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225 Cordova Street
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Most Holy Mother of God Catholic Parish
Volodarskovo 22
690001 Vladivostok RUSSIA

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The Development of Catholicism in the Russian Far East

By Miroslava Igorevna Efimova

Archivist of the Parish of the Most Holy Mother of God Vladivostok

In the nineteenth century the Russian Far East or, as it was called then, Eastern Siberia, was primitive enough that it was said that every 100 miles of travel to the East would let the traveler go back 100 years in time. On this broad plain, a huge expanse from the Urals to the Pacific, lived a variety of tribes. Three million people inhabited 4.5 million square miles. The Tsarist government of Russia carried out a broad program of colonization with material support for the volunteer settlers, including hunters, traders, and peasants, who staked out for themselves the best, most productive land. On these eastern lands there weren't any noblemen, and almost no landowners, so there were also few laborers and defenders. The settler-peasants were themselves the landlords.

A special role in the settling of the eastern lands was played by those settlers who were forced to come: the military and the political exiles. Practically from the very beginning exiles were sent to the Siberian lands already from the time of the War of Stephen Bator in the 10th century, and this continued to the beginning of the First World War in 1914. Especially widescale was the deportation of Poles, White Russians, and Lithuanians, which happened after the rout of the lords' confederation from 1768-72, the rebellion of Tadeush Kostusko in 1794, the Napoleonic war in 1812, the November rebellion in 1830-31, and the January rebellion in 1863, and even after the troubles of 1905. When, in 1795, the neighbor to the Russian Empire, the Polish state, lost her independence, part of the Polish lands passed into the body of Russia under the so-called Polish Kingdom. A national liberation movement appeared in Poland. Besides the rebellious patriots, whole garrisons of the Polish army were sent into Siberia, forming the so-called "Cossack colony". It should be added that after the abolition of privileges, the Russian Army started to call up Poles, White Russians, Lithuanians, and former Polish citizens, who served in the lower ranks of the regular battalions and the marine crews.

This was how a multi-national population and multi-national military contingent found itself in the eastern territories of the Russian Empire at the end of the 19th century, a population which professed the Catholic faith based on their national historical traditions.

During that period of time a precise border between Manchuria and the Russian territories of PriAmurye and Ussurisky Krai still didn't exist, and there was a free exchange of traders and the local population across the border. They were served by the French Catholic mission in Manchuria, who were thus informed about the presence of the Catholics of PriAmurye and Ussurisky Krai. This situation worried the

ruling circle in St Petersburg, which received secret information about it from its ambassador in Peking. This is what Lieutenant Governor-General Korsakov wrote in a secret letter of November 5, 1865, to the St Petersburg ministry of foreign affairs: "There is a very significant number of Roman Catholics in the Amursky Krai and the Primorsky Territory.... The distance of that region does not allow the priest from Irkutsk regularly to fulfill his duties relating to the Catholics. So for several years they are deprived of spiritual nourishment, the reception of the holy sacraments, and the blessing of the Church on the main Christian events of their lives." The governor also expressed his concern that there are even times when the Catholic missionaries from the French Catholic Mission in Manchuria cross the boundary of the PriAmursky Krai. For this reason their bishop, Monsignor Verol, has the impression that the Amur River and Ussurisky Krai can become again a part of Manchuria, as it was earlier. Because the Manchurian diocese was created by the Holy See with such borders, Monsignor Verol declares: "Everything once decided by the Roman See cannot be changed by any other authority."

Considering this political situation, the governor felt the need to name a special Catholic priest in the Amursky Krai, as was done in the Irkutsk Territory. Archival documents tell how long that question moved through the labyrinthine chain of bureaucrats, how slowly proceeded the letters between the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Department of Spiritual Affairs, and the Governor General's staff. Finally, on February 18, 1866, the will of the monarch was declared: "The Lord All-gracious Emperor approved the appointment in Amursky Krai of a Roman Catholic priest." And again the wheels of bureaucratic letter-writing began. It took a long time to decide just where to create a Catholic parish, then scratch up some money for construction, choose candidates for the priest, and send inquiries about his worthiness. Finally, after long consultations, on June 1, 1866, the Catholic archbishop informed the Minister of Internal Affairs, P.A. Valchev, that, according to the opinion of the Catholic pastor of Irkutsk, the best place for the Catholic parish would be Nicolaevsk-na-Amure, the capital of the general governorship, and the center for the regular army and naval forces, from which the priest might travel by the rivers and by the sea to the places of residence of his Catholic flock. A 28-year old from Yulsky parish of the Vittebsky District in European Russia, Cazimir Radzishevsky, was chosen to be the first Catholic priest.

There are many archival documents which tell about his ministry, especially one remarkable request by the priest to the general governor which he wrote after twenty two years of service. The request reads like a tale from a country priest who, for example, calls on his parishioners on Sakhalin Island setting out in winter across the ice by dogsled, spending five or six nights under the open sky, and risking his life in a snowstorm. His parish was huge--all of Khabarovsky Krai, Amursky Territory, Primorye, Sakhalin Island, and the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk [about the size of the Eastern Time Zone in

the U.S.--ed.] He never once made it to Kamchatka or the Commander Islands, which also were part of his parish.

When he left St Petersburg Father Radzishovsky received 1,169 rubles from the Spiritual Treasury for ordering of church goods. There wasn't any other kind of support for the construction of a church, and he didn't have a place to live. In Nicolaevsk he bought an ancient house with his meager means, and in 1868 he managed to get an old house from the treasurer which was able to be used as a place of prayer and for services.

In 1871 the naval port and the residence of the Primorsky Oblast was transferred from Nicolaevsk to Vladivostok which became the main commercial and military port of Russia on the Pacific Ocean. The headquarters of the Army was transferred to the military post in Khabarovsk.. In this way, from his rather large flock, only 25 or 30 people remained in Nicolaevsk-na-Amure, mostly invalids. So it was necessary for Radzishovsky to ask the civilian and spiritual authorities to transfer his parish to Vladivostok, where earlier the priest came only to visit his Catholics. He appealed to the general governor, Baron Korfa, with the fact that from Vladivostok it would be easier to make sidetrips to all points and cities where his parishioners lived.

