

# bridges



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## in this issue

2

### editorial

Letter from the  
Editor  
*Jeanne Dorr*

4

### reflections

“I am the  
Resurrection  
and the Life”

*Sister Margarita  
Bareikaitė*

4

### reflections

100 YEARS  
SINCE  
ADELĖ  
DIRSYTĖ’S  
BIRTH

*Rev. Kęstutis A.  
Trimakas*

6

### spotlight

*Auksučiai  
Foundation’s  
Tenth Anniversary  
Leland H. Ruth*

7

### reflections

TEN  
MOST IMPORTANT  
EVENTS IN  
LITHUANIA’S  
RELIGIOUS HISTORY  
*Father A. Saulaitis, S.J.*

10

### tradition

*Palm Sunday*

11

### cultural SYMBOLISM AND MYTHS

12  
photo album  
*Lithuania’s  
Countryside*

15

### news and views

*Jeanne Dorr*

16

### cultural

Gintas Abarius and  
“Baltic Avenue”  
*Eugenija Misevicius*

17

### education

Volunteering  
in a Lithuanian  
Orphanage

*Daiva Ragaitė*

20

### cultural

KAIP MĖNULIS  
ŽVAIGŽDEI LENKĖSI  
How the Moon  
Bowed to a Star  
*Gloria O’Brien*

21

### poetry

Michael Lucas

22

### calendar

\*Cover: The photo of “Margučiai” Lithuanian decorated Easter Eggs, photographed by Dr. Banga Grigaliūnaitė at “Kaziuko Mugė”, Vilnius, Lithuania - 2009

\*The art work of the Easter Eggs on the back cover is from the book “TĖVŲ NAMELIAI BRANGŪS”.

# Auksučiai Foundation's Tenth Anniversary

January 2009 marked the tenth year of the Auksucia Foundation program of technical research and assistance to small scale Lithuanian farmers. Using private funds donated from a broad cross section of people in the Lithuanian community and others interested in helping, the Foundation has made continued progress towards achieving its goals. During this period, working through its in-country counterpart, the Auksuciai Farm and Forestry Center (AUMC), it reclaimed a piece of raw farm land in Northwestern Lithuania, established an on-going program of agricultural research and established an education center on the farm site available to the local community.



*One hundred year old oak tree at the old Auksučiai farmhouse (destroyed during the Soviet occupation). The tree is now the symbol on the Auksučiai Foundation decals and letterheads.*

launching a program involving local farmers in the production of asparagus. This vegetable crop, new to the area, shows strong potential for increased profitability on the small plots of land common to the area. In May 2008, AUMC organized and conducted a workshop at the Gudaitis Center at the farm with presenters from AUMC, Lithuanian University of Agriculture, Šiauliai University and the Lithuanian Ministry of Agriculture. The workshop was funded by AUMC, Lithuanian Ministry of Agriculture; the Arthur & Beverly Bridges Foundation and individual donations.



*Ambassador Mathew Lee of Taiwan, presents a gift to the Auksučiai Farm (AUMC) From left: AUMC Director Darius Malinauskas (Šiauliai) Ambassador of Taiwan Mathew Lee, AUMC project director Lawrence D. Clement (University of California, Davis) Vytautas Sliupas, P.E. President of AUMC (Burlingame, CA)*

Last year AUMC was instrumental in



*General view of the Auksučiai farm during the new building dedication*

The workshop attended by 50 local agriculturalists and farmers included;

lectures about the growing of asparagus and the history of the plant; field demonstrations on growing asparagus; a cooking demonstration by Martins Ritins from Vincens' Restaurant in Riga, Latvia. The farmers interested in joining a Lithuanian Asparagus Growers Association, being formed by AUMC, were provided 1,000 starter plants free of charge for use on their own farms.



