

mouc. Around 1,000 Christians took part.

While the Czechoslovak government continues to insist that it is 'striving for the best possible relations with the churches and the faithful' and that it is 'prepared to take up all well-intentioned suggestions' for improving relations with the churches*, there is little evidence to support these claims. When last January police forces brutally broke up assemblies in Prague to mark the 20th anniversary of Jan Palach's self-immolation, Cardinal Tomášek wrote to Prime Minister Adamec in protest. 'Citizens wanted to use the occasion of the

anniversary of Palach's death. . . to express their desire for full freedom.' The Cardinal said that believers' trust in the system had been shattered by the action of the security forces, ending his letter with an appeal to the government to 'start immediate negotiations with the Church and all citizens!' If Czechoslovak citizens, religious believers included, continue to voice their grievances so publicly, it may be only a matter of time before the government is forced to negotiate.

*Compiled by members of
Keston College staff*

Recent Changes in Lithuania

In recent months the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania has taken advantage of the opportunities offered by *glasnost** to obtain a number of concessions from the Soviet authorities. Undoubtedly the greatest achievement for the Catholics was the return to the church of Vilnius Cathedral after 38 years during which it was used first as a storehouse and then as a picture gallery. On 23 October 1988 a public announcement was made on television that the cathedral was to revert to religious use, after Cardinal Sladkevičius, the leading Lithuanian bishop, had rejected a state offer to allow the building to be used only periodically for religious services. A mass held the next day by Cardinal Sladkevičius and three other Lithuanian bishops on the steps of the cathedral, in front of thousands of Catholics packed into the square outside, was followed by an even more emotional event on Sunday

5 February — when the cathedral was reconsecrated by Bishop Julijonas Steponavičius the 77-year-old apostolic administrator of Vilnius diocese. Bishop Steponavičius, exiled by the authorities to the small village of Žagare since 1961, was allowed to take up his duties in Vilnius once again. For the 30,000 Lithuanian Catholics who filled the Cathedral and Gediminas Square, the service of reconsecration was a double victory.

The service on 5 February, like that on 23 October, was broadcast on Lithuanian television. The broadcast included a speech by Nijole Sadunaite, who had served a sentence from 1974-80 in labour camps and exile for her work on the *samizdat Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*. She spoke on behalf of all

*Prime Minister Adamec to church representatives on the occasion of 70th anniversary of the republic — 28 October 1988.

prisoners of conscience who had never returned to their Lithuanian homeland. Amongst the congregation in Vilnius Cathedral was Rev. M. Bourdeaux, the only western visitor to receive a visa in time to attend the proceedings. Later he spoke of the impression made on him by the 'quiet dignity' of the massive crowd during the three hour service.

Bishop Steponavičius personified this dignity: never in private or in public a word of self-pity, only an indication to me that a regime of more than a quarter of a century of reading and prayer during his time of enforced exile, with only minimal contact with the world outside, had strengthened his faith.

The cathedral was not the only church building in Vilnius to be returned to church use. St Kazimir's Church, used since the 1950s as a museum of atheism, was reconsecrated on 4 March 1989. In addition, the Soviet authorities have given permission for a new church to be built in the modern suburb of Justiniškes.

At the beginning of February, the first issue of a new Catholic journal in Lithuania — *Kataliku Pasaulis* (Catholic World) — was published. This is the first official Lithuanian religious periodical for 40 years. A print-run of 10,000 fortnightly has been promised.

Another significant development was the somewhat unexpected declaration by the Soviet authorities that All Saints Day and Christmas Day are to be public holidays in the Lithuanian SSR. Attendance at churches and cemeteries on these two religious festivals in 1988 was massive, even by normal standards, according to Lithuanian sources.

The theological seminary in Kaunas has been allowed to increase the quota of first year students to 46 — more than in any other year since the war. An article proclaiming the fact

appeared in the main daily newspaper *Tiesa* on 8 December 1988.

