

THE HAGIA SOPHIA PARISH IN BIAŁYSTOK

The idea of erecting the Hagia Sophia Orthodox church in Białystok emerged in 1986 on a plane back from Constantinople. Bazyli, who was the Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church in Poland at that time, along with Sawa, the Archbishop of the Białystok-Gdańsk diocese and the Metropolitan from 1998, and Father Aleksander Chilimoniuk, the parish priest of All Saints parish in Białystok, were coming back from the visit paid to the Ecumenical Patriarch Dmitri I. They had visited the famous Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. However, they could not pray inside it, because the Turkish law prohibited to do so. They also knew that praying was forbidden in three other Hagia Sophia temples situated in the Soviet Union, which had been fighting the Orthodox Church for seven decades.

„If another temple is to be built in Białystok,” the dignitaries concluded, „let it be dedicated to Hagia Sophia.” „Let there be prayer at least in this church of the Holy Wisdom.” The Hagia Sophia Orthodox churches (Slavonic: Premudrosti Bożijej; English: Holy Wisdom) rank among the most impressive, beautiful and important temples. Not many of them had been built because they were founded by the most powerful people: Emperors and Princes in Constantinople, Kiev, Polotsk, Veliky Novgorod and Thessaloniki.