



Representatives of theological schools of the Coptic Church visit Russia



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A delegation of lecturers and students of the Coptic Theological Academy in Cairo and the Coptic Seminary at St. Mary Muharraq Monastery in Assuit visited Russia from September 9 to 19. The visit was aimed at developing cooperation between theological schools of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church in the context of the Bilateral Commission for Dialogue's work.

Representatives of Coptic academic circles were introduced to the history, the present-day life and academic work of the St. Petersburg Theological schools. This was a return visit, as a delegation of lecturers, staff and students of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy visited Egypt in November 2023. Earlier, in November 2022, lecturers from the two leading educational institutions of the Coptic Church visited the Moscow Theological Academy.

The delegation was headed by priest Elkess Nabil, a lecturer at the Coptic Theological Academy and Seminary, and included priest Elkess Moner of the Academy; Mina Shamshun of the Academy's International Department; Maurice Metri, an education coordinator of the Academy; students of the Academy Theodore Megally, Bishoy Saleb and Mikhail Shafik; and a Seminary student Nader Gerges. Accompanying the guests during their visit were archpriest Dimitry Sizonenko, head of the International Department of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy; hieromonk Daoud el-Anthoni, a representative of the Coptic Church in Russia; Ivan N. Sudosa, head of the St. Petersburg branch of the DECR and assistant professor of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy; and Ivan D. Ivanov, education coordinator of the Academy's International Department.

From September 9 to 13, representatives of the Coptic Church were getting acquainted with the life and activities of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy.

The programme began with a sightseeing tour of the Academy. The guests from Egypt saw the Patriarchal chambers, lecture halls and classrooms, the Church of the Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian, the church-archaeological museum, the rare books and manuscripts in the languages of the peoples of the Christian East stocked in the Academy's library.

Members of the delegation met with professors and lecturers of the Academy, its vice-rector for academic work, archpriest Vladimir Khulap, and attended several academic classes as well as divine services in the Academy's church. Also, representatives of the Coptic Theological Schools and the St. Petersburg Academy held a joint colloquium on "Theological Education in Russia and Egypt," at which they presented reports on the history of the Russian Orthodox and Coptic Churches, their educational institutions, and crucial tasks of the church mission in today's information space.

The guests met with Bishop Siluan of Peterhof, rector of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy. He told them about the history of the theological school he heads and about particular the features of modern theological education in Russia in the context of the national educational system. Also, he drew their attention to the fact that the Academy has a long tradition of admitting foreign students, including students from the Coptic Church. This practice dates back to the pre-revolutionary times and had been preserved in the Soviet era. Special credit goes to the ever-memorable Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov) of Leningrad and Novgorod, whose 95th birthday will be celebrated next October. Bishop Siluan presented the delegation with two portraits of the hierarch. They will be placed in the assembly halls of the Coptic Theological Academy and Seminary.

On September 12, the rector, lecturers and students of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy and the delegation of the Coptic Church attended celebrations marking the 300th anniversary of the transfer

of the relics of the Holy Right-believing Prince Alexander Nevsky from Vladimir to St. Petersburg. The guests took part in the procession of the cross along Nevsky Prospect and attended the festive prayer service celebrated at Alexander Nevsky Square by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' and members of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church.

On September 13, the delegation was warmly welcomed by Metropolitan Varsonofy of St. Petersburg and Ladoga in the Portrait Hall of the St. Petersburg Diocesan Administration. He told the guests about the life of the Diocese of St. Petersburg and about St. John of Kronstadt and the Blessed Xenia of St. Petersburg, the venerated saints of the northern capital of Russia. Discussed were issues of further cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church, including the academic sphere.

From September 14 to 18, the guests visited the religious, historical and cultural sites of St. Petersburg, including the Lavra of the Holy Trinity and St. Alexander Nevsky, the Kazan cathedral, St. Isaac's cathedral, the cathedral of Ss Peter and Paul, St. John's convent on the bank of the river Karpovka, the church of the Smolensk Icon of the Mother of God on Vasilyevsky Island and the chapel of the Blessed Xenia, the State Hermitage Museum and the Peterhof State Museum-Reserve, as well as the holy places of the Diocese of Tikhvin, including the convent of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary into the Temple on the bank of the river Oyat, and the monasteries of the Holy Trinity and St. Alexander of Svir and of the Dormition of the Mother of God.

Also, members of the delegation met with members of the Coptic parish in St. Petersburg.

On September 19, the delegation left for Cairo.

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