

Progress in Blagoveschensk

by Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

Please celebrate with us and with our parish of the Transfiguration of the Lord in Blagoveschensk! We just received a building from the state government to use for the time being as our church! I had the first mass in the building on Thursday, September 11 when the parish celebrated the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

The building is a former laboratory, but was unused for nearly three years. The real Catholic church building in Blagoveschensk is currently in use by the Orthodox as their cathedral, since all the Orthodox churches in the city were bombed after the Revolution. It is also the home of the Orthodox Parish of the Annunciation (The word Blagoveschensk means "Annunciation"). The Orthodox have been using our building already for fifty years--longer than the Catholic parish itself had used the building. Also currently in use by the Orthodox is our former Catholic hospital, which is now the Orthodox chancery building, and the former rectory, which is now a home for Orthodox seminarians. Nonetheless the Orthodox promise to return our church as soon as they have rebuilt their own buildings, which the government estimates will take ten years. Meanwhile the state government has given us a building to use.

Actually it would be difficult at the present time for the Catholic parish to occupy its former building, which is too large for the current size of the parish. The growth of our parish should continue so that when the Orthodox are ready to move we will be large enough to maintain the larger building.

The laboratory is composed of a 100-year-old log home, with a ten-year-old brick addition which has a basement. Parishioners quickly moved to claim the laboratory, and they have begun to paint, repair, and prepare the building for service. It is large enough to have a chapel, a social hall, and living space for a priest, as well as offices for the parish and for CARITAS. It is located near a busstop near the Geological Institute in the center of a grassy square which will make a good place for the children to play, and there will be an opportunity to plant flowers and to put up a sign.

The first thing that was done in the building was to install a new furnace so that repairs could be continued in a heated space. Then some walls were removed to make room for the chapel and social hall, and then running water, a kitchen, and toilets will be installed (currently, as the Russians say, "conveniences" are "on the street"). Some of the work is being done by parishioners who are university students (There are six institutions of higher learning in Blagoveschensk.)

The Church of the Transfiguration of Pittsford, New York, I am hoping to open two more parishes in the Amursky State, of which Blagoveschensk is the capital, one in the former

which has adopted the parish in Blagoveschensk as a sister-parish, is helping with repairs. Also funds were provided by Mr John Bold of Solana Beach, California. Mr Bold earlier provided funds for the parish in Bolshoi Kamen, which was named St John the Evangelist in honor of his help. An electronic organ was donated to Blagoveschensk by Central Catholic High School of Modesto, California, and a full complement of vestments and church vessels will be sent to Blagoveschensk from the donations many parishes have sent us over the past years.

Meanwhile we have asked Blagoveschensk parishioners to donate any excess furniture they may have to the parish, since the building is currently empty. Perhaps a donor would like to provide seating for the chapel. It seems best to have the seating made by local carpenters, or we can buy stack chairs from China, which is just across the Amur River from Blagoveschensk. Those wanting to help can send donations to our Anchorage address: Vladivostok Mission, 225 Cordova Street, Anchorage AK 99501. Specify that it is for Blagoveschensk. Donations for the Orthodox cathedral could also be sent to the same address.

The building is not the only news. On October 14 I had the joy of baptizing and confirming three new parishioners, and of baptizing their four children, increasing the parish by seven people.

That Blagoveschensk is located right on the Chinese border is illustrated by the following telegram of December 8, 1922 from the Polish Cultural Society in Blagoveschensk to an unknown person: "The New Chinese Administration" has stolen the property of the single Catholic church in Amursky Krai, thus spurning justice and the freedom of religion of Catholics. They stole the archive of the parish, the official books, and carried away things from the rectory. If this continues without punishment such incidents will increase, ending in rape and murder. We are asking for immediate help please. We also ask you to inform the Holy Father in Rome." Soon the Communists would steal everything, of course.

Then there is this amazing news: The parish trustee, Alexander Rinaysky, who is a businessman who often works in China, was recently in Harbin, China, [See related article in this issue.] He happened to see a nun's habit on the street, and followed her. She went to a Catholic church where Alexander met the priest and was introduced to the Catholics there. It turns out that there are seven Catholic parishes in Harbin, and one of them is using the old church which once belonged to the Diocese of Vladivostok! We'll try to get more information about this in a future issue. The mystery is that I had sent a special investigator to Harbin four years ago and he found nothing!

parish in Svobodny, whose Catholics are now part of the Blagoveschensk parish, even though it is hours away.

Svobodny is the new home of the Russian cosmodrome, the old cosmodrome being in the Ukraine which is a different country after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Space launches have begun. Surely the space program is one achievement of Soviet times which will be remembered by humanity for all times. I do not know if there still remains an old Catholic church building in Svobodny or not. Research will tell.

The second new parish will undoubtedly be in Raichihinsk, where we have parishioners. Even if a priest volunteers to be pastor in Blagoveschensk, I will have to help for a while, since the new priest won't know all the processes involved in opening a parish in Russia, and maybe he won't even be able to speak Russian yet.

The new building in Blagoveschensk will at last provide the opportunity of a place to begin regular children's catechism classes, as well as providing a meeting place for the parish's Catholic university students to gather. The building should also allow the possibility of a mass or communion service every Sunday until there is a resident pastor for Blagoveschensk, who can also work in the two new parishes, and maybe even in China. Until now the parish has only gathered for prayer when I have been able to come once per month. Sometimes my plans have been thwarted by cancelled flights, blizzards, and slow mail. We usually send a postcard to parishioners telling them when I will be there for mass, but sometimes the postcards don't make it to the parishioners in time.

We have sent many liturgical items from Vladivostok to supply the new building. In addition to the organ we have sent a set of stations of the cross, a Christmas creche, candlesticks, a tabernacle, more vestments, a ciborium, and a monstrance, which we have been saving for Blagoveschensk from the donations people have sent us. These things were sent in a container by railroad. We also took the occasion to send used clothing for the poor, literature and Bibles, a shower stall, and some Gallo mass wine. Too bad we can't send a permanent pastor!

