

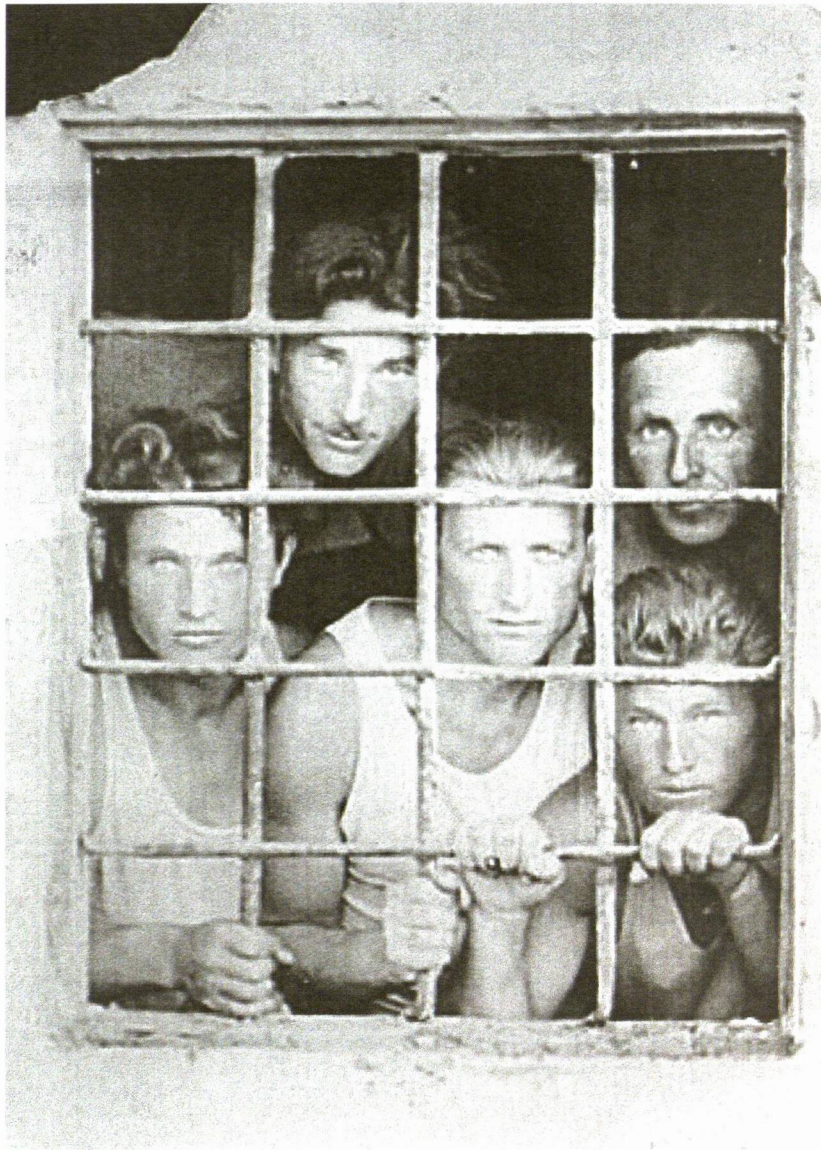
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BRIDGES

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The Day of Hope and Mourning...A Parish's 110th Anniversary

P E R S P E C T I V E S

It's summer by the shore. Although we live year round here, it always seems more festive during the summer.

There is an inlet through which the Manasquan River flows out to the ocean. On either side of the inlet there are walkways where people can stroll, fish or sit on benches. Our side, the Manasquan side, is not only closer to us, but also doesn't have the parking meters. So it's a good deal.

With three fishermen in the family, I am always apprised of which particular fishing season we are experiencing. At this point, blues, stripers, and the fighting herring are always game.

Now that they've grown, my sons use the metallic blue dune buggy to make an entrance for the tourists. To their disappointment, it only attracts the Tonka toy generation.

The guys position themselves at the walkway's railing and cast out into the inlet. You would think this would be a good bonding experience, but it's beyond me how individuals can bond when the only things they say to each other are, "What's on your hook?", "Hey, I got one.", "No, it's only seaweed.", or "Don't tell your mother I hooked a bennie again."

Long ago, every catch was delivered home with huge gestures and great fanfare. I quickly squelched that when the fridge became so crowded with fillets that debate ensued as to why I had to buy more food that would only take up space that the fish needed.

When the guys fish, I like to sit or walk and watch the people around me. Occasionally, we have met other Lithuanians that have come to breathe in the ocean air. But, they are few and far between. The only permanent vestige of a previous Lithuanian at the walkway is a memorial bench with the name Juozas Bakunas inscribed into it. We aim for that bench more often than not.

The walkway reminds me of Palanga's bridge. In the evening, people stroll from the restaurants onto it. Their perfumed bodies leave a trail that only a person without allergies can appreciate. Children and their parents or grandparents usually point to the screaming seagulls, the large party boats going out for their runs or the fish that finally one of my guys has caught.

When we head home, the great fisherman is jubilant, while the rest grumble that next time they'll get one bigger. I'm just happy that it's summer, and we have our own little Palanga to visit whenever we want.

Enjoy yourselves this summer!

Rasa Ardyš-Juška

Editor

(By the way, a bennie is a tourist.)

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From Lithuania...



Lithuania mourns its political prisoners and deportees

On the Day of Hope and Mourning (June 14) a group of former deportees and political prisoners, decreasing every year in number, gathered near the monument for political prisoners and deportees in the capital's Lukiškių Square, located near the former KGB headquarters, to honor the memories of the victims of the Soviet occupation.

“Hope and mourning, they're always together. They will always be together. We cannot forget. If we don't forget the mourning, we can preserve the hope, the hope that it will never repeat itself again. Thus, a hope that we will continue to lead a better life,” the coun-

try's acting leader Artūras Paulauskas said, addressing the elderly crowd that gathered to contemplate, remember and meet friends from their youth.

