

Statement from the vicar

in the Orthodox Church of the Annunciation of Christ in Stockholm, where the Russian tradition is followed

On Sunday, May 12, 2019, an unpleasant incident took place in the Church of the Annunciation in Stockholm. After the service, a fairly large organized group entered the church without having announced their arrival in any way. They demanded to become members of the congregation and tried to force the parish priest, Father Angel, to immediately convene a congregational meeting. They handed him a bundle of applications for membership, showing that they came from outside. Some of these people formerly belonged to the congregation, but left it six months ago and have not appeared in the church since then. Others were excluded on the grounds that by their actions they disturbed the ecclesiastical peace in the congregation. It is known that after this they received their spiritual nourishment in other congregations, and at the same time carried out aggressive propaganda against our community and the vicar personally. But the group also included completely unknown people.

In addition to demanding membership, they insisted that this is a Russian congregation and, for that reason, must come under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. That is why they demanded that a general assembly meeting be called. The group's behavior was brusque and aggressive, and it came into conflict with our parishioners. Screams, threats and insults were heard, including those aimed at Swedes and Jews. A confused situation arose. At the same time, it was time to start a planned baptism ceremony of a child, which was prevented by the aggressive group. The worshipers were worried and upset. The church council members had to call the police, and only when they arrived did the group leave the church premises.

We hereby wish to express our disapproval of this group's conduct, which was not only unchristian but also illegal. We grieve that our church has been defiled by this shameful behavior, by insults and inappropriate expressions.

We also want to remind you of our congregation's affiliation. On the church's website, you can read in more detail about its history. Here we say concretely that the Congregation of the Annunciation of Christ is Russian in its history, its liturgical tradition, its spiritual-cultural identity and when it comes to the veneration of our ancestors. This means that the language of worship is Church Slavonic and that the sermons are given in Russian. The Russian

singing tradition is preserved and developed. It is the Julian church calendar that is followed. It is above all the saints of the Russian Church who are mentioned during the services. There is a Russian school for children, there are discussion groups on spiritual themes where the language is Russian, and the congregation manages a Russian library. In everything else, the congregation is not Russian and has not been since 1931 (see the "History" section on the website). Until March 2019, it was included in the jurisdiction of the Universal Patriarchate and had its diocesan center in Paris. During the last 90 years, the congregation has nothing to do with the Russian state, nor with the diocese of the Moscow Patriarchate, except for a spiritual and eucharistic community.

Due to the international crisis described in the "Documents" section, the congregation now canonically belongs to the Bulgarian Patriarchate. This is to preserve the Eucharistic communion with all Orthodox churches and a complete political neutrality.

At the same time, after 400 years in Sweden, our congregation is also Swedish. Our Christian duty is to bear witness to the gracious gifts of Holy Orthodoxy in this country, where we are full citizens. Alongside Church Slavonic and Russian, it is natural for us to hold church services and preach in Swedish and also to socialize with each other in Swedish. Since this is the official language of the country, it is our duty to respect, study and use it, and to remind that Orthodoxy is not an exotic religion but the Undivided, Holy, Universal and Apostolic Church of Christ in which we believe.

As for the material assets, the church premises and other premises, the congregation rents them. That's how it has always been, ever since 1617. In the congregation, services have been held continuously with very few interruptions, and it has often moved from place to place within central Stockholm. The congregation does not own any real property in Sweden. According to the Statutes, the members of the Church Council jointly decide on the practical and financial matters, and the rent for the church premises is mainly covered by the membership fees of the faithful, by income from the sale of candles and partly also (about ¼ of the annual turnover) by state subsidies, something that all religious communities in Sweden receive.

With its spiritual wealth and its holy power to bestow spiritual nourishment, with the salvation of the soul as its sole purpose, the Congregation of Christ's Explanation in Stockholm belongs to all the Orthodox Christians in the Kingdom of Sweden who wish to become members in accordance with the Statutes. Apart from Russians, there are Orthodox Christians in the congregation who are Swedes, Finns, Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians, Belarusians, Poles, Slovaks, Greeks, Romanians, Serbs, French, English, Germans, Spaniards, Jews and Bulgarians. For us, all people are equally valuable as images of God, and we are all "one in Jesus Christ". (Gal. 3:28.)

On a spiritual level, our congregation is approaching the never-before-achieved ideal of a locally functioning Orthodox Church that stands above ethnic differences in the so-called diaspora.

We strongly condemn all kinds of xenophobia, all chauvinism and all politicization of church life, and we want to remind that all such are manifestations of the dangerous heresy of ethnophiletism (the confusion of church and nation), which today is a spiritual disease of all Orthodox.

We call for a peaceful coexistence, for the preservation of the purity of Orthodox doctrine and evangelical values, for a general witness from all Orthodox Christians to the Eucharistic communion in the Body of the Risen One, in Him who redeemed us from sin with His Blood, in Jesus Christ, Son of God.

Oath in Christ

F. Angel Velitchkov