

Return to Nakhodka

by Brother Paul Brooks, M.S.C.

[Brother Paul Brooks, an Australian Missionary of the Sacred Heart, has visited Russia several times to explore the possibilities of working here. At last he has come to Nakhodka to teach English at a Russian private school and to help the parish of Our Lady of the Pacific. We are hoping that his experience will help us eventually to have a Catholic school in our area. These are some notes from his newsletter which he sends to his friends and benefactors.-- ed.]

I came to Nakhodka first around September 10th, [1997] just in time for the first school term of the year. My visa was limited to three months and it had taken a month in Vladivostok to sort things out, so I had only two months in Nakhodka before having to leave for Japan to change my visa.

My school, "Leaders School", was founded in Nakhodka in 1991 by a group of teachers. The government has lent them a building (formerly a kindergarten) and the school is somewhat crowded with classes which go from year 1 to 11. The school has been registered for another five years and given permission to add a 12th year, which will offer vocational courses and diplomas. The school administration is very keen to have collaboration with Australia and would welcome a joint venture.

When I first arrived in Russia I came on a "religious work" visa. Unfortunately there has been a great deal of turmoil in Russia on the religious front and it was being suggested that the Catholic Church would be banned under the "15 year rule". So local officials were treating the new law as if it was in the original form, and not renewing "Religious Work" visas. So I had to get another, different one. The Australian Consul was very helpful and I managed to get a letter of invitation from the state administration inviting me as a technical adviser on secondary education. And best of all, for one year.

Mass is held once a month in Nakhodka when the parish priest calls from Vladivostok. It is held in a hall borrowed from the Music Institute. There are about forty practising Catholics and the hall is packed. The parish community has a local leader, Leila Abbasovna, and she and they would dearly love to have somewhere permanent where they could base CARITAS for work with the poor, and have somewhere for the priest to stay when he visits. The trouble is they don't have the money. An apartment would cost about \$25,000 Australian dollars.

Nakhodka has a population of about 190,000 people. It was
If there is someone out there who feels the call to do something about this most *disevangelized* part of the world (remember that oppressive communism was in power for over 74 years, and the average life expectancy for a Russian male is

founded about 50 years ago. The word Nakhodka has a similar meaning to a word Australians are familiar with: Eureka.

A young man said to me that he is surprised that he does poorly in Russian at school, but well in English, "for Russians English is easy, but Russian is hard, like Chinese" he said.

There may be some truth in what he said. I have certainly learned that Russian is hard! Most Russians study English at secondary school, and they can teach most of us a lot about English grammar. The problem is that very few of them have ever met a native speaker of English, so they are scared of using it.

Two nights ago I attended a meeting of the English Speaking Club and enjoyed a very erudite presentation on the poetry of Robert Frost. There was about 50 in attendance and it was well done. The amazing thing is that they are so good, given their lack of exposure to English speakers. Fr Daniel Maurer told me that shortly after he arrived in 1992 he attended a meeting of about forty teachers of English, none of whom had ever spoken to a native speaker of English! So they appreciate the opportunity to practice their English with native speakers, and that means of course that there is opportunity aplenty for speakers and educated people to provide something very useful to Russians. Part of my work here at the moment is to see how best we might make such a contribution.

I remember that an English teacher in Darwin, Australia, said to me that she thought she was very much a teacher of religion when she taught English, because so much of it has to do with values.

My problems at the moment have a lot to do with support from Australia. If I taught English all day I could probably do OK. The problem is that such a program is exhausting and means I have little time left to do anything else. Teaching English puts me in contact with a lot of Russians (about 160 at last count), and that's good, but there are other things that need doing, and I must research all the possibilities for the future. For that to happen I need on-going support from Australia. It doesn't mean huge amounts of money--a hundred dollars here, fifty dollars there--would make all the difference. Currently I'm in a temporary apartment (very basic, no bath, no shower, and water for about 5 hours a day) with no telephone, so I'm off the air as far as email is concerned. I don't even know what my address will be at the end of the week. I seem to have been living out of suitcases for about six months. About \$2500 AUD would make a big difference. I guess not having a phone, and not being able to unpack are the two biggest problems. Barry Smith msc, Box 252, COOGEE NSW, Australia, can get money to me.

56.7 years) which has lost any sense of religion, then your company and help would be welcome. Even coming on a tourist visa for three months would be a start. All those prayers said for decades in Australia for Russia won't bear much fruit if

nobody does anything about it now that the opportunity exists. The people are poor, very poor, and they have no idea what to do about their situation. The leaders are generally the same people that were in charge of oppression in the past, they have just adopted different guises now.

