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## Historic Crucifix Returns to Church

By Rev Daniel Maurer, C.J.D.

The parish of the Most Holy Mother of God in Vladivostok has cause for great rejoicing. We have passed another historic milestone, one which reminds us of our past and prepares us to face the future with a renewed understanding of the mystery of God's love.

On November 4, 1996, the large marble crucifix, which had stood as the central image over the main altar before the Communists' attempted extermination of Catholicism, was returned to the church from which it had been removed fifty years earlier. Accompanied by tears of joy, ardent prayer, and more than a little fear for its safe journey, this sacred and moving image of Christ Crucified was brought home to where it belongs. The great occasion was all the more poignant because the crucifix is the only known object which remains from inside the church before the Communists destroyed the parish, converting the building for use as the regional government archive. The joy that its homecoming brings to our parishioners, especially to those few who remember the crucifix in the church, is almost exceeded by the difficulties of the process of its repossession.

Because of the destruction and displacement of historical records during the Communist civil war (1917-1922) and the repression of religion, nothing is known about the origin of the crucifix. No one has been able to tell us where it comes from, when it arrived in Vladivostok, or even who the artist was who sculpted it. It is quite evidently a masterpiece, and therefore not likely the creation of any sculptor known to have worked in the Russian Far East during the 19th or early 20th centuries. A respected Vladivostok historian, who helped in the process of the return of the crucifix to the church, has speculated that it may well be the work of the sculptor, P. K. Klodt, who gained worldwide fame in the middle of the 19th century for his monumental human and equestrian statues on the Anichkov Bridge and the Narva Gate in St Petersburg, the former Russian imperial capital, and in front of the imperial palace in Berlin. If that is true and can be proved, the crucifix would automatically become a Russian national treasure. Its present status is that of "Primorsky Krai regional cultural monument" and as such is not officially the property of the Catholic parish. It remains the property of the state under the administration of the Primorsky Museum of History and Culture, but has been given over to the parish for "safe-keeping" for an initial period of three years.

Four pieces of historical documentation connect the crucifix to the Catholic parish of Vladivosok, but at least two of those three documents prove its true ownership conclusively: the large first communion photograph taken inside the church sometime between 1921-1923 which clearly shows the crucifix in the background (*Sunrise* cover story, issue number 11, June 1, 1995); two written records of the construction of

brick foundations for the heavy crucifix, (the first one is dated 1912 and documents the building of a brick foundation for a heavy marble crucifix in the old wooden church, and the second one documents the construction of a brick foundation for a marble crucifix in the new masonry church around 1922); and finally a written record of the decision by the Primorsky Regional Archive to give the crucifix into the safekeeping of the Vladivostok Art Academy "for the purpose of art instruction". This last document, dated 1947, contains an exact description of the crucifix, and carries on the opposite side a record of receipt of the crucifix by the Art Academy, signed by the director of the academy. It was this written receipt which finally forced a reluctant Art Academy faculty committee to return the crucifix to the Catholic parish after a four-year process initiated by our pastor Fr Myron in 1992.

The crucifix, executed from flawless white marble, stands over 9 feet high, and is composed of four parts: (1) an oblong base sculpted with a design of alternately curved and flat moldings, into which is tightly fitted (2) a simply-sculpted, flat cross, onto which is attached (3) an exquisitely worked corpus, slightly smaller than life-size, in the most authentic illusionist style, and (4) a scrollwork sign bearing the Latin letters I.N.R.I. The corpus is a depiction of the dead Christ, his head drooping low to his right side, his eyes and mouth open. Of special compositional merit is how the sculptor has captured the lifeless body, hanging by the arms, its weight causing the left clavicle to protrude slightly unnaturally under the flesh at the shoulder.

The present condition of this priceless relic shows evidence of its traumatic history, though not enough to obscure the genuine beauty of the piece in general. In what could only have resulted from a deliberate intention to deface the corpus, all the fingers of both hands have been broken off. In addition the nose and the point of the beard have been chipped and a central piece of the crown of thorns is noticeably missing, as is a small piece off the end of the loin cloth. Even a large but thin chunk of marble has been chipped off the left side of the crossbeam. Perhaps, though this is only an unsubstantiated legend, some of the damage might have resulted from an attempt by parishioners to save the crucifix by burying it. Such a drastic solution may have been thought necessary because throughout the 1920's and '30's members of the Communist "Society of Militant Atheists" rampaged through Vladivostok, destroying all 25 Orthodox churches and all exterior religious symbols.

As long-time *Sunrise* readers know, the Catholic church building survived only because the Catholic community was dispersed and almost completely destroyed. After the darkest years of the repression there were no parishioners remaining who would be impertinent enough to ask that the building be reopened for sacred services. Therefore in the mind of the Communist authorities, the church could "legitimately" be given over to another use, i.e. an archive. But besides as an object of religious veneration, what other use is there for a large white, marble crucifix?

