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BRIDGES

● LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL ●

Volume 23

Issue 4, May 1999



Lithuania's Next Step...Mothers Remembered...A Defender of the Faith

P e r s p e c t i v e s

May has been a truly worth while month. Not that the other months previous to it have been uneventful but somehow the first breath of spring complete with flowers, foliage, and warm breezes relax the spirit. Also it's a relief when we can really experience an honest to gosh spring rather than "from the cold to the heat in one fell swoop" type of season.

Most of the neighbors have begun to show themselves after hibernating in their warm homes and stuffy offices. They wander around their homes pulling the first weeds and mowing for the first time. Most of the conversation centers around catching up on the news or the bit of gossip.

Children seem at least a foot taller than in the fall. One little boy next door has gone from toddling carefully around the front yard to zipping along with his dog. Those on tricycles are practicing their balancing acts on shiny new bikes. I always keep a stash of bandaids in my pocket for those unexpected moments of enthusiastic bicycling.

On Mother's Day most of the moms are out planting their flowers and sprucing up the garden beds for the vegetables to come. Being a nudge-type with my sons, I drag them outside and have them haul a bit of dirt here and a bush over there. They don't seem to mind it until I start quizzing them about what the plants are called in Lithuanian. And what beautiful names they have — ramunėlė, gvazdikas, rožė, neužmirštuolė. Now how could they complain.

Yes, May has been a worth while month this year. So much accomplished with so much pleasure.

Rasa Ardys-Juška

Editor

BRIDGES

Lithuanian American News Journal

USPS 017131 — Published 10 times per year (Jan/Feb. and July/Aug. combined). Address of publication is LAC, Inc./BRIDGES, 1927 West Blvd., Racine, WI 53403. BRIDGES is the official publication of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc., 11250 Roger Bacon Dr., Suite 17C, Reston, VA 20190. E-mail: lacinc@erols.com

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Address all editorial correspondence to: BRIDGES Editorial Office, c/o Rasa Ardys-Juška, 1212 Mohegan Road, Manasquan, NJ 08736-1650. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope if return is desired.

For subscription and advertising information, please contact:

LAC, Inc./BRIDGES,
c/o Ramas Pliūra,
1927 West Boulevard,
Racine, WI 53403.

Subscription rate is \$18.00 annually (US Mail serviced subscribers; subscriptions to other addresses are \$28.00), payable in advance (US funds). Periodicals postage paid at Racine, WI; and additional locations.

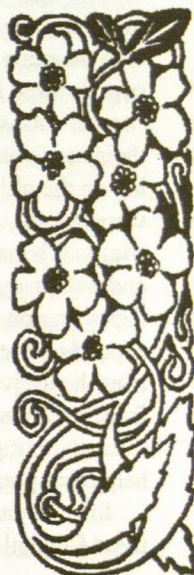
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www.javlb.org

Postmaster: Send any address corrections and/or changes to LAC, Inc./BRIDGES, 1927 West Boulevard, Racine, WI 53403

BRIDGES

- 4** Lithuania's Next Step:
The European Union
From Lithuania
*The steps Lithuania is following
to be accepted in to the EU.*
- 8** NATO Update
From Lithuania
*After the Summit, where does
Lithuania stand?*
- 9** A New Prime Minister?
From Lithuania
*A transition between Prime
Ministers.*
- 10** The Delightful Ladies
of Rumbony
Jeanne Dorr
*The author visits the home of a
small group of senior citizens.*
- 15** Remembering Mama
Audra Lambertas
Memories of the author's mother.
- 16** Rev. Juozas Zdebskis —
Defender of the Faith
Bernadeta Miliauskaitė-Harris
*A priest works according to
Christian conscience during
the Soviet years.*
- 20** New Lithuanian Bible
Sr. Ona Mikaila
*The official Lithuanian-language
Bible has been released.*
- DEPARTMENTS. . .**
- 2** PERSPECTIVES
- 21** REFLECTIONS
Mary as Mother and
First Apostle
Sr. Margarita Bareikaitė
- 22** CURRENT EVENTS

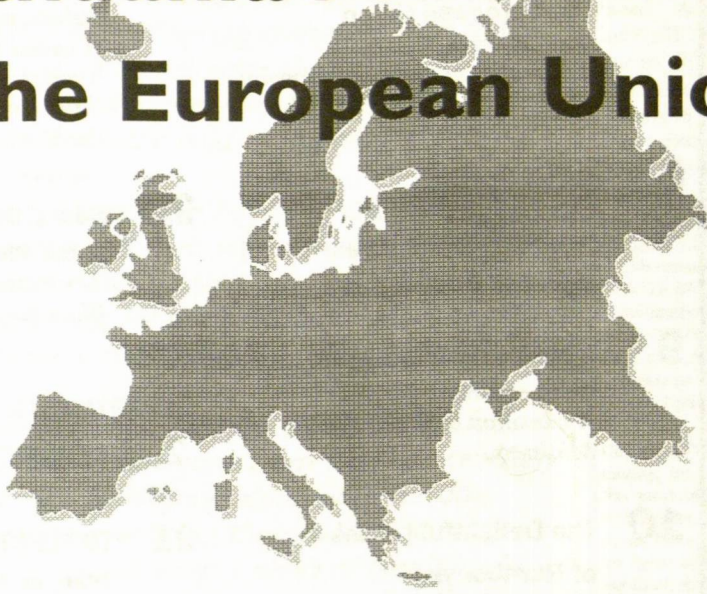
On the cover:
The Aušros Vartai (Gates
of Dawn) which houses
the chapel and miracu-
lous painting of Mother
Mary in Vilnius, Lithuania.
—photo: R. Ardys-Juška



According to Lithuanian Customs and Traditions, the Lithuanian language testifies to the love and respect accorded a mother. We have some 80 terms for mother, including: motulė, mamytė, mamutė, mamulytė, motinytė, motinėlė, motušė, motušėlė, mamyčiukė, motušaitė, mamele, mamučiuokė, mamutėlė, mama, močiutė, motulėlė, and many more. And the most popular gift given to mother is the bouquet of flowers.

— Source: *Lithuanian Customs and Traditions*
by Danutė Brazytė - Bindokienė.

Lithuania's Next Step: The European Union



In Agenda 2000, the European Commission said it would report regularly to the European Council on progress made by each of the candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe in preparations for European Union (EU) membership and that it would submit its first report at the end of 1998. The European Council in Luxembourg decided in their formal Opinion that...

"From the end of 1998, the Commission will make regular reports to the Council, together with any necessary recommendations for opening bilateral intergovernmental conferences, reviewing the progress of each Central and East European applicant State towards accession in the light of the Copenhagen criteria, in particular the rate at which it is adopting the Union acquis.

Prior to those reports, implementation of the accession partnerships and progress in adopting the acquis will be examined with each applicant State in the Europe Agreement bodies. The Commission's reports will serve as a basis for taking, in the Council context, the necessary decisions on the conduct of the accession negotiations or their extension to

other applicants.

In that context, the Commission will continue to follow the method adopted by Agenda 2000 in evaluating applicant States' ability to meet the

economic criteria and fulfill the obligations deriving from accession.

A dynamic approach should be maintained in assessing the progress made by applicant States in the regular reports which the Commission will submit to the Council."

The European Council in Cardiff supported those conclusions, stating that "The Union's priority is to maintain the enlargement process for the countries covered in the Luxembourg European Council conclusions, within which they can actively pursue their candidatures and make progress towards taking on the obligations of membership, including the Copenhagen criteria. Each of these candidate countries will be judged on the basis of the same criteria and will proceed in its candidature at its own rate, depending on its degree of preparedness. Much will depend on the efforts made by the candidate countries themselves to meet the criteria. All will benefit from strengthened relations with the EU including through political dialogue and tailored strategies to help them prepared for accession."

