

Vladivostok Sunrise

Mary Mother of God Mission Society Vladivostok Russia St Paul
Issue Number Seventy Nine January 1, 2008



Father James West, pastor of Immaculate Conception Church in North Little Rock, stands on the steps leading to Most Holy Mother of God Church in Vladivostok, Russia. The church is surrounded by dilapidated houses with no indoor plumbing.

To Russia with love: North Little Rock parishioners strengthen bonds

by Garry Hoffmann, Arkansas Catholic

Father James P. West and a team of parishioners from **Immaculate Conception Church** in North Little Rock got a firsthand look last month at the painstaking task of revitalizing the Catholic faith in Russia. "The Church is building back from nothing," Father West said. "It's so slow, it's moving at a glacial pace."

From 1917 to 1959, thousands of bishops, priests, monks and lay Catholics were killed in an effort to wipe out the Church's influence while thousands of other clergy and laity were imprisoned or deported. Nearly every church was closed. Catholics who prayed for the conversion of Russia for the better part of the 20th (continued on pg 2)

Church Reconsecration Scheduled for February 3.

By V Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

Bishop Kirill Klimovich of the Diocese of St Joseph in Irkutsk will re-consecrate the Most Holy Mother of God church building on February 3, the 70th anniversary of the death of our martyrs who died in 1938 during Stalin's persecution. The consecration will take place 100 years from the blessing of the first cornerstone for the church, which was done by Bishop Cepliak in 1908. We've made a stone to commemorate the event. Here it is: After so many attempts to set a date, I (continued on pg 3)



century need to know that reopening society to religion didn't send waves of people rushing back to church, parishioner Susan Gray said. Emerging from the physical and emotional ruins of a totalitarian state isn't that simple. "There's no family structure now, there's no social structure, no community structures," Gray said. "Everybody's just a bunch of individuals thrown together. ... Family ties have fallen apart, parish ties have fallen apart."

Therein lies the reason why the North Little Rock church has bonded with Most Holy Mother of God Catholic Church in Vladivostok as a sister parish. The Catholic people of the Russian Far East need supportive dollars, action -- as well as prayers -- to support what parishioner John Stewart called a "small flame of faith" that survived 70-plus years of Communist rule. "It was a torch, but now it's just a little pilot light ... and it needs to be rekindled," added John Phillips.

The two men were part of the contingent that spent eight days in Vladivostok, a port city of roughly 700,000 on the Sea of Japan. Gray coordinated the Sept. 14-22 mission with Father West, pastor of Immaculate Conception, as spiritual leader. Four other parishioners made the trip -- Jane Ann Brucks, Ron Lensing, Pat Pyle and John Smith -- along with Dennis Paradise of Las Vegas, where he is a member of another sister parish to Most Holy Mother of God Church.

The team members visited an orphanage, a hospital for HIV-positive children, a hospice, a soup kitchen and also traveled to neighboring parishes. They did some varnishing and woodwork in a budding monastery adjacent to the hilltop church in Vladivostok and helped an elderly woman paint her ceiling. In contrast to church- and school-building missions to Central and South America, Gray said, this visit was all about setting an example of what people can do for one another. When two American priests took up residence at Most Holy Mother of God in 1992, she explained, "There was no such thing as a volunteer, no charitable anything." Besides, Gray added, building anything in Russia requires 23 permits. "The priests gave us a wish list, everything from Kool-Aid to diapers to organ shoes," Gray said. Each team member brought two suitcases, one for themselves and one packed with donated goods.

Father West said the work in Vladivostok illustrates building a Christian society from the ground up. "Communism robbed them of all humanity, all civility," the North Little Rock pastor said of the Russian people whom he saw and visited. "It's as though the church is having first to teach them what it means to be a human

being and then to move from there into the area of faith." The principal teachers are Father Myron Effing of Indiana, the pastor of Most Holy Mother of God, who is assisted by Father Daniel L. Maurer of Michigan. Their parish is part of the Diocese of St. Joseph in Irkutsk, geographically the biggest in the world but has only 22 priests. Irkutsk is about a four-hour plane trip west from Vladivostok, Gray said.

