

# OUR DIASPORA: Hope for Ukrainian education in Poland

by Michael Buryk

When you drive up to the grey stuccoed building in the small village of Mokre, Poland, it probably looks like any other primary school in the area. But, a brightly colored bulletin board that stands out front offers a window on the amazing experience that is taking place inside. The pupils at Niepubliczna Szkoła Podstawowa w Mokrem attend kindergarten through Grade 6, and their curriculum includes instruction in both Polish and Ukrainian. And, there is a heavy emphasis on science and computer technology as well. Could this become a successful model for primary education throughout southeast Poland with its minority population of Lemkos and Ukrainians?

In July 2013, I met the Rev. Julian Felenczak, the heart and soul of this unique, multicultural school that is located in the flatlands and low, rolling hills just south of Sanok in Gmina Zagorz. "I originally came from the village of Bortne (Bartne in Polish) in Gorlice County in the Lemko region," he said. He was ordained as a Ukrainian Orthodox priest in Zdynia, where he was an avid supporter in the 1990s of the Lemko Vatra, which just celebrated its

Mike Buryk is a Ukrainian American writer whose research focuses on Lemko and Ukrainian genealogy and the history of Ukrainians in the United States. You can contact him at [michael.buryk@verizon.net](mailto:michael.buryk@verizon.net). His website is [http://www.buryk.com/our\\_patch/](http://www.buryk.com/our_patch/).

Mr. Buryk extends special thanks to Volodya Cherepanyak for his translation assistance during the in-person interview in Mokre, Poland.

Copyright (c) 2014 by Michael J. Buryk. All rights reserved.



Father Julian Felenczak in a classroom of the Mokre bilingual school.

31<sup>st</sup> anniversary. "There was a change in plans," he said, and in 1996 he was sent to the parish of Morochów/Mokre (the parish includes the villages of Morochów and Mokre) with his young wife, Seweryna, whom he met in France while in the seminary there. An orthodox church had existed in Morochów as early as 1402 and remained until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

#### Rusyns, Boikos, Lemkos

There is a long history of ethnic education in Mokre. The teaching of the Rusyn language began in the area in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and a primary school existed as far back as 1912. At that time many of the local people called themselves Rusyny and there

were about 100 inhabitants each in this village and also in nearby Morochów. Between the two world wars, Ukrainian was taught in the schools and there was a Ukrainian Catholic church here.

There has always been a strong Boiko influence since this Ukrainian ethnic group settled throughout the area and even into some of the villages north of Sanok. The world famous folk-singing and dance group Oslaviany was formed in Mokre in 1972 and today is based at the Ukrainian community center in the village. The group took its name from the Oslava river that runs through Mokre. Their repertoire includes Boiko, Lemko and Hutsul music and dance. The school encourages its students to participate in the group to cultivate their connection with their Ukrainian culture.

#### Effects of world war and Akcja Wisla

Before World War II, there had been a small Jewish population in Mokre. "All the local Jew families were shot by the Nazis during World War II," said Father Julian. In 1947, Akcja Wisla took its toll on the local Ukrainians. "Only five Polish families were left after it happened," he said.

Some Ukrainians were sent to the Masuria region of northeast Poland, while others went to western Ukraine. Under the Polish government of Władysław Gomułka in 1956, those families who had been deported within Poland were allowed to return. "About 25 percent of the families returned," he said. Some Ukrainian families emigrated to European Union countries, the United States and Canada in the 1980s.

The Ukrainian Catholic church in Morochów (there was no church in Mokre, since this village had always been connected with the parish in Morochów) was closed in 1945. In the late 1950s, some of the returning families began to think about opening a new church. And in 1961, a Ukrainian Orthodox parish was established. There was also a Ukrainian Greek-Catholic church built in Mokre in 1992, the Church of the Transfiguration.

