



Ukrainian Catholic NEWSLETTER

Rebuilding the Church in Ukraine

Three New Bishops Reach Out to Serve

Three new bishops were ordained for the Ukrainian Catholic Church in February 2002. Their backgrounds and their new missions show that the Church is expanding, both in terms of its pastoral ministry and territory. In its historical heartland, western Ukraine, the Church is starting to serve those who have been forgotten in post-Soviet social upheavals. It is also sending shepherds to flocks in new areas including eastern Ukraine, Belarus and even southern Europe.

Bishop Hlib Ministers Near and Far

Even before his episcopal ordination on Feb. 27, Bishop Hlib Lonchyna was ministering to Ukraine's forgotten. For five years, then-Father Hlib was the national chaplain for the Faith and Light community, which now exists in seven Ukrainian cities. Faith and Light brings together the mentally disabled, their families and friends, to pray the rosary, sing and socialize. He was also a spiritual director for seminarians and a theology professor.

"Father Hlib has been an incredible friend," says Zenia Kushpeta, founder of the Faith and Light movement in Ukraine. "He accepted us for who we were and he continues to be our friend as a bishop. He witnesses to the unique vocation of people with disabilities."

A monk of the Studite order and native of Steubenville, Ohio, Bishop Hlib himself came from the Ukrainian diaspora. So it is perhaps appropriate that Cardinal Husar wants him to minister to new Ukrainian settlements, in Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Ukrainian immigrants there, often illegal workers, have no bishop of their own. Bishop Hlib says his mission is "to get acquainted with the problems Ukrainians face in these countries, visit the local communities, organize ministerial work and take an interest in people's lives."

Bishops Stepan and Ihor Spread the Word

Bishop Stepan Meniok, ordained on February 15, has been named head of the new exarchate of Donetsk-Kharkiv, in eastern Ukraine. (An exarchate is a form of church jurisdiction in an area where the church is not sufficiently established to create a diocese.)



Following his episcopal ordination, Bishop Hlib Lonchyna greets some of the faithful outside of St. George's Cathedral in Lviv.

For the last seven years he was a seminary rector. All his seminarians remember the motto of this energetic and positive-thinking religious: "A downcast saint is a dubious saint."

Bishop Ihor Vozniak, ordained on February 17, started ministry as a priest in the underground church in central Ukraine's Vinnytsia region, outside of the Church's traditional stronghold in western Ukraine. Like Bishop Stepan a religious of the Redemptorist order, Bishop Ihor was an instructor of novices up to his episcopal ordination.

In line with the geographic spread of the Church, the hierarchs of the Ukrainian Catholic Church recently decided to move the Church's administrative center to Kyiv, the country's capital. Cardinal Lubomyr Husar says that the aim of this move is to link all the parts of the Church, "since its adherents were scattered all over Ukraine by violent acts of the Soviet regime and are now embraced by our eparchies and exarchates."

Inside this issue you will see two more examples of the Church's expanding ministry: Deacon Oleksandr Sapunko and his mission to the neighboring country of Belarus, and the new pro-life group formed by students of the Lviv Theological Academy.

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Words of Wisdom

From the sermon of Lubomyr Cardinal Husar at the ordination of Bishop Stepan Meniok at St. George's Cathedral in Lviv on February 15, 2002.

A Bishop Remains a Human Being

I think we all feel that today's Liturgy is in some way different from all the other Liturgies that are celebrated in this cathedral, even different from pontifical liturgies. And this is not so strange, for it has been eight years now since the last episcopal ordination was held here.

We rejoice that one more bishop has been born in our archiepiscopal cathedral. Yet we need to realize that a bishop is, in the first place, a human being, like all the rest of us. When a hierarch is donning his fancy, expensive vestments, he recites prayers in which he recalls the passion of Jesus Christ. The bishop at this time does not become somehow superhuman, as it seems, perhaps, to many of us. He is, instead, attempting to join in the sufferings of Christ, to be at His side in the moments of His greatest humiliation.

The bishop, chosen from the midst of the people, always remains a human being. But something does change. He becomes the leader of the community, the eparchy, entrusted to him. It is not his particular human qualities which confer his special status on him. We, human beings, do not give something to him. His power and authority come from Jesus Christ Himself.

The bishop lives in the same environment as everyone else. He shares the worries and problems of his people. But his task is, in the midst of everyday life, to try to see "the finger of God," to look on the world "with God's eyes."

