

# **SEVEN YEAR PLAN OF THE AUTOCEPHALOUS ORTHODOX CHURCH IN POLAND**

## **Introduction**

In response to ARC-UN programme invitation to consider creating a Seven Year Plan for generational change, Suprasl Academy has accepted responsibility for preparation of a proposal of Seven Year Plan of ecological actions of members of the Orthodox Church in Poland. A series of meetings and consultations with representatives of dioceses, parishes, monasteries and organisations of the Orthodox Church in Poland organised by OIKONOMOS Foundation and the Suprasl Academy allowed to prepare set of proposals of concrete actions, which could be undertaken by the faithful of our Church to tackle climate change and help protect the natural environment during forthcoming seven years and further.

Implementation of number of these proposals may be undertaken promptly with engagement of our own accessible resources and possibilities to act. Some of them, however, will require appropriate preparation, which may need additional support. A task of coordination of respective actions leading to execution of the Seven Year Plan of the Orthodox Church in Poland has been undertaken by the Suprasl Academy.

According to guidelines prepared by the organisers of the global programme, proposals of our actions sort into seven key areas:

- a. Education and young people
- b. Faith consistent use of assets – land, investments, purchasing and property
- c. Pastoral care – theological education, training; rediscovering past traditions and wisdom
- d. Lifestyles
- e. Media and advocacy
- f. Partnerships and creating your own environment department
- g. Celebration

**SEVEN YEAR PLAN  
OF THE AUTOCEPHALOUS ORTHODOX CHURCH  
IN POLAND**

**I. Education and young people:**

1. Educational activities should include:
  - a) Preparation of educational material on environmental protection for:
    - Orthodox catechists in public schools in Poland;
    - Orthodox priests;
  - b) Presentations/several hours course on environmental protection, sustained development and possibilities of conservation for students of the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Warsaw
  - c) Translation and publication of educational material on environmental protection for children, prepared by a partner organisation from Orthodox Diocese of Grodno, Belarus.
  - d) Subject matter of environmental protection brought up during church sermons – for instance reminders regarding the need of waste selection, harmfulness of Spring burning of dry meadow grass etc.;
  
2. Educational activities directed to children and youth should include:
  - a) Series of camps/workshops on environmental protection organised at Suprasl Academy;
  - b) Camps/workshops on Orthodox spiritual life and conservation organised by the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth in Poland (FOY) – local equivalents of SYNDESMOS Conservation workshops on Valaam Island, Russia and Orthodox Spiritual Ecology camps on Mt Athos, Greece;
  - c) Broader use of the FOY in Poland retreat centre in Bialowieza for programmes dealing with environmental protection;
  - d) Broader and more active participation of Orthodox children in cleaning forest actions organised by schools. Additional forest cleaning actions organised by clergy, catechists, parish branches of the FOY in Poland;
  - e) Camps/workshops on Orthodox spiritual life and conservation organised together by the Suprasl Academy, the FOY in Poland and partner organisations/youth fellowships from neighbour countries. Cooperation in this direction has been declared by an Orthodox youth organisation and conservation department of the Orthodox Diocese of Grodno, Belarus;
  - f) Educational and practical involvement of the FOY in Poland in celebration of the World Day of Prayer for Creation, September 1/14.
  
3. Practical ecological actions at educational institutions:
  - a) Continuation and introduction of stricter waste selection as well as water and energy conservation policy at the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Warsaw;
  - b) Introduction of stricter energy conservation at Suprasl Academy and Holy Annunciation Monastery through installation of geothermal heating systems in 2010-11;
  - c) Strict waste selection at Suprasl Academy as practical educational example for all participants of Suprasl Academy programme;

- d) Introduction of stricter water conservation policy and energy conservation at other Orthodox monastic communities in Poland;
- e) Information on possibilities of installation of geothermal and solar heating systems at monastic and parish facilities.

## **II. Faith consistent use of assets:**

### 1. Practical actions in this key area should include:

- a) Possibility of instalation of local sewage treatment plant considered before construction of a new parish facility;
- b) Eco-tourism included in the programme of activities of the Suprasl Academy and run in environmentally friendly ways;
- c) Introduction of maximum (more than 70%) fresh, local and organic ingredients in the Suprasl Academy kitchen/refectory;
- d) Elements of natural environment protection present in all the programmes of activities of the Suprasl Academy;
- e) Promotion of parish/public school/local community/municipality cooperation in programmes of wasteselection;
- f) Information concerning harmfulness of spring burning of dry meadow grass etc.;
- g) Establishment/Introduction of a Suprasl Academy programme for organic farming promotion among farmers in Podlasie region - “green lungs of the country”.

## **III. Pastoral care – theology, tradition and wisdom:**

1. Ecological crisis may be understood as “a possibility” for a deeper reflection on its reasons and effects as well as a decision to cause changes, make an effort to undertake concrete actions leading to solution of the problem. In understanding of Orthodox Christians any changes on a large scale – local, regional, global – must begin with changes in ourselves.

2. Orthodox monasticism may surely serve as an example helpful in promotion, development and dissemination of a simpler lifestyle.

