

УКРАЇНСЬКА ПРАВОСЛАВНА ЦЕРКВА В КАНАДІ UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF CANADA

A Response to the Comments by the Russian Congress of Canada Regarding Attempts at Orthodox Church Unity in Ukraine

The hierarchs, clergy and laity delegates from congregations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada gathered in Winnipeg, MB, July 13-19, 2015 for the UOCC's 23rd General Assembly (SOBOR). During the course of deliberations and worship, as expected the delegates prayed for and made declarations and resolutions encouraging and in support of a free, independent, unified Ukraine, our ancestral homeland. Even more specifically, they were made for a unified Orthodox Church in Ukraine that in due course will be seen worthy to be recognized as a sister local autocephalous Church, co-existing as an equal among the other 14 autocephalous Churches.

These prayers, declarations and resolutions have never been absent from the programs of UOCC SOBORS over the almost 100 year history of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada. Without doubt, the UOCC will continue to state these hopes and aspirations for our Ukrainian Orthodox brethren until the Holy Spirit inspires it to be so. Since 1686, these aspirations for an independent, self-governing Church, standing equal to her sister churches throughout the world, has been ever-present in the hearts and minds of Ukrainian Orthodox people. The Ecumenical Patriarch himself, upon granting autocephaly to the Church of Poland in 1924, recognized that the "transfer" of the ancient Metropolis of Kyiv into submission to the See of Moscow was anomalous and deprived the Church in the Ukrainian lands of an opportunity for natural growth and development into an independent body, sharing in the struggles for Christ's sake within the fraternal communion of local Churches.

The Honourable Peter Goldring, Member of Parliament for Edmonton East, prepared a press release on March 5, 2015 that summarized his most recent activity and proposals in the area of exploring ways and means of achieving unity within the contemporary Orthodox Christian community in Ukraine. The UOCC appreciates Mr. Goldring's continuing interest in the issue of Orthodox unity in Ukraine. Our hope is that Mr. Goldring will continue to offer constructive commentary as Ukrainian Orthodox work towards achieving that much-needed unity, so long overdue.

Alas, albeit, not at all surprising to us, Mr. Goldring's comments were received quite negatively by the Russian Canadian Congress as evidenced by their open letter of April 22, 2015, over the signatures of the Very Reverend Archpriest Vladimir Malchenko (head of the RCC Committee for Religious Affairs) and Vladimir Lossev (president). This open letter has a tone and content analogous to a previous offering from the RCC directed toward commentary on religious freedoms in Ukraine, by the Honourable Andrew Bennett, Canada's Ambassador for the Office of Religious Freedom. This open letter leaves much to be desired with its confusion of realities, self-serving historical interpretations, misquotes and erroneous statements of facts. The letter is also utterly condescending – the RCC insists a Canadian politician cannot grasp the issues related to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, presuming that *it* has some authority to make conclusions about how Ukrainians are to act, live and pray.

The past year – more specifically, months – have proven that there is a strong determination among Ukrainian Orthodox faithful to achieve the realization of the unity discussed above. ALL

formations in Ukraine have stated their desire for overcoming division and achieving unity. Some are more active than others in pursuing the realization of this goal. We, Ukrainian Orthodox Canadians, are also confident this unity will be achieved in due course.

It saddens us that the Russian Canadian Congress continues to presume that they can direct, influence and even insist upon outcomes regarding current challenges and circumstances in Ukraine. Unfortunately, this is not unlike the present regime of President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of the Russian Federation. We implore the RCC not to augment the tension and acrimony between Russians and Ukrainians, whether in our respective homelands, or here in Canada. Ukrainians will not be compelled to live and worship God in adherence to a foreign, imperialistic template. Our people have experienced such attempts for too many times in past centuries. Our pious Ukrainian Orthodox people, sons and daughters of the ancient maternal Kyivan Church, cannot be denied the opportunity to develop into a unified, independent, canonically-recognized church, existing within the community of Orthodox Churches as a sister *among* them, and not *through another*.

We expect that the Russian Canadian Congress, when it feels moved to offer commentary on topics related to Ukraine or Ukrainians in Canada, especially regarding issues of the Orthodox Church there or here, will do so on the basis of the principles of truth and respect, and will express a genuine fraternal desire for peace and unity in Christ.

May God grant us all in necessary measure –humility, wisdom and determination – to co-exist in such a fashion!

-Briefing and Information Team of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada