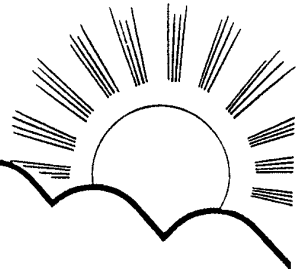


Vladivostok Sunrise



Mary Mother of God Mission Society Vladivostok Russia St Paul Minnesota

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The Visit of Regina Stanko

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

On July 16 Regina Stanislavovna Stanko arrived by train from Tomsk with her daughter Rita and grandson Andre. She is the last witness to the funeral of Bishop Slivovsky that we know of, so we were anxiously awaiting her visit. Her health held up on the three day trip from Tomsk in Siberia, even considering her age of 82! She was interested to come to see the places of her childhood, and we wanted her to come to help us with any more facts related to Bishop Slivovsky and the other events of those times of her childhood.

As a little girl she used to take milk to the sick bishop daily, taking the train from her home in First River to Sidanka where the bishop was exiled. She walked the paths to his home where he lived on a porch, and where he said his daily mass—the last in the Russian Far East. She remembers him well.

After Bishop Slivovsky's death, his funeral was organized by her father Stanislav. She remembers often passing by the grave. It was she who saved the photographs of the bishop's grave, which gave us the exact date of his death. What is still unclear to us is the location of the grave. I walked with her from the Bishop's house to where she thought the grave should be. There is no cemetery in this area at the present time, possibly due to the construction of the Federal Highway #1 and the major water main which serves Vladivostok, both of which are in this area. Local residents say that there was a "Korean" cemetery in this area, but they aren't sure where it was. So for now, finding the bishop's grave will depend upon the opening of new archival materials from the so-called "Tomsk Archive"—a collection from the Vladivostok Archive that was taken to Siberia during World War II to save it from damage in case of a Japanese attack. The materials are currently in Vladivostok, but not ready for public access.

Mrs Stanko made a little trip to Okeansky Station to see if she could recognize the place where her parents had a dacha. The dacha where Fr Yerkevich lived was the adjoining one. Fr Yerkevich is the last priest and pastor of Vladivostok's Most Holy Mother of God Parish, who died in prison in Siberia after being arrested for having some silver coins (It was just an excuse.) It seems that Stalin doubled the sentences of all those convicted as being "enemies of the people", so, although he had been sentenced to ten years, Fr Yerkevich died in his eleventh year of imprisonment. She did indeed find the dacha, and pointed out where Fr Yerkevich lived. She vividly



Father Myron, Regina, and Rita in front of the Bishop's Home.

remembers the day when Fr Yerkevich came out of the woods carrying a shovel, but she does not know the significance of the event.

Mrs Stanko's father, because of his relationship with the bishop, priest, and Catholic parishioners, also became an "enemy of the people" under the Communists. A black stripe was placed in his passport and the passports of all the members of the family. Therefore Stanislav quickly gathered his family in the middle of the night and left for Tomsk where he had distant relatives. In spite of the haste he brought with him what remained of the bishop's things—which Regina has now returned to the Vladivostok parish. In Tomsk Stanislav was able to get new passports without a black stripe for each member of the family. He insisted that Regina take her mother's maiden name in the new passport, as a way of preserving her possibilities to get an



The old chapel in the woods where the Bishop funeral was reported to have taken place. The burial was nearby.

education, so that there was no link with her father in her passport. Mrs Stanko then studied to be a doctor, so I suppose that by our standards, I should refer to her as Dr Stanko, although in Russia physicians aren't referred to by title.

During WWII she worked as a Soviet Army doctor, and received many medals, which she still wears today on her jacket when she dresses formally, in the Russian style.

On Sunday we had a special reception at the church for Regina. It was a chance for the parishioners to express their thanks to her also for the wonderful difference that she made in the life of the parish. After her lifetime of service she and her

daughter—also a doctor--and grandson live in a small two-room apartment, surviving on the tiniest pension that doctors in Russia receive—because doctors were among the lowest paid professions in Russia during the Communist era. So her pension is the tiniest.



Andre was baptized during the visit in the Vladivostok Church.

It was a wonderful visit. It was fun to show Andre what a wonderful greatgrandfather he had, and what a wonderful difference he made in the life of the Church in Vladivostok. It was almost as if his greatgrandfather were alive today, showing us all the places which were so important historically, and allowing us to try to touch and understand the great saints of our parish, especially Bishop Slivovsky and Father Yerkevich. Thanks to Regina for her courage to come visit us. She said it would be the last time she would be able to visit Vladivostok.



