



Ukrainian Catholic NEWSLETTER

Rebuilding the Church in Ukraine

“Look No Further” Seminary Finally Finds a Home

After a long and difficult search, a new home has been found for the seminary of the Lviv Archeparchy (Byzantine Catholic term for Archdiocese). The local government gave about 10 acres of land in the city of Lviv for the Church to build its seminary. This donation was obtained through the efforts of Rev. Bohdan Prakh, Rector of the Holy Spirit Seminary.

Bishop Lubomyr Husar, Auxiliary Head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, knew immediately that this would surely be the home of the new seminary. “Look no further,” the bishop told Fr. Prakh on his first tour of the area.

The current seminary, a drab collection of Soviet buildings once used as a summer camp, is simply falling apart. The pipes are rusty and leaking; it’s poorly insulated, so seminarians often must wear coats and scarves inside during the winter; and 4 seminarians share 1 bedroom and 1 desk.

On top of these problems, the current seminary is located in the rural town of Rudno. “This is a difficult situation for us at present,” explains Fr. Prakh. “The seminary is totally isolated, it’s literally in the woods.”

The new seminary, by contrast, will be built right in the city. It will be within view of a district called Sykhiv. The skyscraper housing projects built by the Soviets here in the 1950’s and 60’s are homes to nearly 200,000 people. But there are only 2 churches in the entire area.



Fr. Bohdan Prakh (center), Rector of the Holy Spirit Seminary, discusses plans for the new seminary with Ivan Herasym (UCEF) and Chorbishop John Faris (Catholic Near East Welfare Association) on a recent tour of the site.

Fr. Prakh envisions his seminarians engaging the community around them. “Our seminarians need to participate in pastoral internship programs,” he says. “They should do work in prisons and hospitals and serve the community around them. Here, they can bring Christ to the people who need it most. It would also be an opportunity for them to grow and develop as people and in their vocations. Moving to the city just helps everyone.”

The seminary is responsible for the pastoral formation of its young men, and the Lviv Theological Academy is responsible for their theological and philosophical training. Education is crucial considering most seminarians enter the seminary right out of high school. The two institutions are collaborating with the Ukrainian Catholic bishops and other Church leaders in an effort to create a Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv by the year 2005.



From the new seminary, you can see the housing projects of Sykhiv. There are 200,000 people in this district served by just 2 churches.

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by Bryon Lee Brindel

Voices from the Underground

On a recent trip to Ukraine, I had the unique opportunity to spend a week with Ms. Iryna Kolomyets. Ms. Kolomyets is the daughter of a Ukrainian Catholic priest (Ukrainian Catholics have maintained the ancient Byzantine tradition of married clergy). When she was just a baby, her father was arrested by the Soviets and exiled to Siberia for the next 7 years. This was during the brutal Stalinist repression of the 1950's.

Today, Ms. Kolomyets is the director of the pastoral support program of the Institute of Church History in Lviv. The program is designed to provide pastoral care and a very modest pension to elderly priests, religious, and laity who survived the brutal persecutions of the Soviet Union. I observed Ms. Kolomyets in her work and was able to talk with some of these survivors and to hear their stories.

After WWII, the Soviets occupied Ukraine. In 1946, Stalin outlawed the Ukrainian Catholic Church. All the bishops were arrested. Most of them subsequently died in prison. Countless other priests and faithful were sent to Siberian concentration camps. From 1946 to 1989, the Ukrainian Catholic Church was forced to live "underground."

It was a great honor for me to meet with these exceptional people. They are true heroes for Catholics throughout the world. They devoted their lives to the Catholic faith and religious freedom. All the survivors I met suffered for Christ, and all were personal friends with martyrs of the Church. Often the house or apartment where our meeting took place served as a "church" or "seminary" during the communist period.

I was so impressed by the people I met that we have decided to run a regular column in our newsletter called "Notes from the Underground." In each issue, we will feature a different "voice" from the underground Ukrainian Catholic Church. It is our way of honoring these remarkable Catholics and sharing with you their inspiring stories.

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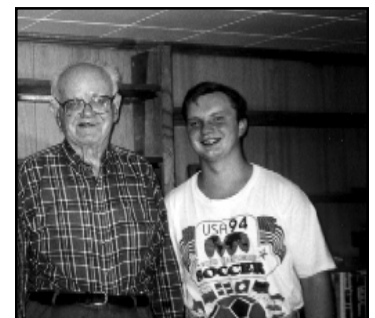


Theological Academy Graduates First Class Since 1943. In July, the Lviv Theological Academy held its first commencement in over 50 years. Myroslav Ivan Cardinal Liubachivsky, the current head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, gave his blessing to the students and seminarians (pictured above). The Academy plans to become the Ukrainian Catholic University by 2005 with faculties of theology and philosophy, social sciences, humanities, and foreign languages.

