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# BRIDGES

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*Thoughts of the Future...A Lithuanian Parish in America...A Teen's Journey*

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

*One of the joys of editing BRIDGES is working with talented contributors for each monthly issue. As the months roll along I receive not only their articles and photos either by e-mail or on a floppy or ready to be scanned in, but also their friendly words, ideas for future issues, and updates on life at their end of the spectrum.*

*I'd like to take this opportunity to publicly thank these wonderful writers for their loyalty to the BRIDGES journal, for their hard work creating thinking pieces, and for their patience with their editor...*

*Edward Baranauskas  
Sr. Margarita Bareikaitė*

*Irena Blekys  
Ina Bertulytė-Bray*

*Jeanne Dorr*

*Rimas Gedeika*

*Albert and Leona Gustaff*

*Sr. Ona Mikailaitė*

*Bernadeta Miliauskaitė-Harris*

*Regina and Bernard Narušis*

*Frank Passic*

*Ed Shakalis*

*And other writers who have sent BRIDGES their work.  
"Dėkoju visiems už Jūsų nuoširdų darbą!"*

*A publication cannot be complete without the publishing and subscription mastermind who makes sure we're on time and part of your postal delivery ten times a year — Mr. Ramutis Pliūra. Ačiū labai, Ramuti.*

*Garrison Keillor often says Lake Wobegon has "strong women, good-looking men, and above-average children". Well, I can safely say that we can extend that description to include Lithuanian-Americans. All you have to do is look over our contributors and you'll know I'm right.*

*Rasa Ardys-Juška*  
Editor

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**T**he 1831 Revolt against the Czarist government resulted in tremendous losses for the Lithuanians in the forms of land, freedom, and education. Intense Russification began. From the primary schools to the institutions of higher learning, education in the Lithuanian language was stifled or abruptly ended. Educating youth would only "confuse their minds". Even publishing books in the Lithuanian language was forbidden.

Lithuanians found ways to circumvent this system and began to publish books in other countries, smuggling them in under the veil of night. "Vargo Mokyklos" or secret schools were becoming the norm in many villages and small cities. These operated as present day home schools do. Mothers working at their spinning wheels taught their children and sometimes neighbor's children. Other families hired teachers who had been fired simply because they were Lithuanian. Educating youth continued even in the direst of circumstances.

Source: *Lithuania 700 Years* by Albertas Gerutis  
 New York; Manyland Books, Inc.; 1969



**On the cover:**  
 A country scene from the village of Rumšiskės, Lithuania.

Photo by Bernard Narušis

From Lithuania...

# Vytautas Landsbergis: Focusing on the Future

**I**n the last few months, Chairman of Lithuania's Seimas (Parliament) Vytautas Landsbergis expressed the importance of change and growth for the 21<sup>st</sup> century when he delivered two very important speeches. The first speech was delivered at the International Conference in Warsaw, Poland following the session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly from May 28<sup>th</sup> to the 31<sup>st</sup>. It was entitled, "*NATO after 50 Years: The New Old Alliance*". This same Conference is scheduled to take place in Vilnius in the year 2001.

The second speech of equal importance and dedicated to the World's youth was given at the European Youth Meeting and Pilgrimage in Santiago de Compostela, Spain on August 5<sup>th</sup>. This address was entitled, "*What Would Be the Politics in the 21st Century?*" Excerpts from these speeches follow below.

## ***NATO after 50 Years: The New Old Alliance***

**I**n the latter several years, as the North Atlantic Alliance was approaching its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, new firm intentions of the organization matured, became visible and were realized. Both of the most important developments directly concern Lithuania, the secure future we are seeking: the geographical enlargement of NATO and the change of NATO ideology.

The first objective is **the enlargement of NATO**. It includes **the principle of membership access** to the organization, a real possibility to accept new members – democratic states wishing to

make their contribution to the international security, international stability in military and other fields of the ever-growing Euro-Atlantic area. The criteria of the preparation for joint defense and peace keeping encourages the applicant states to be a party to sincere and coherent partnerships. Thus, yet before acceding to the Alliance, they are already involved in joint efforts, and adequate readiness for membership is a fair criterion evident to everyone.

The second objective of NATO is **changing the Alliance's ideology** covering its focus and methodology. The territorial defense (when the territories of the member states are added up) is replaced with a move towards the task of protecting a broader international environment. This extends beyond the protection of NATO member states themselves from direct aggression by undertaking the surveillance and stabilization of their international environment: preventive protection against the emergence, escalation or approach of aggression.

What do these changes have to do with Lithuania?

We are concerned with NATO access as a continuous non-stop process: especially in Central Europe, from the Baltic to the Adriatic Sea (yet in further perspective, noticing the aspirations of the South Caucasian states). Certainly we are primarily concerned with NATO access in the direction of Lithuania.

Lithuanian policies themselves perceive this as **the second stage of the liberation** with further implementation of the principle of the freedom of choice and unquestionable, unrestricted national freedom.

A decade ago, we voiced our free will to leave the area of captivity.

*VYTAUTAS LANDSBERGIS is the President of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania. The speeches were translated into English by Jūratė Dvarionaitė.*

It is our will now to leave the area of insecurity and instability. Leave for what? Surely, for the area of stability and its name is NATO. Insecurity always breeds fear and distrust, and fear again is a part of that captivity.

We do not want anyone to threaten or intimidate us or deny our right to choose.

We want freedom from insecurity and we want to freely take on the obligations to international security as a member of the Alliance...

... The Washington Summit came, where I discern, two further steps forward.

First, the document, which characterizes applicant states, enumerated an order... [The first group] In alphabetical order, they are Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovenia. Then follows the second group with a different label – Bulgaria, Slovakia, and yet further – Albania, Macedonia.

According to this list, either all five of the leading states, or some of them, which are more leading than the others can expect to be invited to accede NATO in the year 2000.

Alongside the document, an important step forward was the Washington atmosphere. Some of the issues are no longer debated; they are [considered] to be true. The enlargement is underway, and it will not be stopped. Three new members mean three new votes in favor of not stopping the enlargement. If you will, they are three experts who [know] what is security and insecurity in the post-Soviet area.

Even the Russian generals are beginning to [comprehend] the reality: the fact that NATO is expanding, that Lithuania will be accepted...

... Today NATO stands up to Serbia, to the Hitler of the Balkans. As long as Russia advocates Slobodan Milosevic and the regime of Belgrade without denouncing the brutal expulsion of millions of Albanians from their native lands, Russia, unfortunately, remains on the different side of the value line than the Western democracies.

This was the choice of Russia itself, maybe spontaneous, but still a step towards self-isolation from Europe, from its partner, the North Atlantic Alliance, refraining even from participating in the latter's fiftieth anniversary.

Political support to the criminal regime, which failed to prevent Belgrade from another crime of 'ethnic cleansing', but rather encouraging it, must have one logical consequence. It would be the

awareness that Russia's protests against NATO enlargement bears yet less weight than earlier. In other words, the so-called "Russian factor" should be minimized...

... One cannot reject the risk that for the weakened support to Milosevic and involvement in the efforts to find the solution, Russia can be paid a promise: not to invite a single Baltic state to NATO in 2002.

The outcome would be disastrous; however, forecasts are still too early to make, maybe, there is no need to make them.

There is only a question: will not the Russian authorities be given some promise of this kind?...

... We feel the tragedy of the expelled people stronger than those who have never experienced it. Lithuania has undergone mass deportations to Siberia and will approve of the return of Kosovo deportees to their native settlements when no executioners are left. This must happen before winter. The deportees will have to be protected and assisted. I believe that our country will manage to do that together with the North Atlantic community.



### ***What Would Be the Politics in the 21st Century?***

**P**olitics is the state and inter-state affairs, and activities of statesmen. Its medium is humankind.

In the 21st century politics will depend on the development of humankind, that is, on you in the first place! It will also depend on the responsibility of statesmen. I am certain some of you will become statesmen. Hopefully, happy statesmen, even if such a feeling is difficult to imagine.

What is happiness, which a human being is seeking as an individual and a member of community? This should be the fundamental issue. Yet, do we

really feel ourselves members of one family, brothers and sisters sharing the same fate, who 2000 years ago were told that we have one Father? Such a simple lesson, and we are still learning it in the first form. Alas, this is the reason why the future of humankind is uncertain.

One of the possible paths for humankind is egotism; the epidemic of egotism taking root everywhere.

To us God is love, without which everything loses sense. Because of that we should see how dangerous is egotism as the death of love. This happens when only love for oneself starts to dominate and remains; which ultimately is transformed into the hatred for that self.

There is a popular ballad in the teenage culture in Lithuania at present. Every stanza of which ends with the same words: 'cause nobody ever loved me...'

That is enough to bring one to tears. But, we can also ask if you ever loved anybody, if you have done any good to others, sympathized with anybody or saved anybody.

Love and pity for oneself is rubbish, endless infantilism in the best case (like in that song).

Egotism leads to alienation, hostility to other people and the environment, indifference and cruelty. We are often astonished to witness such deficiency of sympathy displayed by people towards a creature reminiscent of themselves. People take delight in the torture of other people or do this for a couple of dollars: the life of a man, of thousands of men, worth nothing. Where are the reasons? The culture of death is, in fact, a consequence already. What are then the reasons that man does not show mercy for another human being, as if we were stepping back into the natural selection among the kingdom of animalia?

It is possible that there is a much more common reason: the individual, at times also in a collective, ethnic or religious prison of egos. Other people beyond the confines of that prison seem alien, not understandable, and therefore scary. They are ugly and dangerous. There are too many of them and one must protect oneself against them. Their name is a legion, which means an enemy.