An appropriate, Communistic use was found, or perhaps it was a happy excuse advanced by some crypto-believer so that a beautiful but politically incorrect object would not be wantonly destroyed. For the last 50 years the religious masterpiece stood in a very atheistic institution at a 45 degree angle in one corner of a crowded first floor studio, the only precious possession of the Vladivostok Art Academy, to which it was relegated as an object of study and sketching for three generations of high school students. The academy can truly be called atheistic since as part of the Communist government school system, officially mandated classes in atheism were regularly taught to all students until as recently as four years ago when the curriculum was revised by the national government. Since teachers were not re-trained in a broader point of view, it is logical to conclude that many of them are still teaching atheism as they were taught to do throughout the Communist period.

Non-Russians would have to “experience” the Art Academy to believe it. Situated in a residential neighborhood on the north edge of downtown, it is one of the most run-down and unpleasant buildings this author has ever seen. Everything about it carries the conviction of irresponsibility and decay, from the unimaginably filthy bathrooms in the basement with doors broken off or hanging ajar (where light fixtures and even light bulbs have long since been destroyed mercifully so as not to allow one to take in the full horror), through the garbage strewn stairs with unequally high steps, up to the decrepit, completely undecorated teacher’s lounge. Nothing about the building betrays the least evidence that anyone connected with it has ever had a vocation to impart to the young an appreciation of beauty or the knowledge of art. Nothing, that is, but the breathtakingly beautiful figure of Christ momentarily frozen in marble for all eternity. One can understand why the school officials were reluctant to let it go. Not that they treated it well when they had it. Every time I visited the academy to see the crucifix during the last four years, there it was, dirty and ignored, in its corner in front of two windows. In that position, with light coming from the back, it was impossible even to view it well, to say nothing of sketching it as an artistic exercise. Using a black pen one forgotten student had scrawled a peace sign at the center of the crossbar above the head. Thankfully no young couple ever carved a heart with their initials into the chest. About all that can be said for the administration of the academy is that they kept it safe from greater acts of vandalism through the last 50 years, and that finally, when they had to, they consented to its return to us. For that they have received our formal thanks.

They did not give it up without a fight. Knowing early on that the Catholic priests in Vladivostok came from America, and thinking as most Russians do that all Americans are rich, they first tried barter, or was it extortion? At that time the parish possessed no documentary evidence that could prove that the crucifix had been taken from the Church. All we had to go on was the obvious fact that it was executed in the Latin style rather than the Byzantine style of the Russian Orthodox Church and the oral history surrounding the crucifix which

vaguely suggested that it was dug up near our church around 1950 when the city was excavating for the foundation of a new electrical tower. “Not enough evidence,” the faculty assembly solemnly intoned, “but if you really want it, we may be able to exchange it for five-or-so personal computers.” Everything has its price, but how do you recoup a priceless artifact when you are not the rich Americans you are assumed to be? You wait, and you pray. And in Russia you search for a paper trail, because nothing happens in Russia without ten forms being filled out in triplicate. First we found the old photograph with the crucifix clearly visible in its entirety. “Still not enough evidence,” we were defensively informed, “but if you still want it, we now need 30 personal computers with color monitors.” So we waited and prayed some more. We were not too concerned about the waiting. For the first two years we did not even have a place to store it if it had been returned to us. After we got the church building back from the government, we tried again, but made no progress. Finally, earlier this year, a parishioner thought to ask the Primorsky Archive if they might have a record of giving the crucifix to the Academy. (Certainly the Academy should have such a record, but they were not about to admit it.) The director of the archive looked and found exactly what we needed to prove how the crucifix had come into the possession of the academy--a clearly written act of transfer of the crucifix from the archive to the academy, and a clearly written receipt from the academy. All that remained was to show the document to the Primorsky government Director of Cultural Affairs, and the Academy was forced to relinquish its claim over the crucifix.

It took a crew of 14 men, all volunteers from the parish, to carry the crucifix out of the academy to a waiting truck and then into the church through the large front doors. They all deserve a rich reward as modern day Simons of Cyrene, especially since the weight of the two pieces together, base and crucifix, has been estimated to be over 2000 pounds! As it crossed the threshold one could almost hear the choirs of angels rejoicing, and one certainly could hear a collective sigh of relief and shouts of praise from all the parishioners who had gathered to keep a vigil of prayer during the move. The base was too small for all fourteen to carry and too heavy for a small crew to lift up the stairs, so we decided to stand the crucifix temporarily on the ground floor by the stairway leading up to main nave until we could study how best to proceed.

With expert consultation from parishioner Alexander Kovalevski, a college professor who has a doctorate in engineering from the St Petersburg Institute of Technology, assisted by two colleagues, a special steel handle was designed to fit around the base so that six men could lift it easily and carry it up the stairs. On November 23, the day before the Feast of Christ the King which was to see the solemn parish celebration of the return of the crucifix, it was finally set up in the nave of the church. With tears in their eyes our elderly parishioners carefully washed the crucifix as if they were washing the body of the crucified Lord.

