

WE ARE RESURRECTING THE PARISH OF SAINT MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL IN KAZAKHSTAN!

OR, HOW TO BUILD A CHURCH IN ALMATY?



Dear all!

At the request of the local bishop
José Luís Mumbiela Sierra,
we are to revive the parish
of St. Michael the Archangel in Almaty,
the largest city in Kazakhstan.



This metropolitan area, situated at the foot of the beautiful Tien Shan Mountains, was until recently the capital of this largest country in Central Asia.



Alma Ata – means "father of apples" in Kazakh. Do you remember Atatürk? He is the "Father of the Turks". The Kazakh language belongs to the same family as Turkish, so "ata" means "father," or... our "dad", and "alma" means "apples".

And why apples? Well, all the apples in the world come from here! The source of the genome of modern apple varieties is *Malus Sieversii* – a wild apple with a taste similar to the *Golden Delicious*, which still grows to this day at the foot of the local Tian Shan Mountains.

Could it be that – as local legend has it – the Garden of Eden was located here? ;-)

Viernoye – means "faithful" in Russian, but to whom? Most believe it's to the tsarist authorities. However, it seems the answer lies in front of the local Orthodox cathedral: St. Sophia (meaning Wisdom) can be seen there, with her three daughters: Faith (Vera), Hope (Nadezhda), and Love (Lyubov). It was these early Christian martyrs, in reference to three theological virtues, who gave their names to the surrounding towns:

- ❖ The stanitsa, later the fortress of Vernoye, is Almaty
- ❖ The stanitsa of Nadezhinskaya, is today's Issyk
- ❖ The stanitsa of Lubavinskaya, is Kaskeleng
- ❖ The stanitsa of Sofiyskaya, is today's Talgar



A glance at a map from 1881 and everything becomes clear!

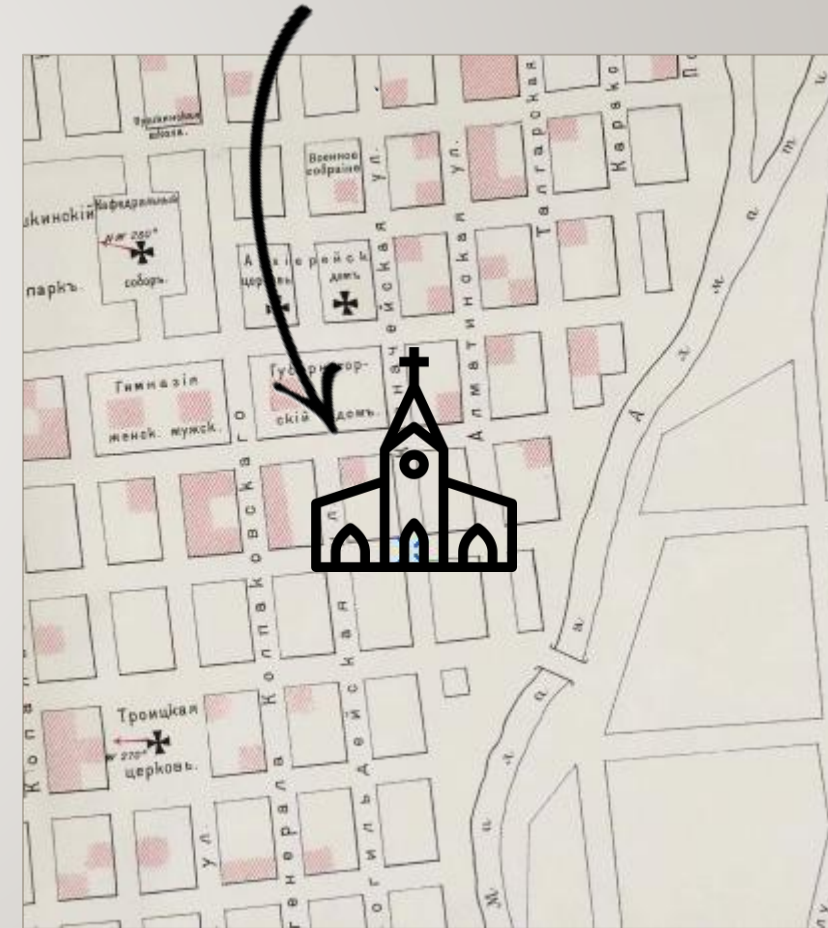


It was here, during the times of Tsarist Russia, that our parish was founded in 1905 – the only Catholic place of worship in this former capital of Kazakhstan.

