Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church adopts a Resolution 'On the Appeal of the former Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev and All Ukraine'

On the second day of its work, the Bishops' Council, held in Moscow from November 29 to December 2, 2017, heard a written appeal of the former Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev and All Ukraine to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and the episcopate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The letter dated November 16, 2017, contains a request to restore the Eucharistic and devotional communion with Christians in the Ukrainian church schism and repeal 'all the decisions on bans and excommunications… for the sake of achieving God-commanded peace between Orthodox Christians of the same faith and reconciliation between nations'. The letter concludes with the following words: 'I ask your forgiveness for everything in which I have sinned by word, deed and all my feelings and I also sincerely forgive all from my heart'.

The Resolution adopted as a result of the discussion states that the Council sees the appeal with satisfaction as a step towards overcoming the schism and restoring the church communion on the part of those who once fell away from the unity with the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The Bishops' Council members stressed, 'Today's duty both of those who are in the Church and those who seek to reunite with her lies in the hourly feat of mutual love and self-renunciation so that the long standing alienation may be overcome, putting our trust in the mercy and charity of Jesus Christ our Lord and God Who has destroyed the dividing wall of enmity. The resolute rejection of violence and capture of churches, the rejection of mutual accusations and reproaches, mutual forgiveness of each other's old grievances – these are the healing means of self-sacrifice and love of Christ which alone can help restore the unity of the canonical Church in Ukraine'.

It is not for the first time that the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church addresses the problem of healing the church schism in Ukraine. Thus, in 2008, the Council's Resolution 'On the Unity of the Church' approved the efforts of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to overcome the schism through dialogue based on 'faithfulness to the canonical tradition of the Church and desire to bring back to church communion those who separated themselves from salvific unity'. And the Message of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church of July 26, 2010, to the Orthodox Christians in Ukraine, who remain outside unity with the Holy Church, stated, 'What can be more desirable than the return of fallen-away brothers to the salvific fold of the One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church? It would be a true

triumph of Orthodoxy, a triumph of the love of Christ! We pray for the approach of the hour when those who have diverted into the schism may wish freely and unconstrainedly to return to the fold of the Church and for the longed-for day that will bring peace and salvation to many exhausted souls. And we believe that it will certainly come'.

For conducting further negotiations with those who have fallen away from church communion, the Council established a commission, which includes Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk (chairman), Metropolitan Antoniy of Borispol and Brovary (Ukrainian Orthodox Church), Metropolitan Feodore of Podolsk and Gorodok, Metropolitan Mitrofan of Lugansk and Alchevsk (Ukrainian Orthodox Church), Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, Archpriest Nikolay Danilevich (Ukrainian Orthodox Church), and Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk (secretary).

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