In accordance with the guidance provided by these Council Conclusions, the progress report on

This is an excerpt from the official "Report from the European Commission on Progress of Lithuania towards Accession Into the European Union" as presented to the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania.

Lithuania follows the same structure as the above Opinion. It...

- describes the relations between Lithuania and the Union, particularly in the framework of the Europe Agreement;
- analyzes the situation in respect of the political conditions set by the European Council (democracy, rule of law, human rights, protection of minorities);
- assesses Lithuania's situation and prospects in respect to the economic conditions mentioned by the European Council (functioning market economy, and its capacity to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union);
- and, addresses the question of Lithuania's capacity to adopt the obligations of membership; that is, the *acquis* of the Union as expressed in the Treaty, the secondary legislation, and the policies of the Union.

It also covers judicial and administrative capacity as requested by the Madrid European Council which underlined the necessity for the candidate countries to adapt their administrative structures so as to guarantee the harmonious implementation of European Community policies after membership.

This approach ensures equal treatment for all the candidate countries. The report takes into consideration progress since the Opinion. It looks at whether intended reforms referred to in the Opinion have been carried out and examines new initiatives, including those directly related to addressing Accession Partnership priorities. The report contains a separate section, which examines the extent to which Lithuania has addressed the short-term priorities set out in the Accession Partnerships.

While the assessment of progress in meeting the political and *acquis* criteria focuses on that which has been accomplished since the Opinion, the economic assessment is based on a longer term evaluation of Lithuania's economic performance. The assessment of progress made in adopting the *acquis* has been made on the basis of adopted legislation rather than legislation, which is in various stages of either preparation or Parliamentary approval. Only in this manner was it possible to objectively measure and compare concrete progress in preparation for accession.

The report draws on numerous sources of infor-

mation. The candidate countries were invited to provide information on progress made in preparations for membership since the publication of the Opinion. Their presentations at the meetings held under the auspices of the Europe Agreement, their National Programmes for the Adoption of the *Acquis* and the information provided in the context of the analytical examination of the *acquis* provided were additional sources of information.

Council deliberations on the Opinion, the reports, and resolutions of the European Parliament on the Commission Opinions [European Parliament Doc. 224.339 'Report on the Communication from the Commission Agenda 2000' (Reporters: A. Oostlander and E. Baron Crespo; Co-reporters: M. Aelvoet, J. Donner, O. Von Habsburg, E. Caccavale, F. Kristoffersen, M. Hoff, C. Carnero Gonzales, P. Bernard-Raymond, R. Speciale, J. Wiersma, J.W. Bertens)], and in particular, the report on the application of Lithuania for accession to the EU prepared by Mr. Kristoffersen were taken into account in the preparation of the reports.

The Commission also used assessments made by the Member States, particularly with respect to the political criteria for membership and the work of various international organizations. In particular the contributions of the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and the IFIs, as well as that of non-governmental organizations were considered in preparation of the regular reports.

Recent developments in bilateral relations

The Europe Agreement between the European Union and Lithuania entered into force on 1 February 1998 following the completion of the ratification procedures. Lithuania has implemented the Europe Agreement correctly and contributed to the smooth functioning of the various joint institutions.

The first meetings of the Association Council and the Association Committee were held in February and June 1998 respectively. The June 1998 meeting was the first to discuss the implementation of the Accession Partnership priorities. Since the entry into force of the Europe Agreement, seven sub-committee meetings have taken place. Since the issuing of the Opinion the Joint Parliamentary Committee comprising representatives of the Lithuanian and European Parliament met twice, in January and

in September 1998.

Lithuania's trade with the EU has continued to increase its share of total trade. During the first five months of 1998 Lithuanian exports to the EU accounted for 33% of total exports (Germany 12%, UK 3.6% and Denmark 3.3%). Imports from the EU amounted to 44% (Germany 16.9%, Italy 3.8% and Denmark 3.7%).

Under the Europe Agreement, an adaptation protocol covering in particular non-processed agricultural and processed agricultural products, has been signed to take into account the results of the Uruguay Round and the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden to the EU. There are no major trade problems in the relations between Lithuania and the EU. A new protocol to the Europe Agreement providing for the liberalization of trade in textiles was initiated. Pending its formal conclusion, it has been applied provisionally since 1 January 1998.

The 1998 Phare programme consists of a national allocation (32 MECU), based on the Accession Partnership priorities, to support in particular administrative capacity reinforcement, environment, transport, energy, as well as the participation in Community programmes and Tempus. An additional 4 MECU have been allocated for a cross-border co-operation programme.

In addition, funding will be provided under the Catch-up Facility [Special EU financial assistance given to Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania for projects aimed at accelerating EU accession preparations in certain areas.], for projects in financial sector reform, anti-corruption measures.

Lithuania also participates in and benefits from Phare funded multi-country and horizontal programmes such as customs, environment, statistics, public administration reform and TAIEX.

Accession Partnerships and National Programmes for the Adoption of the Acquis: Global Assessment of Implementation

The purpose of the Accession Partnership is to set out, in a single framework, the priority areas for further work identified in the Commission's Opinions; the financial means available to help the candidate countries implement these priorities; and the conditions which will apply to that assistance. Each candidate country was invited to adopt a National

Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis setting out how it would deal with the Accession partnership, the timetable for implementing its priorities and outlining human and financial resources implications. Both the Accession Partnerships and the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis will be revised regularly to take account of progress made and to allow for new priorities to be set.

Assessment of Short-Term Priorities

The short-term priorities in the Accession Partnership are the following:

Economic reform: establishment of medium-term economic policy priorities and joint assessment within the framework of the Europe Agreement; acceleration of large-scale privatization and progress towards the restructuring of the banking, energy and agri-food sectors, and enforcement of financial discipline for enterprises.

Reinforcement of institutional and administrative capacity: in particular major efforts on public administration reform, border control, customs, taxation and finance, as well as preparation of training strategy for civil servants and the judiciary, veterinary and phytosanitary administrations (particularly regarding facilities at the external borders), institutional strengthening in the area of environment, and setting up structures needed for regional and structural policy.

Internal market: including further alignment in the areas of intellectual and industrial property, public procurement, financial services, phytosanitary and veterinary administration, and upgrading of independent standardization and conformity assessment structures. Adoption of new competition law and establishment of transparent State aid inventory.

Justice and home affairs: in particular further efforts to implement measures to combat corruption and organized crime and improve border management in facilities for refugee reception.

Environment: continue transposition of framework legislation, establishment and commencement of implementation of detailed approximation programmes and implementation strategies related to individual acts. Planning and commencement of implementation of these programmes and strategies.

Energy: in particular establishing a comprehensive, long-term, energy strategy and decommissioning

plan for the nuclear power plant Ignalina according to commitments entered into in the Nuclear Safety Account Agreement.

Progress concerning the short term priorities of the Accession Partnership can be summarized as follows:

Economic reform: Lithuania has not yet established a medium term economic strategy. It has progressed as regards the large-scale privatization, the restructuring of the banking sector and the enforcement of the financial discipline for enterprises. However, major efforts are still needed in the restructuring of the energy and agri-food sector.

Reinforcement of institutional and administrative capacity: While a number of institutions have been established or reorganized during 1997-1998, their capacity to implement relevant legislation is untested. Some progress has been made as regards the preparation of the training strategy for the judiciary. However, hardly any progress has been made in setting up regional development policies and institutions, and strengthening financial control institution.

Internal market: Lithuania has made progress in the field of financial services, standardization and conformity assessment structures and, to a less extent, as regards competition policy. However, efforts have to be taken especially in the field of public procurement, phyto-sanitary and veterinary administration, intellectual property, and state aid.

Justice and home affairs: Lithuania has taken measures to combat corruption and organized crime. However, these efforts must be strengthened. There is still a need to improve border management.

Environment: Lithuania has made good progress in this field, in particular regarding legal transposition.