In a recent interview about their trip, five members of the mission team estimated that about 250 people attend Sunday Mass at Most Holy Mother of God. Among these are health-care workers and teachers, Gray said, but children are a rarity, as is any type of family presence. "Very, very few children were at Mass, and Father Dan explained that they hardly ever bring their children at all and I think he's trying to encourage that," Stewart said. "He's trying to develop a Sunday school or something like that to get the kids there." Lensing suggested a lingering fear of the state as a reason, left over from an era of Communist officials persuading children "to turn in a parent or a friend." A 95-percent divorce rate and a 75-percent alcoholism rate factor into the breakdown of the family across Russia, Gray said. She also said the Soviet Union was the first country to legalize abortion, in the early 1920s. A Russian woman averages five to 10 abortions in her lifetime, the group noted. Population is declining about 800,000 a year, Phillips added, in part because the death rate exceeds the birth rate and also because of strict immigration policies. Census figures put the Russian population at 141 million in July 2007 as compared with 301 million in the United States.

The North Little Rock group also found the infrastructure of Vladivostok sorely lacking: Roads full of potholes, utilities that struggled to keep the lights on or get hot water to people, the lack of a sewage plant and an unfinished capital campaign that has left city structures sitting idle with tree sprouting from the brick. "The motto and mantra for the trip was low expectations," Gray said. Stewart likened flying into Vladivostok as "going into black-and-white 1940 TV." Father West professed to being taken aback by the "deplorable" hospital conditions. But what struck him the most was the resilience of the people. "They could tell the most horrific details of their past with such calm," the pastor said. "It seemed like every family whose history we learned about had been exiled. ... It's just a fact of life."

Back home, Father West has been gratified by the financial support his parish is providing its sister church in Russia. The only special collection was taken at Mass last Dec. 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, when the two churches formally forged ties. The relationship was

seeded in 2005, when Father West met Father Maurer, with Gray as intermediary. While living in Arkansas, she has served as grant writer for the St. Paul, Minn.-based Mary Mother of God Mission Society since 1993, shortly after she met Father Effing. She made her inaugural trip to Vladivostok in 1996. The Mission Society's purpose is securing spiritual and material assistance for the Catholic Church in the Russian Far East. Funds raised by sister parishes, such as Immaculate Conception, go to the St. Paul office, from where funds are sent via bank transfers to Vladivostok and into the general fund of Most Holy Mother of God Church. Gray said individuals in the United States sometimes contribute funds for specific projects or she will write a project-specific proposal that is funded.

At Immaculate Conception, blue envelopes for donations subsequent to those taken up Dec. 8 are inserted in the monthly parish mail out. Contributions to the Russian mission totaled more than \$1,700 in September alone. "To me, that's the most moving aspect of it all on our side of the ocean, how faithful our parishioners have been to this very worthy cause," Father West said. Church members have an opportunity to learn more about what and whom they are supporting in Vladivostok after 10:30 a.m. Mass Sunday, Nov. 4. The mission team has scheduled a PowerPoint presentation about their trip in Immaculata Hall. "It was such a wonderful experience," Father West said. "I'd get back on the plane and go right back over there right now."

<http://www.arkansascatholic.org/article.php?id=1045>



The new Our Lady of Fatima rectory building at the first snowfall of winter. The fence is not yet done. From the street it looks like a two story building, but, as it sits on a hillside, it actually has three full stories.



The scaffold is in place, and the old metal covers over the place for the steeples have been removed.

(New Date Continued from pg 1.)

hesitated to set one again, but this time it looks final. The bishop has also agreed to bless our new Our Lady of Fatima rectory/monastery building on the evening of February 2, The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord Jesus in the Temple.

Meanwhile, we've started work on the steeples! We can't have them completely done by February 3, of course, but we'd like to have at least some of it done! We're only halfway on the financing, but we are relying on God (and benefactors) to provide. Above is a photo of how the workers removed the metal covering on the base of the first steeple where the bells will be, and temporarily covered the opening with blue plastic for the night. Already now that visible framework has been removed from both sides of the church and the workmen are getting read to pour a concrete floor there, after which the bricks will start rising. Hopefully, no one will fall from the scaffold! Probably the very tops of the steeples will have to be made in China, as we don't think we can find metal workers in the local labor market.

We are hoping God will send major donors our way so that we can finish the job! And I do mean finish. Why? We have a document written by Bishop Slivovsky where he asks the Papal Nuncio to allow him to consecrate the church without the steeples. So the finishing the steeples is a way to honor those folks who tried to finish the church, but then suffered so terribly from the Communist repression, including so many martyrs. So we are hoping to see the reconsecration WITH as much of the steeples as possible.

