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MATUSHKA WITH 17 CHILDREN WINS LEADERS OF RUSSIA COMPETITION



The final stage of the Leaders of Russia competition was held on Tuesday, September 8, in the Moscow region. Among the winners was Matushka Maria Lvova-Belova, the mother of 17 children, head of several social and Church projects, and head of the Penza Diocese's Department for Assistance to People with Disabilities.

Leaders of Russia is an open competition seeking the next generation of innovative leaders in a wide breadth of fields. All of the winners will receive an educational grant of $13,220 (1 million rubles) and a year of free consultations with one of the project's mentors, reports the Synodal Department for Church Charity and Social Services.

President Vladimir Putin held a video meeting with the winners, during which Matushka Maria spoke about her social projects and her family. "I've been doing

charity work for 12 years," she said, "and today I'm talking about an unusual topic—about the wards of orphanages for children with disabilities. These children often end up in nursing homes and psychoneurological boarding schools. I won't tell you what it's like for a young man with a ton of ambitions to find himself in a situation with almost no prospects. So my team is building houses where, with the support of specialists, these guys can live, learn, and work."

And together with the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, Matushka Maria and her team are hoping to implement such homes throughout all of Russia.

President Putin thanked Matushka Maria for her efforts and wished her success in the future.

Currently, Matushka Maria's various projects house 50 people from 11 regions in 3 houses, with 12 more houses for 120 people still in the works, and offer jobs to young people with severe disabilities.

Matushka Maria and her husband, Fr. Paul Kogelman, have 17 children: 5 blood, 4 adopted, and 8 foster children.
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