*Testing new crops at the farm*

This spring AUMC will coordinate an effort to finish forming an Asparagus Growers Association to help facilitate the marketing of the crop. It will also be purchasing and locating on the farm site a 20 foot refrigerated container that will be utilized in holding local farmers production of the asparagus crop prior to marketing. In addition, in mid-March, an AUMC employee will be brought to Michigan and California to receive two weeks training at an ongoing commercial asparagus farming operation. This will be followed by an Asparagus Production Workshop on - site at the farm during the month of July.

The current forecasts are for a slow Lithuanian economic recovery and some are saying things could get worse before they get better.



*Auksučiai Farm and Forest Center Headquarters*

Lithuania is suffering from double digit inflation on top of this weakened economy. Farmers are going to need all the help they can get just to stay in business. Those interested in learning more about the scope of AUMC activities are invited to visit the Auksučiai Foundation website [www.aukfoundation.org](http://www.aukfoundation.org) or contact the Foundation president:

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*\*Photos by Vytautas J. Sliupas*



*Harvested asparagus ready for market*

**Editor's Note:** *Congratulations to the Auksučiai Foundation on the occasion of their tenth anniversary. After almost twenty trips to Lithuania I can attest to the necessity of helping the people who farm the land in Lithuania.*

*"I know of no pursuit in which more real and important services can be rendered to any country than by improving its agriculture, its breed of useful animals, and other branches of a husbandman's cares."*

*George Washington*

## TEN MOST IMPORTANT EVENTS IN LITHUANIA'S RELIGIOUS HISTORY

*The editor of Bridges asked for an article about ten most important events in Lithuania's religious history. As a fan of Animal Planet's "The most extreme", where one is kept guessing what is better or worse or more interesting than the previous creature, I thought of noting religious trends and questions which may help to reflect on Lithuania's millennial heritage and its significance to the living. The most outstanding events are well-known and frequently repeated in articles, books and speeches. May this summary give food for thought.*

1) Every Lithuanian speaker is aware of the words for the sign of the cross, which begins "Vardan Dievo Tėvo..." – "In the name of God the Father," whereas the more universal version does not have the word "God." The simplest explanation may be that Lithuanians (and Latvians) translated a Germanic formula in very early contacts with Christians. Some historians see Arian roots, where God would refer only to the Father. In any case, the traditional Lithuanian blessing is more ancient than our documents could explain.

Christianity did not reach Lithuania first through rulers and bishops. It spread from family to family and village to village. We celebrate 1000 years since Lithuania was mentioned in the annals about the martyrdom of St. Bruno, who admired St. Ansgar, apostle of the North. Ansgar was in Baltic lands in 853-854, and the first seeds of Western Christianity may have been sown that early in our history.

2) Lithuanians sometimes pride themselves or see their role in history and culture as between East and West. The first substantial numbers of Christians in lands ruled by Lithuania were Orthodox, not Latin (Roman). A German historian suggests Lithuanian rulers, being pagans – of the old Lithuanian faith – were free to rule as they wish, not being directly subject to pressures from the Catholic West or the Orthodox East. The bulk of Lithuania in those early centuries encompassed primarily Orthodox areas, but ultimately the rulers – kings and grand dukes – chose Western Christianity.

Yet the concern for unity of faith left both Church and state restless. Nowhere else but in Lithuania did a substantial integration of the two traditions into one Church take place – at Brest (Lietuvos Brasta - "Lithuanian Ford," Brest Litovsk in Russian) in 1596. Eastern Catholics (mainly Ukrainians), incorrectly called "Uniates," worship in the Basilian church in Vilnius, very near to Aušros Vartai (Our Lady of Dawn).

Sometimes one feels that Eastern (Byzantine) Christianity influenced Lithuanian piety and worship more than has been thoroughly studied.

3) Tartars and karaims (caraites) are minorities in present-day Lithuania. The Muslim Tartars were living in the Grand Duchy by the early 1300's, prior to Vytautas, who is credited (and honored by the tartars) for being their patron. The Soviets destroyed the mosque in Vilnius (Totorių street

treet remains), but mosques can be found in Kaunas, Kėdainiai and Keturiašdesimt Totorių village near Vilnius.

