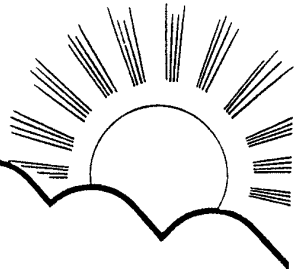


Vladivostok Sunrise

Mary Mother of God Mission Society Vladivostok Russia St Paul Minnesota

Issue Number Forty Nine January 1, 2003



The last of the Joyful Mysteries, "The Finding of Jesus in the Temple", as rendered in the new stained glass window in the Cathedral of the Most Holy Mother of God in Vladivostok. The window was donated by Mrs Mary McDonald of San Francisco, California.

From the development desk...

Dear Mission Supporters,

I know many of you have been waiting years to see this happen. We have developed a tour to the mission in the Far East of Russia. It will include an overnight to our parish in Lesozovodsk and a long day trip to Romanovka and Nakhodka. I can promise you will see everything we do and have fun as well. We will see the new waterfront park near Golden Horn Bay and attend a concert in the Cathedral of the Most Holy Mother of God. I am leading a visitors trip #1 for 11 days in May. It will be \$1000 for all expenses in Russia. You will need to book your airfare which will depend on where you will be coming from and if you might wish to use frequent flyer miles. There is an additional charge of \$70 for your VISA. This time is considered one of the beautiful times of the year in the Far East.

The wonderful news also is that we will have 3 trips in May! A brochure describes the first trip #1 that will be an 11 day trip April 26 to May 6. Some of you might receive the brochure with this newsletter. We are printing them as fast as we can. If you do not have a brochure in your newsletter, there is one you can print off of our website, or call the office. We would love to send you one.

We have another trip going May 6 to the 17 for mission team workers. This 12 day trip #2 will be only \$300 as you will stay in the parish apartment. This trip will be escorted by Janet Clark from Seattle. Janet has made 20 trips to Vladivostok. There will be no side trips as the focus will be on repairing the guest house, painting an orphanage room, cleaning up Sod Gorad with power equipment. Team members needed would be Forest Management persons, outdoorsman, plumbers, electricians, masonry, construction workers and visitors willing to spend 8 hours a day in the orphanages with Janet. She has many contacts with the various hospitals and homes for children. Complete the application form with only \$300 total payment for all expenses in Vladivostok. Many helpers find frequent flyer miles donated from parishioners or a parish might want to send a mission team.

Trip #3 will be for benefactors, foundation directors and parish representatives. It will be a 7 day trip from May 17 to 24 and escorted by Rosemary Winder Strange from Washington DC and Venice, Florida. Rosemary made a previous trip to Vladivostok. She is an old friend of Fr Myron and Fr Dan. Please adjust the dates for your trip on your registration form that is in the brochure. (Continued on Page 8.)

Our Benefactors

COME TO JESUS

*By Martha Osbun
Fort Smith, Arkansas*

As we prepare for Christ's birth during this season of Advent, I think this year will be more meaningful to me than any before. This past September 26-October 8th, I traveled with a group of 10 Americans to Vladivostok and saw the work of our Holy Catholic Church there. I also learned the stories of a people who had waited 70 years to be able to hear again the Good News of our Savior's birth. I learned what it means to treasure one's faith, and met people who go to great lengths to share that faith. Through my own experiences of those 10 days in the Russian Far East, I came to understand the importance of restoring our church there.

When we first arrived in Russia and in the city of Vladivostok, I found the surroundings to be bleak and depressing, and the living conditions very difficult. One could sense the hopelessness, the aftereffects of 70 years of communism. Our living quarters for our 10-day stay were in a dark building up 6 floors with no elevator. Five of us shared a room with rickety beds, a small, not-so clean kitchenette, and a tiny bathroom with no hot water. It was hard not to feel an intense loneliness for my family and the comforts of home.

Fortunately, the day after we arrived was Sunday, so we had the opportunity to experience hearing Mass in Russian for the first time. The first thing I noticed was that there was joy among the people who were coming into the church for Mass. There were bright faces and smiles, and children bringing flowers to place in vases under the crucifix. Most of the stained glass windows were now installed, so the church was absolutely beautiful. These are some of the most beautifully designed windows that I have ever seen. The colors are so bright and each one depicts an important event in Mary's life as the mother of our Lord Jesus.

And the music!--The *Salve Regina* to open the liturgy, the parts of the mass that are sung, and the songs for worship--the organ, violin and the voices were all so beautiful! To see Fr Myron and Fr Dan and our seminarian Zhenya process down the aisle behind the cross, and watch the two priests kiss the altar was beyond words. It was all overwhelming and very emotional to have the privilege of being present at Mass, in Russia! To hear such beautiful music and realize that not a note of liturgical music had been played or sung in this church for over 70 years brought me to tears.

