



## A letter from Monsignor Edmond J. Putrimas, *Lithuanian Bishops' Conference (LBC) Delegate for the Apostolate of Lithuanian Catholics Living Outside of Lithuania*

### *My Brothers and Sisters in Christ*

Upon celebrating the fifth anniversary of my appointment by the Bishops' Conference as Delegate to Lithuanian Catholics Living Abroad, it is my sincere pleasure to share this past year's events with you. I thank God for His many blessings, especially during this past 400th jubilee year of Our Lady of Siluva, and also thank my staff and volunteers who have helped me in myriad ways throughout the year and especially in the preparation of this letter. This newsletter gives me an opportunity to inform you about the pastoral ministry for which I am delegated.



*Monsignor Edmond J. Putrimas*

*photo by J. Kuprys*

It was a pleasure to be invited, to participate in and to read about the numerous Lithuanian parishes and missions, schools and summer camps in Canada, the United States, Ireland, England, Australia and Brazil that joined in the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the Marian apparition in Siluva, Lithuania. These celebrations have enriched the spiritual life of our communities, have brought greater awareness to all of the oldest Marian apparition site in Europe, and have encouraged the laity to become more involved in pastoral activities in parish and mission life. In many instances, it was an honour to have the local Bishop and other dignitaries attend and recognize the importance of this occasion in our communities.

How wonderful that over a hundred and twenty young people from Lithuania attended the World Youth Day celebrations in Australia. Sadly, only two girls from Chicago represented the Lithuanian communities of North America. Hopefully, when we begin to organize a pilgrimage to the next WYD in 2010 to Madrid, the response will be more favourable. The Lithuanian

communities in Melbourne and Sydney did a wonderful job in welcoming and hosting the pilgrims from Lithuania. May the spirit of the WYD inspire them for a long time to come.

This year was filled with pastoral meetings and conferences, which were part of my agenda:

- I helped organize the South American Lithuanian Communities' National Executive Conference in Buenos Aires. Dr. R. Ivoskus, mayor of San Martin (Buenos Aires) and World Lithuanian National Congress President Dr. R. Narusis were major supporters.
- The 2nd European Lithuanian Priests Conference took place in Vilnius and included diocesan priests from Siberia, Kaliningrad region, Punksas-Seinai region, Ireland, England, Germany as well as Jesuit and Franciscan missionary priests who work in Bielorrussia, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, France and other European countries, where large Lithuanian communities are established
- The 2nd US Lithuanian Catholic Pastoral Conference was organized in Chicago to deal with the changing face of Lithuanian parishes and missions in the United States. Many distinguished guests attended, including Cardinal George of the Archdiocese of Chicago, Archbishop S. Tamkevicius, SJ, of the Archdiocese of Kaunas, diplomats representing the Republic of Lithuania, pastors and parishioners from various Lithuanian Catholic parishes and missions throughout America
- Conferences of the presidents of the World Lithuanian National Congress (PLB) and World Lithuanian Youth League in Trakai, Lithuania
- International Civil Aviation Chaplains' Conference in France
- Lithuanian Bishops' Conference Plenary meetings in May and November
- US Lithuanian Catholic Priests' League meetings and retreat in Putnam, CT
- Lithuanian Catholic Religious Aid Board meetings in New York and Putnam
- 49th International Eucharistic Congress in Quebec City, Canada with Bishop Norvila
- Pastoral visit to the Lithuanian Catholic communities in the Punksas-Seinai region in the Diocese of Elk with H. Em. Cardinal Backis
- XI South American Lithuanian Youth Conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Pastoral visits with Archbishop Tamkevicius to Chicago and Cleveland and meetings with local bishops.

It was a year during which I had the honour and opportunity to attend many different functions – Toronto Maironis Lithuanian school 60th anniversary, Lithuanian Martyrs parish's 60th in Mississauga, Canada, St. George's parish 100 years in Rochester, NY, the celebration of 99 years of publishing for



“Draugas” daily Catholic newspaper in Chicago, as well as Detroit’s Divine Providence parish 100th anniversary. A special greeting was sent to the Pontifical Lithuanian College of St. Casimir in Rome, Italy to mark its 60th anniversary. I resided there for 8 years during my studies of philosophy and theology in preparation for the priesthood. I will always be grateful to the College’s staff for their support in helping me to take the required steps to become a priest. There were many more events that, unfortunately, I was unable to attend but sent my prayers and blessings.

