

Russian Orthodox walk out of dialogue

VATICAN CITY - Pope Benedict XVI asked for prayers for participants in the Catholic-Orthodox international theological dialogue after the Russian Orthodox delegation walked out of the meeting.

"I ask you to join me in praying that this important meeting will help the journey toward full communion between Catholics and Orthodox and that we could soon share the same chalice of the Lord," the pope said Oct. 10 during his weekly general audience.

Members of the dialogue commission were meeting Oct. 8-15 in Ravenna, Italy, to continue work begun a year ago on a document on the sacramental nature of the church and its consequences for the structure of the church and church decision-making.

The Roman Catholic delegation met separately from the 16 Orthodox delegations Oct. 9 to prepare for the joint working sessions.

During the Orthodox meeting, Russian Orthodox Bishop Hilarion of Vienna and Austria told the other Orthodox delegates that his delegation would leave the meeting if they did not ask the Estonian Orthodox delegation to leave.

A participant at the dialogue told Catholic News Service Oct. 10 that both Catholic and Orthodox representatives were "a bit shocked" at Bishop Hilarion's ultimatum and decision to leave, but the Catholic position was that it was an internal Orthodox matter.

Delegates decided to move forward with their work and the joint sessions were "going exceptionally well," the participant said.

The Russian Orthodox Church does not recognize the Estonian Apostolic Church, which is tied to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, said a statement by the Russian Orthodox Church. The Russian Orthodox Church believes the Orthodox

in Estonia fall under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church, not the ecumenical patriarchate.

The ecumenical patriarchate and the Vatican sponsor the dialogue and issue the invitations for participation.

The dialogue participant said delegations expect to be able to complete work on their document, "The Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority in the Church."

The document, he said, will look at the biblical foundations for seeing the church as a sacramental presence in the world and at how responsibility and authority are exercised on the local, regional and universal level.

Members of the dialogue commission hope the document will lay the foundation for a new document focusing on primacy within the church and, specifically, on the status and role of the bishop of Rome among all Christian bishops, the participant said.

Of the Orthodox churches participating in the dialogue, the Russian Orthodox Church has the largest membership.

Also Oct. 10, the Vatican announced that Archbishop Paul Cordes, head of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, would meet Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow Oct. 18.

Archbishop Cordes, whose office promotes and coordinates Catholic charitable activity, will visit Russia to participate in a meeting of Catholic charities, which often work in cooperation with Orthodox charitable institutions, the announcement said.