I immediately began to understand the importance of the beauty present in our church here in Vladivostok, both in the physical surroundings and in the spirit among the people, and what it must mean to the parishioners here. This particular Sunday included the anointing of the sick and

elderly. They were helped to the front pews before Mass began by their families and fellow parishioners. As Fr Myron and Fr Dan anointed them with oil and laid hands on them in prayer, I couldn't help but think of the deep and long-term suffering these people must have experienced and were bringing to the feet of Jesus for healing. After Mass, a tea was held for these special parishioners. It had been prepared with simple elegance in their honor. Fr Myron sat and visited with each of them. Children and their parents were present, and music was provided for everyone's entertainment.

And when the parishioners noticed new faces in the crowd, they graciously welcomed us and served us tea. I had the privilege of meeting Sofia, an elderly woman who was one of the original members of the parish, and one of the six who came forth when the priests announced their arrival in the city. Her husband was one of the five martyrs executed by Stalin's soldiers when they were found praying the Rosary in secret. My friend Susan and I asked Fr Myron to introduce us to her, and he translated for us as we told her what an honor it was to meet her. She held our hands and smiled at us with her beautiful blue eyes. I knew for sure that I would see her again in heaven.

Experiencing the celebration of the Eucharist at the beginning of our week here gave me much-needed strength and encouragement for the next few days. Monday and Tuesday were difficult. I found it would not be easy to do the work that I had planned to do as a pediatric physical therapist, since no one in Russia seemed to understand what Americans knew as



Our author, Martha Osbun

physical therapy. It would take awhile for us to understand one another before any of what I had come to do could be accomplished.

Visiting the orphanage and the orthopedic children's hospital proved necessary in helping me understand both the conditions there as well as what the Russians knew as physical therapy. I was ready to begin working with the disabled children and begin teaching staff members some of the techniques we use in the U.S. What I saw of physical therapy here was further back in time than the techniques used before 1950 in the U.S. Nevertheless, the administrators and staff felt that they had the best treatment available and were not open to any ideas that an American might have to offer.

On Monday I was given a polite tour of the children's hospital and told that their doctors, who later I learned were physical therapists, were highly trained and qualified. It would not be possible for me to come in and work with their children. Tuesday at the orphanage was equally non-productive. I had prayed for weeks before I left the United States that if there were families who had a handicapped child at home, that I might be able to meet them and offer help. I knew that with our Church's work to show dignity and respect to each life and to value families, there may be a trend developing for families to care for their child's special needs at home instead of giving them to an orphanage.

I soon learned that two of the staff members at the church each had a young child who had problems with development. These parents had been researching books to find techniques and ideas to help their children, and were very glad for assistance. I sat down with one father whose wife and baby had not yet joined him when he moved to Vladivostok. We sketched out a home exercise program, using pictures and a stuffed animal to communicate when language failed us. And I was able to make several visits to another family's home to begin treating their child, and to teach the parents how to do the exercises he needed. Once the staff began to see what this type of physical therapy was about, it was arranged for me to see more children with their parents. I even began to see parents share the information with one another!

The mission society had purchased a special walker for us to bring over and teach the hospital staff how to use. It had many adjustments and attachments that would enable a wide variety of children to get up on their feet and possibly learn to walk. It was a new product on the market in the U.S. With the help of the Caritas coordinator I was able to return to the children's hospital with a translator, and with this large gift in tow. They were much more receptive to my visit this time. I met with the "physical therapy doctor", who was elated to be shown this walker and asked if we could try it with some children.

One 7-year-old boy was so excited at his new ability to move and take steps in it that he exclaimed: "Who invented this?"

The hospital administrator was deeply touched by the gift for his children there, and told me that no new equipment had been provided for them in over 12 years. He had a hard time understanding that American Catholics had purchased the equipment, and through the Catholic Church in Vladivostok and Caritas, it was being given to the children at his hospital. He said, "I just can't believe how you Americans would love our children".

One thing that became very important to all of us in our group was that we would come back together each day for prayer, or Mass in the church, and to have meals together. This community, this body of Christ, was very important for our encouragement, our survival, and our ability to accomplish any kind of work. We shared our stories, and the conversation at each meal with the staff and priests was like a history or a theology lesson. And there was always at least one good laugh. These gatherings took place in the basement of the church, which served as the parish hall and included the church offices.