Energy: Limited progress has taken place in this area. The presentation of a satisfactory energy strategy is still outstanding.

Lithuania has taken steps to address some of the Accession Partnership short-term priorities in the area of financial services, standards, and certification and the environment. However, Lithuania has not satisfactorily addressed the short-term priorities in the areas of energy (establishment of the energy strategy); economic reform (establishment of a medium term economic programme); administrative capacity (especially public administration reform);

internal market (public procurement, intellectual property, state aids) and JHA (improvement of border management).

Recently, Chairman of the Lithuanian Parliament (the Seimas), Vytautas Landsbergis, delivered a speech at the meeting of the Speakers of the EU countries' Parliaments in Sofia, Bulgaria during the last week of April, 1999. In his speech Landsbergis stressed that Lithuania, an EU membership aspirant, already meets the Copenhagen membership requirements of 1997.

"We have good relations with our neighbors; we have long ago solved the issues of national minorities; and signed border agreements with our neighbors", said Chairman of the Seimas. He noted the stability of democratic processes in Lithuania, and expressed his conviction that rapid and successful development of economy allowed Lithuania to successfully withstand the crisis in Russia.

The Ambassadors of the EU member states and the EC were acquainted with the updated information on the progress in the first quarter of this year in implementing the priority measures plan by Lithuania in preparation for the European Union membership.

Petras Austrevičius, Director General of the European Committee under Lithuanian Government, also presented to the Ambassadors the most recent information on Lithuania's progress and introduced programs currently being carried out in legal system reform, internal affairs and strengthening border control. ♦

From Lithuania...

NATO Update...

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Summit in Washington, D.C. on April 24 and 25 did not yield Lithuania's invitation into the alliance but, it did confirm its obligation to observe the 18th article of NATO, which warranted openness of the organization for the next summit in 2002.

The final statement of the Summit said that NATO "acknowledges and welcomes regular efforts and advancements achieved by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania" after 1997 NATO summit in Madrid. The same wording was used for Romania and Slovenia. Lithuanian diplomats claimed that such wording corresponded to their expectations. Lithuania wished to be explicitly labeled as a future candidate for inclusion in 2002. President Valdas Adamkus claimed that, in his opinion, the summit results were "very positive with powerful moves forward".

The summit also passed the Membership Action Plan as a tool for aspirant countries to prepare for NATO membership. "Until now, everybody had talked about open door policy but it is already clear that a decision will be made before 2002 which nations to invite to the next enlargement stage. Therefore, we have to endeavor not to loose the pace, which had already started gathering momentum. Now we are listed in the first triplet of front-runners along with Slovenia and Romania, and we must be in this position in three years as well," stated Pres. Adamkus.

According to Pres. Adamkus Lithuania established a Coordination Commission on Integration to NATO. This was done to prepare to implement the Membership Actin Plan in the most efficient manner. Lithuania's Parliament Chairman, Vytautas Landsbergis stated that Lithuania "must complete its consistent political, diplomatic, economic and defense projects so that Lithuania could offer a safe existence to its people."

SOURCES used for this article were the ELTA News Agency and the Baltic News Service.

Paul Goble, Communications Director of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and a leading American foreign policy analyst, stated that he believed that Lithuania, along with Latvia and Estonia, could join NATO by 2002 if they made considerable strides to improve their military capabilities. He went on to state to the Baltic News Service (BNS) that the collapse of Russia and changes of governments in a number of Western countries will lead to major changes in the security environment for the Baltic states. Contrary to a number of Western commentators, Globe believes that the crisis in Kosovo has actually increased the chances of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to receive an invitation to NATO because the crisis makes one change political thinking. According to the U.S. analyst the Kosovo crisis has dismissed an argument that European Union (EU) membership is a sufficient security guarantee.

Regarding the Kosovo crisis, Pres. Adamkus predicted Europe would face hard times if NATO lost the war in Kosovo. "If it happens I see no prospects for democratic development in Europe. The defeat of NATO would pave the way to action of any mad dictator," the Washington Post cited him as saying.

Lithuania lost no time in its quest for NATO admittance. During the last week of April, over 50 servicemen from twelve nations attended a three-day Operations and Logic Workshop held by NATO regional headquarters in hotel Villon located near Vilnius. The workshop was among the largest NATO events implemented in Lithuania this year. It was organized by the third-level NATO regional headquarters BALTAP, based in Denmark. It presented the structure and reorganization of the alliance, its conception of peacekeeping operations, and their planning and provision of troops. ♦

A New Prime Minister?

Following a long period of uncertainty and political strain, Lithuanian Prime Minister Gediminas Vagnorius resigned on April 30, 1999 during a televised report. Under the National Constitution, the Prime Minister's resignation means that the ministers in his team would have to resign as well.

The resignation of 41 year-old Vagnorius, who had spearheaded the Cabinet for nearly two and a half years, came about after political tensions emerged between him and the President. According to Vagnorius, "that burdened the government of the country and undermined the national economy — financially weakening the state and marring its position on the international scene."

Vagnorius further stated, "Nevertheless, the government and its entire team made cordial efforts to work for the nation and its people instead of seeking to make their own fortune. We strove for a more just order in the state and stricter prevention of abuse and corruption among state officials, as well as contraband and shadow economy. We strengthened financial stability for the sake of all people."

The Premier also cited some improved economic records as accomplishments of his Cabinet, namely a steadfast monetary system in the context of the Russian turmoil, revival of industry and trade, successful collection of the state budget, reinstatement of people's lost bank deposits, and accumulation of sufficient money resources.

"I know that not everybody will approve of my decision but I have a feeling that the current situation of meaningless political tensions and intrigue dictates resignation as the most suitable solution," Vagnorius said.

On April 30th, President Valdas Adamkus claimed he would consult with all parliamentary factions in quest of the most suitable candidate for the premier's post. The deadline given was May

19th. In the meantime, different political factions expressed their viewpoints concerning the candidate's qualifications. The most vocal of the group was the Homeland's Union or the Conservative political council.

In a document, the council laid down the stubborn stance of the ruling party recommending the president to refrain from proposing or appointing a Conservative member to the premier's office.

When consulting the Conservatives, Adamkus proposed a few candidates to replace the former PM. However, the Conservative leadership spurned his offers. Meanwhile, the other parliamentary factions of the nation told the country's leader the Conservatives were due to shoulder responsibility for naming a new Cabinet leader and reshuffling the government,

Presidential spokesperson, Violeta Gaižauskaitė said the state head held intensive consultations with the most prominent figures of the ruling Homeland's Union (Conservatives) who are eligible for the PM's office. The popular mayor of Vilnius, a board member of Homeland's Union, Rolandas Paksas was offered the position on May 10th but did not accept as yet. He has been the mayor of the Lithuanian capital since April 1997.

Parliament leader Vytautas Landsbergis stated that a new wider and clearer consolidation between the units of executive power— president and government -- was possible, and that their discord was undermining the State. Landsbergis told a news conference on May 10th that he was of the opinion that, with some Conservatives in the new Cabinet, a PM should not be necessarily a delegate of the ruling party.

The political council of the ruling party had made it clear that there were gifted or highly acceptable candidates for the Prime Minister's position not only among Conservatives as an alternative to Paksas. Final word will be given on May 19th. ♦

SOURCE for this article was the ELTA News Agency.

Jeanne Dorr

The Delightful Ladies of Rumbonys

My articles usually center around children. They are the ones who have no voice; they don't vote, and they don't lobby. But there is another group who shares my heart and they are the elderly. I am especially concerned about the people who live in the countryside. When I visit them I feel I am stepping back into the past, whirling through a different time zone in a world which no longer exists. My heart aches for those who have outlived their families or are trying to exist

You'll never see their names in print; they never wrote any great literature; never painted master pieces; or never performed any great roles in the theater. I call them extraordinary because of their courage, strength, and devotion to their families. They are not to be pitied, they would never want that. They are, instead, to be admired: admired for living, for not giving up on life when they had to face one adversity after another. I would like to introduce you to the delightful ladies of Rumbonys.