The crucifix is not the centerpiece of the main altar as it was in the photograph taken in the 1920's, however. Since our parish is dedicated to the Most Holy Mother of God, the central image in the sanctuary should be reserved for Mary depicted as mother of the Christ child. The crucifix stands temporarily in the central aisle at the back, opposite the altar, where it is the first thing that everyone sees as they come up the steps into the nave. It is not uncommon that our parishioners kiss the feet or gently touch the knee of the corpus as they enter the church for Sunday Mass, admiring its beauty and marveling that it has come home.

We are saving the steel handle which was made to carry the base so that both crucifix and base can be moved one more time. It has long been Fr Myron's dream to make a beautiful "Chapel of Martyrs" to the memory of all our parishioners who lost their lives in the religious persecutions or who died without the sacraments during the 62 dark years when our parish was closed, including the priests who died in the camps. The chapel is to be located to the north side of the first floor vestibule, in a vaulted room which may have been the baptistry before the structural changes of the Communist era. When found, the body of the first bishop of Vladivostok, the Most Rev Karol Slivovski, D.D. will be interred in the chapel. The beautiful marble crucifix, a silent, suffering witness to the death of so many millions of Christians of Russia in this century, will be used as the central image of that chapel of martyrs. There it will most clearly become once again what it was created to be, a powerful symbol of our sure hope in the victory of the Crucified.

## First Organ Concert a Spiritual and Musical Triumph

by Rev Daniel Maurer, C.J.D.

The return of the historic marble crucifix (see related story in this issue) was celebrated by the Vladivostok Catholic parish with the first-ever organ concert in the Russian Far East, an area almost as large as the entire continental United States. The day chosen for the celebration was, very appropriately, the feast of Christ the King (November 24, 1996). The parish had wanted to host an organ concert for the city ever since it received the large Rodgers organ as a gift from the Church of the Epiphany in Coon Rapids, Minnesota. The main obstacle was the lack of a trained organist who could adequately show off such an impressive and complex instrument to the music lovers of the city. Before becoming parish organist, Marina Shuyanova Omelchenko was a very accomplished pianist, but she had no training or experience playing an organ until she inaugurated the Epiphany organ at the Easter Vigil last April. She needed time to learn the special legato touch required on an organ, how to choose the proper registers for each musical piece, how to change registers in the middle of a piece, how to switch smoothly between keyboards, and especially how to play the pedals. She has been practicing diligently every week since her debut, with the exception of a month off in July to get married and travel to the Ukraine on her honeymoon to meet her husband's parents for the first time.

When we learned that the crucifix would be returned in November we thought the time was right to plan the first concert in honor of that historic event. Perhaps it was coincidence that we chose to honor the crucifix with a concert of sacred music and that the crucifix was finally returned to the parish on the feast of St Charles Borromeo. Long time *Sunrise* readers will remember that St Charles is one of the patrons of our parish choir, since his episcopal motto was, "Don't Stop the Music!"

With such a beautiful and historically important art treasure as the focus of the occasion, it seemed appropriate to have the concert take the form of a musical reflection on the mystery of the death and resurrection of the Lord. Because Fr Myron the pastor was traveling in the U.S. for most of October and November, Fr Daniel established an *ad hoc* committee to help plan the event for the first Sunday that Fr Myron would be back in Vladivostok, November 24. Members of the committee were Marina the parish organist; Ekaterina Yankina, a charter member of our parish choir and choir director since October 1 of this year; and Ludmila Rakhmanova, also a charter member of the choir and professor of dramatics at the Far Eastern Art Institute. Ludmila is the director of all operas produced in Vladivostok, a position in which she has worked at one time or another with most of the classical musicians in the Russian Far East, many of whom are her former students at the Institute. (She is also the mother of our first parish organist and choir director, Anna Gafurova Jones.)

With the help and "snokomstvo" (Russian for "personal connections") of the committee members, we soon had a stellar list of musicians and singers who wanted to take part in what promised to be a cultural milestone in a very cultural city. Because of last minute cancellations of two vocal soloists due to a flu epidemic, the final list of participants were: Marina as main organist; the parish choir; the Ancient Music Ensemble of the Art Institute; the Chamber Choir of the Primorsky Philharmonic Orchestra; and Marina's father, flutist with the Primorsky Philharmonic who played the flute accompanied by his daughter on the organ.

Given such a good collection of artists, the problem became how to limit attendance so that there would be enough room for the concert guests. We decided not to advertise in the mass media. We also decided to arrange for more seating. Usually our church has around 160 seats. We brought up more pews from the first floor hall and every spare chair in the building for a total of about 300 seats. During the concert every seat was occupied and there were about 50 people standing. By attendance alone the concert was a big success. By other measurements it was one of the most memorable events of a lifetime.

