



Eighty-fifth Session of the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC Held in Zarvanytsia

On July 17-18 2020, the eve of the 25th Anniversary of the All-Ukrainian Pilgrimage to Zarvanytsia, the Marian Spiritual Center 'Zarvanytsia', hosted the eighty-fifth session of the Synod of Bishops of the Kyiv-Halych Major Archdiocese of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church chaired by the His Beatitude Sviatoslav.

This session was scheduled for May, but could not take place until a month and a half later when a reduction in quarantine restrictions was introduced. However, the Synod session was held in compliance with all relevant regulations of the quarantine.

On the first day of the Synod, the bishops prayed for the repose of the newly-deceased Bishop Milan Shashik, eparch of Mukachevo.

The central theme of this session of the Synod of Bishops of the Major Archdiocese was "Permanent clergy formation". In the context of its consideration, the bishops heard a report themed "Analysis of programs for permanent formation of priests in our dioceses and exarchates in Ukraine", which was presented by Fr Dr Igor Boyko. He also reported on the need to create a priestly fellowship in the UGCC. Therefore, in the context of considering the main topic, Fr Dr Oleg Kaskiv presented the document "Golden Age of Priesthood. *Instrumentum Laboris* to Support Priest-Emeriti of UGCC in Ukraine". Online presentation of the document "Directions for the permanent formation and support of the UGCC clergy" was carried out by Bishop Bohdan Danylo (USA), Fr Andriy Onuferko (Canada) and Fr Yuri Kolasa (Austria). They also reported on the sub-theme of the main topic of the Synod— support and formation of the priests' family.

The Synod worked on several drafts of Church documents during this session. In particular, the Instruction on the Presence of Church Structures and Clergy of the Kyiv-Halych Major Archdiocese of the



UGCC on the Internet was considered and adopted for a three-year probationary period, being presented by the Bishop Theodore Martyniuk. The Instruction on the procedure of planning, painting, furnishing and preservation of churches and other religious buildings and liturgical objects was adopted in the first reading as presented by Bishop Yaroslav Pryriz.

A significant part of the Synod's time was devoted to the consideration of topical issues of pastoral service in Ukraine, primarily caused by coronavirus infection. In this context, all the ruling bishops reported on the pastoral situation in their eparchies and exarchates, and the Patriarchal economist of the UGCC, Fr Lubomyr Yavorsky reported in detail on the activities of the UGCC Anti-Crisis Center.

Also, members of the Synod of Bishops of the Kyiv-Halych Major Archdiocese of the UGCC reflected on the issue of Synodal activities in the context of the pandemic. They considered several issues presented by His Beatitude Sviatoslav and Bishop Bohdan Dzyurakh, Secretary of the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC.

The Eighty-Sixth Session of the Synod of Bishops of the Kyiv-Halych Major Archdiocese of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was scheduled for November of the year of God 2020.

RISU (source: Department of Information, UGCC)



The wings of the dove of peace blur as it flies past the balcony from which popes have regularly sent messages to the flock of faithful, eagerly gathered for words of wisdom or consolation. Late in July Pope Francis added his endorsement of peace talks relative to the ceasefire in the Donbas. *See page 3.*

His Beatitude at the Funeral of Bishop MILAN (Shashik): *“He was a worthy successor of the apostles”*

On July 20, 2020, Father and Head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church His Beatitude Sviatoslav took part in the funeral of Bishop MILAN (Shashik), the ruling bishop of the Greek Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo. The bishops of the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC were present at the funeral, together with the Primate.



Prior to the hierarcical liturgy, the subdeacons assist the celebrants' hand-washing ritual.

We have come here to pay our last respects to the newly-reposed Bishop Milan," said His Beatitude Sviatoslav. "Today we are sad because we have not been able to complete so many joint plans. But when we look at his figure, we see a worthy successor of the apostles. And the content, the central idea of his apostolic sermon was the testimony that Christ is truly risen."



In the Altar, hierarchs flank the Holy Table during the funeral liturgy.

The Primate of our Church noted that anyone who knew Bishop Milan at least a little, knew his deep spirituality and optimism.

"Today we want to thank Bishop Milan for all the moments of

cooperation between the Eparchy of Mukachevo and the Synod of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Today we thank him for taking such an active part in the work of our Synod. Thank you for being with us the voice of the Ukrainian people before the mighty of this world, before the whole world community about the pains and sufferings of Ukraine," the Primate of the Church said.

According to him, Bishop Milan is remembered today in the UGCC as someone who tirelessly cared for the Ukrainian people to grow in faith and care for their state on the basis of Christian morality.

"Today we miss you, brother Milan, but we are handing you over to the Risen One, Whom you loved, Whom you preached, Whom you witnessed with all your life and death," said His Beatitude Sviatoslav.



Clerics and laity alike joined their prayers that concluded with the refrain imploring "May his memory be eternal!"

On behalf of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, His Beatitude addressed words of sincere condolences and unity in prayer to the Mukachevo Eparchy. "As Greek Catholics, we have a common history of suffering and persecution. We have a common history of the resurrected Church here in our native lands. We have a joint mission as Greek Catholics of Ukraine, which we still have to fulfill together," the Primate said.

"May Bishop Milan be our intercessor in heaven, so that each of us may fulfill his calling in this life—to be a witness to the Risen Christ," His Beatitude Sviatoslav concluded.

The UGCC Department for Information

An interview with Bishop Milan first published five years ago by *KyivPost*, was re-published after his death at age 67 last month. It is on pages 15 and 16 of this edition of *New Star*.

Pope Francis Welcomes Ukraine Ceasefire

Pope Francis expresses satisfaction for a ceasefire signed this week that aims to pave the way to peace in eastern Ukraine and calls for an effective disarmament and mine clearance process

Pope Francis on Sunday upheld a ceasefire agreement reached by the so-called Contact Group for settlement of the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine.

"I understand that a new ceasefire concerning the Donbas area was recently decided in Minsk by members of the Tripartite Contact Group," he said during the Sunday *Angelus*.

The agreement aims to bring harmoniza-

tion and the approval of additional measures of control over a current ceasefire in the ongoing conflict between the Donetsk People's Republic and the Ukrainian Armed Forces. It was reached in the Belorussian capital, Minsk, and is due to come into force starting Monday, July 27.

The Pope thanked the parties for "this sign of goodwill aimed at bringing much-desired peace to that tormented region."

"I pray that what has been agreed will finally be put into practice, including an effective disarmament and mine clearance process," he said. He then noted that "Only in this way will it be possible to rebuild con-

fidence and lay the foundations for reconciliation that is so necessary and so long-awaited by the people."

Since the autumn of 2014, the Contact Group for settlement in eastern Ukraine has declared over 20 ceasefires in Donbas. Members of the Group declared an indefinite ceasefire in Donbas starting in July 2019, however ceasefire violations have persisted.

Violence in eastern Ukraine between Russian-backed separatist forces and the Ukrainian military has killed more than 10,000 people, injured nearly 24,000 and displaced 1.5 million since April, 2014.