Members of deportees and political prisoners' organizations, soldiers, parliament and government members came to honor the thousands that died with a minute of silence. A choir of former deportees performed songs from the times of deportation. An exposition of children's artwork was held at the former KGB headquarters, organized each year by the Genocide and Resistance Research Center of Lithuania.

Later in the day, former deportees and opera

ARTICLES FROM LITHUANIA are collected and/or written by *The Information Center for Homecoming Lithuanians*. Photos from <http://www.genocid.lt/> — top photo is of Lithuanian deportees in Krasnojarsk in 1950.

singers sang near the Naujoji Vilnia railroad station memorial. A service was held in the capital's cathedral, and a poetry and musical hour in the Vilnius University Church. The Day of Hope and Mourning was commemorated in cities and towns all over Lithuania.

Česlovas Juršėnas, acting speaker of the Seimas, said that The Day of Mourning and Hope should remain on the calendar as a memento of the 20th century and a part of Europe's history, during a solemn sitting held by the parliament to commemorate the victims of the first mass deportations from Lithuania in 1941.

According to Juršėnas, now being a part of the joint western European space, "we must share our historic experience with other nations of the continent".

Juršėnas encouraged making every effort to have the names of the victims of the mass deportation, as well as the signs of the post-war resistance fights, to be reflected in the streets and squares of the Lithuanian cities, on the facades of buildings, tombstones, and other memorials.

He also regretted that Lithuanians have not learned the lesson of the painful period in its history.

"Have we [learned] enough? Why are we still sneering at each other and competing when speaking about our endless love for Lithuania? The continuing talk about the country's "elite" and "beetroots" reminds me of the "class struggle" of those times," Juršėnas stated.

The chairman of the Lithuania's Union of Political Prisoners and Deportees, MP Povilas Jakučionis regretted that "the democratic world is not objective yet and uses the word genocide to speak about the ex-

termination of one nation only".

"The Nazi and communist regimes were twin brothers, both criminals. But only the Nazi regime was condemned and punished in Nuremberg; whereas the communist criminals still have not had their Nuremberg. We expect and hope that the day of justice will come soon. And it will come not for revenge, but for the safety and security of people, and for justice," the lawmaker declared.

According to the data compiled by the Genocide and Resistance Centre, every third Lithuanian national became the victim of the genocide or terror in the period from 1940 to 1958.

The solemn meeting in the Seimas was also attended by acting President Artūras Paulauskas, Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas, former President Valdas Adamkus, deputies of the Lithuania's Supreme Council-Restoration Seimas, judges of the Constitutional Court, and foreign diplomats. ◆



In Siberia, beside the grave of Mr. Lapenas are S. Misiūnienė, F. Lapėnienė, and Jasiūnienė. (1950)

Lithuania's presidential candidates come down to two possibilities

The presidential primary results led to the belief that Kazimiera Prunskienė, the leftists' candidate, will most likely rival Valdas Adamkus in the second round on June 27th, according to policy expert Lauras Bielinis.

In Bielinis's words, Prunskienė's success in the first round may be directly linked to that part of the electorate, which "feels a certain nostalgia" and was effectively "revved up" by a televised address of the ousted state leader Rolandas Paksas, in which the latter vowed his support to Prunskienė.

Just a few days prior to the elections, Lithuanian political experts sounded skeptical about Prunskienė's chances to get into the second round. However, when the voting results showed that Adamkus and Prunskienė would meet in the second round, Bielinis admitted it would be difficult for the ex-president to win over the leftist candidate.

"Virtually, we can witness the same situation as during the previous presidential elections. The second round will be very difficult for Adamkus since Prunskienė may expect backing of Paksas and his Liberal Democrats. They know how to recruit the voters," the expert spoke.

Bielinis also said that the Lithuanian citizens who care about the country's democratic future cast their votes for Adamkus and Petras Austrevičius, former Euro negotiator enjoying backing of the Labour Party and Homeland's Union (Lithuanian Conservatives). However, Austrevičius running in the elections did not allow Adamkus to win the presidency in the first round.

The preliminary figures showed the voter turnout was 46 percent of 2.645 million eligi-

ble voters in Lithuania. Adamkus, the clear frontrunner in the poll, scored 344,496 votes (30.43 percent); whereas Prunskienė received 242,749 votes (21.44 percent).

The official results of the second round could be announced on July 2. The inauguration of the next president might be held on July 12.

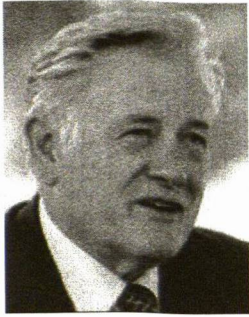
The voters' choice during the second round of the presidential election will be based, above all, on moral attitudes towards the country's orientation either to the East or West and the impeachment of Rolandas Paksas according to Arturas Paulauskas, the acting president of Lithuania.

"I think that this vote means a moral choice, the choice of a pro-Western line. I cannot exclude the impeachment trial either. We can see that politicians and society have made different choices. This also means a vote on whether the top state officials must be responsible for their actions, or whether some should be immune to responsibility," Paulauskas said.

The acting president said that in his judgment both of the presidential candidates running in the second round and their supporters "see the future of Lithuania in a different light".

"There are people concerned about the future of the state, and they have made their choice -- they see us as part of NATO and the European Union and look forward to an active pro-Western foreign policy and stronger Euro-Atlantic ties. The others may have another, pro-Eastern vision and a different opinion on the issue of responsibility," Paulauskas said.

A Look at Valdas Adamkus...



Provided that ex-president Valdas Adamkus is elected the state leader, Lithuania's image, which has suffered a lot because of the previous six-month long presidential scandal, will be restored, according to Kazys Lozoraitis, Lithuania's ambassador to the Holy See and Malta Order.