From the Editor

by Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

So much, so fast! My head is still swimming with all the events that have overtaken us this year. And so much work uncompleted. Would you believe we still haven't given you an article on last summer's very successful summer camp for kids? Nor have we told you about the tremendous work of our benefactors in Porterville CA and Port Charlotte FL and Jacksonville AR and Evansville IN and St Joseph MI? We haven't written about our baptismal and confirmation classes this year, and you haven't heard about the publication of our Russian parish bulletin, nor about the new edition of our parish hymnal which will be used throughout the Far East. We haven't written about our seminarians. It's been a long time since we have said much about the ever growing work of our charitable organization CARITAS. You haven't heard about our organ concerts lately. And even with the tremendous help of our sister parish, Nativity in St Paul, you get this newsletter far too infrequently to keep up with the news, because we priests are just too busy to write and edit, even though it is very important to keep you informed. What can we say? Thank God for you our benefactors, and thanks be to God for producing fruit where there was once a barren desert.

News Notes

by Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

- The Nativity of Our Lord Parish in St Paul, Minnesota, who stuffs, addresses and mails our newsletters has purchased the Nativity window. Thanks to our loyal supporters there, and to Mrs Sandra Sonnen who gave a challenge donation to the parish of \$1000 to start the ball rolling. Thanks to our many friends at Nativity including Pastor Father Patrick Lannan.

We will have to wait until the next issue to announce whether all the windows have been purchased. This is because two donors have offered to purchase the two remaining windows, but we are waiting for their final decision about which window they will choose. Also, sometime while I was in America I received an email that someone was completing the purchase of the Coronation of Mary window, but my computer broke down, and I lost the information! So, dear donor, please send me the note again:
myron@catholic.marine.su

- In November I was in Jerusalem--my first time there--to celebrate my 25th anniversary as a priest. It was a shock to hear my name in a restaurant where I would assume that no one knew me. Facing me was Mr and Mrs Robert and Barbara Ozburn from Janesville, Wisconsin, who said they recognized me from pictures in *Vladivostok Sunrise*. They are the donors of our "Visitation" and "St Joseph" windows. Now they have purchased the Marriage of Joseph and Mary window! Little did we know we would accidently meet in a restaurant in Jerusalem! I was glad to give them my personal thanks, as well as the gratitude of all our parishioners from Vladivostok for their kind donations. It was a pleasure to meet some of our benefactors so unexpectedly and so far from home.

- In 1935 the Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception in Khabarovsk was confiscated on October 1. The parish was registered again in 1992, on October 1. But the parish was told that they would NEVER get their old church back, which is now a venereal disease clinic, even though I said that only God could say "never". So the parish began intensive prayers to St Theresa of Lisieux whose feast day is October 1 for the return of the church by October 1 of this year, although everyone agreed it would take a miracle. They were encouraged to pray by Fr Jim Kelleher, who helped us in Khabarovsk with our Far Eastern Catholic Youth Conference. The parish agreed to have a shrine to St Theresa in the church if it happens. Well, the new Russian law about religion seems to require the return of historical buildings to churches. If so the parish got their miracle, since the law was passed before October 1. It should now be only a matter of administrative process. One must add
- Mother General, Sister Julia Lumbreras, of the Sisters of Charity of St Ann from Zarogosa, Spain, and three more sisters

that the state won't be able to vacate the building so quickly--of course that was expected. Negotiations are under way to receive a temporary building in lieu of the church until the clinic can move. Meanwhile we have a 24 inch statue of St Theresa which someone sent to us in a one of our shipments. We will place the statue in the building as soon as we receive it. St Theresa is the co-patron of the Church's missions, and Pope John Paul II just proclaimed her a "Doctor of the Church".

- Our Bishop Joseph Werth has decided to station two priests in Khabarovsk! They are American Maryknoll priests, Father Benedict Zweber and Father Edward Schoellmann, who have many years of experience in Korea and Africa. Our Korean parishioners in Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, and those on Sakhalin Island will also benefit.

The Visitation Sisters from Japan have also decided to begin working in Khabarovsk. Sister Kiyoko Sewa already has arrived to begin studying the Russian language, and she will be joined by two more sisters in the spring.

It should be quite a team for Khabarovsk, what with two full-time priests and three sisters, such experienced people, and they will bring the resources of Maryknoll. The letter of appointment was written by Bishop Werth in mid-December, but we received it just before Christmas. I went to Khabarovsk to turn over the parish to Fr Ed on December 28, when we celebrated the Feast of the Holy Family.

Because the geographical area of the parish is huge I lost half of my area of duty, but I told the parishioners that giving them to the new pastor was like a father giving away his beloved daughter to her new husband at the wedding--Sad to turn over your responsibility for a daughter to someone else, but happy to think about the new potential that her having a husband brings.

I hope you our benefactors won't mind that my territory will be reduced, because it will mean that I can open new parishes here in Primorye closer to home. It won't mean less work for us.

- Our half-hour per week program on the Christian radio station in Khabarovsk is off the air. Our parishioner Alexei Gartman had pioneered the program using materials from our Correspondence Course in the Catholic Faith, together with Bible readings, stories about the saints, prayers, and music. But the Protestant pastors complained that they were losing or about to lose their parishioners to the Catholics--the program was that good! Maybe someone will help us find a way to pay for a half-hour per week program on commercial radio?

were here to visit in August. They seem wonderful to me, just what we were hoping for. They will come to work in

Vladivostok in July, 1998. The Sisters plan to begin a program for street children and abandoned children as soon as they come. They had meetings already with government officials, so if they receive their visas, four sisters will come to start the project here in Vladivostok. One of the sisters, Sister Alicia, is an experienced novice mistress, and already several young Russian women have expressed interest in joining their community as soon as it is established here. It is clear that they are hardworking, dedicated, professional, independent, and, most important of all, definitely Catholic with no nonsense about it. We can't wait until they arrive.

- A mafia person held one of our parishioners for two days in a garage, allegedly in order to try to help himself to some of the humanitarian aid that we have received. The parishioner finally managed to escape, and went to the police with his story. Then he hid himself so that the mafia couldn't find him.

Naturally the police wanted to know if it was all true, or a made-up story, so we've had to meet with the government officials, we had an instant tax inspection and an instant customs inspection. Nothing had been stolen.

