

Priestly Formation Begins

by Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

With two of our young parishioners, Victor Anisimov and Evgeni Peregudov, our first attempt at priestly formation in the Russian Far East has started.

Victor, 20, began a serious struggle to find the truth with his enrollment in the Hari Krishna Movement, which arrived in Vladivostok before the Catholic mission. After some time with the Krishna's he became a Christian and was baptized in the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The Adventists were here all during the Communist times, having been part of the city's history before the Revolution. He found himself unable to reconcile the obvious teachings of Jesus as expressed in the Bible with the customs of the Adventists, especially the food customs, the relationship of the Christian to the Mosaic Covenant, and the keeping of the Saturday Sabbath. After the Catholic mission arrived, Victor entered the Catholic Church and was confirmed by Father Myron on January 3, 1993. He became a founding member of the Legion of Mary, and has been an active member ever since. He works constantly with the priests, doing translations from English to Russian, translating hymns, helping with liturgy, and preparing booklets for publication.

Evgeni Peregudov, 21, became a Catholic on Easter of 1993 when he was confirmed. He was trained in high school as a textile technician, but wanted to begin a higher education. He is a native of Russian Island, not far from Vladivostok. A member of the Legion of Mary, he worked in the door-to-door project, handing out literature and inviting people to come to church. He works constantly with the priests as a server, and serves the parish as a guard for the church building.

The possibility of beginning some kind of formation program for future seminarians here in Vladivostok became a reality with a grant from the Marianhill Missionaries (*Leaves Magazine*) of Flint, Michigan. The grant was sufficient to pay for teachers for a first half year of education. The program is not yet a "seminary" because the students do not live with priests nor is their day structured by a scheme of prayer, as is usual in the seminary. They live on their own, and meet at classes, and in their usual routine with the Legion of Mary, and with parish activities.

What direction things will take in the future depends upon many factors: How many new students might there be? Will our guys persevere? Will the bishop be interested in our continuing this program? Will our students be accepted at the seminary in Novosibirsk? Please pray for vocations.

Earlier there was hope of establishing a seminary program or a Catholic higher educational program at the Far Eastern State University, but our early investigations yielded no possibility that the University would be open to collaboration with the greatest and largest educational institution in the world: The Catholic Church.

We found better opportunities at the Far Eastern Technical Institute. The administration operates in a much more open and positive style, and is anxious to try new things to develop its program and possible futures for the school. We discussed the needs of pre-seminary students, which involves not only a grounding in philosophy, history, languages, and psychology, but also the beginnings of a scientific study of the Bible. A program was devised, faculty were chosen, and the program begun. Father Daniel is teaching the Introduction to the Bible course, with the help of Igor Davydov. This class meets in the church building. The students meet with their other teachers on the campus of the Institute.

We hope that this collaboration will be good for the students, for the Church, and for the Institute. We are hoping for the development of a Catholic College program in Vladivostok. It is a natural place for such a development, and such a program must begin somewhere in Russia, if the Church in Russia is to have the lay leadership it needs for its future. But right now we are dealing with future priestly leadership, praying to God for vocations among our young Russian Catholics. Pray for us, too! How can you help our vocations program?

How to Fund the Parishes of Russia?

by Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

This is one of the questions that constantly worry me, as the pastor of four parishes! So far, our friends in America and Germany and elsewhere have donated their funds and effects for the needs of the church in Russia. We can live and work here only because of foreign help! Thank you for your support!

But what about the future? Surely the Russian parishes must struggle to become independent of foreign help, like all mission countries must do. There are several aspects to this problem.

1. Vocations. The church in Russia cannot become independent of foreign help until she has her own trained and ordained vocations to the priesthood. Steps to this end were taken in Moscow, with the opening of the major seminary there, and in Novosibirsk with the opening of the college-level seminary. We have two young men from Vladivostok who aspire to the priesthood. The Marianhill Fathers have helped us begin their education. We are always aware of the big need for the future of priestly vocations. Militating against the future of vocations here in Russia, as in America, is the small size and weakness of family life, the presence of greed, drugs, criminality, and the allure of pornography and money--the "Western Values" of Western materialism. Pray that young people in Russia will be attracted to Christ and to religious vocations. Pray for an end to the reign of abortion and birth control which have decimated the Russian future.