During the reception after mass. Regina is in the middle.

Summer Youth Activities 2003

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

This summer has seen a real step forward for our summer youth activities, developments which promise to continue for the future. The first reason is the financial support of the charitable organization of the bishops of Germany, RENOVABIS. This organization earlier helped us by funding half the cost of our “Windows Project”, thus allowing us to install new aluminum frames for the stained glass windows provided by our American benefactors. This time RENOVABIS funded two projects for us to the tune of 8100€-- The Far Eastern Catholic Youth Conference, and our Bicycle Pilgrimage.



Demonstrating the bicycles RENOVABIS bought for our programs.

Both programs were very successful, and the purchase of the bicycles will be a useful part of our summer programs for years to come. The second reason is the initiative and creative ideas of our Director of Evangelization Yuri Byelozorov, whose interest in the youth programs keeps him super-busy all summer. I'd like to tell you about these programs one by one, in the order in which they occurred.

The Walking Pilgrimage. This is our tradition activity meant for the “in-between” crowd—too young for the Youth Conference, and too old for Children’s Camp. Our pilgrims walked from Nativity Parish in Ussurisk to Annunciation Parish in Arsenyev—a nine day walk! Yuri Byelozorov lead the pilgrims. The day begins with a campfire breakfast and prayer, including a theme for meditation for the walk. Fr Sebastian traveled to say mass several times for the pilgrims. One such mass was held near the old bridge in the city of Anuchino. It is a beautiful area which would make a perfect golf course if someone were interested. The vegetation has been eaten short by the sheep that graze there, and so it has to be one of the prettiest places in our state—reminds one of New Zealand. I met the pilgrims in Arsenyev for the final mass. It is clear that the walking pilgrimage really does have its effect on

people. They are extremely grateful that they committed themselves to it, and always say that they would do it again.



Tents and food were loaded on the van and taken to Ussurisk for the start of the pilgrimage. Yuri Byelozorov(l) led the pilgrimage. Kristina Pavlova was the main cook (next in line), and Sister Evgenia (middle) led some of the prayers. Two of the pilgrims were from Romanovka.

Supper in the open field after a day’s walk.



The Bicycle Pilgrimage. This was the first time for such a pilgrimage, which, of course, was very interesting for the youth. The bikers took seven days to travel the approximately 200 miles between Nativity Parish in Ussurisk and Visitation Parish in Lesozovodsk. The plan of the pilgrimage was similar to the walking pilgrimage, with morning prayer and the theme of the day which made for meditation along the route. I was worried about the high level of traffic on Federal Highway One between those cities, but there were no dangerous incidents. Nighttime camping and meals around the campfire with prayers led by

Yuri completed the day. The only mass celebrated during the pilgrimage was the final one with the parishioners of Lesozovodsk who were on hand to greet the pilgrims and offer them hospitality and a hot shower.



Bikers arrive at the Lesozovodsk city limits.

The Far Eastern Catholic Youth Conference. This year's conference, the seventh annual, was centered on the theme "The Christian Life of Youth". The theme gave us the chance to look at each youth to gauge his or her talents and abilities, and to see how these might fit into the big picture of our parishes and our service programs.

To help each person better see his or her own personality, we each took the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory, newly translated into Russian by Fr Myron and his Russian teacher. There was time for explanations of what each personality type meant. We combined this with looking at the variety of gifts and ministries that are needed and used in the church. Each day's theme centered on one of these.

The Conference was headed by our lay theologian Cyril Voitsel, who teaches Theology at the technical university in Vladivostok. Fr Thomas Klayvon from Blagoveschensk served as Chaplain.



Many of the discussions took place in a group setting.

The first day we dealt with the variety of gifts from a Biblical perspective. The theme of the second day was "natural vocations", like teaching and the healing professions. We also looked at religious vocations and the vocation to marriage, which, in the situation of our world, looks more and more like a religious vocation for couples! We tried to understand just what the great needs of the Church in Russia

will be during these next years when the youth will come to adulthood. We concentrated on how we could better meet the prayer needs of our young people. Of course all that was the mornings' activities.

In the afternoon we concentrated on the annual business of our Conference by dividing into three groups: Those at the conference for the first time studied Scripture. The eldest group dealt with NFP and remote marriage preparation. The middle group dealt with apologetics and ecumenism.