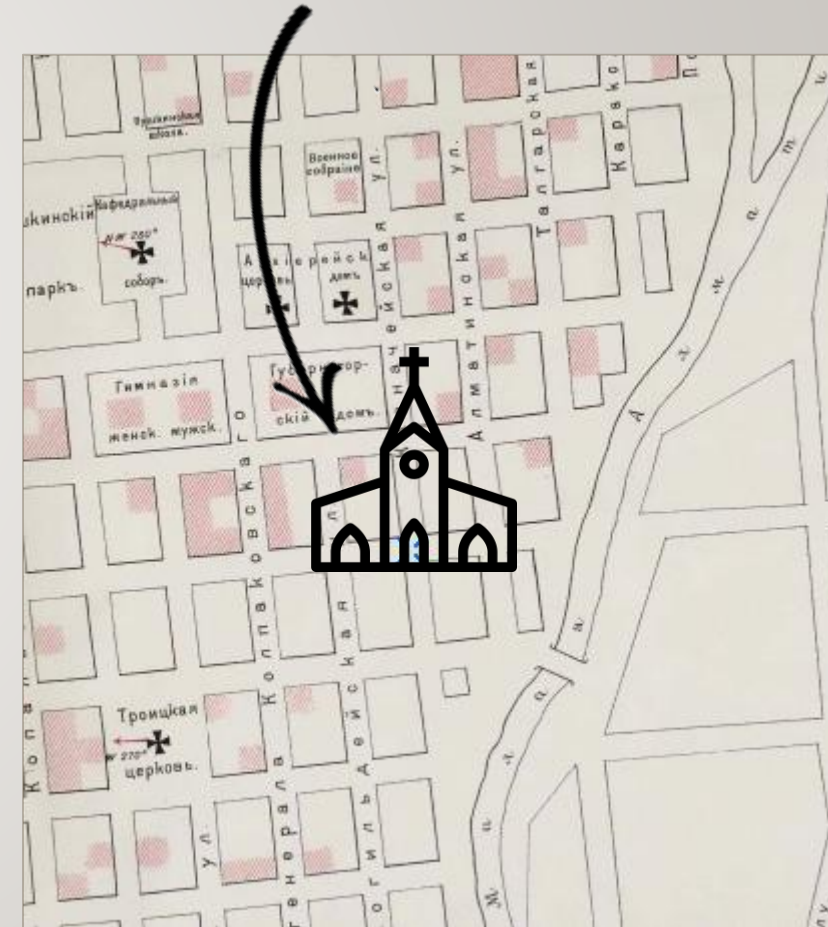
The parish likely served primarily Poles at that time: soldiers conscripted into the tsarist army or workers building a local railway.



We would love to show you a photo of this church, or rather the house that served as a chapel, but unfortunately, no such photo exists. We only have a city map from that time, with the approximate location of the building:



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Today, it is the intersection of Kaldayakov and Bogenbai Batyra Streets.

