Delegation of Russian Orthodox Church attends celebrations marking 1700th anniversary of the proclamation of Christianity as the state religion of Georgia



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On 12th October 2026, with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus', an official delegation of the Moscow Patriarchate arrived in Tbilisi to take part in the celebrations marking the 1700th anniversary of the proclamation of Christianity as the state religion of Georgia. The delegation included Metropolitan Georgy of Niznhy Novgorod and Arzamas; Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, Deputy Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations; and clerics of the Nizhny Novgorod Diocese – Priest Artyom Muzhichenkov and Protodeacon Sergy Guryanov.

Meeting the delegation at the Shota Rustaveli Airport were Metropolitan David, Abba of Alaverdi; Mr D.A. Olisov, Head of the Russian Federation Interests Section at the Swiss Embassy in Georgia; Archpriest Vladimir Alexandrov, cleric of the Russian Orthodox Church in Tbilisi; and Schema-Hegumenia Ioanna, Abbess of the Convent of the Khakhuli Icon of the Mother God (New Shuamta Convent).

On 13th October, the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church visited the Sioni Cathedral. There, Metropolitan Georgy of Nizhny Novgorod and Arzamas, in concelebration with Metropolitan Metodije of Budimlja and Nikšić and Bishop Stefan of Remesiana, hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church, celebrated a memorial litiya at the grave of the ever-memorable Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II of All Georgia (†2026).

After that, the Moscow Patriarchate's delegation and several other delegations of the Local Orthodox Churches that had arrived in Tbilisi for the celebrations met with the Primate of the Georgian Orthodox Church, His Holiness and Beatitude Catholicos-Patriarch Shio III of All Georgia. Taking part in the meeting were Metropolitan Isychios of Capitolias (Church of Jerusalem); Metropolitan Metodije of Budimlja and Nikšić and Bishop Stefan of Remesiana (Serbian Church); Metropolitan Nifon of Târgoviște (Romanian Church); Metropolitan Anthony of Western and Central Europe and Bishop Sioniy of Velitsa (Bulgarian Church); and Metropolitan Nikolla of Apolonia and Fieri. Representing the Georgian Patriarchate at the meeting were also Metropolitan David, Abba of Alaverdi; Metropolitan Theodore of Akhaltsikhe and Tao-Klarjeti; Metropolitan Sava of Khoni and Samtredia; Metropolitan Gerasim of Zugdidi and Tsaishi; Bishop Dositheos of Belgium and Holland; Bishop Vakhtang of Nikortsminda; as well as Protopresbyter George Zviadadze and Archpriest Andrew Dzhagmaidze.

His Holiness and Beatitude Shio III, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, thanked the members of the Local Orthodox Churches' delegations for attending the celebrations, which, as he noted, marked a significant contribution to upholding Orthodox unity. As His Holiness also pointed out in his speech, the past 1700 years were full of hardships and ordeals for the Georgian Orthodox Church, but with God's help it managed to preserve the most important thing – the faith of its people. To this day, faith remains the spiritual pillar of the Georgian people and a pledge of their future, the Primate of the Georgian Church noted.

Metropolitan Georgy of Nizhny Novgorod and Arzamas conveyed to Patriarch Shio brotherly greetings from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' and added that he was deeply honoured to take part in the historic celebrations. Georgia as the first domain of the Mother of God and Georgian saints are held in great reverence by Orthodox Christians in Russia, Metropolitan Georgy noted. In confirmation, His Eminence showed to Patriarch Shio a photobook about the Church of St. Nino, Equal-to-the-Apostles, built in Nizhny Novgorod for a local Georgian community. As a commemorative gift, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church's delegation presented His Holiness and Beatitude with an icon of St. Seraphim of Sarov.

Later that day, the heads of the Local Orthodox Churches' delegations, including Metropolitan Georgy, met with Mr Irakli Kobakhidze, Prime Minister of Georgia.

On 14th October, the Feast of Svetitskhovloba, divine services were celebrated at the monasteries of Mtskheta – ancient capital of Georgia. Taking part in them were the delegations of the Local Orthodox Churches. Metropolitan Georgy of Nizhny Novgorod and Arzamas and Metropolitan David of Alaverdi celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the Holy Transfiguration Church of the Samtavro Monastery. Concelebrating the Liturgy with the archpastors were ordained delegation members and clerics of the Russian and Georgian Churches. After the service, Metropolitan Georgy venerated the relics of the Holy King Mirian and Queen Nana, Equal-to-the-Apostles, and the relics of the Venerable Gabriel of Samtavro.

The delegation then proceeded to the Svetitskhoveli Patriarchal Cathedral. There, His Holiness and Beatitude Catholicos-Patriarch Shio III, His Beatitude Metropolitan Rastislav of the Czech Lands and Slovakia and some other participants in the celebrations delivered greeting speeches.

In the evening, an official reception was given. Taking part in it were His Holiness and Beatitude Catholicos-Patriarch Shio III and hierarchs of the Georgian Patriarchate; His Beatitude Metropolitan Rastislav of the Czech Lands and Slovakia; the delegations of the Local Orthodox Churches; Mr Mikheil Kavelashvili, President of Georgia; members of the Georgian Government and Parliament; as well as representatives of non-Orthodox Christian confessions and religious associations, and diplomats.

Among those who addressed the assembly were His Holiness and Beatitude Patriarch Shio, as well as President of Georgia Mikheil Kavelashvili and the heads of the Orthodox Churches' delegations. Metropolitan Georgy of Nizhny Novgorod and Arzamas read out a message of greetings from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' on the occasion of the 1700th anniversary of the establishment of Christianity in Georgia.

"The Orthodox faith, established in the Georgian land through the labours of St. Nino, Equal-to-the-Apostles, the Holy Righteous King Mirian and many other saints pleasing unto God determined the identity of the Georgian nation, shaped its unique culture and helped it withstand the hardships it experienced in the course of its long history," Metropolitan Georgy said, in particular.

Giving thanks to God, the head of the Russian Church's delegation also pointed out that Christianity in Georgia remains a living tradition, a blooming fig tree that continues to bear fruits in abundance. "Serving as a vivid confirmation of that is the almost semicentennial Primatial ministry of His Holiness and Beatitude Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II of blessed memory, who became the true father of the Georgian people, having renewed their spiritual life. The nation-wide farewell to him this March was a sign of deep piety of the Georgian people, who remain faithful to the Holy Orthodoxy and determined to build up their future on the solid rock of Christian faith," His Eminence added, "We are glad that the

ancient Throne of Georgian Primates is now adorned with a new Catholicos-Patriarch – His Holiness and Beatitude Shio, who successfully continues the work of his great predecessor for the benefit of the Georgian people and the entire Orthodoxy."

As the head of the Russian Church's delegation also mentioned in his speech, the Georgian and the Moscow Patriarchates have long-standing good relations. Believers in Russia have great reverence for Georgian saints, and Orthodox Georgians revere the saints of the Russian Church. "We have common values, common past and the same views on present-day problems and challenges facing the world Orthodoxy. We are united in our understanding that, regardless of the elements of this world, we need to build up church unity on the unshakable foundation of sacred canons and unblemished faith," Metropolitan Georgy of Nizhny Novgorod and Arzamas said in conclusion of his speech, "On this feast day, sharing with the Holy Georgian Church the joy of this memorable celebration, we prayerfully wish it further prosperity and bountiful spiritual fruits, and we wish peace, concord and God's abundant blessings to the people of Georgia – our brothers and sisters in faith."

On 15th October, the delegation of the Moscow Patriarchate departed for Russia.

Photos by Gleb Pushmenkov

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