- A real scare recently came from the proposed new law about religions, which in the end President Yeltsin vetoed. The new version of the law is more humane. President Yeltsin sent a letter to our bishop saying that he would not be able to influence the law so completely that there would be no complaints about it, but after the law is passed religions would be able to appeal to the Supreme Court of Russia to set aside whatever in the law is unconstitutional. Meanwhile we think that there won't be many problems for us. Our historic buildings alone prove our historical right. Our constant charitable work through CARITAS and Catholic Relief Services shows that we are here to give, not to get.

- In September there was a meeting in Vladivostok of CARITAS Russia with representatives from the CARITASes of Japan, Korea, Moscow, Novosibirsk, Italy, and Germany. Representatives from all our parishes in the Far East also attended. The purpose of the meeting was to get acquainted with the charitable work being done in Russia, and to plan strategies and structures for the future work together.

- Our thanks to the Loyola Foundation of Washington DC who gave us money to buy a car for us priests in Vladivostok. We only received \$200 for our old junker before buying the 1991 Toyota from the Loyola grant. The used car will serve us for several years on the terrible roads and streets we must travel. Usually the Loyola Foundation funds new cars for missionaries, but they made an exception for our Russian situation where we don't have usual new car dealerships, and where importing a new car from Japan is extremely expensive, as is buying a native Russian car. Thanks, too, to Mrs Susan Gray of Jacksonville, Arkansas, who wrote the grant proposal and took care of all arrangements for us. Thank God for our

- There is no longer a priest working on Sakhalin Island. The parish had several priests from Korea, but then the local

unpaid mission volunteers. Do you want to help?

- Thanks to a major donation from Epiphany Parish in Coon Rapids, Minnesota, and to Ms Roxanne Lumm of San Francisco and Mr Lee Larkey of our sister parish in St Anna, Minnesota, we were able to purchase an apartment for the Our Lady of the Pacific Parish in Nakhodka [See related story.]

Having a first place to call home is a joy for our young parishes who would find it impossible to buy or build something of their own at this stage. A place to call home is also a means of evangelization, because people in Russia find it hard to accept that a religion is serious if it doesn't even have a church building. The apartment will also give us a place for lessons for adults, catechism for kids, choir practice, daily mass when there is a priest, and Sunday communion services when there isn't. The Catholic Church in Russia does not have adequate financing or capital to buy or build churches on its own at the present time. Now we are looking for furniture for the apartment, and we have to do some repairs there. A telephone line in Nakhodka currently costs \$700. The apartment is located on the first floor of an old building in the center of the city. Under the apartment is the the offices of the Handicapped Society of Nakhodka. We are hoping that CARITAS Nakhodka will be able to work in cooperation with this society, and maybe even share space when necessary for some projects.

- On October 1 we were happy to welcome representatives of CARITAS Japan, CARITAS Philippines, and CARITAS Sri Lanka to Vladivostok. We explored with them the possibility of our joining the Pacific Partnership for Human Development.

I am excited about possible cooperation with the Partnership, because one of the effects of socialism in Russia is that our people do not know how to form independent self-help organizations. During the 70 years of Communism the people forgot how to do things for themselves--they were always at the mercy of the bureaucratic government which claimed to have total control of everything (totalitarianism). So the people know how to administer a project to disburse aid or funds, but they have no experience of how to generate those funds or how to start a cooperative or private project from the very beginning. We spoke about the Pacific Partnership helping us to teach the Russians how to do development work and how to start and manage cooperative organizations. I think the contacts will be very helpful for this. As I tell my helpers, it is wonderful to give out humanitarian aid, but it is more difficult and more important to generate that aid to start with! We are hoping the Partnership will be able to send experienced developers from developing countries like the Philippines and Sri Lanka to show Russians how it is done.

government made getting visas very difficult for some reason. Sakhalin used to be part of our duty area six years ago when we

first came to Russia. The island is the site of oil and gas reserves which are currently beginning to be opened by Russian and foreign companies. North Sakhalin had a Catholic parish at Alexandrovsk before the Revolution. South Sakhalin was a Japanese possession before the Russian-Japanese War early in this century. It also had a Catholic parish of which we have much historical information. The new parish, St Jacob's, is in the state capital, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk. For now Father Ben Zweber is flying there twice a month from Khabarovsk.

- Recently the newspaper *Vladivostok News* quoted the following statistics: "The rates of what doctors call 'social diseases'--including alcoholism and venereal diseases--have risen rapidly. In 1996, 40 times more syphilis cases were registered than in 1991. The number of alcohol psychoses quadrupled in that time. Tuberculosis grew by 8-10 percent, and among children it grew by 15 percent." "This is clear evidence of a society in trouble," said Dr Yury Kaminsky, President of Vladivostok Medical University. He added, "Obviously our health care system is the strongest in the world: It has worked without financing for many years." Recently there was a doctor's strike, complete with barricades manned by doctors and nurses on major Vladivostok streets, because the medics hadn't been paid for so many months. Meanwhile socialized medicine is one of the lowest paid professions in Russia. Private practice is increasing, but most of the population don't have money to pay the private practitioners, so they continue to use the social services where they must pay for medicines in any case. When patients go to the hospital they must bring along their bedding, clothing, and have relatives bring food for them and search for medicines in the drug stores.

Polish Catholics in Harbin (1897-1933)

*by Miroslava Efimova, Archivist
Catholic Parish of the Most Holy Mother of God, Vladivostok
tr Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.*

The beginning of the formation of the Polish colony in Manchuria was in 1897. It was then that the first scouting party arrived in Manchuria for the purpose of doing an engineering and geological study concerning the route of the proposed mainline railway which Russia contracted with China to build from the Zabaikal region to the Liao-tung Peninsula where Russia was constructing a fort at Port Arthur. Included in that scouting party were many Poles. Later, after the construction of the railway began, the flood of Polish settlers grew with the coming of whole families.