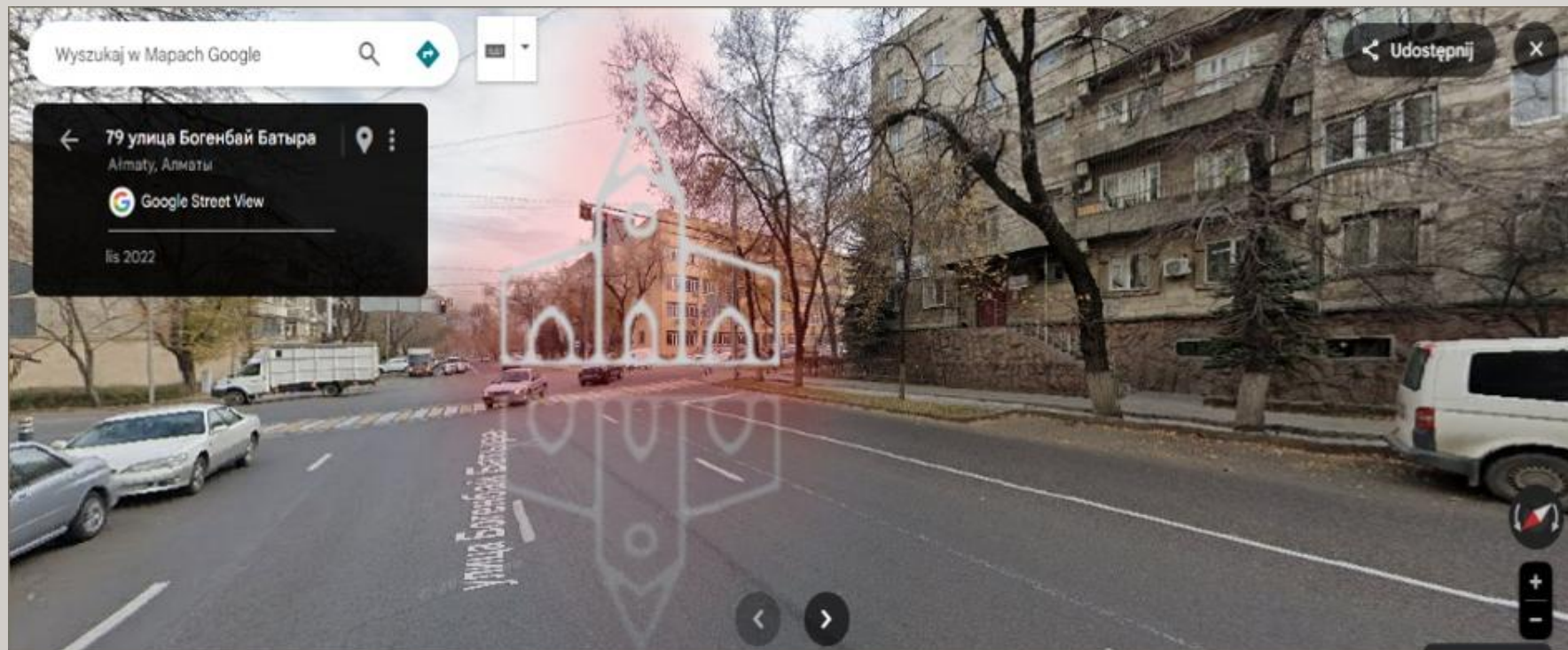
Incidentally, I wonder if this building survived the avalanche of stones that descended from the mountains on Almaty during the 1921 earthquake.



[illegible]

It certainly didn't survive the Bolsheviks,
who permanently liquidated the parish in 1923.

Today, the place looks like this – no trace of the chapel remains:



The parish of St. Michael the Archangel thus shared the fate of many other sacred places of the former Soviet Union. With it, official Catholic life in the heart of Kazakhstan also disappeared for almost 70 years.



