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MOSCOW, January 28 (Itar-Tass) — Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, received 508 votes in a ballot of the Church Council in Moscow.

Kirill, who is regarded as a liberal, said the Church could play a greater role in Russia.

He was the favourite in the contest and was chosen ahead of the more conservative Metropolitan Kliment.

"I accept and thank the Church Council for my election as Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia," Kirill said after the results of the ballot in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour were announced.

Earlier, he called for unity and said the Orthodox faithful must resist Catholic and Protestant proselytising.

After Alexy II's death Kirill had served as acting head of the Church.

Metropolitan Kirill (secular name Vladimir Mikhailovich Gundyaev) was born in Leningrad on November 20, 1946, in the family of a priest. He graduated from the secondary school in 1964 and from the Leningrad Theological Seminary and Academy in 1970 with the theological degree for his study on "The Formation and Development of the Church Hierarchy and the Teaching of the Orthodox Church on Its Gracious Nature".

He was tonsured by Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad and Novgorod on April 3, 1969. He was ordained hierodeacon on April 7 and hieromonk on June 1 of the same year. He was appointed personal secretary to Metropolitan Nikodim on August 30, 1970. As a teacher at the Academy and secretary to the Metropolitan he devoted much of his time to participation in the external activity of the Moscow Patriarchate. In 1971 he represented the theological schools of the Russian Orthodox Church at the SYNDESMOS General Assembly and was elected by the assembly to the SYNDESMOS Executive Committee. He was elevated to the rank of archimandrite on September 12, 1971 and appointed representative of the Moscow Patriarchate at the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva.

He was appointed rector of the Leningrad Theological Schools on December 26, 1974. In 1975 he became chairman of the Leningrad Diocesan Council. By the resolution of His Holiness Patriarch Pimen and the Holy Synod on March 3, 1976, Archimandrite Kirill was made Bishop of Vyborg, Assistant Bishop of the Leningrad Diocese. His episcopal consecration took place on March 14, 1976.

Metropolitan Kirill has been actively involved in the ecumenical activity of the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1975 he was elected to the Central and Executive Committees of the WCC at its 5th Assembly in Nairobi. On September 9, 1976 he was appointed representative of the Russian Orthodox Church at the WCC Plenary Commission "Faith and Order". He participated in the 1st Pre-council Pan-Orthodox Conference in 1976 in Geneva, as well as Orthodox-Catholic dialogues in 1978, 1980 and 1984. From 1976 to 1978 he was Deputy Patriarchal Exarch for Western Europe and later took pastoral care of the Patriarchal parishes in Finland. He was elevated to the rank of archbishop on September 2, 1977. Since 1979 he has been member of the Holy Synod Commission for Christian Unity, now the Synodal Theological Commission.

On December 26, 1984, he was transferred to the See of Smolensk. By the decision of the Holy Synod of November 14, 1989, he was appointed Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations and Permanent Member of the Holy Synod. In 1991 he was elevated to the rank of metropolitan. He is an Honorary Member of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy and Doctor honoris causa of the Reformed Theological Academy in Budapest. He has been decorated with high orders of the Russian Orthodox Church and many Local Orthodox Churches. In August 1993 he was awarded the international Loviis Peace Prize. In 2002 he received honorary doctorate in political sciences from the University of Perugia, Italy.

Metropolitan Kirill is the author of more than 200 publications in church and secular press, as well as of a weekly TV program, which attracts large audiences.