



Mission Society of the Mother of God of Boronyavo

Christmas 2014

The Byzantine Catholic Church in Ukraine

Twenty Five Years!

This Eparchy of Mukachevo* celebrated the 25th anniversary of its deliverance from the catacombs with services across the Transcarpathian Oblast. The main event was held on June 6 at the seminary outside Uzhhorod, with the relics of Blessed Theodore Romzha brought down from the cathedral. The Holy Father appointed Cardinal Jozef Tomko, former Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, as his Special Envoy to attend the celebrations and also sent the Apostolic Nuncio to Ukraine, Archbishop Thomas Gullickson. Cardinal Tomko delivered a stirring homily entitled “God gave us freedom, that we use it well,” recounting the heroism of young Bishop Romzha, only 33 years old and cut off from the rest of the world by the new Soviet border. Then he went on to challenge the vast crowd to use long hoped-for freedom according to the Ten Commandments, and to daily ask God: *teach us to walk along the narrow and difficult road that we are not stuck. Jesus also gave us the commandment to love one another and promised us his presence and assistance: “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home with him.” (John 14.23).*



The challenge of leading a Christian life is the same around the world!

* Ukraine was a former Soviet republic and reached its current borders in 1945, with the annexation of Subcarpathian Rus', now the Transcarpathian Oblast, and the homeland of the Eparchy of Mukachevo. This region, with adjacent areas of Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary, constitutes the territory of origin of the immigrants who brought the Byzantine Catholic Church to North America.

All support of the Mission Society's work is in addition to members' and donors' existing support of their local parish, their eparchy, and the Metropolia of Pittsburgh. Renewal of our Mother Church in Central Europe cannot mean a diminishment of our financial and spiritual dedication to the church in America.

**MISSION SOCIETY OF
THE MOTHER OF
GOD OF
BORONYAVO, INC.**

The Mission Society is an independent organization dedicated to the renewal and strengthening of the Byzantine Catholic Church in America and Central Europe.

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***Our Christmas Project in the
Eparchy of Mukachevo***

Pilgrimage Center in Bilky

The Eparchy wants to create a pilgrim center and spiritual retreat at the church in Bilky. This calls for transforming the Communist-era collective farm office building into a multi-purpose center, as described in the letter from Bishop Milan Sasik. As you can see inside, the eparchy has submitted a complete proposal, which gives the history of Bilky and its famous pastor, Bishop Petro Oros, whose Cause is in Rome for beatification. We will start the funding with our Christmas Card Project. We have arranged with Bishop Milan Sasik that he will offer the Divine Liturgy on Christmas Day, January 7 (Old Style) for the intentions that are submitted from the Christmas cards. Each card has an intention inside that you write down, for the living or deceased. Bishop Milan will lay them out and bless them first, and then will place the entire stack of cards onto the altar of Holy Cross Cathedral next to the Liturgikon for his Christmas Liturgy. He did this for us at Easter, when we sold the cards only in Albuquerque, with great success. We hope to repeat this success now!



Bishop Petro Oros, Martyr

***Servant of God, Bishop
Petro Oros***

Father Petro Oros was ordained in 1942, but on December 19, 1944 he was secretly consecrated as a bishop by Blessed Theodore Romzha, Bishop of Mukachevo. In 1946, he was sent to Bilky, where he became popular among the people for his holiness and humility.

At the suppression of the Greek Catholic Church in 1949, Bishop Petro took to the mountains with three other priests.

They conducted successful underground pastoral work in the Vinohradiv and Irshava regions. He alone evaded capture, but was recognized by a policeman in 1953 after he conducted services on August 27 for

Featured Mission Society Work

*There are so many needs!
The following projects are the ones we wish to emphasize this month.
Please indicate which ones your donation supports:*

- Pilgrimage Center in Bilky
- Divine Liturgies - Ukraine* Please tell us how many you want. You can send payment as you use them.
- Divine Liturgies - Slovakia ** Please tell us how many you want. You can send payment as you use them.
- Christmas Liturgy Card + Please tell us how many you want and enclose payment as either a separate check or part of one large check.
- Korolevo Orphanage
- Sisters of St. Basil

Christmas Cards for Bishop Sasik's Liturgy on Christmas Day, January 7

**As noted on the insert page, we encourage you to ask for Christmas Cards which provide for remembrance of the living or deceased in the Liturgy of Bishop Sasik on January 7, 2015. The income from these donations goes directly to the Bilky project.

Individual Liturgy Cards year-round Please write to the office for these cards, and then return the intention and donation to us in the envelope provided.

**Archbishop Jan Babjak, SJ, affirms that individual Liturgy intentions are of great value for his young priests who do not have parish assignments. Slovakia has more Greek Catholic priests than there are openings for (what a great problem!) and so these clergy work in Greek Catholic offices and schools. Liturgy intentions are a huge help to them.

+ These individual Divine Liturgy intentions go to the Eparchy of Mukachevo, and are used for the support of elderly priests living on pensions, or young priests in poor villages who have a small income.

the vigil of the Dormition (Old Calendar). While being marched to the police station, this fanatic shot the Bishop, first shooting him in the knees. As he sank to the ground, he whispered to his co-worker, Katherine Stanko "Remember the intentions," meaning those Liturgy offerings given to him by people which now needed to be offered. With the second shot, he died. When she reached his mountain cabin hideout, she found the list of Liturgy intentions to give to other secret priests, but she gasped at the last entry: *For the soul of Petro Oros* - he knew that his death was near.