How to Communicate with Us

Internet

Russian language: www.catholic.vladivostok.ru

English language: www.vladmission.org

Sisters in English: www.cjd.cc

Office in Russia: Phone: 011-7-4232-26-96-14

myron@catholic.vladivostok.ru

daniel@catholic.vladivostok.ru

Letters without donations:

Most Holy Mother of God Catholic Parish

Volodarskovo 22

690001 Vladivostok RUSSIA

Office in America: Phone and FAX: 1-(651)227-0208

usoffice@vladmission.org

Donations and letters:

Mary Mother of God Mission Society

1854 Jefferson Ave

St Paul MN 55105-1662

Or you can **donate from your credit card** through our web site. Your donations are tax-deductible. You will receive any required receipt for tax purposes by return mail. Please be assured that we do not sell our mailing list or any other donor information to other organizations.

Donations in kind. If you have items that you think we can use, please contact Mrs Sandra Sonnen at the Mission Office in St Paul giving a complete list of items.

Office in Canada: Phone: 1-(807) 597-6052

gnivall@shaw.ca

Donations and letters:

Mary Mother of God Mission Society

PO Box 868

Atikokan Ontario Canada P0T 1C0

Sisters in Jesus the Lord: Phone: (651)230-3337

525 Thomas Ave

St Paul, MN 55103

Vladivostok Sunrise Edited and produced in Russia by V Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D. Assembled for mailing by Nativity Parish, St Paul, Minnesota.

News Notes

by V Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

• The Parish of the Most Holy Mother of God was able to move Sunday Mass back into the church on October 7 (without the reconsecration yet, of course.) Bishop Kirill was here for that event (which was the date formerly planned for the reconsecration.) The first Sunday of October is our traditional day for the anointing of the ambulatory sick. It was the first time that Bishop Kirill was able to participate in that sacrament with us, which was received by about 35 people. They had been well prepared by the Parish Director of Charities, Lilia

Timofeevna. We also were able to have the first organ concert in the church in over a year on November 8 and 9.



The inside of the church on October 7 with Bishop Kirill. The altar and tabernacle stand are still not in place, and the reredos is still unpainted, but we hope to get that done before February.

The audience awaits the beginning of the first concert.





The laying on of hands in silent prayer is part of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

- October 4 was a great day for Nativity Parish in Ussuryusk. It was the day when Bishop Kirill Klimovich came to bless the new, beautiful building that the Franciscans have built there as a center for social services. It is expected that it will be mostly a homeless shelter—one of the few in Russia. The joint enterprise with the City of Ussuryusk has not opened its doors, yet, awaiting final licensing and the selection and training of staff. But the word is already around the state that Ussuryusk is the place to go if you are desperate for temporary lodging. The Center is planning to provide social rehabilitation services, too. It is located near the city hospital, and has a beautiful park with a fountain in front, and room for some small gardens in the rear. Congratulations, Fr Dominic Kim O.S.F. and parish!

These beds will beat sleeping in the train station on hard benches sitting up, which is usual for the homeless.



Pastor Fr Dominic with Bishop Kirill.



This view shows the front of the building, which is less than half.

Several dance troops provided entertainment afterward.





Korean and Russian government officials, as well as the Franciscan superior and a representative from the Sisters of St Paul de Chartres from Seoul, were on hand to cut the ribbon at the entrance.

- The Board of our Women’s Support Centers met in October to plan activities for the year, and to review the statistics for the effectiveness of our work as we approach the ten year mark in our history. See the table of statistics on this page. Among conclusions was that we need to incorporate the Women’s Support Centers as a non-profit corporation separate from the parishes so that they will have more ready access to public schools and public programs. We need to open several more centers, and that is an investment in equipment and volunteer training. We need to update our equipment to DVD and projectors instead of video, to be able to show films about pregnancy as part of our lecture program. And we need to update some centers’ computers to notebooks. This is because of the theft of several computers this past year because their centers were located in less guarded buildings—thieves mostly entered through windows. By using notebook computers, the volunteers can take them home at night, which will be more safe.

It was also decided that the seminar this year for all volunteers would be held in Khabarovsk at Holy Trinity Parish. In addition to special instructions for new volunteers, and another meeting of the Board, there would also be a Retreat Day of Prayer and Reflection. The seminar is planned for February 8, 9, and 10.

