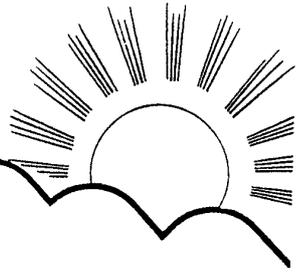


# Vladivostok Sunrise

Mary Mother of God Mission Society Vladivostok Russia St Paul Minnesota

Issue Number Fifty Six March 1, 2004



## Excerpts from My Experiences in Russia in 2003

*By George Riess, Kettering, Ohio*

Last Fall Tony Straub, my fellow St Vincent de Paul Society member, and I visited Orphanage #3 in Vladivostok where parishioners volunteer to work with the children—about 60 children under three years old, all of whom are waiting for adoption. It was Thursday, September 25, a few days before we were planning to leave for America. We had a good reaction regarding the cleanliness and adequacy of the staff. I was also impressed with how strong the cribs were. I tell people that they are stronger than the ones we have in the States.

I have to tell you that our visit was especially meaningful to us in another way. That morning at 10:00, we had received word from Lesozavodsk that a little 2-month-old abandoned baby boy, Daniel, had died two hours earlier. Here is the story. On the second day of our journey to the four pregnancy support centers outside of Vladivostok, we traveled from Arsenyev to Lesozavodsk. We met the parish trustee Vladimir Pisarenko and his wife, Nadezhda, and they showed us the Women's Support Center and the parish chapel, and we were very much impressed with both. We stayed overnight in the local hotel. The next morning, Sergei Akulenko, who was squiring us around in his van, told us that we had a six or seven hour trip back to Vladivostok. However, we wanted to visit the abandoned babies' department that Nadezhda had told us about.

There was only one baby there, little baby Daniel. He had many medical problems, among them being problems with his nasal cavities and esophagus. In the States, he would have been in a neonatal intensive care unit. I pass by one every Monday morning when I am bringing Holy Communion to the Catholic patients at our local hospital. Here he would have been hooked up to



intravenous feeding, and some kind of a respirator. However, the hospital nurse told us that the doctors had given up on him and they were just leaving him there to die. It really tore us up to see that little one, working so hard to take each breath. It was doubly hard for Tony, since his wife had given birth to their first child several months prematurely, and the baby had died within a few hours.

We went out to the van and decided that we had to do something. A young 31-year-old doctor, Alexander Barsukov, had accompanied us on this trip. He

*Russian St Vincent de Paul members delivering the heaters to orphanage #3.*

volunteers with Caritas, giving first aid to the street children in Vladivostok. He is single, was on vacation, and served as our translator. We asked him to go back into the hospital and get baby Daniel's diagnosis, which he did. Then we started out. Upon arriving back in Vladivostok, Doctor Alex translated the diagnosis into English, and we sent it by fax and e-mail to several doctors that we knew back in the States. Tony and I felt strongly that we should arrange to get the baby to Vladivostok where there were facilities to do MRI, etc. However, Doctor Alex did not want to make this decision without some confirmation.

After several days, we were given the name and e-mail address of a baby specialist at the Ohio State Research Hospital in Columbus. In the meantime, we had learned that Vladimir was a lawyer and we asked him by phone to begin the process needed to get baby Daniel transported to Vladivostok. We were phoning Vladimir each day at noon to find out his progress. Vladimir told us that the doctors said that Daniel would not survive a motor trip from Lesozavodsk to Vladivostok, and that the only way to get him there would be by helicopter, which would cost \$1000. That was about all the money that Tony and I had left with us, but we told Vladimir to go ahead and arrange for the helicopter. Then, the next day, Vladimir called and gave Tony the bad news that Daniel had died. I was in the church, doing my hour of adoration, and beseeching heaven for baby Daniel, when Tony came in and gave me the bad news. It really broke us up. I guess the parish staff is not used to seeing old men with tears in their eyes.

During the week that had elapsed after seeing little Daniel, I went over and over a couple of things I should have done. I don't know why I didn't ask the nurse whether I could have picked up little Daniel to hold him and let him know that someone loved him. Secondly, I should have wet my finger in a nearby sink and baptized him. We sent several e-mails to Vladimir, asking him or his wife to do this, but I don't know whether they ever did. He certainly had Baptism of Desire from Tony and me.

Less than an hour after learning of Daniel's death, Sergei Akulenko drove into the parish parking area with Nastia Potapenko, with her little 5-month-old Dima. I asked her to hold him and held him tight, pretending that he was little Daniel. It helped to remove the sting in my heart. After lunch at Nastia's sister Julia's apartment, we proceeded to visit the abandoned babies in Orphanage #3, where Tony and I picked up and held about 20. We would have stayed longer, but we had two more errands of mercy to make that afternoon to help out one of Julia's clients. I have photos of Tony and me holding these babies, and you can tell how much it meant to them and to us. I really hope that our young men in the SVdP will consider visiting these babies and let them know that they are loved. I hope that they will come to realize the true joy that comes from holding one of these precious gifts of God, having the little one lay his/her head on your shoulder, and think of how much trust that little one is putting in us to take care of him/her.

While at the orphanage, I asked the director if there was anything that they needed. She replied that, with the coming cold weather, they needed five space heaters at a cost of about \$500. I told her, that as soon as I got home, she would have the money for them.

I have forwarded the photos to a good friend of mine, Phil Parmley, who is 85 years young, and a fellow parishioner at Emmanuel Parish in Dayton. He is the one who got us involved in St. Vincent de Paul. He and I deliver Mobile Meals to the elderly every other Thursday, and then he has lunch with Joan and me. On the Thursday before leaving for Vladivostok, we were doing our Mobile Meals, and I told Phil that the airfare and visa cost \$2000 and that, as a result, we had to postpone two or three repairs to our kitchen. He told me he would have something to contribute to my expenses upon my return. He was good to his word, and the \$500 for the heaters was his check to me. My wife Joan and I figured that the babies in Orphanage #3 needed it more than we did.

