

DIOCESE OF SOUROZH

INFORMATION SHEET, 1 MAY 2006

On 24 April 2006, Bishop Basil of Sergievo, administrator of the Diocese of Sourozh, wrote to His Holiness Patriarch Alexis of Moscow and All-Russia, asking to be released from the Moscow Patriarchate, so that the Diocese can be received into the Ecumenical Patriarchate on the same basis as the 'rue Daru' community in Paris, which is under the leadership of Archbishop Gabriel of Comana.

Historical background

After the first wave of emigration from Russia following the 1917 Revolution, the Russian Orthodox in Western Europe divided into three groups.

- One group, originally known as 'The Church Abroad' or 'The Church in Exile', became what is now known as the **Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR)**. It separated itself from the Mother Church on the grounds that she was unable to live fully as Church under communist oppression. ROCOR is not in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate, but talks are underway to restore communion.
- The second, '**rue Daru**', group in France placed itself under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, but with freedom to continue to worship according to the Russian tradition.
- The third, which is the smallest everywhere except in the UK, where Metropolitan Anthony founded the **Diocese of Sourozh** in 1962, stayed within the Moscow Patriarchate but attempted to put into practice the reforms of the 1917-18 Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, which were, for obvious reasons, impracticable in Russia itself.

Many of the exiles saw their plight as a God-given *podvig* – to bring the Russian Orthodox faith to the West. While they did not engage in missionary activity as such, they opened their doors to all nationalities and rooted themselves in the local culture.

On April 1 2003, His Holiness Patriarch Alexis wrote to all the bishops of the Russian tradition suggesting that in Western Europe the three different 'jurisdictions' should unite to form an autonomous 'Metropolia' within the Patriarchate of Moscow. This vision is still very much alive, though it is unclear how it could be implemented.

Recent developments

Following the collapse of communism there has been a huge influx of Russians into Britain, especially in London. Unlike the first waves of emigration, these new arrivals are free to come and go from their homeland and maintain links there, including Church links, and – quite rightly and naturally – they wish to do so. What has become clear, however, is that their pastoral and liturgical needs are quite different from those who have grown up within the diocese of Sourozh in this country.

Well before Metropolitan Anthony's death, this sadly led to conflict, and a campaign of open letters, petitions and internet articles and discussions which openly criticise the functioning, vision and leadership of the Diocese. The same issues – loyalty to the Moscow Patriarchate, financial control and liturgical language and style – are being raised today. This is not a question of personalities, but of a clash of cultures bringing structural difficulties for the Church.

At the same time the leadership of the Diocese has been forced to conclude that the Moscow Patriarchate, whose first loyalty has to be to the Russians who have recently come to Britain, does not feel it is in a position to discourage the conflict. Public claims have been made that there is support within the Patriarchate for the people of Sourozh who are 'suffering' under the current leadership. These claims have not been denied.

Many attempts have been made at all levels by clergy and laity to resolve the conflict. Metropolitan Anthony himself spent many hours talking with people, but finally had to admit that he had failed. Most recently, a 'withdrawal of labour' has been declared at the Cathedral in London.

It has become clear that there are two separate tasks:

- Proper pastoral ministry in Russian to the newly arrived Russians. This would most effectively be done directly by the Moscow Patriarchate, using their own clergy and resources.
- The development of the Diocese of Sourozh according to the vision of Metropolitan Anthony. The Diocese currently has thirty parishes and Eucharistic communities throughout the UK, and engages in a number of activities: children's summer camps, an annual conference, charitable work in Russia and in London, and publishing of liturgical and other texts, as well as a quarterly journal. For further details, visit the website at www.sourozh.org.

What are the implications of Bishop Basil's request for the Diocese as a whole?

- Canonically, if Bishop Basil's requests are accepted by both Patriarchs, the clergy and laity of the Diocese will automatically follow him. However he has stated that he is willing to release any of his clergy who wish him to do so to the Moscow Patriarchate or elsewhere, and the laity, of course, will be free to position themselves where they wish.
- The name of the Diocese would change, along with that of its journal and website.
- Those clergy and parishes who remained within the diocese would find their lives largely unaffected: liturgical life would continue and develop along the same lines as before, according to the Russian tradition.
- Members of the Diocese would continue to be in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate and with the Orthodox Church as a whole.
- The Diocese would continue to live by its Statutes, with the elected Diocesan Assembly and Diocesan Council.
- The Diocese would continue to work for unity among the various Churches of Russian tradition.

Questions in the first instance should be addressed to local clergy

Further information:

A number of relevant articles can be found on www.dioceseinfo.org.

The following are available from St Stephen's Press, 31 Warnborough Road, Oxford OX2 6JA:

THE 1917-18 COUNCIL OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH /

СОБОР РУССКОЙ ПРАВОСЛАВНОЙ ЦЕРКВИ 1917 -1918ГГ

Professor Alexei Svetozarsky / Профессор Алексей Светозарский: £3.50 inc. Postage.

DIOCESAN STATUTES OF THE DIOCESE OF SOUROZH (2001): £3.95 inc. postage.

Offprints of the following articles from Sourozh are available at £2 each ,including postage, also from St Stephen's Press:

Bishop Basil of Sergievo: *Metropolitan Anthony as Shepherd: The Statutes of the Diocese of Sourozh* (103, Feb 2006)

Archbishop Innokentii of Korsun: *The Unification of the Russian Diaspora in Western Europe: a Step Towards the Creation of a Local Church* (102, Nov 2005)

Serafim Rebinder: *The Proposed Metropolia – Can It Heal the Divisions of the Russian Diaspora?* (101, August 2005)

A Letter from Patriarch Alexis of Moscow to the Ecumenical Patriarch Concerning the Situation of the Diaspora (99, Feb 2005)

It is Our Urgent Duty to Restore Church Unity: an Interview with Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk (99, Feb 2005)

Appeal of the All-Diaspora Pastoral Conference of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (96, May 2004)

A full index to *Sourozh*, together with the address for back numbers, is on www.dioceseinfo.org.