

Bringing the Chastity Message to Public Schools

by Miss Valerie Walatka

[Valerie is our first full-time lay volunteer. She comes to us from Anchorage, Alaska.]

The Evangelization Director of Most Holy Mother of God Parish, Dennis Bondaryev, and Yuri Belozorov, a parishioner and local middle school science teacher, have developed one of the most effective outreach programs of our parish. In a six-hour seminar they present high school girls with the truth about abortion, contraception, and sexually transmitted diseases. Their pro-life message promotes chastity and natural family planning while pointing out common health and moral problems associated with abortion and contraception. They also give a three-hour seminar for high school boys.

I've been privileged to participate in Dennis' and Yuri's seminars for the past two months, and am proud to be a part of this important work. Both are talented, and they work together wonderfully as a team, and their program is geared perfectly to the youthful audience.

Part I of the seminar for girls begins with a short quiz to measure the students' attitudes toward abortion and premarital sex and to determine their knowledge of human development. Then, Yuri describes conception and fetal development with the help of ultrasound videos from the US. Ultrasound is rather unknown in Russia, and the students view the video footage with awe and wonder. Dennis follows, showing photographs of babies still in the womb and discussing the moral problems of abortion: If these are really human beings, how can we justify taking their lives by abortion?

I give the next talk, on the consequences of abortion, focusing on Post-Abortion Syndrome (which will eventually show up to haunt every aborted woman) and describing potential health problems resulting from abortion: infertility, tubal pregnancies, and breast cancer. After a brief introduction warning the students that they are about to see the real face of abortion and giving them the option to leave the room, we show the powerful seven-minute video "Hard Truth."

There isn't much talking when the students leave the room for a break after "Hard Truth." Each time we show it I can't help marveling at the fact that in the States it would be virtually impossible to show that video in a public school. Here, we have the full cooperation of the administration who additionally assist us by separating the students by sex and age for the seminars. We will reach 300 kids in the school we're currently visiting, and there are several schools waiting for us.

After the break, Yuri gives a short talk on chastity, followed by an animated video "If You Love Me, Show Me," which was translated into Russian by Dennis. This humorous flick shows peer pressure working on a young guy and his girlfriend to convince them to have sex. The message in the end is positive and powerful: "Let's show each other that we really love each other by waiting until

we're married. That way we can keep our own self-respect and continue to respect each other as well!"

Part II of the seminar, held the following week, begins with the same "quiz" given before, which enables us to compare the results. This is where we really see the fruits of our efforts the previous week. In one group of 52 girls, for example, before the seminar only 71% believed human life begins at conception (not surprising, since atheistic Darwinism was taught in all Russian schools for decades), but by the following week the number had jumped to 96%. Before understanding the reality of abortion, 71% of the girls believed that a woman has a moral right to abortion; after our seminar the number had decreased to 29%. Before, 31% said they would advise a pregnant friend to get an abortion, but after our seminar a mere 4% said they would counsel a friend to abort.

The second session covers contraception, problem pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and natural family planning. It includes a video by Family of the Americas (also dubbed into Russian by Dennis) on the Billings Ovulation Method of NFP. Our parish received a grant for the translation and printing of "Love and Fertility," Family of the Americas' book on NFP, and we make the book available after the seminar. Many of the teenage girls want the book, recognizing the value of understanding their fertility.

The seminar ends with a pep talk on saying "no" to premarital sex. Yuri and Dennis want to start a club in each of the schools to reinforce the messages of the seminars and to provide moral support for the kids. In order to do this, we will need many more volunteers. Please pray for the continued success and growth of this vital ministry to the Russian youth.

Our Franciscans in the Far East

by Rev Daniel L. Maurer, C.J.D.

Franciscan Brothers Joachim Mudd and Paul Ruge arrived in Russia on Easter Sunday, April 3, 1994, with a simple and heartfelt desire to serve the Lord by working to rebuild His Church in Russia. They came with the dream of establishing a friary, a City of Mary, and some day, if it be God's will, to be ordained priests for service to the Catholic people of Russia.

They first thought of going to Russia when Shannon Klimek from Modesto, California, a friend of Father Myron and myself, joined their community as a candidate in 1993 and told them stories of the overwhelming need for priests and religious in Asian Russia. Learning of their interest in a possible Russian mission, Father Myron visited their community in Michigan in November 1993. They talked it over and prayed for guidance. Since their rule states that no one can be forcibly sent to the missions, their superior asked if there were any volunteers. Brothers Joachim and Paul joyfully volunteered to be sent to Russia.