2. Money. Even though Communism is officially repressed, socialism and its attitudes have not been. In effect, it means that what we in the America might thank of as "income" is provided, not by a job, but by the state. So that the actual "take home pay" is very small in comparison with the actual cost of all the necessities of life, like home, food, medicine, transportation, and education. Consequently, even if the Church were to receive 10% of people's income, the amount of money is small compared to the expense of living for priests who do not qualify for the social dole, and who must pay for all their own expenses and for the upkeep of the church buildings.

One example: Our fuel bill for our church building in

Vladivostok is \$1000 per month averaged over the twelve months of the year! The heating expense for a family apartment of three rooms is \$.07 per month (Yes, seven cents per month!) The total cost of utilities (heating, cold water, hot water, radio, television antenna, and payment for rent for this same fine apartment is \$1.43 per month. So the family income is commensurably low--since the actual cost of all these things is born by the state. How can the parishioners even begin to help the parish to pay the fuel bill, let alone all the other expenses of the priests and the buildings which do not receive state support?

Some, especially in the Orthodox Church, want to socialized the church, too, as in European socialist countries where churches receive money from taxes. Sometimes the attitude is that only the Orthodox Church needs to receive tax money! We can't wait to see what will happen, but we must make plans now.

The Orthodox Church charges for all its services, with set and rather high prices for sacraments. (Of course, the Orthodox priests are married, and must support families.) She also engages in business, making and selling books, candles, and religious goods. We could do the same, perhaps, but I feel it is not good to compete with her in business. She has few foreigners to provide support, and must live from her income within Russia.

The way out for us, it seems to me, is that our parishes should begin to operate in the sphere of religion-related business. According to Russian law, the parishes have the right to form dependent corporations to carry out their purposes, one purpose of which is funding. These corporations can even form partnerships with purely commercial firms. What are areas of church-related business? Perhaps health care, or the manufacture of health care products. Perhaps health and life insurance, funeral arrangements, or burial. Education is always church-related, so perhaps a Catholic college or high school or business school. Even rest is related to religion--perhaps hotels or tourist services. Jesus fed the hungry multitude, with the Bread of Life, but also with ordinary bread and fishes, so even restaurants or food production or processing services would make sense.

You see we need a lot of thought and development in this area. You also see that a tremendous help to us would be donors who want to make a capital loan so that we can begin a project--the money could be returned after the project is underway, or it could be reinvested with new parishes as they are established so that the

donation could continue to work wonders for the Church.

Also of tremendous help would be some retired businessmen who want to donate their time and talent to the Church in Russia to help it begin to operate on a solid, independent financial basis. You could think of them as economic missionaries!

Do you qualify as a capital investor or an economic missionary for the Catholic Church in Russia?

The Good News

by Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

In the late 1940's, the Great Patriotic War against Germany had ended, but the Stalinist repression was in full sway. A 47 year old woman became pregnant at a time when, naturally, she thought her family was complete. It wasn't a good time for children, especially for Catholics, and all her friends and family urged her to simply have an abortion. She decided that abortion was the only way out for her, and besides, she probably wouldn't live to care for her child--it would only be motherless anyway.

The date set for the abortion happened to be March 25. As she collected her things to go to the clinic, she remembered that March 25 was a holyday--the Feast of the Annunciation. She realized that abortion was a sin, but it would be an even greater sin to commit it on the very day when the angel came to Mary, and Jesus because flesh in her womb. With sorrow mixed with relief, she decided to let her child live, and to accept whatever struggle and pain it would mean. Alexander Ivanonich was born, a healthy child. One evening in the darkness and in secret came someone from the church to their home, and Alexander and his sisters were baptized. Later Alexander's mother told him the story of how he was saved from death by the Feast of the Annunciation--in Russian, the "Feast of the Good News".