Karaim families arrived in Lithuania at the end of the 14th cent. to live near the castle of Trakai, Vytautas's headquarters. Their origins are in present-day Iraq, their religion is Old Testament without additional Jewish laws. The houses of worship (called kinesa) are in Vilnius and Trakai, where a visitor can see the Karaim museum.

More about these communities can be found in history and guide books. The interesting and engaging part of their story is that they survived openly and freely more than 600 years in a mostly Catholic country. The old Grand Duchy was actively tolerant toward ethnicities and religions, a fine tradition to be emulated today.

4) The Protestant Reformation grew into Reformed and Lutheran churches in Lithuania and Lithuania Minor. Pastor (then a student) Martynas Mažvydas published a catechism, the first book in Lithuanian (1547), pastor Kristijonas Donelaitis (18th cent.) is very important in Lithuanian literature and cultural history. The University of Karaliaučius (Koenigsberg, now Kaliningrad) fostered Lithuanian language and Protestantism for centuries since its founding in 1544. The list of notable graduates of the university and Protestant clergy is a litany of notable Lithuanians and students of Lithuanian.

For all the legal and political conflict in religiously turbulent times, Lithuania was able to treat the changes without violence or social upheaval.

5) The education of an informed citizenry is one of the reasons the University of Vilnius was founded in 1579, the College (today we would say high school) in 1570. In Soviet times Lithuanians were accustomed to saying that this university was the most eastern institute of higher education in Europe and older than Moscow University. For all the reputation assigned the Jesuit founders for being very Catholic, the university had students from Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran and Muslim families, all studying in peace. It was truly an inter-national university. (The astronomical observatory of Vilnius University was the first in the world to describe the Green Flash, no less!).

The Jesuit tradition of service to others, especially the



Fr. Antanas Saulaitis, S.J.

needy, fostered student involvement in civic life. Within the first decades of the university alumni founded two churches with hospitals just outside Vilnius – St. Stephen's (now being restored after Soviet abuse) and St. Joseph of Arimathea and St. Nicodemus (a part of which is incorporated into a residential building).

6) The next “extreme” has to do with faith and life. Father Antanas Strazdas (1763-1833), known as Strazdelis to this day, the author of the beloved hymn “Pulkim ant kelių”, impressed his contemporaries and his current admirers with a folksy way of disdaining all the ceremony and opulence of courtly life, both political and religious. The hierarchy did not exactly know what to do with this priest living in a village, working the land, and not very adept at formalities.

Juozapas Kalinauskas (1835-1907), since 1991 Saint Rapolas Kalinauskas, was an engineer exiled to Siberia after the revolt of 1863. When the Lithuanian exiles sang the section of the litany of the saints with the response “save us, O Lord!” to “Through your death and burial..., through your holy resurrection”... they spontaneously added “Through the prayers of Juozapas Kalinauskas, save us, O Lord”. He later became a Carmelite priest in Poland, but people saw this layman's holiness in freedom and exile.

7) The failure of the revolt of 1831 against czarist rule in Lithuania (and Poland) did not squelch the thirst for freedom. The insurrection of 1863 resulted in even more emigration to Western Europe and the United States as the czar crushed the revolutionaries and exiled thousands to Siberia. Rev. Antanas Mackevicius was ultimately hanged, refusing to leave the side of his oppressed people.

He is portrayed by author Vincas Mykolaitis Putinas (in "Sukilimas" – Revolt, 1956) as having a larger task than resisting the czar's armies firing power with scythes and home-made spears. Mackevičius's hardest mission was to convince his countrymen that they have rights, can be free to live and worship, to decide their own future - and need to do their utmost to attain these goals for themselves and others.

