

# EUROPE

## **BELARUS, Minsk**

*Minsk Theological Seminary (MTS),*

Founding of group responsible for youth activities of **Belarussian Orthodox Church**  
**On** 21-23.09.2001 a practical seminar dedicated to the World Day of **Prayer for Creation** was organised by a preparatory committee, **consisting** of the members of the Fellowship of **Orthodox Youth of K. Ostrozhski and St. Nikolaj Orthodox Youth** brotherhood. **Nine** students and a lecturer of the **MTS** were **invited**. **As** the result of this seminar we decided to create an **initiative** group for youth activities of the **Belarussian Orthodox Church**, the members of which are **not** yet decided.

### ***Unite in Pilgrimage to Holy Mount of Grabarka***

18–20 May, 10 young people from **Belarus** (members of the Theological Faculty and the **Brotherhood of Three Vilnya Martyrs**), **joined** with 100 other young people **in** the annual pilgrimage to the Holy Mount of Grabarka, **Poland**, organised by the Fellowship of **Orthodox Youth in Poland**. This pilgrimage was an excellent opportunity for the **Belarussian** youth to get an **insight into** the life of the Fellowship, to re-establish contacts, and to **think** about future cooperation.

### ***Former General Secretary of SYNDESMOS visits Belarussian Youth***

The participation of the **Belarussians** was partly **inspired** by the **visit** to the **Brotherhood of Three Vilnya Martyrs of Wladimir Misijuk (Poland)**, to **speak** to the youth gathering for the celebration of the World Day of **Orthodox Youth**. He **spoke** about the experience of **starting** the **FOY in Poland**. It was very **important** for the youth to hear about the practical **knowledge** of their **Polish** brothers and sisters, particularly as **in Belarus** there is **no national organization** of **Orthodox** youth.

Further contacts envisaged...

Moreover the possibilities of further cooperation between the two **Belarussian** groups have been **discussed** between **Nikolaj Bolochovsky**, contact person for the theological faculty, and **Olga Oleinik**, **SYNDESMOS** Central Europe **Regional Representative**. A meeting about **SYNDESMOS**, to **introduce** young people to **its life and work** has been proposed but has **not** yet taken place.

### ***World Day of Orthodox Youth***

15-17 February **in Minsk**, 10 **Orthodox** youth movements will attend a gathering to mark the celebration of the World Day of **Orthodox Youth** 2/15 February 2002. The meeting of **Belarussian Orthodox** youth on the feast of the **Meeting of the Lord** has **now** become an annual event. **In** a response to the need expressed amongst the young people last year for a **centralised** coordination of youth activities **in Belarus** in the future, **it is** hoped that this year's meeting will establish the "**Union of Orthodox Youth of the Belarussian Exarchate**".

### ***Day of prayer for Creation***

With the blessing of his Eminence Metropolitan Filaret, an ecological practical seminar was held 21-23rd September dedicated to the Day of Prayer for Creation, at the House of interchurch communication "Koinonia". Father George Volkovinski (Gomel), Father Aliaksei Klimau (Minsk), the representatives of Minsk Theological Seminary and youth fellowships of Minsk diocese all took part.

The three-day seminar aimed to raise awareness of the Orthodox tradition and our relations with the environment, to highlight our responsibility for its preservation, and to plan joint action in improving the ecological situation.

The seminar included three lectures: the first by Aliaksei Belanozhka (Minsk Theological Seminary) on "Environment as God's creation. Our responsibility for its preservation"; The second by Natalia Svjatkina (chairperson of the "Green Cross"), and the last by father George Volkovinski on "Orthodox tradition and practice as a response to modern ecological crisis", which emphasized our mission to be ministers of creation and our duty to transfigure the world.

The presentation of the group discussions which followed drew the unanimous conclusion that the first and foremost task is our personal spiritual growth - ie the ecological problem is anthropocentric. Naturally, some young people suggested concrete activities, including cooperation with youth of other confessions and social structures that work in ecological direction.

Also during the Seminar, participants set up a cross in front of the house in the place of the future Orthodox chapel of St. Fedor Astozhski. This was especially symbolic on the eve of the holiday of 27th September. We sang vespers near the cross, during which we read Old Testament texts, referring to the fact that the Lord preserves His Church even in difficult situations.

As a result of the Seminar, amongst other conclusions, participants have agreed to create a committee to plan joint activities in ecological and other directions for the unity of Orthodox youth in Belarus.

### **PHOTO**

*Participants in the seminar in Belarus set up a cross to mark the World Day of Prayer for Creation, September 1 / 14 (see opposite page 27)*

### **BELGIUM**

*Orthodox Youth Choir sing Memory Eternal for the victims of the catastrophe of September 11 in America*

On 15 September 2001 the Orthodox Youth Choir of St Jean Damascene, directed by Serge Sorret, received a warm welcome in Bruges from around 100 people who came to listen to their concert, and to pray.