One large Eurasian State has been ill with this for hundreds of years. I am now thinking about that unfortunate country, which had twice held in long

captivities my homeland – Lithuania. Conquests and seizures had been "poor Russia's" self-defense against the seemingly hostile rest of the world.

The idea that 'the enemies are everywhere' is a deep-rooted dreadful virus, and its attacks can be fought probably only with NATO antibiotics and a patient demonstration of the benefits of democracy and co-operation of nations in the view of former conquests and hegemonies.

Let us imagine an individual who persistently believes that enemies are everywhere around him and we will understand what psychotherapeutic problems will have to be addressed by the so-called 'politics' also into the 21st century. All of us in Europe must help Russia, but in a sincere and friendly manner: which means without ingratiating ourselves with its dangerous weakness for phobias. The Christian ethics knows what is 'demanding love', which has nothing to do with being ingratiating.

Only the Teacher of love on the cross sadly watches us, still in the first form. And the first-form pupils face new modern tasks, too; for instance, how to co-ordinate integration and identity.

The Europe of Homelands would be a concept favored, probably, by most Central European states -- the nations of which survived thanks to their unwavering wish to retain their individuality. Thus they even used to restore their states. To accuse them of cultural 'nationalism' would be equal to a reproach -- why do you still exist, Hungarians, Czechs, and Lithuanians?

On the contrary, the diversity of cultures, the abundance of nations with firm identity in Europe is a treasure of both the continent and the emerging European Union. It is appreciated (when it is conceived), it is adored (when it is seen and heard), it does not have to be feared at all.

In a forest, you can pick wild strawberries, bilberries. In a field, you can dig some potatoes. Taste them one by one, and you will see that every tiny berry has a different tint of taste, a different aroma. Even potatoes, when boiled in a pot, taste differently; moreover, they differ in shape, tinge. One can make jam of berries and mash potatoes; the result is a different quality, a uniform mass. In order not to turn them to a kind of a feeding stuff, sometimes it is useful to bend down, to pick a single berry, and eat it. And do you know that no two

identical leaves can be found on a tree?

From these examples, let us return to the identity of nations and people. If you see a variety of interesting people around you, if you manage, at least to some extent, to know them, to sympathize with them, thus, to slightly love them -- you love life itself. This life among understanding and sympathizing people already protects you against egotism (by the way, against suicide too). And those people appear protected against your egotism; thus an open community of people appears or can appear.

This is another possible path of humankind. Which one will you chose, the creators of the twenty-first-century Europe?

Be yourself, be a personality, an individual, develop your gifts and powers in order to sense the meaning of all that and happiness.

Good neighborhood is the vision of the 'Europe of Homelands'. Good neighborhood can give birth to the feeling of kinship, the equivalent of such a relationship. Then the 'Europe of Homelands' could evolve into 'Homeland Europe', which would not eliminate the first concept, but rather supplement it. I think that the process is possible -- slow and spontaneous, by preserving the identity in the integration. If, anyway, some ideologists and practitioners wishing to speed up the process artificially, moreover, by sacrificing identity for the sake of integrity, emerged, they would fail, and conflicts, opposition would arise. People have their own customs, attitudes, and even apparel. They would reject the uniform relentlessly pressed upon them, and once again save not only themselves but also the essence of Europe -- the treasure of diversity.

Now, let us turn to politicians, people who work on the level of states. Their situation is two-faced and ambiguous. Politics is the crossroads of interests (always), expectations (always), and principles (rather seldom, though should be rather often). Unfortunately, the politician must please; while the truth, especially, the truth, which does not ingratiate with the electorate, usually is not pleasing. To receive the highest possible number of votes, you should not speak of everything you think and would be willing to speak, but rather, first and foremost, you should speak of what those good people want to hear. You speak to them of the affairs in the state and what we should do together, and some of them might be surprised -- why are you not making any

promises about what you will give us tomorrow?

It is good luck, maybe the grace of Providence, to be able to take part in the liberation of millions. This is a wave of joy and hope from the crests of which you may see far away. However, the wave never freezes for long, it sinks... Yes, we have found ourselves on a new shore, but what follows next? Shell-splinters and litter are scattered around, the sun is shining and the grass is swaying. Adam, Eve and their children have to search for a spade and toil. To envy one's brother and to murder is prohibited! Everything seems to be simple; however, it is never simple. One can immediately hear the complaint: 'Freedom has created new problems for us. We wanted something else!' 'We gave you the mandate, but life is still full of hardships. Account for your conduct!'

In large meetings, I used to hear sincere questions of people: answer us, when will we live better? I used to try to answer: as soon as we become better, when we change ourselves, start living in harmony, stop drinking, work hard for ourselves and our families. I used to try to say: 'I am not Godot who could bring an unknown good without your own effort.' 'We will have to labor together, to work patiently and honestly.'

Certainly, these ideas were not those followed by a storm of applause, especially in a post-communist country. There, as we know, generations replaced generations while 'waiting for Godot', and that was not the theatre of absurdity, but the everyday spiritual reality.

Politics must embrace ethics, and politics, undoubtedly, is a part of culture. Yehudi Menuhin used to speak about a future in which arts and politics go hand in hand shaping the society of a higher culture.

You, the youth of Europe, seem to have a lot of time; there are things for you to ponder over in silence, but do not postpone your thinking about politics for the entire Third Millennium. There are jobs waiting for you everywhere: your hands, hearts and heads should serve not only yourselves. Therefore, do not shun the spade of politics. However, never use it for smashing the heads of people in a congregation, as in Tbilisi square ten years ago, but to take up Adam's job: for the patient enrichment of the soil of humankind.

God bless you. ♦

*Lithuanians in America...*

## THE DIVINE PROVIDENCE LITHUANIAN PARISH

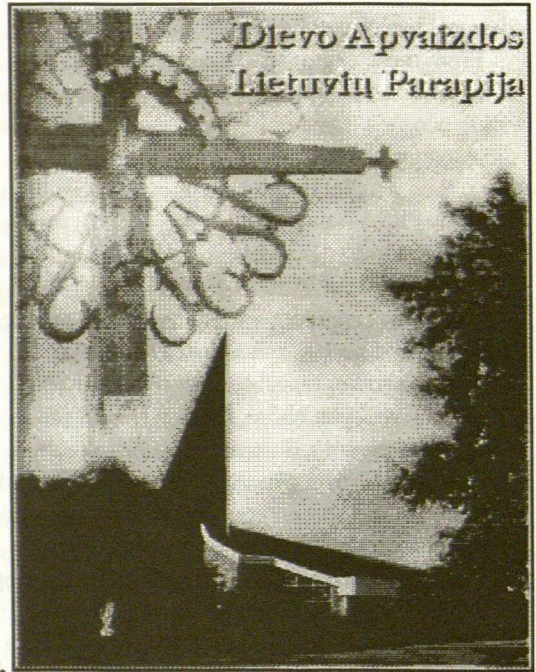
**W**hen each generation of Lithuanians arrived to the United States, they followed their faith and traditions to live near a Church which welcomed and nurtured their Lithuanian heritage. In most cases Lithuanian immigrants and refugees built their own churches and cultural centers. In some instances Lithuanians shared their house of worship with other ethnic groups. The parish was the home base for all Lithuanian-American activity and holds the rich history of the Lithuanian-Americans.

The following history of the Divine Providence Lithuanian Parish of Southfield, Michigan is an excerpt from its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary publication published in October of 1998.

**O**ur parishioners may boast of a most unusual fact -- that in one lifetime our parish has had three churches.

It all began in 1908 on the East Side of Detroit -- specifically on Westminster Avenue. Our first church was named St. George's. Father Casimir Valaitis (1864 - 1941) and the St. George Society organized St. George's Lithuanian parish in 1908. St. George Society had their meetings at the Polish St. Albertus hall at Canfield and St. Aubin Avenues not far from St. Josephat's Church, also Polish, where Father Valaitis was an assistant.

A wooden church was built at Westminster and Cardoni Avenues in the spring of 1908, and Bishop John S. Foley of Detroit blessed the structure in 1909. Father Casimir Skrypkus took Father Valaitis' place in 1915, having arrived from Westville, Illinois. He soon undertook plans for the construction of a brick church, starting in 1916.



Bishop Michael J. Gallagher of Grand Rapids blessed it in 1917. Bishop Gallagher was later bishop of the Detroit diocese.

When Father Skrypkus left in March of 1919, Father Fabian Kemėšis became administrator of the parish. He was one of the most active priests in the Lithuanian colonies of that day. He had been editor of the Lithuanian dailies "Draugas" and "Darbininkas", had organized a local chapter of the American Lithuanian Roman Catholic Alliance, revived the Knights of Lithuania, and built the parish school in 1920.

Father Kemėšis left the parish in 1922, since there were three priests present, including him. The others were Father Joseph Čižauskas and Father Ignas F. Boreišis. He continued his studies at the Catholic University at Washington and then returned to Lithuania, where he taught at Dotnuva Agricultural College. During the war he was de-

*THE DIVINE PROVIDENCE LITHUANIAN PARISH'S PUBLICATION was the product of editor RASA KARVELIENĖ and the editorial committee: FATHER ALOYZAS VOLSKIS, JANINA UDRIENĖ, AND RAMUNĖ MILIŪNIENĖ. Contributing authors and photographers were the parishioners themselves.*



ported to Siberia, where he died on January 21, 1954.

