



A letter from Monsignor Edmond J. Putrimas,

*Lithuanian Bishops' Conference (LBC) Delegate for the Apostolate
of Lithuanian Catholics Living Outside of Lithuania
Christmas 2013*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Ten years have passed since the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference designated me as the Delegate for the Apostolate of Lithuanians Catholics Abroad. I have continued the work of Bishop Paul Baltakis, OFM, who faithfully served Lithuanian Catholics abroad for many years. This position has allowed me to better understand the many concerns and hopes, conflicts and successes that Lithuanian Catholics living outside of Lithuania have faced. For the insight this position has granted me I am most thankful to God.

The profile of emigrants from Lithuania is presently very young – 76% of emigrants who migrated to 42 different countries are between 15 and 44 years of age. In the Eurasian continent there are Lithuanian parishes/missions established in Ireland, Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, United Kingdom, Norway, France, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland and Germany as well as in Lithuanian ethnic lands such as Pelesos and Gervocius regions in Belarus as well Punks and Seinai and in Karaliaucius. In North America there are 37 parishes/missions in the United States and 6 parishes and additional missions in Canada. In South America there are two parishes in Argentina, one each in Uruguay and Brazil; Australia has 1 parish and 2 missions. Altogether there are nearly 70 Lithuanian parishes/missions outside of Lithuania which are served by 51 Lithuanian Catholic priests. There are actually many more Lithuanian priests living outside of Lithuania, but they are either retired, furthering their studies, or do not work in Lithuanian communities. Presently it is impossible to provide a Lithuanian priest for every Lithuanian Catholic community. I am comforted that so many of you do not despair and instead, attend catholic parishes in your local communities. Those communities that make an effort to invite a priest to celebrate the Eucharist in Lithuanian are to be commended. A beautiful example is given to us by the Lithuanians in Finland. As a result of the close ties between the Lithuanian Embassy and the Helsinki Lithuanian Community, arrangements were jointly facilitated to have Masses celebrated in Lithuanian. This is but one example of groups working together for the benefit of the whole community.

It brings me great joy to become acquainted with so many members of Lithuanian Catholic communities throughout the world. Your enthusiasm and achievements give me “food for thought” as I give thanks to God. However, I ask for forgiveness, when it has not been possible to fulfill every need of your communities during the past decade.

With increasing numbers of Lithuanians living outside of Lithuania, there is a growing need for spiritual support. Therefore, I entreated the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference to grant a request to include in the Lithuanian Catholic Liturgical Calendar, a special day of prayer. Beginning in 2014, the first Sunday of March is now designated as the special Day of Prayer for all Lithuanian Catholics living abroad. It will occur each year on the first Sunday of March. Special attention was given to the choice of this day and its proximity to March 4th, the feast day of Lithuania's Patron, Saint Casimir. There are nine parishes or missions, St. Casimir Pontifical College in Rome, a cemetery in Chicago and two Lithuanian Saturday schools named in St. Casimir's honour. Even the Province of the Franciscan Fathers is named for St. Casimir. Since the 17th century St. Casimir has interceded to God for the needs of the Lithuanian nation; since 1948, St. Casimir was proclaimed the patron saint of Lithuanian youth. For the first time in history a young generation of Lithuanians has spilled over the borders of their country to move to different corners of the world. For this reason we are truly in need of St. Casimir's intercession. I hope and pray that St. Casimir, through his intercession, will help to unify us all, that we may not lose our ties to the land of our ancestors and our Lithuanian religious traditions.

May the infant Jesus, whose rebirth we celebrate during each Christmas season, remind us that God Incarnate was also once 'young'. Benedict XVI, in his Christmas message to youth (2006) urged that the Child Jesus be recognized in all children, whom he called the 'joy of the Church' and 'hope of the world. '...In the face of the little Jesus, we contemplate the face of God, which is not revealed through force or power, but in weakness and the fragile constitution of a child... (who) reveals all the goodness and infinite beauty of God. He demonstrates the faithfulness and tenderness of the boundless love with which God surrounds each of us.'

Together may we show love for one another and especially for our younger generation, in Lithuania and abroad, as these young people reflect “the goodness and infinite beauty of God.”

May you all have a blessed and joyful Christmas!

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