Alexander worked in the weapon's industry in the city of Comsomolsk-na-Amure, but found an opportunity to begin a business in the city of Blagoveschensk, a name which translates into English as "the City of the Good News". It is located in the Amursky State, on the border between Russia and Manchuria where there are many tourists and businessmen from both countries. He named his new tourist business "Good News".

In early 1994 it became possible for me to try to find and serve the Catholics of the Amursky State--part of my region of responsibility in Russia, so I placed ads in newspapers there. Alexander was one person who answered the ads. On March 23 I arrived in Blagoveschensk for the first time. I met Alexander and found that his office is just a block away from the historical Catholic church. He invited us to use his office for the Catholic parish until our own building will be returned to us. He said, "My mother would be proud and happy if I were the one to make possible the re-establishment of the Catholic Church here in

Blagoveschensk! In this way I can say 'thank you' to her for her decision not to kill me. And I can thank God and her for the gift of life which came to me on the 'Day of Good News'".

I was happy to celebrate the Mass of the Annunciation on March 25th in the city named for that feast, seeing that God had prepared for the re-birth of the Catholic Church in that city in such a miraculous way.

The House of the Lord

by Father Daniel Maurer, C.J.D.

"I rejoiced when I heard them say:
'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'
(Psalm 122:1)

How can I explain to you what the reception of our church has meant to our parishioners, how it has changed our parish? If you were here, you would feel the difference. From the very first day, January 1, 1994, our titular feast of Mary the Mother of God, we have experienced both the joy and the sorrow of finally coming home from a long and tragic exile. Our hearts, filled with a sober hope, respond with the varied emotions that confront the faithful of Russia learning once again to worship God in freedom. Surrounded by the older ruins of pre-revolutionary culture and the newer ruins of communist ideology, we look in wonder at what we have inherited and what we hold in promise for the future.

We know that the Church is not a building of brick and glass. It is a living body, made up of many members with Christ as head. But we also know that the living Body of Christ, in each of its local parish families, needs a place to worship, to meet, to learn and to grow in faith, hope and love. Our parish had such a place for many years, and now we have such a place, our place, once again.

No longer do we priests need to pack, transport and unpack suitcases full of chalices, hosts, wine, candles, crucifix, statue and all the other objects of our rich tradition for Mass every Sunday in a series of rented halls. After the first Mass on January 1, I hardly knew what to do with myself, being able to leave everything in place in the sanctuary for Mass the following Sunday! And the next. No longer do the busts of Marx and Lenin gaze down on the Sacred Mysteries from the front wall. We were happy enough in our rented halls because we could remember and re-enact the source of our Salvation there. But now we are home. Perhaps we are less comfortable, but more grateful to God.

Less comfortable because of what has become of our church during the last 65 years of ideologically inspired destruction and neglect. There are no busts of Marx and Lenin, but neither are there any remaining symbols of our faith from the original structure. The brick crosses above the great arched doors in the west and south facades were chipped away in a conscious,

desecratory act of militant atheism. The stained glass windows were destroyed, no one remembers how. The altars, statues, paintings and any church furniture have long since been removed. What had been a soaring Gothic cathedral of one main level consisting of vestibule, nave, sanctuary, sacristies and choir loft, was cut up into four floors and 24 separate rooms. Only the exterior, especially the long, south facade with its immense windows, still shows forth something of its former beauty in the forceful lines of its unique design.

Less comfortable because the heating system was neglected to the point of disintegration, and the small panes of clear glass that replaced the stained glass windows were themselves usually not replaced when broken. Imagine an archive of supposedly precious historical documents with the Siberian wind whipping through it like a sieve. In January and February it was often less than 40 degrees inside on the third floor during Sunday Mass. Occasionally we were afraid the heating pipes inside would freeze and burst.

Less comfortable because, like the graceful Gothic ceiling vaults, the cost of repairs continues to soar.