He was succeeded by Father Joseph Čižauskas in 1922 as pastor. His was a long record of thirty-four years in the parish. Father Joseph was an accomplished musician; he taught voice, piano and the organ. He purchased about an acre of land at John R. and Eleven Mile Roads and called it "Birutės Daržas", where for some thirty years parish picnics were held. It is now a children's park in Madison Heights, Michigan. During his pastorate these were a few of the highlights: a new bell was purchased; the school was enlarged; the convent was bricked; the church was painted on the inside with artistic angels, etc. by the Lithuanian artist Jagminas; a statue of St. George was erected on the church lawn, a donation of the Majauskas family; a Lourdes Shrine was also erected; a huge chandelier was hung in the church, a gift of Vincas Jančaitis; and new stations of the cross were installed, donated by Kazimieras Jokubaitis.

It was during this time period, the early 1920s, that the largest number of parishioners was recorded in St. George's history – about 1,000. But later in the 40s, because of a planned freeway adjacent to the building, Rev. Joseph Čižauskas and the church committee began their search for a suitable location for a new church.

The site selected was on Schaefer Road, near Grand River Avenue in 1949. Because of the fact that St. George's was then being used as a 'Mission', Chancery personnel chose "Divine Providence" was their new name.

Not too many years passed before Detroit decided the city needed another freeway. To the consternation of parishioners of Divine Providence, the new road would take the church building.

After several considerations, the decision was made to purchase a plot on West Nine Mile and Beech Roads, in the western suburb of Southfield. During the time plans were developing for the new edifice, the actual period of construction and the subsequent completion of it, nearby St. Beatrice's (under Father Arthur Neffy, pastor) graciously accepted our parishioners into their fold.

Moneymaking projects followed to finalize the dreams of this undertaking. Two organizations, which had their beginnings in the first church, helped with their contributions. They were the

American Lithuanian Roman Catholic Women's Alliance and the newly re-activated Knights of Lithuania. A building fund of \$200,000 of donations by parishioners was established. Newly arrived Lithuanians from the other two Lithuanian parishes, St. Anthony's and St. Peter's, joined the task.

When actual work was needed, all contributed their talents -- whether it was laying floor tile, painting the rectory and classrooms in the Cultural Center, or landscaping the grounds. Rev. Michael Kundrat was pastor at that time. (Father Čižauskas had passed on.) Father 'Mike' and a building committee worked diligently to persuade Bishop Thomas Gumbleton that our wish was for an ethnic Lithuanian parish. Prayers, an impressive presentation, and constant persuasion helped to convince the good Bishop. He conceded.

The original architect was Dr. Alfred Kulpa of Toronto. After two years he was replaced by Albert Kerelis of Chicago.

The day of dedication (1973. IX 23) was eventful, with dignitaries John Cardinal Dearden, Bishops Vincent Brizgys and Antanas Deksnys concelebrating mass with a dozen other clergy.

Numerous groups organized themselves into societies and clubs. All helped in the financial support and upkeep of this newly consecrated church building. The Cultural Center with its modern kitchen and dining facilities soon became the center of activities. The gymnasium/auditorium combination, with its huge stage, afforded space for hundreds of participants during affairs, such as dinner dances, wedding receptions, and theatrical performances. Our parishioners fully utilize its facilities.

Councils, societies, and clubs that actively participate or participated in Divine Providence's rich history include:

- The Parish Council
- The Pastoral Council
- The Stewardship or Administration Committee
- The Christian Service Committee
- The Worship-Liturgy Committee
- The Education Committee
- The "Žiburys" Lithuanian School
- The Choir
- The Lithuanian American Roman Catholic Federation "Ateitininkai"
- Detroit's "country-folk" cappella "Malūnėlis" or

"Little Windmill"

- The 54<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the American Lithuanian Roman Catholic Women's Alliance (inactive as of 1994)
- The Lithuanian American Community Detroit Chapter
- The Daughters of Lithuania Detroit Chapter
- "Šiauliai" – whose purpose was to assist in the maintenance of public safety – two chapters: the Stasio Butkauskas and the Švyturio Jūrų groups.
- The Knights of Lithuania (Lietuvos Vyčiai) Detroit Chapter
- Detroit area Lithuanian Scouts
- Lithuanian sports club "Kovas"
- Lithuanian folk dance group "Šaltinis"

On the lawn stands a Lithuanian-type cross, donated by the Knights of Lithuania. At one of their conventions, John Cardinal Dearden stated, "Hold on to your Catholic Lithuanian traditions." The outdoor sculpture gracing the front windows is a figure of Christ with his arms extended. It was a donation from the Stankus-Raubys family, old parishioners from St. George's. Numerous donations were received to supply the church proper with needed articles for the altar and furnishings. Generosity of individuals was very gratifying. An air-conditioning unit was installed with the extra contributions of considerate parishioners.

During the years from 1973 to 1983, the parish was struggling to become reestablished in its new Southfield location. There were many tasks to perform and an enormous financial debt to repay to the Detroit Archdiocese. Those years were very difficult, but ultimately brought great rewards.

Father Viktoras Kriščiunevičius came to Divine Providence Parish on January 1, 1975. During his twenty years of service, he left a deep impression on everyone. He baptized our children, gave them their First Communion, invited bishops to confirm our adolescents, married our young couples, and assisted the dying. We will always be grateful for his efforts to instill in all of us a love for God and country, and his diligence in the administration of our parish.

Father Kriščiunevičius retired in 1995. A search committee was given the task of finding a Lithuanian pastor. Because there is a shortage of priests in general, finding a Lithuanian priest was all the

more demanding. During this transitional period, Father Dan Trapp served as parish administrator. Volunteers staffed the rectory. Father Trapp was warmly received and well liked by the parishioners.

Father Valdas Valdemaras was appointed pastor to Divine Providence Parish on October 2, 1995. Unfortunately, problems arose in April 1996 because of financial concerns and deterioration in communication. Over time it became obvious that, despite the efforts of the parish council and individual members of the parish to resolve problems with the pastor, serious action was imminent. After several consultations with Bishop Paulius Baltakis and Bishop Kevin Britt, Father Valdemaras was transferred out of the parish.

Again a search committee was formed and the arduous task of recruiting a new pastor resumed. Father Aloyzas Volskis was strongly recommended and assigned to the parish on October 12, 1997. Everyone looked forward to his arrival.

Since 1983, the parish council has been very active. They have helped celebrate anniversaries and special feasts, participated in fund-raisers, organized cultural and religious events, and helped maintain the daily operations of the parish. Currently many renovation projects are in motion, with outstanding physical amid moral support from numerous parishioners, both young and of golden age. At the same time, the pastor and the parish council are pooling their energies to make the spiritual program "Renew" viable for all the faithful.

Our Parish has survived for ninety years of trials and tribulations with many moments of anxiety -- when it was doubtful that we would ever have a worthy house of worship. Our Lithuanian persistence and ingenuity won us the beautiful structure we now worship in and call our own.

As we reflect on our past, it is important to keep in mind that our parish is actually two separate entities, Divine Providence Church and Divine Providence Cultural Center. The Church is the "home" to which we come to worship and learn to live by the teachings of Christ. The Cultural Center is home to our various Lithuanian cultural, educational, and social organizations promoting our heritage. During this 90th anniversary, as Lithuanian-American Catholics, we gratefully appreciate having both, the Church and the Cultural, enriching our lives spiritually and culturally. ♦

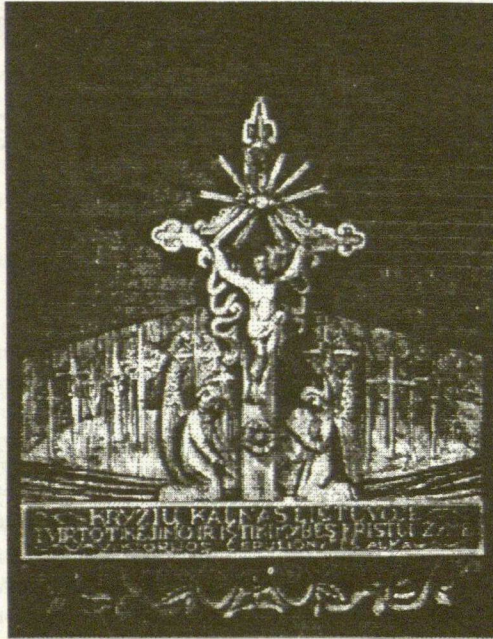
## THE CHURCH REFLECTS THE LITHUANIAN SOUL

Our Lithuanian Catholic Church in Detroit lived through three stages in its ninety years of existence. St. George's Church, built in 1908, was of the Renaissance neoclassic style. The Divine Providence Church on Schaefer reflected the minimalist tastes of the time. The present Southfield church strongly reflects the Lithuanian spirit in a modern structure.

The memorable look of the steeple was achieved by uniquely tilting it. Dr. Alfonsas Kulpa, the architect, sums up the concept of the steeple this way: "The design of the steeple is the result of religious and human expression and represents in the dynamics of the architect the experiences of the modern era." Dr. A. Kulpa received his engineering-architecture degree in Darmstadt, Germany. Ten Lithuanian churches have been built according to his design. Currently he is residing in Canada.

Both the exterior and the interior of the church are impressively adorned with stained glass windows. These are the works of Vytautas K Jonynas, one of the best known Lithuanian artists (1907-1997). He began cultivating his artistic talent in his homeland. Later he established the Baltic Academy of Art in Freiburg, Germany. In New York, he had a successful studio specializing in church interior design and stained glass; he was also a painter and worked in the graphic arts.

The stained glass designed for the Divine Providence Church has Jonynas's typical graphic expression with its lyrical lines and elegant stylization. The subject matter of each of the four windows varies in form from the realistic "St. Casimir" to the abstract "The Ascension of the Holy Spirit." Decorative stained glass of different hues gently illuminates the little chapel of Mary in the back of the church. However, the artist draws the eyes of the



*This wooden sculpture depicts the Hill of Crosses in Lithuania, carved by Jurgis Daugvila.*

*Photo from the Church's 90th Anniversary Publication*

faithful to the front, this time to the white art pieces: bas-relief sculpture to the left of the altar, then to the all-encompassing sculpture of Jesus, suspended high above the main altar with outstretched hands, as if embracing his fold.