The Choir was made up of eight young people from **Paris** and two from **Nice**. They came to **Bruges** on the **invitation** of the **Orthodox** parish of **Saints Constantine and Helen in Bruges**, and the concert took place **in** the church of the **Jesuit fathers**. **Fr Athenagoras (Peckstadt)** welcomed the choir and gave a short **introduction on liturgical music in the Orthodox church**.

The Choir began the concert by **singing the kondakion** for the dead, followed by **Memory Eternal** for all the **victims** of the catastrophe **in the United States**. This was then followed by **hymns** from **vespers and matins** for the **Nativity**.

We would **like** to thank these young people **once more** for the concert, which **in fact** was **not considered a concert** at all, but rather a prayer by which we were brought a little **nearer to God**.

The Choir are expected **once again in Bruges** some time **in 2002**, the year **in which Bruges will be the cultural capital of Europe**.

*Bernard Peckstadt, Orthodox Youth of Belgium*

## **FINLAND**

*Autumn event in Valamo monastery*

**ONL**, The **Orthodox Youth Association** of **Finland** organized its **annual autumn event in Valamo**, the **Holy Transfiguration monastery**, 16-18 November 2001. This year's event had two **main characteristics**: lots of people and lots of crosses. Every year more and more people are **interested** to come to the event. This time there were almost 130 **participants**. This year—because the theme was the **Life-giving Cross**—lots of **different kind** of crosses were brought across the world to the **monastery**. The **biggest cross** was five metres high, a **light cross** specially built for this event. The **igumen** of the **monastery** gave a talk about the **meaning** of the **Cross in our lives**.

**On Saturday afternoon** there were **different workshops**, **in which participants** could make their own **cross, sing, perform.. etc**. The **workshop in which participants** were shooting a **video** about the other groups was especially **interesting**. The material was edited with computer and **shown in the evening** as a **modern PowerPoint-show**. All other groups also presented the results of their **workshops** at the **evening gathering**.

The **traditional procession** to the **monastery graveyard** late **in the Saturday evening** was again **touching** as always. Just as the **Cross unites** all the **Christians in the world**, so the **Divine Liturgy and participation** of the **Holy Eucharist unites** all **Orthodox**. The event **ended** after the **Divine Liturgy on Sunday** and everyone left for home with the **Cross in his or her mind**—this time even to the **northern-most parts of Finland**, all the way to **Lapland**.

*Teemu Toivonen, ONL / Pistis, Finland*

## **GREAT BRITAIN**

*London meeting 17-18 November*

In November 2001 an informal gathering took place over a weekend in London that involved 40 young people, most of them members of Syndesmos member movements. Such a meeting was a natural consequence of the Syndesmos Festival in Saint Maurin (Aug 2001 France) and happened in a very organic way. Clearly, for many participants, the end of the Festival was not the end of a relationship. They knew that they would not be satisfied simply to go home and wait until some inspired person organises another SYNDESMOS event, to enable them to meet again. This is precisely how it came about that some members of Acer-MJO (France) and of GOYGB (UK), literally on the point of saying goodbye at the Festival, decided to meet in England in the autumn, in order to discuss what activity (if any) they could undertake together. The plan for the meeting to come was not extremely precise at that point. Everyone was enthusiastic, and not many had an aim for the meeting, they only knew that they would enjoy meeting each other, and would have a lovely time together. As time passed, the intention of meeting didn't weaken, and a couple of people from both the French and British side started actually planning something. They thought that since Acer-MJO and GOYGB both organise children camps, and both face the challenge of providing a Christian education to teenagers, they could meet over the idea of further activities in common. It seemed easier in a way to start by organising a bilateral preparatory meeting on a specific theme. But when the proposal for an Acer-MJO/GOYGB exchange preparatory meeting was spread via e-mail, it became obvious that what people wanted was much wider than an exchange for two movements. People from other movements and other countries wanted to come, including people that were members of no movement at all.



*Participants from Great Britain, France, the Netherlands and Belgium at the informal youth gathering in London, November 2001*

The draft programme had **initially been centred on discussing** the further co-operation of two movements; it was reshaped **in** order to be of general **interest and then remained** rough enough to allow **any last minute changes**.

At that **point** it was clear that there would be about 15 people from abroad, **and** about 15 more from all over **England**: with **no place to stay**.