According to the Lithuanian Catholic Directory of 2004, the year after I assumed my position as Delegate, there were 95 Lithuanian parishes and 27 missions worldwide. During that year there were 264 diocesan priests and 92 priests belonging to religious orders (total of 356 priests) who served the pastoral needs of the Lithuanian communities outside of Lithuania. Of these, and from existing data, 300 were ordained as priests before 1980 and only 40 after that year to the present.

The statistics for 2008 have changed significantly. The present Directory lists 81 Lithuanian parishes and 10 missions. Serving them are 169 diocesan priests and 95 priests from religious orders (total of 264 priests). Of these, present data shows that 185 were ordained as priests before 1980 and 48 after that year to the present. The number of priests is decreasing, our older priests are working past retirement age and the older ones are dying. In this past year alone news was received of 10 priests passing away while many more are now residing in nursing homes. But few new priests are being ordained as a result of fewer callings to the priesthood. Yet Lithuanian Catholic communities continue to express a wish to have Lithuanian priests serve them pastorally.

During the 2nd US Lithuanian Catholic Pastoral Conference in Chicago, many of the participants raised the concerned need for more priests and the disappointment at the lack of vocations. A young Jesuit seminarian, br. Linas Laniauskas, SJ (born in Cleveland, Ohio), eloquently shared his experiences as he spoke about his calling to the priesthood. His message was that our society masks callings and young men and women are discouraged from considering entering the priesthood or religious orders. Furthermore, Archbishop S. Tamkevicius, SJ stated during his opening remarks at the Conference, that the Church in Lithuania will not be able to supply enough priests to all our parishes abroad. Thus, it is our responsibility to pray for vocations from within our Lithuanian Catholic communities and to encourage our youth to become the future spiritual leaders that our communities will need.

In 2009 Lithuania will mark the 1000th anniversary of the use of its name in historical documents and the beginnings of its statehood. Let us not only celebrate but pray for the Lithuanian nation and Lithuanians throughout the world, that we all remain faithful to our Christian roots and identity.



H. Em. A. J. Cardinal Backis and Msgr. E. J. Putrimas with the youth from the Punkskas-Seinai region

My future plans as Delegate include the preparation of age and language appropriate catechetical material for Lithuanian schools so that our students can become better acquainted with our rich Lithuanian and Catholic traditions and heritage. The next US Lithuanian Catholic Conference will take place at St. Peter’s Lithuanian Parish in Boston in March. This 3rd Pastoral Conference will be important to our parish and mission communities – pastors, parish council members and concerned parishioners alike – to share ideas and support our Lithuanian Catholic communities. The 3rd European Lithuanian Catholic Priests’ Conference will take place in Rome in February. Another important project in the works is a special seminar for the young seminarians from Lithuania who wish to work with Lithuanian Catholic communities outside of Lithuania, to better acquaint them with the pastoral challenges of working outside of their country of birth.

To fulfill all these projects I espouse, as part of my ministry as Delegate to the Lithuanian Bishop’s Conference, I depend on both your prayers and donations. It is important that we have strong and vibrant parishes and missions in our communities in order to preserve our Catholic and Lithuanian identities. This can only be accomplished with your help. Your financial contributions to this ministry, your donations of time and commitment and your continued active worship through the Sacraments and sharing of the Word of God in your own Lithuanian church or mission will help to strengthen the future of our Catholic Lithuanian heritage for the next generation!

*Faithfully yours in Christ,*

Donations are an important means of support for the apostolic work of the Lithuanian Bishops Conference Delegate. Your generous financial assistance will enable Msgr. E. J. Putrimas to continue his responsibilities to meet the pastoral needs of all Lithuanian Catholic brothers and sisters living abroad.

*- Giedra Paulionis, Advisory Council Chair*

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