Over the past few years, folk art tradition has been introduced in the interior of the church in the form of large woodcarvings by Jurgis Daugvila.

Two wooden relief pieces depicting wayside crosses and Archbishop Matulaitis are quite intricate in design, yet blend gently with the ambient earthy tones of the interior of the church. In the back of the church, there is a chapel of

Mary, with its little altar, and the triptych of the Pieta and Annunciation, also sculpted in wood.

From the parish that lasted twenty-two years on Schaefer, many still remember the ten-foot tall statue of "The Sacred Heart of Jesus". It now stands in front of a tree close to the entrance of the Southfield church's property, blessing parishioners and passers-by alike. Further down the drive there is a fenced cross, rendered in the traditional folk style, but produced from a special alloy to evoke a wooden appearance. V. K. Jonynas designed it, with stylized folk elements as if it were carved by a folk artist from Lithuania.

Aside from the art in the church, the adjoining Cultural Center houses a number of paintings presented to the parish as gifts, often by artists who enjoyed their works displayed at organized art exhibits.

The parish, obviously, is comprised of people, but also includes what they have achieved and created with their God-given talent, expressing the feelings of their souls. The Ninetieth Jubilee was a perfect opportunity to reflect and appreciate. ♦

Leona T. Gustaff



# Religion in Lithuania: Death and Resurrection (1940-1991)



On February 14, 1999 Lithuanian Americans in Baltimore, Maryland and the vicinity were holding their yearly celebration of the Independence of Lithuania. A dinner of chicken, potato sausage, dark rye bread, cabbage and other mixtures of American and old country foods took place in the Lithuanian restaurant on Hollins Street. After the dinner, everyone gathered in the large hall on the second floor to be entertained with ancestral traditions by dancers, singers, and speakers.

Two tall handsome young men—strangers to most of us—were circulating the hall. They greeted the public in perfect native Lithuanian language. As they approached us we learned they were seminarians from that nation whose freedom we were celebrating. I was mystified that even though they had spent their youthful days during the years of the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, they had selected the priesthood for their vocation.

I had learned that during the occupation, the Communists had made every effort to eradicate the Catholic faith in the country. Priests and the religious community were persecuted, churches were desecrated, and the teaching of religion by the church was forbidden.

*In the 1930s religion flourished in Lithuania; 95.5% of the citizens were Catholic. The remaining inhabitants were divided between Protestant, Jewish, and Russian Orthodox faiths. Freedom of worship existed. Clergy were exempted from military service and received a small salary from the state government.*

*In 1940 Russia invaded the country and attempted to destroy the presence of Catholicism. Almost a year later, in June 1941, the Germans forced the Soviet*

*army to leave Lithuania.*

*In 1944 Russia invaded Lithuania a second time and began the process of eradicating Catholicism all over again. Church property was confiscated - salaries and pensions denied to clergymen. The Soviets banished the Religious Rites of Marriage and Baptism by priests, and proclaimed that the acts of Holy Eucharist and Confirmation were illegal and superstitious. Priests and nuns were assaulted, imprisoned, and even murdered for their religious work. Many were exiled to Siberia.*

*The Red Army took over buildings, monasteries, and rectories. Some churches were turned into warehouses; their beautiful interiors stripped bare. Pictures, sculptures, stained glass panels—some dating back to the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries—were destroyed. The Cathedral in Vilnius became a picture gallery; St. Casimir's Church (Šv. Kazimiero Bažnyčia) was turned into a Museum of Atheism. In Kaunas, the Benedictine Church stored old books from the Kaunas library, and St. Francis Xavier Church was a bookstore at first, and later, a gymnasium. Adults who continued to practice their religion lost their jobs.*

*The Soviets believed that the church kept the Lithuanian population from accepting Communist atheistic ideology. They also saw that the older generation would be difficult to convert; so, they decided to emphasize their propaganda to the youth. The Soviets banned the teaching of religion in schools and removed all crucifixes and sacred items from classrooms. They destroyed religious shops, bookstores, and publications, and would not permit religion lessons in churches or private homes. The Communist regime forced teachers to teach that Catholicism was idolatrous.*

Kestutis Kevalas and Mindaugas Puronas, the two Lithuanian seminarians, had lived and grown up during the time when Soviet Atheism dominated

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Christian faith and education. Students of Kaunas Interdiocesan Catholic Seminary in Lithuania, they had been sent to the United States by His Excellency Bishop Sigitas Tamkevičius, S.J., Bishop of Kaunas. Kestutis and Mindaugas had received scholarships for foreign country travel and education available to Eastern European Seminarian students who were willing to return to help rebuild the Roman Catholic Church in their land. This honor was given by the U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops through the Office of Aid to the Catholic Church in Central and Eastern Europe. Cardinal Keeler, of the Baltimore Archdiocese, had invited them to study at St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore, Maryland.

I was introduced to the two tall, mannerly, young men who appeared athletic enough to be desirable candidates for basketball teams. They spoke English well with a slight Lithuanian accent, occasionally uttering a word or phrase which was a direct translation and a little archaic to the native American ear. I wondered how Russian atheism affected their religious faith. I wanted to know how their desires to enter the priesthood had emerged during a scarcity of sacred literature and especially when many members of the Catholic clergy were not permitted to perform their priestly duties.

As we spoke together I heard the story of a nation devoted to a Catholic religion they could not forsake. I learned about their struggles for freedom to worship. I felt their suffering, their dangers, their courage, their determination, and finally, their triumphs.

"My parents always went to church," Kestutis began. "My mother was an accountant for the government and my father was a water supply supervisor. They were not politically employed, so they were free to go to church."

"My parents were practicing Catholics but didn't go to church," Mindaugas added. "My father was a policeman who hid his religious affiliations from the Proletariat in order to keep his job. But my parents always celebrated the traditional church feast days, especially Christmas Eve. I also remember that father used to listen to the radio to the 'Voice of America'."

Mindaugas' father was born in Pandelys in the Aukštaitija region of Northeast Lithuania; his mother in Kalvarija. At a very young age, she was

exiled with her family to Siberia where she spent many years. In 1953 when Stalin died, she was liberated and returned to Lithuania.

"It was a blessing that my mother was able to return to her country. Many Lithuanians died in the icy tundra of that strange land where they were forced to live in exile," said Mindaugas.

Communist officials had married his parents in the Town Hall in Kaunas. They secretly traveled to Pandelys to have a sacred ceremony performed by a priest in a Catholic Church. Unfortunately, a neighbor or friend must have informed the KGB who interrogated them. Mindaugas' father evaded the marriage question by announcing, "I like the beer in Pandelys."

"My brother, sister, and I were also baptized in the church in Pandelys. This probably occurred about 2 or 3 A.M.; since many baptisms and weddings were held in the middle of the night or in the early hours of the morning", said Mindaugas. He went on to explain that Pastors of Churches kept two different sets of books to register information about baptisms, marriages and other religious functions: one for the Communists and a true one for Church records.

The Soviets declared how many baptisms could take place. For instance, priests were allowed fifty baptisms a year, and encouraged to perform less than the quota. This was tragic to a nation of people who had strong desires to save their strong faith and long cherished traditions.

Soviet officers would also suddenly and without notice enter the rectory during the night and announce, "Sorry, Father, but we need to make a little order in your Church." They would perform a 'Krata', a search for or requisition of forbidden materials about Lithuanian or church history. Seminarians and priests were allowed to teach or learn only about the Socialist Republic. To study Lithuanian history was denied.

Kestutis story was a little different. Although his parents went to Church, he was ashamed to accompany them, and they did not pressure him. In school, students were told that it was disastrous to go to Church and, most of all, he could not then be a Pioneer. It was important to be a member of the Pioneer group, which is similar to a Boy Scout troop in the U.S.A. except that allegiance was proclaimed to the atheistic Soviet system. All his

young friends were in that organization. He was embarrassed that his friends or even his teacher might see him attending Church services, and they would call him to task that he was disobedient to his government. Kestutis had difficulty trying to decide whom to listen—his parents or the teacher. It was not possible to know the truth; so, sometimes he listened to his parents and at other times he listened to the teacher.

Kestutis was 12 years old when he began his religious education. "One day," he said, "My mother told me that I needed to attend classes in Religion and prepare for the Eucharist. I didn't know what Eucharist meant. I had no idea what it was but because my parents said it was necessary, I agreed."

"My first introduction to God was from a nun," Kestutis continued. "She told us she was in danger teaching about God—that she faced prison or exile to Siberia. There were 20 students in the class. We had to discipline ourselves. We each came to this secret house at a different time. For instance, my time was 5:10 P.M. Two other students came at 5:15, and so on. We each left at different times and were told not to stop and talk to each other but to disperse quickly. It was exciting to go to a secret house, be taught by a secret teacher, and do something that was forbidden by the government. We were too young to recognize the danger, but we were careful to obey all rules. The nun prepared us for Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation. For the first time I was introduced to the Faith by a professional and an interesting instructor."

"My teacher closed the shades in the house," Kestutis went on to say. "She'd begin the lesson by telling stories about Christians who were true to their faith, and how some soldiers refused to remove the crosses from their necks."

"This education by the nun changed my religious life. Although I didn't attend mass very often, I prayed privately—little prayers in mornings and evenings, and once in a while the rosary. The ideology of the government schools presented an inner conflict within me, but I became more convinced of the truth of religious values."

"I remember the David and Goliath story from the Bible," Mindaugas interrupted. "In my group there were only ten students but it was also secret."