The request was received with pleasure and approved by the superintendent of the Holy Synod, and on July 21, 1886, the Vladivostok city Duma decided to give over a parcel of land for the permanent use of the Roman Catholic parish, and to build a home for the sacred ministers on Third Port Street (now Shkipera Geka Street).

At the same time the superintendent of the Synod did not support the idea of building a Catholic church building in Vladivostok. He explained his position in the following way: "...In Vladivostok there still isn't an Orthodox church, but there is already a Lutheran church....If there will soon be also a Catholic chapel, that situation wouldn't respect the Russian Imperial state church and would inspire apprehension about the possibility of heterodox propaganda among the Orthodox population. Therefore the construction of the Catholic church will have to wait until the finish of construction of an Orthodox church." The Orthodox Assumption Collegial Church was blessed in December, 1898, and in December 30, 1898, the Minister of Internal Affairs announced to the superintendent of the Synod that he "acknowledged the possibility to give way to the petition for the relocation of the Roman Catholic parish from Nicolaevsk to Vladivostok."

The Catholics of Vladivostok didn't have a church, and mass was held in the house of the pastor of the Lutherans, where Father Radzishovsky stayed. The local Catholics started a collection for the construction of their church, and meanwhile, according to a decision of the Synod, a general collection was started throughout the regions of the empire. In 1885 Ivan Ivanovich Mantsevich, a Pole and a high officer of the Port Department, gave the Polish Society a piece of land located near the land the Vladivostok City Duma had given to the Catholic parish. There was built the first wooden church, and

on the front was hung a small bell and on the back side living quarters were prepared. Father Radzishovsky practiced his pastoral work in Vladivostok and, as before, travelled throughout the whole huge territory. During a trip to Blagoveschensk, on July 6, 1893, he unexpectedly died, at the age of 55. He was buried by the Orthodox priest, Father Athanasius, according to canonical rites in the Orthodox cemetery in Blagoveschensk.

In 1902, during the night of February 1-2, the Feast of the Purification of Mary, the wooden church burned down with all its effects. In its place was built a small wooden chapel, the mortgage of which continued until 1912, and the construction was completed only after ten years.

In 1920 the Roman Catholic Diocese of Moghilov created the Vladivostok Deanery, including the Catholics of PriAmurye, Khabarovsk and Primorsky Oblasts. The deanery already had five priests and about 11,000 members. There were wooden churches in Khabarovsk and in Alexandrovsk on Sakhalin Island--the rest were brick.

The first dean was a Master of Theology, bearer of the Third Degree of the Order of St Stanislaus, and bearer of the Golden Cross-Ring, Father Karol Slivovsky, who, on October 28, 1923, was consecrated Bishop of Vladivostok in Harbin, China.

Archival materials witness to the varied and wide religious and charitable activities of the Vladivostok parish. In the church children were baptized and celebrated their first communion, young people got married, and funerals were held. There was a Sunday school, and from the first there was a Polish elementary school for 30 children, and later a four-year school for 120 children. The charitable society "Dobrochinost" cared for poor families and for the sick, cooperating with the Red Cross. The parish Boy Scouts had a large list of members.

In January of 1933 Bishop Slivovsky died and was buried in the Sedanka cemetery, and the young priest George Yurkevich was left as pastor of the church. In 1935 the Communist repression accelerated and many were shot or taken to the camps. Father Yurkevich disappeared without a trace. Many parishioners were arrested, services in the cathedral ceased, and on July 7, 1935, the cathedral was closed as "abandoned", and then given to the Bureau of Archives.

That is how the first stage of the development of Roman Catholic spiritual activities in the Russian Far East ended.

In our day the Roman Catholic parish of Vladivostok again exists, having been reborn in 1991, and on September 15, 1993, the Primorsky Krai Council decided to return the church building to the parish. The number of parishioners by 1996 reached about 400. The parish has a Sunday school, and a wide range of charitable works are performed by parish volunteers through the organization "Caritas". The pastor is Rev Myron

Effing, and the vicar is Rev Daniel Maurer, Americans. They teach a course of catechesis, baptize, perform marriages, and serve the dying and the deceased. In addition to the Vladivostok parish, Primorsky Krai has Roman Catholic parishes in Nakhodka, Bolshoi Kamyen, and Romanovka. There are again Catholic parishes in Nicolaevsk-na-Amure, Blagoveschensk, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, and in Khabarovsk.

The current parishioners represent the many nationalities of society, including descendents of the Polish, Lithuanians, White Russians, and Ukrainians, and many Russians whose spiritual interests are more satisfied by the Roman Catholic Church. Since Vladivostok has been opened to the world again, there are even many foreign parishioners--Americans, Japanese, Koreans, and others.

Young Priest in a Young Church with Young People

by Rev Hilary Pangan

At the age of 30, from a very small village in the Philippines, I have travelled to a lot of places and have met a lot of different people and cultures. I have left many friends behind, friends with whom I have shared a piece of my life, my person, and my faith. Some of these friends I will never see again. --These were my thoughts upon leaving Popov Island after the summer camp I had shared with the Russian children. With these thoughts I knew I was also leaving behind my youth. In the camp it struck me that I did not have the same energy I used to have when playing with kids. I found the Russian kids very strong and healthy so that I could not play with them as much as I wanted to. Play, and especially Karate, is no longer the arena where I could jump in with gusto.

Be that as it may, I had a chance to listen more to the depths of the human heart. Our little group challenged me to answer questions that I myself was struggling about: God, faith, morals, etc. In all of these questions I found one thing: the young people in my group were not interested in trivial things. They are interested in how God manifests Himself in the world. They wanted to know Him. To follow Him. And to love Him. In the midst of all these quests for answers, I was consoled by the fact that I have the Christian tradition with me where I can go for answers. Indeed, often at the back of my mind, the person of Jesus shines as the image of God that could be understood by young people in a young church like Vladivostok. Perhaps this is so because Jesus looked at the world with the eyes of a child, completely pure and genuinely searching for the will of God.

