

Russian Orthodox Church mends rift

by UPI

MOSCOW -- Leaders began to mend a decades-old rift in the Russian Orthodox Church Thursday in Moscow by signing a document re-establishing canonical ties.

Patriarch Alexy II and Metropolitan Laurus, who heads the exiled, New York-based Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, signed a unification act in a ceremony that Alexy II said was historic for all of Russia, RIA Novosti reported.

"Joy has descended on our hearts now that the long-awaited historical event has taken place," Alexy II said. "The Russian church has been reunited."

The foreign branch of the church split from the Russian Orthodox Church soon after the Russian Revolution in 1917. Its leaders accused Russian clergy of working with the Soviet Communist regime.

"The restoration of a unified church is an important provision for uniting the entire 'Russian world,' which has always been based on Orthodox faith," Russian President Vladimir Putin said in the RIA Novosti report.

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