What's to do in Russia? There is a religious vacuum here. I don't like to use the word pagan, but others don't have such scruples, and possibly they are right. After all, what would one expect after more than 70 years of systematic oppression. Whatever they had, and they are one of the oldest Christian civilizations, has been very effectively taken from them by an oppressive regime.

There are signs of religious faith up here, and they usually take the form of icons of the Virgin and Child. But one senses that there is a lack of understanding...predictably so. On the human level the thing that strikes me most is the lack of trust. They have little faith in anything, least of all in what their neighbor might do, given half a chance. Can you imagine that everyone lives behind closed, steel doors with multiple locks. Recently a guy said, "If you are in trouble, don't call for help. Scream "Fire!"--that might bring them out, otherwise they'll just double lock the doors."

It's hard for us Australians to imagine such a response, but it's real. They are angry that the end of the Cold War has meant a savage deterioration in their living standards. Before Perestroika they enjoyed free accommodation, free transport, free heating, virtually free holidays, free quality medical care, and now, after conceding defeat in the Cold War they find that people have to pay for everything, and most things are not even available. There is a strong conspiracy theory that suggests that the "West" is deliberately keeping them poor so as to ensure that the Soviet threat never emerges again.

So we have to teach them faith and trust, but we also have to teach them that materialism is not the answer. At the same time we have to be telling western governments and people that exploiting the Russian people is not only unhelpful, but downright immoral.

So there are human and spiritual needs to be met. We can do that at a distance by various campaigns and protests, and we can do it on site by working with them in building a better world. We can talk about faith, but it must be one which enhances their human experience. One can't preach the Gospel to someone who is starving and desperate. There are practical things that need to be done. So this is the "acceptable time, this is the day of salvation." The question for each of us is, "What can I do?" For some it will mean coming here. For others it will mean helping those who come. Either way it is the work of Jesus and Mary. Pray that Mary continues to plead for the work of the Church in Russia.

Incidentally, the pastor wants me to get involved in the local juvenile prison where there are 800 inmates. That will prove

difficult as it is more than a hour away in Vrangle, and I understand conditions there are appalling. Leila tells me that they have no beds even. There seems to be four prisons between Vladivostok and Nakhodka.

At Last A Floor

by Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

It was so long ago I hardly remember when. It was probably 1995 when Judge Donald Wozniak of St Paul, Minnesota, hearing that we needed to tile the bare concrete floor in our Vladivostok church, contacted the "Schneider Carpet One" Company of St Paul, to see if they could donate a tile floor for the church. The company, with a long history of quality floor coverings, as well as a long history of Catholic activities, was operated by Mr Robert Schneider and his sons, Patrick and Mark. The store is located at 1112 W 7th Street in St Paul. They agreed to the expensive proposal, and they began to wonder just who would be available to lay the floor, what materials were available in Russia, and what instruments would be needed. In the end it was clear that not only the tiles would have to be donated, but all the materials, supplies, equipment, and even an employee would have to be sent to Russia to do the job correctly. Some of the materials could not be frozen, so the shipment of supplies would have to be done in the summer. Floor tiles are extremely heavy, especially the tiles chosen for us, which were Tarkett Classics architectural through-chip tiles, which will not show wear, since the patterns go all the way through the tile, and are not just a surface coat. Shipping such heavy tile from Minnesota to California would significantly add to the price. So the Schneiders decided to order the tiles and all supplies in California for delivery to our transhipper, Mahoney Exports in Brisbane, California, where one of our containers was being prepared for shipment.

Our nerves were on edge as the shipment of the container was getting later and later into fall. Finally the shipment was made in October, and we were relieved when we opened the container to find that the contents hadn't frozen--probably just because of the mass of the container, not because the weather on the North Pacific was not cold.

We began the huge process of getting the container and its contents through Russian customs. After all was done it seemed we could expect to lay the floor in the spring of 1996, when the weather would warm up--the church is too cold to lay the mastic for the tile in the winter time. Then we made the discovery that the number of boxes of tile did not correspond with the list sent by the Schneider's! Only the black tile had been shipped by the California company--all the white tile had been backordered, and we didn't know it. So we had to cancel plans to lay the floor, and the employee who had been waiting to get his visa and plane ticket to lay the floor over the Labor Day weekend was disappointed.