We were also happy to receive a grant proposal from the Blagoveshensk center to buy baby buggies which could be loaned to young student moms who don’t have the money to buy their own. (Baby buggies are still popular in Russia rather than strollers because of the roughness of streets and sidewalks—the wheels are bigger, so the ride is smoother. Some strollers are almost impossible to push on rough surfaces and in snow.



CARITAS Women’s Support Center’s Board members: (back l to r) Leila Abasovna (Nakhodka), Tatyana Jakaeva (Arsenyev), Tatyana (Khabarovsk), Fr Myron (CARITAS President), Olga Bernikova (Vladivostok), Nadezhda Morozova (Lesozovodsk); (front) Sr Evgenia Gonzalo (Program Director), Lyubov Sadovnika (Artyom), Galina Anatolievna (Blagoveschensk), and Nadezhda’s daughter Marina.

<i>Women’s Support Centers Activity Cumulative</i>	<i>1998- 2006</i>
Visitors to the Centers	
First-time visitors	10,103
Visitors making their second or later visits	8,768
Volunteer Visits to the Clients	
Visits to clients at home	1,887
Visits to clients in the hospital	1,472
Type of Pregnancy	
Clients with satisfactory pregnancies	2,271
Clients with crisis pregnancies	5,508
No. of Students attending Staff Talks	
Talks on the development of the unborn child	6,946
Talks on Contraception & Natural Family Planning	6,307
Talks on Abortion & Post-Abortion Syndrome	3,916
Talks on Venereal Disease	2,232
Talks on other topics	7,136
Consultations by telephone or e-mail	
By telephone	6,730
By e-mail	528
Pregnancy Tests Administered	2,049
Recipients of Material Help (financial, baby clothes, etc.)	6,680
Number of Ultrasounds Performed	960*

- The first weekend in November was a busy one for our Sister Parish of St Joseph in Modesto, CA. It was the annual dinner for Russia. It was a total success. Here is what Vicky Trevillian, the Sister-Parish Committee Coordinator had to say after the event:

“Sister Parish Team, Congratulations on the wonderful dinner last night! You are marvelous, simply marvelous! Many of our guests had a wonderful time, and we raised three times more for our Sister Parish this year than last year! What a wonderful improvement! Thanks and praise to God! The best part for me was being touched beyond

words and to tears watching the hands go up bidding to help fund the needs of our sisters and brothers in Russia. Watching our parish family united in charity is both humbling and beautiful.

I guess this kind of raises the bar for next year, huh?! Can we meet this Wednesday, November 7, 6:00 pm at my house to debrief before while the dinner is fresh in our minds? We will have a bit of a celebration party, too! It's wonderful working with all of you in the Sister Parish Project. May the Holy Spirit always guide us in joy and love for one another near and far. Thank you for everything. I love you guys! God bless you and your families. Love, Vicky”



The well prepared dinner is always a fun event.

Unsung heroes worked behind the scenes.



**Remember
“Mary Mother of God Mission Society”
in your will.**



Patricia enjoys dinner with grandpa.

- On November 25 I traveled to Khabarovsk to install the new pastor in the parishes of St Benedict and Holy Trinity. He is Fr Marcelo Brandan, from Argentina. He is a member of a new religious order called the Society of the Incarnate Word. This is their third place of service in Russia. They have many vocations in Argentina.

At Holy Trinity Parish, the process was witness by the newly elected trustee of the parish, Valentina Nam



Vladivostok Mission
Mary Mother of God Mission Society
1854 Jefferson Ave
St Paul MN 55105-1662

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
St Paul Minnesota
Permit No. 6732

Address Service Requested



From the development desk...

Dear Vladivostok Mission supporters,

- Lots of kids in your parish? Our baptism and baby items need your help. Might you consider having a table at your parish after weekend Masses to sell these items? We have over 200 items, most are different, “one of a kind” items. It’s such an opportunity to help our first cottage industry in our Lesozovodsk parish in Russia. This is their first venture, but they need more sales. I was there encouraging them to do this; there was hope on their faces. I hate to see this fade. Please assist me as field missionaries. They are donating 20 % of their income back to the parish women's crisis center. See www.baptismalgowns.blogspot.com

- If you already get a *Sunrise* newsletter through your parish, so that you don’t want us to mail you one, please indicate it on your check in the “memo” line.

God love you all, David and Sandra Sonnen
Phone: 651-227-0208
usoffice@vladmission.org