The ruins of today's Orthodox Cathedral of St. Sophia in 1989

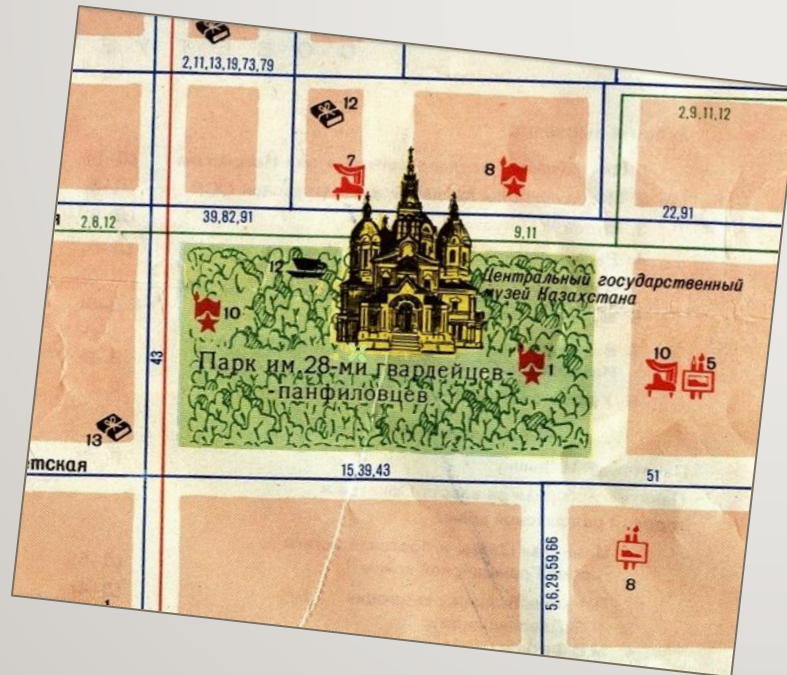


Even the most beautiful Orthodox church in the city became a movie theater at that time.

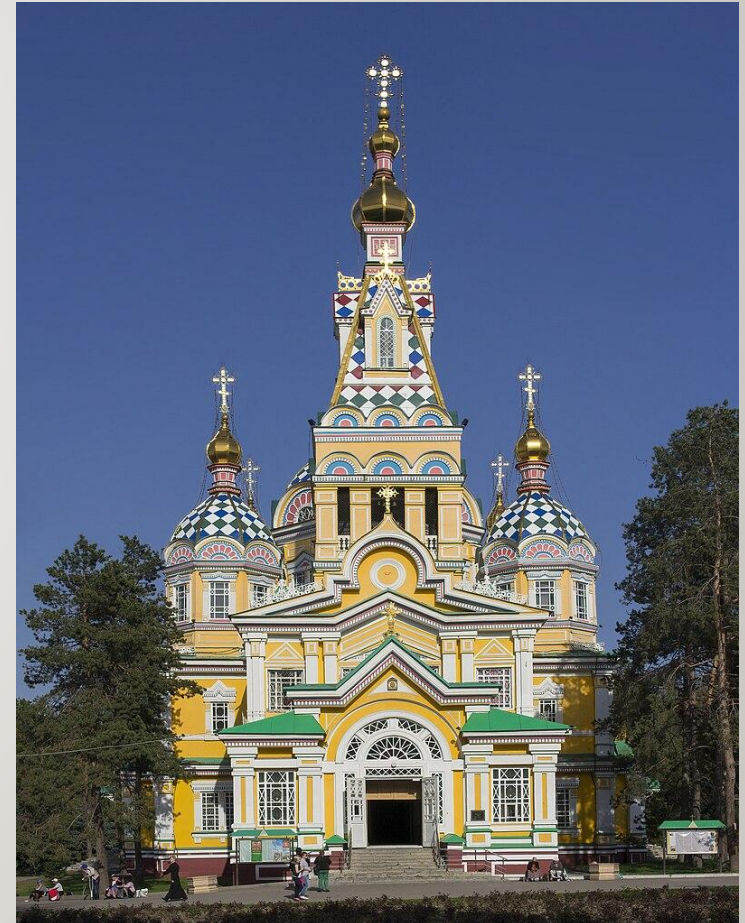
Vosnesenskiy Sobor

or the Cathedral of the Ascension of the Lord

- It is one of the tallest wooden churches in the world (56 m)
- Traditionally constructed without the use of nails
- It was built between 1904 and 1907
- It has survived all local earthquakes, including the largest one in 1911.
- During Soviet times, it served as a cinema, a museum, a radio station, etc.
- Most recently, for several years, it served as an Orthodox cathedral