The explanation of such an active migration is that after the "distribution" of Poland between Russia, Austria, and Prussia, the national freedom strikes were continuous. Hundreds of thousands of Poles were exiled to Siberia, to Sakhalin, and to the Far East of Russia, and in Poland itself there began a cruel Russification: Many Polish educational institutions were closed, and in the rest teaching was in the Russian language. The same happened to the press, the theater, and even the churches were allowed to have services only in Russian or in Latin. These circumstances forced people to flee to the ends of the earth in the hope that in the new lands they could live more freely.

After the strike of 1863 the Czarist government took away the privileges of residents of Poland, so tens of thousands of young Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians were conscripted into the Russian army. Since these military recruits were sent to the most distant regions and provinces of Russia there appeared in Manchuria many former Polish subjects among the detachments of border guards which were deployed along the "Chinese Far Eastern Railroad (CFERR)" during its construction. In this way a large colony began from those who had left Poland, and mostly they were Catholics.

We must notice that the Poles were not the first Catholics in the northern part of China. Catholics had already older roots: In about 1650 French missionaries came to Manchuria who were under the jurisdiction of the Beijing Diocese. During the time of the suppression of Catholics in 1813--during the time of Emperor Chia-Ch'ing--the number of Catholics sharply fell, but the seeds of faith in Christ again began to give growth, and within 25 years, in 1838, the Holy See decided it was necessary to put in place a new Apostolic Administration,

Before the laying of the cornerstone there were already 4000 Catholics in Harbin and its near villages, not counting Chinese, according to the data of the Committee. Thanks to the active work of the Committee and of all the Polish colony the new church was already completed on the 27th of

"Beyond the Wall", for the northern part of China east of the Great Wall of China. It included three provinces: Mukden, Kirin, and Tsitsihar. The huge territory of the Administration was divided into two parts in 1898: The Apostolic Administration of Southern Manchuria with its see in Mukden, and the Apostolic Administration of Northern Manchuria with its see in Kirin. Preference was given to the French among the Catholic priests of the administrations, and they spread the Catholic faith among the Chinese.

At the time of the birth of the Polish colony and of the new City of Harbin in Manchuria there were at first no priests, so the Poles appealed to the French missionaries for their spiritual needs. The Poles didn't demand the building of a church building from the French; for this purpose a "Church Building Committee" was established which realized the dream of a building, and which then became the Parish Council. This committee was the first Polish social organization in China. It is interesting to note that the Church Building Committee consisted of two subcommittees: "The Committee for Building the Church", and the "Committee for Supervision of the Building of the Church". Eventually the subcommittees consolidated into one.

Many busy, respected people worked on the building committee, like, for example, Lieutenant General Gronbachevsky, the famous traveller throughout Central Asia, and later Attaman of the Cossacks of Astrakhan and author of many books written just before his death in Warsaw in 1926.

In order to collect enough donations for the building of the church the Committee and its volunteers held a variety of charitable events: lotteries, plays, costume balls. The local press took an active part, giving excellent billing to the events. Soon there was enough to begin building, and the Committee decided to lay the foundation of the church.

On September 1, 1906, they dug the basement for the furnace, and on September 8, 1906, at noon, the cornerstone was blessed with great festivity. In attendance were many residents of Harbin: The Director of the Central Railroad, Mr Khorbat, and his wife, representatives of the diplomatic corps, and the spiritual leaders of the French mission. A big procession began at the temporary chapel in the premises of the Technical School on Garden Street. Then the procession arrived at the place of laying the foundation where the chaplain of the Collected Military Forces, Father Dominic Pshilusky and his French missionary assistants, Fathers Louis Boyutin, Edward Monaster, and Anthony Obin celebrated the blessing of the cornerstone.

September, 1907. It was a comparatively small building of neogothic style. The bells were in the front of the building, surrounded by a little garden. When the foundation was constructed a small spring of good quality fresh water was discovered. After the completion of construction a well having

a depth of 21 yards was outfitted in the garden. The parishioners accorded the waters of the well healing powers and considered it holy.

Anthony Machuk became the first pastor of the church. In the summer of the following year Redemptorist missionaries arrived: Bobosevich, Neudtskovsky, Polakevich. The parishioners wanted to especially mark the occasion, so they built a huge black wooden cross in the church garden. On it they hung a tablet with the names of all the new Redemptorists and all those parishioners who turned out to meet them.

The solemn blessing of the new church, which was named St Stanislaus, took place in 1909 when the Vicar General of the Mogilev Archdiocese, Bishop John Cieplak, undertook an inspection of the Roman Catholic parishes of Siberia, the Russian Far East, Manchuria, and Sakhalin. At the end of 1909 a new priest came to Harbin, Father Vladislav Ostrovsky, who earlier had served as pastor in the Roman Catholic parish of Vyatka. This intelligent and educated initiator became a messiah for the Harbin Catholics. Already before Christmas there were many important events, thanks to his creative ideas.

For example, the St Vincent de Paul Society was founded, whose members began charitable, cultural, and scientific activities. The appearance of such an organization itself had a formative effect on the spiritual and cultural life of the Catholics of Harbin.

A Polish elementary school was begun which was named St Vincent's. Thanks to cultural connections with philanthropic organizations in Poland, a society for youth in the form of a troop of scouts was formed and expanded. The members of the St Vincent de Paul Society took care initiating youth activities, supporting their events with dances and money raising activities. They allowed for free use of the libraries and reading rooms.