According to the diplomat, Adamkus is the one who could help to reconcile the Lithuanian society deeply split after the recent presidential scandal.

As for future changes for the presidency, Valdas Adamkus vowed to be stricter with bureaucrats and unscrupulous officials.

"I was too soft when seeing some inaccuracy. I always wanted to understand people, hoping they would see their own mistakes and correct them. Now I believe I had to bang on the table sometimes. If people entrust the presidency on me again, I will be different – if I see there is a need to raise my voice, I will do it," Adamkus said.

A Look at Kazimiera Prunskiene...

Kazimiera Prunskienė, leader of the Peasant and New Democratic Parties, believes her chances to become president of Lithuania are connected to the failure of Valdas Adamkus to defeat Rolandas Paksas in the 2003 presidential election and the views of Lithuanian voters, which, she believes, are closer to her platform.

"Usually, people are more interested in domestic policy developments, somehow ignored by Adamkus, who keeps talking about the im-



portance of foreign policy," Prunskienė said. She promised to not avoid domestic problems if elected.

She refuted the accusations of some political experts that she is under the influence of Russia. "I cannot see any specific influence on me or other presidential aspirants. Russia is our neighbor. Lithuania considers Russia her geographic and economic partner within the light of neighborly relations," Prunskienė explained.

In a meeting with US Ambassador Stephen Mull, Prunskienė told the American diplomat about her skeptical views over the war in Iraq. However, the lawmaker and a contender in the upcoming second round of the presidential elections avoided any direct answer about what Lithuania should do regarding the country's military there if she won the elections in two weeks.

"I cannot stop thinking about our national interests since some premature commitments, prior to Lithuania's entrance to NATO and the EU, were of little benefit to the country. This is the major reason for my reserved stance on the issue," Prunskienė added.

Meanwhile, the council of the Lithuanian Russians' Union on June 18 voted to back the Prunskienė's campaign before the June 27 runoff.

"Prof. Prunskienė was born in Lithuania. She is aware of the problems existing in our country and of the needs of national minorities. She is a famous economist," Sergej Dmitriyev, the chairman of the Lithuanian Russians' Union.

The union also took account of the fact that during the first round of polls on June 13 Prunskienė won a broad support among the residents of Visaginas and Šalčininkai Districts, and Vilnius City and District, which are home for large communities of national minorities.

Prunskienė revealed that during the runoff she hoped to get a strong backing of the Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, and other national minorities. ♦

(The Information Center for Homecoming Lithuanians)

Six Lithuanian parties to share mandates of Euro parliamentarians

Preliminary results of the Euro parliament elections in Lithuania showed six political parties will enter the most important institution in the European Union.

Under the existing laws, only the parties, which climb over a five percent barrier, may expect mandates in the European Parliament. The preliminary data compiled by the Chief Election Commission (VRK) showed six political organizations – the Labour Party, Social Democrats, Homeland's Union (Lithuanian Conservatives), Union of Peasant and New Democracy Parties, Liberal-Centre Union, and New Union (Social Liberals) – won the right to send their representatives to the Europe's top legislature.

Based on the data from 200 of 2,038 constituencies, other five political organizations and one coalition failed to reach the five percent barrier.

However, head of the VRK, Zenonas Vai-gauskas did not rule out a possibility that the data from Vilnius district may change the current situation – the coalition of Lithuanian Polish Election Action and Russian Union may expect an upsurge in the number of votes, which presently accounts for 0.29 percent only.

According to the latest reports of the VRK, the Labour Party received 19,146 votes (37.83 percent), Social Democrats, 7,455 votes (14.73 percent), and the Homeland's Union (Lithuanian Conservatives), 5,075 votes (10.03 percent). ♦

(The Information Center for Homecoming Lithuanians)

Baltic countries and Russia view events in 1940s differently

The Russian embassy in Vilnius issued a public statement on June 22 in which it presented the comments of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the apology required by Estonia for the occupation of the Baltic state in 1940 and the request for damage compensation incurred because of the occupation.

The press release reads that Russia has a different view of the developments in the Baltic States in the 1940s and their annexation by the U.S.S.R. According to the statement, any attempts to present claims to Russia are un-

grounded.

“The idea of comparing policies pursued by the U.S.S.R. with the activities undertaken by Hitler's Germany, which started an aggressive military campaign in Europe with the aim of enslaving or annihilating entire nations, look ridiculous because of one obvious fact: the efforts of the Soviet Union helped to destroy Hitler's regime,” according to the press release.

It also underlines that both the Soviet Union and Russia have spoken of the repressive nature of the Soviet regime in the 1940s many times in the past. The statement emphasizes

that all the victims of violence and political repression deserve sincere compassion and remembrance.

In the opinion of Russia's foreign office, Estonian historians and politicians should take into account some events in their country prior to its annexation by the Soviet Union, especially the period after 1934 and the thousands of innocent victims in 1918-1920.

"The major guarantee that the tragic history will never repeat itself can be created by strengthening democratic institutions in our countries, respecting human rights and the rights of national minorities, and developing mutually beneficial relations between Russia and Estonia during the building of a new Europe without dividing lines. Any attempts to make historic claims turn into obstacles for all of this," from the comments of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