"We went to the home of an elderly woman who lived alone in two rooms. She allowed us to use one

of them. She was at great risk because the government forbade group meetings, as well as religion classes. The Communists feared revolutions and insurrections. They were suspicious of peaceful movements or meetings."

Although education was secret, worship wasn't. But worship could only take place in the Church. Old people and children attended services regularly. Mindaugas' grandparents took him to daily Mass. Kestutis' parents took him to Church every Sunday and Church holidays. During the Holy Days, especially Christmas and Easter, many Lithuanians attended mass. The priest would put loud speakers outside the building to accommodate the many attendees who could not get into the church.

The middle class in the nation did not attend church services. They were afraid they would lose their jobs, and that their friends and neighbors would be afraid to associate with them or confide in them.

*On January 12, 1941, many seminary buildings were confiscated and seminarians were taught in churches or in private homes. By 1944, the Kaunas Seminary was the only one remaining in Lithuania. The number of seminarians was limited to one hundred and fifty, and decreased gradually each year until only 25 remained. Professors and seminarians, one after the other, were arrested and exiled from the country. Until 1989 the Seminary consisted of only one building, the Department of Religious Matters. "Communists kept it for flavor, to show that the country had freedom. But Lithuanians knew they were limited and persecuted for their belief in God," said Kestutis.*

Mindaugas told me that two of his friends tried desperately for five years to enter the seminary. Algis Budaitis, another acquaintance, waited seven years. Communists refused to give the necessary permission. No one could help the young men—even bishops.

"Only young men who were accepted by representatives of the Soviet government could study to be priests. There was a list of items that would not permit you to enter the seminary. For instance, you traveled abroad earlier; your family was in the underground movement; you yourself were suspicious; you had YELLOW literature at home (literature that was Lithuanian and not Communist). Any or all items, which were mostly false, would be charged

against you. All this was done to keep the young men from becoming seminarians," Mindaugas offered.

"The Soviets would organize meetings and conferences with speakers on Atheism. Seminarians had to be enthusiastic—cheer and clap when they were told they would create a New World. In the back of the room members of the political party would monitor the response of the groups. Those who did not applaud were apprehended. Some were relieved of their studies and banished from the Seminary," Mindaugas continued.



St. Casimir Church in Vilnius converted to a Museum of Atheism. From *The War Against God in Lithuania* by Dr. J. Savasis (New York; Manyland Books, Inc.; 1966).

An article in the Lithuanian Newspaper, *TIESA (The Truth)* on August 19, 1956 had reported: "It is imperative that lectures be given in every factory, office and farm, in order that the immortal ideas of Marxism and Leninism spread enlightenment among the workers."

Communists did not stop there. When a young man became a seminarian he was approached and requested to involve himself in becoming a KGB agent. The young student was promised a large parish, a lovely home, and a good salary. He had to sign a paper that would say he was an agent in the seminary. In return he had to spy on other students, priests, and professors, and report their actions to the governing political party. Mindaugas was embarrassed to say that some seminarians and priests did sign their names to this controversial paper. He maintained that they sold themselves for a foolish and eventually unrewarding task.

An underground Seminary came into existence. Very often the meetings between students and professors took place at nighttime when they would meet secretly in homes and churches in different cities and villages. Those who were fortunate enough to finish their studies and become ordained were generally sent to the Missions, especially to Siberia, by the Bishop. Most of them returned to their native land after Lithuania won its freedom.

Some active priests gave retreats in the forests for secret Catholic organizations. They would meet in a small house in the woods. Occasionally they were discovered. Bishop Sigitas Tamkevičius was apprehended and sent to Siberia for ten years.

Kestutis was 17 years old in 1989, the year that some freedom of expression was permitted even though Lithuania was still under Communist rule. He entered the tenth form (grade) and was taught religion by a priest. The Catholic religion became interesting to him. "I was confused," he confessed. He spent an entire year searching religious literature for words about God. "I desperately looked for something to read."

Mindaugas was two years older than Kestutis. His did not have the good fortune to have a priest teach him religion. Education was still under Communist domination when he entered secondary school. "I remember the slogans we were taught in primary and secondary schools," Mindaugas began. "Lenin introduced, *Mokytis, mokytis ir dar karta mokytis*. (Study, study, and study some more.) He also promoted the concept that cinema was the best art. Lenin's words were considered sacred and were accepted like revelations from God."

"Teachers taught that there was no God. The Communist government forced teachers to teach atheistic views, such as no God, the Old World is dying, and you will live in a New World."

In the book *Eyewitness: Writings From the Ordeal of Communism*, authors Ross McKenzie and Todd Culbertson wrote: "For every single one of us, Stalin was greater than God, a reality in which it was impossible not to believe; he thought for us, he was our savior, he was responsible for our happy childhood." (p. 132)

Before 1989 Soviet rules were strict and difficult to obey. The outside world had been kept in ignorance of the terrible sacrifices, inhuman treatment, and the hindrances placed before the Christian faith. By 1991, through many struggles, Lithuania regained its inde-

*pendence. In spite of the intense suffering Lithuanians encountered under Communist occupation, many remained united in their love of country and loyal to their Christian faith.*

In the summer of 1992, when he was 20 years old, suddenly and unexpectedly Kestutis began to feel a true vocation to the priesthood. "I received a huge explosion of feelings to God and to the church."

He was watching a Catholic program on television and saw a Bishop invite young Lithuanian men to be students at the seminary and become candidates for the priesthood. He was moved by the words of the Bishop and he could not be apathetic to God's call.

He followed his hunger, went into the Charismatic movement (a newly introduced spiritual program), joined the *Ateitininkai* (an intellectual Catholic youth group), and attended religious summer camps and seminars. Nobody ever encouraged him; perhaps, only as a joke – "Kestutis, you should be a priest". He began to have thoughts that he should be a priest.

In the summer of 1993 Kestutis and Mindaugas entered the Kaunas Interdiocesan Catholic Priest Seminary. "We were fortunate. These were blessed years, no big tensions, no persecutions. We had the means to go and do [our duties]." Freedom opened doors and encouraged young men to study for the priesthood.

Kestutis and Mindaugas will go back to their country after their studies are completed in the United States. They are obliged to return to their beloved nation, but they also are anxious to return. Their stay at St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore, Maryland will last three years.

Soviet Atheism does not exist in Lithuania anymore. Lithuania now has freedom of worship. Lithuanians can read the words of the Bible and celebrate religious holidays. The words of God can be spoken in classrooms; the faith can be taught in churches, schools and homes. Priests can preside at marriages, baptisms, and burials. Lithuanians are free to live without fear.

When Kestutis and Mindaugas return they will find a different nation. As Lithuanians are beginning to attend church services without fear of retaliation, a shortage of priests exists. It has not

been an easy return to the practice of their religion for many citizens. Some, especially those born and raised during the atheistic regime, are finding it difficult to turn to Catholicism after being led to believe that Communism was the world's most progressive doctrine. Not everyone had received religious education and training from the church to make it desirable to express a relationship to God. A scarcity of Lay person involvement prevails.

Before these seminarians arrived here, their general picture of America was of people always smiling. Lithuanian citizens believe that Americans smile just to be polite. In correspondence to Mindaugas, his Lithuanian friends inquired, "How will you put together the speed of American life with Lithuanian reflections on life?"

"American people are generous and not as suspicious as Lithuanians. There is no basis for distrust of strangers or friends in America. During the Communist years, we never knew to whom we were speaking, especially if it was an unknown person who might publicize something dangerous and false about our relationship with the Communist Government. People learned not to smile, not to show their feelings. That's why we are so cold," said Mindaugas. "There is a sharp change in Lithuania now. The face of the country has changed. There are new streets, new stores, people are more content."

As I prepared to leave, Kestutis said to me, "When we return to our country we shall speak the truth about America. We shall tell about the generosity of the people and the absence of suspicion." Mindaugas nodded his approval.

Kestutis Kevalas and Mindaugas Puronas, with the help of God and their many friends in the United States and other continents, will join the other young countrymen who are answering the call to the priesthood—to rebuild the Catholic faith in Lithuania. ♦



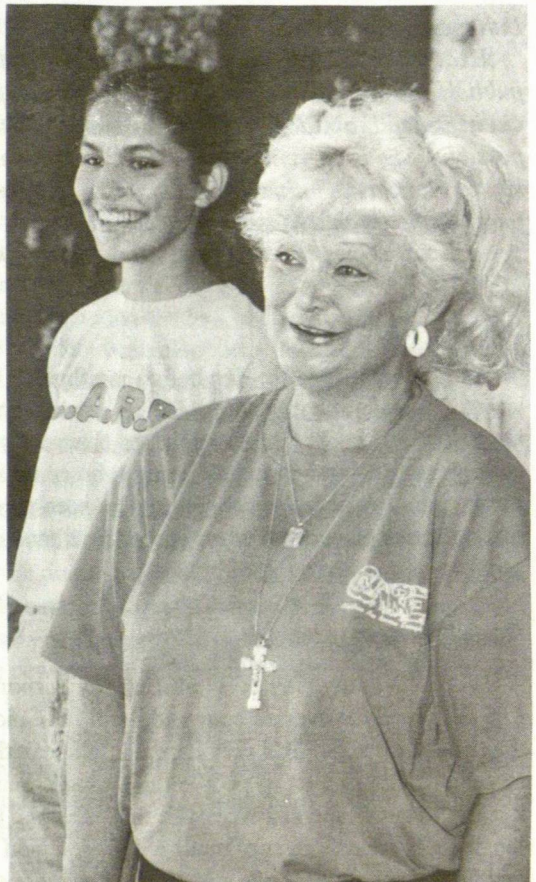
**Heather Jorge**  
with an introduction from Jeanne Dorr

# Heather's Journey

*I*t is always my greatest pleasure to turn this column over to a young writer. Last winter I learned that Heather Jorge, who at that time was a senior at Lemon Bay High School in Englewood, Florida, would be making a trip to Lithuania in June. I thought it would be a marvelous opportunity to learn what an American teenager who is not of Lithuanian descent thought about the people and the country. I asked Heather to keep a diary and to share it with the BRIDGES readers. This is not sugarcoated but it is written through the eyes of this talented young writer. Because of space I have had to condense it, but I am sure you will be delighted to share Heather's thoughts about her journey.

