

MONITORING OF THE VIOLATIONS OF CHRISTIANS' RIGHTS IN BELARUS; DECEMBER 2005 - DECEMBER 2006

FIFTEEN EMPLOYEES OF THE PALACE OF CULTURE OF THE TOWN OF VALOZHYN WERE DISMISSED AFTER THE SEMINAR HELD BY A PROTESTANT PREACHER

On the initiative of the department of culture of the Valozhyn District Executive committee the seminar dedicated to the problem of family relationships was held in the palace of culture on December 28, in which the from the Minsk church "Blagavestsye" Uladzimir Golikau took part. The admittance to the seminar was free. The seminar gathered about 40 people.

On the 20th minute of the seminar the preacher's speech was interrupted. The deputy chairman of the Valozhyn Executive Committee on ideological work A. Bobryk appeared in the auditorium and demanded that the lecture should be stopped immediately.

On Monday, December 28 an extraordinary sitting of the Executive Committee was held where the decision to dismiss 15 employees of the palace of culture was taken.

Pastor of the local church of Evangelical Christians and Baptists Syargey Yasku commented on the situation in the following way:

"The decision taken by the Executive Committee is illegal. The local government representatives have been long trying to eliminate any cooperation of evangelical Christians with public organizations.

For example, after a series of events in schools of Valozhyn run by the sports club "Avana", it was prohibited for believers to visit any educational establishments.

Moreover, there appeared the direction of the education department, signed by the deputy chairman on ideology A. Bobryk which demanded to find out what Sunday schools were attended by schoolchildren. If children happened to attend Protestant Sunday schools, the teachers had to have a talk with their parents. So, we both as a church and as private persons are deprived of the rights to attend public events and to organize them."

THE PUBLIC ORGANIZATION "PAKALENNYE" WAS CLOSED DOWN BECAUSE OF RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY OF ITS MEMBERS

On January 25 -26 the case of closing down the international public organization "Pakalennye" was brought before the Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus. The formal ground for the case was the Ministry of Justice's declaration that the public organization "Pakalennye" has no juridical address which caused repeated legislative violations connected with it.

Gleb Yarmakou, a believer of the Church of Evangelical Christians and Baptists, was at the head of the organization. Among the goals of public organization "Pakalennye" were education and work with young people. In court the members of the organization were accused of religious activities.

In the end the accusation was not proved and the court declined it. But it didn't influence the final decision to close down the organization.

It should be mentioned that the organization lost its juridical address after representatives of the Organization on Economic Crimes Struggle visited the institution which provided the public organization "Pakalennye" with juridical address.

IMPRISONMENT FOR THE CHURCH SERVICE

On March 3 the pastor of Minsk Baptist church “Zapavet Hrysta” (Christ’s Testament) Georgiy Vyazouski was sentenced to 10 days of administrative imprisonment for conducting the service without an appropriate official permission (Article 167 – 1 of the Administrative code)

The sentence was passed by the Court of the Partisan District of Minsk.

Having visited the Sunday service the district administration official N. Philippkou together with a district militia officer drew up a report that stated that pastor G. Vyazouski “... repeatedly organized a religious meeting in his own private house ... with worships and religious songs singing ... without an appropriate permission. About 20 people were present at the service.”

Meanwhile N. Philippkou and the district militia officer broke article 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus about the inviolability of the home by entering the private house and taking photos of those present without its owners’ permission.

The court found the pastor guilty and taking into account that G. Vyazouski had been given a warning for the similar offence, he was sentenced to the maximum possible term – 10 days of imprisonment.

The religious community “Zapavet Hrysta” consists of 40 members, services are held in a private house in Minsk.

On March 13 about 30 people came to the gates of the detention centre in Akhrestin Street to see in pastor Vyazouski who was to be released. But the people were forced to move 200 – 300 metres from the building of the centre by emergency platoon. Only the pastor’s wife and his parents were allowed to meet him.