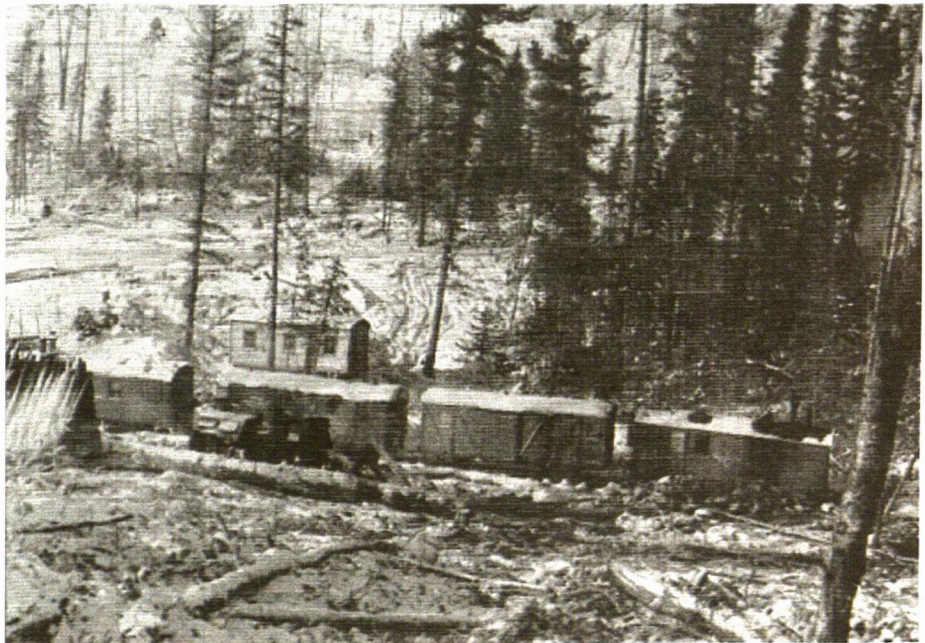
On June 17, Lithuania's Seimas decided to back the initiative of Estonia's parliament, which claimed compensation for the violations of human rights during the Soviet occupation and wished to normalize relations with Russia if the latter paid compensation for damages that occurred during the occupation. A draft

resolution, "Over normalization of the relations between the Baltic countries and Russia", was registered with the Seimas secretariat on May 20.

"We want to state that the major stance of Russia over the occupation and annexation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union is well known since it was in the 1991-1992 Russian-Lithuanian Agreement on the Foundations of Relations between the States," the declaration reads. "This signaled the hope and belief that after removing the aftermaths of the annexation, which violated the sovereignty of Lithuania, extra conditions bringing about a higher degree of trust between the parties to the agreement and their citizens will emerge,"

When presenting the draft resolution to the Seimas, Landsbergis noted, "that since the March 11 [restoration of Lithuania's independence] normalization of relations with the Soviet Union and later Russia, this issue has been on the list of priorities of Lithuania. Currently there is only one problem common to all the Baltic States left in links with Russia – compensation of damages for the Soviet occupation." ♦

(The Information Center for Homecoming Lithuanians)



A train the Soviets used to transport Lithuanians to Siberia.

Peter Verseckas

A short history...then and now...

St. Joseph Lithuanian Parish at 110

This year, St. Joseph Lithuanian Roman Catholic Church in Waterbury, Connecticut has quietly reached its 110th year. It was established on March 28, 1894 when the first Mass was offered.

No major celebration has been planned for this 110th anniversary, but a subtle reminder is present in that of a sign that reflects just that in front of the Church in the courtyard.

The early years...

The first Church building was erected and finished on December 16, 1894; the Dedication Mass was celebrated on Christmas Day less than two weeks later. That must have been a joyous day in the hearts and minds of the new Lithuanian-immigrant parishioners offering their prayers in thanksgiving to Almighty God for the newly established parish of St. Joseph.

Earlier that same year, on March 28, St. Joseph Lithuanian Church was established to provide for the spiritual needs of the many Lithuanian immigrants who settled in Waterbury, Connecticut. The area was an economic draw to the many Lithuanian settlers provided by the scores of factories, dominated by the prosperous brass industry, promised hope for a better life in this "new world" to support the needs of their growing families.

No one knows when the first Lithuanians settled in Waterbury, but in recorded history the

Paplauskas family from the Suvalkija region of Lithuania were the first known settlers here in 1848. Word would reach their homeland, and in subsequent years more settled here making Waterbury their new home. The Lithuanian population in Waterbury expanded greatly in those early years. In 1886, the colony consisted of twelve families and some twenty single adults. In 1890, John Tareila noted that about thirty families and about 120 individuals lived in the Brooklyn area, blossoming with the arrival of 2,000 immigrants in 1893.

In the pre-parish years, the early Lithuanian settlers formally organized a group, the St. Casimir Society on July 5, 1884. It was this group that would send out a request to the residing Lithuanian priests in the surrounding Northeast region to visit Waterbury for Mass and Sacramental needs, namely, Rev. Simeon Pautienius, Rev. Anthony Varnagiris, Rev. Juodišius, Rev. Matthew Juodyšius, and the Rev. Alexander Burba.

It was by the encouragement of the visiting priest, the Rev. Alexander Burba, that a group was formed on May 1, 1892 with hopes to form a parish. Land was sought and purchased on John Street for \$700.

The Lithuanian missionary priest, Fr. Juozas Zebris, traveled to America to visit the many Lithuanian immigrants who settled in the heavily industrialized Northeast. He briefly visited the

PETER VERSECKAS is an active member of St. Joseph Parish in Waterbury, Connecticut. He was honored as honorary mayor of this city, as covered in the April issue of Bridges. Photo sent in by Laurynas Misevičius.

city in September 1893. Then in 1894, when Fr. Zebris returned, he saw an ever present need to establish a Lithuanian Parish in Waterbury that was to be the very first in New England. The Most Reverend Michael Tierney, Bishop of Hartford, welcomed the formation of this parish with favor and designated Rev. Zebris as the first pastor to this early congregation of Lithuanian immigrants.

March 28, 1894 is the established beginning of St. Joseph Lithuanian R.C. Parish with the official appointment of Rev. Juozas Zebris as the first pastor, and the first Mass was celebrated. Adding to the joy of the occasion, Fr. Zebris christened an infant. The first public Sunday Mass was offered a few days later on April 1, 1894 in a tenement, the Mitchell Block in the Brooklyn neighborhood. Soon after, daily Mass was offered in a private home, which presently stands at 24 Green Street, around the corner from the Parish.

