



## **Holy Synod makes decisions concerning external church relations**

At its session on December 27, 2016, chaired by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church considered in particular some matters concerning external church relations.

Patriarch Kirill made a report about his visit to the Diocese of Chersonese from December 3 to 7. The official delegation, which accompanied His Holiness consisted of Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations; Archbishop Sergiy of Solnechnogorsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate administrative secretariat; Bishop Antoni of Bogorodsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate office for institutions abroad; Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), DECR vice-chairman; and Archimandrite Savva (Tatunov), deputy chancellor of the Moscow Patriarchate.

On December 3, Patriarch Kirill presided over the All-Night Vigil at the church of the Three Hierarchs in Paris.

On December 4, the Presentation of Our Lady to the Temple, he presided over the Grand Consecration of the Trinity Cathedral at the Orthodox Spiritual and Cultural Center in Paris and the Divine Liturgy in it. The singing was performed in Church Slavonic and French.

Among His Holiness's concelebrants were the ROC delegation members and Metropolitan Innocent of Vilna and Lithuania, Metropolitan Mark of Ryazan and Mikhailovsk, Archbishop Michael of Geneva and Western Europe, Archbishop Yelisey of Sourozh, Bishop Nestor of Chersonese, as well as representatives of Local Orthodox Churches, namely, Archbishop Emmanuel of France and Archbishop John of Charioupolis (Patriarchate of Constantinople), Metropolitan Ignatius of France, Western and Southern Europe (Patriarchate of Antioch), Metropolitan Joseph of Western and Southern Europe and Bishop Mark of Nyamets (Romanian Orthodox Church).

Present at the service were A. Kolpakov, chancellor of the President of the Russian Federation, Senator Jean-Pierre Chevenement, special representative of the French Government for relations with Russia, Russian Ambassador to France A. Orlov, Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo.

Among the honorary guests were Ms. S. Medvedeva, president of the Social and Cultural Initiatives Foundation, Ms Helene Carrere d'Encausse, permanent secretary of the Académie Française,

Archbishop Luigi Ventura, Apostolic Nuncio to France (Roman Catholic Church), and other representatives of Christian confessions.

After the service, His Holiness met with Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo.

On December 5, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church met with France's President Francois Hollande, at the Élysée Palace. They discussed the situation of Christians in the Middle East and other matters of mutual concern.

On the same day, Patriarch Kirill met with the Catholic Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Andre Vingt-Trois. His Holiness thanked Cardinal Vingt-Trois for the support he gave to the construction of the Trinity Cathedral. They also talked about the role of traditional Christian values in the life of modern-day Europe.

Patriarch Kirill visited the Sainte Genevieve des Bois cemetery in which he lifted up a prayer for the repose of Patriarch Alexy II of eternal memory and Russian emigres who died far from their native land. He also visited the Russian House in Sainte Genevieve des Bois, in which some 80 pensioners live.

His Holiness concluded the program of his visit to France with a visit to the Chersonese diocesan Spiritual and Cultural Center of St. Genevieve of Paris. At the chapel of this educational institution the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church celebrated a thanksgiving.

On December 7, His Holiness presided over the Divine Liturgy at the church of the Resurrection of Christ in Zurich – a parish that marks its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. After the liturgy, a reception was held in honour of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the parish.

The Holy Synod thanked God for the completion of the construction of the Trinity Cathedral and the Orthodox Spiritual and Cultural Center on the Branly embankment in Paris. The members of the session also thanked His Holiness Kirill for the work and the joy of communion in prayer that he brought to archpastors, pastors and the faithful of the ROC Diocese of Chersonese. The Synod also thanked Bishop Nestor of Chersonese and the Russian Ambassador A. Orlov for their efforts in organizing the visit.

Metropolitan Varsonofy of St. Petersburg and Ladoga made a report on the anniversary events devoted to the Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Patriarch Kirill turned 70 on November 20. Official delegations of Local Orthodox Churches arrived in Moscow to take part in the celebrations: a delegation from the Church of Constantinople, led by

Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, from the Church of Alexandria, led by Patriarch Theodore of Alexandria and All Africa, from the Church of Antioch, led by Metropolitan Niphon of Philppople, from the Church of Jerusalem, led by Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem and All Palestine, from the Church of Georgia, led by Catholicos-Patriarch Iliya of All Georgia, from the Church of Serbia led by Patriarch Irenaeus of Serbia, from the Church of Romania, led by Metropolitan Nifon of Targoviste, from the Church of Bulgaria, led by Metropolitan Antonije of Western and Central Europe, from the Church of Cyprus, led by Archbishop Chrysostomos of New Justiniana and All Cyprus, from the Church of Greece, led by Metropolitan Ignatius of Dimitriades, from the Church of Albania, led by Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania, from the Church of Poland, led by Metropolitan Sava of Warsaw and All Poland, from the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, led by Metropolitan Rostislav of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, from the Orthodox Church in America, led by Metropolitan Tikhon of All America and Canada.