RISU; Source: Vatican News

When the quarantine restrictions are lifted, the dispensation that exempted us from going to church will be revoked, His Beatitude, Sviatoslav

Even during quarantine, we understand that participating in the Liturgy online is a temporary solution. We may spend some time praying online, but it is wrong to completely refuse to go to church. This position of the Church was expressed by His Beatitude Sviatoslav, in a commentary for the UGCC Information Department.

"I hope that the state authorities will one day declare victory over the coronavirus and lift all quarantine restrictions. Then it will be the time to resume the public celebration of Divine Liturgy," His Beatitude Sviatoslav added.

The Primate of the Church explained that God's commandment to celebrate the holy day exists even during lockdown and no one can cancel it. For us, Christians, observing a holy day means attending the Liturgy, and neither secular nor church authorities can remove this by their order. But since there are now objective, insurmountable obstacles to visiting worship services, the Church,

as a good mother, meets her children and gives certain dispensations (exemptions) so we may celebrate the holy day not in the temple but at home.

"The gift of the Eucharist gives rise to a church commandment that obliges us to participate in the Sunday Divine Liturgy. Since there is an exemption from this obligation during the quarantine, we do not need to confess missing Sunday service," explained His Beatitude Sviatoslav.

At the same time, the Archbishop emphasized that a person who participates in prayer online should not be like an outsider watching this broadcast as a spectacle, but an active participant, as if he were in church.

"When the quarantine restrictions are lifted, the dispensation from the obligation to participate in the Liturgy will be revoked," the Head of the Church said.

The UGCC Department for Information

A prayer for the time of the COVID-19 viral pandemic:

Priest: Let us pray to the Lord.

Response: Lord, have mercy.

Priest: Almighty and Eternal Lord, You do not want the sinner to die, but you want him to convert and live. You sent salvation through your only begotten Son, who commanded us, "Ask, and it will be given to you; search and

find; knock, and they will open to you" (Mt 7:7). Therefore, we fall before You and we tearfully pray to You: "Do not enter into judgment with us, but mercifully turn away Your righteous anger from us and subdue coronavirus that in these times affects the human race unexpectedly. Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us, and save Your people, that they may live in good health according to Your commandments and glorify Your holy Name. Have mercy

and visit those sick with this illness; lift them from their bed of infirmity and restore their spiritual and physical health; and the souls of those who have already died from coronavirus in the faith and hope of the resurrection, give them peace with Your saints, where there is no pain, no sorrow, no sighing, but life everlasting. By the prayers of the Most Holy Lady, the Mother of God and ever-virgin Mary, the protection of the honorable heavenly incor-

poreal powers and guardian angels, with the grace of Your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom belongs all glory, honor, and worship with the eternal Father, and the Most Holy Spirit, now and forever and ever.

Response: Amen.

(Praying at home with no "priest"? Family members may rotate as the leader of your prayer.)

Taken from The Book of Needs, (Требник) Zhovkva, 1926, p. 849



CARDINAL CONRAD KRAJEWSKI CONSECRATED THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN PAUL II IN LVIV:

The consecration of the Church of St. John Paul II in Sokolnyky near Lviv became a major event of the visit of the representative of the Vatican, the papal distributor of alms, Cardinal Conrad Krajewski. The consecration was July 18 as part of a follow-up of a series of events of the guest from the Vatican in Lviv.



The Liturgy was celebrated by Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic clergymen and attended by representatives of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Pope, Saint Pope John Paul II. Therefore, it is symbolic that Cardinal Krajewski consecrated the church named after this saint.

The new Church is located opposite Lviv's Hippodrome. In 2001, during the visit of Pope John Paul II to Lviv, two services (in the Latin and Greek rites) and a meeting with young people were held there.

“During his visit to Lviv, John Paul II passed several times by this place, where the parish named in his honor, is now located,” says the rector of the Church of St. John Paul II Father Gregory Draus. “This parish is a continuation of the work of Pope John Paul II, and therefore not only honors his memory but acts in two important directions: opening the doors for Christ (so that we become true Christians) and a new evangelization for the baptized and non-believers. Since families were the core of our parish at the time, a family center will be consecrated near the church, where, in particular, we plan interesting preschool activities for children. Cardinal Krajewski was among those who were at John Paul's side during the last years of his life.

RISU

METROPOLITAN OF THE UGCC JOINS THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE:

On July 8, Pope Francis appointed six cardinals and sixteen hierarchs from all continents to this agency. The Metropolitan of the UGCC in Canada was included among them, as reported by Vatican Radio.

They are, in particular, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, recently appointed prefect of the Congregation for Evangelization of Peo-

ples, Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, Archbishop of Luxembourg, Cardinal Michael Cerny, Deputy Secretary for the Department of Migrants and Refugees of the Dicastery for the service of integral human development, and Metropolitan Archbishop LAWRENCE (Huculak OSBM), of Winnipeg in Manitoba, Canada.



RISU

THE OCU AND UGCC MOST TRUSTED CHURCHES IN UKRAINE:

KIIS conducted a survey from June 24-30, 2020 regarding the attitude of Ukrainians to the main Churches in Ukraine.

Among all respondents, 42.4% have a positive attitude to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, 10.3% have a negative attitude, and 37.2% have a neutral attitude (the balance of positive and negative ratings is +32.1%).

The next in this category is the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church; 35.3% positive against 6% who are negative (with 46.1% of those who have a neutral attitude) (balance +29.3%).

23% of respondents have a positive attitude to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, 31.6% have a negative attitude (with 36.8% of those who are neutral) (balance -29.3%).

KIIS conducted the survey using the CATI method (computer-assisted telephone interviews) based on a random sample of telephone numbers.



The sample is representative of the adult population (aged 18+) of Ukraine. The samples do not include territories that are temporarily not controlled by the government of Ukraine—the Crimea, certain regions of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The survey included 2,000 interviews.

The statistical sampling error (with a probability of 0.95 and considering the design effect of 1.1) does not exceed: 2.4% for indicators close to 50%, 2.1%—for indicators close to 25%, 1.5%—for indicators close to 10%, 1.1%—for indicators close to 5%, 0.5%—for indicators close to 1%.

RISU

POPE APPOINTS NEW ADMINISTRATOR OF THE GREEK CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF MUKACHEVO:

Pope Francis appointed Bishop NIL (Lushchak, OFM), auxiliary Bishop of the Greek Catholic diocese of Mukachevo, as Apostolic Administrator of the vacant see of the Greek Catholic Diocese of Mukachevo *ad nutum Sanctae Sedis* (until the recall of the Apostolic See), the Vatican press service reported on July 20.

The eparchy became vacant on Tuesday, July 14, 2020, upon the premature death of the eparch, Bishop MILAN (Shashik).

The appointment was announced during funeral services in the Uzhorod Cathedral.



Why?/Why:

by Fr Denny Molitvy

Everyone wants peace. The Pope is constantly quoted as praying for it and reminding everyone about it. Why, in our prayers do we in the “litany of peace” mention “our military”?

