

## UOCC Delegation to the Ecumenical Patriarchate

**ISTANBUL, TURKEY** – In the morning of February 13, 2015 the delegation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in



Exterior of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey. Hagia Sophia was rebuilt in its present form between 532-537 under the personal supervision of Emperor Justinian I. For over 900 years the Hagia Sophia was the seat of the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople and a principal setting for church councils and imperial ceremonies. Hagia Sophia remained a functioning church until May 29, 1453, when the city of Constantinople was conquered. It was converted into an imperial mosque. Hagia Sophia served as the principal mosque of Istanbul for almost 500 years. In 1934, Hagia Sophia was secularized and turned into the Ayasofya Museum.

Constantinople in Istanbul, Turkey, held extensive discussions with His Eminence Metropolitan Elpidophoros (Lambrinidis), Metropolitan of Bursa, Turkey. At this time, past attempts at unification of the Ukrainian Orthodox in Ukraine were discussed.

This progressed to exploring options for future directions and the specific obstacles that would be necessary to overcome. This was a very direct, open and productive discussion that delved into great detail regarding how this process could be resumed to successful completion. The delegation concluded this session with a sense of renewed hope that progress had been made and resolution of this issue was indeed possible.

In the afternoon members of the delegation visited the magnificent Hagia Sophia, the Holy Wisdom cathedral, which is a museum today. The delegation was guided by the distinguished and learned historian Panagiotis Ozkourkoutis.

The delegation members gathered around the baptismal font where St. Olha, Equal-to-the-Apostles, was baptized. St. Olha was the grandmother of St. Volodymyr. The members were awed to reflect on her decision to accept Christianity from Constantinople that changed the course of history in Ukraine.

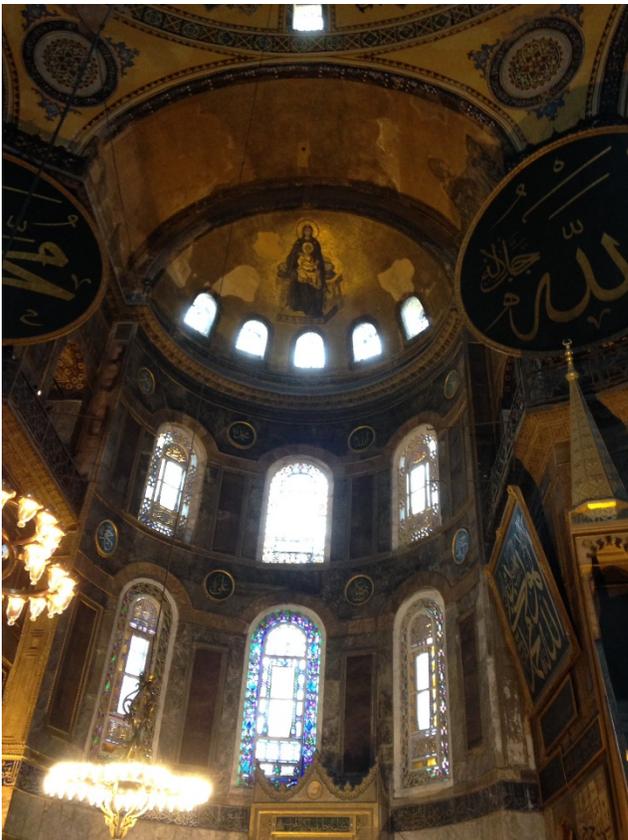




The stone baptismal font where St. Olha, Equal-to-the-Apostles, was baptized. This was a truly moving spiritual experience for the UOCC delegation.



This mosaic, dated 886 to 912, tops the imperial entrance to the interior of the Hagia Sophia. It depicts Christ Pantocrator holding a book with the inscription "Peace be with you. I am the Light of the World." Christ is surrounded by roundels portraying the Virgin Mary and the angel Gabriel. At Christ's feet is a bearded emperor, who is believed to represent Leo VI asking for forgiveness for his four marriages.



The Deesis Mosaic in the Hagia Sophia is dated to be from around 1118. Part of this mosaic depicts the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child, who holds a scroll and makes the sign of benediction.

Inside the magnificent interior of the Hagia Sophia, the walls are covered with icons and gold mosaics.

Next, the delegation visited the Sacred Patriarchal and Stavropegian Monastery of Baloukli. It is here that are located the tombs of many of the reposed Ecumenical Patriarchs, including His All-Holiness Patriarch Athanasios and His All-Holiness Dimitrios I. His All Holiness Dimitrios recognized and received the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada as a Metropolia under the omophorion of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.



UOCC delegation members Vasyl Balan, His Grace Bishop Andriy, and Chancellor Rt. Rev. Victor Lakusta stand next to the marble tomb of the reposed Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I.



The delegation made a last visit to an important sacred site in the afternoon to the church of the Theotokos of Blachernae. This is the church where there originated the feast day of the Holy Protection of the Theotokos, or *Pokrova* in Ukrainian.

Chapel in the Church of *Panagia* Blachernae. To the right can be seen the sacred spring.



The miracle-working icon of the *Blachernitissa*, or the Protection of the Holy Theotokos, is located in the Church of *Panagia* Blachernae in Istanbul. When Constantinople was being attacked by invaders in 625-626, the icon was carried in a procession along the city wall. The church building is fronted by a garden and is protected by a high wall. Empress Pulcheria (ca. 450-453) and her husband Emperor Marcian (450-457) had the church built on the site of a sacred spring. It is the most celebrated sanctuary to the Theotokos in Constantinople.

-UOCC Delegation members  
Dr. Peter M. Kondra  
and Mr. Vasyl' Balan  
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