There was a shared feeling of urgency because we all **knew** that when projects are postponed they are **in danger of never happening** at all. **Still** the idea of rented accommodation was **not considered**, because the weekend had to be **kept low cost**; the idea was that as many people as possible should be able to participate. We ended up **in London, in** a friend's flat; girls **in** the living-room, boys **in** a spare room; the hostess was **kind enough** to share her bedroom with three girls... People came from France, **Belgium**, the Netherlands, there was also a participant from the **USA, and another** from Hungary. We all (almost all) helped preparing the meals, when there was **not enough** food for everyone (new people **kept arriving**) plates of fish & chips seemed to appear out of nowhere.

We had three **discussion sessions in** a relaxed **and** at the same time serious atmosphere: some **concrete results** have come or **will most probably** come out of them, **sometimes opening unexpected perspectives** to the participants. The organising committee members for a **Syndesmos event in** the UK (see Calendar of events 2002) was recruited, a programme was drafted. Acer-MJO and GOYGB camp leaders agreed **on activities** for the 15 to 17 age group. **Everyone** felt **enthusiastic with** the idea of **contributing** to the **Syndesmos General Assembly** (due **in** 2003) to offer help to the General Secretariat, to make sure their member movements **send delegates** that are aware of how **important Syndesmos is** for the life of the Church. **Another project that is in** the process of **being implemented** while these **lines** are written was to have a **new year gathering organised in** Cambridge **and** hosted by the **Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies**.

The real aim that came **naturally** from the **discussions**, was that **it is time** for us to become more **conscious** of our **engagement with Christ in** the Church. We cannot **anymore remain closed in on** ourselves **within** our small towns or our local movements, but we have to go out, to go forward to meet **one another and** to realise the Gospel **in** the life of our local communities. To perform **this greatest aim**, we need to gather together, share our thoughts, our preoccupations. The "**nucleus**" that was **constituted in London**, following **Saint-Maurin Festival**, seems able to **undertake** the **organisation** of common youth activities, **in a spirit** of love. This "**nucleus**" is ready to **extend itself** to all young people who want to collaborate for their **neighbour in** order to be real **witnesses** of Christ.

**Of course, it is not enough**: every place where young people live **needs** such teams. At the **end** of the day, what **is** the result of our **Christian baptism**? **Isn't it** that we become **brothers and sisters**, the different members of the **single Body of Christ**? Have you ever **seen** **brothers and sisters** – a family – where we love each **another without seeing** each other **and sharing** a few days together?

*Lydia Obolensky D'Aloisio (lydiao@wanadoo.fr)*

## HUNGARY

*SYNDESMOS is happy to foster links and facilitate contacts with ALL Orthodox youth. Recently, the Orthodox Youth in Hungary have been sending participants to our events. Whilst they are not members of SYNDESMOS, we are glad of the opportunity of learning more about the Orthodox Youth in Hungary and their activities. The report below of the second Orthodox Youth camp organised by clergy and lay people from all the Orthodox jurisdictions in Hungary opens a small door onto the activities of the Orthodox youth in this region.*

Father **Sergej Bilku**, with the help of us young people, organized a youth camp in Gy•ngy•s this summer from July 29 to August 4. Gy•ngy•s is a scenic town about 50 kms from Budapest. It has a small but lovely Orthodox church. The meeting took place with the blessing of Archbishop **Pavel Ponomarev** (Budapest/Vienna), and from 20 to 40 participants from Orthodox parishes located within Hungary. **Sister Agnes**, who lives alone in this monastery, was our very gracious host.

The week opened with an exhibition displaying the works of local Hungarian Orthodox artists, including icons, embroidery, and sculptures. On the fifth day, the choir gave a concert in the town square, in order to give the public an opportunity to learn more about the Orthodox Church.

Our main goal was to revive the relationship and establish closer links with the bishops, priests, and believers from the various Orthodox Churches located here in Hungary - to reinforce and re-establish a sense of community, by way of common daily services and lectures held by Father **Danilo Krstic** (Serbian bishop of Budapest), Father **Tibor Imr•nyi** (Hungarian, in Szeged), Father **Nikolaj Kim** (Russian, in Budapest), and Bishop **Sofronij Drincec** (Romanian, in Gyula).



*Participants in the second Orthodox Youth Camp in Hungary, together with Fr Sergei (main organiser) and Fr Tibor (lecturer)*

The **highpoint** of the camp was **definitely** the celebration of the **Divine Liturgy** on the last day. It was here that we experienced the real **unity** of Acts 4:32: "Now the multitude of those who believed were of **one heart and one soul**." **Is it not** sadly remarkable that three **bishops** from three **different jurisdictions** could be found together **under one roof, and praising God in unity?! After the Liturgy** we had a wonderful agape lunch **in** the courtyard; it was **simple and rejuvenating** and very full of joy.

**Our hope is** that we will be able to **enjoy** more camps and **gatherings like this in** the future. Glory to God for his great **kindness and generosity**, one of the richest **displays** of which **is** the coming-together of his people!

*Irene Kaulics, Orthodox Youth of Hungary*