

## **Bi-monthly Informative Publication No 1 Bulletin for Inter-religious Cooperation**

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### **On the program Inter-religious Cooperation in Macedonia (PRM)**

The Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC) is a civic society organization focused on stimulation, support and development of the local, regional and international initiatives for advancement of the sustainable development of the human resources in Macedonia and beyond. Since this year, MCIC has begun implementing the Program Inter-religious Cooperation in Macedonia (PRM). The goal of the program is to enhance the mutual understanding among the churches and the religious communities and the understanding on the part of the Macedonian public. The goal group is the overall public in Republic of Macedonia. The actual goal group is constituted of the members and activists of all the religious communities in Macedonia, with a focus on the students of the educational institutions (theological high schools and faculties) as direct beneficiaries.

Within the program Inter-religious Cooperation in Macedonia, several activities have been foreseen: exposition (display), capacity building and informing. The exposition part includes lecture exchange, visiting theological educational institutions, visiting religious objects, days of the religious communities, summer camp and visits to positive examples. The capacity building part consists of technical support to the theological faculties, training on inter-religious dialogue, training on project cycle management/ institutional development and organizational strengthening, English language courses and

computer courses, as well as workshops, seminars and meetings. The informing par foresees realization of bulletin, address book, inter-religious calendars, comparative studies and info-office. The program has been funded by the Norwegian and Danish Church Aid.

### **On the bulletin...**

In light of the need for more intensive communication and cooperation among the churches and the religious communities and informing the wider public about their activities, and having been motivated by some initiatives by the religious communities (for example, the lecture given by the Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Studies at the Orthodox Faculty and other way around), MCIC has developed the program Inter-religious Cooperation in Macedonia.

The goal of the Bulletin on Inter-religious Cooperation is to provide information about the activities of the churches and the religious communities in Macedonia, in particular the cooperation activities. The topics covered with this bulletin are related to the current events and activities at the Orthodox Faculty and the Faculty of Islamic Studies, information about the current events within the churches and the religious communities and other information of interest to the members of the churches and the religious communities and the wider public, as well.

## **MACEDONIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

### **The Background of the Macedonian Orthodox Church**

The Christianity in Macedonia, also wider in the Balkan, was spread and preached by the Holy Apostle Paul as part of his missionary journeys, which is recorded in the Apostles' Books. He had been accompanied by Luke, Timothy, Sila and Tihik, who had also by themselves worked on Christianization of these regions, independently of Saint Paul. The Holy Apostle Andrei had preached throughout Macedonia and ordained the Holy Apostle Urban to be the first Episcopope of Macedonia. The Holy Apostle Siluan had been the first Episcopope of Thessalonica, and Epafrodit of Adria or Adriacia (bordering place with Thracia). It leads to the conclusion that the foundations of the organized Christian church had been laid back then. It is

worth noting that the Apostles Aristarch and Secund came from Thessalonica, Epafrodit from Fillipi, and Gay from Dober (Dervia) located somewhere between what are today Strumitsa and Valandovo. In those times, Macedonia was under Roman rule, thus the borders had been often reshaped and the ethnic composition of the people as well. As a result of the Christianization in the first three centuries, the Christians in Macedonia had their own organized Church complete with church hierarchy, whose Bishops had regularly been taking part in the Synods at local and ecumenical level. In the V century, several dioceses of Metropolitans and Bishops can be found throughout Macedonia, most renowned are Thessalonica, Skopje, Heraclea, Bargala and Stoby. In that period, many early-Christian basilicas had sprung up throughout Macedonia. During the reign of tsar Justinian I (527-565), who originated from the village of Tavrion nearby today's Skopje. He gave order for a new town Justiniana Prima to be built and the Skopje Metropolitan to be raised to Autocephalous Archiepiscopacy. Katelijan had been the first Archbishop of the Justiniana Prima Archiepiscopacy. We know of other Archbishops as well, like Benenat, Paul, Joan I, Leon and the last Joan IX, who in 680-681 had taken part in the Trul Synod in Carigrad.