The “Litany of Peace” is not just a clever title to give an apt name to this introductory series of petitions to God to provide us a comfortable atmosphere for prayer. It is a heartfelt plea from a trusting and pleading people for the quality of life that is necessary for all that stems from our dependence upon Him in all we do. The simple introductory “in peace let us pray to the Lord” is amplified with each succeeding phrase.

Each line addresses God, and expands upon basic tenets, acknowledging our dependence upon the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a complete unity and example of interdependence of three persons.

“For peace from on high” is a request for something beyond our limited plane of existence on this planet. Herein we recognize that we do need help in attaining this peace which is so desired. It seems above our limited capabilities—but peace is not so far removed from us to be unattainable. But we need to understand it.

Peace is a quality of relationships. It is more that “the absence of war”. With the Trinity as a model, we are buoyed in our efforts to seek some semblance of what it is.

The search for peace is a life-long endeavor that permeates every phase of our existence. It seems elusive if we try to find it in natural—or merely human—activity.

It is fed by our hunger and thirst for the balance of wills that sometimes clash with ours. Each encounter we experience gives us a chance to practice “peace”. We find ways to accommodate others—so neither entity concedes or demands beyond reason. It is a spiritual power that tempers our wants and needs and respects the needs and wants of those we meet.

Once realized, we beg that that peace not be squandered, but shared. That is why we next request for “peace throughout the world; for the well-being of God’s holy churches; and the unity of all.” We come to know that a oneness of purpose unites us more than our individual concerns might divide us. But

how do we learn about God’s holiness as expressed by His Churches?

We can deal with that in an individual manner as one of those “who enter (this holy church) with faith, reverence and fear of God.” Faith disposes us to reverence. If the church is holy, we experience some notion of the specialness of the place. It is not just a mundane dwelling, but a descendant of the holy temples God directed to be built hundreds of generation ago, to elicit awe and inspiration from His Chosen People. Reverence can be sensed in the sights, sounds smells and acts that bring us together—individuals worshipping together with one voice, in harmony, making a “joyful noise” to the Lord. That’s just a start.

Having gathered, we then recall those who lead us, teach us, protect us in our quest for directions in finding—or re-discovering—it among the whole spectrum of our existence. Our spiritual leaders—in a descending hierarchy: His Holiness; His Beatitude; His Eminence; His Grace—men of episcopal rank, mentioned by name—descendants of the apostles, charged with the task of putting the Good News of Jesus before us. Their allies are the rest of us. Among them, priests, deacons and “all the clergy and people”. United. To God and to the Church that they are.

Then we realize the society in which we find ourselves deserves a piece of this peace.

Grouped together “our nation under God: our government, and all the military” is mentioned next. We are not so specific—not naming names of presidents, congressional persons, cabinet members, governors, mayors, judges, or even the ranks or branches of the military. These are combined with a prayer for our city, town or village, monastic community—and for “every city and country, and the faithful living in them.”

Here your question might be addressed. The term “military” is used in our particular English translation of terminology that appears in the ancient Greek or Church Slav-

onic texts. As such it is a generic term. Other translations by different churches *sui juris* have slightly different wording. Some say “all our armed forces,” others mention “all in the service of our country” thus including a myriad of persons who contribute to the peaceable well-being of our civil society. It includes public works persons, from police, trash collectors, dog catchers, IRS agents, firefighters, mail carriers, park rangers—the list seems endless, as are their tasks.

But if you think the word “military” seems too bellicose, you need only refer to Biblical mention of the need for an army or navy as defensive protectors, rather than aggressors aimed as undercutting human unity that helps us realize the peace we so desire.

Future translations may very well address the use of this term—or we can take consolation in the preventative measure that a military force may have upon those who would take advantage of our life.

The petitions continue—seeking from God other favors that border on the selfish if misunderstood. We ask for “favorable weather, an abundance of the fruits of the earth and for peaceful times” encouraging our praises.

Not neglecting those who we may not now see: “seafarers, travellers, the sick, the suffering, or held captive; for their salvation.”

Striving to live a peaceful life, we plea “that we be delivered from all tribulation, wrath and misfortune.” Lord have mercy.

Reminding ourselves of our dependence upon God we continue: “help, save and have mercy and protect us, O God, by Your grace.”

Summing it all up, we call out: “Remembering our most holy, and immaculate most blessed and glorious Lady and ever-virgin Mary, together with all the saints” we “commend ourselves and all our lives to Christ our God”.

This, with the “Lord have mercy” sung after each of the petitions, gives credence to the message of the psalm that reminds us: “Do not put your trust in princes or in men. There is no salvation from them.”

Peace be with you. As Jesus told the apostles.

Send your questions to
Fr DennyMolitvy:
newstarwhywhy@aol.com
include your name and parish,
which will not be published.



His Beatitude Consecrated a Monastic House for the Congregation of the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate in Odesa

On July 22, 2020, in Odesa, His Beatitude Sviatoslav, together with Bishop Mykhailo Bubniy, Exarch of Odesa, and local clergy, consecrated the chapel and the monastic house of the Congregation of the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate (S.S.M.I.)

At the beginning of the ceremony, the Decree about the establishment of a monastic house and a chapel in honor of the Lord's EAncounter was read. Then His Beatitude Sviatoslav consecrated the altar, the chapel and the entire monastic building.

Later, Bishop Mykhailo Bubniy, Exarch of Odesa and chairman of the Patriarchal Commission for Monastic Affairs, explained that the idea of founding this monastery arose in the context of the reorganization of the monastic ministry in the UGCC: "Where the ministry of a certain consecrated community had already fulfilled its historical mission and where there are no vocations for a long time, we decided to sell the property and invest the money in the place where our Church is developing and where there is a need in consecrated communities," said the bishop.

According to the bishop, the provinces of different countries were encouraged to cooperate, and it was the Sisters Servants who were the first to respond to this idea. "The Sisters Servants of the Province of Christ the King decided to sell their house in Canada and buy a house for a monastery here in Odesa, in the southern part of Ukraine, where our Church is actively developing today," said Bishop Mykhailo.

His Beatitude Sviatoslav

in his address after the consecration of the monastery stated that the significance of this event will become clear only with time, "from the distance of history." If an eparchy or exarchate does not have monasteries, it has no roots. The foundation of a new monastery is the moment when this young structure of our Church becomes deeply rooted in the land where the Lord God wants to build, restore, and order His holy Church.

Addressing the sisters on the occasion of the consecration of the monastery, the Primate said that he sincerely congratulates them "on such a wise decision. Today, more than ever, here, in these lands that have seen and experienced different pages of history, your presence is so needed; it is so necessary for someone to teach a modern man in Odesa to believe in God, to rediscover Him, present and alive, among us," said His Beatitude



At the end of the festivities, Sister Myroslava Yakhymets, Provincial Abbess of the Sisters Servants in Ukraine, thanked His Beatitude Sviatoslav for the blessing of the house. "If it were not for the Lord, this would not have happened, and I believe that this is His plan," she added.

In a special way, Sister Myroslava also thanked the Sisters of the Province of Christ the King: "Such a gesture testifies to the deep unity of our congregation, and my heart rejoices over this. Dear sisters! This monastery is under the protection of the Lord's Presentation at the Temple and may everyone who enters this house meet with God."