Arriving in Russia by crossing the Pacific, they immediately went to the heart of Siberia to see Bishop Werth in Novosibirsk to ask his permission to live and work in the diocese. The Bishop suggested that they stay with us in Vladivostok to begin their Russian language studies until he could receive the necessary recommendations from Rome and the United States in preparation for their future ordination. Afterward, if everything proved to be positive, he would assign them to a priestless city in his vast territory where they could establish a friary and a parish, and where they would eventually serve as deacons and as priests.

Little did they know when they arrived in Vladivostok on April 15 that they would still be here ten months later, still waiting to hear! Even less did they know that in those ten months, due to the renovation project in the church, they would have to move their humble friary to three different floors of the building, and move to Novosibirsk with all their earthly possessions and back again just three weeks later. The reason for the long wait: Rome was not built in a day, and evidently it still takes them a long time to do things. The bishop is still waiting to hear.

The two peripatetic Franciscans are members of a new and unofficial religious community called the Franciscan Friars of Mary Immaculate (O.F.M.I.) founded in 1984 by the Franciscan Father David-Ladislaus Przedwiecki, O.F.M. of the Assumption Province of the Order of Friars Minor (Pulaski, Wisconsin). The fledgling community currently has two friaries in the United States: Our Lady of Mount Carmel Friary in Mount Morris, Michigan, where they operate a boarding school for boys, and where their members in the initial stages of formation live (candidacy, postulancy and novitiate); and Our Lady of Fatima Friary in Cromwell, Connecticut, for their members who study at Holy Apostles Seminary. The community now numbers 16 friars: one priest, seven in final vows, three in temporary vows, and five novices. In addition, there are several postulants and candidates living at the Michigan friary.

Before leaving America, Brother Joachim Mudd was named by Father David to be the local superior of the new two-man mission community in Russia. One of five children of Joseph and Catherine Mudd, he was born 35 years ago in Louisville, Kentucky, where his mother still lives. His father died when he was three. Before entering religious life, Brother Joachim worked as an auto mechanic and carpenter. The latter skill has come in very useful for various projects in the decrepit Vladivostok church building and in the apartment which serves as the residence for the Canons Regular of Jesus the Lord. He was one of the first members of Father David's new religious community, joining in January 1984. Since his arrival in Vladivostok he has studied Russian with a private tutor for three hours each workday, making steady progress in his ability to speak Russian. In the afternoons he does various errands for the mission, including shopping for tools and supplies (almost a full-time job in Russia) and manual labor at the church building where he lives.

Brother Paul Ruge, was born in Detroit with his twin brother 64 years ago, two of six children of the late Paul and Catherine Ruge. After graduating from high school and serving in the Army in Korea, he worked for 25 years in the food industry, holding various positions in supermarket chains in Michigan, including store manager and regional supervisor. During those years he always taught catechism classes in his parish. For the six years before he joined the Franciscan Friars of Mary Immaculate in August 1984, he worked full time as Director of Religious Education at Holy Family Parish in Saginaw. Since arriving in Vladivostok he too has studied Russian for three hours each weekday with a private tutor, and does manual work at the church each afternoon.

Moving seems to come naturally for the two friars. In the 11 years that they have been with the Franciscans in North America, they have lived in friaries in six different towns, Vladivostok being the seventh and by no means the least comfortable. Almost as if the Lord were preparing them for their trials here, they spent two years in Luken, Ontario, Canada, living in an abandoned church with no water, no central heat, and no rooms. They slept in the choir loft. The building was served by a total of 15 amps of electricity so they did all their cooking each day for nine friars on one small hot plate. In comparison, their present quarters in the crow's nest fourth floor of the former Vladivostok Cathedral, next to the vaulted ceiling of the former sanctuary, seem palatial, even though the temperature does sometimes get down to 45 degrees at night, and the water, for some mysterious reason, has been turned off in the entire neighborhood for more than two months.

What would possess seemingly sane people to go through these hardships time after time? The vision of their founding charism is more than enough to sustain truly dedicated men who want to serve the Lord with their whole being, even in conditions of extreme discomfort. Father David has inspired his friars with the spirituality of St Maximilian Kolbe, O.F.M., the patron of their new order, and one of the 20th century's most famous martyrs.