The Conference attendees were very positive about their experience. We began with some difficult physical problems at our Sod-Gorod facility, because there was no water. But this didn't dampen the spirits of the participants who finished the Conference in a very positive mood.



Keeping everybody satisfied at mealtime in Sod-Gorod was Maria's job, and she did great! Everybody commented about the delicious food.

Last year the conference was held in Blagoveschensk. The year it was Vladivostok, and next year it is Khabarovsk's turn to host the Conference.

"Oasis" Children's Gathering. Sod-Gorod was the setting for this year's children's gathering. Our theme this year was "The Sacraments", so each day's lessons and activities was geared to one of the sacraments.

But the experience was really different this year! Part of the camp experience for the boys was hiking in the woods, sometimes camping overnight, and cooking on campfires! We wanted to give them an experience similar to Scouting, in the hopes that many will then want to join our new scout troops. Our "scoutmaster" Yuri Byelozorov (who has four boys of his own) taught the catechism lessons on the road as part of the program for the boys.

The girls remained at Sod-Gorod for their programs under the careful eye of Marina Malinina who is in charge of our Sunday school program. So there were days when boys and girls were together, and other days when their programs were separate.



Yuri and Marina met with the campers and staff “under the bigtop” at the start of the camp.

Everybody’s hungry at camp-- Including the three Americans who attended—here in the background.



The boys during one of their hikes, this one at Bishop Slivovsky’s last home.



Time for supper at the end of the trail.

News Notes

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

- Friday, August 1, was a kind of historic day for us. A very large group of Chinese Catholics came to the church for a tour from the city of Taiyuan. We didn’t know they were coming. In fact, I was on a bus to our parish in Lesozovodsk at the time. They climbed to the second floor where we celebrate mass and where the tabernacle is located, and all together sang the *Salve Regina*. It was interesting for our Russians to hear—two very different cultures united by a common song in Latin to the Blessed Virgin! The Chinese were especially fascinated by the four large bells which stand in our vestibule, waiting for a donor to build our steeples. We hope there will be many more such tour groups coming. When the church is fully repaired we hope our church will become a pilgrimage site, and probably the greatest number of pilgrims will be from China!

- A wonderful book has just been published which truly does reflect life in our part of Russia. *The Other Side of Russia: A Slice of Life in Siberia and the Russian Far East*, by Sharon Hudgins (Texas A&M University Press, 2003). I happened upon it in the Anchorage Public Library. Congratulations, Sharon, for really capturing life in Russia as we have known it.

- One of the solutions to our lack of vocations in Russia would be for us to start a Catholic school again. The Vladivostok parish had a school with grades 1-8 before the Revolution. Probably if we started a school today it could be self-funding after the initial costs are paid. Perhaps we can dream. The fact of the matter is that we haven’t found funds to build our

rectory/parish center, which also means that we can't finish the repair of the church building either, because we can't do one without the other. All parish offices and activities are in the church until we can move them to another building, and only then can we remove the last walls and the floor that was added by the Communists, and so restore the church to its former condition. It is interesting that through these economic uncertain times of terrorism and war, the Russians held onto any dollars they had, believing in the economic stability of America more than in that of Europe. Half the old school building is still standing, and we could purchase it back from the city.

- What a surprise that I suddenly found myself in Anchorage, Alaska! I forgot that my Russian visa was good for only nine months, and not one year as usual. The reason for the short visa was that my passport expires in February, and it is customary not to grant visas for the last six months of a passport. So I found it necessary to get out of Russia ASAP to get a new passport and visa. The new passport was easy to get in Seattle, and now I'm in Anchorage waiting for word of a new visa. I have my tickets back to Vladivostok, so as soon as I get the word, I'm on my way. I hope it doesn't take long, because at the present moment there is only one priest in the whole state of Primorye where Vladivostok is located—Fr Sebastian DeSilva, my assistant. Fr Dan is on a fundraising trip throughout the USA. The Franciscans are waiting for their visas in Korea. The new priests for Nakhodka from the Diocese of Seoul still have not received their visas yet. So poor Fr Sebastian has his hands full! Luckily, once the youth camp was over, it is kind of a low time for the parishes as families finish their summer plans and get ready for “back to school”. Of course all of this travel and passport and visas are expensive, but it is the price we have to pay to do missionary work in Russia. Thank you for your financial support! Thanks, too, to the Archdiocese of Anchorage which is always ready and willing to help out in Russia. They gave me a place to stay while I'm here in Alaska.

