

Ecumenical Youth Camp at the Lintula Orthodox Convent, Finland  
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*UPBEAT presents the following story by a young Finnish Orthodox, Maria Iltola, as a concrete example of what has been done in one country as a service to the Church. It is noteworthy that the young people working to rebuild the Lintula Convent were not all Orthodox.*

Every year the Youth Department of the World Council of Churches sponsors Ecumenical Youth Service Projects all over the world. One of these projects was held in Finland last summer (1967) at the Orthodox convent of Lintula, from July 14 to August 13. Twenty young people from seven countries (Sweden, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Great Britain, the United States and Finland) took part in the camp. They represented eight confessions, praying, working, and relaxing together.

Ecumenical youth service projects gather groups of young people of various church, racial national, social and cultural groups who have voluntarily chosen to live together in a Christian community to do simple unskilled work on a project of vital Christian concern. The purpose of the projects is not to segregate so-called "Church" youth from "non-Church" youth, but to offer the challenge of a living and compelling faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The first experimental camp took place in 1920, near Verdun, France. Out of this experience the international work camp idea was born and spread all over the world. In 1934 the first American group—Quakers—used this camp idea, and at the end of the Second World War other American Churches began to join in. Today over a thousand young Christians from more than fifty countries participate in work camps of the World Council of Churches each year.

Through the years camps have worked on all sorts of projects—floods in Holland, Madagascar, Kenya and Japan; earthquakes in Greece; refugee situations in Austria, Germany, Jordan, Hong Kong, and Korea. Camps have given aid to struggling minority churches and congregations. They have built schools and conference centers for the youth of the Church. They have taken part in missionary and social work. Volunteers have helped in rehabilitation of refugees, worked in mental hospitals, factories with migrant workers, and organized programs for handicapped children. This new kind of work in the field of youth camps has received a great response, and for this reason the name was changed to "Ecumenical Youth Service" comprising both the ecumenical work camps and the new social service projects.

The campers who came to Finland in 1967 were welcomed by the Primate of the Finnish Orthodox Church. His Eminence, Paavali, Archbishop of Karelia and All Finland:

Dear Young Christians:

What is prayer? What is its essence? How can we learn to pray? What does the Christian experience as he prays in humility of heart? These issues are dealt with in the *Art of Prayer*, published last year in London. The original version of this book was published at the monastery of Valamo in Finland, in 1936. The compiler of the anthology was Igumen Chariton, the abbot of the monastery of Valamo.

This book, which includes the rules of inner prayer, is in my opinion of equal importance to Christians of all Churches, and is a real ecumenical gift to them. In 1940 Valamo was engulfed in the Second World War. So was Lintula, the only convent of the Orthodox Church in Finland. Later on the community life of both of them was re-established and now there are a new Valamo' and a new Lintula.' The previous autumn the convent of Lintula was given a new building, following a world-wide collection of funds, but much more should still be done. I have great pleasure in bidding you, young people from many countries, welcome to Finland in your mission of love to help the convent of Lintula to continue the monastic life in its ancient tradition of inner prayer.

The twenty young people whom the Archbishop greeted arrived in a small nation situation between the Soviet Union and Sweden. In 1967 Finland celebrated its Fiftieth Anniversary as a free nation. The Finnish people are proud of their culture and their independence. Culturally, Finland belongs to the western nations; but due to its geographical location it has become the meeting place of East and West. In ecclesiastical life this means that there are two state Churches in Finland, the Lutheran and the Orthodox. The vast majority of the population are happy to have been given the widest state rights that any Christian minority has in the world. In spite of the short space of time, the campers were able to get an idea of the ecumenical unity which really exists between the two Churches. During the camp the youth was given a chance to become acquainted with both state Churches through visits, excursions and other contacts.

The Convent of Lintula was founded in 1894 in southeast Finland in Karleia. Before the wars there were sixty sisters and the convent was the spiritual center of that area. The Second World War dealt a severe blow to the Finnish Orthodox Church. As a result of the War, the Church lost 90% of its property; and 70% of its members had to leave their homes and were scattered all over Finland. Lintula was also evacuated from Karelia, which had to be surrendered to the Soviet Union. In 1949 the Finnish Parliament passed a law by which the Orthodox Church was reconstructed in the years 1950-1960. During this decade, thirteen churches, forty-two chapels, nineteen parsonages and nineteen cemeteries were built at state expense. But Lintula was forgotten. Today it has no church. It is located on a farm in a small country area. The nearest towns are Joensuu and Kuopio (50,000 people). The latter is the center of the Finnish Orthodox Church, and is the seat of the Archbishop. During the last years the convent has undergone many repairs. In the previous summer, a new home was built thanks to collection and

donations from all over the world (Greece, the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the United States). The fifteen sisters (three of them young novices) must work very hard in the fields, in cow sheds and in the candle factory where all the candles for the Orthodox Churches in Finland are made. The sisters want to build a new Church where they can take part in the services, in place of the small room that presently must be used.

And so, twenty young campers poured into the schoolhouse with their suitcases, sleeping bags, and other belongings. Campers slept on the floor in two of the rooms, and the third classroom was used as a dining room and lecture hall. During their stay, the campers constructed an entry porch and wall for the convent, tore down an old barn, participated in haying and gardening and painted walls in the old convent home.

The students took turns writing a diary each day. Commenting on the first day of work at the convent, an Irish boy named Alan said that “After a night disturbed only by the buzzing of man-eating insects, we rose at 6 o’clock rather reluctantly. At 7 busily engaged wielding spade, crowbar, shovel and axe when a horse paid us a visit through a hole we had left in the fence....Through the morning visitors to the convent stopped, stared and passed on as we raised monolithic boulders from the dark, mysterious depths of the trench. Then after our labors we languished in the sauna, and made our way, footsore and weary, back for lunch. Before supper we had talk and discussion on the problem of the communion in ecumenical work camps...at 10 o’clock we were ready for bed, after killing off the bugs with the spray.”

An average camp day began at six. Work started at seven after breakfast and morning prayers. In the afternoon and after dinner, campers had sessions, lectures, Bible studies, discussions, nationality evenings, excursions, swimming, volleyball, and camp fires. The campers enjoyed the sauna baths each day. One problem which the campers did find was that the June nights were not dark; therefore, the students had to adjust to sleeping in the daylight.

Campers communicated easily with the nuns because some of them were able to speak Finnish, Russian, English, German or French. On the Sunday of Transfiguration, there was a great pilgrimage at the convent. About three thousand people from all over Finland arrived at the convent. The diary related “...The Liturgy in the open air had already begun when we arrived at the convent. I shall not forget the impression of the procession moving along the birchway from the old convent building up to the new house.” The nuns were leading the procession, and they were an image of both dignity and human frailty, according to the diary.

The wall progressed, and campers worked very hard. But, the camp came to an end too soon. On the last day at camp, the students enjoyed the luxury of sleeping late. The morning was spent in finishing up last minute details, such as cleaning up the schoolhouse, packing and completing one section of the wall. In the afternoon the campers had tea with the nuns at the convent. There was still time for one last sauna bath and several swims in the lake. The last campfire was *ihana* or wonderful.

One student, Keith, the English camp leader, summed up his feelings and impressions about his stay at the camp with these words:

The nights became days,  
And the days ran together like a continuous dream,  
Of hard work and sauna,  
Of birch-bark fires and the sharing of laughter,  
Of soft wind and the quiet lake...

But soon the days will become nights,  
A cold wind will swirl from the forest,  
Wrapping schoolhouse and convent in a cloak of white stillness,  
But through the dark silence of the Finnish winter  
The golden memories of Lintula will remain...