We originally hoped that the concert could be about 90 minutes, though at first this author as head of the committee was skeptical that we could find enough sacred music in this most Soviet of Russian cities to fill the bill. There was no need to worry. The concert turned out to be exactly two hours long without an intermission. Interspersed among the musical selections were four readings from the New Testament on the theme of the crucifixion and cross. After an introductory hymn by the parish choir and the first reading from St Paul's letter to the Philippians, ("Jesus accepted even death, death on a cross,") Fr Myron unveiled the nine-foot tall crucifix and incensed it in the first public act of veneration of this precious relic in more than fifty years.

The eight student member Ancient Music Ensemble sang three pieces *acapella*: a *Kyrie*, a *Sanctus* and an *Ave Marie*. Their young, clear, true voices blended perfectly with the acoustics of the Gothic cathedral for an ethereal, uplifting sound. It was the first time they had sung sacred music in a sacred place. They did an excellent job. The fifteen member Chamber Choir of the Primorsky Philharmonic, the men dressed in white tie and black tails and the ladies in black evening gowns with silver-glittered floating panels, sang two beautiful pieces, Schubert's *Stabat Mater* in German, and in what was perhaps the emotional high point of the afternoon, a powerful rendition of "*Libera Me*" from Gabriel Foure's *Requiem No. 6*, during which all those present who had lost relatives and loved ones in the Communist repression came forward, invited by Fr Myron, to light and hold votive candles in memory of the deceased. Then, to honor our parishioners who were killed during those bloody times, Fr Myron unveiled a mural-sized version of the First Communion class of 1923--the "miracle picture"--showing our Bishop Slivovsky, a priest

and the First Communicants standing below the very same crucifix which we were rededicating, and before which we are also privileged to pray.

The stars of the day were Marina and the Epiphany organ. She not only played five solo pieces, she also accompanied the parish choir in three hymns, accompanied the assembly in four hymns, accompanied the Chamber Choir of the Primorsky Philharmonic Orchestra in the Schubert *Stabat Mater* (in five segments), and played the organ for three duets with her father on the flute. Among the composers whose works she played were Handel, Bach, Corelli, Valentine, Foure and Beethoven. Her final solo piece was a very triumphant Prelude and Fuge by Handel with many register changes ending finally with all the stops out. Her playing was masterful and self confident. With only seven months of practice on the organ it was surprising that she managed the register changes perfectly. The only slight flaw was something that has happened to organists the world over. (Welcome to the club, Marina!) When she stood up to take her final bow, she forgot to turn off the pedal stops, so a loud groan momentarily emanated from more than six hundred watts of power. The audience chuckled good naturedly and gave her an even warmer round of applause.

One of the New Testament readings during the concert reminded all those present, "The message of the cross is absurdity to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Cor 1: 18) For the closing of the concert-reflection in honor of the return of a statue depicting a tragic death, everyone stood and proclaimed in song their faith and hope in the resurrection from the dead. Following the text printed in the program, over three hundred voices blended together singing a beautiful Russian translation by a young parishioner of the famous hymn set to the melodic theme of the closing movement of Beethoven's 9th Symphony, the "Ode to Joy",

Sing with all the sons of glory,  
Sing the resurrection song.  
Death and sorrow, earth's dark story,  
To the former days belong.

It was the triumphant *finale* of a never-to-be-forgotten afternoon. The priests of the Most Holy Mother of God Catholic Church wish to take the opportunity of this article to thank again Fr Bernard Reiser and the people of the Church of the Epiphany in Coon Rapids for making possible this historic occasion. Their gift of the organ is a gift which truly keeps on giving, providing inexpressable joy to all who hear it, and continuous praise to God. With St Charles we pray, "Don't stop the music!"

## Summer Camp 1996

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

Now it's winter already, and we still haven't told you about our summer camp! Winters are long in Russia, so this is a good time to remember those summer days, August 11 to August 18, although it was rain, rain, rain for the first four days of camp--until August 15, the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Then the sun came out! And the kids spent a glorious few hours on the beach, the most beautiful beach in our area--on Popov Island. The beach is clean--so clean that one can eat seafood right out of the ocean! Then it was sunshiney for the rest of the camp.

I'm rather old to run around with the children, but I tried. We owe our thanks to the two young priests--one Japanese and one Filipino, two seminarians, two sisters, and seven Japanese Catholic university students who came to help with the camp. We don't have any sisters in this whole third of Russia, so the children's camp is the only time our kids get to see sisters, and Sister Maria, who is Polish but works in Japan, was here to help with the children's prayers and songs, as well as to serve as interpreter. The two seminarians came from Byelorussia for the camp. They speak Russian. We hope that they were an inspiration for the kids, as well.

How was the camp financed? Parents paid what they could, but it was sad to see that some children from the parish couldn't go to camp because we didn't have enough money to send everybody--as usual we were broke. The Marianhill Fathers paid the expenses of the seminarians. The Japanese students donated a large part of the camp expenses, and our sister parish in Yokohama covered the rest. Thanks to all who helped make our camp a success. Next year, who will help?

The following articles are from other camp participants.