We pray for our bishops, and particularly for our newly-ordained hierarch, not only today, but always.

Election Reduces Communist Reps

Despite irregularities at many polling stations and government intrusion into the campaign, Ukraine's parliamentary elections on March 31 resulted in some gains for reformers.

Half the parliamentary seats are selected on a by-party basis. Though 33 parties and blocs were on the ballot, only 6 of these managed to get at least 4 percent of the vote, which is the minimum for participation in Ukraine's system. Two of these are pro-presidential: For a United Ukraine and the Social Democratic Party-united, which received 11.98 and 6.24 percent of the vote, respectively. The Our Ukraine Party (23.52%) is ambivalent towards the president. The other three parties are antipresidential: Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU), Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc and the Socialist Party of Ukraine.

One important result of the elections is that the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU) is no longer the largest faction in the newly elected parliament. The CPU faction of 66 deputies was reduced by nearly half of the 115 seats it held in the outgoing parliament and is even fewer than the 80 it had in the 1994-1998 parliament. (Members of parliament in Ukraine are called "national deputies.") Ukraine's population, which has declined by 4 million people since the 1989 Soviet census, has also affected the CPU's support base among pensioners. As a result, the newly elected parliament is less left-wing than any of its predecessors.

The other half of the seats are selected on a by-district basis (as in the United States), and the pro-presidential block was particularly effective in using its influence here. The total parliament now has three strong blocks: the pro-presidential, the reformers, and the communists.

Theology Finally Recognized as Academic Discipline in Ukraine

Thanks to a resolution passed on March 11, 2002, theology is now included on the list of academic disciplines recognized by the Ukrainian government. This is the first step in order to enable a graduate of an educational institution where theology is taught to receive a diploma recognized in Ukraine.

At a Liturgy of thanksgiving for the resolution, held in the chapel of the Lviv Theological Academy, Father Borys Gudziak, Ph.D., said: "From the very beginning, when in 1994 the LTA was renewed, our whole community was united by the common goal of accrediting theology in Ukraine. Now our church, other denominations and even representatives of non-Christian religions are going to benefit from this resolution. This great deed is just a small step. The fact that theology is now recognized as an academic discipline is probably not the most important, though. More important for us as Christians is the experience of remaining steadfast in our faith, which proves that in this country, too, one can achieve his goal without bribes and craftiness, even if at the beginning its achievement seems quite unrealistic."

According to information provided by Ukraine's Committee on Religious Matters, at the beginning of 2002 there were 147 educational theological institutions with a total of 11,554 full time students and about 7000 correspondence students in Ukraine.



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In the Mission Fields

“First we baptize the children, then their parents.”

Catholic Re-Evangelization in Post-Communist Belarus

Deacon Oleksandr Sapunko has left his native Ukraine to serve in neighboring Belarus. Though he is proud of his native Ukrainian, he has learned the Belarusian language. But he can't put down roots in his new country. “Today you're in Brest, tomorrow in Minsk. The next day they call you to Mahilyow.” (See map for details.) His family doesn't understand his vocation: why didn't he get married and settle down?

A passionate Ukrainian Catholic, his answer is as radical as the Gospel:

“Our Church is, above all, a missionary Church, which goes out to other nations, to help them to rebuild their church life. From the fruits of this work the Church will grow and strengthen.”

While still a seminarian in Lviv, Sapunko was sent to Belarus for pastoral experience, to help the Catholic Church there recover from 70 years of Communist repression. In Sapunko's opinion, Belarus was affected by communism perhaps even more than Russia or Ukraine. And the present regime in Belarus is an heir of the former communist regime, making it difficult for believers to practice their faith.

Eastern-rite Catholics in Belarus

The Belarusian Church confirmed its full communion with the Catholic Church in 1596, along with the Ukrainian Church, at the Union of Brest. At that time major parts of both the Ukrainian and Belarusian lands were under the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The first martyr of this union was



Catholic missionaries from Ukraine must travel throughout Belarus.

St. Josaphat, archbishop of Polatsk, who was martyred in 1623 in Vitsyebsk. All three of these cities are now in present-day Belarus.

Throughout the 17th and a large part of the 18th century, the center of northeastern Europe's Eastern Catholic Church was in Belarus. By the 18th century about 80% of Belarusians were Eastern Catholics.

But at the end of the 18th century Belarus became part of the Russian Tsarist Empire. In 1839, in Polatsk, the Belarusian Catholic Church was liquidated, joined to the Russian Orthodox Church. The western Ukrainians were under tolerant Austrian rule and their Catholic Church survived.