The UGCC Department for Information

God With Us
+ ONLINE +

Webinar Series Resumes in September
go to easterncatholic.org for details and registration

Transfigured in Christ

While sorting out my collections of books, reprints, and articles from different literary sources, as I try to become more organized during the Corona virus pandemic, I found the August, 2015 issue of *New Star*. In this publication there were four major articles dealing with the important feasts that occur during this month. Because I had planned on writing an article for *New Star* that dealt with some of these feasts, especially the Transfiguration, I decided to use some of the information in this publication (*inter alia*) for my remarks.

In the Eastern Christian churches, August is the last month of the ecclesiastical year. It is a time to reflect on our relationships with Christ and those around us. On August 1, the Church commemorates the Procession with the Holy Relics of the Cross and the Seven Maccabees' martyrs. In the first two weeks, we celebrate two major feasts: the Holy Transfiguration of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (August 6) and the Dormition of the Theotokos and ever Virgin Mary (August 15). The month ends with feast of the Beheading of John the Baptist.

The Feast of the Transfiguration is linked to the celebration of the Exaltation of the Cross on September 14. By Tradition the Transfiguration of our Lord took place 40 days before His Crucifixion on Great and Holy Friday, but the Byzantine Church observes it in August, instead of during the Great Fast, to place great emphasis on the Feast (*Light for Life Part Two*, 46).

One of the most complete and comprehensive theological treatments of Transfiguration that I have read is in Pope Benedict XVI's book *Jesus of Nazareth. From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, Chapter 9. He ties this event to Peter's confession of faith that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:15-16), stating that this confession can only be understood in relations to the Passion of Jesus and the message of God the Father at the Transfiguration "This is my beloved son, listen to him" (Mark 9:7, page 316).

How does the Transfiguration tie into the glory of the Cross? Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him; he also had them accompany him in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. They went up mountain. Mountains were involved in many critical events of Jesus' life, because they are a symbol of the closeness of God. They also played an important role in the history of Israel, including Moses' and Elijah's encounters with God. Therefore in the Transfiguration narrative the three apostles were led up to a high mountain and he was transfigured before them. His clothes became radiant, so white that no one on earth could bleach them (Mark 9:2-3). In Matthew's Gospel it is stated that Jesus' face shone like the sun, and His clothes were as white as light (Matthew 17:2). Luke explained the purpose for Jesus' ascent: it was to pray (Luke 9:28). Pope Benedict stated that in was in the context of Jesus' prayer that the three apostles witnessed the Transfiguration (309-310). Jesus' true divine being was revealed, as He was in communion with the Father. This event also show us that one day, the faithful will be glorified with

Jesus.

Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Jesus, to demonstrate that this was no mere hallucination of the apostles. They spoke with Jesus about what they said while on earth, pointing to the salvation that would come from the



Death and Resurrection of Christ. They represent the Law and the Prophets that demonstrated the "hope of Israel". Just as Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, His passion and death on Mt. Calvary is transformed into light, freedom, and joy (311). Coming down the mountain, Jesus talked with Peter, James, and John about His upcoming death and resurrection. He cautioned them not to tell anyone about the transfiguration until the son of Man should have risen from the dead. They questioned this among themselves but seemed to be more concerned about the return of Elijah. Jesus told them "Elijah does come first to restore all things; and how is it written of the Son of man, that He should suffer many things and be treated with contempt: But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him" (Mark 9:12-13 RSVCE). Christ identified Elijah with John the Baptist, who proclaimed the coming of Christ.

Because this event took place during the Feast of Tabernacles, Peter wanted to give some permanence to it by erecting three tents. There was a cloud that overshadowed Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, just as it did in Old Testament encounters when Moses entered the tent of meeting, indicating that God was present. The Feast of Tabernacles looks forward to the restoration of Israel. During this feast Jews live in huts, as a remembrance of the protection of God when they wandered through the desert (314). In my personal experience, I had Jewish neighbors who would ask me for corn stalks, from my garden, that they could use to adorn the huts they set up in their back yard. This feast takes place during harvest time, and in the UGCC tradition first fruits, mainly grapes, are brought to the Church to be blessed. These fruits started out as small seeds, which eventually were transformed into mature fruit, just as we will be at our Theosis.

Present events should have us reflect on the nature of God's creation and how it needs to constantly transformed, because we let sin in our lives. All humanity is created in the image of God, and deserves to be respected. There is no just cause for racism, or religious intolerance, or anti-Christian behavior.

May we reflect on this season as a chance to reform our lives, and live as Jesus would want us to. We can be transfigured in Christ.

Henry J. Peresie, Ph. D., CECS

Our Mother Does Not Smile

When looking at pictures, we seem to notice if people are smiling or not. We assume that if they are smiling, they are happy. Why is it that in paintings of the Mother of Jesus, even when she is holding Him, she does not smile? This is not just a phenomenon in the art in Byzantine churches, but also in the Latin or other churches. She does not smile, neither in paintings nor on statues.

It may have something to do with the history of painting and smiles. Of course, the most famous painting of a person not smiling is that of George Washington. Many explanations are given as to why he does not smile. Some people claim it's because his wooden dentures were uncomfortable. But on a recent tour of Mount Vernon, our guide indicated that it might have been because he only had one tooth.

In the Middle Ages, artists in the West painted a smile to illustrate a characteristic of the person. Sometimes a smile was used to suggest that the person was not “all there”. They had some mental defect that would cause them to act in an unacceptable way. When the artwork had to deal with performers or magicians, a smile was meant to show that they were deceiving you or they were vicious. Besides, people do not smile permanently. It is a temporary condition to show joy. This joy is fleeting and will pass shortly.

So it is logical that pictures—icons or paintings—of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, would not have a smile.

Also, in Byzantine iconography she does not smile. The reason is somewhat different. In an icon, we view the person from a heavenly perspective. When a person is in heaven, it is a permanent condition and not temporary. Heavenly joy is perpetual and not fleeting.

Facial expressions in iconography show the peace a person has in heaven. As we know, these are not pictures of the person in heaven but rather an expression of their heavenly existence. Saints on earth have been known to smile and to laugh and to show joy. Smiling is not sinful or evil. Therefore it is probable that the saints who smiled on earth will smile in heaven. The saints who laughed on earth will laugh in heaven. But the essential state of a person in heaven is that of a dispassionate peace. In heaven, there is no need for extreme emotions. The happiness experienced in heaven permeates the whole self and is constant and consistent, so it is permanent and not fleeting. It is also more significant than any type of feeling we experience know on earth.