Now permit me to introduce you to Heather. She was a resident of Massachusetts until eight years ago when she moved to Florida. Heather is the youngest of five children and lives with her mother who is her inspiration because of a kind heart and unyielding love.

In her freshman year she took French with Aldona Stanton who was born in Lithuania. Aldona is the sponsor of a club called CARE (Children Are Reason Enough), which has done a tremendous amount of charity work locally, throughout the US., and abroad. The students also sponsor a child through Lithuanian Orphan Care. In her junior and senior years Heather was elected president of the club. Her praises for the other club



Heather Jorge (background) and Aldona Stanton during their trip to Lithuania.

Photo: Valstiečių Laikraštis

members and especially for Aldona, who is referred to as Madame (because she is a French teacher), throughout her diary are unending.

When Aldona suggested to Heather that she join her on a "working" trip to Lithuania, Heather was delighted but she simply did not have the money to go. They sought the help of the principal, Mr. Strickland, and he suggested they approach the Sunrise Rotary for help. The Rotary paid some of Heather's costs, as did the Key Insurance Agency. The faculty of Lemon Bay High School gave hundreds of dollars, and Bay Harbor Ford matched the funds that were already raised. They went over their goal to buy a ticket for Heather, and the excess funds were given to needy

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*Lithuanian families.*

*Heather specifically asked that the donors be publicly thanked for their trust in her. She is especially grateful to Aldona Stanton for making it all possible. She is currently a student at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Her anticipated major is French with a Masters in Education.*

*Jeanne Dorr*

*June 5, 1999*

As I sit on my bed the day before my flight leaves, I wonder what the approaching week is going to bring. I know that it is going to change my outlook on life, but I just can't seem to brace myself for the pain I'm about to see. Sure, I've seen pictures of these places, but when I see it first hand it's going to hit me like a ton of bricks.

*June 6, 1999*

Well, I'm at my "lay over" at Kennedy Airport. I've been here for over an hour and I still have more than one hour to go. It's very hard not to speak the same language as a lot of people I'm sitting around, but I'm about to spend a week like this. Despite the language barrier, I am sure that I will understand and learn a lot about life in Lithuania. I just hope that I can convey to the children how much CARE loves them and, to the adults taking care of them, how grateful the word is for their love and kindness.

*June 7, 1999*

Well, I'm in Lithuania! Although I'm very tired, it is still really interesting. Luckily, I didn't have any problems with changing planes or with customs, otherwise I would have cried. When I first arrived, Mrs. Stanton, her niece, her cousin, and her friend greeted me with roses. They told me that it is a Lithuanian custom to do this for visitors.

The countryside is very beautiful. There are miles and miles of big trees, rolling hills, and old, historic, beautiful, little houses. They are all painted pastel colors and it reminds me of a make believe street in a Disney movie because they are so cute. We've driven and walked over cobblestone streets and walked through Lithuanian gates used to keep people protected during times of war.

After we dropped my luggage at the hotel we met

with Laima from a local shelter for children. We visited her home and did it ever touch me. I want to be rich so I can give these children everything. They were so adorable. Laima and other adults take care of the twelve beautiful children. Less than five years ago the bottom floor of the building was "donated" to them and they remodeled the whole thing. They painted, put up walls, put in plumbing, and changed one large hall into a living space. Sure, the rooms are very small but it was certainly home.

Each child did something special for us because we were their "aunties." Some sang songs, while others recited poems. When we gave them each a pack of gum and a lollipop, they said thank-you and sang a song together. I want to take them home. When we were leaving, they said they wanted us to stay and so did I because I'm missing their innocence.

When they finally dragged me away from the beautiful children, we went to Sts. Peter and Paul's Church. It was like no church I've ever seen before. There wasn't a one-foot square without some intricate architectural design. It was amazing.

Traveling from the church to the soup kitchen Laima told us about the children at Laiknos Vaiku Globos Namai, or the temporary children's house. She said that a lot of these children were from families where the parents died, couldn't take care of them, or just put them on the streets. I can't imagine how anyone could have done that to these wonderful children.

Although the children wore slippers as shoes and lived in a "house" not big enough for a family of four, they felt as if they were rich and had it all. I now know that they do because they have the love of each other and many people like CARE around the world.

The soup kitchen was a place that fed about 60 people each day and also provided many other services. The building had an exercise room, a room for tea or coffee for the elderly, a doctor's office, and many other facilities. (*Heather is referring to the kitchen run by the Lutheran Evangelical Church in Vilnius.*)

Mr. Kiauka, our guide and head gentleman, was very kind about telling us about it. He said that Diakonija Vilniaus Sandora raises funds through their clothing store and outside eating area, but they can

never make enough to support the program. It was very enlightening to see a different place that CARE helps to support.

Our third visit that day was to visit Tremtinių Grįžimo Fondas. It is a group dedicated to those exiled from Siberia. They usually close at 2 PM but they waited until after 4 PM just to see us. Because it was so late, we didn't get to see much but the ladies were so very kind. Even if I didn't understand a word of what they said, they hugged me and smiled the whole time we were there.

### *June 8, 1999*

Today was a very interesting day. We went to lots of interesting places by car and then we walked around Vilnius.

Our first stop of the day was the Lithuanian Press Building that was first occupied by the Russians. We visited Valstiečių laikraštis (newspaper). The editor's wife showed us around for the day. She is the lady in charge of Kaimo Vaikai (Countryside Children's Fund). Regina Svoba took us around to some of the local areas as they distributed clothing and other things.

Our first stop was a school of about 150 children from first grade through high school. With Madame Stanton as a translator, I told them a little about

what CARE does and how we do it. Then we distributed Jolly Ranchers, gum, and lollipops. I felt like Mrs. Claus giving out Christmas toys. They were all smiling and a lot of the kids impressed me by saying thank you.

The school was in good shape as were the children. Some wore old clothes and slippers as shoes but it wasn't bad because Countryside Children's Fund helps them a lot. As we were leaving the children gathered in the hall to say goodbye. Some of the teachers were also there. It was all so wonderful. The director and art teacher insisted that we take some beautiful clay things they had made for us. We thanked them and went on to our next stop.

Our next visit was to another distribution area, but this time to families, often with five or six or even twelve children.

Regina told them that they will give them all the aid possible unless they find out that the items or money are being spent on liquor. If that is the case, the newspapers will humiliate them and all help will be stopped.

We met a lady whose son drowned in a lake one week ago. She still had eleven children and she cried and cried. Regina gave her clothes and peanut butter and I gave her \$20.

Each registered family received a bag of clothes



*Aldona (left) and Heather (middle) visit with several girls in a group home.*

*Photo: Valstiečių Laikraštis*

likely to fit their children, peanut butter for the family, and donated toys they could pick out of boxes. Their faces beamed as they received their bags. We also gave \$20 to a gentleman and his two children who just lost their mother due to trauma to her head. Next we drove to another family's house. The mother was bombed out of her mind, half clothed and a nasty woman. She was yelling at Regina because she was unannounced and kept screaming to take the clothes away. She kept saying she wasn't a beggar. Regina whispered to one of the children to take the bag in the back and to quickly take out what they needed. The child knew enough to hide the clothing. The children were wearing filthy clothes, no shoes, and looked undernourished. I felt so bad for them. I wish I could take them home with me.

Our final stop was at another school. The fifty or so children that were there met us outside and then took us inside to the cafeteria that was set up for us. It was filled with plates of fresh fruits and breads. We sat and talked about Lithuanian and American customs and what the children are learning. They make their own curtains and clothing, and they also know how to knit. The boys learn carpentry and how to work with tractors. Everyone learns practical things that will help him or her get a job.

They showed us around their living quarters and classrooms. They gave me a doll, a crossstitched an-

gel, and a pair of Lithuanian socks. I gave each child a dollar bill. A girl about my age wanted me to sign her dollar for her. I signed my name and wrote, "We love you" on it. She said she would never spend it and so I gave her another dollar.

All the children came to say goodbye to us. It was an unforgettable day.

### *June 9, 1999*

Today was a day of new experiences and surprises. Bernardas Saknys, the journalist who traveled with us, was fun. We stopped and picked up a photographer from the newspaper. Our first stop was at a beekeeper's house. The man had recently lost his wife and Bernardas had written an article about him. He brought the man some bread and wanted to check to see how he was doing. We took a lot of photos of his picturesque farm.

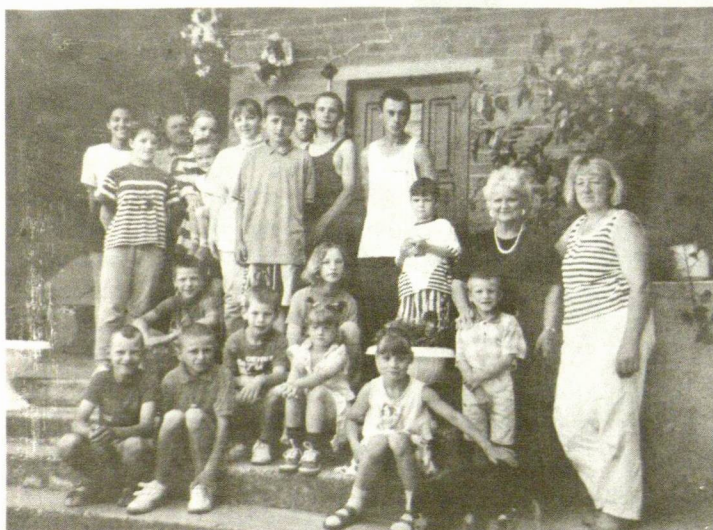
We piled back in the van and headed for our first school. The director showed us their archaeological and historical museum. They had thousands of things that had been dug up through the years. They had a war room that had guns, hats, cannon shells, and other items from World War I and II.