Their lives have not been a bed of roses. There may have been a rose here and there, but mostly they stepped through the thorns. Despite the fact they are elderly and some are in poor health, they retain a sense of humor. Regardless that their faces are wrinkled and their brows are creased, they still smile.

As usual, I came upon the women in a totally unplanned situation. I was visiting the children of Rumbonys, many of whom are orphans. These children are cared for by Father Gumauskas, a 93 year-old priest, and several Sisters. When I

returned from Lithuania in 1996 I wrote about the children in BRIDGES, and one of the first groups to offer help was the Taurus Club and the Ladies Auxiliary of the Taurus from Scranton, Pa. They went beyond the call of duty and these children became their children.

The purpose of my second visit was to take a monetary gift from the club to the Sisters and to take several rolls of pictures of the children; so the members could have a closer look at "their" children. I accompanied each child as they went about performing their chores. The older boys did the jobs of men; while, the girls did jobs appropriate to their age. The Sisters believe in everyone carrying his own weight; there are no couch potatoes or whiners among the group.

We walked through the fields while the little ones pulled weeds and I watched the older ones milk the cows. In spite of their jobs, every child was laughing and happy! One of the girls was telling me about a funny incident that occurred while she was visiting the ladies who lived in a house not far away. The children's house and the ladies' house is only

JEANNE DORR, is a member of the Board of Directors of Lithuanian Orphan Care, a branch of the Human Services Council of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. She is also a Social Studies teacher in New Jersey.

separated by a cemetery. It dawned on me that I had never visited the women residents and I asked if this was possible. Of course it was possible, Lithuanians, especially those in the country, never stand on formality and so all things are possible with them.

My young friend, Lina, was only too happy to take me to the house. As we walked through the beautiful, well-tended cemetery, Lina would stop now and then, and explain about a certain person or a particular interesting tombstone. She was a teenager but there wasn't a question she couldn't answer. I asked her about her relationship with the ladies. She replied that she loved them because they were part of her family. She had no one else in the world.

She started to laugh when she reminded me that they weren't always the easiest to get along with or to please. Take the issue of food. The meals were cooked in the house where the children lived and taken to the ladies. The diet usually consisted of foods which did not require a great deal of chewing. Apparently the women could never agree on the quality of the food. It contained too much cream or not enough cream. It was overcooked or it was undercooked. It was too hot or it was too cold. To my amazement this teenager took it all in stride. She expected the litany of complaints and said it was alright. She knew the women loved them. Complaining was just their way of showing love.

We eventually came to a neat house with a lovely wooden gazebo in the back yard. The door wasn't locked and Lina didn't knock. She felt very much at home here.

A young Sister explained that most of the ladies were already sleeping. I was a little surprised since it was just a little after 6:30 p.m. As I was walking down the hall, someone said to me, "Genute, come here." As I turned to answer the person who was calling me, I passed an open door and heard someone say, "You can't have that name. It's mine." I peeped inside and saw an elderly, tiny woman. Although it was July the weather was cool and she was wearing several sweaters. She appeared almost elflike as she sat on her bed clutching her rosary in work worn hands. But what

a twinkle in her eye; she lit up the room.

I gave her a hug and a kiss and sat down on the bed next to her. Neither one of us was shy, after all, we shared a name. We spoke for a few minutes and then I walked across the room to meet her roommate. She was also saying her rosary and was dressed in several sweaters. We talked for a few minutes and they asked me if they would see me again. I told them they couldn't get rid of me even if they tried. And so ended my first visit to the ladies of Rumbonys.

My second visit was a week later and I was traveling with an entourage. My friend, Joann Antanavage, from Philadelphia was with me. She had danced in the dance festival and stayed a week longer in Lithuania. Also along was Vincent Kreder, a fellow teacher from New Jersey, who has taught in Lithuania almost since the beginning of independence. Vince was with the first group of Peace Corps volunteers to go to Lithuania and he continued to stay there and teach. Of course, I am

*"She appeared almost elflike as she sat on her bed
clutching her rosary in work worn hands.*

But what a twinkle in her eye; she lit up the room."

rarely without an Orphan Care child in tow, and so nine year-old Donatas from Alytus was with us, too.

The ladies were all assembled in one room and waiting for us. I told them about the BRIDGES readers and how they are the best and most generous readers on earth. I explained that I would like to write about them. They seemed a little perplexed -- after all, they weren't famous. A few minutes later I had everyone convinced and we were ready to start. I decided not to use the tape recorder because it sometimes intimidates people. I would simply write quickly and pray to God that I could read my own handwriting when I returned home.

Every group has a leader or spokesperson, and I spotted her the minute I walked in the room. Everyone was sitting along the walls on beds or chairs. Our spokesperson sat alone on a chair in the center of the room.

I asked her to tell me about herself. Her name was Onutė and she was born in the Alytus region

not far from Rumbonys. She told me she was ninety years and six months old. At the age of seven she started working on the farm. In those days Onutė wore wooden shoes. When she didn't have those, she worked barefoot even though there was snow on the ground.

She spoke of living through the horrors of war. She had four brothers and one sister and had outlived them all. Onutė never married but she wanted me to know it wasn't because she wasn't pretty. She left the room and returned carrying a black and white wrinkled photograph of herself when she was a young woman. She really was a beauty: tall with very dark hair. She was still a beautiful woman. Despite her age, she carried herself with grace.

Onutė insisted that she and I sing a song together. I told her I had a terrible voice and couldn't carry a tune. There was no way she was going to let me get out of this. We finally agreed on an old folk song that my grandmother taught me

“All the women agreed on one thing and that was that they were grateful for the good home and loving care they were receiving. They especially cherished the company of the children.”

many years ago. The duet barely started when she held up her hand and told me to stop. “You’re right,” she said, “you can’t carry a tune. I’ll finish it alone.” The duet now became a solo. So much for diplomacy.

She was ready to continue with her interview but I whispered to her that maybe I should talk to the other ladies who were patiently and quietly waiting their turns. Deep down I knew I met my match with Onutė. I also knew I hadn't heard the end from her.

I turned to Genutė who was now my new friend. She and her roommate had a little more importance in the group because we had already met. This seemed to increase their social stature. Genutė was her own sweet self. Maybe I was a little partial toward her or maybe it was because of the workout I had just been through with Onutė, but I felt more at ease.

Genutė had very little education because it was

considered unimportant in those days. To educate a woman, especially one who would be working on a farm, was a waste of time. She had two sons and she buried them both, as well as her husband and the rest of her family. All she could remember clearly is that she never stopped working from sun up to sun down. Through her story she still had that twinkle in her eye and a smile on her face.

Monika couldn't remember too much of anything including how old she was. She knew she was born in the village of Rumbonys. She never married and her four sisters were dead. But like Genutė, she remembered working the soil her entire life, until she could no longer bend.

At this point Onutė needed my attention again. I had a feeling we were away from her too long. She wanted my watch because her alarm clock was broken. Sister later told me her alarm clock wasn't broken because she never had one. I told her I couldn't give her the watch because I wouldn't know what time it was to be able to be at certain

places. She thought about it for a moment and seemed to accept it. But she accepted it only for a moment. Now she wanted my glasses! I had to patiently explain to her that if I didn't have the glasses I couldn't see the numbers on the watch. Once again, she gave it some thought and agreed my reasoning was logical. At this point, I figured I better hold on to the fillings in my teeth. Genutė leaned over and whispered to me not to pay attention to the requests. I figured we still weren't finished but went on to the other ladies.