If we were to look at our own lives for the times we were our most

joyful, we would discover that it is the most profound joy. Well, having a drink with friends can be joyful as well as playing a game with children. These moments are fleeting, and not profound. The deepest moments of joy are serious moments. The first time you hold your grandchild, it is a joy that permeates your whole person. The moment that you discovered the person you loved also loved you was profoundly impacting. Those kinds of joy are the kinds of joy we have in our relationship with God. As we live and grow, we have moments that we sense the divine entering into our lives. When a young man feels that he is called by God to be a priest, it is a joy that is profound and yet not something to jump up and down about. When a young woman realizes that she is called to serve God as a religious, it impacts not just her spirit but her body as well, with a different kind of joy. When a married couple celebrates their 50th wedding anniversary, and they look back at all the years they spent together in love, the joy is in the union of each

other. In this way heavenly joy impacts us totally. It is profound, and it is deep, and it is all-encompassing. But it is not the joy that we kick up our heels about. It is the joy that can be found in the examination of a person's faith, and in particular, their eyes, which are the windows to the soul.

It is common to notice in icons that the eyes look right through you. There is a depth to what you see in them. The eyes are not small but large because the saint is living not only in joy, but in awe.

In iconography, we have to look at the whole of the face. The eyes are wide, and this wideness wipes away all the tension and somber lines

around the facial features, which shows the depth of true joy, not just a fleeting time of happiness. Not only Mary, but Christ and all of the saints exhibit the same serenity—iconographically.

So the holy Mother of God is at peace in heaven, and it is shown in her face. The joy that she has is both being with her Son, and being in paradise.



Fr Jonathan Morse

“To celebrate Sunday as a “holy day” means to give it to God and neighbor,” His Beatitude about Sunday

Six days a week a man reserves for himself, because he “eats the fruit of the labor of his hands.” The seventh day should be given to God as a sign that we do not live only from the work of our own hands but also because God sustains us. This was stated by His Beatitude Sviatoslav, Father of the UGCC, in a comment for the UGCC Information Department.

According to him, the seven-day period of our work and rest is a legacy of Judeo-Christian culture. The commandment to celebrate a holy day responds to human needs for it helps to restore our strength. Therefore we must thank God for the gift of the weekdays and of the holy day. That is why it is so important on the Lord's day to refrain from hard work and dedicate it to our Creator. However, it is important to remember some rules to do it right.

“The seventh day which we sacrifice to God shows our correct understanding of the basic foundations of life. It shows us the eternal source on which our well-being, health, our present and future depend,” the leader of the UGCC is convinced.

“Christians, while celebrating the holy day, must attend the Divine Liturgy. When a person does not do this consciously and voluntarily, then he sins. In this way, he distorts the meaning of this day and experiences it incorrectly,” he said.

“When a person cannot participate in the Divine Liturgy due to certain obstacles, for example there is no church where he lives, or during a pandemic, when there are strict quarantine restrictions, it is necessary to celebrate the holy day as much as the circumstances allow,” adds the prime hierarch of the Church.

In his view, modern culture gives us various opportunities to do so including online broadcasts. It is important not to fall out of the spiritual rhythm.

In addition, personal prayer is one of the elements of devotion to God. That is why it is important to pray on this day, to read the Holy Scriptures, to meditate, to communicate with God. That is, to direct time and personal attention to your Creator.

On the one hand, His Beatitude Sviatoslav warns people against the temptation to work hard on Sunday, and on the other hand, he says that good deeds should be done on a holy day as well.

“Therefore, when you visit your parents only on Sunday and see that they need help that requires hard work, then listen to your conscience and help them. However, in order not to be reproached by your conscience, it is better to find an opportunity to visit your parents on Saturday, Monday, or another weekday,” he says.

May your conscience be a good voice of God in order to help you organize the holy day correctly and fill it with deeds of love and mercy,” the Primate of the UGCC emphasized in conclusion.



A Message from Sloatsburg

Dear Pilgrims,

Due to the pandemic, our 66th Annual Holy Dormition/Assumption Pilgrimage will be a very different experience for you, our pilgrims, as well as for our Sisters and Clergy. Although physically separated from one another, we will remain “united” under the Omophor of the Mother of God, who we honor each year at this time. The holy grounds of Sloatsburg will be barren of pilgrims standing in lines for Confession, for the Healing of the Sick, for the spiritual nourishment of the Holy Eucharist, as well as standing in line for pyrohy and holubchi.

However, the Sisters Servants hope to fill that “pilgrimage void” by coming into your homes through live-streaming the Divine Liturgies and other services throughout the Pilgrimage week.

The theme of this year’s Pilgrimage is “*Mother of Tenderness, be our Strength.*” If there was ever a time in our country and our world when we need the tenderness and strength of Our Lord and the Theotokos to help us respect, care for and support each other, it is **NOW**, during these challenging times!

Listed is the schedule of Pilgrimage services and the access links to them. We have also provided you with a form so that you may request a Divine Liturgy and/or light a candle for your special intentions. The request forms will also be available on-line on our website: www.ssmi-us.org.

Sister Kathleen Hutsko, SSMI Provincial Superior

66th Annual Dormition Pilgrimage

Our Annual Holy Dormition/Assumption
Novena will be prayed from August 1-9 according
to the following schedule:

August 1-7

Divine Liturgy **9:00 am** at St Mary’s Chapel

Saturday, August 8th

3:00 pm Divine Liturgy - Rev. James Hayer,
Byzantine Eparchy of Passaic
Blessing of Water

6:30 pm Panahyda followed by Moleben to the Mother of God
Bishop Kurt Burnette, Eparch of Passaic

Sunday, August 9th

9:00 am Akathist - Fr. Bohdan Tymchyshyn,
Rector of St. Basil’s Seminary

10:00 Hierarchical Divine Liturgy - Bishop Paul Chomnycky, OSBM,
Eparch of Stamford,

choir: Seminarians from Stamford,

Blessing of Flowers, Blessing of the Sick

1:30 Stations of the Cross – Basilian Fathers

3:00 pm – Moleben to Mother of God – Fr. Andriy Dudkevych,
St. Nicholas Parish, Passaic, NJ

ACCESS LINKS:

To access the links for the Pilgrimage celebrations and novenas, you will need to go to our website:
www.ssmi-us.org and the links will be posted on the HOME page beginning August 1st.

His Beatitude Sviatoslav, Like Myroslav Ivan Lubachivsky 25 Years Ago, Renewed the Consecration of the Church to the Protection of the Theotokos in Zarvanytsia

July 19, 2020, during the All-Ukrainian online pilgrimage to Zarvanytsia, His Beatitude Sviatoslav renewed the act of consecration of the Ukrainian people under the protection of the Most Holy Mother of God.

On this occasion, the Head of the Church recalled that the first who gave the Ukrainian people under the protection of the Theotokos was Yaroslav the Wise. "It was when he opened before the eyes of the Kyiv community an indestructible wall—Oranta, who stands with outstretched arms in prayer before the face of God. Interestingly, the inscription on it says that 'God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved.' This is exactly the faith we hear about in today's Gospel," assured the Primate of the UGCC.

According to His Beatitude Sviatoslav, from the perspective of time we understand that freedom and independence are God's gift for us. They are God's response to our parents' faith. "We also renewed a similar act of consecration on the eve of the Feast of the Theotokos in 2014. As you remember, Ukraine then lay defenseless and weakened in the face of the aggressor who was shedding blood in the Donbas and Crimea," added the spiritual leader of the Ukrainians.

"We see that the Blessed Virgin has covered us with a veil. God appeared to us and gave us strength. We remained united as the Church and the country."