We chose to use the top floor for Mass because it was the least divided and obstructed, and because the vaulted ceiling makes it look and feel like church. No pews. No place to sit for the first two Sundays, we were temporarily united in spirit with our Russian Orthodox brethren in Russia who never sit during Mass, and we consoled ourselves by remembering that but theirs service lasts three hours instead of one. Then someone told us where we could buy three hundred used theater seats for less than \$5.00 apiece. For once we got there in time. We did not want to bolt them to the floor because we hoped the floor would not be there much longer, so we hired a carpenter to put them together in movable banks of four seats by nailing them to long baseboards. They are comfortable, but our parishioners cannot kneel during Mass because the raised baseboards make getting up and down too dangerous.

In May we removed both the fourth floor in the transept and the 30 foot high wall that separated the nave from the transept, so now we have a much nicer, better lighted, higher space for the sanctuary and the first rows of seats. The removal of that wall left another much-scarred wall directly behind the altar, with a slightly off center open doorway into the temporary sacristy, so we

constructed a background screen and hung it with blue and gold draperies against which the crucifix, statue of Mary and fresh summer flowers are strikingly visible and beautifully arranged for Sunday Mass. Knowing that our third floor loft location is only temporary, we do not want to spend much money decorating it for Mass. New altars, a raised sanctuary, a beautiful image of the most holy Mother of God, pews with kneelers, a suitable place for the choir and organ, and most importantly the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the sanctuary: these will all have to wait until we move down to the ground floor and can renovate the entire structure. Until then we have decided to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in a side chapel on the first floor in what used to be a sacristy, where we celebrate Mass on weekdays.

Though we do not have the resources to begin the actual dismantling of the floors, which will be the next stage of the comprehensive renovation, there is much more that we have already done:

- A local architect has completed an complete series of initial studies and drawings of the existing structure and land use in the vicinity, including an impressive rendering of what the church may look like with the originally planned Gothic towers and spires on the west facade.

- A new and very costly heating main has been laid at our expense from the street to the building. (Building heat in Vladivostok is regional, being piped in from neighborhood boiler complexes by huge insulated pipes.)

- Six temporary electric light chandeliers were hung from the vaulted ceiling after the archive suddenly returned to remove all the electrical wiring in the entire building.

- Also on the third floor, a medium size room where the choir loft was located has been cleaned and refurbished as the parish library-bookstore. A smaller room to the side of it has become the confessional-reconciliation room.

- A major accomplishment: a telephone line was legally acquired and a telephone installed in the office of the caretaker.

- A container of plate glass has been purchased and delivered so that we can begin to glaze the empty window panes.

- All the ceiling-high steel shelves that lined the main rooms of the first, second, third and fourth floors have been removed. The first floor, obstructed in the center by a series of steel beams holding up the upper floors, has become a temporary warehouse for the storage of religious literature and building implements. The second floor was inaugurated as the parish social hall on June 26, the date of the first Mass celebrated by our bishop, Joseph Werth, S.J., D.D. The third floor is where Sunday Mass is celebrated. The partial fourth floor was completely removed.

- A new wrought iron fence and gate have been placed on the front of the enclosure that surrounds the church yard, and a second gate was placed in the back where there was a large gap in the enclosure right above a dangerous cliff.

- Walls have been removed from three small rooms on the ground floor in what was originally the altar boy sacristy and part of the sanctuary, and a new bathroom and office-bedroom is being built for Fr. Myron in the former sacristy.

- The other former sacristy was cleared, cleaned and redesigned for use as the daily Mass chapel. A simple altar of repose was built for the beautiful Gothic style tabernacle donated by Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco which will eventually be placed in the main room of the church.

- The flower borders inside the perimeter of the church yard and under the windows of the transept have been cleared of weeds and planted with a variety of flowers. They are lovingly cared for regularly by a Regina Pivinskaya and a number of other parishioners.