Into the 20th century, leaders of the Belarusian national movement continued to preserve the idea of the union, and between the two world wars there were signs of a revival. Part of Belarus was under Polish rule and Belarusians could freely profess the Catholic faith. In October 1939, Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, established an exarchate for the whole territory of Belarus. Blessed Bishop Nicholas Charnetskyi was named exarch.

But after World War II, with the creation of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Catholic revival was quenched. Individuals remained Catholic, Ukrainian Catholic priests from Ukraine traveled to Belarus to minister to the Catholic faithful, but the structures of the Belarusian Catholic Church were destroyed.

Post-Soviet Belarus has almost forgotten about its Catholic past. So Sapunko does not have *babusias* (“old women”) coming to Catholic gatherings in Belarus, which is a common sight in Ukraine.



Seminarian Andrii Pozbekva (left) and Studite Sister Olha (center, in white) engage in children's ministry in Polatsk.

A Church of Youth

The missionaries for the re-evangelization of Belarus have started with the youngest. As Sapunko says, the Catholic Church in Belarus is “a Church of youth, the Church of the Belarusian national intelligentsia.”

One of the deacon's important projects is an Evening Catechism School. Most of the students are youth. But this does not mean that the adult population has been forgotten. The children's interest eventually affects the parents. Deacon Oleksandr comments that it often happens that “first we baptize the children and then their parents.”

Many of the Ukrainian Catholic missionaries who come to Belarus are engaged in youth ministry. Deacon Oleksandr's classmates from the seminary come to Belarus during their holidays to help lead pilgrimages, catechize, and otherwise to bring youth to Christ. And the Studites, a monastic order particular to the Eastern Churches, with male and female branches, are making special efforts to assist the Belarusian mission.

A Woman Raised Atheist But “Seeking The Truth”

Deacon Oleksandr recalls an adult woman that he prepared for First Holy Communion:

“She grew up in a totally communist system. Religion was unknown to her. It was something abstract. Faith was for old people, outdated. But here we see how God just steps into a person's life in various ways, by reading books or by hearing the Word, even from Protestant ministers. A person starts seeking the truth. And when he starts seeking the truth, in one way or another he comes to the True Church.

“So this lady happened to come to our church. Our task was simple: to show, first of all, who God is. Not to begin immediately with the differences between various denominations, but just to talk about who God is. And now I realize how important that is in this community, which is not in



Seminarians and nuns organize a youth pilgrimage to Polatsk, where the martyr St. Josaphat served as archbishop.

mission territory, but let's say ‘re-mission’ territory, because Christianity was present here once.

“You just begin: God is love. Demonstrate, through a Christian community, what love is. Now we are trying to do in the Belarusian Church what the first Christians called ‘agape.’ Namely, there's a Liturgy and then there's time for normal socializing. After Liturgy, people are ‘churched’ in this way: they can talk with one another, with a priest, with a catechist. So people have the possibility of continuing what they have received at Liturgy in their daily lives.

“I prepared this woman for her first confession and First Holy Communion. And the joy she received, going to confession, to Communion... I think that she will bring the joy which God poured out on her on that day with her to church. Our work is simply to support her through example, through literature, through our common life...”

Thanks to your contributions, UCEF is able to help Deacon Oleksandr and other Ukrainian Catholic missionaries re-evangelize Eastern Europe.

If you know scholars who would like to donate academic books to the library of the Lviv Theological Academy (now Ukrainian Catholic University) please contact us at UCEF.



Barbara Zang, an American teaching in Ukraine as part of the Fulbright scholar program, visited the library of the Lviv Theological Academy in December of 2001. She shared her positive impressions with Prof. Jeffrey Wills, president of UCEF.

Dear Professor Wills:

In December I brought journalism students from Ivan Franko University to the Lviv Theological Academy library. Earlier they had mentioned the paltry holdings in their faculty library. “I hear the Theological Academy has new books,” one said, with the emphasis on “new.” It does, I assured her.

My students found the LTA library inviting. (“Three reading rooms!” one exclaimed.) The library assistant patiently answered their many questions. Most of all, they appreciated the books, the new as well as the old. They couldn't believe the abundant supply.

They cannot use the Lviv city libraries because they're not Lviv residents, they told me. They learned how to get ID cards to use the LTA collections. They'll be back.