The leader of the Church emphasized that now, hearing that the world is kneeling before the disease, we are kneeling before

the miraculous icon of the Most Holy Virgin Mary. Such an act, in his opinion, will testify to our faith that God is ready to work a miracle here for us—those who believe.

"Our faith is manifested in the fact that God is among us. He is with us, and we will not be shaken, we will not kneel before anyone or anything," His Beatitude Sviatoslav said.

"Today, like friends of the relaxed, we bring in prayer all those who have asked us for it, all those who are fighting with the disease, especially our doctors who are 'at the forefront.' We bring all those who pray to God for joy, peace, justice, goodness, and health for their loved ones. Today we pray for peace, because we do not forget that Ukraine is still at war. May the Lord God, who is our

peace, as the Apostle Paul says, listen to our prayers through the faith of His mother. And may He tell us today: rise, pick up your bed and go home," he added at the end.



"Twenty-five years ago," His Beatitude Sviatoslav recalled, "our predecessor Myroslav Ivan Lubachivsky renewed the act of consecration of Ukraine and the Church under the protection of the Mother of God here, in the retreat center in Zarvanytsia. At that time, more than a million pilgrims came here," he said.

Bishop JOSEPH (Milyan) Viewed the Working Process of Erecting the Monument to Lubomyr Husar

On July 24, 2020 Bishop JOSEPH (Milyan), auxiliary bishop of the Kyiv Archeparchy held a working meeting with artists who are working on erecting a monument to the blessed memory of His Beatitude Patriarch LUBOMYR (Husar).

The bishop visited a workshop on the invitation of sculptors Oles Sydoruk, Borys Krylov and Ihor Davydov, “SAYAMAT” company director. Together they discussed the details of a project completion. On the initiative of Bishop Joseph and Fr. Gregory Rohatskiy the monument will be erected in Vinnytsia in a park zone next to the Church of the Intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, UGCC.

Press Service of the Kyiv Archeparchy



Open Letter of Bishop Benedict to the Clergy (to Be Communicated to the Faithful)

Please read the letter to the right. It explains part of the bishop's expectations—not necessarily his, personally, but the expectations the Church imposes upon him, and the expectations the faithful have a right to have in regard his role as Bishop.

Actually, the root word for “bishop” is, like so many other terms, from the Greek language. It even has some recognition by English-speaking people: “*episcopos*”. He has the role of episcopal rank. There are two parts: “*epi*” (for over) and “*scopos*” (one who looks or sees). He is to oversee all aspects of the Church entrusted to him. As may be noted, His Grace has taken this responsibility seriously.

In this letter, he asks his assistants, the clergy—deacons and priests—to bring to his attention those persons in each local parish who have an interest in and desire to share their gift of faith, granted at Baptism and Chrismation, nurtured by the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist.

The inauguration of a Mission Institute in the eparchy is not only a way of staffing the parishes with clerics—but a means of enriching the spirituality of any who wish to delve into the depths of the mysteries of our Faith for their own enrichment, but also to equip the holders of the Good News with tools necessary to reach and teach others—not only as catechists, but dedicated individuals whose very lives become beacons of light to the world of darkness that often abounds.

After all, we are “our brothers keeper” in the sense that we are, as Christians, kind of looked upon to be examples of a life that transcends all the material advantages around, but also becomes capable of exhibiting coping skills when times get tough—as our present pandemic shows.

So, if you were not in the church when your priest mentioned this—here's your own copy to peruse and consider to respond to as you are able.

Help our bishop to help you.



June 3, 2020

OUT-2020-138ENG

“After this, the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of Him to every town and place He was about to visit. And He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest. ...” (Luke 10:1-2).

Establishing of the Mission Institute

Glory be to Jesus Christ!

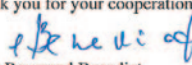
Dear Fathers,

The Good Lord calls each and one of us for service daily, and He requests that we find place for him within the human soul especially within the heart. We try to find that special place within the individual and we realize that our laity, make up 99 percent of unrevealed potential. It is our laity who can bear testimony and take us places where physically we cannot be. In order to fulfill Christ's guidance, two years ago, according to Good's will, a decree was issued about an establishment of the Mission Institute within our Eparchy.

Last year, thanks to your help, 26 students applied to the institute. They are currently completing their first year of study, which was an experimental year for us and for them. During this year we have become more acquainted with the students and we can say with joy in our hearts that they are really disciples of Christ who want to serve in their parish communities and realize their vocation in serving others. This year we are starting the recruitment of students for the new academic year.

I appeal to you with a request to advertise and to spread the world about the Mission Institute in your newspapers, parish bulletins and websites, social media, and so on. Dear Fathers, the Lord calls everyone by name, so, in addition to the ads, do not be afraid to approach active parishioners and personally invite them to study at our Institute. Be the voice of Christ, do not deny it and postpone it – take every opportunity to inform your parishioners in different ways to get them involved. More detailed information will follow soon.

Thank you for your cooperation, I will pray for each of you and for your parish communities.


Most Reverend Benedict
Bishop of St. Nicholas Eparchy

Maybe, Maybe not...

Maybe you misjudged the scope of the lockdown or quarantine—whatever way you refer to the “shelter-in-place” tactic. For a short time time could be spent just being together, doing things with the family. Talking, praying, hoping things would normalize soon.

With realization creeping in that the time would soon drag on, and on, and on, out came board games, cards, dominoes, whatever, to while away the time. TV re-runs are passe. Games like tic-tac-toe, hangman might have grown to be too competitive. Maybe you tried puzzles: jigsaw, crossword, sudoku to name a few. That gets old, too. Even Rubik’s Cube asked for a break.

How about trying to solve some of the absolutely tough, and real puzzles of life? Try to come up with definitive answers to some age-old problems!

Here are four (in no particular order): Why is there a ‘D’ in *fridge*, but not in *refrigerator*?; Who knew what time it was when the first clock was made?; If money doesn’t grow on trees, why do banks have branches?; How do you get off a non-stop flight?

If this epidemic is true-to-form as previous pandemics were—example the 1917-1918 flu—and other plagues, we might be in for a long haul before “normal” returns, little by little. You might just discover yourself—or even come up with a similar pressing problem as listed above. If you have a perplexing issue, send it in for possible inclusion here to: fornewstar@aol.com, subject line: “*maybe, maybe not*”. Maybe one will have an answer!

We might be able to come to grips with our particular place in history—even if we do not solve some of these “mysteries”.

Making a Difference

As I write, it is July 4, Independence Day in the United States. This American holiday is always accompanied with parades, fireworks, flag-waving and a heightened sense of pride of country. And this is all good—to a point.

A love of country—whether that country be Russia, China, South Africa, India, the Philippines, New Zealand, Trinidad and Tobago, the U.S., or any other nation—is a healthy, genuine love when it humbly understands that one’s own nation is an equal member in the world community of nations; and that it not only possesses virtues to celebrate, but also commits sins in need of repentance.