All the same there were many problems ahead for the Harbin Catholics. Father Vladislav Ostrovsky understood he couldn't solve these problems all by himself. He needed good contact with the Apostolic See in order to support the new status of the Catholic parishes of Manchuria and the Russian Far East: the formation of a diocese in the East of Asia. The connection with the single Russian Roman Catholic Diocese of Mogilev was completely problematical because of the

The recommendation of the Apostolic Nuncio to begin preparing priests was understandably well received by Father Vladislav and the Dean of the Vladivostok Deanery, Karol Slivovsky, because the Roman Catholic Church always puts a lot of stress and attention on the institutions which train future ministers. In Vladivostok the minor seminary was opened in 1920, even though it didn't have its own building. After the completion of the new church, the premises of the temporary church were given to the seminary. Franciscan Father Maurer Kluge was appointed the seminary rector. He had come to the Far East as secretary to the Papal Nuncio Bishop De Guebriant.

enormous distance and the difficulties of transport. Father Vladislav Ostrovsky sent a letter to the Holy Father and to the Mogilev Russian archdiocese, but nothing changed. Even in Poland Father Ostrovsky didn't find any support, since the Polish Catholics weren't interested in the spiritual and cultural needs in the distant corners of the Empire. Our inveterate enthusiast decided that he had to stir the waters, so he left for Europe in 1920 [after the Communist Revolution]. There disappointment awaited him because everywhere he found a complete absence of awareness of the importance of the problems of the Catholics of the Far East, and only Bishop Edward Roop and Archbishop De Guebriant paid any attention to his requests, concerning themselves to the point of conviction. A result of the European tour of Father Vladislav was the visit of Papal Nuncio Archbishop De Guebriant to the Far East and to Manchuria in June of 1921. The eminent guest carefully investigated the gist of the problem which Father Vladislav had described earlier and made many interesting recommendations. The Archbishop especially called attention to the need to establish a minor seminary where it would be possible to support the preparation of future priests. Beside that the Papal Nuncio pointed out that the number of Catholics of Harbin had grown to the point that the existing church of St Stanislaus was already not able to serve all the believers, so it was necessary to build a new church, which should be located in the commercial part of the city where most of the parishioners were concentrated who worked for the most part on the Chinese Far Eastern Railroad. After Harbin the Papal Nuncio set out to visit Vladivostok.

The wish of Archbishop De Guebriant to build a church was finally realized thanks to people of good will who helped, the first of whom was the vice-director of the railroad, Mr Stephen Offenberg. For the construction of the church the railroad administration gave a beautiful piece of land which was near the river station where many parishioners lived who worked on the railroad. They had had to walk two miles to St Stanislaus Church, but the new land was located close to home and work.

On September 3, 1921, the festive moment to lay the cornerstone arrived, and soon the church was built. The Harbiners referred to it as "the church at the station". The third Catholic church was built in the village Manchur, where there were many Catholic railroad workers.

The minor seminary in Vladivostok didn't exist very long, since already on February 13, 1923, the civil authorities closed it for an unspecified time. [The Communists had come to the Russian Far East in 1922.--ed]

With that sad event the minor seminary in Harbin became the seminary for the whole Far East, even receiving the name, "Vladivostok Seminary". A letter was sent to all the parishes of the Far East asking for a search for pious boys from good Catholic families who could be sent to Harbin. This urgent call wasn't able to be realized due to the very complex political

situation in the Far East and in Siberia, and the sending of children abroad was practically impossible.

Nonetheless, the Central Vladivostok Minor Seminary in Harbin continued, supported by a local staff, even though there were a multitude of problems. In the first place there weren't enough finances, and the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome wasn't in a hurry to send money. One of the organizers of the seminary, Mr Grokhovsky, wrote, "Various thoughts have come to me. I tried to borrow money from my acquaintances without success. It was suggested that I borrow from a bank, and I knew about that possibility without getting advice, but at the bank one had to pay 11%, and besides, then we'd have to reregister the seminary building in their name, and I certainly didn't want to do that. Finally there came the good idea to send a telegram to one of my bishop acquaintances in China to ask for a loan. That time it worked, and he sent me \$25,000, but the whole process took a long time."

After the difficulties of the organizational stage of the Vladivostok Minor Seminary in Harbin the seminary began to work at full steam, and received the name "St Charles". At first the Seminary was located at Henry Sinkevich High School but then received its own two storey building.

Meanwhile time and the stormy events in Russia forced a change in the plans for the Apostolic Administration for Siberia. It was difficult for the representative of the Holy Father to direct dioceses and parishes in a country to which he was not able to travel, and from which spiritual leaders could not freely travel either. Even so, the Apostolic See tried to proceed with plans which had already been made. By an apostolic letter taking effect from December 1, 1921, Pope Benedict XV separated all of Asian Russia from the Mogilev Archdiocese, and created a new Siberian Administration which was bordered on the West by the Caspian Sea and the Ural Mountains, on the North by the Arctic Sea and the Bering Strait, on the East by the Pacific, and on the South all the way to Persia, including eastern Turkestan and Manchuria, the Amursky State and Primorye.

On October 30, 1922, a letter arrived in Harbin from Cardinal John Rossum of the Roman Congregation for the Faith which was an order of the Apostolic See that the Vladivostok, Irkutsk, Omsk, Tomsk, and Tashkent Deaneries would be separated from the Mogilev Archdiocese, and that a new separate Apostolic Administration would be formed from

Even so the question of the shape of the Vladivostok Diocese hadn't been answered: To whom belong the Harbin parishes? The Apostolic Delegate didn't know the answer either, and he proposed that all await the decision of the Apostolic See. But the Catholics of Harbin didn't want to wait, and the Parish Council decided to ask the new Bishop Karol Slivovsky to include the Harbin parishes in his diocese. The Parish Council placed all their arguments in a letter reading: "To His Excellency Bishop Karol Slivovsky, with the highest joy we,

them. Naturally such a huge administration--taking in all of Siberia, the Russian Far East, Turkestan, and Northern Manchuria--was bigger in area than all of Europe, and in the future, depending upon the development of Catholicism and the growth of the number of Catholics, it would be divided into several Administrations. The Catholics of Harbin worriedly awaited further news from Rome, and finally there came the important word: On February 2, 1923 the Vladivostok Diocese was established, and Dean Karol Slivovsky would become the Vladivostok bishop. This was a long expected event, forecast earlier, but now the Harbin parishes wondered where they would belong since they had earlier only been under the jurisdiction of the Mogilev Archdiocese. According to the strict canon law of the Catholic Church and geographically the Harbin Catholics should fall under the Kirin Diocese, but they all wanted a different decision--that they would be included in the Vladivostok Diocese. Everybody awaited with patience the Apostolic Delegate who would perform the ceremony of ordination of Dean Karol Slivovsky to the episcopate.