THE SUPREME COURT CLOSED DOWN “THE LEAGUE OF ORTHODOX YOUTH NAMED AFTER ST. GEORGE THE VICTORIOUS”

According to the judgment of the Supreme Court the organization of the Orthodox youth “The League of Orthodox Youth named after St. George the Victorious” was closed down on March 3. The action on closing down was brought in to the Supreme Court by the Ministry of Justice. The well known public figure Mikola Astreyka headed the organization when it was closed down. This public association was registered on April 12, 1999.

The judgment on its closing down was delivered by the judge of the Supreme Court Larysa Philimanihina.

AN ADMINISTRATIVE CASE WAS BROUGHT INTO ACTION AGAINST SYARGEY TSVOR, BISHOP OF THE LEAGUE OF THE CHRISTIANS OF EVANGELICAL FAITH

An administrative case according to the article 167-1 was brought into action against the bishop of the League CEF in Minsk region Syargey Tsvor in the Maskouski Court of Minsk.

Bishop S. Tsvor was charged with holding church services in a private building owned by him in Kurgannaya Street (Malinauka micro-district) in Minsk.

Such services are considered by the authorities as “mass religious meetings in the place which was not specified for it without the permission of the executive committee” and thus violating

article 167 of the Administrative Code. Such violations are punished by the term of 3 -15 days' imprisonment or 30 – 150 minimal rates (900 thousand – 4,5 million Belarusian rubles). The case was closed and was not tried in the court.

CATHOLIC PRIEST WAS SENTENCED TO 10 DAYS' IMPRISONMENT

On March 24 at night priest Andrey Sidarovich from Orsha, a monk of Catholic order of Mariams was detained in Minsk in Kastychnitskaya Square and sentenced to 10 days' imprisonment.

The Catholic priest served his sentence in Zhodzina prison. In Kastychnitskaya Square Father Sidarovich was engaged in ministering work with tent camp participants.

THE HEAD OF GEORGIAN BAPTISTS WAS ARRESTED IN KASTRYCHNITSKAYA SQUARE

On March 20 in the evening during the actions of protest in Minsk three citizens of Georgia were detained: Lado Gaghiashvily, the director of a religious research center in Georgia, deacon Basil Kahabidze, and Malkaz Sangulashvily, the head of the League of Baptist Churches in Georgia. A Belarusian citizen who accompanied them was detained as well. Those mentioned above were holding flags of Georgia and Ukraine.

Having been kept in isolation, interrogated and threatened with shooting, the citizens of the foreign country were deported to their motherland after the official protest of the Ministry of Foreign affairs and the Parliament of Georgia.

“I wore the clothes of a priest, so representatives of Belarusian authorities could notice me very easily,” said Bishop Malhaz Sangulashvily. “The KGB that embodied Belarusian authorities in that situation showed negative attitude towards us as to religious organization members. They think church ministers have no right to participate in political struggle”.

“Belarusian authorities considered our coming to Minsk and our wish to pray with people in Kastychnitskaya Square to be the interference in political struggle. Our main message is that both believers and non-believers should take part in liberation of Belarusian people. Belarusians are worthy to have freedom and democracy,” said M. Sangunashvily.

SYARGEY SHAUTSOU, A LAWYER, WAS SENTENCED TO 10 DAYS' IMPRISONMENT FOR ORGANIZATION OF THE SEMINAR WITH A FOREIGN PREACHER

On March 22-24 a seminar dedicated to the outlook and its influence on different spheres of life was held. Darrow Miller, the author of the book “Discipling Nations”, took part in the seminar. The seminar was arranged by the organization “Christian Business Initiative” and took place in one of Minsk cafes.

On the third day of the seminar representatives of militia and the KGB entered the cafe and declared the seminar to be illegal. The report was drawn up on Syargey Shautsou, a believer of a Protestant church, for organization of a mass unauthorized meeting.

The court found him guilty according to the article 167 of the Administrative code.