Slogans like “my country, right or wrong” and “love it or leave it” and “America first” and “American exceptionalism” reveal an unhealthy, arrogant, unenlightened and unholy nationalism which exaggerates the nation’s virtues—even attempting to display certain vices as virtues—all the while ignoring the nation’s sins.

Sadly, and dangerously, large segments of many nations hold to this unhealthy patriotism, which is not conducive to genuine freedom, but instead enables the forces of darkness to shackle the mind and soul of both individual adherents, and much of the nation, to a self-centered false sense of superiority which blocks

God’s gift of inner spiritual freedom, and fosters serious obstacles to establishing a just and peaceful world community.

Many people understand freedom to mean doing whatever one wants to do. But that mentality is definitely not freedom, instead it’s what’s known as “license.”

And license results when one’s ego is the driving force. “Don’t tell me what to do. I do what I want” is what people say and do whose lives are being steered by self-centered egoism. This attitude is not freeing, on the contrary it enslaves the person to her/his passions and greed.

And the same goes for nations. Many countries and corporations also have the selfish attitude of “I do what I want” with little regard for the freeing Catholic social teaching principles of solidarity, the common good, and the special option for the poor and vulnerable.

Mark Twain astutely said, “Patriotism is supporting your country all the time, and your government when it deserves it.”

Governments seeking dangerous and unjust dominance by investing astronomical amounts of money in their military—at the expense of the poor and hungry—and companies that treat workers like mere cogs in the corporate wheel—who often labor in sweatshops—instead of as human beings with human rights, are not

only enslaving others, they are unwittingly enslaving themselves.

Unlike secular culture, Jesus shows us that real freedom is not gained by seeking more and more pleasure, fame, money, and power for oneself and one’s country.

Rather “The Way”—the earliest name for the Church—of Jesus is selfless love. In the Gospel Jesus teaches, “Whoever wishes to come after Me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” And Jesus said, “If you remain in My word, you will truly be My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

So, true freedom is not about you doing your thing and me doing my thing; it’s about doing God’s thing. We are not the center of the universe—God is. And when we as individuals, and as a nation, invite the Center of the universe to be the center of our lives and nation, we are then, and only then, free!

Tony Magliano



Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated Catholic social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings. Tony can be reached at tmag6@comcast.net.

True Freedom Leads to Healthy Patriotism

OCU Implore the Holy Theotokos for Intercession Jointly with Patriarch Bartholomew As Hagia Sophia is Converted into Mosque

First Islamic Prayers Held in Hagia Sophia in 86 Years

On July 24, 2020, numerous Orthodox communities around the world will hold services with the reading of the Akathist to the Holy Theotokos. This was reported by the official website of the OCU.

The Orthodox faithful will unite in prayer for the mercy of God and the intercession of the Holy Theotokos at a time when the Ecumenical Patriarchate, like the rest of the world, is facing challenges due to the conversion of the Cathedral of St. Sophia of Constantinople into a mosque.

As a gesture of prayer solidarity with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, His Beatitude Metropolitan Epifaniy of Kyiv and All Ukraine gave his blessing that the churches of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine hold a service (prayer or evening) on July 24, 2020, with the reading of the Akathist to the Holy Theotokos.



TV pictures showed crowds forming at checkpoints surrounding old Istanbul before the main doors were opened. Over 20,000 policemen patrolled the area as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan attended Friday prayers along with several hundred special guests.

Erdogan issued a decree on July 11 ordering the historic Hagia Sophia to be opened for Muslim prayers on 24 July.

His order followed a ruling from Turkey's top administrative court which revoked Hagia Sophia's status as a museum.

The conversion sparked criticism from church and political leaders, who said the conversion for Muslim worship risks causing religious divisions.

At the Angelus address on July 12, Pope Francis said he was "very saddened" when he thought about Hagia Sofia

Example of religious harmony

Since 1934, the building has been a living example of religious harmony in the form of stone. In recent years it has become the most popular tourist attraction in Turkey, drawing over 3.5 million visitors during 2019.

Hagia Sophia is a UNESCO world heritage site in Istanbul.

Reacting to the news of the conversion in early July, the Eastern Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople said Hagia Sophia belonged not only to those who own it at the moment but to all humanity.

For their part, UNESCO said that the building was inscribed on its world heritage list as a museum, which binds the Turkish state to ensure that "no modification is made to the outstanding universal value of the property."

RISU

Nathan Morley, Vatican Radio

Bishop's Chancery

OFFICE HOURS: Monday-Friday 9:00 am-4:00 pm
[Central time zone]

TELEPHONE: 773-276-5080

FAX: 773-276-6799

The office is closed on all major
Church Holy Days and civic holidays

**Deadline for the September issue
of New Star is August 15.**



Published monthly with the permission and authority of His Grace, Bishop BENEDICT (Aleksiychuk), by St Nicholas Publications, official publisher of the:

St Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy
2245 W. Rice St Chicago, IL 60622

Address manuscripts to: **Editor, For New Star**
2245 W. Rice St.
Chicago, IL 60622-6848

or: [Eng] ForNewStar@aol.com
or: [Ukr] newstarua@esuucc.org

All submissions are subject to editing for style, content or length.

Electronic photos in JPEG format are preferable. Hard copy photographs returned only when accompanied by a self-addressed, postage-paid envelope. Photocopies, computer print outs, newspaper or magazine clippings are not accepted. Permission is granted to reprint any original material, acknowledging *New Star* as source. (a courtesy copy is to be sent).

Published by: **FOR NEW STAR, A CONSORTIUM**
with the assistance of:

Fr James Karepin, OP; Fr Denny Molitvy;
Fr Jonathan Morse; Henry Peresie, PhD;
Phyllis Muryyn Zapananiuk.
Fr Roman Bobesiuk, Ukrainian Editor

All e-mail to *New Star* must contain a "Subject Line" topic or it will be deleted, unread.

Greek Catholic Bishop: ‘Many People Have Lost Their Lives for This Church’

By Mark Rachkevych. Originally published in *KyivPost*, November 6, 2015, reprinted by *KyivPost* July 17, 2020.

Bishop Milan Sasik’s eyes shine as he guides visitors through his residence, discussing the restoration of the 18th-century murals adorning the unfurnished chamber.

Located about a mile from Ukraine’s border with Slovakia, the 62-year-old Vincentian’s residence had been part of a state university library for nearly 60 years, until 2004.

The bishop pauses at a painting of a winged herald sounding a trumpet. “We had artisans come from Lviv to do the painstaking restoration work. They did this for more than a year,” he says.

He points to the Latin words on the banner hanging from the angel’s trumpet, which translate to “Long live Maria Theresa”—a reference to the Holy Roman empress of the Hapsburg dynasty who, in 1771, successfully petitioned Pope Clement XIV to erect the Eparchy of Mukachevo and recognize the faithful in this rugged region as Greek Catholics.

This dedication is an example of the historical pedigree Bishop Milan is trying to restore in Ukraine’s westernmost region of Transcarpathia, in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, where some 25 percent of the population—about 320,000 people—are Greek Catholics.