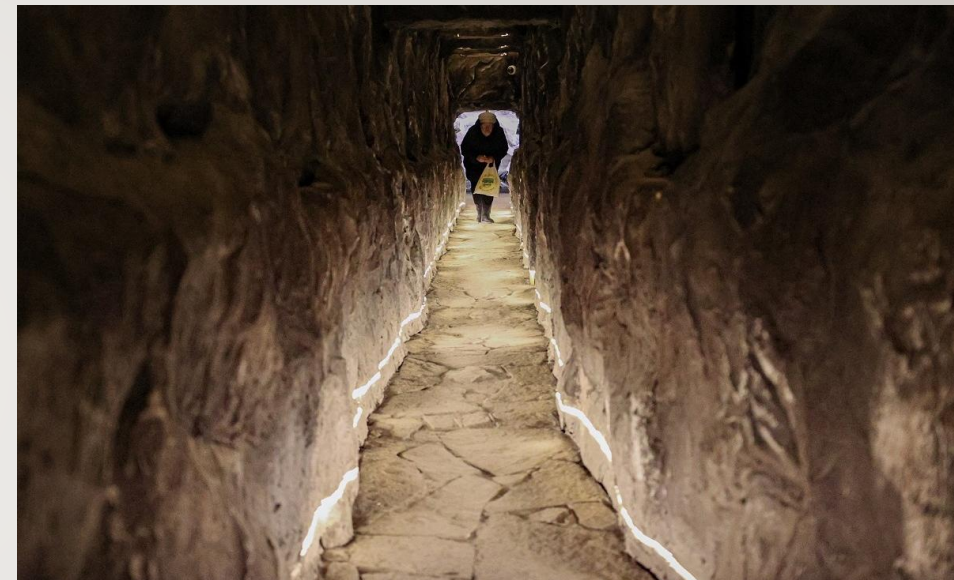
Fragment of a 1974 city map



The church went underground.
In the case of the Orthodox Church, this was not just a metaphor.