## **Second Annual Children's Camp on Popov Island**

*By Yuri Belozorov, Camp Director*

The Most Holy Mother of God Parish summer camp for children was held during August in the fisherman union's preschool building on Popov Island. At the week-long camp 33 children ages 10 to 16 from the Vladivostok, Nakhodka and Blagoveschensk parishes grew in their knowledge of the Faith through spiritual exercises, discussion and prayer. Japanese Catholics from our sister parish in Yokohama participated again this year in addition to the Russian staff, carrying out organizational and administrative functions of the camp.

Our three primary goals for the camp, listed in the order of importance, were the following: To increase the religious and spiritual consciousness of the participants; to provide an atmosphere for inter-cultural exchange between the Russian and the Japanese; and to improve the physical health of the participants.

In our religious instruction we aspired above all to bring the children to a knowledge of Jesus present in His Church through the sacraments. All members of the camp had an active prayer life that week, under the spiritual leadership of Sister Maria, a Polish nun from the Japanese delegation. (May the Lord lead her to full-time work with the children of our parish!)

The children quickly understood that it is possible and even necessary to address God with their requests. It was a little more difficult to teach them to see in everyday life how God loves and cares for His children and to teach them to give thanks for all of God's many gifts.

It really is quite hard to see to concerns about spiritual growth in a rain that pours down from morning to night for three days in a row. However, the first few days we took an occasional break from our religious mind-set in order to dream of being on the beach under the nice hot sun. After the daily routine of the camp was established and the children had gotten to know each other, on Thursday, the Feast of Our Lady's Assumption, the Lord bestowed on us a wonderful gift of hot sun, a blessing which remained for the duration of the camp, only mildly distracting us from our spiritual exercises.

One way we developed international dialogue at the camp was through the group task of writing a script on a religious theme and then together rehearsing the play. The campers were divided by age into four groups, and the staff were distributed among them. Each afternoon there was time for development and discussion of the script and for rehearsals. On Saturday a festival was held with one performance following the other and not any play leaving the observers indifferent. The award for the best performance went to the 10 to 12-year-olds, who used as their plot the parable of the Good Samaritan. Their group

leaders were Andre, a seminarian from Belarus, and Eri, a future teacher of English and French from Japan. (May God continue to develop their talents for their vocations.) This group also won the award for "Team Spirit" because of its members' enthusiasm.

The most difficult problem by far in organizing group work lay on the strong shoulders of two men. Victor Anisimov from Most Holy Mother of God Parish and Father Ghandi from Japan had the not always pleasant job of working with the 13-year-old campers. But both group leaders coped successfully with all the young teen-agers' problems. (May God grant Victor and Father Ghandi success in all of their future dealings with teen-agers!)

Another young group of campers, the 10 to 12-year-olds, was constantly at work and play with leaders Slavik, a seminarian from Belarus, and Ayako, a kindergarten teacher from Japan. These two leaders' cheerful manner and spontaneity made for great teamwork in all of the games and tasks. (May the Lord continue to increase their love for children.)

The most problematic group for religious instruction was the 14 to 16-year-olds, led by our pastor's secretary, Valerie Walatka, and Filipino priest Father Larry from the Japanese delegation. In their discussions the inquisitive young men and women pondered deep questions about God and human nature, posing most difficult questions to the leaders. Fortunately this group was graced with the middle-aged Sister Naoko from Japan, whose contributions were a great asset in the theological discussions. (May God grant all members of this group further growth in the knowledge of Him and of His Church.)

This year, as in last, the sports program for the camp was organized by our kind friend Valery from Komsomolsk-na-Amure. How through Karate this man came to faith in Christ and to the Church would make a fine theme for a separate but very large article, which hopefully will one day be written. Valery didn't come alone to the camp this year, but brought with him from Komsomolsk two students from the pedagogical institute, Aleksy and Alexander, who gave instructions in Karate each day. (May God allow them to grow in their faith in Jesus Christ.)

It is necessary to mention the role of the organizer of games, who rallied all of the camp participants into the music hall in one big group each evening after supper. This person was Tai, a student in Management from Japan. Under his direction laughter and running around did not cease. Each game was appropriate for mixed nationalities and mixed ages, and everyone had a good time. (Blessed be God for giving Tai the job of organizer.)

Each day before lunch everyone met in the music hall, where for half an hour they practiced hymns under the keyboard accompaniment of Vitalie, one of our campers. Indeed it was both joyful and interesting. (May God grant Vitalie fuller development of his talents to the glory of the Church on earth.)

Certainly, no religious camp can do without spiritual guidance. Either Father. Myron or Father Daniel was at the camp each day all week, taking spiritual care of the participants. (May the Lord assist them both in their noble service.).

Providing invaluable assistance in the organization of the camp were the manager of the preschool, Svetlana Pavlovna, the main engineer of the Popov fishermen's union, Alexander Evgenievich, and the workers of the fish factory. The cafe, where we ate three meals a day, was also indispensable for the camp, and Nina Josefovna and Galena Josefovna's culinary skills were repeatedly awarded by applause. (May God bless all of these people for their kindness and bring them all to a knowledge and love of Him.)