In the V century, Slav colonization takes place in the Balkans and brings about mixing among the old inhabitants with the Slav people. The Christianization of the newcomers starts in the IX-the c. with the work of the Sts. Cyril and Methodius from Thessalonica. They are believed to have composed the alphabet of the Slav language. They had translated the Holy Scriptures and the other works necessary for the church services to be conducted in the language spoken by the ordinary people. The work of the Sts. Cyril and Methodius had been carried on by the St. Clement and St. Naum of Ohrid, St. Constantine of Bregalnitsa and their disciples, towards the end of the IX and the beginning of the X c.

St. Clement had established the first University of the Slav people, and St. Naum had established the first Monastery on the coast of the Ohrid Lake. In the second half of the X c, The Ohrid autocephalous Archiepiscopacy had been consecrated as Patriarchy in the Samuel state, and after the fall of the Samuel Empire it had been demoted to Archiepiscopacy again and, as such, it had been in existence for eight centuries until 1767, when it was abolished.

Prior to the end of the WWII, in 1944 in the village of Vranovci, an Initiative Board for establishing Macedonian Orthodox Church was constituted. In March 1945, the first Church-people Synod was organized in Skopje and a resolution for the Ohrid Archiepiscopacy to be re-established as Macedonian Orthodox Church was made.

Today, the Macedonian Orthodox Church is headed by Venerable, Archbishop of Ohrid and Macedonia Mr. Stefan. He chairs with the Holy Archpriest Synod of MOC. The territory of Macedonia is organized in seven eparchies within the MOC. Around 400 priests actively serve in the MOC eparchies. In about twenty monasteries on the territory of the MOC, over 100 monks and nuns in prayer and in monk duty preserve the legacy of the holy fathers. The American-Canadian eparchy and the Australian-New Zealand eparchy headed by Metropolitan Mr. Peter and the Western-European eparchy headed by Metropolitan Mr. Gorazd come under the MOC authority.

The educative mission of the Ohrid Saint Clement School is carried on by the Orthodox High School - St. Clement of Ohrid and the Orthodox Faculty - St. Clement of Ohrid within the Macedonian Orthodox Church. Each year, young theologians, teachers of religious science and future priests are being trained and educated in these educational institutions.

Prepared by: Dejan Dimitrijevski

### **Orthodox High School St. Clement of Ohrid**

### **Macedonian Orthodox High School St. Clement of Ohrid, Skopje**

On 26 September 1967, the Holy Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church made a decision for an Orthodox Faculty to be established, as well as high school educational theological centre designed for preparing the teaching staff necessary to the Church. The curriculum was defined at the first professors' counsel held on 17 October 1967 with a blessing by the Debar-Kicevo Metropolitan Mr. Methody. At the beginning, the high school was situated in the monastery "Upper St. Ilija" in the village of Banjani in the Skopje surrounding. The regular teachings started on 1 November 1967 with 68 students arranged in five classes. The professor staff was comprised of three in-ordinary professors and another six professors. The first rector of the

school was Prof. Boris Boskovski. The following year, the school was relocated in the village of Dracevo. The school year started on 4 December 1968. Due to the bad condition, the school building was renovated in 1973. In the school year 2001/2002, the teachings were given in the housing compound within the monastery "Nativity of the Holy Mother" in the village of Kalista, Struga. At the same time, the high school compound in Dracevo was being restored, thus it grew into modern institution. New parallax dedicated to the patron of the school St. Clement of Ohrid was built.

