



To the Holy Synod of the
Bulgarian Orthodox Church
Sophia, Bulgaria

Geneva, 15 March 2024.

Your Eminences, Your Graces,

On behalf of the ecumenical fellowship joined in the World Council of Churches, I wish to convey to the Holy Synod, clergy, and faithful of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, our sincere condolences on learning that His Holiness Patriarch Neophyte, Primate of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, has passed over into repose in the Lord.

We reflect with deep respect and gratitude upon the numerous contributions of His Holiness Patriarch Neophyte to the Church and society as a whole. His decades-long dedication and service, with increased responsibilities, culminating in his patriarchal leadership, demonstrates his determined commitment to the spiritual well-being of his flock. Furthermore, his scholarly pursuits during his tenure as Dean of the Theological Faculty at Sofia University, reflect his profound dedication to nurturing the intellectual and cultural growth of his community.

A generation after the complete suppression of religious life in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and Patriarch Neophyte have reclaimed a place in the hearts and lives of the Bulgarian people. An early advocate of Bulgarian independence and the restoration of religious activities in the country, Patriarch Neophyte's steadfast advocacy stands as a strong testament to his visionary leadership and unyielding faith. As so many tributes attest, Patriarch Neophyte cultivated a genuinely brotherly love and respect in his relations with other churches as well as with Jewish and Muslim communities. His gracious welcome of Pope Francis in 2019 stands as a notable example for his commitment to fostering inter-Christian dialogue and understanding. Additionally, his denouncement of the war in Ukraine demonstrates his dedication to promoting peace and unity among diverse communities. All these instances underscore a foundational principle that guided his spiritual leadership – a steadfast commitment to a common and prophetic voice of Christians in Europe in the face of societal challenges. This commitment reflects his resolute dedication to uniting believers in a shared mission of love, justice, and compassion. Through his actions, Patriarch Neophyte exemplified the timeless call for Christians to stand together as a guiding light of hope and righteousness in a world often besieged by discord and turmoil.

During this period of bereavement, we join you in mourning the loss of a beloved leader and spiritual father. We pray for the rest of the soul of Patriarch Neophyte in the tents of the righteous (Ps 118,15) and in the light, peace and love of the Most Holy Trinity and we give thanks to Christ, our Lord, the One who is the resurrection and the life (cf. John 11:25), for the life and ministry of His Holiness.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pillay". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay
General Secretary
World Council of Churches