As soon as the court was over Syargey Shautsou was taken to the detention centre to serve his sentence.

PASTOR WAS OBLIGED TO PAY A FINE FOR HOLDING A CHURCH SERVICE

On May 18 the Administrative commission of the Executive Committee of the town of Kobrin (Brest region) found Protestant pastor Ilya Radkevich guilty in violation of article 193 of the Administrative code and obliged him to pay a 150 thousand Belarusian rubles fine. Article 193 of the Administrative code specifies responsibility for violation of “Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations Law”.

As Galina Kuksyuk, a secretary of the administrative commission of the Kobrin Executive Committee, explains the offence is that the community which has regular services didn't register its charter.

Considering this case, the Commission of the Executive Committee based upon the report of the district militia officer. Pastor Radkevich refused to sign this report and required the consideration to be conducted in a legal form.

Ilya Radkevich is a pastor of the Joint Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith in the small town of Povits, Kobrin District, Brest Region. The church consists of 50 believers.

LEGAL PROCEEDINGS WITH THE BELIEVERS OF THE MINSK CHURCH “NOVAYE ZHYTSYO” (NEW LIFE) CONTINUED

The main point of the conflict is the right to own the building of the church in Kavalyova St. in Minsk. For about two years the authorities have been putting pressure upon the church and forcing it to relinquish the right to own the building and sell it.

On June 22 the next hearing of the case took place. The church “Novaye Zhytsyo” demanded that the Minsk Executive Committee should officially register the building in 72, Kavalyova St. as a cult one (building used for religious purposes).

The representative of the Minsk city administration and the head of the Department on General Building up Alyaksey Vaga took part in the sitting.

It was a preliminary sitting where the sides expressed their positions on the issue.

The representatives of the “MinskArchitecture” in particular declared that placing a church in the city requires a special decision of the Minsk Executive Committee.

The lawyer of “Novaye Zhytsyo” Syargey Lukanin noted that “believers repeatedly put in written requests to give the church any place in Minsk. The answer to these requests was the following: all the sites for cult buildings have been distributed up to 2010.”

On June 7 the pastor of the church “Novaye Zhytsyo” V. Gancharenka sent the letter to the Mayor of Minsk Michail Paulau in response to the letter of the deputy chairman of the Minsk Executive Committee M. Tsitsenkou.

Pastor Gancharenka asked M. Paulau “to consider the question unbiased and understand what believers of the church, Christians, citizens of Minsk had to go through being put under severe pressure of the city authorities”.

In the letter the pastor noted that at officials' will no room for the church could be rented in the capital. So the believers had to meet on Sundays in the open air in any weather. When the parishioners managed to buy a private building the authorities called meetings there illegal.

At the end of the letter pastor Gancharenka expressed the hope that the question however will be settled.

BELIEVERS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE ADOPTION OF THE LAW “ABOUT GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION”

On June 16 the Council of the Republic adopted the law “About General Secondary Education”. The law was adopted by the deputies of the Chamber of Representatives in the middle of May. Changes in the new law (in comparison with the old one) worried representatives of teachers, parents and believers of different denominations.

The rights of parents to represent the interests of their children are considerably limited. In particular parents are deprived of the right to choose the form of education for their children. It means that a family which wants their children to be educated outside the state system of secondary education has no such rights any longer.

“It is known that we have a secular system of education. It means that the outlook and moral values, which are taught there, are secular as well. What can parents who want to teach their children according to the Bible do?” – Svyatlana Svyetlaya, a teacher and specialist in the sphere of education said. “Why are parents who bear the greatest part of responsibility for their children deprived of the right to choose how their children are to be taught?”

The so called “home schooling” movement in Belarus was getting more and more powerful. Parents - believers being deeply concerned about the preponderance of ideology, lack of freedom, and pressure on children of pious families in Belarusian schools, educate their children at home. Till present the legislation of the Republic of Belarus allowed getting education outside schools and provided the system of assessment of knowledge for such pupils. As a rule home schoolers showed very good results. Will they have any further opportunities of this kind? Belarusian believers are becoming more and more anxious about this question.