The Apostolic Delegate arrived in Harbin on October 23, 1923. They prepared a grand welcome for him in which not only clerics participated. The Polish consul Mr Pindor, the Polish vice-consul Mr Simonolovich, the Consul of France, Mr L'Eprissiere, and diplomatic representative of Lithuania, Mr Polishaitis, the director of the CFERR Mr Stephan Offenbergl, the commander of the Chinese Army General Chu, the Polish Knights, students of the Senkevich High School, and a huge crowd of Catholics and residents of Harbin were all present. A holiday procession, with banners, flags, and candles led the Apostolic Delegate to the doors of the Church of St Stanislaus where the veterans of the Polish Army met him with bread and salt. After a solemn mass the Apostolic Delegate gave a speech in classical Latin that Poland was always and is a faithful member of the Catholic Church.

On the last days the Delegate visited the Senkevich High School, the St Vincent Elementary School, and the St Charles Vladivostok Minor Seminary. On October 28, Sunday, he consecrated the Vladivostok Dean Father Karol Slivovsky a bishop, with the participation of Bishop Gaspee of Kirin. The Harbin Catholics rejoice, "We can be glad that the Apostolic See chose Father Karol Slivovsky. He is a very active person, a good priest, and he knows completely the realities of Far Eastern life," wrote the journal *Tigodnik Polski*.

the parishioners of the Harbin parishes covering the City of Harbin and all the extent of the Chinese Far Eastern Railroad, learned that by decision of the Apostolic See the Roman Catholic Diocese was established in Vladivostok of which, thanks to the mercy of God, you, our worthy pastor, are the leader. But with great concern we hear that the decision to include the Harbin parishes into the Vladivostok Diocese has not been made, and that that question would be decided in Rome. Regardless of that, we come to you, Worthy Pastor,

that you would hear out our request and mercifully agree to support our plea to His Excellency, The Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Celsius Constantini that our parishes be included into the Vladivostok Diocese. Our plea has the following arguments: 1. From the first moment of its founding in 1908 our parish has always belonged to the Mogilev Archdiocese, like all the parishes of Priamurye and Primorye. 2. Our main church St Stanislaus' was blessed by the Chief Vicar of the Mogilev Archdiocese, Bishop John Cieplak, and the church from the beginning of its construction always was a church of the before mentioned Archdiocese. 3. The Catholics of the Harbin parishes are almost exclusively Polish, with small numbers of Germans, Irish, and Lithuanians who, together, make up about 1-2% of the parishioners. 4. All the cultural and social organizations of the local Roman Catholic churches consist of and are supported exclusively by the Polish. 5. All 100% of the students of the local Sinkevich High School and of the St Vincent De Paul Elementary School are Polish nationals. 6. Since the Fundziazi village and many other villages within the zone of the CFERR which are close to Harbin have a widely developed chain of parishes of the Roman Catholic French Mission for the spiritual care of the Chinese Catholics and Europeans working within the confines of the Concession, it follows that participation in the Vladivostok Diocese of our Harbin churches will not cause any problems. 7. If in the future there were a change in the number of Poles among the Europeans and those living in Harbin, in any case the Poles will consist of the most representative group, since the future trade connections between Harbin and Poland will always be basic. If the number of Catholics of various nationalities will grow with time, they will all relate to various nationalities and languages, but the Poles will always represent the largest group with their own culture and national traditions. We humbly beg you, worthy Pastor, to give your merciful attention to these reasonings, and to support them and to present them to His Most Reverend Holy Papal Delegate for his merciful decision. Harbin October 29, [1923,] Parish Council."

On November 22, 1924, the Holy Father appointed as administrator of the gigantic Siberian region Father Gerard Piotrovsky, a Franciscan missionary who had been working in Nanking for 14 years. The political situation did not allow the

With the death of the Vladivostok Bishop and the imprisonment of his assistant Father Yuri Yurkevich, no Catholic priest was left in the Russian Far East. The Harbin Catholics lost any hope to be received into the Vladivostok Deanery.

In the 1930's the Polish colony of Harbin changed, since many Polish families returned to their homeland or left for Europe closer to Poland. Many ventures closed in Harbin, and unemployment rose. Judging by the published press of the times, the Poles departed from their strict nationalistic stance, since they began to understand what it meant to live in Manchuria which was only a part of the huge country of China. The Polish papers began to print historical material

Administrator to go to Siberia to assume his post, so the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith assigned his residence to be Harbin. He arrived there on February 2, 1925, and lived at the Sinkevich High School. Later his office became the St Charles Minor Seminary at 18 Horvatsky Prospect. The Administrator's ties with the Siberian and Far Eastern parishes were purely spiritual, although sometimes it was possible to give some material help. Bishop Piotrovsky tried to go to Siberia in 1926, but the Soviet authorities categorically forbade him entrance to Russian territory. In such a situation the work of the Administrator was limited to teaching in the Minor Seminary and to helping with its administration while awaiting better times which never came.

Worse also was the situation of the Vladivostok Diocese which, according to a Papal Bull of February 2, 1923, included Amursky State, Primorye, and part of Sakhalin. The diocese had six priests and about 200 thousand Catholics. The participation of the Harbin parishes in the Vladivostok Diocese also had not been decided by the Apostolic See. The border between Primorye and Manchuria was closed, with strict visa controls, as Vladivostok Bishop Karol Slivovsky found out when he tried to return on November 15, 1923, after his ordination to the episcopate. To cross the border he had to use his old acquaintanceship with the supervisor of the border station whom he had sometime or other given a handout when he had been in need.

In January of 1933 the sad news of the death of Vladivostok Bishop Karol Slivovsky came to Harbin. When he found out, Father Vladislav Ostrovsky, who was at the time Harbin Vicar General, decided to commemorate the courageous bishop by placing a monument at the St Stanislaus Church because the ordination of Karol Slivovsky to the episcopate had taken place there. The newspaper *Tigodnik Polsky* wrote about this event: "Near the church among the flowers and candles lay a large crucifix on which were symbols of episcopal authority...Father Vladislav blessed the crucifix, and, kneeling, prayed before it. Most of the people cried, and all warmly prayed for the soul of the Polish Bishop who died in exile, in Siberia, where death had already found thousands of his fellow countrymen...Died and buried without Christian ceremonies..."

about the origins of the Chinese government, began printing Chinese language lessons. In the schools the Chinese language became obligatory.