- Permission has been granted by the city government to move the public water pump located on church property immediately in front of the church and which in recent years has attracts dirty cars from all over the city. It will be moved about 200 feet down the street where workers have already begun to build a new cement platform for it.

Still to be done:

Interior:

- Removal of the second and third floors of reinforced concrete and steel I-beams, and of additional non structural interior walls.

- Complete restoration of the vestibule, baptistry, nave,

choir loft, sanctuary and sacristies, including all surfaces and furnishings.

- replacement of all electrical, plumbing and heating systems.
- Replacing eight very large, very tall stained glass windows, including exterior protective/insulating layer.
- Insulation of the roof.

Exterior:

- Replacement of missing and deteriorated bricks.
- tuck pointing.
- construction of two towers and spires.
- bells for the towers.
- replacement of all exterior doors.
- design and execution of entire new landscape for the church yard enclosure and the approach to the church.

Poor banished children of Eve with no permanent home on earth, we await the fulfillment of our hope in heaven. While we wait, we rebuild a beautiful church for the Lord dedicated to His most holy Mother, the "fairest honor of our race". She is in a very real sense the reason for our hope. With body and soul she has gained the place we long to be, where neither moths nor rust corrode, and thieves and ideologues do not break in to plunder.

Dear Readers

You notice that *Vladivostok Sunrise* too infrequently comes to you! We want so much to communicate with you regularly, but the tremendous workload we have does not allow it--now we have five parishes between us, on such a huge territory.

If all goes well, we will have an American volunteer living with us here in Vladivostok who can facilitate our communications and the more prompt and frequent printing of this newsletter. We'll keep you updated! Where would we be without our volunteers in Seattle, Anchorage, and Vladivostok? And you our donor-volunteers!

Meanwhile, we count on your prayers and support, even if communication is so very difficult. God bless you. --Fr Myron

How to Communicate with Us

Donations of money should be sent to:

Vladivostok Mission
225 Cordova Street
Anchorage AK 99501 USA

Letters should be sent to:

Catholic Parish of Vladivostok
P.O. Box 3185
690087 Vladivostok RUSSIA

Donated objects should be sent to:

Vladivostok Mission
Mahoney Exports, Inc
400 Valley Dr
Brisbane CA 94005 USA

More urgent messages can be sent via:

FAX: 7-4232-26-9616
E-mail: INTERNET:myron@catholic.marine.su
Phone: 7-4232-22-4292

New Parish in Blagoveschensk

by Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

Blagoveschensk is a city of several hundred thousand at the confluence of two great rivers, the Amur and the Zea. It is a border city, with Xey-Xee, Manchuria, China, also a large city, just across the river Amur. In the winter, on the frozen ice, border guards keep their windswept vigil, while on the Chinese side an impromptu highway takes advantage of easy transport on the ice to haul huge loads of freight, with swirling snow at times making them invisible.

Always, from the Chinese side, one can hear the blare of Chinese music from loudspeakers aimed our way, which contrasts sharply with the quiet of the Russian city with its people hurrying to where it might be warm. There is peaceful co-existence now, but in this region the border between China and Russia is still disputed, and why not? This is a land rich in soils, trees, and an active working people.

To Blagoveschensk came many Poles when Poland was partitioned between Russia and Germany. They sought a new life in the East, like their American counterparts sought a new life in the West. They built a beautiful church, and--a first for our Far East of Russia--a Catholic hospital, where sisters served the poor pioneers, whose land was so rich they shouldn't remain poor for long!

Then came the Revolution. The Bolsheviks decided to make Siberia a showplace of the new Communist era. It was to be a country of the future, "a land without Church and a land without God" (Walter Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, p 84) Blagoveschensk, just beyond the Southeast border of Siberia became a place of resistance to the Revolution, as did all the Far East when the Far Eastern Republic was proclaimed, and even America had military men in the Far East to try to defend it from the advancing Red Army. When Lenin succeeded all the way to the Pacific, resistance was crushed ruthlessly, and the Poles found it necessary to leave in mass numbers and return to Poland via Vladivostok and the ocean. Pity those left behind! To this day their descendants begin to cry at the mention of those times.

