

Mgr. Nicolai Gennadevich Dubinin



The first catholic bishop with Russian nationality since Church institutions were re-established following the collapse of communism. He is auxiliary bishop to the Archdiocese of the Mother of God in Moscow

The in Novoshakhtinsk born 47-year-old Conventual Franciscan Father Nicolai was part of the very first group of seminarians who attended the major seminary after it reopened in Moscow in 1993. His seminary cohort "recaptured" the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception through prayers and action, and brought its headquarters back to the old see in St Petersburg, where it is currently located.

In 1995 Dubinin joined the Franciscan conventual family in Moscow, led at the time by Father Grzegorz Cioroch who taught at the seminary. Appointed custodian of the Franciscan Province of Russia in 2001, Fr Grzegorz died a few years later in a car accident on his way back to Russia from Poland at the age of 42.

Fr Nicolai's ordination is a tribute to the work undertaken by Fr Grzegorz who was one of the first missionaries to come to Russia in the 1990s, where he set up a Russian Franciscan publishing house and the Russian Catholic Encyclopaedia.

Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz of Minsk (Belarus), then Archbishop of Moscow, in the late 1990s had already realized the need for an auxiliary bishop in the Diocese of Moscow. Mgr. Dubinin now joins Italian Archbishop Paolo Pezzi, inaugurating a new era for the local clergy.

His ordination is a sign of the spiritual and social renaissance of the small Catholic community of the Russian Federation, now well integrated into the country's cultural and historical fabric, which is dominated by Orthodox Christianity.

Although few in numbers, Russian Catholics are present throughout the country, in the Archdiocese of the Mother of God at Moscow – which includes the "two capitals" of Moscow and St Petersburg (separated by 700 kilometres) – and several other important cities like Pskov, Kursk, Vladimir and Nizhny Novgorod, all very distant from each other, not to mention the Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad.

Although Catholics currently entertain good relations with the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian authorities, recent bills and government regulations have complicated the work of foreign missionaries of all religions in Russia. For example, getting permanent, or at least long-term, residence permits is still difficult.

For the Catholic Church, there are also not enough local priests to meet the pastoral needs of the Catholic communities of this vast country; the first priests from the St Petersburg Seminary were ordained only in 1999, and Dubinin himself became a priest in 2000.

Now hope lies not only with local vocations, but also with the many local Catholic families and communities, more than a quarter of a century after the Church re-established her presence in the country.

His ordination took place on 4 October 2020 in an impressive celebration. He is titular bishop of Aquae in Byzacena.