On the ship, upon leaving Popov Island, I went to the front with Little Katya to have a look at Vladivostok. Since Katya could speak good English, I had been talking with her in the camp. On the ship I told her, "God is good." She looked at me puzzled and asked, "What is God?" so I said, "The one who made all the things that you see." "Ah, KAMI SAMA!" she said. That was the Japanese word for God that they had learned in the camp as we prayed to thank the Generous Giver of everything before meals. Indeed, the heart of a child can easily see the presence of God. They need not travel so far, they need not see many places and meet many people. They can see right through.

When I got back to Japan I wished I was a Russian kid with much energy to play and do some more Karate. I wished, too, that I would have a better answer to questions like, "What is God?"

News of Our Benefactors:

Gift of Blue Paper

by Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

All our parish letters and documents are now being printed on blue paper because the American ship *Blue Ridge* was here for the 300th anniversary of the Russian Navy. The Catholics on the ship donated the paper to us--we were out of paper.

Meanwhile, CARITAS volunteers are starting the production of simple sewn items like dolls' clothing, hot pads, and aprons, thanks to the sewing machines, patterns, and boxes of cloth remnants that were given to CARITAS by the *Blue Ridge* and by other benefactors. Thanks, Father Doug Smith and the Catholics of the *Blue Ridge*!

News Notes

by Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

• Our “Widows” Project continues to make progress. Donors so far, in addition to the major grant from RENOVABIS of Germany, are:

Window	Donor
Visitation:	Mr and Mrs Robert Ozburn
Assumption of Mary:	Paula Smith in honor of Rita Krieger
Our Lady of Sorrows:	Julie Shepard
Pieta:	Mr and Mrs Robert Flynn
Scourging at the Pillar:	Timothy Higgins
Crowning with thorns:	Marian Makoutz
Three Kings:	Alex Martini
Holy Innocents:	Pat and Chuck Pelletier in memory of aborted children
Holy Family:	Mr and Mrs Robert Ozburn
Tree of Jesse:	Mrs Virginia Murphy
The Crucifixion:	Mr John Bold
Flight into Egypt:	Mr John Mahoney
Most Holy Mother of God:	Mr & Mrs Paul Hasselbrinck in memory of Fr Myron Effing’s 25th ordination anniversary
Queen of the Holy Rosary:	Bill & Jean Smith
Martyrs of Vladivostok:	Blessed Mother Church, Owensboro, Kentucky
Vladivostok Exiles:	Jim & Inez Yarbrough
Coronation of Mary:	We received a major donation from Coronation of Mary Parish of Grandview MO toward this window. Additional donors are: Rose Barbarossa, James and Elizabeth Hildebrand, in honor of their children. Additional donors for this window are still needed.

Windows which are still available are:

Window	Cost
Nativity of Jesus	3,780
Presentation of Jesus in Temple	3,780
Finding of Jesus in the Temple	3,780
Annunciation, Gabriel and Mary	9,000
Mary, Mother of the Church (with Apostles)	9,000
Immaculate Conception	4,320
Betrothal of Joseph and Mary	4,320

• In March *Mary Mother of God Mission Society* was officially incorporated in the State of Minnesota as a way of helping us American priests working in the Far East of Russia. We are hoping that having our own corporation will be a way of better coordinating our efforts in America on behalf of Russia. We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Archbishop Hurley and the Archdiocese of Anchorage for their constant help and support, but since we are not priests of the Archdiocese, and, since we are not officially sponsored by the Archdiocese, we felt that with time we will have to develop our own American organization, rather than keep the entire burden on Anchorage. Meanwhile we continue to depend upon the

missionary spirit, the love for Russia, and the hospitality of Alaskans.

Besides Archbishop Hurley and his staff, we owe a big debt of thanks to our volunteers in Anchorage, especially Mr Ray Rzeszut who handles the thousands of details involved in the support of our mission. Thanks too to Father Richard Wey and Mr Roger Schmitt of St Cloud, Minnesota, who handled the incorporation process.

The officers of the Mary Mother of God Mission Society are Father Myron Effing, Father Daniel Maurer, Father Richard Wey who is Director of the Mission Office of the Diocese of St Cloud, and Mrs Virginia Murphy, a member of our sister-parish committee at Nativity of the Lord Catholic Parish in St Paul, Minnesota. Several bishops have agreed to serve on the board. More news about that later.

• Recently we had the joy of hanging a beautiful and original icon of Our Lady of Vladivostok in the church. It was painted by Father Damien of Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Redwood Valley, California. It is already a favorite of our people, and they place votive candles in front of it every Sunday. The expenses connected with the icon were paid by Judge and Mrs Wozniak of St Paul, Minnesota, in honor of their parents. Wait for a picture in the *Sunrise*.

• We are anxiously waiting for our first sisters in the Far East! Spanish Sisters of Charity of St Ann will come to Vladivostok in August at the invitation of our Bishop, Joseph Werth. Fr Dan speaks Spanish, so communication should be easy until they know Russian. The speciality of the sisters is charitable work so they should make a great team with our CARITAS. We are also hoping they will take on work with our children, and some of the regular chores in the church building, especially preparations for Holy Days. Fr Dan usually does this work, and it takes quite a lot of ingenuity to make things look nice in the scarred floors and walls of our church which is still without adequate windows and without a permanent altar. We are grateful to people who have included cloth of various kinds in their aid packages--cloth, like charity, covers a multitude of sins!

• The Pilgrim Virgin Statue of Our Lady of Fatima arrived here from Irkutsk by train during Holy Week. The statue had already been in almost every parish in European Russia, where travel is easier. In two weeks we tried to have it visit every parish here in the Far East, and were nearly successful. It did not make the parish in Blagoveshchensk (because Blagoveshchensk is accessible only by train, and we didn't have enough days to complete that trip), and in Aldan, Yakutia (because there was an airline pilots' strike and the planes didn't fly). In European Russia the statue was always accompanied by a person, but we couldn't do that here. We had to send it by air freight from parish to parish. We had a procession here in Vladivostok, before the Easter Noonday Mass. The statue should already be in Kazakhstan, making the rounds of the parishes before it returns to Portugal.

- This month we received a container with donated items, including 3000 pairs of new winter boots and used clothing from an independent charitable organization in Seattle named CARITAS. We have begun distributing these things to the needy, including the orphanages in our region, the Women's High-Security Prison in Khabarovsk, and the Young Men's Prison in Nakhodka.