In the period from November 19 to 22, Patriarch Kirill met with heads and delegations of Local Orthodox Churches.

In addition, there were meetings with the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II, the Chairman of the Muslim Board of the Caucasus Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshuqur Pasha-zade, and a delegation of the Roman Catholic Church, led by the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity Cardinal Kurt Koch.

On November 20, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church celebrated the Divine Liturgy together with heads and representatives of Local Orthodox Church and an assembly of the ROC clergy. Present at the service were the Chairman of the Russian State Duma V. Volodin, the first deputy of the Presidential Administration S.Kirienko, the Presidential Envoy to the Central Okrug A. Beglov, the Deputy Prime Minister and Head of the Presidential Administration S. Prikhodko, the Minister of Culture V. Medinsky, the chairman of the Council of the Federation committee to constitutional legislation A. Klishas, the Moscow Mayor S. Sobyenin, the chairman of the State Duma committee to international affairs L. Slutsky, as well as representatives of the state and public organizations.

Patriarch Kirill received congratulatory messages from Russian President Vladimir Putin, Byelorussian President A.Lukashenko, Kazakhstan President N. Nazarbaev, Moldova's President-elect I. Dodon, Azerbaijan's President I. Aliyev, as well as high-ranking representatives of the state authorities, religious, public, cultural figures and scientists.

On November 21, a grand act took place at the Church Councils Hall in the Church of Christ the Saviour. Congratulatory messages to Patriarch Kirill were read out, and His Holiness addressed himself to the gathering with a response.

The festive concert devoted to Patriarch Kirill's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, which took place on November 22, at the Church Councils Hall, was attended by President Vladimir Putin, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko, Prime Minister D. Medvedev, Council of the Federation Speaker Ms. V. Matvienko, as well as hierarchs and clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church, representatives of the Presidential Administration, heads and representatives of ministries and federal departments and regional authorities.

The head of the state awarded His Holiness Kirill the Order for Merits to the Fatherland, Degree I.

Noting with satisfaction the participation in the celebrations of official delegations of all the Local Orthodox Church, the Holy Synod members stressed that the common prayer and fellowship that had taken place were of great importance for the consolidation of the unity of Holy Orthodoxy.

The Holy Synod members thanked Patriarch Theodore of Alexandria and All Africa, Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem and All Palestine, Catholicos-Patriarch Iliya of All Georgia, Patriarch Irenaeus of Serbia, Archbishop Chrysostomos of New Justiniana and All Cyprus, Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania, Metropolitan Sava of Warsaw and All Poland, Metropolitan Rostislav of the Czech Lands and Slovakia and Metropolitan Tikhon of All America and Canada for their personal participation in the celebrations. They also thanked Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, Patriarch John of Antioch and All the East, Patriarch Daniel of Romania, and Archbishop Hieronymus of Athens and All Greece for having sent official delegations of their Local Orthodox Churches.

Gratitude was also expressed to Pope Francis of Rome for the attention he had paid to the special day in the life of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church and had sent a representative for participation in the celebrations.

The Synod also thanked the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos Karekin II of All Armenians and the chairman of the Muslim Board of the Caucasus Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshuqur Pasha-zade for their personal participation in the festivities.

Words of gratitude for participation in the festive events were expressed to President Putin, President Lukashenko, Prime Minister Medvedev, Council of the Federation Speaker Ms. Matvienko, as well as representatives of the ministries and federal departments, regional authorities, and public and cultural figures and leading scientists.

The Holy Synod also considered the adoption of new versions of the statutes of several synodal departments, among them a new version of the statute of the Department for External Church Relations.

The session members head a report made by Metropolitan Hilarion about his working visit to Rome and Bari (Italy), which took place from December 10 to 13, 2016, with the blessing of Patriarch Kirill.

On December 10, Metropolitan Hilarion met with Pope Francis of Rome in the Vatican. On behalf of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, he conveyed to the Pope congratulations and best wishes on the occasion of the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday the Holy Father is to celebrate on December 17. He also presented Pope Francis with an icon of St. Seraphim of Sarov.

They discussed various issues concerning the bilateral relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, especially cooperation in giving aid to suffering Christians in the Middle East. They also considered the development of cultural cooperation.

On December 11, Metropolitan Hilarion and the Bishop Antony of Bogorodsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate office for institutions abroad, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Moscow Patriarchal Church of the Holy Protomartyr Catherine.

From December 12 to 13, Metropolitan Hilarion was on a visit to Bari, where he met with Mons. Cacucci, Archbishop of Bari, and celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the crypt of the St. Nicholas Basilica, on the saint's relics.

*DECR Communication Service*

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