“A number of important issues connected with the new law have not been discussed publicly. Nobody asked the opinion of those whom this law was meant for,” Svyatlana Svyetaya said. “Though protection of physical and psychological health of our children is being constantly spoken, the circumstances they have to face can do them nothing but harm.”

PASTOR OF BARANAVICHY (BREST REGION) PENTECOSTAL CHURCH IS FINED FOUR MLN ROUBLES

On July, 2 Sergey Paznyakovich, pastor of Baranavichi Pentecostal Salvation Church, was fined 4 million roubles by Baranavichi court for baptizing people outside the church. The reason for that fine was the fact that the baptism had been held without permission from the local City Council.

Salvation church is the biggest in Brest region. There are about 1500 believers in it. The permission, according to the law, was to be given by the local City Council because water baptism is considered by the authorities as kind of an open-air crusade. But the authorities refused to give permission stating that the water did not correspond to some sanitary regulations. Nevertheless, the baptism was carried out.

Last year the City Council fined pastor Sergey Paznyakovich 100 000 roubles for holding the unauthorized church service.

THE SUPREME COURT SUPPORTED THE DECISION ABOUT THE LIQUIDATION OF COVENANT OF CHRIST CHURCH

The hearing was held on July, 12. Covenant of Christ church was liquidated according to the decision of Minsk City Court of May, 6, 2006. The Supreme Court supported the decision. The official reason for liquidating the church became the fact that the legal address of the church did not correspond to the requirements of the new Law on public organizations. In March 2006

pastor of the church, Georgy Vyazovskiy, was imprisoned for 10 days for holding unauthorized church service.

PARENTS HAVING MANY CHILDREN, EVANGELICAL BELIEVERS AND THEIR CHILDREN WERE FORCED TO LEAVE PLACE OF RECREATION IN VILLAGE TSIZHISHKI, SMARGON DISTRICT

The recreation that was organized by families having many children took place in the village Tsizhishki, Smorgon district, Grodno region, on private land and in private buildings. Altogether there were about 60 people, among them 45 children.

On August, 9 local authorities with the help of 12 soldiers of border-guarding service forced those 60 people to leave for Minsk.

The parents sent a complaint to Minsk City Executive Committee (the City Council). The reply, signed by the deputy head of the City Council M. Titenkov, stated that 'the decision to stop the recreation was caused by the necessity to liquidate the reasons threatening the children's life and health'. The fact that the workers of the Department on Religious Affairs and Nationalities had been present there as well was explained by belonging of some parents and children to full gospel churches and by 'the necessity of finding out the circumstances of organizing the collective staying on the farm'. It was also stated in the letter that 'the officials didn't exceed their authority'.

THE COUNCIL OF THE DIOCESE ADVISED THAT FATHER ALEXANDER SHRAMKO SHOULD NOT USE INTERNET

The Council of the Diocese of Russian Orthodox Church in Belarus decided on advising to father Alexander Shramko that he should stop his Internet activities and concentrate on pastoral ministry proper.

The reason for the decision is that father Alexander Shramko is the author of several articles on topical problems of church life in Belarus and he published his articles on the web-site *Tsarkva (Church)* and in *Live Journal*.

Priest Alexey (Shinkevich), responsible for the relations of the Belarusian Department of the Russian Orthodox Church with mass media, notes that in his articles father Alexander Shramko stated things which 'do not correspond to the high rank of an orthodox priest' and which caused negative reaction among orthodox Internet users.

The decision was taken on September, 15 on the meeting of the Council of the Diocese headed by the High Priest of Minsk and Slutsk Philaret.