Greg Holman, a Schneider's employee, worked hard to get In November while he was gone I happened to mention to Wendell that we had all the materials for the floor but were waiting for the weather to warm up. In winter, because of our leaky windows which we will start to replace soon, our

the back-ordered tile to Brisbane for the next shipment, which would be made in the summer of 1997. Meanwhile, the Schneider family and we were grieved by the sudden death of Mark Schneider, one of the donors of the floor. We expect that the Lord, through the intercession of the Blessed Mother, will take into account the generosity of this man to the Church in Russia.

Finally the white tile arrived in the fall of 1997, but the weather was already getting cold, and we were afraid to lay the floor, expecting to wait again another year! It would be laid in a checkerboard fashion on a diagonal axis, as is the custom in Gothic churches. The edges of the church, and the area around the pillars would be black. The stairs would be edged in black.

Article continued by Fr Dan Maurer, C.J.D.:

Then suddenly in the late fall of 1997 providence intervened again and allowed us to complete the project in an unexpectedly quick and economical way. Mr Wendell Clarke a Jamaican who is now a citizen of Canada, came to the church for Mass one Sunday. After Mass he asked Fr Myron if he could take instructions to be baptized. Many of the members of his family are Catholic but he was raised Baptist as a boy. Because the Baptists do not baptize children and because he never stayed with it long enough, he was never baptized. We enrolled Wendell in our weekly Sunday afternoon baptismal lessons. He does not speak Russian, but the first five lessons are given in English with a Russian translation so he could understand them perfectly. He was baptized in our parish after Sunday Mass on November 23 with all the members of his class present. They would later be baptized during mass on the Sunday before Christmas, but by then Wendell would already be home in Toronto.

As we got to know Wendell we learned that he was here in Vladivostok with a Canadian construction firm to do the interior renovations of a number of bank buildings. His specialty-- you guessed it--is laying tile floors. Once when Fr Myron was talking to him after the lesson he mentioned that he would like to use his talent to do something special for the restoration of the church. He did not know that we had all the materials to lay the floor and were just waiting for the weather to warm up and for some specialist to come from the U.S. to advise our workers on how best to do the job. Since we were under strict orders from the Schneider Company not to lay the floor until the inside temperature of the building was above 70 degrees Fahrenheit Fr Myron proposed another project to Wendell. But before we could organize it Fr Myron left on his annual fund raising trip to the United States and his pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

worship space in the upper church hovers from 38 to 55 degrees depending on the wind chill factor. Wendell and his fellow worker Sidney Kerr, also a Jamaican and a citizen of Canada, specialists that they are, took a look at the tiles and at

all the floor leveling cement, fillers and adhesives, and were amazed that the Schneider Company had donated us the very best quality of everything. Sidney said more than once that such high quality adhesives were not available anywhere in Russia and that if we wanted to sell them he could get us a very good price! They both agreed that there would be no danger in preparing the old floor and in laying the new tile, even in the cold atmosphere of our upper church. So why wait!

In the last week of November, under the direction of Wendell and Sidney, our own team of workers began mixing and spreading the complex mixture of leveling cements and liquid and powder preparatory adhesives. It was then that I learned the hard way that a church, no matter how small it looks, is a large building. What a job! We mixed and poured and spread, and then, after the mixture dried, we went back with hand-held grinding stones to smooth out every wrinkle and finally to vacuum up all the dust.

After three days of preparatory work, Wendell and Sidney arrived in the evening (after a full days work at the bank) to begin actually laying the floor. It was then that I learned the difference between amateurs and professionals. You should have seen them work! We could not bring them the tiles fast enough. But still it is a large area, so it took five evenings (from 7 pm to 1 am), and all day Saturday just to lay the main floor area and sanctuary. We still have to finish the edges and stairways.

Since I could not expect our paid workers to work such late hours and since I usually did not know in advance which evenings Wendell and Sidney could be here, our two resident vocation prospects, Zhenya Balanyov and Oleg Yelchininov, and I worked as their helpers and gofers. The two young men became quite proficient at spreading adhesive ahead of the fast working Jamaicans. I contented myself with feeding them tiles and also with doing some of the tile cutting for edges and corners.

I kid Fr Myron that when he goes away each November he always leaves me with the big projects on purpose (removal of the third floor, return of the historic marble crucifix, laying the new floor.) Actually he does much more than all of us put together. It just seems that the big things come up when he is away. [I prepared well, but why stick around for the details?--ed.]