Ukraine's Economy Continues to Sink. Ukraine's State Committee on Statistics reports that the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) per capita has continued to fall since 1990, from \$1,165 to \$496 in 1997, and that currently 63 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. The debt repayment crisis is severe, with credits surpassing revenues. Back wages owed to state workers equal the entire national budget.

American Scholar Donates Humanities Library.

Dr. John Basarab, a Ukrainian-American scholar from Pennsylvania, began seriously collecting books in the 1940's while living and studying in Czechoslovakia. Dr. Basarab has a deep love for history and earned a Ph.D. in this field. His library consists of more than 2,500 scholarly volumes and covers a vast array of subjects. It is especially rich in modern Ukrainian history, art history, Byzantine history, and Ukrainian and Russian literature. Dr. Basarab



Dr. John Basarab and Ukrainian seminarian Jury Sakvuk after packing the initial shipment of 80 boxes of books in Pennsylvania.

decided to give his books to the Lviv Theological Academy, because he felt students there would really take advantage of such a resource. The Basarab Collection is an important contribution to the intellectual growth of talented students in Ukraine.

Restoring Christ's Church

by Prof. Andrew Quinlan

When Jesus spoke to St. Francis of Assisi for the first time, He asked St. Francis to “restore” His Church. The Saint took the Lord literally and at once began to rebuild the ruined chapel of St. Damien, where the mystical encounter had taken place. But God had greater plans for St. Francis than that of an amateur builder.

Since coming to Ukraine four years ago, I have seen a great deal of Church restoration, and I have had a lot of opportunities to reflect on what Jesus said to St. Francis.

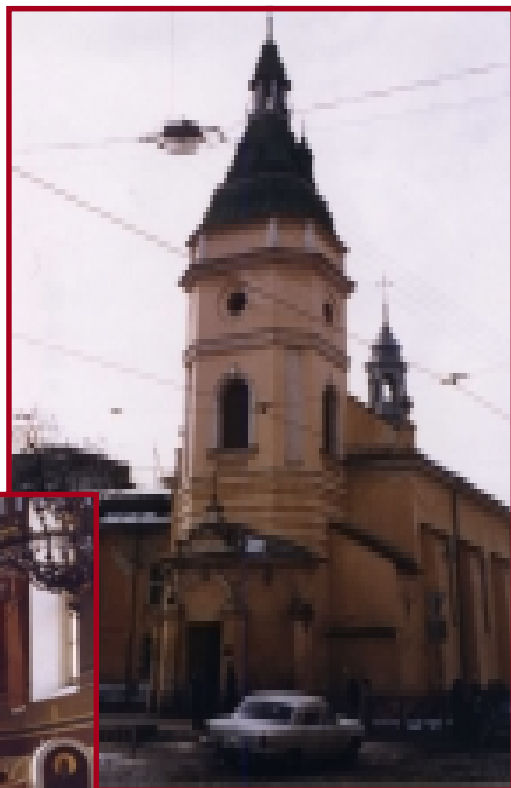
One of the most dramatic moments in the life of any Ukrainian parish, is the Easter Vigil service when the priest announces for the first of many times that “Christ is Risen”. As the light is gently spread from one candle to another in snow-bound village churches, the power of the message and the symbol is overwhelming. It is quite natural for people to see in the events that have taken place in Ukraine over the past 10 years an image of the Resurrection. It would seem that the Ukrainian Catholic Church has “risen from the dead.”

After a short while in Ukraine, it becomes clear that this is not true. Resurrection is for the dead, and the Church will never die. The Ukrainian Catholic Church was persecuted for 50 years. According to the Soviet state, it did not exist. That was a lie. Of course, the Church existed: it did not die. It prayed, it gave and received the Sacraments, it did good for the sake of the Lord, and it even nourished the monastic life.

The Ukrainian Martyrs now enjoy their reward in Heaven, and the more obvious aspects of persecution have disappeared. But what about the Church? Everything lies in ruins.

After 50 years of violent persecution, petty harassment, and total neglect, the devastation is unimaginable. In some ways, it is only now that the full impact of the persecution can be felt. When the Church struggled in its hidden way, the trials and suffering just had to be accepted. Now that Ukrainian Catholics are free, the Church must be restored. In many places, the simple faith that sustained Christians during the winter of persecution, has taken up the challenge in the same way as St. Francis did. They are restoring their churches.