BELARUSIAN GOVERNMENT REFUSED TO PROLONG VISAS TO 7 CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND 5 NUNS WORKED FOR GRODNO CATHOLIC DIOCESE

On September, 20 it became known that Belarusian government refused to prolong visas to 7 Catholic priests and 5 nuns from Poland who had been working in Grodno region. Grodno bishop Alexander Kashkevich tried to achieve cancellation of the decision, but with no results. Till the end of December all the ministers who are citizens of Poland were to leave Belarus.

The government explain this decision be the necessity of taking to work priests and nuns who would be Belarusian citizens. The representatives of Grodno diocese say that Catholic church has its own law according to which only the bishop and not the secular authorities can decide which priest and to which place is to be ordained.

NEW LIFE CHURCH: WE DEMAND JUSTICE!

In 2002 New Life Church bought a cowshed building in the village Sukharevo nearby Minsk. In a while, believers carried out work on improving the area and making the building suit their needs. There are about 700 to 1000 people who come to the services.

In 2004 village Sukharevo was added to the city of Minsk. It became the reason for the City Council to start forcing the church to cancel the Agreement of buying the building and to try forcefully buy the building from the church. The first hearing took place on October 25, 2005.

NEW LIFE CHURCH PASTOR FINED 1 000 000 ROUBLES

On August 6, 2006 one of Minsk courts (Moskovskiy court) decided to fine New Life Church pastor Slava Goncharenko. The church was informed about it on Friday, August 4, 2006 by the letter which was sent to the church office. Pastor Goncharenko was fined 30 basic rates (about 1 mln roubles) for organizing unauthorized service.

Court hearing was held without Slava Goncharenko. At that time he was on holiday abroad.

THE COURT DEPRIVES NEW LIFE CHURCH OF THEIR BUILDING

On July, 21 Minsk City Economic Court took decision about forced buying of New Life Church building situated in Minsk, Kovaleva 72, the building was to be bought in 10 days for 37.5 mln roubles (about \$17 000). The decision was taken by Alexander Karamyshev, judge of the Economic Court. Minsk City Executive Committee was represented by Alexander Kazyatnikov, main Minsk City Executive Committee lawyer.

Church representatives consider the decision to be ungrounded.

The officials evaluation of the building is 30-35 times less that its real value. Moreover, the Court obliged the church to pay 310 000 roubles for court expenses. On August, 28 the Commission on Appeals at Minsk Economic Court also supported this decision as legal. Under the law believers are to leave the building in 10 days after the money is transferred to the church account.

ON OCTOBER, 5 NEW LIFE BELIEVERS ANOUNCED FASTING HUNGER-STRIKE. UNPRECEDENTED PROTEST ACTION LASTED FOR 23 DAYS

The reason for beginning this action became forced buying of the New Life Church building. On September 29, 2006, according to Minsk City Economic Court decision dated by July, 21, the money for the building (about 37.5 mln roubles) was transferred from Minsk City Property Fund account to the New Life Church account. After this date believers were given 10 days to leave the building, so they had to do it on October, 8.

In reply to these actions, New Life Church believers announced fasting hunger-strike in Thursday, October, 5. initially, 16 people participated in the action but already on October, 10 132 from different places in Belarus took part in it.

Their main requirements:

- to cancel Minsk City Economic Court decision according to which New Life Church was deprived of its land and building:
- to allow the church building to get the status of a cult building (building for church services).

“We want to hold our services and pray here”, said Belarusian Christians. The events around New Life Church roused protest wave among believers. All the time during the action in the building of the church were about 100 people. Every day the services were held where Roman and Greek Catholics, Russian Orthodox believers, Apostolic Orthodox believers and protestants from different denominations took part.

DOCTORS REFUSED TO EXAMINE THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE HUNGER-STRIKE

Doctors of state clinics from Sukharevo, Minsk refused to examine the participants of the hunger-strike and advised that they should call the ambulance. During the time of the hunger-strike four people got to intensive care. Many people had fits of chronic diseases, fainted and complained of headache.