Many thanks to you and the LTA staff for developing an academic library open to all scholars. It's a gem.

Best wishes,
Barbara Zang, Ph.D.

Students Witness to the Value of Human Life

According to the Ministry of Public Health of Ukraine, there were 600,000 legally registered abortions in the country in 2001. This rate is over 1% of the population (double the US abortion rate). The younger generation is shocked by this situation and some are trying to do something about it. With the blessing of Cardinal Husar, a pro-life group was formed at the Lviv Theological Academy in 2001. A core group of 4 young men and 6 young women are trying to save babies in their little corner of the world.

The Abortion Situation in Ukraine

Vladimir Lenin legalized abortion in 1920, making the Soviet Union the first country in modern history with such a policy. As Soviet power came to Ukraine, so did the practice of abortion. There are estimates that the average Soviet woman had 7 abortions in her lifetime.

Unfortunately, independent Ukraine has also legalized abortion, which is available at the woman's request until the twelfth week of pregnancy. It is also possible, for medical or social reasons to have a legal abortion from the 12th to the 28th week of pregnancy.

But, as Petro Husak, a researcher at the Institute of Marriage and Family Life at the Lviv Theological Academy, points out, many abortions are not registered. "Doctors are paid under the table, the abortions aren't legally registered, and legal restrictions have no significance." So it's difficult to estimate the real number of abortions.

This is all in the context of a country that is all-too aware of what is called "a serious demographic crisis." From a post-independence high in 1993 of 52.2 million, Ukraine's population by 2001 had reduced to 49.3 million.

Speaking Out For Life

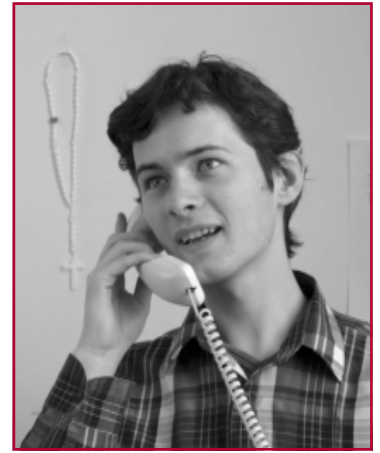
Artem Mysiak and Vasyl Kopyn, both third-year students and members of the Academy's pro-life group, talk about their activities and objectives:

"In the West there are organizations that protect unborn human beings. Borrowing this Western experience, we decided to start a group of LTA students and workers, in order to protect at least a small portion of unborn children. We feel that it is our duty as Christians to protect human life and dignity, as well as reveal the truth about anti-human and immoral practices.

"Our pro-life group has developed a three-day program for schools and higher educational institutions. On the first day, we give talks on human dignity, the essence of love and marriage, contraception as a means against love, and the inappropriateness of premarital and extramarital sexual relations.

"The second day is solely dedicated to abortion. Our members briefly tell the audience about the practice of abor-

Vitalii Melnyk, a third-year student at the Lviv Theological Academy, mans the phone at the crisis pregnancy hotline. In a country where there are more abortions than live births, the need for the pro-life message is very great. The phone counselors advise pregnant teens, older women lacking financial means to support their babies, women suffering from post-abortion syndrome, and even fathers contemplating abortion.



tions in Ukraine. Then we show videos on abortion during the early and late stages of pregnancy and show the development of the embryo in the mother's body.

"On the third day, the students have an opportunity to ask questions, express their own opinions or discuss the issues with pro-life activists in small groups. This method has proven to be particularly effective, since students can ask any questions and communicate without pressure.

"We have already conducted these presentations in more than 10 educational institutions in Lviv, in a school in the Transcarpathian region and in a parish in the Ivano-Frankivsk region.

"Frankly speaking, we must say the youth are deeply impressed by what they hear and wish they had known more about it before. At first, they only listen, but on the third day everybody is ready to talk. We feel that students are concerned with these issues and are greatly moved by what they see.

"But we don't always get this kind of understanding from teachers, especially school psychologists. In most cases, they were educated under the Soviet system, where such topics used to be taboo. This may be the reason why so little attention is paid to sexual education in schools nowadays. Oftentimes, teachers simply take it as a formality. Consequently, we have a high level of early pregnancies and a huge amount of abortions at an early age, so characteristic of third world countries."

Pro-life hotline

In the fall of 2001, the group was given the opportunity to open a counseling room in the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Hospital in Lviv, Ukraine's only Catholic hospital.

