of such activities in many dioceses of the Russian Church'.

His Holiness put a special stress on the need to resume the work of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and Oriental Churches and to continue bilateral theological consultations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church.

His Holiness asked to convey the best wished to His Holiness Coptic Patriarch Tawadros II, who this year marks his 70th birthday and the 10th anniversary of his election to the Patriarchal See.

'I think our next meeting during the bilateral dialogue could do even more effective our joint movement to meet halfway', said the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In his response, Metropolitan Serapion of Los Angeles thanked His Holiness Patriarch Kirill for the hospitality and conveyed to him best wishes from His Holiness Coptic Patriarch Tawadros II.

'We would like to express our support for the Russian Orthodox Church and her Primate and for all the clergy of your Church in connection with the present grave situation full of challenges. We too are

praying for the establishment of peace, which must be just and must consider the interests of all the sides. We pray for the repose of those who were killed and affected and for the wounded in the hope that soon they will find themselves in security', Metropolitan Serapion said.

His Eminence thanked the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church for the support she invariably gives to the work of the Commission for Dialogue between the two Churches.

'Our cooperation in the sphere of pastoral care for the Russian-speaking Christians in Egypt and the Copts in Russia is an important part of the bilateral cooperation. We are grateful for the care that you show for the Egyptian Christians residing in Russia and certainly for this gift - the transfer to the Coptic parish a building they need so much - as a reciprocal gesture of the Coptic Church in help to the Russian parishes in Cairo, Hurghada and Sharm ash Shaykh', the hierarch said.

'The Coptic Church welcomes the resumption of the work of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Churches. We are confident that without the participation of the Russian Orthodox Church this dialogue will be senseless. Therefore, we intend to study carefully some aspects of this issue as especially topical and to understand what practical steps are to be made in this direction', Metropolitan Serapion noted in particular.