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“ST. NAUM OF OHRID” MACEDONIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH COMMUNITY IN TRIENGEN, SWITZERLAND (1992-2017)

By Aco Gorevski

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The Macedonian Orthodox Church – Archdiocese of Ohrid (MOC-AO) marks fifty years of autocephality this year. Numerous celebrations have been scheduled with regard to the jubilee of the year 2017, including the rite of consecration of several cathedral churches in Macedonia, canonization of saints, theological conferences, gatherings and events around the country. Also, the eparchies of MOC-AO have planned various local celebrations.

One of the most important events that will take place in the Macedonian Orthodox Diocese of Europe shall be the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Macedonian Orthodox Church community in Triengen, Switzerland (1992-2017). This silver

jubilee shall be celebrated with the publication of a monograph written on the activities of the church community in Triengen.

The Macedonian Orthodox Church is an Ancient Church

The Macedonian Orthodox Church is over a millennium old (Acts 16: 6-15). During the Middle Ages, the church was known under the name of the Archdiocese of Ohrid, and at some point, was raised to Patriarchal rank. The Orthodox faith of the Macedonians has remained in harmony with the Apostolic period. It will remain as such till the end of time. The Orthodox Church keeps and hands on the holy teaching of Orthodoxy. The strength of faithful and pious Orthodox Macedonians has been built upon the examples of the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of the Holy Fathers. Despite the hardships during the five-centuries-long Ottoman bondage, Macedonia and the Macedonian nation have never lost their identity and integrity. Modern Macedonians have kept their language, folklore traditions, music and culture of their ancestors. As a living monument of the rich church life and culture, this country abounds in old churches and monasteries, treasured fresco-painting and iconography, and superb wood carvings of iconostases. The cultural heritage of Macedonian folk embroidery and folk literature are a reflection of the Macedonian spirit enthused by the Orthodox Christian faith and ethics.

MOC-AO continues to support the development of the religious and national spirit of Orthodox Christians. This is especially seen abroad where Macedonian diaspora, i.e. ethnic Macedonian emigrants, continue to actively participate in the life of the Orthodox Church communities. Raised in the Orthodox faith and traditions, Macedonians organize church communities, help raise funds for constructing churches and cultural halls, thus keeping their national identity, religion, traditions and customs alive.

Macedonia is situated in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula and extends on a territory of 25,713 square kilometers. It is a landlocked country of over 2 million inhabitants of which 1.5 is an ethnic Macedonian population (mostly of Orthodox denomination). There are 1.5 million Macedonians living and working abroad (in the neighboring countries, and on the European, North American and Australian continents).

There are eight dioceses of MOC-AO on the territory of Macedonia, and four in the diaspora (Europe, North America, and Australia). The twelve eparchies are under the supreme jurisdiction of 11 Metropolitans. A clergy of 600 members are holding priesthood offices in 500 parishes with over 2000 churches and monasteries. Monastic life is very much alive in 20 monasteries under the jurisdiction of MOC-AO with over 150 pious monks and nuns who hold on to the tradition of the Holy Fathers' teachings. In line with the spirit present in the apostolic times and the literacy mission of the Ohrid School of St. Clement, as well as in keeping with the contemporary development of theological studies, the Macedonian Orthodox Seminary and the Faculty of Theology in Skopje provide training for young theologians, priests and theology educators.

There are over 30 church communities that belong to the Macedonian eparchy of Europe. Over the years, the registry of new churches has increased as the Macedonian communities expand in new members. With the new generations of young people who were born abroad and decided to stay abroad, Macedonian families feel the need to help construct churches in areas where their children live and work. This trend of initiating parish offices in Europe was especially popular in the 1990s.

Macedonians living in Triengen in the Canton of Lucerne in Switzerland

The *Neue Luzerner Zeitung* online daily newspaper (13 July 2015) shows that there were between 12000 and 15000 Macedonians living and working in Switzerland. One of the factors why people move to Switzerland is the better socioeconomic conditions. These data imply that this is perhaps the most dangerous period in the Macedonian emigration history. On the other hand, this also suggests that the Macedonian emigrants play the role of a significant bridge of cooperation between the two countries. For Macedonians living in the area of the canton of Lucerne, the focal point is the Macedonian church community in Triengen.

Macedonian Orthodox Church in Switzerland

The year 1992 marks the beginning of the organized church life of the Macedonians living in Switzerland. A group of faithful people living in Spreitenbach, a municipality in the district of Baden, near Zurich, took the initiative of establishing a Macedonian Orthodox Church community under the patron saint of St. Naum of Ohrid (MOCC). Their desire to have their own church led to a founding assembly which took place on February 22, 1992, where the first Church Board was elected and a MOCC was established under the name of the Macedonian Enlightener and St. Naum of Ohrid. The Divine Liturgy in the newly established MOCC was conducted in Spreitenbach the same year. The first missionary priests were under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop Gavril, who was succeeded by Metropolitan Gorazd, and later by Metropolitan Pimen.