We called the orphanage in Lesozovodsk to find out how many kids were there, and the person who answered the phone said "40". After taking 40 pairs of shoes, we discovered that there were 120 kids in the orphanage. The director was in total disbelief when we gave her the 40 pairs and promised another 80 pairs. She said, "You're kidding! Free of charge? New shoes?" Yes--no strings attached! Russian are accustomed to strings attached to everything. (Actually, the shoes didn't have strings anyway, only velcro!)

Not only the items in the container were donated, but the 40-foot container itself was donated! We will use it as a shop for the restoration of the church. It was amazing to see the Russian crane pick up the huge container off its flatbed semi truck, raise it high in the air, swing it over the neighbor's garage and the retaining wall, and place it neatly next to our church building.

We'll print pictures in the *Sunrise* of kids getting their shoes.

- One of our parishioners, Miss Mika Madzuno, a Japanese lay missionary who works with CARITAS, has decided to give free Japanese lessons to any children of our parish who want to participate. There was a rush, of course. Since everything is getting privatized now in Russia with the end of socialism, most people don't have the money to spend on extras like special classes. This will be a wonderful gift for these students who otherwise wouldn't be able to pay for Japanese lessons. The dioceses of Japan are our neighboring dioceses to the east.

More About the “Miracle Picture”

by John Anonymous and Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

[See issue number 11, June 1, 1995, of *Vladivostok Sunrise* for a copy of the “Miracle Picture”. --ed]

The prelate seated on the right in the picture is a bishop, and not a monsignor, because since February 3, 1888, by concession of Pope Leo XIII, bishops, and only bishops, were allowed to wear the purple biretta. Until 1969 monsignors wore a purple pom-pom tuft on their black biretta. But the prelate in the picture quite obviously is wearing a purple biretta.

If you will look closer at the bishop’s biretta, you will notice the three prominences rising from the top of the hat. Birettas, by tradition, have three prominences, even though there are four corners--one without a prominence. If you look close enough at the bishop’s biretta in the picture you will see that he in fact does have a prominence on the left side of his biretta. Quite unusual. The fourth knotch was unusual even back then, because it means that the bishop in the picture was a Doctor in Theology. Before 1968, Doctors in Theology had the right to wear the four-prominenced biretta while teaching! No wonder he was made a bishop! If the bishop was a cardinal there would be no pom-pom tuft on his biretta. Nowadays the biretta has suffered from lack of popularity, but it’s use is still required of all the canons of the patriarchal basilicas in Rome.

When was the picture taken? The candles are not lit, and the three altar cards on the altar make me believe that the Mass is about to start. Back then the altar cards were generally put on the altar right before Mass and taken off the altar right after Mass. One might think that the bishop just got finished hearing confessions, but his stole is not a confession stole, but rather a preaching and benediction stole. If, for some reason, the bishop were to be the one saying the mass, there would have been no altar cards, since bishops did not use altar cards--he would have had his Pontificale Romanum spread out and propped up against the tabernacle in front of the altar, because of his extra prayer formulas.

The bishop isn’t about to say Mass because for a Pontifical Solemn High Mass seven candles were required back then, except for a Requiem Mass. There would have been the regular six as usual, and then a seventh, in the middle. The altar crucifix would stand behind it, but I don’t see any kind of candle in front of the cross. If the photo were taken in the cathedral, then there would be a bishop’s throne, but none is visible.

Perhaps the children have gathered for First Communion or for Corpus Christi. Corpus Christi could be in late May, and then First Communion in June, as was the custom in some places. But if that were so, then there should be a Pascal

Candle in the picture, which should stand on the Epistle side of the altar (our left). So the Easter season must have been completed.

I don’t understand the two flags, either--they both look foreign. Then there is the matter of the dark-colored frontal on the altar, and the dark-colored dossal behind the crucifix. They almost look like violet for the penitential season, not white for a festive occasion or for First Communion. I’m bothered by the placement of the altar rail--it almost seems as if the sanctuary continues on the people’s side of the rail.

The two girls on the right in white dresses don’t have their heads covered--something very unusual at the time--you’d think they would at least have white veils on. Some of the boys in the front row are wearing shorts--I didn’t even know they had shorts back then! The priest’s cassock almost looks like the official Jesuit cassock. I’ve seen photos of the old Jesuit collar, and it was pointing down, like the one in the photograph.

It is surprising how good the lighting looks in the church. The sanctuary lamp hung from the ceiling of the church. It is in the way of Christ’s feet. And I don’t see a tabernacle, but there must have been one. The picture couldn’t have been taken professionally, though, because of how off-centered it is.

[Dear John, Thanks for being a real sleuth. Try to learn more about the picture, if you can. Concerning your remarks, here are some observations. Maybe other readers can add to our knowledge of the picture, too.

1. Bishop Slivovsky was in fact a Doctor of Theology, which we know from other sources--you got it from the picture! But you helped us anyway, because he was consecrated a bishop only in 1923, so if only bishops who were Doctors of Theology wore their birettas when they weren’t teaching, then his biretta shows that the picture was taken after that date. Did you notice the finger ring? Could a lesser prelate have been wearing a ring in those days?

2. The peak of a tabernacle is visible above the altar card. Since we now have the Cross back, we know that this peak is not part of the Cross, so it had to be the top of the tabernacle.

3. Concerning candles, there are extra candles on the altar, including one unmatched one which is in front of the altar card on the right.

4. Thanks for pointing out the shorts on the boys. Nobody would wear shorts in Vladivostok except in summer, which suggests that the picture was taken in June or later. We know from records that the Boy Scouts were active in our parish at that time. Perhaps the boys were Scouts? Two of them seem to have a kerchief around their necks.