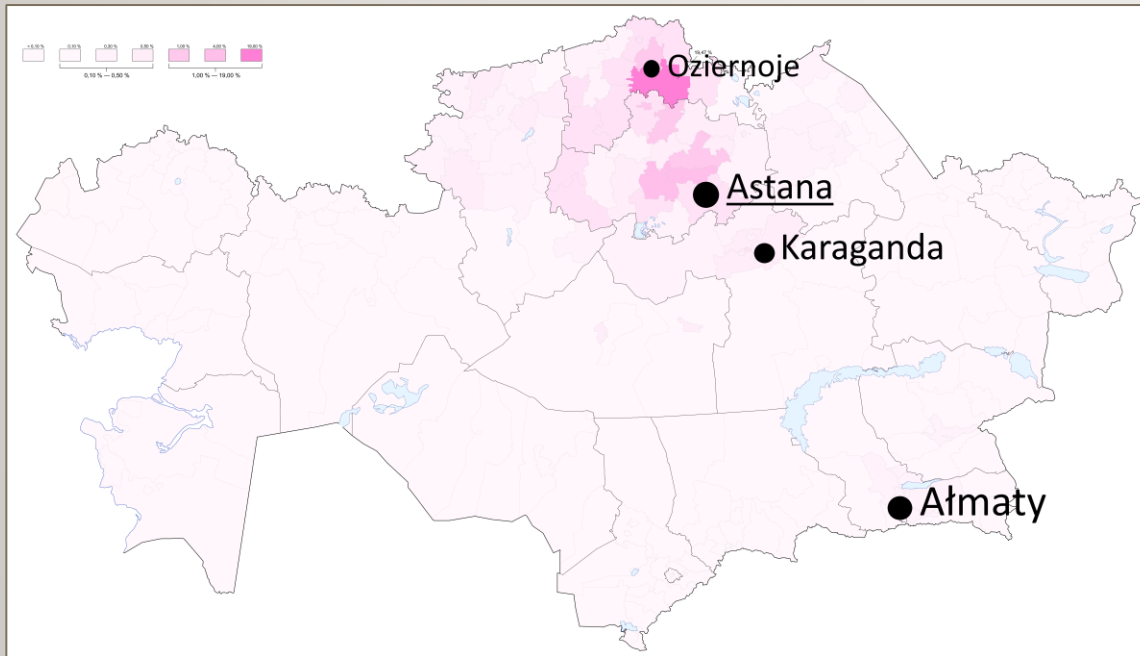


cabar.asia

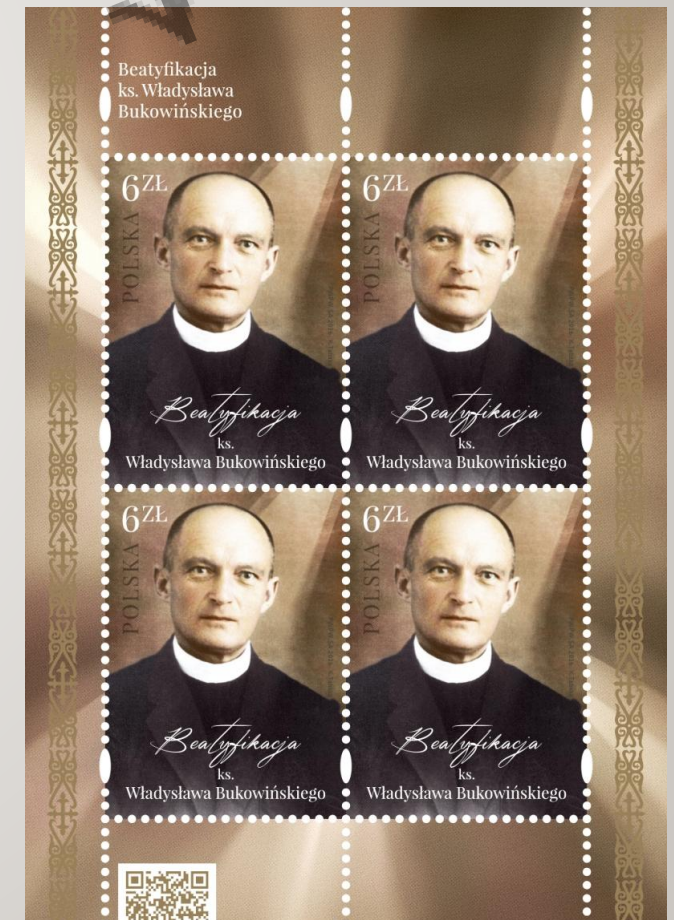


A few years ago, a cave was discovered beneath the Kazan church in Almaty, where the faithful prayed secretly.

Across the country, Christians also risked their lives in homes, celebrating the sacraments at night, with their windows drawn. The memory of one of the bravest Catholic priests, the recently beatified Władysław Bukowiński, lives on to this day. He ministered to Poles exiled to Siberia and their descendants, as well as to Volga Germans resettled in northern Kazakhstan.



Percentage of Poles in Kazakhstan (from 1% to 19%)



The situation changed in the 1990s, when – in the now independent Kazakhstan – the restoration of old and construction of new Orthodox and Catholic churches began.



Interestingly, the first of them (St. Joseph's) was built in Karaganda, thanks to the remarkable Lithuanian priest Albinus Dumblauskas, back in 1980. It was the first religious building in the entire Soviet Union to be approved by the communist authorities!

Listen to how it all came about,
told by Father Andrzej Szczęsny:



The story of another church in the town of Ozornoye is also very interesting. On the Feast of the Annunciation in 1941, the so-called Miracle of The Lake Full of Fish occurred, saving Polish exiles from starvation. There were so many fish that trucks began transporting them to Karaganda, several hundred kilometers away!



Image of the Virgin Mary filling the lake with fish, Bishop's Chapel in Almaty.



In 1993, a church was built there, which became the [National Marian Shrine of Kazakhstan](#).

Natalia Kandunina even made a film ["The Lake"](#) about it.



Currently, in Almaty (a metropolitan area of almost three million people), there is only one proper Catholic church building, the Holy Trinity Cathedral, built by the Franciscans.



The other two parishes are located in an ordinary house (owned by the sisters of Mother Teresa of Calcutta) and in a former wooden restaurant (here, pastoral care is provided, among others, to Koreans):



Many residents of Almaty still remember the Korean friar Diego Kim, a Franciscan who treated the sick using Eastern methods in his outpatient clinic.