During his life in Japan and in Nazi-occupied Poland, St Maximilian sought to evangelize a pagan and neo-pagan world. He stressed devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary as a way of bringing people to Jesus her Son, giving special emphasis to bringing fallen-away Christians back and to working with young people. St

Maximilian envisioned a place he called Marytown (in Polish Niepokolanow) in every country: communities of people dedicated to the most holy Mother of God, where all would grow in the love of God through faith and hope. In honor of St Maximilian who was Polish, the Franciscan Friars of Mary Immaculate preserve many traditional customs, songs, prayers and practices in the Polish language which St Maximilian himself used. The emblem of their order is an embroidered patch of the Polish icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa sewn onto the front of their brown Franciscan habit.

In the eleven months that Brothers Joachim and Paul have been with us, they have endeared themselves both to the Canons Regular of Jesus the Lord and to all the people of our Vladivostok parish where they help out on the weekends. On Sundays Brother Joachim sings in the choir and Brother Paul coordinates the preparations for "Sunday Club", the informal gathering of parishioners after Mass for a presentation of some topic related to the faith and for tea and refreshments. In addition, Brother Paul helps prepare breakfast and supper six days a week for the combined community of canons and friars. He is famous for his American style pancakes every Sunday morning. After breakfast, he looks up the Franciscan saint of the day in "The Franciscan Book of Saints" published by the Franciscan Herald Press which somehow found its way into the library of the Canons Regular. On the Feast of St Anthony of Padua we reminded him that the Franciscans "stole" Anthony from the Canons Regular. Since then, he often embellishes the lives of Franciscan saints to say that they too defected from the canons.

When they left Vladivostok to attend the First Pastoral Conference of Novosibirsk in October 1994 the friars thought that Bishop Werth would send them from there directly to their future placement somewhere in Siberia, so they packed up everything and said goodbye to their many friends in the Vladivostok parish amid the sadness of parting. (No more pancakes for the canons.) They had so many things for their friary that, instead of flying with the other delegates, they had to take the train five days from Vladivostok on the Pacific to Novosibirsk in the heart of Siberia (further than from New York City to San Francisco). Showing up with a trainload of baggage for a one-week Pastoral Conference made them the butt of many good natured jokes about the "Poor Franciscans". In Novosibirsk the bishop told them that he had still not heard from Rome about their status, and suggested that they return to Vladivostok until further notice, so they loaded their traveling friary on the train again and rode five days back to Vladivostok. Their "homecoming" at the parish was greeted with loud rejoicing.

Through all the plans and disappointments, the delays and the unknown, our friars have maintained the good nature and equanimity that can only come from complete trust in the Lord. After their founder Father David travelled to Vladivostok and to Novosibirsk to talk with Bishop Werth in early January, and at this writing, they still do not know their future or even if they will be allowed to stay in Russia. Please pray that if it be His will, the Lord will allow them to establish their friary somewhere in Asian Russia, the closer to Vladivostok the better.

A Call To Service

by Valerie Walatka

[How does one become a missionary? In the Fall of 1994, Valerie Walatka came to us from Anchorage, Alaska, to work as an English language secretary for Father Myron, and to help with our parishes's pro-life and Natural Family Planning programs. Here is her story. --ed]

I was at World Youth Day in Denver in August of 1993 when the Holy Father said to us, "Go evangelize!"

After his wonderful pep talks, who wouldn't be hyped? As a certified teacher of English as a Second Language I was ready to go off to Japan to teach and evangelize in a Catholic school.

But God seems to have had other plans, for when I was waiting to hear back from the school in Japan I came across an ad in *The Wanderer* to "Help Convert Russia!" The ad said a priest "in Vladivostok, Russia, near Japan" needed people to help in his parish. "Interesting," I thought. "Near Japan. Maybe this is my calling!" I thought it even more interesting, still, that the contact address was less than a five minute's drive from my Anchorage apartment. So I typed up a letter and delivered it with my resume to the Archdiocese of Anchorage.

I had heard nothing from the Catholic school in Japan when I received a phone call from Father Myron Effing, Pastor of the parish in Vladivostok, in early November. He was in Anchorage for a day on his annual visit to America and wanted to meet me. I hurried down to the Archdiocesan office where in two hours' time Father Effing effectively convinced me that God had been preparing me my whole life specifically for work at the Vladivostok mission!