5. The two boys in cassocks are wearing white gloves, which again suggests they served the bishop, holding his mitre and crozier.
6. After the Russian Revolution, Bernardine Franciscans, who formerly served on Sakhalin Island, came to Vladivostok. Could the priest's habit be theirs? I don't know what their habit looked like.
7. Several of the girls look older. Could it have been their "solemn communion", which was a custom at the time, wasn't it?
8. In general, pews in Poland are much more compact than American pews, so much so that you can't actually kneel at all, but only half kneel-half sit. The kneelers don't even move, but are under the pew in front of you. Consequently they usually leave space for a very wide center aisle, which may explain why there seems to be so much space in front of the communion rail--enough space for a Persian rug.
9. The original picture isn't off-center--in fact one boy was left off the right side of the photo we published. Our photographer who copied the photo made the mistake.
10. We would dearly like to find Bishop Slivovsky's family, which was said to be from Warsaw. Surely they still have some records about such an illustrious relative as a Doctor of Theology and Bishop of Vladivostok. How can we find them?
--ed]

A Letter to My Parents

by Chris Church

[Chris is one of our American parishioners who is working with the Peace Corp on an ecological project near the Tiger Preserve in Ternei, Primorye. "Karyn" is Karyn Becker, another Peace Corp worker. --ed]

8 January 1997

Dear Folks,

Hello and Happy New Year. I'm sorry I was unable to call last weekend. A huge snow storm blew over Ternei for about four days and dumped almost a yard of snow on the ground. The town has been shut down ever since. All the roads were closed, the phone lines down, and the power out for most of last week. I've got sore muscles from shoveling so much snow. On top of it all, Karyn was stuck in Ternei until finally she was able to leave on a specially arranged bus to Vladivostok on Sunday.

This year definitely started out on a wintery note. The town is finally working its way back to normal. The roads are mostly clear, with about six-foot drifts on either side of them through town. Today is the first work day since last year, thus I'm finally getting a chance to write.

Well, I have a lot of news. First of all, the police in Dalnegorsk caught the kid that broke into my house. They have found a number of the things that were stolen, but I'm not sure what. I do know that the computer is not included and it was sold to some random person in the large Dalnegorsk market, so I don't think I will be seeing it any time soon. I did however get one computer disk back and it has my October journal on it! I have printed it up and will send it in the slow mail soon. That's the best news. The bad news is that the kid that broke into my place is in pretty bad shape. He is 13 years old, has no father, his mother is a drunk, and he lives in the root cellar of his family's house. He is now in the jail in Dalnegorsk and he doesn't want to go home, because in the prison it's warm and he is fed. It turns out that his friends stole all the money from him. They have been caught by the police as well and it turns out they used it to buy a motorcycle, clothes, and who knows what else. It looks like I will have to go to court, but probably not for another year, because of the way the Russian judicial system works. Anyway, I will probably travel to Dalnegorsk within the next few weeks and pick up my things and hope that they find the computer before I go. At least something's finally being done about it.

Other wierd news. Two poachers were found frozen to death in the zapovednik [reserve] last week. They were caught by the storm and died while trying to drag a poached elk from the forest. The man had seven children, all of which were malnourished and thin.

Also, Hundyai, the Korean logging company that is working in Ternei, had two men transporting 40,000 dollars from Vladivostok to Svetlaya, a village to the north of Ternei. Near Cheguevka, they were stopped by armed bandits shot, killed, and robbed.

Also, John and Linda's "red" golden retriever was killed by a neighbor in order to make a fur hat. They are devastated. It was so sad because people would always joke that the dog would make a great *shapka* and then someone finally did it. Their other dog was killed by a drunk driver on New Year's Eve.

So that's all the news. Sorry it's mostly bad. This place has been rather crazy lately. The phone rates went back up, so I probably won't be able to call for awhile. I haven't received any regular mail for a while because of the weather. I will let you know as soon as something comes through. I'm anxiously waiting.

Work is going well. Life is moving right along. I love you and miss you. I really enjoyed our phone conversations! Stay in touch.

Love, Chris

Maria Iosephovna

by Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

It was a ten hour drive by car so I was exhausted, when I arrived in Dalnegorsk for the very first time. It was September, and I wanted to find out if there were Catholics there before the winter would set in. My helper Yevgeny Balanyov had arranged for advertising in the city newspaper and rented a small hall where any Catholics could gather to meet us.

But first I wanted to find a very special person, Maria Iosephovna, whom I knew lived in Dalnegorsk because of our contact with her sister from Vladivostok. She would be 83 years old, and had been a parishioner of our Vladivostok parish before it was closed by the Communists. We rented a room at the hotel and rested up a bit before trying to find her.

It turned out that she lived not far from the hotel, and she welcomed us to her apartment which she shares with her daughter's family--a three room apartment, which was very tidy and comfortable. She looked 55, with dark hair, a smooth complexion, but thick glasses. She introduced us to her granddaughter, and offered us tea, but apologized that she couldn't offer anything else, since her daughter and son-in-law had not received their paychecks for several months. The family was basically living on Maria Iosephovna's pension, even though they all continued to work so as not to lose their own future pensions. Their food was basically bread with occasional vegetables from their garden. She was embarrassed that she couldn't offer me any sugar for the tea.

Maria Iosephovna was happy to remember what she could of bygone days. She said that as a girl she was a special helper to Bishop Slivovsky and to Sister Casemira, who cared for Bishop Slivovsky in his old age. She told that one of her jobs was to make the communion breads, and I know she did it, because after sixty years she still knew the recipe and the process exactly. She especially mentioned making "oplatki" for Christmas, which, if you are Ukrainian or Polish you will know is the traditional unleavened bread used to reconcile enemies and friends before the celebration of Christmas. Too bad that we don't have an oplatki iron now!--I'd sure like to find one. (When I was in Portland, Oregon in November, Fr Philiposki of St Stanislaus' Parish gave me enough oplatki for Christmas this year.)

She mentioned that the bishop had a Chinese cook who prepared his meals, and that she and the cook were good friends--she could always get a special treat from him. (Vladivostok was nearly 50% Buddhist before the Russian Revolution, so many Chinese and Koreans lived here. Almost all were deported or exiled to Kazakhstan by Stalin.)

She also told us the sad details of the bishop's death and funeral, which took place in the little chapel in Sedanka, a village ten miles from Vladivostok where the bishop was

exiled after the cathedral was confiscated. She also told of how someone dug up the bishop's grave after two days, and stole the ring from his finger and the bishop's crozier, which had been buried with him. So the sad little community had to rebury its bishop. We had hoped to learn from her whether the bishop's body still lay in the grave in Sedanka, or whether the body was taken to Poland. Unfortunately she couldn't remember.

