



The discussion at Etchmiadzin.

should mention above all the true brotherly and sisterly friendship which appeared among the participants; it also became clear that by having this friendship in Christ as a foundation for communication, we can discuss difficult issues of our faith, religion, and culture without placing ourselves in opposition to one another. Common solutions can be found with humility and repentance. We have a long way to go before we can remove the obstacles erected by previous mistakes and conflicts.

We are grateful to all local organisers - members, Youth of Jrvezh, and personally to Lilit Sargsyan, who did a wonderful job for preparation and implementation of this meeting, Fr. Dajad A. Davidian and the staff of the Holy See of Etchmiadzin - Fr. Hovakim Manukyan and Eliza Manukyan. For them, being new to Syndesmos this meeting was a perfect introduction to the life of the Fellowship and a real test on trustful and effective cooperation.

During the last day of the encounter the group went on an excursion to Etchmiadzin. There the international participants had the honour of meeting his holiness Catholicos Karekin II, who expressed his joy over this first encounter and his wish for an even stronger cooperation with Syndesmos in the future.

*Olga Oleinik,
Spyros Tsimouris, Outi Vasko*



The international participants and Catholicos Karekin II.

Syndesmos members activities

*Common work, fun
and prayer*

25 years of the Fellowship
of Orthodox Youth in Poland

Year 2005 marked the 25th anniversary of the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth in Poland. This splendid event was celebrated in various ways during almost the entire year. The first part started with the film show describing the history and present life of the fellowship, which took place in March in Bia_ystok, the town where the headquarters of the fellowship are located, with about 300 people in attendance.

“Day of Open Doors” was another event to introduce more people to the work of the fellowship. Young people visited the main office in Bia_ystok and observed the work of the managing board. There were talks and discussion about the aims and the work of the fellowship.

The biggest common event was organised in one of the fellowship's center in a small village in the east of Poland, with a river and beautiful landscapes around. It was called “Summer Festival”. People gathered together for three days to pray, discuss, and have fun, celebrating the anniversary of their organization. The program consisted of the championships of small parish groups, where the people could show their creativity or sportsmanship. There was also a film show, common volleyball match, and a special event - an auction of the historical fellowship's gadgets - T-shirts, posters from the pilgrimages, balls with logo etc. Saturday's lunch was prepared from the ingredients brought by the participants and the common soup was cooked. There was also a short discussion about the fellowship's history, prepared by the founders of the organization, its first workers, and volunteers.

During the whole event there was also place for the common prayer. On Saturday and Sunday, liturgies were celebrated, where the people took part in the Eucharist and gave thanks to God for the common years of work and entertainment within the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth.

The last part of celebrating the anniversary was the photo exhibition “25 years of the fellowship in Poland” connected with the show of the film about the organization. All of the events were visited by the hierarchy of the Church, who participated together with parish priests and the youth.

The Fellowship of the Orthodox Youth in Poland was established in 1980. During the difficult political situation (years of communism in Poland) a group of people tried to create the organization, which



At the celebrations.

could help young people to actively participate in the life of the Church, as well as to meet and get to know one another. The “good soul” of the whole initiative was a young theologian Jan Anchimiuk, who later on became an archbishop of the Wrocław and Szczecin Diocese. The organization evolved during the years. At the very beginning it organised summer camps for children and common youth paschal pilgrimages for youth, afterwards the fellowship began cooperation with Syndesmos, WSCF and so on. Now it works actively on the international level, as well as on the regional one. The fellowship still tries to actively teach about the faith, but also to integrate young, Orthodox people in Poland.

The Orthodox Church in Poland consists of about 500 000 worshippers, which comprises more than 1% of the whole Polish population (mainly Roman-Catholic). The administration consists of 6 dioceses. Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church takes part in the work of the international organizations (WCC, CEC etc.). Its (young) members also work in the field of ecumenism in WCC's office in Geneva. Our Church, although small, is well known for the activity of youth, gathered within the Fellowship of the Orthodox Youth.

There are several Church newspapers, and two especially active web pages - the informational one (www.Cerkiew.pl), and the one exhibiting photos about Orthodoxy (www.Orthphoto.net), both prepared and edited by youth. A lot of these activities have their roots in the work within the fellowship, which now bears its fruits.

Anna Siegien



Birthday cake of the Polish Fellowship.

Exploring Lithuania with a Cross Procession

Lithuanian Orthodox youth took part in a Cross Procession from Paneviežis to Gegobrastai. The new Tihvin icon of the Theotokos, painted by Olga Bogomolova, was also carried in the Cross Procession. The icon was painted during one of the icon-painting camps, which are held in Gegobrastai. During the year the icon is kept in Panieviežis Resurrection of Christ church. Then before the icon's feast day on the 8th of July 2005 it is carried with a Cross Procession to the church in Gegobrastai and stays there for the duration of the icon-painting camp.

Gegobrastai village is well known among Orthodox Christians in Lithuania. Firstly, because famous protopresbyter Nikolai Gurianov used to be the rector of the church there. He named Gegobrastai the “second Athos”. Secondly in the beginning of 20th century, saint martyr archbishop John (Pommer) of Riga, organised Cross Processions to Gegobrastai from other cities.

The Cross Procession started with a short service. In Catholic Lithuania an Orthodox procession is a very unusual event, so therefore, the local people were very interested in seeing Orthodox youth walking and singing psalms. It was very hot (appr. 30AC) and the way was very hard. The Procession arrived at Gegobrastai in the evening and had a rest. In the morning the Divine Liturgy was celebrated. In total, the procession travelled 42 km in 11 hours of walking. However, the main objective of the Procession was not to cover this distance, but to bring together young and old Orthodox Christians in Lithuania for celebration and witness of their common faith. Those interested in participation in the similar Cross Procession in 2006 are invited to send their applications to the address: antjan@takas.lt.