3. Series of presentations/several hours course on environmental protection, sustained development and possibilities of conservation run regularly for all students of Ortodox Theological Seminary in Warsaw may help to promote simpler lifestyle, deepen their knowledge on Orthodox *ecotheology*.

3. More intense reflection on elements of *ecotheology* in worship of the Orthodox Church may be supported by ceremonies of:

- traditional seasonal blessing of farmlands,
- blessing of water,
- blessing of bread, wine, rain of wheat and oil (gr. *artoklasia*) and
- Eucharist as liturgical manifestation of human care for natural environment entrusted to people by God.

We will attempt to cause revival of traditional spring/autumn farmlands blessing in all countryside parishes and more often blessing of water and *artoklasia* in all parishes.

4. Lives of particular saints explain how creation/natural environment has always been taken care of in our Christian Orthodox tradition. These stories are not known widely and they should be disseminated.

5. Sacred Hill of Grabarka and Sts Mary and Martha Convent there, Suprasl, Krynoczka/Bialoweza, Piatienka are a kind of local mini-eco-systems. Orthodox churchyards and courtyards (*pogost*) have always been considered sacred area/ground and Orthodox churches have usually been surrounded by several large trees providing shelter for birds. In recent years a number of large trees have been cleared off several churchyards in Eastern Poland due to their age and bad condition. Replacement of the trees should occur ASAP.

6. Pilgrims to Grabarka Sts. Mary and Martha Convent and to other pilgrimage centres in Poland will be asked/reminded to leave no trash upon their departure.

7. Podlasie region, where majority of Orthodox faithful in Poland abide, has not been affected directly/distinctly by climate change. Programmes of emergency first aid addressed to flood victims in southern regions of Poland were organised in the past. Depending on needs similar emergency first aid projects may be organised again. Children of flood victims should be offered summer vacation rest.

#### **IV. Lifestyles**

1. To promote simpler lifestyles Suprasl Academy will coordinate:

- a) preparation, publication and wide distribution of educational material and practical guidelines concerning sustained development and conservation in a household.
- b) translation, publication and distribution of literature on Orthodox approach to creation and environmental protection:
  - “Orthodoxy and Ecology”,
  - “So That God’s Creation Might Live”,
  - “Man and the Environment; A study of St Symeon the New Theologian”
- c) series of books on environmental protection for children – examples of exceptionally ‘nature friendly’ saints.

2. Through the booklet on sustained development perceived by Eastern Christianity as well as one on ‘methodology’ of environmental protection in a household („Let’s begin with ourselves” – the home oriented programme of environmental protection out of the house), the faithful will be encouraged to carry out environmental audits of their households and to undertake appropriate practical action (for example use of environmentally friendly detergents, reducing water consumption by installing “stoppers” in toilet cisterns, going for shopping with a carrier bag, etc.). The booklets may be supplied to every Orthodox family during traditional pastoral home visits after Epiphany Feast.

3. 2009 international conference organised by the Chair of Orthodox Theology at Bialystok University on “Orthodoxy facing problems of contemporary world” encompassed issue of “Orthodoxy and Ecology”. Subject matter of environmental protection should also be studied at annual diocesan and deanery clergy conferences.

4. The faithful should be encouraged to live simply and in harmony with the environment through specially prepared educational material, booklets and books as well as parish pamphlets, bulletin boards, posters, occasional sermons.

5. Already in 1980, the Fellowship Orthodox Youth in Poland restored tradition of walking pilgrimages to holy places of the Orthodox Church in Poland - Grabarka, Jableczna, Kostomłoty, Piatienka, Saki, Suprasl, Turkowice, Zwierki. Initially there was only one pilgrimage to Grabarka organised by the Fellowship (number of its participants was over 2000). Nowadays numerous parish communities (over 20) organise their own walking pilgrimages in various directions - especially to Grabarka and to other monasteries. Broader information on the pilgrimages in the Orthodox mass media should help to increase their number and numbers of their participants.

#### **V. Media and advocacy:**

1. Suprasl Academy and Oikonomos Foundation pledge to publish books and other publications on environmentally friendly paper only. All other Orthodox publishers/publishing departments will be encouraged to do the same.

2. Editions of Suprasl Academy paper publishing will be significantly smaller due to availability of digital versions of the printed material.

3. Special section on ecology, development and realization of our Seven Year Plan will be provided by:

- Suprasl Academy website
- OIKONOMOS Foundation website
- FOY website

Similar material may be provided on other Orthodox websites – especially the most popular and the best known [www.cerkiew.pl](http://www.cerkiew.pl)

#### **VI. Partnerships and creating your own environment department:**

Environmental protection and sustained development is integral part of the programme of activities of the Suprasl Academy. Suprasl Academy “environmental work department” may become environmental office of the Orthodox Church in Poland.

Specialists in law, water management, land management, education waste management, ecology, sustained development working at higher education institutions in Bialystok will be invited to help in further development, improvement and realisation of the Seven Year Plan

#### **VII. Celebration:**

The World Day of Prayer for Creation initiated by Ecumenical Patriarch should become an occasion for deeper concentration on the natural environment. Its celebration should be accompanied by meetings, seminars, symposia as well as

practical conservation oriented actions – i.e. planting trees and/or shrubs around newly constructed churches, on churchyards, parish grounds and elsewhere.