I offered to hear her confession, and gave her Holy Communion--the first in many years--and also anointed her, considering her age and the distance away from a Catholic priest.

While I was in Dalnegorsk, I decided to pay a courtesy call on the Orthodox priest, and to find out if he would help Catholics in case of emergency. When we found the church the priest did not want to talk with me. When I didn't go away, he finally came, full of--what can I say?--hatred for me. He didn't extend his hand nor greet me in any way. He made it clear that he considered me a heretic, worse than a pagan, and wanted nothing to do with me. When I asked him if, in case of danger of death, he would help my Catholics, he replied, "Only if they become Orthodox!" This was a young priest, just out of training, with such hatred for a fellow Christian. Pray for him and others like him. Thank God he is not typical of all Orthodox priests. When I asked a certain Orthodox bishop the same question his answer was, "Of course! It is our obligation to help any dying baptized Christian!" In the bishop's city I told the Catholics to call the bishop in case of emergency, but in Dalnegorsk, they will need to call me--ten hours away by car!

At the end of the day, a group of five Catholics, responding to the advertising, came for Mass, including a woman with a small child who hadn't been baptized. They said that there are more Catholics in Dalnegorsk, but it's been so many years since they have been to church that most aren't ready to begin practicing their faith. Considering the poverty of the child's family, which means they wouldn't be able to come to Vladivostok, and considering the probability that I wouldn't be in Dalnegorsk anytime soon, I baptized the child after giving a lesson in the Catholic faith to the whole group.

Dalnegorsk is just one of a hundred small cities and villages in our region which have Catholics. They were displaced from Europe, sent to Siberia, and wound up in the Far East. I am reminded of the phrase from the third Eucharistic Prayer, "In mercy and love unite all your children wherever they may be."

Progress in Khabarovsk

by Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

Don't be embarrassed if you have never heard of Khabarovsk. I never heard of it either until I landed there on a flight from San Francisco in 1991, on my first survey trip to Russia. In fact, it is the "capital" of the Far East of Russia, with rail and air connections to everywhere. It is located right near the Chinese border, and we are hoping that the parish can become a future mission base for China.

Our parish of the Immaculate Conception in Khabarovsk had been in existence since the 1860's. In spite of Czarist persecution, it had managed to build its own wooden parish church, and a brick building which was used as a parish school and as a home for the priest. The parish was forcibly closed by the Stalinist government in 1935 after most of its members had been disbursed or martyred or lost to history, including the last pastor. Both its buildings are still in existence-- currently used as the venereal disease clinics for the Khabarovsk State, which has a population of several million, and stretches from the latitude of Seattle to Anchorage on the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk near the Pacific Ocean. Immaculate Conception currently is the only Catholic parish in the state.

Having reopened it in 1992, I've been doing the best I can to help this parish which is about 450 miles away from our mission base in Vladivostok. Long distance telephoning is a necessity when your parishes are separated by a thousand miles, but I was always held back in our work in Khabarovsk by the fact that my parish trustee Stanislaup Yermak had a very poor phone line. Thank God he had a phone--most people in Russia don't! But shouting and screaming into the phone and being regularly disconnected does not encourage one to work by phone.

We were convinced that there were more Catholics in the city who couldn't find us, because we didn't have a regular place of worship, and we didn't have enough visibility in the city. The parish didn't even have a place for a phone, or a door with our name on it, nor a place for me to stay when I come for mass. In other words, they had nothing!

Another big problem was nationalism. The parish began when the Polish Cultural Society, which existed before the parish, invited me to Khabarovsk. They had hoped that the parish could simply be part of the Society. I made it clear that the Catholic Church is "catholic"--for everybody--and that the parish would have to be independent from the Polish Cultural Society, as it is in Vladivostok. Nonetheless the situation wasn't comfortable for non-Poles, including me! For a long time the parish consisted mainly of elderly people, and I always felt very constrained in the Khabarovsk parish, like I was a second-class human who somehow didn't match up. Other people must have felt the same way, judging by the lack of new

members, and judging by the numbers of non-Poles who became Catholics but then left the parish.

Now--suddenly--things have changed. Stanislaup has a new phone line, and it's as though he's in the next room. Now his phone line is good enough that we can even communicate by electronic mail.

Several young people have joined who are very devout and have brought new stimulus to the parish, and they are of Russian, Korean, and German descent, as well as Polish. They form a new basis on which to build.

The week-long educational program that we held for parish trustees and CARITAS workers last summer has widened the horizons of some members of the parish to see that the future is with the young Catholics, and not with nationalism because they experienced first-hand the vitality of our other parishes.

I also appointed a new parish council in Khabarovsk, to include a variety of nationalities, but all are dynamic young people, and they have challenged the older generation to form a new future, without excessive longing for a country which is far away and which has no future in the Russian Far East.

Thanks to the Raskob Foundation of Wilmington Delaware, which decided to support our evangelization efforts with a grant, we have been doing more in Khabarovsk to find Catholics. Now more young people have asked for baptism, and even children attend mass. Just recently a group of Catholic businessmen and their families from Korea joined the parish. Since many do not speak Russian or English, I bring the mass readings in Korean along with me from Vladivostok where we also have Korean parishioners and where we have a Korean lectionary.

Meanwhile CARITAS, under the leadership of Tatyana Yermak has taken on new life and branched out to help two orphanages. Even though it is very poor, the Khabarovsk parish already has this charitable outreach--a program for abandoned children who are temporarily housed at the Police Holding Orphanage and a program for children and mothers at the State Maximum Security Women's Prison.

In typical Soviet fashion the first orphanage is a socialist boondogle! It has fifty employees, including a complete medical staff, but only 15 to 25 children at any one time. The kitchen did not have a refrigerator. Water was heated for laundry using an immersible coil. But the kids aren't at fault! These are children that the police find on the street, or whose parents are drunk or under arrest awaiting arraignment.

CARITAS PriAmurye, under Tatyana's leadership, collects children's used clothing and toys. Most of these items come from regular schools where she places special collection boxes, and asks the teachers and children to bring donations.

