

Features

Lithuanian

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the Rochester Committee for the Commemoration of the 600th Anniversary of Lithuanian Christianity, noted that the Soviet Union had placed its reluctant satellite "in a selective quarantine to minimize participation in the anniversary festivities." Individual and group travel to Lithuania during the month of June, 1987, was banned, and even the pope's request to join the celebration in Lithuania, she observed, had been denied, even though 85 percent of Lithuania's three million citizens are Western-rite Roman Catholics. Nor were any Lithuanian priests, bishops or lay people allowed to leave their country to participate in the June 28 solemnities in Rome, as Father Justin Vaskys, OFM, pastor of St. George's parish, noted in a letter he wrote to fellow diocesan priests in June.

In the Soviet Union, says Klimas, "there's all this talk about *glasnost* (openness), but it's a farce. (The Soviets) were afraid that there would be some type of demonstration in support of the pope. They're so afraid of him, and they're so afraid of the Lithuanians' faith."

The pope's beatification of Jurgis Matulaitis, an archbishop of the city of Vilnius who lived from 1871 to 1927, was also extremely important to Lithuanians, according to Klimas, "because we only have one saint, St. Casimir, and we share him with Poland. We need someone to pray to."

Lithuanians are as proud of their heritage as they are loyal to the tenets of their faith, says Klimas. "It's incredible, the faith that Lithuanians have. There are people who have spent almost half their lives in the Soviet prison system, who come back and resume their dissident activity again as soon as they are released. The Soviets really fear them, because they never give up."



The late Laima Lelis of Rochester received a blessing from Pope John Paul II during the special Lithuanian celebration in Rome in June.

As both Klimas and Birute Litvinas have observed, a clear testament to the faith of Lithuanians is the continued publication of a clandestine journal entitled "The Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania," now in its 15th year of underground distribution, despite alleged KGB threats of death or imprisonment for anyone caught writing or distributing it.

"The Christianity of Lithuanians bonds us," Klimas attests. "Lithuanians have a responsibility to keep that faith alive. If we're going to be assimilated into Russia, we might as well go down with a fight."

The jubilee is important to Lithuanians, Kli-

mas observes, precisely for that reason. "We do have a cause, and this celebration brings it all out," he asserts. "We have a bond with our religion, and we have a bond with our language, but we don't have a home."

Whenever even two or three Lithuanian expatriates gather in Christ's name, however, the seeds of a new home — if not a homeland — take root in countries all over the free world.

As Paulius Klimas concludes, "There's always hope for the future. Maybe Lithuania won't be free, but we'll keep the faith and the language alive."

Historic

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On September 15, 1987, the cornerstone was pried from its foundation and the copper box, which had been sealed into it by Bishop McQuaid on July 30, 1876, was opened. Father Leone invited me to attend, as diocesan historian, and to be the first to examine the contents of the copper box. I found that the paper items — including newspaper clippings in English and German — were almost pulp, browned and sodden. But the American silver coins still shone brightly.

This is a consoling image, I think. Even if Holy Redeemer Church cannot avoid being reduced to dust, the precious doctrines taught from its pulpit will survive and continue on as the heritage of its children's children.

As the death of the church draws near, therefore, I pray the Holy Redeemer Himself to make this symbol of undecayed doctrine, of precious heritage, come true. The great hymn of the old Latin Requiem Mass, the *Dies Irae*, suggests such an entreaty: *Tantus labor non sit cassus*. "Let not vain Thy labor be"

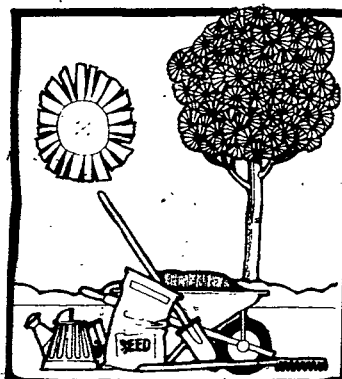
Father McNamara is historian and archivist for the Diocese of Rochester.

First meeting scheduled for adoption support group

The Peer Adoption Support Group will meet for the first time on October 27 from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. in the Memorial Lounge of Summerhill Presbyterian Church, 4845 St. Paul Blvd., Rochester.

The group will begin to define the format it will take. People who have adopted children or are in the process of adoption are invited to attend.

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