ZUŠ Police nad Metují

OPERATION JAN JOSEF KOHL

Josef Kohl was born on February 21, 1928 as the fourth son of Antonín and Anna Kohl. The family owned a farm in Suchý Důl.

Having been raised in a deeply religious environment, he became interested into becoming a priest. Since it was impossible to study during the war, he went into apprenticeship as a shop assistant. After the liberation, he enrolled in the Náchod commercial academy.

On September 14, 1949, after his baccalaureate, he entered the Benedictine monastery in Břevnov and became the last candidate before the forced closure of all Czechoslovak monasteries.

On September 19, 1949, just a few days after entering the monastery, Josef Kohl witnessed the arrest of abbot Anastáz Opasek. In the following period of uncertainty, candidate Kohl was transferred into the Emauzy Monastery where he continued with his preparations for becoming a member of the order. He took his vows on November 10, 1949, receiving a monastic name Jan Křtitel (John the Baptist).

On the night of April 13, 1950, the National Security Corps, the State Security and the People's Militias cracked down on virtually every male monastery in Czechoslovakia and transferred the monks into concentration monasteries. Emauzy and Břevnov were taken in the second phase of this barbarism on April 27. The arresting took all night.

Jan and his fellow brothers were taken into the monastery of Hejnice. They were photographed from three sides like criminals and the authorities took their fingerprints. The rules in the monastery closely resembled imprisonment. Their correspondence was censored, they were forbidden to speak to anyone and were given low-rank manual work.

Near the end of August, the young monks were offered to enter a newly-formed general seminary. This was, however, run by the state instead of the Church, therefore a majority of them refused. The latter were drafted into the Auxiliary Technical Batallions (ATBs), special military units where conscripts were not trusted with weapons and received pickaxes and shovels instead. Brother Jan entered the service on September 5, 1950, in Libavá, being later moved to build an airport in Přerov and mine coal in Horní Suchá. In September 1952 when their compulsory service was supposed to end, they received a new offer – either three years in mines of five in military construction. Those who agreed could take off their uniforms, the rest remained in the ATBs with private Kohl among them. He was not released until New Year's Eve in 1953, after forty months of service.

After his return home, Josef Kohl started looking for work in Police nad Metují. However, his documents stated “monk” as his former occupation. It was not in the interest of local companies to employ people with such backgrounds and even if Josef Kohl got a position, he was always released shortly after and had to try again elsewhere.

During this time, he was the sexton and choirmaster of the local church.

At the end of the 1960s, the atmosphere in the state changed and this brought new opportunities. At the age of 40, Josef Kohl was finally allowed to study at the Faculty of Theology of the Charles University in Litoměřice. He was ordained on June 23, 1973 in the St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague by Cardinal František Tomášek and celebrated his first Mass on July 30, 1973 in the Church of Ascension of Virgin Mary in Police nad Metují. Bishop Karel Otčenášek, who was forbidden to enter the Hradec Králové diocese, attended the Mass in secret.

Before 1989, a priest needed an official “consent of the state” to legally perform religious service. Father Kohl did not receive one and he began his career as the sexton of the holy Spirit Church in Hradec Králové. In 1975, he was permitted to become a chaplain in Litomyšl and in 1983, he was transferred to Svratka. After the Velvet Revolution, abbot Opasek called him back to the Břevnov Monastery from which he was evicted forty years ago.

Authors

Teacher

Elementary school in Police nad Metují

Graphics

Print

popisky a fotografie

“Operation Kohl” is a part of the Traces of Totalitarianism project. The project if funded by the EU Structural Funds through the Education for Competitiveness Operational Programme of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.

The Traces of Totalitarianism project is under the auspices of Petr Duhan, Director General of Czech Radio.

Popisky shora dolů

Josef Kohl's parents, Anna and Antonín Kohl.

The Kohl farm in Suchý důl.

The Kohl family.

Josef's letter to his parents after coming to Prague.

In military service with the ATB in work and dress uniform.

“Monk” Kohl photographed in the Kovopol factory in Police. The picture appeared in local party press, to much ado when the comrades found out who exactly was the man in the picture. At that time, Kohl was already working elsewhere.

Ordination.

With Cardinal Tomášek and other clergymen after the ordination.

Father Kohl's first Mass.

With abbot Opasek after the return to Břevnov.