The director fed us so much. I ate rye bread (it tasted like oatmeal), porridge, sausage, and drank water. It is a Lithuanian tradition to feed visitors—so wherever we went, we ate!

Our next stop was to visit the little girl CARE sponsors through Lithuanian Orphan Care. The school is named Daugeliškis. We left Christina some candy, a photo frame, and \$10 for her and her sister to share. Christina wasn't there so we gave the gifts to her sister.

We then visited more schools. The Lithuanian schools were very hospitable and kind. They all showed us around.

The Russian school was very interesting. The curtains were all embroidered and were obviously new. They even had an auditorium with velvet curtains. They had the guts to ask us if they could speak to us in Russian. They teach their classes in Russian and their library had communist books and newspapers. They even asked madame if we would buy them a computer. Madame told them to go to Russia if that's



*Aldona (second right) and Heather (upper left corner) visit the Sereika family.  
Photo: Valstiečių Laikraštis*

what they wanted so badly.

After that we went and prayed at Bernardas' parent's graves. They said Lithuanian prayers as we all knelt by the graves.

Our final stop was Father Tunaitis' church. It was so beautiful; a local had painted and decorated it. We all knelt and he blessed each of us.

Then we headed back. I'm ok—every place except the Russian school gave us food and cookies. It was so sweet of them.

### *June 10, 1999*

Today was the most amazing day. I visited a camp and the memories I have will be forever remembered. Father Ramašauskas and Thomas picked us up. Thomas is a wonderful gentleman, a little older than I, studying to be a priest. He said he spoke a little English but his English was actually very good. Father was such a happy person. I could tell as the day went by that he loved being at the camp with the children and giving spiritual guidance to so many.

Father showed us the cabins where the older children stay with the younger ones, so they can take care of them. We walked along the river, and then Thomas drove us to some lakes and rivers that were his favorite fishing spots. The places were all so peaceful. There was a river and a waterfall that flowed between two banks of flowers. We went to another lake that looked exactly like a place in Massachusetts. The trees, breaks between the forest where the river passed—everything was the same. I wanted to cry because it was so much like it.

We returned to camp for lunch, and the children all stood around the table and held hands while they said grace. It was so very moving. Madame, Father, Thomas, and I all sat at the same table. They tried to get me to speak Lithuanian but I was too shy. We ate delicious soup, rice, meat, and a beet salad. In America camp food never tasted so good.

Later we went to Mass with all of the children. The chapel was in a small room with a table and a few chairs for guests. Father said the Mass was in honor of his guests, but I think it should have been for the children and him and all the adults for having us there. When he asked the children for everyone to pray for what they wanted, their responses were so heart felt and innocent that Madame almost

cried.

After Mass we sang songs and played games. Later all the adults went down to the river to meet with the soon to be priests who had just returned from a few days of river boating. I couldn't believe it when they tossed me, and everyone else within reach, into the water. We had so much fun. We sat around a bonfire so that everyone could get dry. Later we went for a walk and I petted a cow. The cow just stared at me like it was thinking, "Hey, American girl, do you like petting cows?" It had an inquisitive look. Oh, yes, I also fed and petted a goat.

We ate some meat that was cooked over the ashes of the bonfire, and Madame and I thought it the best meat we ever ate.

Then it was time to leave the camp. We sang the entire way home. At the hotel we waved goodbye and my amazing day ended. As I'm writing this, I'm wondering if it was a dream because it was too perfect! But it was real, and I loved it.

### *June 11, 1999*

Today was a really fun day. Madame, her niece (Sevile), her cousin (Brigita), and their friend (Severas) drove us to Trakai for the day. Before leaving, Sevile surprised me with a cute cow, a candle house, a book on Lithuania, a book on Trakai, and a beautiful amber bracelet. I felt so honored and special that I wanted to cry. One day I will repay her for such a wonderful time.

Trakai is a big beautiful castle in the countryside filled with historical artifacts. Each room had a different type that Sevile explained to me. There were probably over fifty rooms filled with artifacts. It is amazing how much history such a small country can have. It is wonderful and refreshing to see how much pride Lithuanians have in their heritage.

We rented a rowboat and Sevile, Severas, and I went out on the lake by the castle. Brigita bought us some delicious hot sandwiches and drinks so we rowed to an island and had a picnic. It was all so peaceful.

After we left Trakai, we visited an historical village. Each village had a different type of house. Some had thatched roofs, clay floors, and some were wooden. These were real houses that had been restored. They were really cool to see.

After our visit I visited Seville's house. They fed me delicious pancakes for dinner and we sat and talked. The house was just as I imagined Lithuanian houses to be—very welcoming. I felt I could sit here and relax like it was my house.

Later we went to the Cathedral. We walked around inside and some little old woman yelled at Seville because she was "naked." She was wearing a dress that was just above her knees and she was totally covered up. Oh, well. We looked at the side rooms in this very beautiful church.

Later we walked around Old Town and up to the castle. Long walk! Madame said I conquered it! From the top I could see most of Vilnius and I felt like I was the Queen of Lithuania watching over everyone. And so another day in Lithuania comes to an end.

### *June 12, 1999*

Today was another day full of surprises. Madame, Seville, Brigita, and Severas went for a visit to the Baltic Sea. On the way, we stopped in Raseiniai to a children's home called Likimas (destiny). The place was wonderful. Of course, they had us sit for some coffee. We talked a lot with Aldona, the "Mom" of the house, about its history.

She and her husband started it from an old building that was used as a junkyard about five years ago. People took what they needed and no one took responsibility for the upkeep. She asked the government if she could have it and they said yes. The government did not and does not give them any help, so they had to beg for paint and other items to fix it up. Now the government brings people there all the time to say, "Look at our beautiful shelter"—even though they offer no help.

We went outside and saw the flower garden that had every flower known to mankind growing. There were bunnies, a cockatiel, and a hamster, which the children loved. They also had two mean watchdogs and one nice mutt. The kids were all asleep when we got there but by the time we left they were outside playing with the animals and running around. We took some photos and then left for the seashore.

When we reached Palanga, a seashore village, we headed for the women's beach where most of the ladies were naked. Madame and I were shocked; we

just weren't used to this. We kept walking quickly until we reached the family beach where most were clothed.

We walked to a bridge and sat on the end for a while. It was really nice just to sit and watch the people go by. After a half-hour we walked into town and had a lunch of delicious dumplings.

After lunch we toured the Amber Museum. Lithuanians are very proud of their amber, so the museum is large and beautiful. I learned a lot and they really enjoyed telling me about it...Lithuanian pride.

After the museum we stopped by the sea. Brigita and Seville went in the water, while Madame searched for amber and I sat with the bags. Seville found me three pieces of amber and a shell that I will save forever.

Once in Vilnius, we drove by the gates of Vilnius with the statue of Mary above, but they were redoing her so we couldn't see much. Madame, Seville, and I went to McDonald's where I treated them to dinner. Then it was back to the hotel where I packed, called home in America, and wrote. Good night, for the last night in Lithuania.

*Heather Jorge*

*Note: I hope you enjoyed reading about Heather's journey as much as I enjoyed typing it. Heather sent me thirty-one handwritten pages and so for that I am truly grateful to her. I would like to thank the administration, students and faculty of Lemon Bay High School with special thanks to ALL the members of CARE. Kudos to the businesses who financially supported this talented young lady.*

*Thanks to Aldona Stanton for putting it all together. Aldona received her greatest reward when Heather chose French as her major with plans to teach. There is no greater reward than to have a student follow in your footsteps. My sincere gratitude to Heather for writing this journal and sharing it with the BRIDGES readers.*

*Heather hopes to start a CARE club wherever she starts teaching so that the spirit of giving will continue through her future students. How fortunate those young people will be to have such a caring and compassionate teacher.*

*Jeanne Dorr*

# Reflections

Sr. Margarita Bareikaitė

## Martyrs for the Millenium

As we approach the year 2000 and the Great Jubilee celebrating the coming of Christ, Lithuanians all over the world are invited to pray for the canonization of four Lithuanian martyrs. They died for their faith as disciples of Christ during the religious persecutions of the Soviet era.

Three are bishops who endured torture and death rather than betray God and the Church. The fourth -- Adelė Dirsytė -- a laywoman and teacher who died in a Siberian labor camp. As canonized saints of the Church, their example and intercession would be our help and strength in the difficulties and sorrows we must face. The following are short biographical notes about each of them; some were subjects of previous articles in *BRIDGES*.

### Archbishop Mečislovas Reinys (1884-1953)

After studies abroad, Reinys was ordained in Vilnius in 1907. A scholarly man, gifted educator, and pastor, his leadership qualities were soon recognized and he was consecrated bishop in 1926. He worked as assistant to the bishop of Vilkaviškis. Made archbishop in 1940, he was assistant to the archbishop of Vilnius. In 1945 he was made Apostolic Administrator of the Lithuanian part of the diocese of Vilnius. Arrested by Soviet agents in 1947 and sentenced to eight years in Vladimir prison in Siberia, he died in 1953. Buried with other prisoners in a common grave on the prison grounds, the approximated spot has been found and marked with a memorial plaque.