CARITAS PriAmurye also started a project with the second "orphanage"--the Children's Shelter at the Women's High Security Prison. This Prison is located outside the city of Khabarovsk, so there are few visitors or volunteers to work with the children, of which there are 32 between the ages of birth and three. The mothers of all these children have been convicted of major crimes including murder. This is the only such children's home in all of Asian Russia. The director of the home, a physician, met CARITAS very warmly, and, speaking about the problems of the home, expressed the wish that in addition to humanitarian aid CARITAS might provide spiritual help to these lost women and their children.

While I was in the Prison, I spoke with the Chief Physician. He explained how he only receives money for the payroll and for medicines for the prisoners. They have to grow their own food or live on charitable donations or money from their families. He also mentioned how difficult it is for the women to find work after six or eight years in prison. They sometimes have children too, one of which might have been born in the first year of their prison term (or later, if they try to get favors from guards). These children grow for three years in the prison orphanage, and then they are sent to an outside orphanage. Mom, who can't find work, has trouble collecting her child from the orphanage after her time is up!

Formerly the Prison had a state factory for producing clothing. With the new economic realities, people prefer American or Chinese clothing--the first of better quality and the second cheaper than the Russian products. So the Prison factory has no orders, and no income for the prisoners.

We agreed that it would be a wonderful idea to begin a Women's Cooperative at the Prison. The Coop would try to find work orders in the private sector for the prisoners, so that they could use the production equipment in the prison, and sell these things outside the prison walls. The income would be used by the prisoners for their personal and food needs, and hopefully there could eventually even be Coop work outside the prison for freed prisoners. Their first idea is to make sewn items and funeral wreaths for sale in the local market. Want to help??

Six of the women at the prison are already taking instructions in the Faith. They want to have their children baptized too. Stanislav is meeting regularly with the class, discussing the lessons from our correspondence course, "Introduction to Christianity", and showing videos and teaching the women to pray. Parishioners are preparing to be god-parents of these prisoners and their children, and to give them a helping hand when they leave prison. (They need a video player and TV set.)

Recently Father Franz Edlinger of a Catholic community in Austria named "House of Peace" visited Khabarovsk and the police orphanage and made a donation of \$2300 to CARITAS to help with the orphanage project. It is a challenge to decide how to spend the money so that it really goes to the benefit of the children and does not prop up the socialist system which is

the cause of much of the suffering in the first place. Thank you, House of Peace, for your Christian charity for these children in need.

Father Richard Philiposki of St Stanislaus Parish in Portland, Oregon, was also a recent visitor. He donated a keyboard instrument with several organ voices to the parish so that it could support its singing with an instrument. Now we are looking for the musician who will play it. Thanks, Father, for your personal donation to our parish.

At last the Khabarovsk parish has a place to meet regularly! It's even warm! After four years of being thrown from pillar to post, and spending too much money on room and office rentals, and spending many hours on the streets looking for places to have Mass and meetings, we now have a place for at least a year. One of our own parishioners, American Michael Junne, offered our parish to use a room in his sewing factory! It isn't a church, and it isn't fancy, but it is big enough, warm enough, and convenient enough that we accepted his offer. He said, "I was tired of seeing the parish roving around like a bunch of Gypsies." (There are many Gypsies in Russia.)

At last we have a place which we can somewhat call our own, so that we can welcome new members, although we will need to find some pews, chairs, or benches. The only furniture the parish has were some secretary's wheeled chairs and some office desks that were given us by the Catholic Relief Services when they cut back their office staff in Khabarovsk. We plan to send to Khabarovsk an altar, a tabernacle, candelabra, vestments, and other church goods which were contributed by the Diocese of St Cloud and the Archdiocese of Minneapolis and St Paul, as well as by Albuquerque's Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish. The average of \$300 that we spent every month on rent can now be used for more productive activity.

Stanislav has launched a parish bulletin to bring local news to parishioners--earlier they only received the Vladivostok parish bulletin. Stanislav holds a weekly Sunday Communion service with the Blessed Sacrament which I consecrate at my monthly mass there. Attendance at the Communion Service is increasing.

So all of this fertilizer has been applied to the plant. Pray for the growth of the parish! What of the future? Recently when I was in Albuquerque Fr Christopher Zuggger of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Byzantine Catholic Parish told me that there had been an underground group of Eastern Rite Catholics in Khabarovsk, even until the 1950's. I've invited Fr Yaroslav Spodar, the priest responsible for Eastern Rite Catholics in our part of Russia, to come to Khabarovsk with me in May to search for our lost Eastern Rite brethren.

I sent a letter to every American parish named "Immaculate Conception" asking for help for Khabarovsk. One really notable response is from Immaculate Conception Parish in Skidmore, Texas. The Pastor, Father Jim Kelleher, SOLT,

proposes to bring six of his parishioners to Khabarovsk to do evangelization. We've decided, if we find the means, to offer a 7-day summer youth camp. We'll invite our unmarried young people from every parish to Khabarovsk for a week-long retreat with the Texas parishioners. The Texans will also be able to visit and help at the orphanages. If it all happens, we'll let you know in a future newsletter.

What can you do, dear reader, for the parish in Khabarovsk? First of all, pray! Pray for the repentance of sinners who need to find forgiveness and salvation. Pray for the gift of faith for these people so long under the yoke of atheism. We need a priest for Khabarovsk! Pray for vocations, so that at last these people will not only have a priest to serve them daily, but also that they might generate their own priests for the needs of Russia and the world. After prayer, donations are always welcome!

A Trip to Chita

by Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

Chita is one of those mysterious places in Russia about which foreigners have no information. It's lost somewhere between Irkutsk with its great Lake Baikal, and the plains further east toward the Pacific Ocean. It's sort of squashed between Mongolia and the mountains which form southern Russia. It's a dot on the TransSiberian railroad. It's a piece of frozen tundra which even the migrating birds can't find. On March 9 it was even forgotten by the Sun as a total eclipse covered the land bringing a new darkness and chill to the all-but-God-forsaken place.

It is one of the last places in Russia where we hadn't found any Catholics, so I decided it was time to come here personally, after considering the matter for a long time.