Father Effing didn't come into our meeting wanting to convince me of anything; he simply wanted to tell me about the different ministries of his parish and make suggestions as to how my background and experience might be useful if I were interested in volunteering. None of that "Do you want to think it over and pray about it and decide if you might possibly want to come?" Father Effing came right out and asked, "When can you come?" I shocked myself when I opened my mouth and gave him a date without the slightest hesitation. That was how I learned that I had already made the commitment in my heart. But I also knew with certainty that if it wasn't God's Will for me to go, He would prevent me from going.

I still had student loans to pay off, but just weeks after meeting with Father Effing I received a big promotion at work which nearly doubled my salary! Next, I was wondering how to support myself at the mission. I'd planned to teach English, but was realizing that I wouldn't be able to do that, plus work in the parish, plus learn Russian. What was the answer? A pro-life group sent a seminar to Anchorage on how to raise financial support, and God gave me the grace to go out and ask for money for the mission. The encouragement and support of my friends, my family, and my dear bishop Archbishop Hurley convinced me even more that it was indeed God's Will for me to serve Him in Russia.

Most Holy Trinity: Our Eldest Sister Parish

by Father Daniel L. Maurer, C.J.D.

The old adage, "You can choose your friends but not your relatives," does not apply to sister parishes. The Catholic parish of the Most Holy Mother of God in Vladivostok is part of a growing family of siblings. We presently have several sister parishes, and in the next several issues of the *Vladivostok Sunrise*, we would like to tell our readers about them as a way of thanking our sister parishes for the support and encouragement they give us.

The first parish to give our Russian mission ongoing support is much older even than our original Vladivostok parish founded in the 1860's. Holy Trinity Parish in Ehrenstein, Germany, was founded by Count Bertram von Nesselrode in 1477. Ehrenstein is a small village located in the Westerwald section of former West Germany, in the archdiocese of Cologne. The link between our two parishes came about through our abiding friendship with the pastor of Holy Trinity, Father Bernhard Leisenheimer, O.S.C. Father Bernhard, born in America of German ancestry, attended Crosier Seminary in Minnesota in the 1960's where he was taught Mathematics and Astronomy by "Frater" Effing who was then a Crosier major seminarian. The Crosiers' full name is the Canons Regular of the Order of the Holy Cross.

After Brother Bernhard joined the Crosier Order, he and Father Myron lived in the same community in northern Indiana where they taught on the faculty of Wawasee Prep, the former Our Lady of the Lake Seminary. It was there in 1973 that they met this author who at that time was the Director of Admissions of the school.

A few years later Brother Bernhard accepted the call to become a member of the newly restored Crosier monastery in Ehrenstein, which had been founded in 1486. He has lived there ever since, where he was ordained a priest in 1982. He was named pastor of the adjacent parish of the Holy Trinity and of a neighboring parish a few years later. Both Father Myron and I have visited Father Bernhard in the beautiful Valley of the Blessed Virgin of Ehrenstein during trips to Europe to meet with representatives of the various orders of canons regular.

In a recent letter to Father Myron in Vladivostok, Father Bernhard wrote to explain how he and his parishioners began their special relationship with the parish of the Most Holy Mother of God in Vladivostok:

Knowing you and Father Dan for years previously, there was the fraternal bond that boundaries do not disrupt. Then one Christmas time some years ago [1992, our first Christmas in Russia] someone came to me and said that the Christmas Collection held by the German Catholics for the needs of the Church in South America was something that has done so much good, when are we going to start helping in the east? My answer was, "I just happen to know two confreres who are starting to work there."

Father Bernhard had heard that we needed to buy a car--a huge investment for us. A sizable sum of money was donated by one parishioner, and other individual parishioners followed suit. Later some of the proceeds from numerous parish festivals were also forwarded to Vladivostok. Occasionally parishioners have requested that gifts of money made in memory of loved ones be donated to the Vladivostok parish instead of being used for excessive amounts of flowers.

Once, in a very touching gesture, Father Bernhard sent a beautiful and costly priestly stole, hand embroidered in gold, with an accompanying note explaining that he understands that so much in the former Soviet Union is bleak and ugly, but the people should not be deprived of beauty in the Sacred Liturgy. Other beautiful vestments followed.

As the relationship of the two parishes has progressed these three years, the amount of financial help given by the parishioners in Germany has been extremely generous and has made a tremendous difference in how the fledgling mission has been able to minister to the needs of the Church and the people of Russia.