The schooling lasts for five years in dormitory conditions. The day starts in 5.45 h. with getting up, followed by Morning Prayer and breakfast. Afterwards, the regular lessons follow. At noon, lunch is given. In continuation, the pupils are free to devote themselves to off-lesson activities. The evening prayer follows, two studying sessions, a dinner, TV watching and afterwards another studying session. The collective prayer prior to going to sleep is organized. At 22:00 h, the students get ready for the night rest. The off-lessons include orthodox debate, literature section, school choir, ecological section, humanitarian section, Red Cross section and sport section, all headed by professors. The high school has school library with 5.979 books. It is worth mentioning that many students from our school have obtained university degrees from our or from foreign Faculties. Several Masters of Art and Doctors of Philosophy come from our school, as well. The fact that two Metropolitans, Timothy and Stefan, come from our school is encouraging, as well. As for the monk order in Macedonia, which is currently being restored, six students from the high school have accessed the monk order so far.

Prepared by: Dejan Dimitrijevski

### **Orthodox Faculty St. Clement of Ohrid, Skopje**

**The current Dean of the Faculty is D-r. Jovan Takovski.**

There are about fifty professors teaching at the Faculty, renowned for their highly-professional work and scientific results. The Faculty is in expectation of

new generation of teaching staff, in the moment on post-graduate studies in Belgrade, Bucharest, Veliko Trnovo and Rome. In the period 1982-2004, 150 students – theologians have graduated at this Faculty. Many of them are working as professors in the Orthodox High School or at the Faculty, or as religion teachers in the primary schools and within the parish churches. Three Metropolitans, members of the Holy Synod of MOC (the Metropolitans Cyril, Agatangel and Naum), one Episcopate – Reverend Gavril Svetogorec, Episcopate Velicki and many monks hold a degree from this Faculty.

The cooperation between the Orthodox Faculty “St. Clement of Ohrid” and the Sts. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje is realized through directing some theologians to complete higher education at other faculties, exchange of professors and in other aspects. The cooperation with other Orthodox Faculties (or institutes) in Bucharest, Belgrade, Veliko Trnovo and Rome is realized through the post-graduate students. The Faculty publishes Annual – Collection of scientific works, while the students publish their own newsletter – “Orthodox Newsletter”. The students realize their activities through the Student society, which organizes the publishing of the student newsletter and the student theological debate. Over 250 students currently are on studies at the Orthodox Faculty in Skopje, out of which two thirds are full students.

Prepared by: Dejan Dimitijevski

## **Islamic Community**

### **The Islamic Community and Islamic Institutions**

The Islamic community in Republic of Macedonia is an independent organization that operates as legal subject on the basis of the Islamic norms and rules, as well as in accordance with the existing laws. It represents a continuation of the Shejhul Islam institution, dating back to the post-Ottoman period, for already more than 100 years. It has been functioning in different forms, under different rules and systems, championing the continuation of the Islam from historical, as well as from cultural and religious aspect. The Islamic community pursues its goals and responsibilities in accordance with its constitution, which is the highest act of this institution. The religious life norms

and the obligations towards the believers and other way around are provided in the constitution. Within this highest normative act, the Labor relation code, Systematization and organization of the obligations and duties of the employees' code etc. have been adopted. The Islamic community seeks to build and maintain the Islamic religious objects, the educational, scientific, cultural and humanitarian institutions. The Islamic community is organized in organs, bodies, institutions, resources and sectors, like: the Reisul Ulema, Medzlisi Sura, the legal-financial Medzlis and muftinees. The following six sectors operate as part of the Medzlisi Sura: religious-educational, scientific-cultural, informative-publishing, legal-administrative, financial and Vakuf sector. Other religious, cultural and educational institutions that are actively involved in the social life are the High Islamic School "Medresa Isa Beg", the Library "Isa Beg"; the Society "Il-mije", the humanitarian organization "El Hilal" and the Faculty of Islamic Studies. The Islamic community with its organizational units notably contributes to the affirmation of the Islamic values, from religious, as well as from cultural aspect. The Islamic community represents a strong guaranty for maintaining and cultivating the religious, moral and cultural Islamic values and tends to the educational, social-economic and the scientific prosperity of its members in this region.