With Stalin, things grew worse. All Catholic churches in the Far East were confiscated. All remaining Catholic presence was eliminated by martyrdom. Orthodox churches were destroyed by the hundreds. Which churches remained were turned into the most

degrading use possible: toilets and barns. Cemeteries were used for amusement parks, as if to dance and play to deny death any cautionary effect at all. The Catholic church in Blagoveschensk was made into a barn for horses.

In the 1950's, what remained of the Orthodox faithful asked the city to receive the Catholic church for their use--All the Orthodox churches had been destroyed. The building was rented to them free of charge, and they repaired it, and it has been in constant use since then. We will try to detail more of this story when we receive the opportunity speak about it with the Orthodox pastor.

In 1993 I sent one of my Vladivostok parishioners to Blagoveschensk, to find out the situation of the church and Catholics in the city. He placed ads in the local newspapers to see if there were Catholics in the city and in the surrounding state. I went there myself for the first time on March 22, 1994, saying my first Catholic mass there on March 23, and was especially happy to say mass in Blagoveschensk on March 25, the nameday of the city according to the Gregorian Calendar--the Feast of the Annunciation. I visited Catholics in their homes.

On June 28, 1994, Bishop Werth re-erected the parish of Blagoveschensk, calling it "The Transfiguration of the Lord"--the name we think was the name of the former parish--we aren't sure (yet). I was named pastor, and my first public mass there was on July 20, 1994, when we had the organizational meeting of the parish. I plan to go there monthly, but the parish needs its own priest, because there are Catholics scattered throughout the Amursky State. Where can we find a priest?

The hospital is still standing, working as a special state hospital for the indigent poor. Wouldn't it be great to find medical sisters to staff once again this hospital full of elderly people who need the consolation of Christ? Where will we find them?

The Orthodox parish has received back its land where its former cathedral was located, and they want to rebuild their church in its former glory. Then we will be able to receive back our building, too. It is a beautiful building, and in good repair. We want to help the Orthodox parish to rebuild. For that we need help ourselves.

Former (and future) Holy Transfiguration Church in Blagoveschensk, and the old Catholic hospital.

Back view of the Church, showing its good repair.

The Risen Christ within the church. The woodwork is original, but not the paintings and icons.

Two children and mom in their baptismal garments.

Mr Alexander Renaysky and Father Myron, at our first meeting in March of 1994.

Seminarian Victor Anisimov serving as translator at a home baptism in the north of Primorye State.

Seminarian Evgeni Peregudov helping Bishop Werth with a child's baptism.

Tuckpointing anyone? You will also need to replace many fallen bricks.

Our church in Vladivostok in the winter sun, at the end of Volodarskovo Street.

Bishop Werth with a group of assembled priests from our diocese, The Apostolic Administration of Novosibirsk. Most are foreigners, and most are members of religious congregations. Bishop Werth remarked that he has only a few priests who are incardinated in the diocese that he can depend on in the long term, so vocations must be a priority. We are among those incardinated!

Home at Last!

by Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

Like the rest of us, he was a sinner, I suppose. He was terrified to die without the help of a priest. He lived in a hospital for the indigent poor in Vladivostok where there were no priests, and where everyone was afraid to even think that there might be a God, let alone openly speak about it. But on his deathbed he spoke to his nurse--she was Orthodox. He told her he was Catholic, and that he was afraid to die without a priest. Would she promise that as soon as she heard of a Catholic priest in Vladivostok, she would go to the priest and ask him to pray and offer mass for him? She promised, and he died.

A year later, she heard there was a Catholic priest in Vladivostok, and she came to us to fulfill her promise. How happy I was to assist at the death of our Catholic brother, praying for him whom I had never seen, and be with him even across time in the hour of his death!

But we had already been in Vladivostok a year before his death! He was too isolated and alone to even know about us. It is important that we continue to advertise our presence, and to appear in the newspapers and on the radio from time to time.

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