The hidden role in all aspects of the camp was played by the director Yuri Belozorov, author of this article. (May God allow me at next year's camp to participate in group work with the kids in addition to my administrative responsibilities.).

I ask you, brothers and sisters, to pray to the Most Holy Mother of God and Ever Virgin Mary for the continued success of our religious summer camp in future years to the greater glory of God and our Church. Amen!

## A Camper's Viewpoint

*by Galina Olegovna Pavlova*

As we all know, any education, whether it be physical, cultural or religious, needs to begin at an early age. Not without reason, the Russo-Japanese Christian camp on Popov Island accepted children from 10 to 16 years of age, at which ages it is possible to begin making a child conscious of the spiritual life. The fact is, many of the children who came to the camp for the first time didn't know even one simple prayer.

It is necessary to note that many children who attended the camp last year brought along with them this year their brothers, sisters and even friends from the neighborhood. I registered my little sister to attend the camp this year under her persistent request. To be honest, I had doubts as to how it would warm up to the religious atmosphere of our camp. So I was pleasantly surprised at how easily she found a common language with everyone and how whole-heartedly she participated in all of the activities and even went on her own to the Masses that took place several mornings at the camp..

As to the schedule at the camp. To the credit of the organizers, the days were filled with the most diverse activities.

The day began with calisthenics, in which everyone participated, children, adults, Japanese, even priests and sisters. After morning prayer and breakfast, group work began. The campers were divided by age into four groups with adult leaders in each group. After a short talk on the theme of a day by one of the camp organizers (themes centered around the sacraments and prayer), the groups met in separate rooms. Two of them were busy discussing the theme of the day, while the two other learned Karate under the direction of two young men from Komsolmosk-na-Amure, who came to the camp with their coach, assistant director of the camp. After an hour the groups rotated.

After the first two main activities of the day, everyone met in the music hall, to practice hymns for the Thursday feast day Mass for the Assumption of Mary. After lunch the groups either went to the beach for swimming and sunbathing or prepared skits to be performed on Saturday morning. Working in groups gave them the opportunity to get to know each other better. In the evenings we all went to the music hall where we played games, sang, and visited with one another.

It was surprising to see that the cultural and language differences did not prevent dialogue between the Russian children and the Japanese youth. And anyone who spoke a foreign language had an opportunity to practice.

In addition to the regular daily camp activities there were four Masses. There were two Japanese priests and practically all week one of the priests of our parish was on the island. It

was a pleasure to see the campers going on their own to daily Mass, attendance at which was optional.

The children learned a lot in the course of the week. They learned what prayer is and how to pray. But they did not simply learn to say prayers; in their small groups they creatively planned and skillfully led evening prayer for the whole camp. The campers learned about Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Confession. They were able to discuss the sacraments in their groups, and those who had already received the sacraments, were able to share their impressions with the others.

The physical training strengthened physical health of the children and even enabled them to prepare a show on karate. And of course there were skits the children practiced the whole week and finally performed on Saturday.

And on Friday evening was our farewell campfire. As last year, we headed to the beach to make the event a tradition. There was a barbecue, swimming, and singing around the campfire until late into the night. The stars lit the way for us on the road back to the camp. It was joyful, but at the same time, a bit sad.

No one wanted to leave. Everyone felt the same way, both the children, who had befriended one another, and the adults, for whom the "children's" camp had been a positive experience as well. We sailed away from our "Oasis" (that was the name we chose for our camp) promising each other to meet there again next year.

Actually, the official closing of camp was held the next day at Sunday Mass. The five priests who concelebrated that day blessed all of the children and adults who had attended the camp. And then there was tea and the exchange of addresses. Some of the campers invited Japanese to their homes.

That Thursday we saw the Japanese off at the airport. It was sad, but I remembered that last year Sister Maria had told me, wiping my tears, "We must learn to part." So farewell, until next year!

News of Our Benefactors:

## Central Arkansas for Russia!

*by Mrs Melanie Alberson*

Jacksonville, Arkansas, is home to two parishes that have actively supported the Vladivostok Mission for the last four years, Holy Family Parish at the Little Rock Air Force Base and St Jude's Parish of Jacksonville. Now we are making plans for fund raisers to be held in 1997.

Holy Family parishioners first met Fr Effing when he visited their pastor, Fr Dale Edwards, in the fall of 1992. At that time, Fr Effing told of his work with the Vladivostok Mission and the need for food, medications, and clothing in the area. Parishioners were quick to respond with collections of the needed items, and a small but dedicated group handled all the packing and shipping.

Fr Effing visited again in the following year and was invited to speak not only at Holy Family Parish, but also at nearby St Jude's Parish. Collections of food, clothing, over-the-counter medicines, and medical supplies continued, but now with both parishes participating.

After Father's trip to Central Arkansas in 1994, the two parishes decided to conduct a major drive for the same needed items. It was during this effort that local interest in the Vladivostok Mission soared.