The priests even live in very small rooms in the church, as there is no rectory for them. It was in this parish hall, as I was waiting to meet someone, or putting together a home exercise program for a parent, that I experienced the heart of the parish. There was constant activity: an AA meeting, a Bible study, Caritas activities, meeting with one of the priests, liturgy planning, a youth group meeting, to name a few. This is where I saw or met some of the most devoted and talented people in the world. They were working harder than any people I had ever met to bring the light of Christ into their world.

Thursday evening was the most enjoyable part of our week in Russia. Fr Dan had arranged for a concert to be held in honor of the birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. The concerts were simply evangelical genius. Since Benediction had just been held an hour or so earlier to wrap up a day of adoration to the Blessed Sacrament, the sweet smell of incense was still in the air as the people arrived. The seats had all been turned around to face the choir loft, so they were also facing the beautiful marble crucifix.

Yuri, the evangelization director, was the narrator, reading an eloquent introduction to each piece, which told about the Mother of God and a role that she plays in our church. The music included organ, chamber orchestra, and voices, and was all very beautiful. At the end of the concert, the people stayed to mill around the church, view the stained glass windows, and ask questions. Fr Dan was the gracious host. The people had come dressed in their finest clothes. I realized that they had arrived and would depart in the dark by way of the steep unpaved hills that led to and from the church. It took quite some effort for them to be there, but it was obviously worth it to them. They too experienced the beauty of the Catholic Church in their city, and heard stories and music about Mary and her son Jesus.

On our second Sunday in Vladivostok, we again were able to attend Mass at The Most Holy Mother of God parish. By now

it was feeling like home, and so many of the parishioners now recognized us, greeted us with smiles and hugs and made us feel like we were a part of the parish. As our stay in Vladivostok was winding down to the last few days, instead of being so anxious to return home, we were beginning to feel like we could use more time there.

Each of the travelers had so many experiences to share. We had gone in different directions all week, visiting the many programs, projects, and activities that were underway or being developed through the direction and vision of Fr Myron and Fr Dan. Susan Gray and Fr Dan conducted a two-day music workshop, and musicians from all of the outlying parishes had attended. A group went to Russian Island to see where a treatment center for alcoholics would possibly be located. Another group visited the elderly in the town of Romanovka.

We were amazed at the extent of it all, and at how many outlying parishes have been started and are growing. We saw the charitable work of the church thriving in this part of the world, operating under very difficult circumstances. Young adults in their 20s and 30s are doing amazing work here, running women's support centers, teaching classes, feeding the street children, and doing evangelization programs. We heard the priests challenge the parishioners to learn the faith and to practice it in every aspect of their lives. After all, they are now the ones making a history for others to follow as their church is being restored and the faith renewed. When I saw the sweet children in the parish, I knew that life would be much more hopeful for them as they were being brought up with a knowledge of Jesus Christ.

We were blessed to have Sister Julia as part of our group from the United States. She asked Yuri, if a group of sisters were to come to live in Vladivostok, what could they do? His reply was, "To just be sisters. We need only to see you!" What is so important, he said, is to see evidence that the faith is coming back!

We experienced only a few of the difficulties that the Russian people have all the time. And we saw what it meant to these people to have beauty brought back to them through the Catholic Church, to experience the community and hope found in the body of Christ, and to again have the Eucharist to sustain them in all their circumstances. I now understand what it means to pray for our one holy Catholic apostolic Church.

Before the week was out, Fr Dan played a song for us from a tape of last year's Christmas concert. It is entitled "Come to Jesus". The refrain seems to summarize everything about the return of the Church in Russia:

Come to Jesus, receive His love.
He is our Savior, the son of the God of love.
Accept Jesus, the King of Kings.
He has been waiting to show you His love.
Come right away! Come to Jesus.

I loved this song when I heard it, because I knew this is what the presence of our priests, and our Holy Catholic Church in Vladivostok, Russia is finally, after 70 years, saying to a people who waited.

How to Communicate with Us

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Please do **not** send any **donations** of any kind directly to Russia. For donation information, see below.

Letters without donations can be sent to:

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Volodarskovo 22
690001 Vladivostok RUSSIA

Office in America:

Phone and FAX: (651)227-0208 and (651)690-5139

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Internet: English language: <http://www.vladmission.org>

Donations of money and **letters** should be sent to:

Mary Mother of God Mission Society
1854 Jefferson Ave
St Paul MN 55105-1662

Or you can donate from your credit card through our web site. Your donations are tax-deductible. You will receive any required receipt for IRS tax purposes by return mail.

Donations in kind. If you have items that you think we can use, please contact Mrs Sandra Sonnen at the Mission Office in St Paul giving a complete list of items.

