

Church leaders welcome new Orthodox patriarch: Patriarch Kirill I

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Ecumenical leaders have welcomed the election of Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad as the 16th patriarch of Moscow and of all Russia and expressed hopes of greater church unity under his leadership.

The 62-year-old became Patriarch Kirill I after being elected by an overwhelming majority of a council of the entire Russian Orthodox Church on January 27 in Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral.

He succeeds Patriarch Aleksy II, who died December 5 after guiding the world's largest Orthodox church, of more than 140 million people, through the turbulent post-Soviet era.

Pope Benedict XVI congratulated Kirill, saying, "May the Almighty also bless your efforts to seek that fullness of communion which is the goal of Catholic-Orthodox collaboration and dialogue."

Samuel Kobia, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, noted Kirill's past activities in interreligious dialogue and international relations.

In the 1970s, Kirill was the Moscow Patriarchate's representative to the WCC. His ecumenical work and ties with the Catholic Church had made him a target of criticism from nationalist-oriented sectors in Russia. -*Ecumenical News International*