

## Summary



### The Lithuanian National Catholic Church: Ethnoreligious Identity in the Diaspora

The stereotype of a close relationship between Lithuanianism and Catholicism is prevalent in Lithuanian, and especially émigré Lithuanian, historiography and public discourse. With the stream of (e)migration from Lithuania as strong as ever, the issue of preserving Lithuanian identity abroad continues to be relevant. In this context, the contribution of religious communities to the maintenance not only of religious but also of national/ethnic identity is notably important. However, with respect to the Lithuanian diaspora, the standard emphasis is exclusively on the inputs of religious communities and societies associated with the Roman Catholic Church, while the part played by other religious communities (not associated with the Roman Catholic Church) in both the history of the Lithuanian diaspora and the formation of Lithuanian identity has been neglected.

One such community is the Lithuanian National Catholic Church (LTKB in Lithuanian), founded in the United States at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and still active up to this day. The fact that and how such a church (often called the *Independent Lithuanian Church* by prewar immigrants) came to exist is interesting, but until now it has been little known in

Lithuania itself. The Providence of God Parish in Scranton, Pennsylvania, was founded in 1913 and recently celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary: it is the last and currently the only community of the Lithuanian National Catholic Church in the United States.

In the summer of 2012, after making contact with the Providence of God Parish and its pastor, the Rev. Dr. Walter Placek, a group of researchers from the Lithuanian Emigration Institute in Kaunas decided to undertake a close study of the history and present-day situation of this religious community. The goal was to collect as much information about it as possible in order both to construct a historical and sociological picture of the Lithuanian National Catholic Church as well as to present this research to Lithuanian academic circles and to society-at-large. During a two-week-long scholarly expedition to Scranton in March and April (the Easter season) of 2013, the researchers collected much audiovisual material about the parish community and its environment, and using qualitative research methods conducted observations of, and interviews with, its members.

The results of this research are published in this issue of *Oikos*, the journal of Lithuanian

migration and diaspora studies. Processes occurring within the Roman Catholic Church and the Lithuanian diaspora in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and contributing to the formation of the Lithuanian National Catholic Church are presented in a paper jointly written by Artūras Grickevičius, Iлона Strumickienė and Daiva Dapkutė. The Lithuanians who arrived on U. S. shores at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century experienced things that other nationalities had gone through a bit earlier: the struggle to create parishes, build churches, and look for priests of one's own nationality; disputes between parish committees and local pastors; and issues relating to property ownership. Daiva Dapkutė's article on the earliest attempts to create a national independent church sheds light on the complexities of Lithuanian diaspora religious life as it felt torn between Catholic faithfulness and free-thinking and sought to distance itself from the Polish national religious community by establishing Lithuanian parishes and by seeking to keep church property in the local community's hands. The creation of the Lithuanian National Catholic Church was difficult and complicated. Most of the Lithuanian attempts to establish parishes independently of the Roman Catholic Church were unsuccessful not only because of incessant disputes with priests about the right to own and maintain church property but also because of failures to raise sufficient funds for creating and keeping up a new parish and to find competent clergy to lead a parish spiritually and to administer it bureaucratically. Kristina Vaitkevičienė in her article reconstructs the historical development of the Lithuanian National Catholic Church, presents its network of parishes and

the priests working therein, and elucidates the associated problems. Interpreting the Church's texts and related audiovisual material, Artūras Grickevičius analyzes the features of that religious community's liturgy, dogmatics, ecclesiology, and apologetics, and highlights differences from the official Roman Catholic doctrine and practice on these issues. Giedrė Milerytė-Japertienė presents the relationship between the Lithuanian and the Polish National Catholic Churches as an example of harmonious cooperation.

The Lithuanian National Catholic Church was active not only in the United States. There were endeavors to establish a "national church" in Lithuania itself during its period of national independence (1918–1940) and later during the early years of Soviet occupation. The first initiative to found a "national church" in Lithuania was led by the Lithuanian National Catholic Church already based in the U.S. The second, later effort was part of a larger Soviet political, anticlerical endeavor. These attempts to found a "national church" are the topic of Iлона Strumickienė's paper. Finally, a look at the present-day situation is provided by Ingrida Celiešiūtė in her paper on the character of the Scranton parish's ethnoreligious identity. The Lithuanian National Catholic Church was a creation of one of the oldest waves of Lithuanian immigration to America. Those Lithuanians that came after World War II did not join this religious community at all. Thus the natural assimilation (Americanization) of its second and later generations substantially reduced the size of the national church's membership and the number of its communities. The only presently active Providence of God parish in Scranton is palpable proof of that.