Albina's father worked for a very rich Lithuanian farmer. His sisters had fled to Belarus and apparently were always in need of their brother's help. They wanted him to bring his daughter and live in Belarus but he refused. He was a Lithuanian and he would live in Lithuania. In addition to his four sisters, her father also had two brothers. Albina was proud that her father was there for all of them when they needed him. She married a farmer and they had one daughter. Her daughter died in a drowning accident when she was fourteen. Albina continued to work on the farm. Later she would also work in the railroad station, a job she held for more than thirty years.

I was starting to see a definite pattern. The ladies wanted to talk about their parents and siblings but only a few mentioned their husbands.

Ona was born in the Alytus area but didn't know how old she was. She did remember that she was born in 1910. She asked me to figure out how old she was and to let her know her age. She was married but had no children. Her husband died in 1981. Like the rest of the women, her memories were filled with work on the farm.

Marta was also from the Alytus area. Her husband was deported to Siberia and she never saw him again. She was left to raise 13 children alone. Some of her children are dead. She remembered that her sons came to visit her while she worked on the collective farm, but she couldn't recall the last time she saw them.

Onutė once again required my attention. She had given the situation some more thought. If she couldn't have my glasses maybe she could have Joann's. I explained to her that Joann could probably see less than I could without her glasses. I was thinking that Onutė could most likely see better without her glasses than we could see with them.

Ona was born in Prienai. She didn't know how old she was. She had been married and had two sons. The first one died at the age of two and the second at the age of three. Both died from childhood diseases. She didn't know what the sickness was but she remembered that many young children died of the same illness.

Elena was born in the Alytus area in 1912. At the age of eighteen she married a farmer and they remained married for fifty years until his death. They had five children; three of them were dead. She had very little education but couldn't remember exactly how much. Her husband attended school for four years before he started to work. Elena's daughter was well educated, in fact, she spoke seven languages. She had an important job and lived in Vilnius. Many times she invited her mother to live with her but Elena did not want to live in a big city.

She was happy in her own house until she broke her arm. There were complications and she remained in the hospital for nine months. When she was released, she was surprised to learn that her bills were unpaid. She said "they" took her house from her. When I asked who "they" were, she couldn't seem to answer me. When I asked why her



Onutė and Donatas talk, joke, and enjoy the visit.



A resident reminisces about her life with her visitors.

All photos courtesy Jeanne Dorr.

children didn't take care of the house, she was also at a loss for words. All she kept saying was that her arm was useless. A few minutes later she told me she was afraid to live alone.

All the women agreed on one thing and that was that they were grateful for the good home and loving care they were receiving. They especially cherished the company of the children. They told me when many of them were sick at the same time, the older children would come and spend the night with them. They often sat up the entire night holding the women's hands or praying with them. They were all in the same situation; they had no one except each other.

There appeared to be a slight commotion between ninety year-old Onutė and nine year-old Donatas. Onutė proposed marriage to Donatas and suggested they have the wedding soon. I offered to buy the wedding gown and host the reception. Donatas kept shaking his head "no." Onutė pretended to look offended as she asked him if she might be a few years too old for him. Of course not, Donatas explained. He was going to be a priest and that was the only reason that he could not marry her. As she sat looking at him with a grim face, it finally dawned on him that it was a joke and he joined the rest of us in having a good laugh. It is a rare child of nine who can laugh at himself and that is one reason Donatas is so special.

As we prepared to leave, I hugged each lady and asked permission to take their photographs. I also asked each one if they needed anything and they all shyly demurred saying, they had everything they needed -- all except one.

Onutė told me she would love to have a box of chocolates. I told her that was not a problem but I would have to check with Sister before I left. I wanted to be sure she had no diet restrictions. She seemed offended that I could possibly think there was something she couldn't eat. As I bent to kiss her, she told me to look in the hall and see if Sister was there. After I took a peek I told her the coast was clear. She brought my head even with hers and whispered that chocolates are not as good without a nice glass of wine. She wanted to remind me to bring some wine on my next visit. This time I had to be firm with her. In a cowardly manner I blamed Sister Elvyra. I told Onutė that if I brought wine to the home Sister would be angry with me, but I did

promise her I would be back with the chocolates.

Before I left, I spoke to the Sisters and asked them what was most necessary. They need anything medical that helps elderly people. Although they get some help from the government, it is not always what they need. There is a need for aspirin, over the counter pain medication for arthritis, muscle rub, medication to help with sleep. Of course, there is always a need for money. I have spoken to several organizations who have been very helpful in sending some of the needed items. If you can help in any way, please contact me. My address appears at the end of this article.

A week later I returned with a box of chocolates for each lady. They were all seated at the table finishing dinner when I walked into the room. They were delighted to see me, not for the chocolates but just for myself. I will never know how it happened so fast but Onutė ended up with all the candy. Sister very firmly pried it away from her and told her the gifts were for everyone. She seemed a little taken back with that statement. She did manage to ask me if that was all I could come up with. I gave her a wink and told her that was it -- only chocolates!

I want to thank all who made my visits to Rumbonys so pleasant. Father Gumauskas and the Sisters, who despite having material goods, saw the need to help those less fortunate. I can only say that these people are saints who are living on earth. They give so much and ask for nothing in return. The children must be thanked for their love and patience in caring for the ladies. They also give of themselves and ask for nothing. But my sincere thanks to the ladies of Rumbonys for showing me the spirit and love of true Lithuanian women.

The story has a sad note. After I returned home from Lithuania I received word that Onutė died. I am sure the children will feel her loss the most because they have lost one of their "grandmothers." But if I listen carefully I can hear Onutė giving orders in heaven. Rest in peace, dear Onutė, perhaps you can now find peace.

If you can help please contact me.

Jeanne Dorr
4 Shrewsbury Yard
Riverton, N.J. 08077



Audra Lembertas

Remembering Mama. . .

My mother was beautiful. My mother was funny. My mother was the type of person who would, good-naturedly, give my boyfriends a kick in the pants, literally, when they came to call just to break the ice. My girlfriends would often end up chatting with my mom when they called on the phone, because I had a "fun" mom: one who could write school plays, give advice about boys, one who always had something interesting and exciting to say.

This is not to say my mother was a casual mother. She took her job of forming and raising us very seriously. Intellectually, morally, psychologically, and culturally – all aspects of our growth were carefully tended and never, ever one at the expense of another. The bottom line was that we were loved, and if we failed to reach a goal or aspiration, we were loved just as much.

It was in large part my mother's longstanding fascination with nutrition and vitamin therapy that led to my interest in nutritional biochemistry, which culminated in my receiving first my bachelor's degree, and then my doctoral degree in biochemistry.

She always let me know she was proud of me, but without pressure to live up to any expectation. If I wanted to pursue a professional career, that was terrific. If I wanted to put it all aside and devote myself to something else, that would have been wonderful, too.

My mother was a very proud grandma. She was eager to tell



Dana Daukantas Lembertas with her grandson Logan.

anyone that she had four grandchildren. My mother was a unique grandma, who wore long earrings and perfume on the golf course, yet could drive the ball 250 yards down the green in a single stroke. . .

My mother was very brave. When she first learned that she was ill in 1993, she did not make

a fuss. She found out what needed to be done and did it without complaint. She was a source of inspiration in her patient's support group -- lifting the spirits of other women in her same situation who could not bear what lay before them. Yet through it all, she called no attention to herself, preferring that she and those around her go on about the business of living, rather than mope about the possibility of dying. When she relapsed in 1997, she resolutely faced the doctors again, without publicity or complaint, and traveled to Lithuania only a month after her treatments. She continued to enjoy dancing and golfing and being a grandma until the disease overtook her a third and final time.

Her life is now a book with the chapter on old age left unwritten. She taught us and loved us as best she could in the time, which she was allotted. Let us honor her memory by the excitement, which we bring to our living, by our dedication to our children, and by our faith in God and providence in the face of adversity. ♦

AUDRA LEMBERTAS wrote these words in memory of her mother, Dana Daukantas-Lembertas, who passed away March 19, 1999 in Santa Monica, California. ALÈ RŪTA ARBAS sent Audra's touching tribute to BRIDGES.