You can read more about his life and the marvelous events that accompanied his death and the finding of his body in the chapter "The Bishop Who Climbed In Through A Window" in *Finding a Hidden Church*, available for \$30 plus postage at www.ecpubs.com or from Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, 1837 Alvarado Drive NE, Albuquerque 87110, 505-256-1539.

From the Chaplain

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Thank you for your continued support of the Mission Society, and for your prayers for the ongoing restoration of our Church in Central Europe.

As this is being finished, election results from Ukraine show strong support for pro-European parties. Despite war in the east and a struggling economy, Ukrainian citizens turned out in large numbers to vote. In addition, Ukraine is now engaged in a "lustration" project, revealing past corruption in order to punish those people and discourage further attempts at corruption.

Below is a project report about some of the good work being accomplished, in part, through the Mission Society in the Greek Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo:

Project: Construction of the future spiritual retreat center of the Servant of God Petro Oros in the village Bilky, Irshava district, Transcarpathia region, Ukraine.

Project initiator: Greek Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo.

Nature of the help requested: \$38,163.27

Project Description

The village of Bilky is located at the foot of Carpathian Mountains in the valley of the river Tysa, 18 km north-east from the district center town Irshava and 80 km far from the main administrative center of Transcarpathian region-city Uzhgorod. It dates from at least the 14th century.

Before 1949, Bilky was mostly Greek Catholic. Dormition of the Holy Theotokos Parish in Bilky had its own church and parish house. In 1949, our Greek Catholic Church was liquidated and ordered to convert to Russian Orthodoxy, the church's building and parish house were taken away. The church was going to be demolished but it was turned into a museum of atheism and later into a club.

The parish house building, where Servant of God Petro Oros lived, was given over to the new collective farm's offices: all farms in the region were consolidated into this one communist-run farm. After the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church in 1949, many priests continued their work underground. Among them was the parish priest of the village Bilky, Petro Oros.

The Burial of Bishop Oros

The story of the burial of Bishop Oros' body was first told in English in Father Athanasius Pekar's *You Shall Be Witnesses to Me* (Pittsburgh: Byzantine Seminary Press, 1985). Some Americans rejected it as fantastic, but Father Chris Zuger confirmed this during his research in Ukraine 2001-2007, interviewing witnesses and hearing it from those who heard the interview with the assassin himself, from his exile in Siberia.

After the murder, the body was buried in a shallow grave, but cows unearthed it. When the herders brought out villagers to the site, the assassin rose up from the bushes, cursing them and telling them that they would never have the Bishop's body.

After that, the police removed the body, refusing to say where it was. But for three nights, the voice of Bishop Petro was heard throughout the town, singing the Divine Liturgy in Church Slavonic. After that, the voice ceased.

In 1992, delegates went to the home of the policeman, who had fled to Siberia for fear of retribution. A cold man, he wanted first to know the fate of his pigs and property. Finally, they asked him, where is the body? He recounted that they brought him back to their garage, and put him in the cellar where prisoners were tortured. But after three days, they dug a deep hole and covered him with cement. Why was that done? "Because," the killer answered, "we could not stand the sound of his voice singing like that!"

The body was then dug up, identified, and returned in triumph for burial in a new chapel built near the church. Since then, pilgrims have come there throughout the year to pray to the martyr for his intercession. This is why Bilky is now a pilgrimage center!

**Bishop Petro Oros in
lay clothing**



The Servant of God Petro Oros was born on July 14, 1917 in the village Biri (Hungary) in the family of a Greek Catholic priest. In 1919, his family moved to Transcarpathia, in the new state of Czechoslovakia. In 1937, he entered Uzhhorod priestly seminary and on June 28, 1942 he was ordained a priest. His pas-toral activity started in the village Velyki Komyaty of the Vinogradov district as an assistant to a parish priest. On December 19, 1944 Bishop Theodore Romzha secretly consecrated him a bishop. In 1946, he was assigned to the parish in Bilky. In 1948, the Soviet Regime resorted to different methods of influence in order to persuade Father Petro to convert to Russian Ortho-doxy. For him, as for the rest of the clergy that didn't give up their faith, no state license was given to allow him to conduct pastoral work. But he remained always faithful to his vocation, continuing in the un-derground with his altar brothers. He organized a small group of priests who withdrew to the mountains. They were captured in a police trap, and he went on alone.

This priest's stubborn insubordination irritated high-ranking government officials and, a reward was placed on his head. In 1953, he was killed, and then secretly buried. The remains of the Martyr were found in 1992 and moved to the chapel at the now reopened church.

After the legalization of our Church in 1989, this parish community was officially registered in 1991. Thanks be to God, soon our church building and parish house were returned. During the time when the parish house was the property of collective farm, the second floor and the entrance part of the building were added to the building. Since that time, no repairs were conducted and the building decayed.

Now, the new parish administrator Father Vitalij Shelemba lives there together with his family. The parish house building is very big and hard to heat. Moreover, its roof leaks. That is why the Parish Council decided to start the con-struction of a new parish house on the same plot of land, which will not be as big as the previous one. Instead, the old building will be turned into the spiritual retreat center named in honor of our Bishop Martyr Petro Oros. Without changing the roof, however, we cannot start other reconstruction works.

The main objectives for the present project are:

1. Retreats for children and youth
2. Spiritual retreats for priests and priests' wives
3. Spiritual renewals for Mothers of Prayer communities



So far, there have been project documentation and estimated cost of the reconstruction works prepared. We kindly request your financial support for the purchase of the necessary construction materials and qualified services in order to reconstruct the roof of the future spiritual retreat center of the Servant of God Petro Oros in the village Bilky.