- Andrew Poole, an Eagle Scout who is studying theology in Rome came to help us try to get the scouts off to a good start. He met with boys and potential leaders in Vladivostok, Nakhodka, and Lesozovodsk. He worked with the boys on knot tying and the proper way to build a campfire. With the



adults he explained the theory of Scouting. Founding the Scouts is one of our projects for formation for boys in Russia. Most boys are from broken homes, and have little contact with their fathers, who mostly remarry.

Andrew and his translator, Viktor Anisimov.

- Recently we had to pay \$5210 in taxes! Taxes are high in Russia because of socialism and because of the large social burden of so many unemployed and elderly persons who have no one to care for them. So you see that our mission is still truly dependent upon your help. We are also struggling to increase our local help. Please accept our gratitude for your part in supporting our mission.

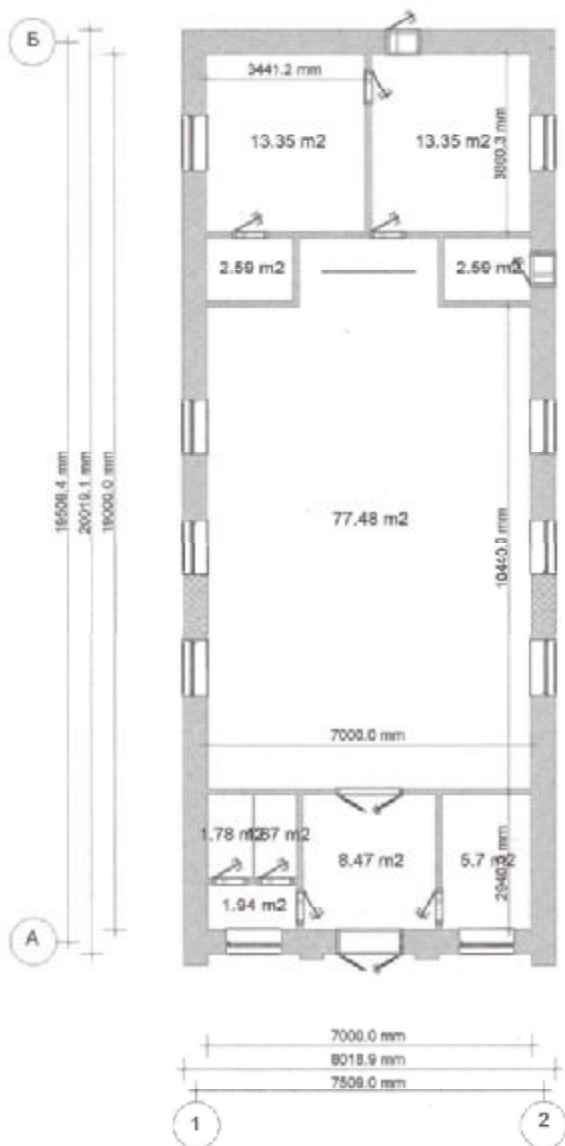
- The building committee for Holy Trinity Parish in Romanovka has asked an architect to do a plan for a new building. He donated his services--That is a 10% savings on building costs. The building is designed to be plain but functional. Pictured here are the results. Of course the atheist architect did not put a cross on it—parishioners have to decide that for themselves.



The Holy Trinity Church, according to architect's plan.

- Fr Sebastian presided at the funeral of one of our original parishioners, Nell Artyomovna. She was a remarkable woman who was imprisoned by the Nazis in Austria during World War II where, as a young girl of 16, she was trained and worked as a welder. Recently she began to receive some compensation from the German government. When she returned to Russia she raised a wonderful family, but, due to the lack of Catholic priests in the Russian Far East, they are all Orthodox. Nell retained her Catholic faith, and was among the most active of our early parishioners. She made many of the arrangements for my outdoor first mass in front of the cathedral (which was the state archive at the time) in November of 1991. Her grandson, though Orthodox, played the organ for the first few months of our masses in Vladivostok until our first Catholic organist was baptized. In these later years Nell suffered from a stroke which left her partially paralyzed, but she continued her prayers and contacts with parishioners by telephone. Hanging over her bed were a crucifix and an icon of the Blessed Virgin. When I would bring her communion, she would say, “Of course Jesus is our savior and deserves our worship, but when I really have to talk to somebody, the Blessed Virgin always is ready to hear me!” I anointed her and gave her Viaticum just before I left for America, and heard of her death by electronic mail. Eternal Rest Grant to her, O Lord! (and, Nell, please put in a few words with the Blessed Virgin for us and for our benefactors! May the angels lead you into paradise!)