A number of prominent Lithuanian Catholic prisoners of conscience were released in October and November of last year. Helsinki monitors Viktoras Petkus and Balys Gajauskas, both of whom were serving 15-year sentences, arrived back in Lithuania at the beginning of November, as did the poet and journalist Gintautas Iešmantas and the Catholic priest Fr Sigitas Tamkevičius. Fr Tamkevičius, a founder of the Catholic Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights, for which he received a ten-year sentence in 1983, was welcomed back to Vilnius by 400 of his parishioners from Kybartai, waving Lithuanian and papal flags. All prominent Lithuanian political prisoners have now been freed.

Lithuanian Catholic activists, as well as former prisoners, have become involved in the new national movements which have appeared as a result of *perestroika* — the Lithuanian Movement to support Restructuring (*Sajudis*) and the more radical Lithuanian Freedom League. Demonstrations organised by the two groups, such as that against the Ignalina nuclear power station in September, are often preceded by a Roman Catholic service. Celebrations of Lithuanian Independence Day on 16 February, officially tolerated this year for the first time since the war, included a mass at Kaunas Cathedral. One of the speakers at a rally in Kaunas to rededicate a Monument to Freedom, removed in the 1940s by the Soviet authorities, was Cardinal Sladkevičius.

Like all Christians in the Soviet Union, Lithuanian Catholics are awaiting with hope the promised new law on freedom of conscience. In an interview with *Kathpress* on 16 January, Bishop Steponavičius expressed the hope that this would include 'real

changes' — especially concerning the religious education of minors. He also felt that it was extremely important to build churches in

the new city suburbs of the post-war era.

MARITE SAPIETS

The Church in Ukraine — 1988

Greek-Catholic Bishop Isidore Borcky of Toronto visited Ukraine in September, 1988. His report is given here in a slightly abridged form.

On the death of Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky in 1944 and the conclusion of the Second World War, the Stalin government moved to suppress the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic church. In 1945 all the bishops in Western Ukraine were arrested. In 1946 a mock 'synod' was held, virtually at gun point, which proclaimed the 'reunion' of the Greek-Catholic Church with the Russian Orthodox Church. Since 1946 the Greek-Catholic Church in Ukraine has been *de facto* illegal: in other words, the Soviet government regards the Greek-Catholic Church as an illegal assembly not entitled to the rights accorded other religious bodies.

In the early years, priests were arrested in very large numbers, along with religious and lay people. Over the past two decades, fewer priests were actually imprisoned, but arrests occurred often enough to remind everyone that no one was safe. For the last year or so, no priest has been actually imprisoned for the 'crime' of conducting Greek-Catholic worship — but instead both priests and laity have suffered heavy fines.

All of the properties and church buildings of the Greek-Catholic Church were given to the Russian Orthodox Church in 1946. In the intervening years, rather more than half of the functioning churches have

been closed to any religious use. Today slightly more than 2,000 formerly Catholic parishes are still functioning under the aegis of the Russian Orthodox Church. The faithful — and not infrequently even the clergy — of these parishes usually retain the consciousness of being Catholic and will say so readily.

'Illegal' Greek-Catholic services have been held wherever there was a priest to serve — often even without a priest. To replace the clergy who died or were killed, new priests have been ordained. Sometimes the Catholic priests are able to celebrate the Eucharist in actual church buildings which are legally considered closed, but in the great majority of cases the Divine Liturgy and other services must be held in private premises, or in the open air.

There are about five million Greek-Catholic faithful in Western Ukraine, plus a large but indeterminate number elsewhere in the Soviet Union [. . .]

With the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev, and the whole movement of *perestroika*, hopes have risen for the restoration of equal rights to the Greek-Catholic Church (this is often referred to as the struggle for legalisation of the Catholic Church). The specific goals of this movement include a formal recognition of the church's right to exist and function, the right of the clergy to hold divine services and of the faithful to attend services without legal, social, or political repercus-