From the building of that first wooden church structure in the early years of St. Joseph's Parish (completion on December 16, 1894), Reverend Zebris served his growing parish for four years until 1898 when Rev. Peter Saurusaitis became the 2nd pastor to lead the parish. Fr. Saurusaitis saw many changes to an ever growing Lithuanian population and the need to expand.

A rectory was constructed in 1902. The first wooden church structure was moved up on John Street to make way for a much larger edifice. The present church building, the cornerstone set in 1904, was completed on July 22, 1905 with the Consecration of Bishop Tierney.

Subsequently, the relocated wooden church structure had become the first Parish school established in 1904. The Daughters of the Holy Spirit were invited in January 1905 to undertake the task of teaching the young children of St. Joseph School. Fr. Saurusaitis had to make room for the influx of Lithuanian immigrant children and constructed a more spacious school building in 1912 on Congress Avenue.

The growth years...

In 1919, Rev. John Valantiejus succeeded Fr. Saurusaitis as the third pastor of St. Joseph Parish. His reign as pastor would be the longest

term in the Parish's history, spanning four decades up until July 1959. Fr. Valantiejus, as a youth of seventeen years, left his native Lithuania home and came to Waterbury on September 12, 1900, where he labored in the factories by day and attended school in the evenings. He attended Seminaries in the States and Fribourg, Switzerland. He was ordained on November 20, 1914 by the Most Reverend John J. Nilan, Bishop of Hartford.

Highlighting Fr. Valantiejus' long, fruitful, and devoted pastorate was the establishment of the St. Joseph Orphanage in 1919, caring for over 500 children up until 1951. He was also instrumental during the two interior church renovations and re-decorations both in 1920 and in 1944 and the second addition to the Rectory in 1937. In January 1924, Professor Alexander J. Aleksis was invited as the long-standing liturgical music director who oversaw the installation of the magnificent Moller pipe organ.

In 1939, the Government of Lithuania bestowed upon Fr. Valantiejus the "Order of Gediminas, Grand Duke of Lithuania, in recognition of his manifold charities and selfless dedication to the religious, cultural and social advancement of his Lithuanian people".

Fr. Valantiejus' vision of growth for the parish continued with the building of the third permanent building – the present St. Joseph School, an imposing structure completed in 1925 instructing the large population of parish children in the finest Catholic tradition. The large auditorium, "St. Joseph's Hall", adapted to the various parish needs and functions. It became an extension for the many Lithuanian cultural activities throughout the coming years. The Church and the school were always inseparable, an integral part of the parish until the eventual closure of the school in 2002. In the present day, "St. Joseph Hall" remains an important "gathering place" for the many parish activities.

This year the school would have attained a "Centennial"; however the vibrant school unexpectedly closed in June of 2002 after ninety-eight years. The school will remain "Forever in

our Hearts” – Amžinai Mūsų Širdyse.

St. Joseph Lithuanian Parish through the years had some twenty-three church and school organizations serving the faithful. Through the years, some disappeared with the passing of the generations; even so, there was never a shortage of activities.

Most notable, Professor Alexander J. Aleksis, the distinguished composer and prominent leader has been organist and choirmaster at St. Joseph Church for fifty years. Born in Lithuania, he studied at the Warsaw Conservatory of Music, receiving his degree in 1913. Shortly thereafter, he came to America, serving the Lithuanian communities from Chicago to New York and arrived in Waterbury in 1924.

During his lengthy St. Joseph Parish assignment, Mr. Aleksis both chaired and was active in many church, cultural, and musical organizations. During WWII, he organized the “Liberation of Vilnius League” and the “Servicemen’s Families Society”. For his work in social culture, Mr. Aleksis was honored by the Government of Lithuania in 1938. The Lithuania Government conferred on Mr. Aleksis “The Order of Gediminas, Grand Duke of Lithuania”, with the title of Cavalier, on the occasion of Lithuania’s twentieth Independence anniversary.

Mr. Aleksis was the composer of the patriotic opera, “Į Tėvynę” – “To The Fatherland”, along with some 80 Lithuania songs, liturgical hymns, and the “Knights of Lithuania” hymn.

Throughout Professor Aleksis’s tenure as organist and choir director, he directed the following: St. Joseph Parish’s, Students’, and Women’s Alliance Choirs, as well as the formation of the Lithuanian Little Symphony Orchestra, Lithuanian National Dancers, and Dramatic Club. The choirs participated in many parish and community events.

Though Professor Aleksis was the most prominent in parish history as organist and musical director, others preceded him and also came later. The first organist was Mr. Peter Grajauskas, then Mr. Bronis Bruzevičius, and Mr. Jonas Kovas, who served for fourteen years, and then Mr. J. Saurys, and Mr. A. Visminas came just before Mr. Aleksis.

In 1974, Mr. John Beinoras became the organist and choir director; he remained until his death in 1987. Then Mr. Adolfas Čampė served in the position until he died in 1992. Since then, Mr. Antanas Paliulis has and presently is the current choir director. His son Raymond is the accompaniment organist for the Lithuanian Senior Choir.

Mr. Victor Vaitkus was also a notable Lithuanian immigrant who came to Waterbury after WWII. Mr. Vaitkus was responsible for the great continuum of Lithuanian Faith and Culture at St. Joseph Parish up until his passing on November 25, 1995. Victor would always add an artistic touch to every event making them most memorable. Even during the first two St. Joseph School Fundraising Dinners, Mr. Vaitkus adorned the background setting with Lithuanian folk art. His passing was noticeable, but the Lithuanian Community continues the time-honored traditions of Lithuania with Mr. Albertas Melninkas, Mr. Linas Balsys, and Mr. Antanas Paliulis.

The Knights of Lithuania’s Council No. 7 chapter was organized at St. Joseph in 1913. At that time, Mr. John Stokes is credited with the formation of the St. Joseph Holy Name Fife and Drum Corp. that entered and won many competitions throughout the Northeast. For many years, the new school lobby used to be lined with many trophies to their credit. The band was organized in the early years and disbanded in the 1960’s. The K of L was long noted early on for its winning basketball and baseball teams.