8) Žemaičiai (Samogitians) are accused of being very stubborn, but this could be a Lithuanian trait in general. Some years ago a study of language use in U.S. churches of all denominations over the past 100 years showed that the founding language persisted longest in Armenian, Greek and Ukrainian parishes. Of the 44 nationalities Lithuanians came fourth, where the congregation even insisted on having the Gospel read in Lithuanian at Mass, even though no one spoke Lithuanian any more. Note, please, that the first three ethnic communities are primarily Orthodox and have their own rite. Lithuanians outlast all Protestants and Catholics.

The same determination is evident in the history of many of U. S. Catholic parishes. Some were even founded by the original immigrants just off the boat, purchasing land for a church before finding a priest and obtaining the bishop's approval. Far from their homes, exiles in Siberia conducted religious services as best they could without a priest, baptizing, marrying and burying their own until a priest was able to celebrate clandestine Masses in Soviet gulag camps, on the average, every five to seven years.

9) Much of the community spirit and practice of these Lithuanian immigrants is due to the tradition fostered by bishop Motiejus Valančius (first of Varniai, then of Kaunas, d. 1875). Valancius insisted on parish choirs, which were more than liturgical singers, but a true small community and the nucleus of involvement in parish life. Very often the choir members participated in folk theaters and dramatic performances, another fruit of cultural and community spirit both in Lithuania and among Lithuanians abroad.

Valančius countered czarist oppression by having religious books printed in East Prussia, on Lithuania's western border. In solidarity with their homeland, Lithuanians in Plymouth, PA and elsewhere published untold thousands of books for shipment to the underground book railroad. Many people in the late 19th

century learned to read from prayer books. Books on agriculture, history and other "secular" topics helped to educate Lithuanians to whom schools were closed under Moscow's repressive regime. The same solidarity is so apparent in the world-wide scandal of the massacre at Kražiai (1893), which would have been unknown were it not for Lithuanians in the U.S.

10) During Soviet occupation, even in the middle 1980's, a woman would bring her child to be baptized in the church quickly and in the dark of night; two weeks later, the father would bring the same child to the same priest for baptism: Eloquent testimony to the efficacy of the Soviet rule of fear.

On the other hand, the clandestine "Chronicle of the Catholic Church of Lithuania" (1972-1989), many petitions with signatures, public manifestations at the arrest or murder of priests or other activists brought together those who would not relent to fight for human rights and religious freedom. The very favorable confluence of anniversaries even the Soviets could not deny helped to strengthen bonds and give voice to Lithuanians – 400 years of Vilnius University (1979), 500 years since St. Casimir's death (1984), 600 years of Lithuania's evangelization (1987), 1000 years of Christianity in Russia (1988). These jubilees had to be public, and the faithful made good use of them to pry open the door to the future.

*Fr. Antanas Saulaitis, S.J.*

*Fr. Antanas Saulaitis, S.J. is presently the chaplain of Blessed Jurgis Matulaitis Mission in Lemont, Illinois. From 1997-2006 he rebuilt and expanded the Jesuit High School in Vilnius while at the same time providing pastoral care at St John's Church in Vilnius.*

*Fr. Saulaitis loves young people. He continuously participated in various youth organizations (his special love was the scouts) and worked tirelessly to better nurture their spiritual growth. In 1977 he was the chaplain of the Lithuanian Youth Center in Chicago.*

*Bishop Paulius Baltakis, OFM, who was the spiritual leader of all the Lithuanians outside Lithuania included Fr. Saulaitis as his primary counsel.*

*Bonds of friendship keep Fr. Saulaitis connected with South America's Lithuanians. From 1970 -1977 he was stationed in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Here he was instrumental in the vibrant growth of the Lithuanian parish.*

*He was also elected as the Provincial of all the Lithuanian Jesuits. He frequently writes for the Lithuanian newspaper and magazines and has also written numerous books.*



*Photo Album of  
Lithuania's  
Countryside*



*Photos by:  
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JD - Jeanne Dorr,  
Riverton, NJ*



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