Bernadeta Miliauskaitė-Harris

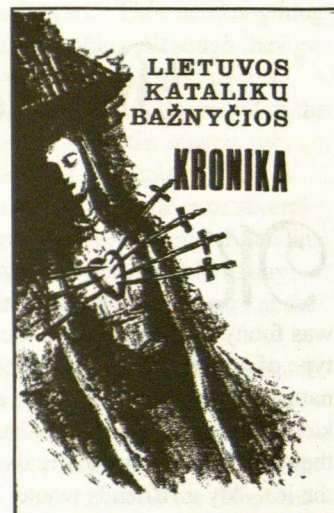
Rev. Juozas Zdebskis – Defender of the Faith

How much would you be willing to sacrifice in order to defend your faith? Chapter 5 of the Acts of the Apostles gives the account of the 12 Apostles' arrest and trial. When told by the high priest that they had violated the orders not to teach about Jesus, Peter and the apostles replied: "Better for us to obey God than men!" (verse 29). After that, they were whipped and ordered not to speak about Jesus again. Upon their dismissal, they left joyfully as a result of being able to suffer for Jesus' sake and continued to teach and proclaim the Good News.

The same words with which Peter defended himself were spoken once again on November 11, 1971 by a Lithuanian priest, Rev. Juozas Zdebskis (1929-1986), at his trial for catechizing children in Soviet-ruled Lithuania. Like the apostles, Fr. Zdebskis was a threat to the system because he was not afraid to go out and preach to all men as our Lord instructed. His persistence and unyieldingness to the Communist government earned him the code name "Akiplėša" assigned to him by the KGB. This colorful word, literally translated, describes someone who tears or claws your eyes out. Father Zdebskis never harmed anyone and loved his enemies as Jesus commanded, while courageously suffering to defend the rights of the faithful.

Father Juozas' fascinating life has been documented in a series of eight books published in Lithuania during the past few years. They include his diaries, letters, sermons, and reminiscences of friends and people whose lives he touched. A documentary video has also been released. One of the

The Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church, to which Fr. Zdebskis contributed vital information.



books entitled, "Akiplėša", discloses information from the KGB file on Father, which miraculously survived destruction along with all of the other KGB files when Lithuania regained independence. It consists of 2,040 pages including 465 agents' reports signed by 115 different KGB agents -- all on this one priest's activities. It provides information on the special means they employed to destroy his credibility. A look at Father's life may inspire us to be more courageous in defending our faith.

His Life...

Juozas Zdebskis was born on May 10, 1929 in the parish of Mindaugai, Marijampolė district. His parents were farmers, who had three other daughters, two of which died young. Father's older sister, Marytė, lives in Marijampolė. His father died in 1955. His mother, who spent the last years of her life with Fr. Zdebskis, died in 1979.

After high school, Juozas entered the seminary in Kaunas and was ordained a priest on Sept. 21, 1952. After serving in various parishes, Father was transferred to Kaunas in 1956 to further theological studies and assist in two churches. In 1961, he was appointed pastor of the Gudeliai Church.

Father Juozas believed in fulfilling his duties in regard to the catechization of children and did so,

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even though the government forbade it. He was arrested and sentenced to one year in prison on Nov. 26, 1964. He was released on June 4, 1965 after serving with hardened criminals. Next he worked in the parishes of Alytus and Leipalingis before becoming pastor of Kapčiamiestis in Nov. 1966. Besides faithfully serving his parish, he also gave retreats in other towns.

Father Juozas became concerned with the sorrowful state of the seminary. While about 30 priests died annually, only five to seven were ordained. Government, not Church, officials chose candidates for the priesthood. If the young men agreed to collaborate with the KGB, they were permitted to enter the seminary.

At the end of 1968, Fr. Zdebskis, along with Fr. Sigitas Tamkevičius (currently Archbishop), began to gather signatures for a petition protesting this situation. For this he was transferred to Valakbūdis. After signing another petition demanding that more seminarians be allowed into the Kaunas Seminary, his and Fr. Tamkevičius' registration certificates and the right to officially function as priests were taken away. Both worked as laborers in land reclamation for one year. In the spring of 1970, Father was allowed to resume his priestly duties in Prienai. He continued organizing retreats, ministering to Catholics throughout the Soviet Union and catechizing children, which led to his second arrest on Aug. 26, 1971. He was sentenced to one year in the Pravieniškių correctional work facility, where he remained until Aug. 26, 1972.

The Tribulations Begin...

After Father's return, he was not assigned to any parish but continued to minister to Catholics in various towns. In the summer of 1973, he was assigned to Šlavantus as pastor where he remained for 12 years. Being in an out of the way parish gave him more time to broaden the scope of his activities.

The Communists had confiscated and destroyed all Catholic literature, which was desperately needed to raise the people's awareness from the materialistic to the spiritual level. Father organized the copying and passing around of what little pre-war literature he had. He also worked on obtaining information for the "*Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania*", an underground publication which was smuggled out to inform the free world of violations of believers' rights under the Communists.

Father was also a founding member of the Catholic Committee for the Defense of Believers' Rights. He recognized the needs of younger people growing up in an atheistic environment and organized them into the "*Friends of the Eucharist*" movement.

Robertas Grigas, a former member, describes their meetings, which were held at different homes under the guise of feast day or farewell dinners. During the summer, they met outside to enjoy the beauty of God's creation. They learned Lithuania's real anthem and history. Father Juozas encouraged abstinence from alcohol and taught the youth to do penance by sacrifice. For example, giving up candy and television for Lent.

At the time, this seemed childish to Robertas but now he understands Father's insight. It was the youngsters who sacrificed little things like candy, who later were able to withstand interrogations and not succumb to fear or persecution. Whenever Father learned of a member in trouble, all would appear offering consolation and support.

When the time came for Robertas to serve his time in the Russian Army, he refused to go against his conscience by taking the atheistic oath. Because of this he was terrorized. Father Juozas and Robertas' mother traveled to Kazakhstan, where Robertas was stationed three times. Father secretly heard his confession, held Mass and gave him Holy Communion. This strengthened Robertas to go on. Today, he is a priest. Other former members also entered religious life; while, those who chose matrimony created strong Catholic families. All were taught by Father to love their persecutors.

The Persecution is Stepped Up...

This extraordinary priest was not without a sense of humor. To get rid of KGB agents who were always following him, Father Juozas would enter an apartment building, which he did not have to go to, wait, and leave. The agents would then have to question each tenant on every floor. This enabled him to move about freely for a time.

Father would attend all the trials of dissidents in order to show his support. Once security agents approached him in the courtroom to inquire why he was there. He replied with a smile that he had come to gather material for the "*Chronicle of the Catholic Church*."

Monsignor Svarinskas tells of another instance when after hours of interrogation, Father Juozas

was released. He stood at the door and beckoned for the interrogators to come over. They thought he was at last ready to divulge information and ran up to him. Instead, he offered to baptize their children.

Needless to say, the KGB did not like Father Zdebskis. Daily Mass, prayer, and contemplation strengthened him to continue carrying out his duties. Unable to break him by trials, warnings and threats, the Communists resorted to measures of terror. He was beat up in Marijampolė in Oct. 1972. On several occasions accidents were set up followed by raids and interrogations. An especially cruel plan to discredit him reads like a thriller.

On October 4, 1980, family and friends were gathered in a Marijampolė home awaiting Father Juozas to baptize his sister's grandchild. He did not arrive until 11:30 p.m. because he was being followed. After christening the baby, Father was invited to dinner. He sat down hesitantly. When he got up half an hour later, the chair was stained with blood. He explained that it might be a skin infection and asked Dr. Genovaitė Drasutyte to accompany him. Two KGB cars followed.