DEFAMATORY REPORT ON MINSK TV

The new reason for court hearing became the visit of cameramen and journalists from Minsk TV (Stolichnoe TV) to the place of the hunger-strike. They were not allowed to enter the building, nevertheless on October, 14 and 15 defamatory reports about New Life Church were broadcast on the channel. During these reports the officials of the Department on Religious Affairs and Nationalities gave untruthful information about the church. The believers, in reply to these actions, sent to Prosecutor's Office a complaint about Minsk TV and the journalist L. Djuraeva – the one who made the report and required that the lie should be refuted.

On December, 8 New Life Church got a letter from the Department of Internal Affairs at the Administration of Central District of Minsk. It said that the church had been refused its request to initiate a trial of the journalist L. Djuraeva and the officials A. Ryabitseva and I. Yanushkevich, 'because there was no sigh of any crime in their actions'.

MEETING TO SUPPORT THE CHURCH

On October, 21 on the Bangalor Square in Minsk a meeting of support of New Life Church was held. About 2 000 people took part in it. Pastors of different Evangelical denominations spoke there about the demands to restore justice.

PASTOR SLAVA GONCHARENKO THREATENED WITH A FINE OF 6 MLN ROUBLES

New Life Church appealed to the Supreme Economic Court regarding the decision of Minsk City Executive Committee and Minsk Economic Court about transmitting their building into owning by Building Exploitation Service of Moskovskiy district of Minsk.

On October, 26, a letter from the Supreme Economic Court was received by the church. The letter said that Pastor Slava Goncharenko might be called to responsibility for not carrying out the decision of the court and might be fined 200 basic rates (about \$3000).

SVETLANA, WIFE OF THE MAN TAKING PART IN THE FASTING HUNGER-STRIKE (VLADIMIR MATSKEVICH) IS FINED

On October, 26, wives and children of men taking part in the fasting hunger-strike tried to meet the deputy head of Minsk City Executive Committee M. Titenkov. The relatives wanted to speak with him and other officials about the fasting hunger-strike and to persuade them to fulfill the requirements of the believers.

Svetlana, Vladimir Matskevich's wife, was forced to leave the building. She was taken to the police station for finding out her personal data. The court was held on the next day. Svetlana was fined 5 basic rates (155 000 roubles).

GOMEL LOCAL AUTHORITIES ASK THAT PASTORS SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN NEW LIFE CHURCH FASTING HUNGER-STRIKE

The deputy head of Gomel City Council (the one responsible for ideology) spoke to the full-gospel churches pastors on the phone and asked that they should not join the protest action *FASTING HUNGER-STRIKE* to support New Life Church. One pastor said that the deputy head stated that those problems would be dealt with by Minsk government and added some problems would arise for pastors if they were to support New Life Church protest action.

OCTOBER, 28 – ACTION FASTING HUNGER-STRIKE TEMPORARILY STOPPED

New Life Church got a letter from the Supreme Economic Court which said that the decision of Minsk Economic Court had been reconsidered by the Supreme Economic Court Board. This news caused the action to be temporarily stopped. On November, 27, it became known that the decision according to which the church had been deprived of their land and building, was cancelled by the Supreme Economic Court Board. But still, people would stay at the church building overnight and the services would be held every day.

AN ACT OF VANDALISM AGAINST THE NEW LIFE CHURCH BUILDING

At night of November, 1, an act of vandalism was committed against the New Life Church building. Somebody wrote “No to totalitarian sects” on the wall of the building and it caused material damage to the church. Believers turned to police for help. On November, 17, the police refused to initiate a criminal case.

THE FIRST HEARING IN THE SUPREME ECONOMIC COURT TAKES PLACE

On December, 22, the first hearing in the Supreme Economic Court took place during which the claim of New Life Church about the previous decision of Minsk City Executive Committee of August, 17, 2005 was considered.