Prepared by: Irsal Jakupi

## **Faculty of Islamic Studies**

### **High Islamic School "ISA BEG MEDRESA", Skopje**

The High Islamic School (SUI) Isa Beg Medresa honourably continues the centuries' long tradition of the Medresa built in the second half of the XV c. (1469) by Gazi Isa Beg, thus the Medresa is named after him. He preserved the tradition passed on by his father Isak Beg who built the first Medresa on the Balkan. In 1936, the true glory of the Medresa Isa Beg will be restored. It will be granted a status of high school where imams, mual-limis and other religious clerks will be trained. Mainly religious subjects were studied in the Medresa, as well as Arab, Turkish, French and Bosnian language, general and national history, geography, maths, physics, chemistry, logics,

psychology and pedagogy.

In the school year 1939/40, this Medresa schooled 145 students, and in 1940/41 the total number of students was 180. Besides the regular studies, the students took part in free activities like: literature group, drama group and student vacation association. Also, the Mevlud school choir had a good reputation in Skopje and beyond. As soon as the World War II flared up in 1941, the prosperous functioning of the Medresa came to an end.

### **THE MEDRESA TODAY**

The idea for building a Medresa in Macedonia was born in 1978. Subsequently in 1979, the Assembly of the Islamic Community of Macedonia for the first time opened up a discussion and made a decision to forward a request to the highest representatives of the Islamic community. An approval for building a Medresa was obtained after considerable efforts were put in. The bedrock was laid in Kondovo, close to Saraj, on 17 Ramazan (2 August) 1980, while on 15 October 1984 the Medresa was ceremoniously opened. Thus, the anniversary of the Medresa is marked each year on 15 October. The Medresa compound consists of a building with eight classrooms, plus two language laboratories, informatics laboratory, mesdzid, library, reading room, café, administrative offices, while the boarding house and the restaurant complex stand separate from the school building. The boarding house can accommodate 265 students, and the restaurant hall can cater for 150 students. The education in the Medresa lasts for four years and is for free. Once the student completes the four year education and passes the graduation exam is prepared to take up a post of imam, vaiz and mual-lim anywhere a need may occur. However, many students opt for further education at famous universities in the Arab world, in the countries of the region and the Faculty of the Islamic Studies in Skopje. The statute of the Medresa is of a professional high school designed for education of staff necessary for the Islamic community in Macedonia. Any student who has completed primary school with excellent marks and who has passed the entry exam is eligible to enrol at the Medresa high school. Within the four academic years, 29 religious and regular subjects are studied. Besides the regular lessons, the students are obliged to complete the Ramazan practice as well.



In the course of the school year, many religious, cultural and sport activities are organized. Most notable are the choir and the mevlud, as well as the literature and drama groups, which have roused the people (dzemat) wherever they have appeared.

The program given to celebrate the Bajram days is worth singling out, as well as other dates significant for the Islamic history. The association of students publishes a newsletter under the title "IKRE" where the students demonstrate their poetic abilities through original texts and translations in Albanian, Macedonian, Turkish and Bosnian language.

Even though the Isa Beg Medresa is quite new, particularly in comparison with its sister Medresas, with the significant work and commitment put in by the staff it became an institution for the Muslims to pride themselves on. It emanates with light and warms the hearts and souls of the believers. May it be everlasting!

#### **FACULTY OF ISLAMIC STUDIES – SKOPJE**

The Faculty of Islamic Studies (FIS) in Skopje is the highest educational institution within the Islamic community in Macedonia. The bedrock of the Faculty of Islamic Studies has been laid in February 1995, and the construction has been completed in December 1997. In the same year, the Faculty has commenced with standard teachings. In the first year, 12 professors worked at the Faculty, five of them held doctors of philosophy degrees. The number of professors, today, is much higher. The Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Studies is Prof. D-r. Ismail Bardhi. There are over 100 students on studies at this Faculty, at the moment. Once the students complete the education at this Faculty, they have earned themselves the title of Professor of Islamic studies. The larger number of graduates goes on post-graduate studies. Some of them take up posts of teachers of religious science in the primary schools or imams in their birthplaces.