Parishioners, friends, and "friends of friends" came from all corners of Central Arkansas with help and donations. A member of Holy Family Parish knew of a local clinic that was closing and was able to secure a medical examination table and other equipment. A medical supply sales representative from another parish donated 20 boxes of new items. Members of both parishes brought large popcorn tins in which to pack the half ton of donated dried beans.

St Jude's Men's Club, Senior Catholic Youth (SCY), PRE classes, and Altar & Rosary Society all aided the effort. The Men's Club held a valet car wash to help pay for shipping-- Parishioners arriving for Mass left their car keys with club members, and returned to find their cars sparkling. The SCY held Lenten soup suppers to help pay shipping costs, and PRE students brought canned foods. Altar & Rosary Society ladies collected, screened, and donated used clothing, and Boy Scout Troop 23 worked tirelessly to box and label hundreds of items. A total of four tons of donated goods left Jacksonville in May of 1996.

After resting up, parishioners decided it was time for another fund-raising event. A committee of eight St Jude's women came together to publish a parish cookbook. With the help of Morris Press in Kearney, Nebraska, the ladies collected recipes from parishioners. They organized, proofread, and formatted the recipes to the publisher's specifications; selected paper

stock and typefaces; and began an advertizing campaign and taking early orders. To stimulate extra interest, the parish held a "Name the Cookbook" contest, with the winner to receive a home-cooked meal prepared by the pastor, Fr Charles Thessing. Finished cookbooks, entitled "Confessions of Sin-Sational Chefs" arrived in September, just in time for early Christmas shoppers. The book features 400 recipes, including one from the bishop, Andrew J. McDonald and one from Fr Thessing. The Jacksonville newspaper even gave front-page coverage to the cookbook and to the growing local support for the Russian parishes. All proceeds from the sale of the books go directly to the Vladivostok Mission. (Want to buy one? Send \$10 to Ms Melanie Alberson, St Jude's Catholic Church, 2403 MacArthur Dr, Jacksonville AR 72076.)

For Fr Effing's visit in October, the same group of women planned, organized, and advertized a Wednesday evening spaghetti supper. More than three hundred people signed up to attend. Cooking began two days in advance. Fr Effing spoke at the Wednesday evening Mass and the dinner followed. Vladivostok Mission supporters from St Jude's and Holy Family packed the parish hall for an evening of home-made spaghetti and dinner rolls, salad--and desserts from the parish cookbook. Fr Thessing donned a tuxedo and serenaded the crowd with violin music. Fr Effing roamed among the diners, collecting autographs in his copy of the cookbook.

The growth in interest and support for the mission has truly been incredible, and talented, creative, and energetic people from both parishes have come forward to assist in the various projects. Catholics in Central Arkansas have certainly taken the Russian parishes into their hearts and hope to continue efforts for many years to come.

## News Notes

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

• We were not successful in finding enough donors to begin our “Widows” Project in 1996. So far, nine smaller windows have been reserved by donors. But, thanks to the Catholics of Germany who, through their organization RENOVABIS, have offered to purchase for us THE OUTER PART of EVERY window! This is like a matching grant, since we cannot buy just the outer part! So our donors can now reserve for themselves the inner part, for a savings of approximately 40% over the donation needed for a whole window. Please consider donating for this great need. Thanks you, RENOVABIS! The remaining windows, with the 40% cost savings, are now the following:

Window	Window Name and Image	Cost
1E1	Visitation (St Mary and St Elizabeth)	\$3,780
1E2	Nativity of Jesus	3,780
1E3	Presentation of Jesus in Temple	3,780
1W3	Finding of Jesus in the Temple	3,780
1W2	Assumption of Mary	3,780
1W1	Coronation of Mary as Queen	3,780
2E	Annunciation, Gabriel and Mary	9,000
2W	Mary, Mother of the Church (with Apostles)	9,000
3E	Immaculate Conception	4,320
3W	Betrothal of Joseph and Mary	4,320
6W	Tree of Jesse (King David and ancestors)	1,620
8E	Crucifixion (Ss Mary, John, and the Thieves)	900
8W	Flight into Egypt	900
9C2	Queen of the Most Holy Rosary	900
9E	Vladivostok Martyrs (chapel door)	900
9W	Vladivostok Exiles (library door)	900

• On December 7 three masked thugs tried to kill one of our workers in order to gain entrance to the church at night. They hit him on the head several times with a crowbar, and it required a two-hour operation to mend his skull. He managed to run away, so they abandoned their attempt to rob us. Thank God he seems to be okay and on the mend. Probably he will be in the hospital two weeks. Besides, they broke his arm. This is the first time there has been any crime committed against us or the church in our five years here. We think they were teenagers. It seems they tried to gain entrance to the church through the boilerroom. The Orthodox bishop in Khabarovsk told me that their church was robbed 17 times already, with all their chalices stolen! We will have to spend some money on improving our safety situation.