Natallia Vasilevich on the basis of reports of the Cross Procession participants



The young and old together in the Cross Procession.

XII Orthodox Congress in Western European



The Congress at work.

The XII Orthodox Congress in Western Europe took place 29-31 October 2005 in Blankenberge (Belgium). The theme of this gathering was “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev 21:5). The main goal of such congresses is to gather the Orthodox from different jurisdictions for common worship, communication and discussion of common issues of the church life in Western Europe. The congresses are organised once in three years. Approximately 600 people from France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Great Britain and other countries including a large number of youth and children participated in the past congress.

The congress started with the talk of Bertrand Vergely, philosophy professor of St. Serge Institute in Paris, entitled “Human being: depersonalisation or renewal”. The next day Oxford University professor, bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, delivered the lecture “The new heaven and new earth”, and the closing address “The challenges of the Church in the third millennium” was made by Michel Stavrou, professor of dogmatics at St. Serge’s. In conclusion Archbishop Gabriel of Komana and Fr. John Gueit summed up the results of the Congress.

Fr. Serge Sollogoub shared his impression of the event: “This Congress was exceptional due to the fact that many people from the old generation of theologians previously active in the Orthodox Fellowship in Western Europe (Olivier Clément, Fr. Boris Bobrinskoj, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, deacon Nikolaj Lossky) were not present because of age, illness or other reasons. Their absence from the meeting was a challenge to us. Thanks God



Common worship in many languages.

everything went well and this proved that the Fellowship has a future even if our dear founding fathers and mothers are not there. We can continue their mission and new congresses will be organised at a high level.”

Olga Oleinik

on the basis of the materials from the website www.sfi.ru

Orthodox Theology Student Discuss Issues of Human Sexuality

The Orthodox Student Association and Pistis, the Association for Students of Theology, organised a seminar on relationships (Joensuu, Finland, 18 - 20.11.2005). Traditionally the Orthodox teaching deals mostly with marriage and life in a monastery or convent. In our times, other options have emerged. In Finland more and more people live alone (it is financially possible) and young couples date often long before marriage. Couples of the same sex can marry legally. Medicine makes it possible to control birth, both with effective prevention and fertility treatments. The clergy may be unfamiliar with these matters and therefore regard them as scary signs of secularism. This leads to denial and often rejection of people who would need pastoral care just like anyone else. Our times call for theology on these matters that would be rooted in Orthodox tradition.

The keynote speakers of the seminar showed that it is possible to face these challenges while respecting the people and without using double standards. For example, people who are dating can be helped to understand the responsibility they have for the other person. In this way they can prepare themselves for the Sacrament of Love. There has always been and will always be homosexually oriented people. The time has come for our Churches and local communities to change their attitude from eluding this fact to formulating and following clear pastoral approaches based on the principles of Holy Scripture and Tradition to integrate such people into the communities.

Sexual relationships are less discussed in tradition. For example, few of the people we remember as Saints were married. Sexuality has not been discussed in public, and for a reason. It is a very private and intimate matter. However, in their work the clergy have to face it just as all the other aspects of humanity. The question is whether they are prepared for it. Can they meet another human being as a God-created person, or do they see in him/her only an expression of sexuality?

Altti Moisala, Finland



Fr. Teemu Toivonen speaking at the seminar.

In the previous issue of “Syndesmos News” (Volume XVIII-1) we reported on the conference “Youth in the Church: Problems and the Ways to Solve them”, which took place in Moscow 16-21 February 2005. In this issue we include one of the statements of the conference entitled “Church Community, Liturgical Life and Christian Service”. The statements were written by a special working group and unanimously approved by all participants of the conference.

We consider that this statement deserves attention of “Syndesmos News” readers as it represents the position of the most active youth workers of the Orthodox Church in Russia on vital issues of Church life.

Church Community, Liturgical Life and Christian Service



The participants of the Conference.

1. The purpose, sphere of activity and tasks of the church community

The purpose, sphere of activity and tasks of the church community (orthodox parish) are identical to those of the Church as a whole. A parish is the Church expressed in a concrete and visible community. The task of a church community can be generally defined as the salvation of a person in Christ. The centre of a church community's life is the Eucharist, its sphere of activity church services, the realisation of the spiritual life at parish level and the expression of these two things in external service, i.e. the gospel in word and deed. Having united themselves to Christ in the Eucharist, Christians are called to take His gift into the world through their lives and Christian, including social, service.

The activity of a community outside church services proceeds naturally from its Eucharistic life and must in the first instance be directed at the parish itself. Only after this can it be widened beyond this to missionary and social service.

2. Principles of relations between the clergy and laity

The basic principles of relations between the parish priest and the

church community can be defined as living as a family, brotherhood and fatherhood, the expression of love and trust between all the members of the parish, both priests and parishioners. In spiritual terms the ideal situation is for the parish priest and other priests of the parish to be the spiritual fathers of the parishioners. On the other hand, the parishioners and priests must observe a certain subordination in their mutual relations, as one often comes across cases of distortion of the principle of fatherhood; for example the sort of relationship, which divides people up into “one of us” and “one of them”, or cases, where one or another community feels itself to be somehow elite. It is essential to understand that such relations are sometimes fostered and provoked by the priest himself.

It is worth noting the importance of the obedience of the parishioners to the priest based on a conscious choice of him as spiritual guide (in the sphere of personal spiritual life), and also based on the status of the service of the priest (in teaching the faith and church administration). At the same time the priest is called to remember that the laity in their entirety constitute, according the apostle Peter “a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Peter 2 - 9). Therefore the participation of the whole parish in taking important