

Toronto
April 27, 2013

To: His Grace Bishop IRÉNÉE
Cc: All Saints of North America Orthodox Church Rev. Geoffrey Korz,
V. Rev. Vasyl Kolega,
Parish Council members,
Yulia Semenova

This is the letter regarding the decision of the Rector of the Russian Orthodox Christ the Saviour Cathedral V. Rev. Vasyl Kolega on the membership of Yulia Semenova in the Sisterhood (dated April 24, 2013) (see the Rector's letter attached). Yulia did ask me to write the present letter (and, moreover, was unaware about the content of the present letter), so that this is completely my own initiative to write it.

As Yulia's husband and the member of the Parish Council, I would only like to bring to your attention some facts that you might find important.

I believe that, before any disciplinary action is imposed, (a) the incriminated fault must be proven, (b) the accused person must be informed about what s/he is accused of and must be given the opportunity to respond to the accusations, (c) the necessity of a disciplinary action as well as its gravity must be well grounded.

Have the Rector ever informed (either verbally or in written form) Yulia that she was doing something wrong and that her action(s) may lead to a disciplinary penalty? Never. In the Rector's letter there is also nothing about what Yulia is accused of. Section 3 of Article XI of the Cathedral Constitution and By-laws (see it attached) clearly states the reasons for deprivation of rights. Which one applies to Yulia's case? The final statement in the Rector's letter "Finally let us stress that this letter should in no way be construed as a criticism of your character or your abilities" lets me think that no one. But, in such a case, what is the ground for the Rector's decision? Immediately after receiving the Rector's letter (i.e., on April 24, 2013) Yulia asked (by e-mail) the Rector to let her know the reason(s) for his decision, but the Rector did not respond to her e-mail. It is impossible to respond to an accusation if it is unknown and the Rector refuses to provide any evidence and does not even present the accusation itself. Is it possible to impose a disciplinary action without not only proving any evidence, but even explaining the reason for the disciplinary action? Another question is - Is it possible for a Rector (i) to request an individual to resign from a Parish institution and (ii) to make such a request in such an ultimate form?

The Rector announced his decision on Yulia's membership in the Sisterhood at the Council meeting that took place on April 23, 2013. Was Yulia informed that her case would be discussed at that meeting? No. The Council Secretary (Yuriy Sulakov) called Yulia on Friday (April 19, 2013) and invited her, together with the Head Sister, to the meeting. When Yulia asked Yuriy about the question(s) that were expected to be discussed at that meeting, Yuriy told her that he did not know. Given that she is not the member of the Parish Council, Yulia decided not to come to that meeting due to her work. Is it fair not to give Yulia the opportunity to defend herself? It is worth noting that

Yulia is not the only person who was unaware that Yulia's case would be discussed at the Council meeting on April 23, 2013. Even the members of the Parish Council (including me) were not informed that Yulia's case would be on the agenda of that Council meeting. In the agenda sent by the Council Secretary on April 22, 2013 (just one day before the meeting) there was no word about this. On April 19, 2013 several members of the Council (including me) sent e-mails to the Rector and the Council President (Elena DeLuca) and informed them that, due to their work, they would be unable to attend the meeting and asked to change the date of the meeting. Despite this, the Rector and the Council President did not change the date of the meeting and it took place on April 23, 2013 at 19:00. As a result, many Council members (including me) were absent from that meeting and hence were not given the opportunity to express their opinions on this matter.

In the e-mail sent by the Rector on April 22, 2013 it was announced that the meeting on April 23, 2013 would be closed. As per Article VIII, Section 16 of the Cathedral Constitution and By-laws,

“In the case of such a closed meeting, or part of a meeting, any decisions reached in camera will be reported in the minutes as part of the public record”.

After the meeting (on April 24, 2013), I asked the Council Secretary to send me these records, but I did receive neither the records nor even the response to my e-mail. This leads me to think that no records in camera were taken and hence there was a serious violation of the Cathedral Constitution and By-laws.

Many parishioners already called Yulia and expressed not only their support to her, but also their outrage of how the Rector treats people, that contributed so much to our Cathedral (it is worth noting that Yulia is one of the key persons in the Sisterhood), without even explaining the reason for his decision.

Given that there is some rumors spread out by some people in the Cathedral about the content of Yulia's letter that she sent to you on September 2, 2012, that could influence the Rector's decision as well as that of the Council, I found it appropriate to attach Yulia's letter, as well as your response to it, to the present letter, so as the Council members will also be informed about the content of this letter.

The procedural irregularities (in my opinion) listed above make me doubt the compliance of the Rector's decision with not only some commonly accepted rules of acting in such situations, but also the requirements of the Cathedral Constitution and By-laws. I apologize, if I am wrong. In any case, I believe that it was my duty as the Council member to share my concerns with you.

I ask for your prayers.

Andrei Semenov

Member of the Parish Council,
the Russian Orthodox Christ the Saviour Cathedral