



Ukrainian Catholic NEWSLETTER

Rebuilding the Church in Ukraine

'Making Do' Without Energy

The basic pleasures of daily life many of us take for granted, such as turning on a light switch, are not so common for Ukrainians. "The city of Lviv is divided in two parts, each waiting its turn for the lights to come on," writes Natalia Kovaliv, a secretary at the Lviv Theological Academy (LTA). Basic electricity is one example of a fragile infrastructure's inability to meet supply and demand as the country works toward establishing itself as an independent economy.

Whether living in cities or rural areas, Ukrainians make do without energy. Natalia continues, "One morning I got up at 7 a.m. and made my way in semidarkness to the bathroom. There was no hot water. I thought I would heat up some water in a saucepan. I realized I would not be able to do that because I have an electrical stove, and there was no electricity. I calmed myself down, ate a piece of bread, and left for work."

For one engineering student the "economic crisis is especially harsh. The state run electricity only operates 12 hours a day. I have had to shave my face by the light of a candle."

The difficult, wintry months are particularly difficult to cope with. A librarian at the LTA, Ivan Herasym, tells us that his little children coming home from school cannot concentrate on doing their homework because of the lack of heat in their apartment. "The whole family sits still until 9 p.m. in the cold, without hot water." And for those commuting home after work, there is complete darkness. Those who reach their apartments safe and sound are considered 'lucky.'

Energy limitations have had far-reaching effects, causing concerns throughout Ukrainian society. Without sufficient electricity, healthcare faces challenges of scheduling operations and treating the sick. Companies run the risk of losing business. As an insurance measure, one company offered to pay the government in advance for a year's supply of electricity to safeguard production. That attempt failed. Ukrainians' access to the Internet is jeopardized, as one individual expressed: "We are cut off from the whole world."

Until such a time when economic reform transitions Ukraine into a country that realizes improvements to its infrastructure, Ivan, Natalia and others will continue to make the most of what they have. As Natalia said, "We do not have a boring life in Ukraine, do we?"



Homeless workers have set up a tent outside the Lviv city hall to protest living without adequate infrastructure services, including electricity.

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The Editor's Word

by Jeffrey Willis

Pysanky: Signs of New Life

With spring, color returns to nature. And for Ukrainians, colorful dyes and paints are also brought out for 'pysanky', the colored Easter eggs. Perhaps the most recognized folk art of Ukraine, these decorated eggs are a symbol of the new life promised in Easter. Within the Easter rites, pysanky are given as gifts or exchanged as a sign of affection. In a country where Lenten practices are severe and hope is always difficult, Easter is a particularly powerful season.

This spring at the Ukrainian Catholic Education Foundation (UCEF), we are also experiencing the renewing power of God's love. As you will read on the opposite page, the death of our spirited and spiritual colleague Bryon Brindel has left a tremendous void in our work and in our lives. A recent college graduate, he had never been far from his native Milwaukee before he went to serve the Church in Ukraine. After he returned, his writing talents and infectious enthusiasm introduced many others to the story of the heroic Ukrainian Church. Fortunately his series of dramatic interviews "Notes from the Underground" continues on the back page of this issue, as Fr. Okhrymovych recalls his ministry as a priest exiled in Siberia.

The clearest signs of renewal are our new staff. Maria Salemi, our new executive director, brings more than 20 years of experience in churchwork, teaching, and non-profit management to our cause. We hope that she will have the same success and excitement that she had working at the Archdiocese of Chicago. Another native Chicagoan Maddie Rodriguez joins us as administrative assistant. With this new energy we put ourselves once again at God's service ready for new opportunities to help those in great need.

News Briefs

Ukraine Gets Its First Doctor of Theology

For the first time since the beginning of the renewal of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, the degree of Doctor of Theology has been awarded to a native son of Ukraine-Fr. Sviatoslav Shevchuk. Father Shevchuk teaches courses in moral theology at the Lviv Theological Academy.



Fr. Shevchuk decided to pursue studies in moral theology because, as he said, "I remember there was only one teacher of moral theology at the seminary-Fr. Mychayliuk. He taught this subject during the entire underground period of our church. He was quite old when I was at the seminary so I decided to specialize in this field as well."

Matching Grant Benefits LTA

A matching \$6,000 grant from the Loyola Foundation has enabled the Lviv Theological Academy (LTA) to acquire sorely needed computers and office equipment that facilitate serving continuing education needs of priests, students and faculty.

The Loyola Foundation awarded the grant in recognition of the LTA's commitment to the educational programs of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. In matching this grant, special thanks go to Mr. and Mrs. Andriy Petrina, the Ukrainian Selfreliance Michigan Federal Credit Union, and the Ukrainian Patriarchal Society.

With updated equipment now installed, the LTA's Office of Academic Administration is better able to meet the needs of its 600 students.

Announcing

The annual Sheptytsky Institute Summer Intensive in Eastern Christian Studies will be held at the Studite Monastery in Orangeville, Ontario, June 24 - July 22, 2000. Two undergraduate courses will be offered for six university credits: "Theology and Spirituality of Icons" and "Eastern Christian Ecumenism." For details contact the Institute at St. Paul University: (613) 236-1393 Ext. 2332. or check the website: <http://137.122.12.4/sheptytsky/>

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In Memoriam

“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...” Bryon Lee Brindel wrote this in the last issue of this newsletter about a valiant underground patriot he interviewed in Ukraine. Bryon had worked in Ukraine as associate director of the Ukrainian Catholic Education Foundation.

