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**To His Holiness Alexis II
Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia**

Your Holiness!

It is with great sadness that, after much prayer and reflection concerning the significance of recent events in the Diocese of Sourozh, I write this letter. I apologise for its being in English, but I did not want it to be translated into Russian until after it had been received by Yourself.

When I accepted to be put forward as a possible successor to Metropolitan Anthony, I made it quite clear that I would strive to take the Diocese forward according to his vision. Metropolitan Anthony had for many years let it be known that he was working for a 'local' Orthodox Church in Great Britain. The Russian tradition was the vehicle that carried the Orthodox Faith, but it needed to become rooted in the local cultural reality. As a result of his efforts, a community of a few hundred people in London in the 1950s became, by the time of his death, a small diocese with thirty parishes and eucharistic communities throughout the United Kingdom.

The development of the Diocese and its gradual assumption of a British ethos followed closely the enculturation in Britain of the Russians of the 'first' emigration. Metropolitan Anthony also insisted that the Diocese was open to Orthodox of all nationalities and we have been conscious for many years that we are not simply 'Russian'. The Orthodox Faith is for all people. Our clergy in fact are mostly English-speaking, and many of them work in secular jobs to support their families.

Over the past ten years, however, the demographic changes that have taken place in Britain have completely changed the character of the Russian Orthodox presence in this country. Before the collapse of communism in 1991, there were not more than 2,000-3,000 members of the Diocese of Sourozh, a large majority of whom were English-speaking. Since then, however, some 250,000 Russian-speakers from the former Soviet Union have come to Britain. Approximately 100,000 live in London alone.

It is altogether understandable that the Patriarchate should be primarily concerned with the care of these new arrivals. They require clergy who understand their background and their pastoral problems, and who can hear their confessions in their native language. Many of them also want to keep close ties with their homeland, and expect to do this, at least in part, through the Church. Unlike previous waves of emigration, they are now in a position to do so.

You will be aware that a number of these new arrivals have expressed deep dissatisfaction with the Diocese of Sourozh in a campaign waged through petitions, open letters, on the internet and even in the press against myself and the clerical and lay leadership of the Diocese. The fact that the same issues are raised as when Bishop Hilarion was in Britain – loyalty to the Patriarchate, financial control, liturgical language and practice – indicates that these problems are structural and endemic. They are not a question of personalities. Nevertheless, it must be said that my assistant bishop, Archbishop Anatoly of Kerch, is completely out of sympathy with the vision and practice of the Diocese as this developed under Metropolitan Anthony. I need hardly remind you of the recent difficulties with Archpriest Andrey Teterin. Just before Holy Week the supporters of Father Andrey organised a ‘withdrawal of labour’ from the cathedral parish, causing considerable disruption.

Even a superficial consideration of events since Father Andrey’s talk on 3 December 2005 leaves no option but to conclude that there are elements in the Moscow Patriarchate that support those who have been seeking to undermine my authority in the Diocese and are interfering in my conduct of its affairs. Public claims to this effect have been made and have not been denied. Members of the Diocese are encouraged by the DECR to think that if they are unhappy about anything, they should simply contact Moscow. Such a situation is intolerable. It is also contrary to the principles of Orthodox ecclesiology, which prohibit the interference of one bishop in the diocese of another.

It is with sadness that I therefore write to ask to be released from the Patriarchate of Moscow. You will understand, perhaps, what this means to me when I say that I first began attending the Divine Liturgy in parish belonging to the Patriarchate of Moscow in 1957 and have been faithful to that first calling ever since. Events of the last few years, however, both before and after the death of Metropolitan Anthony, have finally convinced me that the Diocese created by him in Great Britain and Ireland should now leave the Patriarchate of Moscow and become a Diocese of the Ecumenical Patriarchate with a status similar to that of the Archdiocese of Russian Parishes based in Paris.

Your Holiness, you have made it clear that you believe the Russian Church is best understood as a single entity embracing both its members in Russia and those abroad. The jurisdictional divisions that exist outside Russia are therefore not fundamental and should be treated as temporary administrative expedients, brought into existence by the vagaries of history. This is confirmed by the fact that the West European Archdiocese under the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Patriarchate of Moscow are in communion with one another, and that negotiations are currently taking place to restore communion between the Patriarchate and ROCOR.

If this is the case, however, it is only reasonable to acknowledge the changes that have taken place in the Russian Orthodox flock in Britain and to accept that a restructuring of the Russian Orthodox presence in Britain is necessary. The new arrivals from Russia

should continue to be the focus of attention of the pastoral work of the Patriarchate, while the Diocese of Sourozh, in the form in which it has developed over the years, should be allowed to align itself with the ecclesial entity that most resembles it, the Archdiocese of Russian Parishes that is based in Paris and forms part of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The Diocese of Sourozh, now given a new name, would then continue to offer all the help it can to the new arrivals, while the Patriarchate would intensify its efforts to provide a Church home for the same people. There is no reason why cooperation should not be possible.

Your Holiness, I am asking that you release me to the Ecumenical Patriarchate for the sake of the further development of Orthodoxy in Britain and Western Europe – and ultimately for the good and well-being of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Yours ever in Christ,

BISHOP OF SERGIEVO
Administrator
Diocese of Sourozh