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Remember
"Mary Mother of God Mission Society"
in your will.

First Conference in Russia of St Joseph's Covenant Keepers

By V Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

Steve Wood and Patrick Long came to Vladivostok from Port Charlotte, Florida, to hold the first conference of St Joseph's Covenant Keepers in Russia. The conference which was held on October 26-27 was attended by some 40 Russian men from throughout the Vladivostok Deanery of the Diocese of St Joseph.



Steve Wood (r.) with his Russian translator Victor Anisimov.

It was a successful conference, in which many of the Russian men were faced for the first time with the importance of fatherhood for the health of their children and families, an importance that the Communists tried to forget. The government bureaucrats invented all kinds of substitutions for fatherhood, and I've often seen that the place of the father in the family is taken by the grandmother. Because of abortion, many moms had only one daughter, and so it is natural that after—or even before—her daughter's divorce, the family becomes grandma, mom, and two kids. The suicide rate among elderly men in Russia is astounding, and the average age of death of Russian men is 57, compared with 79 in America, and many of these deaths are from self-destructive behavior if not suicide.

One of the few places in Russian society still occupied by men—besides the bureaucracy—is the military, but with the end of the cold war, the military is being cut back to a volunteer army which means that there are almost no role models in society for men. In Russia there are very few men doctors, extremely few men teachers (and they are considered to be strange), and, after the military, what is one left with?—Hollywood stars, sports figures (of which there are also few in Russia except martial arts experts), and the mafia which show their strength in every level of society. So the Church, too, is trying to reach out to men and boys to help heal and to teach what ought to be. In later years the Communist government

proposed that the family is the nucleus of society, but there wasn't much left of the nucleus!

Positive Results from the Conference in the opinion of the Russian-side organizers:

1. The Conference actually occurred; more than 40 men took part from the whole of the Vladivostok Deanery.
2. The Conference was really necessary for the men, and especially for the fathers (including future fathers). It gave the men the moment to think about their own fatherhood and their own role in the family. Judging by the men's questions during the Conference, it became obvious that men and fathers need guidance.
3. The Conference was not only good for the fathers, but also for those who are preparing to be fathers.
4. It was a good idea to have the Conference with only men present. That gave a flavor of the seriousness for men of the information conveyed. There was a feeling of masculine solidarity.
5. The Conference didn't try to overload the men with information.
6. Steve forewarned Russian men about the things that sometime take away the attention of fathers during the time they should form their children, including such concrete things as pornography, the influence of the mass media, the bad effects of the children's peers, and that it is impossible to be a full father without taking part in the formation of the children.



Time for questions from the Russian men.

Negative Results:

1. Considering the fact that our initiative needs support from the clergy, it was sad that priests from other cities in Russia did not take part in the conference even though they were invited. Are our priests the only ones who care?
2. Few of the participants in the Conference can become leaders without further education.
3. The Conference was a bit too monological, and would have been helped by a variety of presenters (of course we don't have anyone trained yet in Russia to be presenters.)



Many of the talks were accompanied by a powerpoint system.

4. The contents of the Conference sometimes weren't attuned to the Russian conditions (naturally), with many American problems like internet pornography; the statistics were American, and there was much talk about the problems of the American family instead of the Russian one.
5. The teaching was more centered on the preservation of good families and the passing on of values to the next generation, than on the correction of the problems of troubled families, which is the Russian situation.
6. There probably should be more attention given to the Russian facts of extremely small apartment and the dangers of the street when talking about teenage dating.
7. While the powerpoint presentations were fine, more real, concrete examples would have been appreciated.

Did we achieve the purpose for which the Conference was held? There were two purposes:

1. To attract men to a more active participation in the Church.
2. The help solve family problems.

Obviously the Conference all by itself can't solve the problem of passive churchmen and family problems. But it is important that men actively participated in the life of the church and in the transformation of their own families. Men should play the leading role in the family, not dismissing the wife's place in the heart of the family. Therefore it is necessary to continue to work with men in general, and with those men who participated in the Conference. In that way this conference can and should become a beginning of new activities in the parish and in the deanery.

We must plan for the future. It was decided to have activities on three levels:

1. Deanery—more conferences in other deanery cities. Yuri Byelozorov, the catechetical director for Most Holy Mother of God Parish, has been asked to organized futher conferences.
2. Long-term plans and projects must include the founding of a scouting group (initially for boys), work with men in prisons, and the founding of a center to help families, including marriage preparation, preparing mentoring couples. It would



Group picture of those who attended all three days.

also be good to help found a lobbying group to work at the local, regional, and national level to improve the legal conditions for the family. It would also be helpful to create centers for help to men about finding work, retraining workers, recruiting workers.