Who are these generous people who took the initiative to offer substantial help to a struggling mission? Father Bernhard explains:

Today we number about 285 parishioners but have many friends who regularly come to our liturgies, Bibles classes, and festivities from other places than the villages that make up our parish boundaries. In contrast to other parishes, we are young, in as much as we have many young families with many children - over 40% of the parishioners are under 12 years of age! That is unusual for this country, as the age pyramid is becoming more and more top-heavy.

Father Bernhard also says that the link between the sister parishes of Vladivostok and Ehrenstein is not just a one-way street. He writes that his parishioners have received much in return:

...the news of your parish, especially its founding by a group of young people, as well as the interest and responsibility shown by members of your parish, has found its way into homilies and parish bulletin articles and has very much impressed and encouraged us. We live in a traditional Catholic milieu which has given us the inheritance of a rich religious culture. But because the last time we had to fight for it is so long ago, [hearing about] the initiative that seems so lively among you [makes us think] that we are getting the better part of the deal in our "exchange".

Father Bernhard would like to be able to welcome some members of his sister parish to the beautiful Westerwald of Germany if the opportunity presents itself in the future.

We wish to acknowledge publicly our great debt to the pastor and the members of Holy Trinity Parish, Ehrenstein, especially to the children, who have worked hard to raise money for our struggling mission. Thank you, Elder Sister. May the Lord bless you richly

for your generosity!

Thoughts about Russia

by Brother Paul Ruge, OFMI

We have been impressed with the warm welcome received here in the parish. The many people we have met in the city have such a friendly smile and greeting. The delightful children, and how the Russian people love their children and like to dress them up so well.

The Franciscan Friars of Mary Immaculate, Brothers Joachim Mudd and Paul Ruge, arrived in Khabarovsk on April 5, 1994, from Our Lady of Mount Carmel Friary, Mount Morris, Michigan. Stanislauf and his son Zhenya, members of Transfiguration Parish in Khabarovsk, met us at the airport and took us to their home.

Ghennadi, Father Myron's interpreter and man Friday, registered us with the government and made arrangements for our trip to Novosibirsk in Siberia, where we were guests of the Franciscans. The next day we had our appointment with Bishop Joseph Werth. He asked why we had come to Russia. We replied, "To ask permission to establish a Franciscan Friary here in the Diocese of Siberia, and to help wherever needed."

At the second meeting, the next day, the bishop recommended that we come to Most Holy Mother of God Parish in Vladivostok and stay with Father Myron, to learn the Russian language, meet Russian people, and learn their Russian way of life, customs, and tradition. The bishop said that the most important thing for us was to have a healthy spirit and strong faith which comes from daily prayer and meditation. "The underground church had a good prayer life, and we need people to teach as the parents taught in the underground church. We need to be sensitive to the people and not impose our culture on them, but learn from them."

The sounds of the city--trams, buses, and the many people walking in the downtown center--remind me of the 1940's in America. The respect for older people is evident: I have been offered a seat on the buses and trams many times. Young and old alike stop to talk to us. They ask about our Franciscan habit, and talk about God and tell of the inner feelings in their hearts, and about their longing for a knowledge of God.

In America the Christmas Nativity Set is forbidden to be displayed on public property. Here in Russia the manager of the GUM, the government operated retail store, called Father Myron and asked if he had a Christmas Nativity Set which could be displayed in the store window. In America, prayer is forbidden in a public school. Here in Russia we have been invited to speak in a public college.

We brothers have been studying the Russian language for the past ten months. We have enjoyed working here in the parish, and especially with the parishioners each Saturday when there are four hours of volunteer labor. Brother Joachim sings with the choir, and I help with the Sunday Club, an after-mass chance to have a cup of tea and talk to fellow parishioners. Special highlights of our stay have been the visit of Bishop Werth last June for confirmation, the mass at the Memorial in the woods where many Catholics were

executed in the 1930's. We have especially enjoyed the prayer life and the many feast days liturgies, such as Corpus Christi, Ascension Thursday, Pentecost, and the Advent and Christmas season.

We brothers are grateful for the generosity and friendship that we have received from Father Myron, from Father Dan, and from the parishioners of the Most Holy Mother of God Parish. We will be back in America March 17, when our visas expire, and will return to Russia when we receive an appointment from Bishop Werth.

The treasure of Russia is its people, and the hope of the Church. We pray with and for them, that they may find God in the one holy Catholic Church.