We echo these words in loving memory of Bryon Brindel. At the age of 26, Bryon died unexpectedly in his sleep on February 6, 2000. He is survived by his family in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Living Like Jesus

Bryon’s association with UCEF grew from his own deep spirituality. A month after graduating from college in 1996, Bryon traveled to the mountains of Ukraine to tutor seminarians and other students in English. His year there was one of profound spiritual and personal growth. He lived a spartan life, teaching in unheated buildings, and changed the lives of many students.

Student Natalia Pavliv recalls, “Very rarely does life send us people who touch the deepest corners of our heart and consciousness. Bryon was one such person. His sincerity, openness, charm, and friendliness will stay with me forever.”

Returning to the United States in 1997, Bryon managed UCEF operations where he dedicated the rest of his days to rebuilding the Catholic Church in Ukraine. Bryon was committed to educating Americans about the state of the Ukrainian Church; helping meet academic and financial needs of students; and aiding spiritual and theological growth of seminarians. These are areas of service to which he devoted talents, skills - his very life. Roman Zaviyskyj reflects, “Bryon was a brilliant person and one of my favorite teachers. God takes those whom he loves best.”

Bryon’s desire to serve God and the church enabled him to live like Jesus as he

tirelessly worked to help those in need. His deep faith, passionate nature and youthful enthusiasm brought to UCEF a vitality and energy that will be sorely missed.

As in Life, so in Death

Bryon’s parents and friends have established a memorial fund in Bryon’s name dedicated to supporting his devotion to evangelization and missionary efforts, particularly among the youth in eastern Ukraine.

Students at the Lviv Theological Academy note, “It is interesting that Bryon’s birthday coincided with Independence Day in Ukraine. Bryon himself was a person of independent mind and taught others to listen to the voice of their own hearts.”

Writing just a few days before his death, Bryon encouraged his Ukrainian friends: “The most important thing for now is to try to inspire young people to have a significant impact on society, to have dreams, and the desire to realize them.”

Bryon was probably the first person in my life who listened to my spiritual seeking and understood it. I thought: why must the person from the far America come to Lviv, to listen to me, and to understand me?



Discussing matters of faith with seminarians was a common occurrence for Bryon Brindel (center) while working in Ukraine.

Notes From the Underground

Living as an Exiled Priest

The story of Fr. Okhrymovych

When I was exiled, I, along with others, lived in barracks in far eastern Russia. You could see the Pacific Ocean from there. The soldiers warned me not to celebrate the liturgy and they would watch me to be sure I didn't. I held different jobs while there. Later we were moved to Haberovsk. I helped construct buildings for awhile but then the director at Haberovsk needed someone who could write. He knew that he could trust me and so I was the one chosen to write different documents.



The Underground Church

The leadership in Haberovsk knew I was a priest and that I baptized people. The KGB asked me if I married people, performed baptisms, and said funeral masses. I said that I did. They told me that I was 'forbidden' to do these priestly ministries and later reprimanded me for telling others that the KGB had forbidden me to perform my duties. People would gather for liturgies and prayer services, though. People from other barracks would come as well. Maybe 50-60 in all. We would gather in the forest, find a tree stump, cover it with embroidery and icons, and sing.

I was in exile in Haberovsk for six-and-a-half years, at the beginning of the 1950s. I worked there initially as a blacksmith but later I applied to the Ministry of Education to become a teacher. After all, I had four years of university education. The blacksmith shop owner was very angry with me and said I was only able to do physical labor and that was all I was supposed to do. While working at that shop I developed high blood pressure: the result of too much physical labor, according to the nurse. Since there wasn't any easier work at the shop, the nurse gave me a three-month medical leave certificate. The blacksmith shop owner didn't believe the certificate but for three months I didn't work. Of course, I also didn't earn any money, but at least I didn't die!

Post-Exile

After I returned from exile, it wasn't that difficult for me to find employment because of my background and skills as a teacher. My family and I went to the town of Stryj. There the Minister of Education told me that if I had pedagogical training and physical skills I wouldn't have trouble finding employment. People like me were in high demand.

However, there was discrimination, but there were sympathizers as well. For example, there was an older Russian woman who wanted to give me a lot of money. She had been part of a highly aristocratic family, and almost all of her family members had been executed. So, she sympathized with me in my having been discriminated against.

I was under surveillance as well. The KGB started interrogating me. They would summon me but not very often. They even claimed that I worked in a cult.

After I came back from Siberia, I basically stayed close to home, celebrating liturgy there. I lived a simple life. I think faith is the greatest treasure, maybe more than life itself. I remember one time at Haberovsk the communists tried to provoke me to join them. I recall telling them, 'I'm a faithful man. I'm never going to sign anything. Forget it.' To that one of the Soviets said: "You know, I like your fortitude, your spunk. Even though I don't like what you're telling me, you have the courage to say it. You're not afraid."

The Catholic faith is a treasure. It's not like wearing a pair of gloves that you change. You can't change faith. You have faith. You have a soul. I have a soul and I know it is immortal.



Fr. Oehrmouych poses with a papal certificate noting his ministry during exile.