- It seems that progress moves very slowly. Long ago we showed you the photo of the building on Russian Island that it is hoped will become a rehab center for those afflicted with



The floor plan of the proposed Holy Trinity Church in Romanovka.

alcoholism. At last the mayor of Vladivostok, of which Russian Island is a part, has signed a document asking his assistants to look at the situation and made a decision. The city is offering to rent the building, at least temporarily, to the "Just Say NO!" Corporation. It will then take several steps to receive the property because it first has to be transferred from the federal military to the city, hopefully free of charge, and then only can the city make a final decision.

It is hoped that the rent will be minimal, and in fact the city might offer free rent in exchange for simply safeguarding the building--The neighboring building was attacked by thieves and is now all gone, even the bricks! We are hoping to be able to do some repairs soon, so that gradually we will be able to use the whole building. We hope to gradually inhabit it, and gradually build a staff to care for the building and begin to

offer it for AA get-togethers and outings on holidays (no booze), and then for rehabilitation needs during weekdays. We are planning that alcoholics who don't have current jobs can provide the workforce for the renovation. So far our mission has provided the money to put on a steel door on the building so that thieves can't break in.

Development Desk (Continued from Page 8)

stamped envelope and most now are stamped. We also pay 95¢ for each corrected address, so sending us your new address helps. If you receive our newsletter with a stamp on it, it means that something is missing from your address that the bulk mail machines can't process. Please call or send your correction.

- We have a new web master. Gail Gavin is working for us on this temporary task. See our site and watch for a new format she is putting together that will be even more user friendly. Jim Weatherly, our volunteer web master for the last 5 years is still involved but he is grateful for the help. We thank Jim, and volunteer Jeff Lang before him, for the wonderful time, energy and expertise they gave the mission.

- Our congratulations go out to volunteer Ron Dragonowski and his new wife Ann Marie on their recent wedding. Ron works at all hours to keep our data base up and running.

- We send 11,000 newsletters by bulk to parishes and groups that request them. Some are placed at the church entrances but most are slipped into the parish bulletin. It's a great way to keep Catholics informed about the revival of the Catholic Church in Russia. We send any where from 15 to 1500 to parishes.

God love you all, Sandra and David Sonnen

How to Communicate with Us

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Address Service Requested

From the development desk...

Dear Friends of the Vladivostok Mission,

- After a hiatus of nearly 2 years (since 9/11) We are finally receiving the monthly mail as before that date. Donations had taken a very deep dive. The parishes in Vladivostok have been struggling, almost strangling.
- The need to start a university parish in Vladivostok has not yet been realized. If you might wish to invest in some property please consider a large apartment in Vladivostok. Father Myron could purchase one for you for about \$60,000. The mission would cover refurbishing. Your apartment would be used as a chapel, a Caritas women's support center office, a library and meeting room for Catholic student activities. It would also be a place for AA meetings, NFP classes, catechesis classes, and support for men (St Joseph Covenant Keepers).
- Have you seen our promotional video that EWTN is showing? They own a copy and have rights to translate it into any language and broadcast it any time they wish. We feel so fortunate they feel this is a first rate video and a worthy cause. How right they are! If you would like a copy please contact the office. Several family members in

Columbia, SC paid for it. Please pray for them.

- Please see the web site for a listing of where Fr Dan and Fr Myron will be in the next months, September, October and November. Call them to say hello, visit them at one of the parish Masses or take them out to lunch. They would enjoy seeing you. Have some friends to your home to meet them or a prayer group--Knights of Columbus, school, college or University where they might address a group. Call me to get in the schedule.
- If you have any ideas how we might be more successful please contact us. Recently several men around the country mentioned we should have VLADIVOSTOK MISSION at the head of our return address as many do not know what Mary Mother of God Mission Society means. We have taken that good advice. Another suggested credit card on line donations. We have that set up on our web site.
- Can you help us with Mass stipends? These funds keep a priest warm, housed and fed in very poor conditions in the Diocese of St Joseph in Irkutsk, Russia. Our web site can accommodate your requests for mass stipend--or write us.
- We have decided to stop using business reply envelops. The yearly fee has gone up to \$450. We are charged 70¢ for each envelop without a stamp, and we are charged 10¢ for each
(Continued on Page 7)