When they arrived at the rectory at 2:30 a.m., Father's blood pressure had dropped and he was very weak. His lower back, buttocks and backs of thighs were red, swollen and covered with blisters filled with bloody fluids. Some had broken causing his clothes to stick to them. They were caused by chemicals, which the KGB had poured on Father's car seat to disable him. These chemicals not only burn but are absorbed into the skin where they damage the heart, kidneys, central nervous and gastrointestinal systems.

Due to the severity of the burns, it was necessary to hospitalize Father Juozas. Three people accompanied him to the Kaunas Clinic's burn unit. They prayed all the way. This time they were followed by three cars and stopped once. The doctor's driver license was checked. After looking in the car to verify that Father Zdebskis was actually in it, the

agents allowed them to proceed.

A stop was made at Dr. Drasutyte's place to administer medicine, change the bandages, and take a blood sample, which was sent to the lab under an assumed name to be tested for venereal disease.

The results were negative.

It was now October 6th. The next stopped at a house in Kaunas where the Franciscan Sisters lived. Father, despite all his pain, offered Holy Mass. An ambulance was called and he was taken to the clinic, where the doctor who was consulted asked

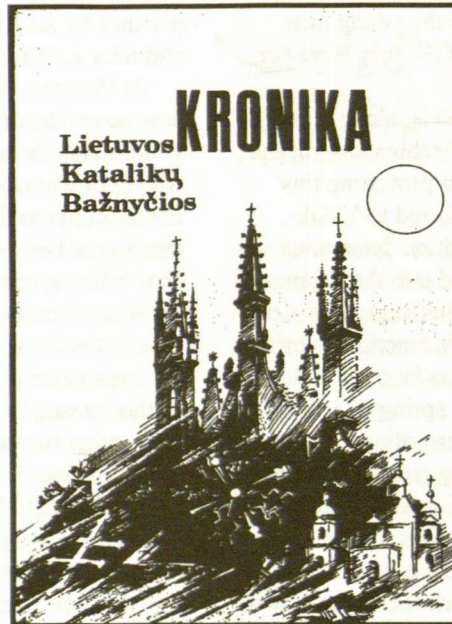
him if he had sat in a pot of boiling water. The diagnosis was second and third degree burns.

On October 8th, through God's will, a friend who worked in the lab notified Father's friends that a lab specimen without a name was brought in and ordered to be diagnosed as positive for venereal disease. The KGB was demanding that Father Juozas be diagnosed as having venereal disease, and that he be transferred to that section of the clinic. The only solution was for Father to escape.

His medical record still stated that he was being treated for burns. Friends took it, and Father wrote on it that he was leaving to be treated at home. They also photo-

graphed his chart to have proof in case someone did change it to read venereal disease.

With God's help, the escape took place at night. While two friends, Dr. Birutė Žemaitytė and Vytautas Vaičiūnas, entered the hospital, a third, Dr. Drasutyte, waited in the car. The two made it safely past the guards. The elevator operator was an acquaintance of Dr. Žemaitytė and agreed to wait with closed doors on the floor of the burn unit. Mr. Vaičiūnas hid in the toilet with Father's clothes. All was quiet. As Dr. Žemaitytė entered the doctor's office, who was on call, she quietly thanked God that it was a friend of hers, Dr. Rimantas Žebrauskas. After informing him that she had to take



A cover from "The Chronicle of The Lithuanian Catholic Church."

Fr. Zdebskis, he agreed to conveniently disappear in the cardiac section.

Dr. Žemaitytė then brought Father to the toilet where Mr. Vaičiūnas helped him to dress. They waited until the corridor was empty before taking the elevator to the basement, where they passed through dismal tunnels, before climbing the stairs and finally making it outside to the waiting car. Each step for Father was very painful. Once in the car, they prayed to their Guardian Angels and the Blessed Mother before hurrying away. They were not sure where to go but decided that Viduklė, where Fr. Alfonsas Svarinskas was, would be a safe place.

Father remained there until Oct. 12, when his heart rhythm became irregular. It was decided to move him to the Franciscans' apartment in an out of the way section of Kaunas. Before leaving, Father went to Confession and received the Last Rites. Dr. Drasutytė arranged for his treatment. In order to keep his location a secret, no one left the house or answered the telephone. If he were discovered, the KGB plan would succeed. Food and medicine were delivered at night. Father offered his pain and suffering for the souls in Purgatory and the conversion of sinners. He refused pain medication so that he would have something to offer. Prayer, meditation and celebration of the Holy Mass, which he could only do lying down, filled his days.

On Oct. 21st, news reached them that the authorities were searching for Fr. Zdebskis in order to seize him and two women, and hospitalize them for venereal disease. All turned to prayer. Brave priests, such as Rev. Indriūnas in Kaunas, spoke out from the pulpit about the KGB's plot to disable and discredit Fr. Juozas. Once this was out in the open, the KGB kept its distance.

God's Work Continues...

Slowly, Father recovered and began to walk again. He returned home on Dec. 5, still under treatment. He was able to continue his priestly duties in Šlavantai for 11 years. Among them he visited the sick every first Friday in order to bring them the Holy Eucharist, educated for abstinence, taught by example, and continued to obey God instead of the atheistic government.

His last assignment was the parish of Rudamina where he served until his death on Feb. 5, 1986 when he was killed in an automobile accident ar-

ranged by the KGB. Fr. Juozas' car, driven by Algis Sabaliauskas, collided with a milk truck. Three passengers died and a fourth, Romas Žemaitis, was injured. Monsignor Vincentas Jalinskas, who prepared Father's body for burial, observed that his forehead did not look quite right. When he touched it with his finger, his finger immediately penetrated very deeply. Monsignor Jalinskas speculated that either Father died instantaneously, or someone "helped" him die.

Various obstacles were posed to claiming Fr. Juozas' remains and personal effects. The authorities wanted to forbid his burial in Rudamina's churchyard, but the grave had already been dug. The KGB kept the entire funeral under special surveillance, especially those taking care of the arrangements. Nevertheless, this did not prevent thousands of people and hundreds of priests from attending and paying their last respects to this martyr for Christ.

Father's Legacy...

Even though Father Juozas is no longer with us physically, he is present in spirit. The seeds of faith, hope, and love that he sowed have borne fruit. Thanks to him, many young people whom he taught are now priests, sisters and lay people bearing witness for God and building up the Catholic Church in Lithuania today.

Many reading about Father Zdebskis' life may find motivation to defend their faith against the excessive materialism and hedonism of today's society. Behaviors, which used to be sins, are no longer called sins. It has become acceptable to engage in premarital sex, engage in homosexuality, live together without marriage, enter into same sex marriages, commit adultery, kill the unborn and the sick — all to the detriment of the family. Promoting chastity, especially among teens, is discouraged. Pornography, sex, violence, and profanity in the media, especially the entertainment industry, have destroyed the innocence of today's children. Like Fr. Zdebskis, let us pray to the Holy Spirit to strengthen us to fight against these evils by following the Ten Commandments and proclaiming their existence to others even in the face of ridicule and disdain. Then, like the apostles, we too will be obeying God, rather than men. ♦

Sr. Ona Mikaila



LITHUANIAN BIBLE

A new translation of the entire Bible into Lithuanian was published in Vilnius in December of 1998. Sponsored by the Lithuanian Catholic Bishops' Conference headed by Archbishop Audrys Bačkis, this is now the official Bible approved by the Catholic Church in Lithuania.

This new translation of the Bible into Lithuanian is unique because it contains both the books of the Old Testament and of the New Testament in one volume. The translation has been made from the original languages -- Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.

The Bible is in hard cover totaling 2,000 pages. It is similar in appearance to the Jerusalem Bible. Copies have now reached the USA and are being sold at various Lithuanian-American bookstores.

Monsignor Anthony Rubšys, Scripture professor at Manhattan College, is responsible for the translation of the Old Testament and is general editor of the entire volume. Father Česlovas Kavaliauskas of Lithuania translated the New Testament. These

two noteworthy Lithuanian Scripture scholars have also provided readable and informative introductions to all the books of the Bible, as well as footnotes elucidating the text.