With regard to the various activities carried out by the FIS students, we would mention their engagement as lecturers at the mosques, during the month of Ramazan. Also, the students have good cooperation with their peers from other Faculties and offer them basic explanation on the Islamic principles.

In the school year 2002/03, the professors at the Faculty of Islamic Studies

published a book containing scientific researches on various subjects pertinent to the Islamic religion, in Albanian, Macedonian and English language. The topics in this book and their authors are: 'The Holy War in the Monotheistic Religions' by D-r. Ismail Bardhi, "The Beginnings and the Development of the History of Religion science" by M-r. Kani Nesimi, "Psychology of the Religion as Science" by M-r. Musa Musai, "The Freedom and the Political Rights of the Non-Muslims Minorities in an Islamic State" by Suleiman Redzepi, "Description of the Sufi-Backache Values in the Naim's Poetry" by M-r. Metin Izemi, "Another Approach Towards Certain 4 Exported Myths on Albanian Historiography Between Occident and Islam" by Olsi Jazedzi etc. Worth mentioning is the book "Material and Social condition of the Imams in Skopje in 1844/45" by Prof. D-r. Ahmet Shariff, published in Turkish and Albanian language. For the first time in 1998, the Macedonian translation of the Koran by M-r. Hasan Dzilo was published in Medina under the title "Koran with Translation".

Prepared by: Irsal Jakupi

## **Catholic Church**

### **The Catholic Church in Macedonia**

In Macedonia, the Catholic Church dates back to the very beginnings of the Christianity and the times of the Holy Scriptures. In fact, the Books of the Apostles tell us that the Holy Apostle Paul had preached Christianity in Macedonia. Therefore, a regular church hierarchy was established as back as the first centuries. The presence of the Bishop Dakus of Skopje, as well as some other Bishops at the Nikea Synod (325) stands as testimony to this claim.

The first Christians, considered to be ingenuous and members of the universal Church, were named with one name Catholics (catholicons – universal, common). As the time passed by, the term "orthodox" was introduced and as long as XI c. it was interchangeably used with the term "catholicons". The difference emerged due to political reasons.

The Catholic Church of Macedonia is structured in two church units, that is: Skopje Diocese (eparchy) based in Skopje, which embraces all the Catholics

of the Roman (western) ritual and the Apostle Exarchate of Macedonia, based in Strumitza, for the Catholics of the Byzantine (eastern) ritual. The jurisdiction of both institutions extends on the whole territory of Macedonia. Only 1% of the overall population in Republic of Macedonia are Catholics. The contact address of the Catholic community is st. Risto Shishkov No. 31, Skopje.

Prepared by: Marjan Ristov

## **JEWISH COMMUNITY**

### **The Jewish Community in RM**

Let me express my gratitude to MCIC, as well as to the staff of this renowned and respected nongovernmental organization, for publishing the Bulletin of inter-religious cooperation in our country Macedonia.

The members of the Jewish community, descendants of the few that have survived the Holocaust, are indebted towards our forebears and our children not to forget and to raise the issue of hatred, war – race, religious, national and other types of hostilities so that it will happen never again.

Our community continues living and pulsating together with all the peoples, religious communities and churches in this part of the world, for centuries. It is our collective wealth, of all the people in Macedonia. We are convinced that the Bulletin will offer spiritual and expressive insight into the life of the religious communities, the festivities, the joint activities and events, the visits, thus it will enrich our knowledge of each other.

In the end, I would like to call on all the good-willed people, with their contribution, to enrich the contents of the new offspring “BULLETIN OF INTER-RELIGIOUS COOPERATION”.