THE CATHOLIC PRIEST ANATOLIY KOCHKO, THE CITIZEN OF POLAND, FINED 62 000 ROUBLES AND WILL BE ABLE TO STAY IN BELARUS TILL THE EXPIRATION OF HIS VISA ONLY IF HE IS NOT ENGAGED IN RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY

Policemen said Anatoliy Kochko had broken Belarusian law. According to their papers, Anatoliy Kochko had broken the rules of staying of foreign citizens in Belarus because he had not been registered when entering Belarus. Also, he held services in Catholic churches without permission. Under the Belarusian law foreign ministers have to get permission from the Department on Religious Affairs and Nationalities for carrying out religious activity, while Anatoliy Kochko did not have that permission.

The Catholic priest, accused of breaking the rules of staying of foreign citizens in Belarus, was threatened with either a warning or a fine of 20 basic rates.

It is noteworthy that Anatoliy Kochko was born in Brest district of Belarus and his relatives still live there. For the last 15 years he has been ministering in the village Zamostye of Slutsk district, Minsk region. Passing through Minsk, he ministered a mass on September, 22, and after that he was detained by the police and fined.

BELARUSIAN CATHOLICS SENT A REQUEST TO LUKASHENKO THAT POLISH CATHOLIC PRIESTS SHOULD NOT BE DEPORTED

In October, the believers from Grodno Diocese of the Belarusian Roman Catholic church sent a request to Alexander Lukashenko. They requested that the decision should be made to prolong permission for work for the next year to seven Polish Catholic priests and five nuns.

The believers took this decision when the Department on Religious Affairs and Nationalities in August refused to prolong permission for work for the Polish citizens. The given reason was as follows: there is a necessity to give this job to Catholic priests, citizens of Belarus, who graduate from Grodno and Pinsk Catholic seminaries. A similar answer was given to the Catholics, who signed the paper about those priests and nuns, by Grodno local authorities on September, 26.

Grodno bishop, chairman on the Conference of Catholic bishops in Belarus, Alexander Kashkevich, asked that all believers should pray for all priests and nuns who work in the Diocese.

Also, believers in the Catholic churches of Grodno and Grodno region started to sign the request to the authorities to prolong visa to the Catholic priest Yaroslav Grynashkevich, editor of the Catholic newspaper *The Word of Life*.

Nevertheless, seven Catholic priests from Poland, who minister in Grodno Diocese, have not got the permission to keep on working in the next year. Also the permission has not been given to five nuns, citizens of Poland.

According to the information on October, 2006, in Grodno Diocese there are about 170 parishes, where there are about 70 ministering priests from Poland. Of all 354 Catholic priests in Belarus 170 are foreign citizens, in most cases – citizens of Poland.

IN BREST THE BELIEVERS OF *THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH ABROAD* ARE FORCED TO REMOVE THEIR AGREEMENT FOR THE REGISTERING OF THE CHURCH

In Brest Belarusian officials (having agreed it with the local priests of the Russian Orthodox Church) tried to force the believers of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad to remove their signatures of agreement for the registering of the church there.

Part of the procedure of the registering is signing by at least 20 citizens of Belarus the paper about their intention to start a religious community; there they must put their full name, their address and date of birth.

Priests and believers of the Russian Orthodox Church (of Moscow) came to the people who had signed that paper and, according to their words, tried to force them to remove their agreement.

The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (its center is in the USA) broke its relations with the Russian Orthodox Church (of Moscow) in 1927 when the latter decided it would be loyal to the Soviet Union.

NOT KNOWN PEOPLE DEFILED THE SIGNBOARD OF THE PROTESTANT SALVATION CHURCH IN BARANOVICHI

At the night of November, 10 an act of vandalism was committed against the Salvation church (the Pentecostal Union) in Baranovichi.

The vandals wrote in black painting “Do not believe sects” on the signboard of the church, 5x2.5 m (it’s the information billboard of the church with its address and telephone no. which is situated on the Telman and Pershukevich street crossing) and threw stones and empty bottles at it.

Believers turned to police for help.