Taking into account the fact that in Manchuria after the war a strong Japanese influence began to be felt, the Polish press continually stressed the worthiness of the Japanese nation, many pointing out how well the Japanese treated the Catholic parishes on Sakhalin. The local commentators took a clearly friendly stance concerning all the diplomatic actions of Japan. But that is another story...

Funerals - Soviet Style

by Rev Daniel Maurer, C.J.D.

It is no secret that many Americans have flirted with Communist ideology for as long as it has existed. The sympathy with which some Americans have regarded Communism is often merely silly or naive, like my university friends in the early 1970's who went to Cuba to help the Communists harvest sugar cane in a spirit of misplaced solidarity with the workers of the world. As though the Cubans could not harvest their own sugar cane if they had any real incentive! Sometimes this sympathy is dangerous or subversive, as when, in the name of liberation theology American missionary priests and sisters actively fought and sometimes even killed in South America in order to bring about a more just distribution of material goods in this world. As though Christians don't know that Marxist categories of class hatred and violence could bring about anything just and good!

For many years I have wished that all my Communist-sympathizing friends and acquaintances could see firsthand the logical outcome of their ideology, the ruins of civilization that is the former Soviet Union. If only I could put them all on a plane and bring them to Vladivostok where they could see the spiritual, moral and physical devastation caused by real, no-holds-barred Communism. Instead I have to content myself with writing about it and hoping that some of those same people, who in their youth so blithely accepted Communist propaganda, will read about the sad reality to which they in part gave their sympathy or even allegiance.

I have written about the religious persecution and about the economic disintegration and poverty in early issues of the Sunrise. Recently I was able to gain greater insight into the spiritual emptiness in the wake of fallen Soviet ideology by attending for the first time a non-religious funeral. I offer a description of it here in the hopes that it will help our readers to understand better the complete destruction of spiritual categories among the majority of Russian people.

Michael Ivanovich, one of our church boilermen, died of lung cancer at the age of 61 (already five years older than the average life expectancy in Russia.) He had worked for us for about 7 months, and that was only once every fourth day. I did not know him well, but I chatted with him a few times when he was doing odd jobs around the building.

During the winter our four boilermen work a typical Soviet schedule: 24 hours on followed by three days off. (This one-day-in-four schedule was cleverly thought up by the

The earthly remains of Michael Ivanovich were brought home on a high, open, flatbed truck in a red cloth covered coffin. Relatives and friends had gathered in the winter cold in front of the apartment. The time of the arrival at the home was 1:00 p.m. Every funeral begins at 1:00 so that the assembled mourners can accompany the body to the cemetery

Communist Party at the beginning of the Soviet period as a way of making it impossible for workers to attend Sunday Mass regularly.) On duty our boilermen get to relax and sleep during the night, but during the day they must tend our three furnaces, 35 radiators and one pump. When not making their daily rounds they should also be available for other manual jobs around the building. For that they get a steady (though modest) salary and we get the security of knowing that there is always someone to watch the heating system.

Although I had said only a few words to him during his life I went to his funeral to represent the parish and also so that I could see what happens at the funeral of a non-believer or non-practicer in Russia. This somewhat loosely-defined category of "non-believer and/or non-practicer" comprises over 90% of the population of Vladivostok. Before this I had only been to the funerals of practicing Catholics or other devout believers. What happens at a non-religious funeral is simple: nothing at all. For those of us accustomed to a religious culture, we have to experience *nothing* at a funeral really to understand that *NOTHING* happens. Nothing, that is, but burying the body.

It appeared that the deceased was baptized and believed in God because there was a chrome Orthodox style cross affixed to the black, sheet metal, grave marker which could be seen on the truck that brought his body home. But if he was typical of Orthodox Christians in the Russian Far East he had probably been inside a church only once in his life, for his own baptism. The funeral was to be a typical Soviet style funeral. The arrangements were made by the family through the State Office Of Ritual, that is, the government funeral service.

When a person dies his body is taken to a government morgue for preparation for burial. All morgues are government operated since everything in Russia is government operated. The burial is scheduled for the third or fourth day after the death. This gives the family a chance to notify relatives, friends and co-workers. On the day of burial the body of the deceased is taken from the morgue and brought home one last time. There are no funeral homes, and apartments are very small (often one room 6' by 6') so the reception of the body from the morgue takes place in the street in front of the deceased's home or apartment. The hearse is a truck which can be one of two kinds, either a large, high, open flatbed truck in which case it is quite a job to get the coffin down to the street, or more conveniently but more rarely a van with back doors that open so that the coffin can be slid out. The coffin is cheaply made of soft wood, covered outside by bright red or black cloth and inside by white cloth.

in time for the rigidly observed 2:00 burial. Male relatives and friends took the coffin out of the funeral truck and placed it on four short kitchen stools in the street in front of the door to the stairway of the apartment. When the coffin was set firmly on the stools the one-piece top was lifted off for viewing the body. Tiny snowflakes began to fall and were brushed from the face

of the deceased by his widow. Other women stood around the open coffin in the cold and fussed over the body in silence, trying to comfort the widow and adult daughters with hugs and gestures. As usual the men stood at a distance looking uncomfortable in the presence of death. Everyone was waiting for the rented bus which was to drive them to the cemetery. No public word was spoken, no word of prayer was prayed out loud, and no one looked as though they were praying silently.

By 1:15 the rented bus arrived, a dirty and dented mid-size (24 seats) South Korean model. The time is synchronized so that the funeral party will arrive at the cemetery on the northern outskirts of the city at 2:00 where the grave diggers are waiting to bury the body. This is the sign for the funeral procession to begin. The empty truck now drives about a block away from where the coffin is sitting on the stools. The procession of mourners forms: first a lady carrying an enlarged photograph of the deceased; then ladies carrying any of the larger artificial paper or sheet metal floral displays; next two ladies strewing broken-stemmed flowers on the path. (At my first Russian funeral I thought the stems were broken as a symbol of mortality, but later I was told that it was simply so that the flowers would not be picked up and taken away by passers-by to be used again); next the open coffin carried by male relatives or friends and then other men carrying the lid of the coffin; after the deceased come the next of kin and finally all the mourners. Everyone walks slowly the block or two to the truck where the open coffin is loaded on. The next of kin climb up on the truck to accompany the deceased on the ride to the cemetery. Some mourners disperse, others get into the rented bus to follow the truck. Not one public word has been spoken, though the mourners have occasionally been chatting quietly among themselves.