The team has been resurrected by Laurynas Misevičius as an inspiration of the original K of L team, “The “Lithuanian Sports Club of Connecticut”. The make-up of the team is of the most recent immigration wave from Lithuania. However, the supporting organization has a large membership reaching far and wide, indicative of the immense support. Interestingly enough, the team called “Ažuolai” calls St. Joseph home.

There were trying years; a time with the end of World War I, the influenza outbreak, and the

ravages of World War II where over 800 parish sons and daughters served, and the loss of 31 who gave all. Shortly after the end of WWII, America opened her shores to the many thousands of “displaced persons” of various national origins. This second immigration wave gave St. Joseph Parish the transfusion that it needed. These unfortunate victims of Nazism and Communism brought new ideas and a strong cultural direction with them to the parish.

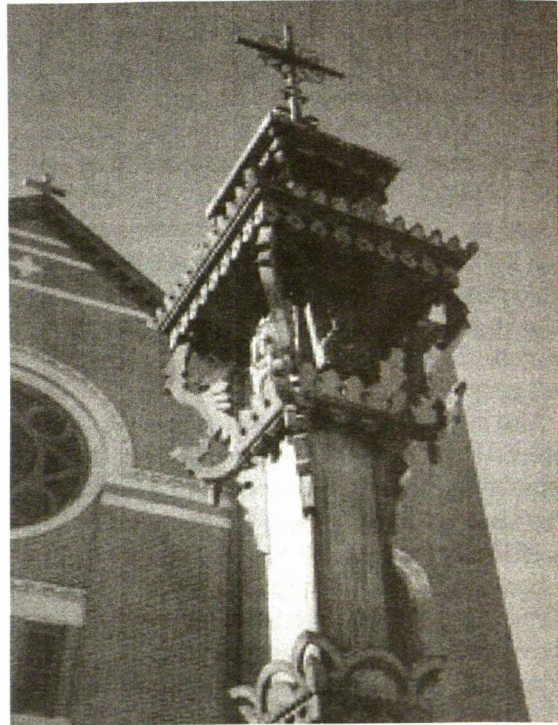
Over its 110 years, St. Joseph Lithuanian Church has seen the service of six Lithuanian pastors: Fr. Juozas Zebris, Rev. Peter Saurasaitis, Rev. Juozas J. Valentiejus, Rev. A. Edward Gradeck, Rev. George J. Vilčiauskas, and Rev. Francis V. Karvelis. Some twenty-seven associate pastors and several resident priests served the parish as well through those years. Of the sixteen vocations to the priesthood, the three former pastors were among those: Fr. Valentiejus, Fr. Vilčiauskas, and Fr. Karvelis. Some twenty-two entered vocations to the Religious Life as Sisters. The first two notable graduates of St. Joseph School who entered the religious were Fr. Anthony Bruzas and Sr. Joseph Bernadine, Klimašaitis, D.H.S. Many more followed.

The transition years..

On August 19, 1955, the “Great Flood” washed away many of the homes of parishioners with the loss of 29 lives, and five of the parish family were never found. The entire parish facility was being utilized for the needs of the Salvation Army and the Red Cross to care for the many flood victims to assist in the alleviation of human misery in the aftermath of the flood.

After Fr. Valentiejus’s retirement in 1959, the fourth pastor, the Rev. Edward A. Gradeck, saw a tenure that would continue until 1968. Fr. Gradeck saw the construction of the new St. Joseph Convent, a permanent home to the Daughters of the Holy Spirit whose love of teaching the parish children for 68 years was to end in June 1975. Their short-lived home of splendor lasted a mere thirteen years.

Fr. Gradeck saw a major church re-decoration in 1964, the same year that Fr. Val had passed away. There was the addition of a school library



The Wayside Cross at St. Joseph Church.

and school cafeteria. From the time of the massive flood devastation to the time of the construction of the new highway, the face of the Lithuanian Brooklyn neighborhood changed forever. However, the parish stayed strong during those years of vast change.

In 1975, Rev. George J. Vilčiauskas became the fifth pastor until 1985. Rev. Francis V. Karvelis became pastor in 1986 after Rev. John Lonergan, an interim temporary administrator.

During Fr. Vilčiauskas’s pastorate, the Daughters of the Holy Spirit vacated the Convent. He tried to find another order to teach the school children of the school but to no avail. So the Convent served the needs of an order of Vietnamese Sisters, then an order of Dominican Brothers as an Evangelization Center. Finally in 1984, the St. Mary School of Nursing occupied the premises until the late 1990’s. The Pro-Life Catholic Ministry of “Carolyn’s Place” became once again permanent tenants. Fr. Vilčiauskas had been greatly concerned with caring for the

post WWII generations of Lithuanian immigrants' spiritual and cultural needs.

When Fr. Karvelis became Pastor in 1986, he was returning to the parish of his baptism. Fr. Karvelis was the only one of the six Lithuanian Pastors to have been baptized and ordained in the parish. During his pastorate, major renovations to the St. Joseph School and subsequently an effort by parishioners and students' parents to prevent the school closure in 1994 were initiated. Each year the significant fundraising dinner would occur coinciding with the anniversary date of April, raising many thousands of dollars from generous school alumni, parishioners, and local businessmen.

Also in 1994, the Church celebrated the Centennial and the 90th Anniversary of St. Joseph School. Mr. John Ambrozaitis erected the Wayside cross in memory of the Founders of St. Joseph Parish.

Under Fr. Karvelis, the parish linked with a "Sister Parish", the Blessed George Matulaitis Church in Vilnius. With strong financial help, we funded the construction of their new church building. Additionally, St. Joseph has also supported the Vilnius Soup Kitchen. These alternate monthly collections remain to the present. Though the Parish saw an historical decline as the oldest parishioners passed on, nonetheless St. Joseph remained vibrant from a faith and cultural aspect. With the retirement of Fr. Karvelis in 1999, the Lithuanian tradition thrives into the present.