As the meetings of the Church Board increased, so did the number of church members, and eventually a parish office was established. The Statute of the Church Board was approved in March 1992. In August of that year, MOCC opened a bank account in Spreitenbach. The year

1992 marks the early period of independence of Macedonia when former Yugoslav communities (clubs) were being transformed into separate national clubs, some of which were converted into Macedonian church communities, following the example of those already established on the North American and Australian continents. In the following years, a dozen church communities were established on the European continent which spurred the foundation of the European Eparchy of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. The MOCC in Switzerland was not among the first communities but it grew into one of the most productive and most prosperous ones.

In an interview with one of the initiators of establishing the church community in Switzerland, Mr. Boncho Jankov said that “Switzerland is a beautiful country and the best country to live in, but no matter how beautiful and rich she is, we are always going to feel like foreigners here and this country will always be foreign to us.” (*Makedonsko sonce*, 15.11.1995, p. 10). Then, he quoted few lines from a poem written by the Macedonian poet Nikola Vapcarov: “This land that we walk upon today, no, it’s not my land, - Sorry, but it is foreign!”

Christian Love at Work

In the beginning, Divine Liturgies were being held at the Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche Weiningen, a Protestant parish office in Spreitenbach, at the discretion of gracious Madam Rumer and Rev. Pierre Vuilleumier. Pastor Vuilleumier was a very good friend to Macedonians living in Switzerland. He was of great help to them in the process of gathering and arranging all the necessary documentation required for the construction of the Macedonian Orthodox church building. He attended almost every celebration of the Macedonian community and his wish to visit Macedonia came true in June 2006 where he met with the Macedonian bishops and theology professors. He was impressed by the Macedonian churches and monasteries, especially

in Skopje and Ohrid. He was a most beloved and respected pastor not only in his community, but also in the Macedonian church community. At the laying of foundation stone of the new church in Triengen, he briefly said “Nine years ago I promised that in ten years’ time there will be a Macedonian Orthodox church here. I wasn’t very confident in that. But here today I give you my blessing and I hope we will have the opportunity to meet on another occasion in the near future. It was a pleasure meeting you. Thank you.” Undoubtedly, Apostle Paul’s words suited his personality well: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (II Tim 4:7).

Herr Bruno Fischer is another person who has helped greatly in the building of the church. As a lawyer working in the canton of Lucerne, he was contacted by his brother, a theologian who had been previously communicated by Rev. Vuilleumier. In his address at the laying of the foundation stone of the church in 2007, he said: “It was ten years ago. I pastor by the name of Vuilleumier called me on the telephone. I can certainly say that without that telephone call none of this would have happened. Rev. Vuilleumier had to assure me that this project was for a good cause. Afterwards I had to assure the neighbors that this project was necessary. There was distrust and ignorance about the Macedonian people. Today I can say that nothing better could have happened to our community.” On another occasion, after the church was being built, Mr. Fischer paid a visit to Triengen along with 20 Swiss colleagues and told them the story of the construction of the church, saying that the church had belonged to their ancestors as well.

We should also kindly remember Mr. Franz Stadelmann, the President of the Church Board of the Catholic Church in Triengen, and Mr. Georg Dubah Kunz, the President of the Municipality of Triengen, as well as the great humanitarian Mr. Reupp Peider, who helped with

the church fundraising. Additionally, the Swidler family from Fehraltorf near Zurich provided financial support for St. Naum of Ohrid Church.

Church Life

The St. Naum of Ohrid Macedonian Orthodox Church community in Triengen, with the construction of the new church, the additional premises, and a suitable home for the priest and his family, has obtained all the necessary requisites for a full religious life of the parish.

The first friendly gathering between St. Naum of Ohrid Church and the Catholic Church community of Villmergen (in the canton of Aargau) took place on 22 June 2014 in Triengen, at the initiative of the Community of Macedonian Associations in Switzerland with its President Mr. Zivko Atanasov.



The diocesan bishop Mr. Pimen regularly visits the tomb of St. Cyril in Rome, usually accompanied by priests and believers from his eparchy. These visits open a fruitful dialogue between the Western and the Eastern Christian traditions.

The Macedonian Orthodox parish in Triengen is an example of bringing common religious values together. The diversity of the Triengen community enriches people's lives. The

intercultural dialogue and the interreligious diversity promote tolerance and mutual respect, thus bringing shared values to life and ensuring human dignity for all.