Our parish would therefore be the fourth in the city. Interestingly, it has formally existed since September 2022. It was then, on the occasion of Pope Francis' visit to Kazakhstan, that the authorities of that country, as a gesture of favor, allowed the registration of three new parishes (including ours).



And it's important to remember that it is a Muslim country (according to official statistics, 65% of the population is Muslim, 15% Orthodox, and less than 1% Catholic). The government's official policy, however, remains open to other religions and even—thanks to long-time President Nazarbayev—continues to promote the country as a meeting place for different religions and cultures.



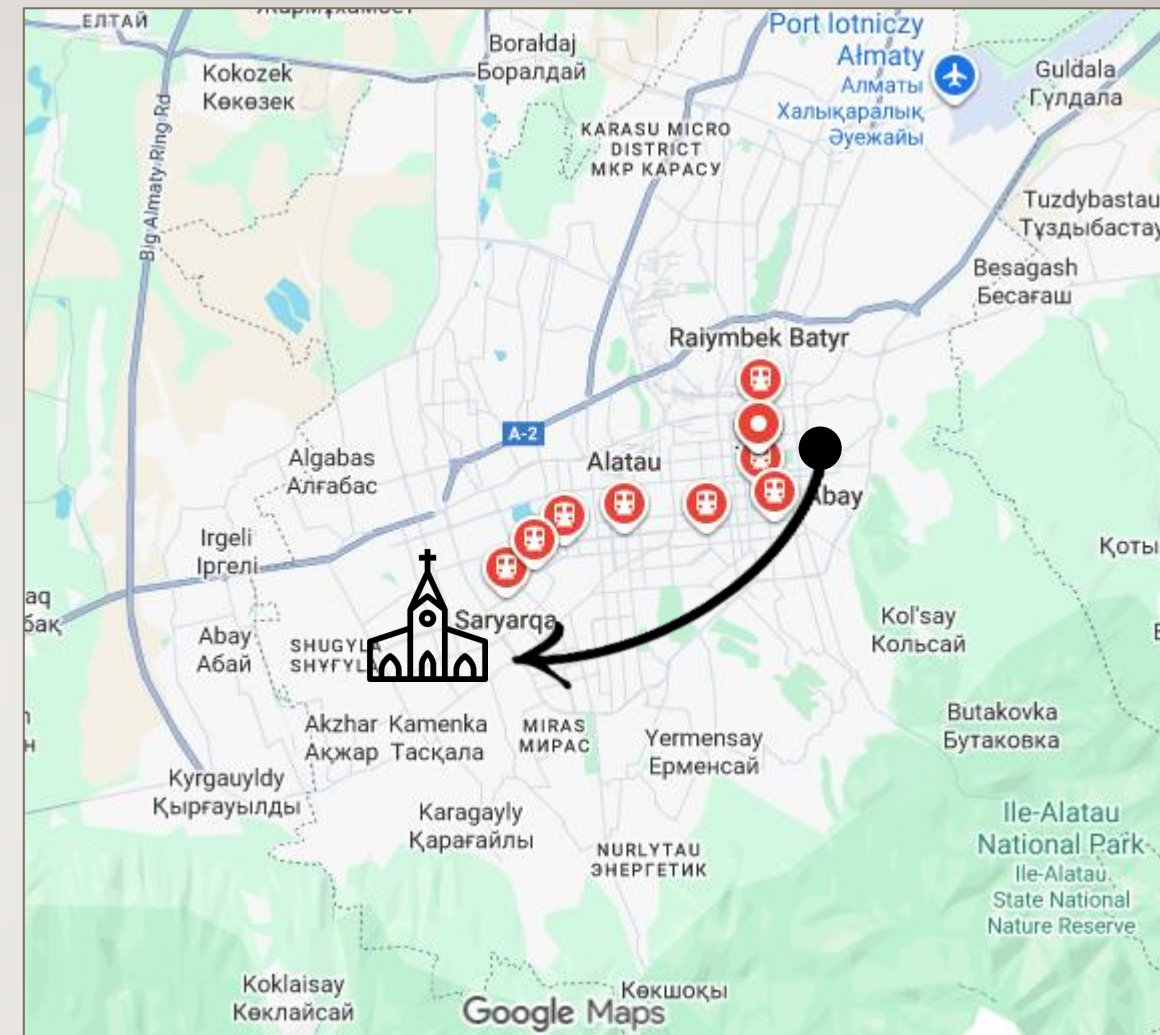
vatican.va

Annual interfaith meetings in the country's new capital, Astana (here with Pope Francis in 2022)

Now, all that remains is to unpack this gift of Providence and put it into practice.

