

Pope meets with Russian Orthodox ecumenical officer

by [Eric J. Lyman](#)

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Rome, September 30 (ENInews)--Pope Benedict XVI met with Metropolitan Hilarion, the Russian Orthodox Church's chief ecumenical affairs officer, in what Hilarion said afterwards could be a precursor to the first-ever meeting between Benedict and the Russian church's Patriarch Kirill.

The meeting, held at the pope's summer home, Castel Gandolfo, was the conclusion of a two-day visit to meet with top-level Vatican officials, most notably Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Hilarion was also honored with a dinner hosted by the Community of St. Egidio, an international charitable and peacemaking organization, and celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Catacombs of Priscilla in commemoration of the Day of the Holy Protomartyr Nicetas.

There was no official communiqué from the meeting from either the Vatican or the Orthodox Church, and Vatican officials would say only that the two leaders discussed "expanding and progressing" dialogue between the two churches.

However, Hilarion spoke with Vatican Radio, praising Benedict as a "man of great faith" and said he was "encouraged by his spirit, his courage, and his dedication to the life of the Church worldwide" and "the attention he pays to the dialogue between the Catholics and the Orthodox."

Hilarion also addressed speculation that Benedict and Kirill could meet some time in 2013, the 1,700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan from Roman emperors Constantine and Licinius, officially ending the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire.

But while Hilarion told Vatican Radio he believed the pontiff and Kirill would eventually meet, he cautioned against expecting it on a specific timetable.