

Our Ukrainian flock thriving in New Zealand

Published in Church and Life 23.3.2010 - 11.4.2010 No 6

On Thursday 8th April, Bishop Peter and Fr Felix travelled as part of a small Ukrainian posse to visit the burgeoning Ukrainian community of New Zealand. On Monday 12th, Bishop Peter spoke of his experience briefly from an 80ha macadamia farm two hours north of Auckland where he and Fr Felix were guests of Dr Anatoly Lykho, the Honorary Consul of Ukraine in New Zealand.

“I’m floored...! The atmosphere in NZ amongst Ukrainians is electric...! There is real Ukrainian spirit here...! I assume his Grace didn’t mean “spirits” – ed We don’t come here enough...! We really have to become more engaged!”

It seems to have been a particularly successful few days during which Bishop Peter, Fr Felix and a delegation from UYA (SUM) including its Australian president, Peter Duma, travelled around the North island, meeting Ukrainian families in their homes, blessing graves, participating in liturgy and other church services and conducting many other meetings with the newly (and not-so-newly) arrived Ukrainians.

“Fr Felix has been doing a wonderful job over here visiting the communities for the past five years—they are growing... thriving even, and are very keen to expand their Ukrainian life with the church and in contacting other Ukrainian organisations across the Tasman.”

Bishop Peter noted that they are extremely well organised as a community, taking ample advantage of modern communications technology in circulating news, organising themselves and of course maintaining contact with Fr Felix.

Over the few days, the missionaries participated in services with 300 local Roman Catholics and newly arrived Ukrainians in a small church south of Auckland. 75 mostly Ukrainians including about twenty kids came to a special liturgy on Sunday in Auckland.

The missionaries attended a Ukrainian concert on Sunday afternoon which included accordion music, a young girl reciting Ukrainian poetry, singing, sopilka playing, Ukrainian stalls. The NZ Minister for Multiculturalism was at the concert along with the local MP.

“Among the many Ukrainians that make up the community three original 1949 migrants remain. Added to them, several Canadian-Ukrainian? migrants, a girl from Melbourne, and the bulk—young families—many in their 20s and 30s —from Kharkiv, Odessa, Lviv and other places—mostly professionals or businesspeople. Many speak Russian, but all of them identify with being Ukrainian and in that spirit seemed very open to finding new ways to grow their Ukrainian life abroad. Many of them aren’t really even church people, but they were interested in us and in what the church can offer them in terms of community.”

Asked what his message is for Ukrainians and Ukrainian communities in Australia, Bishop Peter replied “there is an active and vibrant community of Ukrainians in NZ which is holds open arms to Ukrainians from across the Tasman and which is in need of anything we can offer to help make their community thrive and develop... We have pledged our support. If more Ukrainians in Australia could do likewise it would be a great opportunity for growth for all of us.”

Bishop Peter noted that the Redemptorists (to whom he belongs himself) are ministering to the Ukrainian Catholics at present and most Ukrainian activities in Auckland centre around their church. However, his Grace will also be approaching the Archbishop of Auckland about access to a church of our own.