MEČISLOVAS REINYS



TEOFILIUS MATULIONIS



VINCENTAS BORISEVIČIUS



ADELĖ DIRSYTĖ

*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. This article was translated by *SR. ONA MIKAILA*.

### **Archbishop Teofilus Matulionis (1873-1962)**

Ordained in 1900 in St. Petersburg, Matulionis ministered in parishes with a missionary spirit in Latvia and St. Petersburg where he was secretly consecrated bishop in 1929. He served two terms in Bolshevik prisons until 1933 when he and nine priests were exchanged for Bolshevik prisoners and allowed to go home. In 1943 he became bishop of Kaišiadorys, but was again sent to labor camps in Siberia in 1946. Having spent 16 years in prison, he returned to Lithuania in 1956.

He secretly consecrated the present Cardinal Sladkevičius as bishop and for this was exiled from this diocese by the Soviet authorities. He lived in the small town of Seduva, where the KGB raided his apartment in 1962. He was given a lethal drug injection from which he died. He is buried in the crypt of the Cathedral of Kaišiadorys.

### **Bishop Vincentas Borisevičius (1887-1946)**

Ordained in 1910, Borisevičius became a seminary professor and later rector of the Telšiai seminary. Consecrated bishop in 1940, he was assistant to the bishop and, in 1944, himself became bishop of the Telšiai diocese. Between 1945 to 1946, he was arrested and imprisoned several times. Finally in 1946, he was imprisoned in Vilnius, interrogated, and tortured. Condemned to death in 1946, he was executed by a Soviet firing squad. He was buried with other prisoners in a common grave on the Tuškelėnai estate in Vilnius.

### **Adelė Dirsytė (1909-1954)**

After university studies in 1932, Dirsytė became a high school teacher and worked with Catholic Charities in Vilnius until 1946. At that time she was arrested and sent to labor camps in Siberia. In the various camps she developed an effective youth ministry and wrote a small prayer book to help her fellow prisoners stay in touch with God and not lose hope. Often beaten, tortured, and interrogated, she died in a

prison camp hospital in 1954, just before she was due to return home. The Siberian prayer book, called "Mary, Save Us", was smuggled out to the West and published in Lithuanian in 1959. Translated into many different languages, it became the voice of persecuted Christians. Dirsytė's burial place is unknown, but a memorial has been erected in the churchyard of St. Joseph's Church in the town of Kėdainiai where she went to school.

We are asked to say the following prayer, which has been approved by the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference, and to sign petitions asking that the Pope canonize these Lithuanian martyrs. The petitions will be given to the bishops of Lithuania who will send them on to Rome. Kindly mail the signed petitions to: Sr. Margaret Bareikaitė, Immaculate Conception Convent, Putnam, CT 06260

#### *PRAYER*

-- For the canonization of  
the Lithuanian Martyrs --

We thank you, heavenly Father,  
that during the time of religious persecution  
you strengthened our archbishops  
Mečislovas and Teofilus,  
as well as Bishop Vincentas,  
giving them courage to endure torture and  
death as they faithfully followed  
in the footsteps of Jesus  
in his passion and death.  
We now humbly ask you,  
that through the intercession  
of our Blessed Virgin Mary,  
Queen of Martyrs and Mother of the Church,  
our martyr bishops may be glorified  
upon our altars.

We ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen. ♦



## C u r r e n t   E v e n t s

### Lithuanian Radio Amateurs Come Together

**O**n July 25th, ten Lithuanian Radio Amateurs met at the immaculate Conception Convent's Annual Picnic in Putnam, Connecticut.

The ten men were as follows: WIHNF ED, DK1BJ ED, K1AMG TONY, K1NCZ DAN, WEIN FRAN, KD1SI GEORGE, AA1SR HIGH, KB1TY RIMAS, W1WHM VIN, and K1WWZ LOU. We all enjoyed what we amateurs call an "EYEBALL Q SO", and we had a great time just being together.

We also have our regular weekly meetings by radio at 9:30 a.m. on Mondays at 7.233 megahertz, and we often use our native language. We call this meeting by radio our LY NET. LY is the international call for Lithuania and we all take turns conversing when conditions are favorable in our native Lithuanian. We look forward to getting together again! ♦

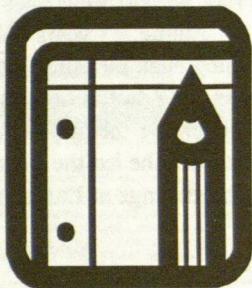
- Tony Sidla, K1AMG

### It's School Time!

**T**he New York Maironis Lithuanian School is offering a course for adults wishing to learn the Lithuanian language. Although the class started on September 18th, there is always room for other interested students.

The class meets every other Saturday from 10:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. at the Lithuanian Cultural Center, 361 Highland Blvd., Brooklyn, New York. Fausta Sinkūnienė teaches the class.

For more information, please contact Audrė Luškoševičiūtė at 718-849-6083. ♦



### A Gift to Lithuania

**T**he Lithuanian Human Services Council of the USA., together with the Embassy of Lithuania and the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. Washington D. C. Chapter, invite you to participate in the "Gift to Lithuania" Conference on November 5 to 7, 1999 at the Key Bridge Marriott (1401 Lee Highway, Arlington, VA 22209)

The purpose of this conference is to:

- summarize the work that has been done;
- analyze what has and has not worked;
- gain an understanding of what is still required;
- obtain information from individuals who have worked and continue to work in Lithuania and with Lithuania's people in providing humanitarian assistance.

The Conference will begin with a "get acquainted" reception and end after symposiums and workshops.

The Organizing Committee is made up of Jūratė Budrys (chair), Algis Augaitis, Birutė Jasaitis, Rita Kazragas, Ramunė Kligys, Saulius Kuprys, Jurgis Lendraitis, and Dr. Vytautas Narutis. The Committee asks that those interested in attending, register in advance by sending your full name, address, phone number together with the registration fee of \$85.00 per person to:

Jūratė Budrys  
8015 S. Karlov  
Chicago, IL 60652.

Make checks payable to: *Lithuanian Human Services Council*.

Hotel reservations can be made by calling the Key Bridge Marriott at 1-800-228-9290, mentioning the "Group Code LITO" and that you will be participating in the November 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup>, 1999 Conference. The room rate is \$104.00 per room per night.

If you need more information, please call Jūratė Budrys at 773-284-6786. ♦

## Baltic Way Commemorated

Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the anti-Soviet Baltic Way solidarity human chain. It was on August 17, 1989 that Lithuanian Independence movement Sajūdis announced that the three Baltic states were to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact by inviting people to join into a live chain to link the Gediminas castle in Vilnius, the Freedom Monument in Riga and the Tompea Castle tower in Tallinn.

Approximately two million Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians flocked to a highway stretching from Vilnius to Tallinn through Riga and held each other's hands to show to the world a three-nation solidarity. Black ribbons, flags, and candles, manifesting the resolution of to get rid of Kremlin rule, adorned this uninterrupted chain.

To commemorate this 10 year anniversary a conference was held in Vilnius on August 23rd. Baltic Way organizers and public figures made speeches.

In addition, a memorial plaque was unveiled in Vilnius's Gediminas Castle to designate the point of origin of the Baltic Way chain.

The Sajūdis movement encouraged people to go to the same sections of highway where they had been standing ten years ago. There, freedom-symbolizing bonfires and photo exhibitions were arranged.

Earlier in the day, a group of Lithuanian lawmakers headed for the Latvian capital to participate in the 29th intellectuals' conference called "*Baltic Way - Ten years ago, in the Present and in the Next Millennium.*" Here the top member of the national delegation to the Baltic Assembly, Laima Andrikienė, delivered a report. During their stay in Latvia, the Lithuanian Parliamentary Ministers also joined other decennium events and a special bonfire ceremony at the border checkpoint.

The Lietuvos Paštas Co. (the Lithuanian Post Office Company) introduced into circulation a new set of three postage stamps, as a joint project with the Latvian and Estonian postal administrations, marking this historical Baltic Way event.

Painter Violeta Skabeikienė designed the Lithuanian stamp for the Baltic Way. The stamps depict the flags of the three Baltic countries with stylized

pictures of Baltic Way participants.

The countries have issued a half a million of the stamp units and about 100,000 units of the stamp sets. The nominal price of a postage stamp was fixed at one litas (approximately 25 cents), and for the whole set -- six litai (approximately \$1.25).

The protest of the Baltics surprised the world and marked the start of "the evil empire's agony", according to the *Kauno Diena*, a Lithuanian daily. According to *Lietuvos Rytas*, the Baltic Way was the most successful protest at the militant end of the century and, in the background of the Balkans and Northern Caucasus, it looked as peaceful and effective as Ghandi who led the protest movement in India. ♦

## Lithuanian wins Tour de France

Lithuanian cyclist Diana Žiliūtė, 1998 world champion rider, won the women's Tour de France title after the final fourteenth stage outside Paris, the *Lietuvos Rytas* and the *Respublika* reported. The 85-km stage brought the participants of the race around Vincennes Castle outside Paris.



Žiliūtė, 23 years old, won the 1998 world cycling championships at Valkenburg in the Netherlands. Žiliūtė's coach told the *Respublika* that hope to achieve the title became apparent after the first stage. She led the Tour de France after she won the fourth stage at Laruns in southern France. ♦

Source for news from Lithuania: ELTA News Agency

## Oops!

*Editor:* In the last issue, July/August 1999, in the article entitled, "Hope for Lithuania's Waters", I mistakenly used Nemunas River where the river's actual name is Neris River (flowing through Vilnius). Nemunas seemed to stick in my thoughts more profoundly and so I overlooked this error. Thank you to those readers who alerted me to this mistake. ♦

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