This wooded, mountainous area has a diverse population, which includes ethnic Ukrainians, Slovaks, Hungarians, Jews and Roma. Many identify themselves as Rusyns (often Latinized as “Ruthenians”), an eastern Slavic people who trace their roots to the Kievan Rus’, a kingdom that flourished about a millennium ago.

Their spiritual traditions are founded on the [efforts] of two Byzantine sibling monks, Sts. Cyril and Methodius, credited with introducing the Cyrillic alphabet in Central Europe in the 9th century.

Isolated by mountains from other eastern Slavs, such as the Ukrainians and Be-

larusians, Rusyns developed their own unique culture and identity. Although Transcarpathia is their primary homeland, they also inhabit portions of eastern Slovakia and Hungary, as well the southeastern border areas of modern-day Poland.

“We have four Romanian parishes, 40 communities that speak Hungarian, as well as Slovaks,” Bishop Milan says. “We celebrate the liturgy in four languages—Church Slavonic, Ukrainian, Hungarian and Slovak.”

In addition to their Eastern Christian faith and distinct alphabet, the unique wooden churches that dot the area constitute an art form unto themselves. Constructed from carved wooden joints without the use of nails or other tools, these airtight buildings are a distinctive part of the Rusyn heritage.

A detailed model of one such church stands prominently in Bishop Milan’s meeting room—a gift for his 60th birthday.

“I foremost felt the fear of God,” the Slovakia-born bishop says, describing his reaction when Pope John Paul II appointed him bishop of the Eparchy of Mukachevo in January 2003.

“I gradually felt the historical weight on my shoulders, including the weight of the region’s problems. I had spent six years in Kiev from 1992 to 1998, and two years nearby in one parish in Zakarpattia [the official name of the region] since 2000. When I directly faced these problems, it turned out that there was much I didn’t know.”

These complications stem from years of ethnic antagonism. The people of Transcarpathia faced subjugation at the hands of the Hapsburgs, and later what became the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which pursued campaigns of forcible assimilation. Many Rusyns emigrated abroad as a result—as far away as the United States, where tight-

knit communities formed, and as near as the Balkans, where they populated lands in modern-day Croatia and Serbia.

Rusyns enjoyed brief autonomy in the interwar period, under what was then Czechoslovakia. Unified within a semi-autonomous region, the Greek Catholic Rusyns flourished, building networks of schools, seminaries and churches, and expanding infrastructure throughout the region, such as paved roads and rail transport. Greek Catholic priests would often act as administrators, given their advanced education through the local seminaries. Bishop Milan has also inherited the deeply entrenched legacy of the Soviet Union, which suppressed the Greek Catholic Church nearly to the point of annihilation. From 1946 until *perestroika* in 1989, the church was driven underground.

According to Bishop Milan, his Soviet-era predecessor, Bishop Theodore Romzha, was assassinated in November 1947. Deprived of the services of his Church and kept under *de facto* house arrest, required to ask for permission to take leave, Bishop Theodore soon fell victim to an orchestrated vehicle accident; a truck struck his horse-drawn carriage in Uzhorod. While the driver of the carriage was killed, the bishop was hospitalized.

Soon thereafter, a female intelligence agent posing as a nurse administered a lethal injection.

Bishop Theodore was laid to rest in a crypt housing generations of bishops, priests and prominent church community members. So bare was his interment, no looter disturbed his remains in the chaotic years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

As Ukraine still struggled with nascent nation building, Bishop Milan encountered a community in a state of “spiritual hunger.”

Its shepherds, 128 priests, had been

placed in Soviet prisons and sent to exile in Siberia, and 20 would never return alive. Some 40 churches had been destroyed by the Communist government, and 273 more were transferred to the Orthodox Church of Russia—the only church the Soviets had authorized, which operated under the strict control of the Kremlin.

In 1991, when Ukraine gained independence, the eparchy initially regained only 117 churches and four monasteries from Moscow. Of the more than 500 eparchial institutional buildings that were nationalized, the eparchy was left with 60.

As a result, Bishop Milan initially had nowhere to live.

“I joked that I would live in the cathedral tower, or in the crypt or even in the sacristy.”

Parishes were forced to celebrate the Divine Liturgy outdoors, or share space with Roman Catholic or Orthodox churches. Parish priests had nowhere to live so they stayed with relatives, rented dormitory rooms, or sought shelter in ways less conducive to serving their flocks. Moreover, as of 2003, about a third of communities were not regularly served by a priest.

The priority was clear: The bishop initiated numerous brick-and-mortar projects—most importantly, a seminary to meet the demand of the newly resurgent faithful.

“I saw that I had to respond to that spiritual hunger, that priests were needed. As a pastor, I understood this was beyond my strength; I couldn’t create the vocation in them, since it is God who donates the vocation,” he says

Bishop Milan sought funds from various donor organizations abroad and locally, and began construction. He consecrated eight new houses of worship in 2003. The following year he erected another 20 churches, and has since averaged about 15 yearly.

“Some churches get built in four years, others, larger ones get built in more—we

don’t know about the future,” the bishop says.

“The year 2014 was the weakest; because of the war, only six churches were completed and blessed,” he says. “I’ve already blessed seven completed churches this current year.”

The bishop notes parish donations have dwindled because people are donating more for the war effort. The violence in the eastern half of the country has killed more than 6,000 people, according to the U.N., and displaced more than 2.2 million people—including 1.4 million internally displaced.

“We buried more than 50 men because of the war,” he says.

“Still, we must ensure that churches get built. If we have 265 priests and only 125 rectories, that means we have up to 150 priests who don’t have a roof over their heads—they either rent living space or live with their relatives. This is a huge problem.”

Today, the eparchy’s clergy has roughly doubled. “There were 135 priests, now we have 265 serving priests,” Bishop Milan says. And more are yet coming—another 80 seminary students have nearly completed their studies.

The eparchy’s priests average 35 years in age. Younger members use Facebook and other media to engage with parishioners. Some organize bike rides, hold soccer matches and strive to make youth catechism more fun, according to the bishop.

The eparch notes that each priest may have a different way to immerse himself within the community, though all face similar difficulties—especially resource limitations during this difficult time.

“If you want to become rich in this world, please enroll in a business school,” Bishop Milan warns his priests and seminarians. “If you are truly called by God, then get ready to be poor in this world and to face difficulties. This is the first condition that you must take into consideration.”

Yet there are other challenges, as well—especially in the more secluded, rural areas where the Orthodox Church holds sway, where some report sectarian tensions. Bishop Milan speaks harshly of acts “promoting religious hatred,” adding that such parochialism “denigrates the work of priests.”

For his guidance through countless difficulties, Bishop Milan has earned a reputation among lay people and priests alike for legendary, seemingly boundless energy and passion—perhaps the universal character trait required for any vocation.

Despite his achievements, however, the bishop remains modest.

“My role is that of being a middleman. I see no merit here. Almighty God showed His love toward this eparchy,” he says.

“I see God’s blessing and grace toward our Church. Many people have lost their lives for this Church, for the survival of this Church and its resurrection.



PHOTO Carpatho-Rusyn Greek Catholic Bishop Milan Sasik, C.M., admires the wooden church model his office. (Oleg Grigoryev)