• The Central GUM Department Store has again this year invited us to place the Christmas manger scene in one of their main show-windows for the Christmas season. We loaned them again the set from St Clement’s Church in Dearborn, Michigan. Thanks to the generosity of Mrs Doloras Anderson of Oakland, California, we now have a second large set for use

in the church building. May the scenes of Christmas be a blessing to you, our dear readers, and to the curious on the main street of Vladivostok, “Svetlanskaya”. Merry Christmas everyone! God bless you during the new year.

• CARITAS, which is our version of “Catholic Charities”, is alive and well and working in Vladivostok. It is also beginning its work in our other six parishes. In November alone, the following record of activities was recorded for Vladivostok:

543 needy people came to CARITAS for help.

117 people were seen free of charge by CARITAS’ volunteer Russian physicians.

1953 medical procedures were performed by our own staff of nurses and physicians, thanks to CARITAS Japan.

123 people received help in the form of used clothing, produce, or medicines--free of charge--thanks to our American sister parishes. December saw the first results from CARITAS’ new activities which are meant to employ the needy and handicapped. From the sewing machines donated by the American ship Blue Ridge came doll’s clothing, kitchen mittens, and kitchen aprons. From the candle molds came the first variety candles in time for the holidays. Would you like to help CARITAS help the poor?

• Missionary success. “More than 1,000 Russians have been trained as church planters through the Project 250 program. Started three and a half years ago, Project 250’s goal was to train 250 new missionaries to start new churches. Meanwhile, 503 churches were started in the last year through the Alliance for Saturation Church Planting in Eastern Europe in the former Soviet Union. In addition, 4,909 small groups are in existence, attended by more than 105,000 people. By the end of this August over 1,200 local leaders will have been trained in starting churches.” Who are these people--The Catholics? No, this is a quote from *Pulse* (June 7, 1996) published by the Evangelical Missions Information Service!

*Our Lady of Guadalupe, one of the favorite images of our parish. Gift of the artist, Martha Gorza of Houston, Texas.*

*“Visitation” window, waiting for a donor.*

*Enjoying the spaghetti dinner at St Jude’s in Jacksonville, Arkansas, to benefit our mission. Father Charles Thessing, Pastor, plays the violin.*

*Slaving over a hot stove for Russia.*

*Desserts straight from the experts.*

*Selling tickets for the lottery.*

*Mike Alberson, serving as busboy. He had already spent three full days baking all the oregano bread!*

*Some of our Arkansas crew met at a restaurant over dinner to get better acquainted. Standing (l to r) Jim Bush, Grand Knights at St Jude’s who, together with his wife gathered much of the pharmaceuticals that they’ve sent us; John Hertzog, President of the Men’s Club (in addition to the valet car wash for our benefit, they provided funds for shipping donated items; James Hertzog, an Eagle scout--the Scouts donated their time to box, label, and load donated items; Ann Bohard; Beverly Hestand who is the “Voice of Vladivostok” at the Little Rock Air Force Base, keeping interest alive and overseeing much of our work there; Max Bohard, who, together with his wife Ann, purchased much of the food items for our mission; Dan Pyne, communications guru who handles most of our FAXes and letters that move between Russia and the States; Butch King, Parish Council president at LRAB, who continues to stimulate interest in Vladivostok; (sitting) Theresa Hertzog who was a mainstay on packing day; Susan Gray, who is our assistant for all work with foundations in America; Debbie King, who is a parish council officer at the Air Base.*

*After the camp, when all had a chance to clean up and rest a bit, the staff, Japanese, Byelorussian, Russian, and American met for a farewell dinner.*

*Meals were served at a restaurant since we didn’t have cooking facilities of our own.*

*A lot of the teaching was done in small groups where all could get better acquainted.*

*Our Karate teachers Alexander and Alexei, with their own teacher, our parishioner Valerie Ovsyanikov. Fr Myron doesn’t exactly belong in this picture, for obvious reasons.*

*Fr Larry participating in one of the skits.*

*The playground where a lot of activities were held.*

*The crew which had carried the crucifix to the second floor and washed it. We posed in memory of our bishop and our deceased parishioners who had posed beneath the same crucifix before the nightmares began.*

*The Ancient Music Ensemble.*

*The Parish Choir.*

*First the base must be carried upstairs, using the special harness so that eight people can carry it. Then the crucifix itself, which is too heavy to carry, must be pulled upstairs by a block and tackle.*

*The first station of the crucifix, on the first floor where it would remain for several days.*

*Again beneath the crucifix! To the right of the crucifix, Sophia Michaelovna, who stood beneath the same crucifix for her first communion in 1923, and saved the picture for us. On the left, Yadviga Francevna, whose brother was killed by the Communists. He also was in the “miracle picture”.*

*These ladies not only put together the cookbook, they also planned and cooked the spaghetti dinner: (l to r) Karen Ozment, Janie Smith, Mary Aclin, Terry King, Mary Koorstad, Christine Levonton, Carol Oberle, and Melanie Alberson.*