The room has a hot-line where the members work as counselors. They man the phone for 4 hour shifts on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The hot-line is advertised in popular newspapers and fliers are distributed throughout the city.

Artem Mysiak concludes: "We obviously need more money to advertise the hot-line in the mass media. Nevertheless, thank God our benefactors do support us and their charitable donations enhance our pro-life activities."

Blessed Sister Laurentia, Catechist in the Catacombs

In her short life, Blessed Laurentia Harasymiv faced Nazis, Bolsheviks, tuberculosis and the cold of Siberia. She never ceased praising God by her word and example, in sickness and in health. Leukadia Harasymiv was born on September 30, 1911, in the village of Rudnyky, Lviv region. Her father Illia was a farmer and her mother Julia the village midwife. There were six children in the family. In 1919, she started school, but she only finished four grades.

She often thought about her calling in life. A number of girls from the neighboring village had entered the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph (the Josephites). Inspired by their example, she also decided to become a nun. In 1931, she entered the Josephite order. Receiving her habit on January 8, 1932, she took the religious name Laurentia.

Sister Laurentia was surrounded by good and holy nuns whose example strengthened her religious calling. In 1933, she took her first vows and was sent to a parish for apostolic work. In 1938, she and her fellow sister, Olympia Bida, who was also to be beatified, were sent to the sisters' community in the city of Khyriv. Sister Olympia became superior of the house, and the fates of the two were crossed until death.

Nazi and Soviet Occupations

Soon the war came, the Nazis and the Soviets. The nuns were warned, even threatened, to stop wearing their habits. The sisters expected arrest but didn't want to leave the place to which Divine Providence had brought them a few years before.

The sisters continued to spread the Good News in secret. They prepared children for First Holy Communion, though it was forbidden.

Members of the NKVD (precursor of the KGB) often "visited" the sisters, laughing and carrying out searches. The sisters bravely endured it. But most terrible were the sudden visits after dark.

In April 1950, the NKVD returned with a vengeance. Sr. Anna Harasymiv, a relative of Sr. Laurentia, recalled the night:

"The NKVD agents fell upon our convent. They spent a long time breaking down the door. It was night; the sisters were terrified. Sister Laurentia ran to the cellar and escaped into the garden through a little window. A cold rain started. When the NKVD broke into the house they immediately noticed the open window and ran to look for her. It was dark and with their bayonets they poked every bush. A few times the bayonet was right in front of sister's eyes. Not finding her, the NKVD went away, but Sister was out in the rain until the morning. She came to the house exhausted and



Sister Laurentia was very gentle, approachable and kind. A wonderful singer with a pleasant soprano, she always sang vespers and matins. She lived in the spirit and charism of her congregation.

Sister had a special devotion to the Mother of God, so she was given the grace of passing into eternity on the feast of the Assumption (Julian Calendar), August 28, 1952.

frozen. After this incident she got seriously ill, lay in bed. They took her to prison when she was infirm."

The regime in the Boryslav prison was severe. They refused to feed the sisters. Their only food was whatever they themselves managed to get hold of. The nuns waited for their "appointments" and interrogations.

Exile to Siberia

Sisters Laurentia and Olympia were eventually sentenced to lifelong exile in Siberia's Tomsk region. The journey from the prison to Tomsk was particularly exhausting. And when the guards saw that Sister Laurentia was too sick to stand on her own, they were forced to allow Sister Olympia to stay with her for the trip.

They traveled for two weeks. When they transferred to a steamboat, the sisters and others had to carry Sister Laurentia on deck because of her high fever.

On June 30, 1950, the sisters were told to go to the village of Kharsk. They had to find lodging for themselves, but no one wanted to let in people with tuberculosis, which Sister Laurentia had contracted. An exiled Russian family was merciful, giving them a room. The paralyzed owner of the house lay there and Sister Laurentia stayed behind a partition.

The sisters soon were set to work. Sister Laurentia had to do whatever work was available. People ordered artificial flowers, which she prepared.

It was pointless to ask doctors for help. The Soviet system was degenerate, geared to the destruction of "enemies of the people." The local doctors weren't interested in easing the suffering of exiles.

Though she was physically weak, Sister Laurentia bravely bore her sufferings. She patiently bore the cries of the slowly dying paralytic and prayed for him. This had its results. The man changed: he stopped shouting and became more calm with those near him.

Sister Laurentia died in the odor of sanctity on August 28, 1952, longing for Holy Communion.