A REPORT DRAWN UP ON PASTOR IN KRUPKI FOR SUPPORTING NEW LIFE CHURCH

On October, 30, pastor of one of the churches of the Pentecostal Union was called to the police station and a report was made on him for living in the town without registering. Nikolay Borichevskiy is registered in Minsk, but he has been living in Krupki, where he ministers as pastor, since 1997.

Pastor Nikolay Borichevskiy thinks that the reason for such "attention" from the police lies in the fact that pastor spoke supporting the protest action in New Life Church in Minsk. According to Pastor's words, on November, 23, he was called to the district Executive Committee and asked to speak on his position toward the government. He was also shown some documents from Minsk regional KGB about himself.

CATHOLIC BELIEVERS IN GRODNO WERE ON A HUNGER-STRIKE ON DECEMBER, 1 TO 6

On December, 1, for the first time in the history of the Belarusian Catholic church believers together with the priest Alexander Shemet from the parish of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy in Grodno, announced a hunger-strike. A week before that the Catholics held a protest action in front of the building of Grodno City Executive Committee. About 100 people took part in it.

The believers could not get permission for the building of their church since 1997. They were given a plot of land for the building, but were never given permission. They have asked the authorities about the permission several times, but it gave no results. The parish is situated in the downtown and has about 5000 people. They had to hold services in a chapel, 100 people at a time.

The fasting hunger-strike was started by 10 people. It was supported by Grodno bishop Alexander Kashkevich. For some time the officials ignored the fasting hunger-strike, but on the 6th day it became known that they gave permission for the building. On December, 6, the priest Alexander and 16 participants of the fasting hunger-strike stopped their action.

'The spark that started to burn in Minsk during the time of the fasting hunger-strike of New Life Church believers, got to Grodno and won the battle with the injustice. But, still there's a long way for us to go in fighting the violations of the Christian church rights', said the priest Alexander Shemet in one of his interviews.

NOT KNOWN PEOPLE SET ON FIRE THE BUILDING OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN MOZYR

On December, 25, not known people set on fire the wooden church of St. George in Mozyr. Fire-fighters arrived there but were not able to save the building. The criminals used diesel fuel for setting the church on fire. They spilled it in the corners of the church inside the building. As a result, the church burned down completely.

The criminals wrote some satanic inscriptions on the walls of the building. A criminal case was initiated after the fact of setting the church on fire.

This is the second time when somebody tried to set on fire an Orthodox church in Mozyr. A month and a half ago the criminals had no success in it.

AN INDEFINITE (WITHOUT TIME-LIMIT) HUNGER-STRIKE ANNOUNCED ON DECEMBER, 29 BY CATHOLIC BELIEVERS IN THE VILLAGE LAZDYNKY, IVYE DISTRICT, GRODNO REGION

The protest was supported by the neighboring parish in the village Yuratishki. More than a hundred believers took part in it.

The first ones to announce the hunger-strike were Veronika Sklyapovich, Yanina Karpinskaya and Yanina Silvanovich (all of them are over the retirement age). They required that the authorities should prolong the visa to their priest Mariush Ilyashevich, the citizen of Poland.

About one hundred people from the village Yuratiski neighboring with Lazdyny, joined the protest action.

Belarusian authorities do not prolong the permission to the priest saying that in Belarus there are unemployed graduates of local Catholic seminaries.

The priest M. Ilyashevich had been ministering in Belarus for 13 years. He helped to build the Catholic church in Lazdyny and helped with the building in Yuratishki. His mother is Belarusian, she was born in Chashniki, and his father helped to free Belarus from fascists.

The believers were not able to get permission, and on December, 31, Mariush Ilyashevich had to leave Belarus.

The survey is composed according to the own information and information from the sites www.svaboda.org, www.spring96.org, www.charter97.org, www.newlife.by, www.bchd.info, www.info.belreform.org, www.jesuschrist.ru, www.krinica.org, www.belngo.info, www.zabelarus.info etc.