I did find some warmth, however. The city was the exile-home of the Decembrists, those Russians who fought to overthrow the Czar in the 1860's, and they brought their Orthodox faith, as well as their plans, their science, their music, and--most evident of all--their beautiful architecture! Here I found the most beautiful buildings in this part of Russia. The city is laid out with beautiful St Petersburg-style plans. It is the capital of the Chitinsky State, with plenty of gold mining, fur farming, sheep raising, and the busy center of the Zabaikalsky Railroad. It even has a philharmonic orchestra and a puppet theatre.

The city was once the hotbed of hope for Russia and the Russian culture. It was here that the White Army set up its headquarters in opposition to the Red Army of Communism. Chita was made the capital of the independent Far Eastern Republic, Russia's last stand against the Communists.

The Faith also had a final flowering here. The huge and beautiful Russian Orthodox Cathedral on the main city square was a great hope for the people. The Tartar mosque and the Buddhist temple showed the freedom of religious life. The Catholics built their small but elegant church on edge of the city, and many Catholics from the west of Russia came to Chita in the hope of religious and economic freedom.

How sad it is to see the plaque on the building downtown which reads, "In this building were made the plans to free all of Russia of the White Army and of foreign interventionists, and to extend the Revolution to the Pacific Ocean." Chita's Catholics fled to Vladivostok, and from there to Australia, California, or back to Europe by sea. The small Catholic church was closed, but, as elsewhere in Russia, was miraculously saved from destruction by the disappearance of its members. The Orthodox churches, including the beautiful cathedral, were summarily bombed to force the people away from their faith.

When it became possible for the Orthodox to believe openly again, they received the Catholic church building for their worship. There, a strange mixture of hot and cold continues to this day: The church caught fire twice, and the Orthodox who now use it have a great hatred for Catholics--The local people say that is why the building burns. This time only the lower walls were left standing, and the Orthodox are again trying to restore the building, since there isn't money to build a new one.

Meanwhile, I am the first Catholic priest to visit the city openly since the defeat of the White Army. The city is the favorite target of wild Protestant evangelists who accuse the Orthodox of worshipping icons and the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Protestants have established eight parishes, opened a school, and are building fancy brick buildings. The Orthodox are rummaging around in the junk of the fire, and their rejection of anything but a very narrow Super-Orthodoxy makes even the Russians reject them, since you cannot preach a religion of love without love.

Here in Chita you feel the sorrow of the Great Divide between Orthodoxy and Catholicism--instead of the "two lungs" of the Church helping and loving each other, there is the hatred which separates brother from brother, a hatred which gave rise to this Century of Horrors. Did not Jesus pray, "That they might all be one so that the world may believe"? And was not his final commandment to us, "Love one another as I have loved you"? Instead there has been nearly a thousand years of senseless, heartless division. I'm sure that if I said in America that the church had burnt, there would be some kind of help. Instead, the priest threw me off the property, and said they didn't want any help from Catholics. I predict that the building will burn again--The restorers don't understand that the charcoal of the old fire is a catalyst for a new one, but they won't accept advice from me.

While some Orthodox accuse us of trying to conquer Russia for the Catholic Church, our intention is really quite the opposite. Naturally we want to find and help our Catholics back to the faith, but what we would really like to see is the Orthodox church flourishing in full force as our beloved brothers and friends in a reunited Christianity! And shouldn't that be their dream, too? Instead, there is the icy chill of hatred.

I put an ad on the radio asking Catholics and anyone interested to contact me at the hotel. The Chita Orthodox would object to the "anyone interested", but the radio station refused to place an ad inviting only Catholics, since they are the government radio station and have to serve everybody! Nobody came to the hotel or contacted me.

I took a bus trip to a mountainside where I planned to watch the eclipse, but on the night before the eclipse, there were clouds gathering in the west, so I decided to abandon my plan to stay in Chita. I took a train east to Buzholay where the stationmaster and I, together with a local citizen of Buryat ancestry, stood in the snow for the total eclipse.

It was beautiful, but not exceptional, since the sun was very quiet. There were few solar prominences to be seen, even though the corona was quite broad. Mercury and Venus blazed to the right and below the Sun, and Comet Hale-Bopp was clearly visible to the naked eye. In the midst of the celestial fireworks, in the few moments that the sun went out, the world grew noticeably colder.

After the eclipse my new Buryat friend invited me to his home to wait for the next train. There a hot cup of tea and a bowl of warm soup made me feel better.

Perhaps something will come of my trip. I left my business cards wherever I went. I had been thrown out of a church, but had dined in the home of a pagan. After the cold, spring is bound to come.

Julie and Rob Flynn, with Nicolas and Elise.

The “Annunciation” window--still unclaimed.

The east end of the former Catholic Church in Khabarovsk, now a clinic for venereal diseases.

Baptism in Khabarovsk.

Father Franz Edlinger of the “House of Peace” of Katzelsdorf, Austria, accepting our thanks for his help and the help of his community.

Maria Iosephovna examining the first rosary she has seen since childhood.

Maria Iosephovna and her great-granddaughter.

Miroslava Igorevna outside the window where one of the priests lived before the Russian Revolution.

Christmas party in the Khabarovsk parish, 1996. Behind Fr Myron is Stanislav Yermak, the parish Elder, who is in charge of the parish during Fr Myron's absence.

Fatima procession in Vladivostok with one of our seminarians, Yevgeny Baranyov, and servers from our parish of Nakhodka.

Prisoners who are taking instructions at the Women's Maximum Security Prison in Khabarovsk, with Fr Myron, and CARITAS's Tanya Yermak on the left.

Repair of the burnt upper walls of the former Catholic church in Chita, now an Orthodox church.

Lilia Selina, Director of CARITAS for the Vladivostok parish, showing the first items produced from the sewing machines and cloth donated by Blue Ridge.

Historic former wooden Catholic Church in Chita. The roof and towers have twice been destroyed by fire. It is in use by the Russian Orthodox Church, which is repair the fire damage.

The sewing factory where the Catholic Parish of the Immaculate Conception of Khabarovsk is currently having mass.

Terry and Debbie Kopp and their children., (clockwise) Shaun, Angela, Jemifer, Alexandra, Monica, Matthew, and Christopher. The picture was taken before the birth of their eighth child. They donate the cost of printing this newsletter four times per year.