

Russian Orthodox Church Envoy Gives Pope Mother of God Icon

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Pope Francis, who met with representatives of a dozen faiths Wednesday, speaking with Metropolitan Hilarion. **Osservatore Romano**

An envoy of the Russian Orthodox Church has met with Pope Francis at the Vatican, where he presented him with the Mother of God icon and expressed hope that ties between the two churches would continue to improve, the Orthodox Church's official website said.

During the meeting on Wednesday, Hilarion Alfeyev, the metropolitan of Volokolamsk and chairman of the Department of External Church Relations of the Patriarchate of Moscow, extended warm greetings and gratitude for prayers from Patriarch Kirill, saying the head of the Russian church had closely followed the election and enthronement of the new pope.

Alfeyev presented the Pope Francis with a Spanish edition of Patriarch Kirill's book, titled "Freedom and Responsibility," and a gift from the Russian Orthodox Church: an image of the Mother of God icon, called "Look Down With Favor on My Lowliness."

He noted that Pope Francis' "first steps after the election were marked by lowliness and

humility," Interfax reported. Pope Francis replied that he lacked humility and asked for prayers to grant it to him.

Alfeyev said that the Moscow Patriarchate shared Pope Francis' concern for the poor and suffering, and that this shared compassion creates new opportunities for cooperation between the two churches.

He informed the pope of existing problems between the two churches and said he hoped that the inter-church relations that improved under Pope Benedict XVI would further strengthen.

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