Today, Father Julian is the pastor of the Meeting of the Lord Orthodox Church in Morochów and the parish extends to the village of Mokre. He teaches religion, mathematics and IT (information technology) in the primary school. Teaching religion in state schools was allowed for the first time in Poland in 1989, and parents make a religion choice for their children when they first enter school. Their choices include Orthodox, Greek-Catholic and Roman Catholic.

#### Challenges facing the school

With Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, there was greater opportunity for teaching minority languages in state schools. Also, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages was approved by Poland in 2009. Ukrainians are

recognized as a national minority along with their language. However, state and local funding for schools where minority languages are taught is not always sufficient to maintain and expand their facilities and programs.

Today, the director of Niepubliczna Szkoła Podstawowa w Mokrem is Bernardetta Holowaty. It is now an association school and no longer a state one, and it operates with a local, private board under the direction of the Association Baladhora. This major administrative and financial change occurred in September 2012. The Gmina of Zagorz no longer helps to finance the school as it did previously, but has lent the building to the association. They must raise money for its maintenance and heating, the furniture and any additional education projects. There is still some funding from the Polish Ministry of Education for existing curricula and teachers, but their salaries were cut in 2012 as a result of the loss of funds from Zagorz.

In terms of the student population, 30 Polish, 30 Ukrainian and 30 mixed Polish-Ukrainian families send their children to the school. Although the study of the Ukrainian language is optional, at least 50 percent of the students from Polish families elect to study it. Many of these families have at least some Ukrainian roots.

There is a shortage of funds to continue innovative programs and develop new ones in science, computer technology and the arts. And funds must be raised to maintain the school facilities as well. Currently, teachers have a heavy workload and it would be desirable to have at least one new teacher in the lower grades.

Father Julian is especially proud of the computer lab. "I wish there were more funds available to upgrade the equipment and purchase new, updated software," he said. He would also like to have more crafts materials for the students and toys for the pre-school. The current budget for all of this including computer hardware and software is only 350 zloty (about \$150 U.S.) annually.

An ongoing major concern for Father Julian is enrollment. If the student population were to drop below 30, then it would lose state funding. While this is not a problem now, it could be in the future. So Father Julian hopes to continue to provide the kind of multicultural environment and up-to-date curriculum that will attract new students year after year.

\* \* \*

If you would like to contribute to support this innovative grass roots Ukrainian multi-cultural education effort in southeast Poland, here is where you can send money: The association's address: Stowarzyszenie Baladhora, Mokre 22, 38-542 Rzepedz, Poland;

The association's bank account: Baladhora NSP Mokre, PBS o/Sanok Poland; SWIFT: PODSPLP1; IBAN: PL 55 8642 1184 2018 0031 6433 0001.



The Mokre bilingual primary school.

## Special rates on Certificates

1.61% APY\*

5 yr. term

0.60% APY\*

9 mo. term

Effective 5/1/14

\*APY-Annual Percentage Yield. \$500 minimum opening deposit. UFCU reserves the right to discontinue or modify this offer at any time. Rates subject to change without notice, however the interest rate APY are fixed for Certificates and will be in effect for the term of the account. Penalties for early withdrawal. Fees could reduce earning in the account. The APY is based on an assumption that interest/dividends will remain on deposit until maturity. To open an account, you're required to establish membership by opening a Share Savings Account with a required \$50 minimum deposit. Federally insured by NCUA.

**UKRAINIAN**  **УКРАЇНСЬКА**  
FEDERAL CREDIT UNION ФЕДЕРАЛЬНА КРЕДИТНА СПІЛКА

MAIN OFFICE | 824 Ridge Rd East | Rochester, NY 14621 | 585.544.9518 | fax 585.338.2980

BRANCH ALBANY, NY SACRAMENTO, CA SYRACUSE, NY BOSTON, MA PORTLAND, OR BUFFALO, NY VANCOUVER, WA  
OFFICES 518.266.0791 916.721.1188 315.471.4074 781.493.6733 503.774.1444 716.847.6655 360.597.2096

[www.rufcu.org](http://www.rufcu.org) 877-968-7828

Federally insured by NCUA

