

PASTORAL CARE FOR A POST WORLD WAR II COMMUNITY IN

AUSTRALIA:

THE UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLICS

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Background

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church is both ethnically and ritually diverse. I mean by that that most members of the Church are of Slavic ethnic origins, although these days due to marriage many come from other ethnicities, myself included. Matters are complicated even more by the ritual difference of a Church which derives its liturgical life from the Byzantine Rite. Vatican II, in *Lumen Gentium*, referred to:

. . .different Churches set up in various places by the apostles and their successors joined together in a multiplicity of organically united groups which, whilst safeguarding the unity of faith and the unique divine structure of the universal Church, have their own discipline, enjoy their own liturgical usage and inherit a theological and spiritual heritage.¹

This provided a challenge for Ukrainian Catholics who came to Australia mainly as displaced persons from Germany in the wake of WW II. Initially they came with their own priests from Europe and later Canada. Some of these priests were married, as was the custom in Ukraine and other places. Fr Smol, the first married priest went through the immigration system of the time, was sent to Bonegilla and then eventually came to Melbourne where he worked as a labourer by night and each morning celebrated the Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom in Slavonic in the Archbishop's personal chapel at St Patricks. Other bishops did not share Mannix's tolerance for married priests of the Eastern Churches; so Fr Smol was sent packing (to Florida as it turned out) and married clergy did not emerge again until after the Australian Bishops' conference overwhelmingly approved a motion presented by the then newly appointed Ukrainian Bishop Peter Stasiuk in 1996. The essence of the issue was that in Ukraine most priests in parish ministry are married. There simply is no pool of celibate priests available

In the light of this sliver of Church history, Ukrainian Catholics are shocked to learn today of plans in Europe to form one Byzantine Metropolia for all Eastern Catholics of the Byzantine Rite. Such a plan appears to fly in the face of pastoral care which takes ethnicity fully into account.

¹ LG, # 23

What worked?

- Given that celibate priests were not readily available some religious orders such as the Redemptorists, the Dominicans and the Sacred Heart Fathers helped by providing priests from their communities.
- Churches and community halls for local communities were purchased or built. In this way provision was made for people of the same language to gather and share information; help on common or similar issues could then be more readily provided.
- Parish brotherhoods developed credit unions early on to help with housing loans and financial planning.
- In the 1950s priests identified with the problems of migrants because they themselves were often émigrés.
- Ethnically mixed marriages were often perceived as a problem at least by the clergy. It is no surprise that a principal topic discussed at clergy conferences was the problem of marrying out and how to prevent it. Most weddings are ethnically mixed even if between a Ukrainian Catholic and a Roman Catholic. There are exceptions, but they are becoming more unusual. Most of those in ethnically mixed marriages can't be fully at home in this situation, unless they effectively become Ukrainian Catholics who offer hospitality to a marriage partner from elsewhere. Parishes leaders frequently ignore this issue.
- During the last 20 years at least some things have changed: The marriage Liturgy known as *Crowning* is usually conducted in English. However the local custom of the procession of bride and father accompanied by the bridal party has all but supplanted the custom of assembling the families of both couples at the entrance to the narthex where the betrothal takes place.

Challenges

- Some would go so far as to say that a quasi-Ukrainian ghetto has been set up by a powerful in-group who maintain strong nationalist sympathies especially given the present crisis in Ukraine created by the Russian invasion of Crimea and further aggression on the borders.
- One effect of this approach is the aging of parishes. Nearly all of the first generation has gone. Youth seldom attend regular Church services. Sunday attendance is in severe decline.
- Very few return to attend regular Sunday worship after the baptism of an infant. This is mainly a family event with little connection to Sunday worship

The success story:

- Many problems were solved by forming a cohesive likeminded community of Ukrainians which maintains a strong federation.

- There are many successful professionals in medicine, nursing and education (many chose to become doctors, nurses and teachers for their profession); others have achieved success as academics in Australian Universities; the world of business was successfully chosen by many.
- **The First generation** came from agricultural stock: their children were like them but were the first to form relationships outside the community (They are stuck in their own past: i.e. the 1960s). However the following describes that reality

Ethnic Schools Ukrainian is often learnt as a 2nd language

(English is first spoken language)

The Multi lingual reality is still working

Dance groups These are a very popular, athletic outlet for youth

PLAST & CYM These outdoor groups are not quite so successful as they once were. They are struggling to maintain a connection with the Church.

They struggle with identity and change

The Church Came from diverse places; built parishes and became a community

Transition from village life to urban cosmopolitanism

Village: cohesive, generational identity, walk to church,
the village priest (usually married);

the Church the soul of the village

Belonging: face to face relationships

Urban life: Church at a distance; neighbours; the priest is now a Professional who services births, deaths and marriages; going to Church is a decision rather than an integral part of life.

Points on Ethnicity:

1. The Founding fathers came from Ukraine via Germany; they were political refugees and displaced persons; their children were mostly born in Australia; essentially non-attenders; separate existence

2. Children born in Australia or who came as infants; 1st wave of Yugoslav migrants in the 70s; non-attenders
3. 1991 Post Soviet Ukraine; immigration of *homo sovieticus*
4. Late to mid-90s second immigration after dissolution of Yugoslavia
5. Almost all immigrants in ethnically mixed marriages
6. Of 18 active priests 8 were born outside of Australia

What have I learnt?

No group is sufficient to itself, especially not the westernised pagan culture that now dominates the public life of Australia.

The tribe, the culture the languages of the group from which I came are precious to me for they gave me life.

Family and church are the strongest generators of meaning available to me in this life.