3. Local Actions to solve current problems would be the occasional calling together of the men of the parish in "huddles" to decide what can be done and who can do it. This should attract a wider circle of men from the parish to action.

Obviously our plans will need financial support, but the benefits to Russian society should be very great, and the Catholic Church will be able to a real good for Russia through further work with men.

News Notes

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

- One of the fun things we priests get to do is to regularize marriages of Catholics that were entered into during the Soviet era when there were no priests. This is the marriage photo of Mr and Mrs Vladimir Kaspruk who married in our chapel on December 19. The bridesmaid was their daughter. How pretty the couple is, even today!



- The Second River Women's Support Center reports the following incident. The Director, Olga, told me that a lady who was 45 years old called her because she was afraid of the advice that her doctor had given her. Her doctor told her that she had a cyst that required a hysterectomy. But the lady had her doubts but didn't know where to turn, so she called the Women's Support Center and came to talk. Olga referred her to a second opinion at the gynecologist that the Center uses, who gave her an ultrasound test. It turns out that the lady was simply pregnant! She was delighted, because she and her husband had no children, but always wanted them. Apparently the first gynecologist had no idea that a 45 year-old lady would want to give birth, and simply recommended a hysterectomy instead!



Olga and her husband with Fr Myron at the time of the blessing of their apartment.

- In St Paul, Minnesota in the St Agnes Parish, Sister Julia Kubista is starting a private association of women who want to join a new religious community. Already professed sisters as well as interested women under 35 are welcome to inquire. She will also train lay volunteers for 1 to 3 year commitments to serve in Russia. The women and volunteers will study and attend the Russian studies program at St Thomas University in St Paul, and operate a retreat center in St Paul. The new community will be named "the Missionaries of Jesus the Lord." It will be a companion order to our priests' new order in Russia. We are in great need of women and lay volunteers to come to help both in America and in Russia.

- On December 29 I appointed a new trustee for the Parish of Our Lady of the Pacific in Nakhodka. He is Vitaly Orlovsky, 29 years old. Vitaly came to us from Novosibirsk after he finished the seminary, but decided not to be ordained, so we are happy to have a trustee with theological training, and one so young. He will work as full time trustee, which is also a first for the parish which has been without a fulltime resident since Brother Paul Brooks, M.S.C. had to leave Russia because of ill health and return to his native Australia. We are very much hoping that he will be able to work with the youth and adults alike.

Retiring after serving the parish for eight years as trustee is Lelia Abasovna Yashinko. She was the first and only trustee

until now, and saw the parish through all the growing pains of the first years. She had no training other than her baptismal lessons, but served very well, especially when one considers that the priest visited the parish only one day per month, and that for only several hours! She worked without pay of any kind. She will continue on the parish council, and she currently heads the Nakhodka CARITAS Women's Support Center which she will continue. Now she will be freer to expand that work.



The new trustee in Nakhodka, Vitaly Orlovsky, Pastor Fr Myron, and retiring trustee Leila Abasovna Yashenko.

Meanwhile, after eight years the parish has grown, but still has no church or chapel. Now a gracious benefactor has made a donation which hopefully will allow to us buy premises for a chapel and office area for the parish. The old parish apartment can continue to be used as the residence for the trustee or as a residence for a future pastor if the Lord will send us a fulltime priest. Nakhodka is our oldest parish which still does not have a chapel. So now is the time, God willing! Pray for vocations!

- Work is continuing on the repair of the façade of our church building. The Chinese company worked until it was really too cold and windy, but they will return after Chinese new year to continue their work. We are about half finished with the existing façade. Then we have to repair the downspout system and the minor towers. Will we be able to add the steeples some day?



Workers repairing bricks and mortar near the roof.

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From the development desk... **(Continued from Page one)**

We are in need of parishes to visit. Please consider mentioning us to your Pastor. We have received 9 parish invitations from friends who approached their Pastors for us.

We are contacting local Catholic foundations. We are asking them to consider us in their charitable giving. If you wish to be a reference in your area please contact the mission office. We have done several cities already and we have 2 applications from foundations. We generate the letter; you sign it and mail it.

We are sending another container to Russia. Religious goods, contents of churches, computers (pentium or better), sewing machines, sewing supplies, cloth (yard goods), yarn, especially needed. No clothing at this time. We would like to do a clothing container in the future if this one goes through Customs.

God love you and your family,
Sandra Sonnen
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Christmas in Vladivostok scenes.