It was exciting for me to lay the first tile on the central chalk line that Sidney so painstakingly measured out. And it was exciting to see the diamond pattern of the floor taking shape. But it was most exciting to see the delight of our parishioners when they came to Sunday Mass and saw the new tile floor for the first time. What a contrast to the old, flaking, paint spattered, pockmarked concrete floor!

I was not the only one excited by the laying of the new

floor. Fr Myron returned from the United States the night that the major work on the floor had been completed. (What did I tell you about leaving the job to me?) As he walked into the building from the airport, with his hat and coat still on, after being gone on his longest trip ever (almost two months) Zhenya our younger vocation prospect, greeted him eagerly saying, "Hi! Have you seen the floor yet?"

Continued by Fr Myron:

When Wendell and Sidney left Russia, they had to take the most important thing with them, the large commercial tile cutter. But the floor was not done! So on my next trip to America in January, I had the task to buy and bring to Russia a commercial tile cutter. The cost was very high, but one can't do the job without it, and we hope to sell the used cutter after our floors are complete. Since I was leaving for Russia from St Paul it was again the Schneiders who helped me to find and buy at a discount the appropriate cutter. I had to carry the monster in my luggage, and pay customs on it, but now we can complete the floor ourselves. As each window is installed we can complete the floor to the end beneath it. As the vestibule and new chapel on the first floor are completed, they, too, will get a tile floor.

It has been a big project. We hope the floor will serve long and well. With the high quality materials donated by the Schneiders, facilitated by Judge Wozniak and installed at a fraction of the cost by professionals we think we have the best floor in the diocese--a diocese which is twice the size of the United States.

News Notes

by Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

- We are trying to reach out to the youth prison in Nakhodka. It seems that the prisoners there are in great need, not only materially, but especially spiritually. All are teenage boys who are serving time for varied offenses such as drug abuse and car theft. Brother Paul Brooks, M.S.C., from Australia is beginning to teach English at the prison. We are trying to figure out how to help the prisoners with much needed clothing and recreational equipment. We've started with some ping pong sets and basketballs, which we purchased. We also gave the prison a regulation basketball hoop and net donated by Judge Wozniak of St Paul, Minnesota. None of the boys have underwear or socks, since the prison can't afford to buy them. They also have only one set of outer clothing, which they must wash and put back on wet. We are trying to locate some resources to help these "bad boys".

- Earlier it was easy to import aid from the States, but now it has become almost impossible due to increased customs regulations and taxes on humanitarian aid. Our sister parish in St Paul, Nativity, brainstormed on how to solve the problem. It was decided to do an experiment where small packages are mailed directly to individual recipients who are prisoners or orphanage residents. If the packages get through, we will let you know, and expand the program.

- Welcome to a new sister parish, Our Lady of Sorrows in Snoqualmie, Washington. Father Jan Larson is pastor and Monte Lynch is facilitating communications by email. The parish has a struggle of its own--to build a new church and parish complex because the parish is growing rapidly. Nonetheless, they hope to have a program of reaching out to Russian children.

- At last we hope more effectively to help adoptable children and American couples seeking children to adopt. Our CARITAS has a new volunteer to coordinate things in Russia: Dr Marina Victorevna, who is a child psychologist and mother, and who is one of our parish CCD teachers. On the American end, we will be working with the Children's Home Society in St Paul, Minnesota, which is a non-profit organization with a 100 year history of helping with adoptions. Those wishing to begin an adoption process in Russia should call Mrs Carol Wahl at the Society, (800)952-9302.

- In a hurry to work in the prisons after it became possible for us, our helpers Yuri Byelozorov and Evgeny Balanyov conducted the first monthly lesson in Christianity at the High Security Prison #20 in Zavodskoy, Russia, on March 2, 1998. It means we are now regularly working in three prisons: One for women, one for men, and one for teenage boys. Of 1800 prisoners at Prison 20, 40 men attended the lesson. It seems

the men considered the event like being in the outside world, because the evangelizers treated them with respect, considered their opinions, and even called them by their first names, rather than "Convict", as they are usually addressed by guards. The topic for the night was, "The Human Condition: Sin, War, Murder." We'll watch how the program develops.

- Transfiguration Parish in Pittsford, New York decided to have a Lenten program for their sister parish, Transfiguration, in Blagoveschensk, Russia. The families of the parish were given baskets to place on their dining room tables during lent, and the proceeds at Easter will be used to buy seating for the Russian parish which has no furniture for its new chapel.