At the cemetery the next of kin climb down after their freezing ride on the open highway, the open coffin is off-loaded and taken to the grave site. This can be quite a feat of engineering since the Vladivostok graveyard is not the most orderly of places. Families buy small plots of two or three graves and separate them from others with metal fences or even concrete or stone dividers, often encroaching onto the public paths between rows of graves. I once saw one of the pallbearers fall into an open grave trying to lift the coffin over a metal fence. I have also seen the pallbearers almost tip a coffin upside down trying to get over the obstacles. Michael Ivanovich's grave was relatively close to the truck path, so this time there was not too much trouble reaching it. The kitchen stools miraculously re-appeared and the coffin was again placed on them. The women removed the strips of cloth which had

I have always imagined that death would be the most ritualized part of life's journey in any culture. At this funeral, if that is what you could call it, there was no ritual remaining at all. After what Russia has been through, what is there to say in the presence of death? Not many seem to know. Sometimes someone mutters "Sleep in peace," or "May the ground be soft beneath you." I have occasionally even heard a

bound the hands and feet of the deceased during the transporting, and they also removed the real flowers from the coffin.

Then comes the time for what would be called, in our tradition, the graveside service. In Russia this sometimes involves close friends and co-workers of the deceased--and family if they are up to it--addressing the assembled mourners to say a few words in praise of the deceased: what a good husband or father he was, how energetically he worked, how well he got along with everyone. But for Michael Ivanovich no one said anything. The widow and daughters simply continued to cry softly. After allowing an opportunity for any last words, it is time for the next of kin to say their good-byes while the others present take a step backward so as not to interfere. Again, this leave-taking was done completely in silence, the only sound being the noise of the forest cemetery and the quiet sobbing of the next of kin. Two men brought the coffin lid and nailed it on, the hammer blows splitting the silence of the gray, wintry day. The coffin was then hoisted over the grave and rested momentarily on two boards laying across the opening in the ground until two long canvas straps could be threaded under it and held in place by the grave diggers. When other men removed the boards the grave diggers lowered the coffin by the belts into the grave. The mourners, first the next of kin and then everyone in twos or threes, came up to throw a handful of dirt into the grave. Then they removed themselves a few feet and watched the grave diggers shovel the dirt directly onto the coffin.

At Russian burials everyone always stays until the job is completed. Sometimes members of the family throw a few coins into the grave as it is being filled in, reminiscent of pagan cultures in every time and place. But no coins for Michael Ivanovich. When the dirt is mounded up, the temporary, sheet metal monument is fitted in place and the grave diggers leave. This is the signal for the women (and only the women) to start decorating the grave with all the flower arrangements and cut flowers that have been brought by the mourners, making sure to break all the stems short so that they will not be removed and used by someone else. As some women busy themselves arranging the flowers, others have set out sandwiches and plastic cups of vodka for all present to consume in memory of the deceased. When everyone has eaten and drunk just a little, they file back to the bus and return to the home of the deceased, or in some cases to a restaurant or cafeteria, where a funeral dinner has been prepared. This time the dinner was at the apartment. I did not attend.

quiet "May he be in heaven," as the closing phrase of last words for someone, but that was during a religious funeral service. In the case of Michael Ivanovich it was the absence of any public prayer or formal sentiment that was so striking to me. Later I told a number of Russian friends about my experience and they all confirmed the fact that at funerals where no representative of a church is present often nothing is

said at all. The people gather, they walk a block, they ride to the cemetery, they bury the body and they go home or to the funeral dinner. It is a stark reminder to me of the spiritual unreality of this tragic country. There is lots of work to do.

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Money cannot legally be sent by mail to Russia. Donations of money should be sent to:

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Your donations are tax-deductible. You will receive the required receipt for IRS tax purposes by return mail.

Letters without donations can be sent to:

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Please do not mail packages directly to Russia, since every package mailed to Russia costs us \$50. If you have items that you think we can use, please contact us by electronic mail or contact our volunteer representative in California who will help you:

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- 11 - - 12 - - 13 - - 14 - - 15 - - 16 -

The interior of one of the Catholic churches in Harbin as it is today.

Priests in Harbin, Father Van Ti Sen, 82, who spent 21 years in prison and Father Tin Shi Tuen who is recently ordained. Between them, the trustee of our Blagoveschensk parish, Alexander Rinaysky.

Father Christopher Zuger (front) and his deacons and parishioners in Our Lady of Perpetual Help Byzantine Catholic Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico, who gave us many liturgical items which will be used in Blagoveschensk.

The Twelfth Station from the new set of stations we received from The Church of the Resurrection in Clymer, Pennsylvania.

Our Marian statue on Easter Sunday, under the Relic of the True Cross which we received from the Propagation of the Faith office of St Paul and Minneapolis.

The open front door of the new Blagoveschensk Catholic Parish Center.

The first mass in our own building, September 11, 19987.

Confirmation in our former meeting place, our trustee's tourist office.

First baptisms in the new Catholic Parish Center, "The Transfiguration of the Lord."

The wedding of Mr and Mrs Alexander Revtsov in Blagoveschensk.

Miroslava Igorevna Efimova, Vladivostok Parish Archivist.

Procession and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament on the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, August 15, 1997.

Mr and Mrs Ozburn and Fr Myron in Jerusalem.

Zhenya Balanov at the radio station control center. Will he be able to announce a Catholic radio program?

Sisters Anna, Julia, and Alicia when they visited Vladivostok.

Our driver Anatoly Petrovich with his "new" car.

Representatives from all over the Pacific at our "Partnership" meeting.

First communion and confirmation of children from the Romanovka parish with Bishop Werth.

Our benefactor, Mrs Eunice Abrahams of Australia with her rose petal from Mary.