During the Soviet period many churches were stripped of all religious images, their walls were white-washed, and they became factories, store houses, sports centers, and even garbage dumps. I ate my first meal in Ukraine sitting on a



A furniture factory during Soviet times, St. Anna's Church is once again a vibrant center of the Catholic Faith.

chair made in the furniture factory that is once again the Church of St. Anna in the city of Lviv.

For many churches the first stage of “restoration” entails digging out garbage that has accumulated over 50 years. In one village, the priest told me that the congregation had done this by hand and in the winter, so that the church could be ready for the celebration of Easter.

The love and joy felt by Ukrainians and the strength they draw from their newly restored churches is impossible to communicate. When the people enter these churches, however poor and run down, they feel themselves in Heaven. How beautiful is your dwelling place, O Lord!

So, how could such a precious and powerful aspect of the Church escape the notice of the enemy who sows while we sleep? Perhaps St. Francis' first simple action after his conversion was truly prophetic. If he had headed straight off to Rome to tell the Pope and the Church what they had to do, I think the history of the Church and our understanding of what the Church really is would be a lot poorer.

Andrew Quinlan is a professor of Byzantine Liturgy. He has taught in several Ukrainian seminaries over the past 5 years. Prof. Quinlan is currently teaching at St. Paul University in Ottawa on the faculty of the Sheptytsky Institute.

Interested in teaching English in Ukraine this summer? Contact the UCEF office.

“Jesus Lived Here”

The story of Maria Viuchik

It is rare that we are able to meet a human being of whom we can say to ourselves with confidence and sincerity: this is a servant of God. On a recent trip to Ukraine, the Lord blessed me with such a meeting.

Maria Viuchik was born in the small village of Zheldets in western Ukraine in 1910. Her poor, though hard-working, parents raised her in the Ukrainian (Byzantine) Catholic Church.

In 1929, Maria set off for the city of Lviv, looking for work. The Lord clearly had special plans for this humble woman, and He immediately led her to the Church. “I went to the Church to find a job, because I liked to sing,” Maria describes her calling. What she found at the church of St. Onufriy was not only a choir but the Basilian Fathers (a Ukrainian Catholic religious order). This began an intimate spiritual kinship that would last through the Polish occupation, WWII, and 50 years of Soviet persecution.

World War II

In 1939, the Soviets occupied western Ukraine (where the city of Lviv is located). During the next two years, they arrested countless Ukrainian Catholic priests and intellectuals. In 1941, when the rumor spread that the Germans were outside the city, the Soviets murdered all the innocent Ukrainians they had imprisoned.

“One morning, I walked out into the street,” Maria recalls, “to the grounds of the Launsky prison. There was sand there, fresh sand, and a huge ditch. What I saw was a mountain of corpses...Oh, my heart was crying,” she adds with visible emotion.



Maria Viuchik kneels before a cabinet that was used as the tabernacle of the Eucharist for secret liturgical services. Baptisms, ordinations, and seminary and catechetical training all occurred in this apartment.



The Underground Church

After the war, Stalin’s first move was to destroy the Ukrainian Catholic Church. He tried to force the clergy to renounce their faith and switch over to the Orthodox Church.

“The priests who switched over were left alone, but those who kept our faith were swept away,” says Maria. “I didn’t ever switch over, because I know where the truth is: ‘Peter, you are the rock, and on this rock I will build my Church.’ I have one faith, and I would never give it up.”

For the next 45 years, Maria Viuchik played a key role in the life of the “underground” Church in Lviv. Her apartment was the center of an intricate network of ecclesial activity.

“Jesus Christ protected us because Jesus lived here,” she says, kneeling before a cabinet used as the tabernacle to hold the Eucharist during secret liturgies. Maria’s apartment was used for baptisms, training priests and catechists, ordinations, and other activities. Maria assisted the Basilian Fathers in their clandestine activities all over Ukraine.

What impressed me most about Maria was her desire to serve the Lord and the Church and the joy she derived from this devotion. After so many years of pain and hardship, Maria has no regrets. Her own words express this best.

“It’s very pleasing to live and to suffer. We suffered so much, it was like a dream. But God has blessed us with a new generation of priests and seminarians. The Virgin Mary loves us. It’s wonderful to live in a spiritual, complete way without fear of punishment.

“There was a time when I needed nothing. I didn’t have to eat or sleep, I could just sing. I wish I had those days again. When I sang I felt such joy. I wanted the whole world to know how good it was to serve the Lord.

“Now, you can sing freely without persecution—sing at the top of your lungs. Thank God for freedom!” Indeed. And thank God for Maria Viuchik.