The design and layout of the text was done by Dr. Jonas Boguta of **Kovas Desktop Publishing** in Cicero, Illinois. The **Lithuanian Catholic World Publishing House** in Vilnius added illustrations and maps; while, the printing and binding were done at the new printery in Kaišiadorys.

This handsome new publication was introduced to the Lithuanian public at the close of 1998 through two seminars held at the Vilnius Seminary on December 17th at the University of Vilnius on December 21st. The Lithuanian hierarchy and many notable scholars were present.

Archbishop Audrys Bačkis noted that the publication of this new Bible in Lithuanian is an event of the greatest importance for our nation. "This is a great spiritual and cultural achievement, a wonderful gift for the faithful Catholics of Lithuania who will be joining the Christian world as it celebrates the second

millennium of Jesus Christ, the Word made Flesh."

Lithuanians in the USA and Canada are celebrating the publication of this new Lithuanian Bible by organizing special presentations of the book to interested audiences in Lemont and Chicago, New York, Toronto, and other places.

This monumental work was produced due to the cooperation of many people in the Lithuanian Community in the USA and in Lithuania. Overseas Lithuanians were very generous with their financial support for this publication.

Monsignor Anthony Rubšys, a native Lithuanian by birth and living in the U.S. for almost 50 years, has been honored for his work on the Bible with the International Award of Lithuania received in 1995. He has been elected president of the Lithuanian Bible Society, which is now publishing an ecumenical Bible in Lithuanian. This edition will be acceptable to Christian communities of various denominations in Lithuania and overseas. ♦

*SR. ONA MIKAILA is a writer and editor of **Bendradarbis**, and belongs to the order of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a Lithuanian order in Putnam, Connecticut.*

Reflections

Sr. Margarita Bareikaitė

Mary as Mother and First Apostle



It is significant that the Holy Bible connects Mary with the blessing made to Abraham. Blessings came because she was the fulfillment of the blessing of Abraham, who was told that she would be a source of blessing for the world. Mary's blessings came about through her inseparable relationship to Jesus in the miraculous conception and in the nurturing role as mother. The Holy Spirit also blessed her. These blessings all took place by the message of the Angel, then, by Elizabeth, and finally the prophet Simeon.

To learn more about Mary, Mother of God, we have to turn to Evangelist Luke who regarded Mary as forever blessed because of her permanent relationship with Jesus. Mary's own hymn's, "Magnificat's", response seems

to confirm this, "All generations will call me blessed" (Lk. 1: 48). He portrays Mary, as Mother of Jesus very well as an apostle: a model for those who remember and ponder over the meaning of God's plan.

In reading the Holy Bible we see her reaction to the shepherds' visit and the sign of the manger. Jesus' mother Mary is not differentiated from or opposed to the disciples; rather she is included among them not as a mere physical mother of Jesus, but as one who is a mother and witness in the community because she hears the word of God and keeps it. Mary is the mother who believes the divine promises about Jesus' "impossible" birth -- the plan for Jesus' tragic suffering, death, and resurrection. She is the model and mother of all believers, whose role is a very active one as the carrier of blessings to her

children. Also she is a key witness of Jesus' humanity in his birth and death.

Mary is also a remembering mother of the essential continuity and succession in Jesus' presence through the Spirit in the Church. Thus the New Testament roots establish Mary as essentially related both to Christians and Christian teachings. She is not only the mother of the disciple and the mother of the Church, but also as God's place of encounter with all that is most beautiful among all men. As one preacher said, she was the first and most perfect of those who simply "treasure all these things in their hearts". ♦

SR. MARGARITA BAREIKAITĖ belongs to the order of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a Lithuanian order in Putnam, Connecticut. She is also the Chairperson of the Religious Affairs Council for the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.

C u r r e n t E v e n t s

Žalgiris – European Cup winners

Lithuania's Kauno Žalgiris was greeted by tens of thousands of fans rejoicing the historic victory in the Euroleague Finals in Munich when team members arrived home on April 24th. The team, which marked the victory by shaving off their hair, was met by a host of political leaders including Seimas Chairman Vytautas Landsbergis, who thanked the players for their outstanding performance.

However, the victory-turned-national-holiday nearly switched to a mass riot as the basketball fans flooded the streets of Lithuanian towns and cities celebrating the victory by overturning cars, pulling down billboards, and hitting traffic lights, dustbins and trees. The crowds of basketball fans were dancing, singing in the streets during the night, spraying champagne, and chanting the names of Žalgiris players. Kaunas police and the first army division were called to control the situation.

President Valdas Adamkus called from Washington and said that the victory of the Žalgiris players was a restitution of the name of Lithuanian basketball in the whole continent.

At a special awards ceremony on



April 28th, Pres. Adamkus awarded the Grand Duke of Lithuania Gediminas 2nd Grade Order to the team's chief coach Jonas Kazlauskas. Gediminas 4th Grade Orders were given to seven Žalgiris players -- Dainius Adomaitis, Americans Anthony Lee Bowie and Tyus Dwayne Edney, Tomas Masiulis, Darius Maskoliūnas, Kestutis Šeštokas, and Jiri Zidek of the Czech Republic. Since the other three leading players -- Saulius Stombergas, Eurelijus Žukauskas, and Mindaugas Žukauskas -- were decorated with Gediminas 4th Grade Orders already last year, Pres. Adamkus handed them letters of gratitude.

The president handed a copy of the decree of Lithuanian citizenship to Žalgiris club co-owner and board member, Shabtay Kalmanovich. Oth-

ers awarded were Coach Algirdas Brazys and the club's board chairman Mindaugas Plukas. The rest of the team, including the doctor and masseur, received Gediminas 1st Grade Order medals.

They were also honored in the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. Government officials and several hundred schoolchildren met the champions carrying the Cup. "Basketball hour" was held there, during which the basketball players imitated government officials and answered questions. A representative of the U.S. Embassy in Vilnius welcomed American players of Tyus Edney and Anthony Bowie.

In addition to the awards, the government allotted four million litai to the team for preparation for the next season.

The owners of the Žalgiris team hinted to *Respublika*, a Lithuanian daily, that Eurelijus Žukauskas was leaving in the summer for the NBA, and Turkish and Italian teams were interested in Saulius Stombergas and Tyus Edney, who received the title of the Most Valuable Player in the Final Four tournament. ♦

Source: ELTA News Agency

FYI – from the editor

We've received several inquiries regarding our "Books to Note" section. Unless otherwise noted, all books can be ordered at your local bookstore. We've tried to mention those books that have recently been released or are still available. If you stumble upon one that is out of print, let us know. We'll make a note of that in the column.

At the present, we're collecting a new batch of recently published books. Some can only be purchased from the publishers themselves. That information will be given with the articles.

Another set of inquiries includes questions regarding events in specific locations in the United States. We

don't list all the Lithuanian-American Community chapter events mainly because we don't receive them in time for people to schedule them into their calendar – usually it's after the fact.

There is a way to find out what is happening in your area, though. If you contact Mrs. Audronė Pakštas at the Lithuanian-American Community Washington Office (11250 Roger Bacon Dr., Suite 17C, Reston, VA 20190 or e-mail lacinc@erols.com or www.javlb.com), she will be able to give you your area's contact person. Many local chapters publish their newsletters, which contain calendars and interesting news. Several chapters that come to mind are the Philadelphia, Seattle, Pittsburgh, Chicago, St. Petersburg, Fla., and others. ♦

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The information in this application is accurate as of 2/99. The information may have changed after that date. For more current information, please call MBNA at 1-800-523-7666. TTY users, please call 1-800-833-6262.
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BRIDGES

• LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL •

Volume 23

Issue 4, May 1999

Subscriptions:
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Racine, WI 53403

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