



## **Department for External Church Relations marks its 65th anniversary**

The Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR), a most important Synodal department of the Russian Orthodox Church, marks its 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 4 April 2011.

The DECR was set up by the Holy Synod on 4 April 1946 as the development of external activities of the Russian Orthodox Church demanded a special body for it.

Metropolitan Nikolai (Yarushevich) of Krutitsy and Kolomna was the first DECR chairman until 1960. The DECR was headed by Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov) of Leningrad and Novgorod from 1960 to 1972, by Metropolitan Juvenaly (Poyarkov) from 1972 to 1981, and Metropolitan Philaret of Minsk and Byelorussia from 1981 to 1989.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia headed the DECR as archbishop from 1989 to 1991 and as metropolitan from 1991 to 2009. Qualitative changes in the DECR structure and activities were introduced during this period. Dialogue with the state authorities was enhanced to a new level; contacts and cooperation with political, public, cultural and other organizations were expanded and consolidated.

The DECR elaborated the document on the attitude of the Church to various social developments and

problems – the Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church that was adopted at the Jubilee Bishops' Council in 2000.

The unity of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia was reestablished by the signing of the Act on Canonical Communion on 17 May 2007. This was the result of long consultations and talks held with the DECR's active participation.

Being guided by pastoral care for the Orthodox compatriots living outside of our Motherland, the DECR has contributed to the increase in number of the Moscow Patriarchate's parishes and institutions abroad.

After the demise of His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia, the Holy Synod elected Metropolitan Kirill *locum tenens* of the Patriarchal Throne on 6 December 2008, while on 27 January 2009 he was elected Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia by the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church and was enthroned at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour on 1 February 2009.

On 31 March 2009, the Holy Synod resolved to optimize the activities of the Synodal departments and has set up, on the DECR's basis, the Department for Church-Society Relations and the Moscow Patriarchate's Administration for Institutions Abroad to perform a part of DECR's functions. The branch of the Moscow Theological Academy's postgraduate course attached to the DECR was reorganized as the Ss Cyril and Methodius Postgraduate and Doctoral School.

Bishop Hilarion of Vienna and Austria (now Metropolitan of Volokolamsk, Vicar of the Moscow Diocese) was appointed Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations.

At present, the Secretariats for inter-Orthodox Relations, for inter-Christian relations, and for the far abroad countries carry out the DECR's activities along the most important lines.

DECR's status and tasks are determined by the Statutes of the Russian Orthodox Church and the DECR By-Laws. DECR is accountable to the Patriarch and the Holy Synod who annually approve its work plan. The documents guiding DECR are actions of the Local and Bishops' Councils of the Russian Orthodox Church, resolutions of the Holy Synod and instructions of His Holiness Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.

According to tradition, DECR jubilees are celebrated after Pascha.

The fiftieth jubilee was celebrated on 27 March 1996 with the participation of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II, His Holiness Patriarch Maxim of Bulgaria, and

members of the Holy Synod, including the then DECR chairman, now His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

On 6 June 2006, Patriarch Alexy II of the blessed memory led the celebration of the DECR's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary held at St. Daniels' Monastery.

For the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the front of the DECR building was decorated by the fresco of the Most Holy Mother of God with omophorion in her hands. The decoration was made thanks to the St. Gregory the Theologian Charity Foundation.

On 4 April 2011, the jubilee date, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, read a lecture on inter-Orthodox relations at the Moscow Theological Academy.

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