With Hope for the Future..

In the 110 years of St. Joseph Parish history, the first 75 years seem to be by far the most defining by growth. Faith and culture have flourished from the first day of the Parish's beginnings, to the second immigration wave of the post WWII era, onto the present. Every generation brings with it a new beginning.

Today, St. Joseph Parish sees and welcomes a revival; the most recent Lithuanian immigrants from the years after the newfound independence of Lithuania; from 1990 they were freed from the covetous grasp of Soviet rule. These "newcomers" to America and to our parish find themselves here for similar reasons to the first

wave of immigrants, economic, as the Independent Republic of Lithuania once again seeks to find its place in the free world. Their needs, hopes, and aspirations for faith and family are similar to the generations of the past.

The growing Lithuanian community today is much indicative of past history of St. Joseph. Making room for the "newcomers" is what the Parish Community is all about. Much the same, as in generations past, the displaced persons of the "second wave" of immigration were welcomed into the parish family, so too for the "newcomers" to help keep the traditions of faith and culture of the Lithuanian homeland alive for future generations.

It is with this closing thought that the St. Joseph Parish Founders placed all of their hopes and aspirations in their faith for the generations of Lithuanians that would follow. In thanksgiving, we remember them in prayer. St. Joseph Parish might hold the truth to our Catholic Christian belief... "but with GOD all things are possible." MT 19:26. ♦

Historical sources:

Švento Juozapo Lietuvių Parapijos Istorija – Saint Joseph Lithuanian Parish History (1919).

Lithuanian Pioneer Priest of New England by Fr. William Valkavičius (1980).

St. Joseph Church Golden Jubilee Fiftieth Anniversary Book – 1894-1944.

The Parish Centennial Book 1894-1994.

Various parish program memorabilia.

Laurynas (Larry) Misevičius

Basketball — a big draw for Lithuanian-American sports clubs

The 54th annual games of the Lithuanian American Athletic Union of North America was held on the campus of the University of Bridgeport, Connecticut, June 18-20. The sponsoring organizations were the Bridgeport Chapter Lithuanian American Community and the Lithuanian Sports Club of Connecticut.

Thirty-two athletic clubs from U.S. and Canada participated with men's, women's, and youth (16-18 years) basketball teams at these games. Two of the referees Antanas Ramanauskas and Artūras Gelvich, were from Lithuania.

The opening ceremonies were on Friday, June 18, 5:30 p.m., at the nearly 100-year old Lithuanian built St. George Church Hall, 443 Park Avenue, Bridgeport. Participating dignitaries were Lithuania's Ambassador to the U.S. and Mexico, Mr. Vygaudas Ušackas, the President of the University of Bridgeport Dr. Neil Salonen, the President of the Lithuanian American Community, Inc., Vaiva Vėbra-Gust, and others. The host was Rev. Julio Lopresti, pastor of St. George's parish.



The Games started Friday, June 18, 8:30 p.m., at the University of Bridgeport Wheeler Recreation Center (400 University Ave.) and Harvey Hubbell Gymnasium (120 Waldemere Ave.).

Saturday, June 19, the first contest was at 8:30 a.m., simultaneously at the University of Bridgeport Wheeler Recreation Center and Harvey Hubbell Gymnasium.

The day ended with a program at the UB Student Center Social Room (244 University Ave.) at 7:30 p.m. with a concert by "Small Farm Animals" classic rock group from Boston and a performance by a Lithuanian folk dance ensemble from New Haven, "Vėtra". A disco party followed. The finals, Sunday, June 20, started 12:30-5:30 p.m., at Harvey Hubbell Gymnasium.

Results of the games were as follows:

- Men's "A" group – Chicago's "Žalgiris" won in the finals against Philadelphia's "Aras-A" (60:49). Third place went to Chicago's "Lituanica"; fourth to Toronto's "Vytis".
- Women's group – New York/New Jersey combined team won against Toronto's

LAURYNAS (LARRY) MISEVIČIUS is a regular contributor and the vice president of Sports Affairs of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. Photos from Larry.

“Vytis” (43:38). Third place went to Connecticut’s “Audra” winning against Chicago’s “Baltija”.

- Men’s “B” group – Chicago’s “Stumbras”, in a close match, won against New York’s “LAK-1” (46:45). Third place went to New Jersey’s “Statyba”; fourth to Cleveland’s “Žaibas”.
- Youth group up to 18 years of age – in the finals two Chicago teams of the same group, “Lituanica” played off. The “B” team won – (42:39). Toronto’s “Vytis” won third place; Toronto’s “Aušra” took fourth.

The passion for basketball drives the participants of these athletic clubs to keep playing and competing. Basketball was introduced to Lithuania by Lithuanian Americans in the 1930’s and has been the most popular sport in Lithuania ever since. The Lithuanian team

won two consecutive European championships in 1937 and 1939, also the one last year - 2003. It was a tough opponent of the U.S. “Dream Team” in the semifinal during year 2000 Olympics, held in Sydney, Australia and narrowly lost by a margin of only two points to easily claim the bronze.

World famous Lithuanian basketball players Arvydas Sabonis and Šarūnas Marčiulionis became the first players from this small Eastern European country to join NBA and played for the Portland Trail Blazers and Golden State Warriors respectively, and their younger colleagues Žydrūnas Ilgauskas and Darius Songaila are active players in this league at present, representing Cleveland Cavaliers and Sacramento Kings. These role models serve as heroes for Lithuanian basketball players here and in their homeland. ♦



Chicago's sports club “Žalgiris” — after the big win!