In other words, *we need to resurrect the parish of St. Michael the Archangel,*

because – by the decision of Bishop José Luís, in reference to the first church – that will be our parish's name.



Only the location will change. It will no longer be in the city center, but rather in the remote and vast neighborhoods near the metro terminus (yes, there is a metro here!)

Thanks to this, Catholics living there (and we've already met some) won't have to commute to church on the other side of town – and by the way, due to daily traffic jams, traveling short distances here can take up to an hour or more...

...and then there's that smog!!!



by Igors Jefimovs

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On the other hand, it will open up the possibility of evangelizing these huge population centers. By evangelization, we don't mean the public proclamation of Christ (which is forbidden), but the simple possibility of inviting those willing to pray, which is severely limited in the current circumstances (praying in an apartment building, we have to sing in a hushed voice to avoid angering the neighbors).

So we need a house of prayer!



We've been pondering for a long time how to approach this matter.
What should we do? Adapt an existing building to our needs?



Or maybe build a new church and, in the meantime, meet in people's homes, like the early Christians?

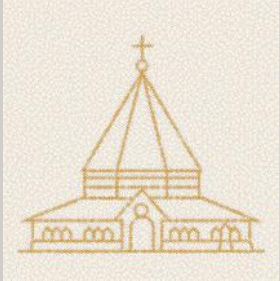
The final decision will be up to our bishop.

If we were to go for the second option, we would like to buy a plot of land in the western part of the city, which is currently under construction. It's growing very quickly: new housing developments are springing up like mushrooms after rain, although there are still vast areas of undeveloped land.



We already have some ideas how our church could look

- We'd like it to accommodate about 200 people.
- We'll need parish halls and a rectory.
- If necessary, we'll also open a soup kitchen.



Church of the Holy Family of Nazareth in Oulu (Finland)



However, all of this is still a distant prospect.

For now, there's one problem:

**WE NEED TO BUY A PLOT OF LAND
AND BUILD THIS CHURCH!**

And the diocese can't afford such an expense.

Considering current prices, we need:

900 000 USD

For now, we're worried that someone will beat us
and purchase our chosen plot.





That's why we're asking various organizations for help,
collecting donations, **looking for sponsors**,
and encouraging support for this initiative:

in USD: PL 52 1020 4115 0000 9302 0298 3682

in EUR: PL 47 1020 4115 0000 9502 0298 3674

in PLN: PL 13 1020 4115 0000 9702 0297 2354

with the note: donation to the Foundation

These are the account numbers of our Foundation, which we established for this purpose.

You can still donate to the Gniezno Caritas account, especially if you want to deduct 1.5%

PL 26 1020 4115 0000 9102 0050 0272

with the note: Church in Kazakhstan

You can write to us: sv.michail.almaty@gmail.com

or visit our website: www.sv-michail-almaty.kz

All of this is crazy, but we believe that with God, nothing is impossible.

For every single coin, we already say a **heartfelt "God bless you"**,
and we entrust your affairs to the good God.

May Mary, Mother of the Great Steppe, bless you all!



Painting from the Carmelite monastery in Ozornoye

Authors: Father Andrzej Szczęsny and his colleagues.

Father **Andrzej Szczęsny** comes from Poland. In mid-October 2025, he became the parish priest of Saint Michael in Almaty. Bishop José Luís personally invited him, and despite his age and health issues, he accepted this mission. He currently lives in an apartment building. With the permission of the bishop, who recently visited us, he created a small chapel for our needs in his apartment.