Meanwhile, in Blagoveschensk, the parish looked for the best kind of furniture to buy on the local market which will be at the same time economical and longlasting. They decided to order the seating special-made at the local furniture factory, which will also give work to local citizens. The seating will be based on Russian-style college classroom seating, without the writing tablets. It should be very long lasting, and economical. The contract has been let already: 86 seats at \$25, or \$2150.

- We are also excited to welcome the first sister to the Far East of Russia. Sister Kiyoko Sewa of the Visitation Sisters of Japan began her work in Khabarovsk in December, temporarily living with one of our parishioners. She was just settled in when she slipped on the ice and broke her leg, so she had to return to Japan for convalescence. We hope she will soon return, and two more of her sisters will join her this spring. The sisters are hoping to begin working with the elderly needy.

- Saturday, March 7, 1998, was an historic day for Father Dan and the Romanovka parish of the Holy Trinity. It was the first mass in the parish. 28 people attended mass. He was very pleased. Even though the parish has existed for two years, they haven't had mass, because Fr Dan usually combines masses for Romanovka and Bolshoi Kamyen, since the parishes are close together. But Romanovka has grown, so now he will begin a monthly mass there. The Romanovka people are very zealous evangelizers. Fr Dan found that there are three rooms available in the Officers' Club which are currently unheated and unused. He could rent them for the parish. Romanovka is a military town--Air Force--where many Chernobyl widows live. Their husbands died after flying emergency missions over the nuclear mishap in Chernobyl.

Recently Fr Dan also had a funeral in Romanovka. The deceased was Orthodox, but she had opened her home to the parish for classes and meetings, since the parish did not have a place for activities. There was no Orthodox priest, so Fr Dan had the funeral.

Somewhere in the small village of Romanovka the Soviet "hero" Lazo killed 200 sleeping American soldiers in 1919. Sometimes I think that there should be a monument there to those men (many of whom were probably Polish Catholics), and maybe that monument could be a chapel for the parish.

- Now that our "windows" project is nearing a successful conclusion, we have begun to look at the exterior of the church building in Vladivostok with its fallen bricks and 70 years of neglect. An Italian company has been working in Vladivostok for six years restoring other old historical buildings, so we asked them to help us evaluate the cost of restoring the brick exterior of our building. This restoration would not yet include adding the steeples, although this will also have to be done eventually. After study, they report that restoring the brickwork will cost \$189,000.00.

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CORRECTION: *Vladivostok Sunrise* #19 on page 12 mistakenly referred to the "Pacific Partnership for Human Development". The proper name is, "Asian Partnership for Human Development."

From the Editor...

Our Sister-Parish of Nativity in St Paul, Minnesota, who take care of sending our newsletter, asked us to make the newsletter smaller, but send it more often! It will be easier for them to take care of, cheaper to mail, and perhaps results in more awareness of our mission needs. So we are shifting to an 8-page format, and sending the newsletter every two months. The total quantity of pages in a year will be smaller. We'd like our readers' response to this change. God bless you.

--Fr Myron

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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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The new floor of our church--in time for Christmas of 1997.

Zhenya Balanyov working on the mastic.

Wendell, Oleg, and Sidney in the middle of their work.

Fr Dan and Wendell lay the first square.

Wendell in his baptismal robe, with Fr Dan and Wendell's godfather, Yuri Byelozorov.

Wendell spreads the first mastic.

The Nakhoda parish, having tea with Fr Myron on his 25th anniversary of ordination. At Fr Myron's left, Leila Abasovna, the parish trustee.

I to r: Brother Paul Brooks, M.S.C., who works in the Nakhodka parish, Our Lady of the Pacific. Maryknoll Father Benedict Zweber, pastor of St Jacob's Parish on Sakhalin Island, and Maryknoll Father Edward Schoellmann, pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish, Khabarovsk. Canon Daniel Maurer, pastor of St John the Evangelist Parish, Bolshoi Kamen and Holy Trinity parish, Romanovka.

Victor Anisimov, the chief teacher for our correspondence courses, including "Introduction to Christianity".

The proclamation of the Gospel in Vladivostok during Lent.

Our children at work in catechism class.

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.

Fr Nicolas McLoughlin, pastor of St Charles Borromeo Parish in Port Charlotte, Florida. Not only are Fr McLoughlin and his parish generous benefactors, they also took in one of our parishioners suffering from a type of cancer which was untreatable in Russia.