Gloria Adomkaitis

Update from St. Peter's in Boston

Hello to all Friends of Saint Peter Lithuanian Parish. This is written to provide the latest information about our efforts to keep St. Peter Lithuanian Parish open. A Central Steering Committee has been formed to act as a clearinghouse and sounding board for all actions being undertaken in our campaign to nullify the intent of the archdiocese to close the Parish. Committee members are: Gloria Adomkaitis, Gintaras Čepas, Rima Knašas, William Olevitz, and Anthony Shalna.

A Finance Committee, comprised of Algis Adomkaitis, Vytautas Dilba, and Wanda Grigavicius Kiely, is busy receiving, recording, and processing donations that are coming in daily. It is important that we reach our intended goal of \$100,000+ if we plan to challenge the archdiocese in a meaningful way. So, please, if you have not yet donated to the cause, please take time to write and send your check today. A \$500 donation per family is suggested but any donation, larger or smaller, is welcomed and needed. Acknowledgements, of donations received, will be sent out.

If you know of families or individuals who may have left the area, but still feel an emotional attachment to the Parish, please contact them and ask for their support. If you have additional names, addresses, phone numbers or email addresses of individuals who may wish to support our cause, please send them to our email address wecare@savestpeter.org. We appreciate your help.

The Public Relations/Publicity Committee will be officially formed during June. A seed

group of volunteers worked busily preparing for the rally which was held Sunday, June 13th, after the 10:30 a.m. mass. The media was invited to attend.

The first meeting of the Appeals Committee was held on Wednesday, June 9th. Many sound ideas and processes were discussed. Assignments were divided among the group. The group will meet again to refine their objectives. A list of Committee members will be available in the next update.

Inquiries for outside assistance have been made and are now being evaluated. For more information, please log on to the Internet at <http://www.savestpeter.org>.

Here is an excerpt from Boston Herald's article "Doomed churches keeping the faith" on the rally (<http://news.bostonherald.com/localRegional/view.bg?articleid=31829>) which appeared on Monday, June 14, 2004, written by Brian Ballou.

"Parishioners at St. Mary, St. Peter Lithuanian Church in South Boston, and St. Catherine's in Charlestown are asking [Archbishop Sean] O'Malley to visit their churches to see and hear firsthand how much the churches are needed.

Monsignor Albert Contons, a retired pastor of St. Peter, said parishioners there are deeply disappointed in the archbishop's decision.

"This is the only church in greater Boston that



Emily Strazdis, 6, sits on the steps of St. Peter Lithuanian Parish. (Boston Herald Staff Photo by Nancy Lane)

GLORIA ADOMKAITIS writes for the Friends of St. Peter Lithuanian Parish. Visit St. Peter's Friends at <http://www.savestpeter.org> to see what you may be able to do.

holds Lithuanian language sermons during the summer," he said. "There is a very strong tradition of heritage in the community and going to Sunday sermons given in Lithuanian is an important part of passing the heritage through the ages. So we strongly disagree with the letter sent by

the archdiocese that Boston no longer needs a Lithuanian church."

"The church is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year and has about \$165,000 in the bank with no debts," Contons said." ♦

Centuries of Faith as a Role Model

While browsing through the Lithuanian Museum Halls on the Internet, one can find a virtual tour of Christian art in Lithuania. Wonderful pieces were highlighted along with descriptions of how they illustrated the initial struggles with and for Christianity.

Along the way, there was a page on *The Baltic Times* that listed a chronology of Lithuanian Catholicism-related events. Here are just some interesting facts to consider as we battle for the continued survival of our churches here in America:

1009 A.D. Lithuania first mentioned in Christian chronicles. By this point, Lithuanians are still staunchly pagan; their religion is based on the belief that all things, from the forests to the sea, have a spirit.

1200s German Crusaders swarm the Baltics to spread the word of God. They Christianize Latvia and Estonia, but fail to subdue the Lithuanians.

1251 Lithuanian King Mindaugas converts to Christianity, but his successors quickly revert back to paganism. Most of Europe has been Christianized centuries before; Lithuania is the only pagan nation left.

1389 Lithuania's Grand Duke becomes Christian as part of a deal forming an alliance with Poland; one of his first acts is to destroy pagan statues. Christianity takes hold, but vestiges of paganism remain for centuries.

1500s Reformation comes to Lithuania, but Catholicism remains dominant.

1795 Lithuania falls to Russia; Moscow sees Catholicism as heretical and Russian Orthodoxy vies for influence in Lithuania.

Early 1800s Catholic clergy encourage the study of Lithuanian. There is a growing link between religion and Lithuanian nationalism.

1830, 1863 Polish-Lithuanian uprisings against Czarist rule followed by repressions. Hundreds of

churches are closed. The few seminaries allowed to stay open become centers of learning.

1895 Restrictions on the Church are eased.

1918 Lithuania proclaims independence. Religious teaching is made compulsory; divorce is prohibited.

1926 Nationalist coup in Lithuania; the Church's influence is curbed.

1940 Soviets occupy Lithuania. Religious teaching is outlawed, a million religious books are burned and atheist brigades harass the faithful.

1941 Thousands deported to Siberia, including many priests. Later in 1941, Germany invades; the Catholic Church is not directly repressed, but thousands of Jews are killed.

1944 Soviets retake Lithuania. Partisans take to the forests; the initiation process for the anti-Soviet fighters includes kissing a cross, then a gun. The Soviets deport and execute more priests; by 1947, one bishop remains.

1953 Stalin dies. Propaganda and infiltration of the Church replace open repression.

1983 Priests Svarinskas and Tamkevicius sentenced to ten years for anti-Soviet agitation; they are released from prison in 1988.

1986 Priest Juozas Zdebskis killed in a car crash; many believe the KGB is involved.

1988 Independence movement begins in earnest. Then First Secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party Algirdas Brazauskas hands the historic Vilnius Cathedral back to the Catholic Church.

1990 Lithuania declares full independence.

1991 After a failed Kremlin coup, Soviet leaders recognize Baltic independence.

1993 Pope John Paul II visits Lithuania. ♦

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