SALOM

President of the JCRM Victor Mizrahi

### **The background of Methodism in Macedonia**

When the word “protestantism” is mentioned, large number of people may react confused. Some of them are even hostile, labelling us as members of a sect. The question how has the Protestantism emerged in the Balkan needs to be looked at, as well as what is its significance. At the time of the Inquisition

and the indulgencies, many religious customs were in disharmony with the Bible. Martin Luther, as a monk had been reading the Bible and came to realization that the Catholic Church needs to be reformed. In 1517, Martin Luther brought his thesis for reformation to light. The preaching of the clear Evangelical works, based on the Bible, by the Prof. Martin Luther sparked huge protests, criticism and hatred on the part of the Church authorities. The movement was dismissed by the Church authorities, thus instead of reformation movement it turned into Protestantism. The term Protestantism is a common name for numerous reformation movements. In no time had the Protestantism overcome the borders of Germany. John Wesley (1703-1791), an English preacher, brought the Protestantism on British soil. New reformatory Churches had started to be established. In 1860, the first protestant Church was established in Pirin Macedonia. In 1820, the first Protestant missionaries were sent in the Turkish Empire by the faithful in America. This is considered to be the start of the spread of the evangelical word in the Balkans. In 1860, the first Protestant Church was established in Macedonia. The missionaries had frequented the prisons in Thessalonica, Carigrad, and Asia Minor and spread the Word of God. The missionaries interceded with the Turkish authorities on behalf of the prisoners and sought pardon for them. Thus, the prisoners when back home spread the Happy News. The first missionaries came in Strumitsa in 1882. Soon after, churches were established in Murtino, Monospitovo, Veljusa, Kolesino etc. Besides spreading the religion science, the missionaries used to set up primary schools (I-IV grade) as well. In 1871, the first girls' school was opened up in Bitola where Mr and Mrs. Jenny and Mrs. Bond were teaching. Some of the many missionaries working in Macedonia, particularly in Strumitza region, were: D-r. Haus, D-r. Hekel, D-r. Cooper and the well known Elena Stone, portrayed in the Macedonian movie "Miss Stone". After the First World War, in the Kingdom Yugoslavia, EMC went through difficult times. The preacher Mr. Pane Temkov tirelessly worked and was in charge of the Church in Strumitza and the neighbouring villages. Mr. Vladimir Daskalov, graduated professor at the Columbia University in USA, used to work in Samokov and started preaching in Radovish and Strumitza, in 1924. He organized the first Ecumenical Spiritual choir in Strumitza. He continued working as preacher

and as maths professor in the “Jane Sandanski” high school. In 1922, the Church was named Evangelical-Methodist Church (EMC). After the WWII, the churches in Vojvodina and Macedonia functioned as one. The preachers Nikola Arnaudov, Kosta Karamazov, Krum Kalajliev, Ceko Cekov and many others have greatly contributed to the work of the EMC in that period.

After Macedonia gained independence in 1991, new structural and organizational changes were made in the Church, since the new times bring new challenges and the Church should be ready to respond. EMC counts 13 communities in Macedonia, small groups and great number of friends. The EMC numbers around 6000 members and it is based in Strumitza. EMC is an international church with branches in over 150 countries and has World Council. EMC is a member of the World Council of Churches based in Geneva and it has been included in the Ecumenical movement. EMC has never undertaken any actions against the other churches, it has always been open for cooperation with the other churches and religious communities. Today, EMC honours the good cooperation with the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, the Islamic Community and the Jewish community.

Prepared by Milica Poprizova

The significance of the Bulletin of Inter-religious Cooperation could be best illustrated with the words by John Wesley, the great reformatory preacher, “The World is my parish, my church district, and the Love of God in me stands testimony to that”. It implies that the mercy and might of God come upon each person, regardless of his personality and religious orientation. Before the Word of God we are one. Through the publishing of the Bulletin of Inter-religious Cooperation we should announce and celebrate the Name of God.

The Pastor of the Evangelical-Methodist Church of Macedonia:

Mihail Cekov