*Dear George,*

*Yesterday the Saint Vincent DePaul Society of Vladivostok presented the five space heaters purchased by the Saint Vincent DePaul Society to the director of the Orphanage #3 for abandoned children. Making the presentation were SVdP members Igor Radzuk and Konstantine Kuchenko. Accompanying them were Viktor Anisimov and me.*

*The director and many of the staff expressed their sincere gratitude for the gift, and asked us to extend their thanks to the people who gave the money to make this donation possible. Please also extend to them my gratitude for making possible this initial action of our newly formed St Vincent DePaul Society in Vladivostok.*

*It was the first time that I had visited the hospital. Knowing the conditions in Russia, I was very impressed with the cleanliness of the premises and the dedication of the very limited staff. I was heartbroken to see the children alone in their little cribs with no one to hold them; it was especially heartbreaking to learn that several of the children were infected with AIDS by their mothers during the birth process.*

*Sincerely yours in Christ,  
Fr Daniel Maurer, C.J.D.  
Most Holy Mother of God Catholic Church  
Vladivostok, Russia*



*The sign on the heaters noting the St Vincent de Paul Society.*

## Vladivostok Even Without Knowing Russian?

By Kelly Whittier

I traveled to Vladivostok this past summer from Washington, DC, via Los Angeles, Osaka, Japan and Seoul, Korea. As I looked at the world map in the airplane magazine, the realization kept coming that Vladivostok is almost halfway around the world. As the plane from Seoul neared the Vladivostok airport, all I could see out of the window was mile after mile of forest, with small (from the air) clearings here and there. When I was greeted at the airport by Vladivostok parishioners Dima and Nikolai, I immediately felt less far away from home. Five minutes after arriving at Most Holy Mother of God Catholic Church, I attended Mass for the first time in Russia.

I had just barely learned the Russian alphabet before coming, but could not say anything else in Russian. I joined three other Americans from St Paul, Minnesota who had already been there for two weeks, and found that we could get by with very little Russian on our daily excursions. Many of the younger Russians speak some English, and in the nursing home and the orphanage few words were needed.

We went to the nursing home on my second day in Russia. Mara and Deanna were greeted with great affection by many of the residents, who knew them already after several visits. Mara had helped one day by trimming the residents' hair and nails, and Deanna had sung to them. The conditions in the one floor building were not so good (dirty sheets), but many faces brightened as we entered each room. Most of all, the elderly need human contact, and they hesitated to let go of our hands. Deanna and I sang a few duets for them, and their eyes followed us as we left.



*Kelly and a Resident at the Romanovka Nursing Home.*

The orphanage we visited a few days later is for babies 1 month to 3 years old. There are more than 60 babies, and over 20 of them have AIDS. Now these babies have not learned much Russian yet, either, so the language barrier was not a problem! One little boy, about three, recognized Mara and ran right up to her when we entered the hall. He came with us to many of the rooms, each of which had at least six cribs, one baby per crib. As we entered each room, the older babies who could stand would hold themselves up by gripping the crib railing and rock back and forth, pleading with us to pick them up. They laughed out loud as we played with them. Some of the littler babies did not respond at all when I reached over to hold them, but once they had been held for a few minutes, did not want to be put back in their cribs. One baby in particular—Natasha—cried inconsolably until after Deanna had held her for about a half an hour (see picture). The nurses love the babies, but there are



*Deanna and baby Natasha*

only five or six nurses, and they spend most of their time feeding and changing. We tried to hold all the babies, and left reluctantly after several hours.

One evening on our way home, we stopped through the marketplace in Vladivostok, interested in purchasing some film. As we passed by

a group of five or six girls, ages 14-16 or so, one of them called out "Are you Americans?" We turned to them and started talking, one of them leading us to the film stand. A girl came right up to me and asked quietly in English "Are you Christian?" I said yes, and asked her if she is a Christian. She said yes, and I asked her if she goes to church. Her clear eyes clouded over slightly as she said that she used to go when she was at home with her family. I suddenly realized that she and the other girls must live on the street. When the other girls came up to us, she bent down to put on more makeup, and two young soldiers looked over in her direction. We hoped to see her again, but only saw the younger street boys on subsequent visits to the market.

One day we took the three-hour bus ride with the Spanish Sisters of the Charity of St Anne to Romanovka, to visit the sick and for a communion service at the Catholic parish there. I accompanied Sr Evgenia, and we visited several shut-ins. The first was a family with a large vegetable garden. The grandmother is the "bread winner" for the family, as her husband has been confined to his bed for the past five years. She welcomed us with wonderful Russian hospitality, pressing us to take some piroshki and vodka (I succumbed). At another



*Visiting Romanovka parish members.*

house we prayed with a younger woman suffering perhaps from cerebral palsy. We prayed the Our Father together, sister in Spanish, the woman in Russian, and I in English—a "universal church" moment.

The doors of all the places we visited were open to us because of the Catholic Church's efforts in "reaching out" to the community. Even the boys who live on the street ran up to us and hugged us, just because they knew we were with the Church. I am excited to be learning Russian now—Russian 101. I look forward greatly to returning to Vladivostok sometime in the next couple of years, hopefully as a "Sister in Jesus the Lord".

## Good Neighbors: Holding babies in Siberia

By Sue Nowicki  
Bee Staff Writer

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November 16th, 2003  
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Malissa Souza of Modesto told friends she was going to Siberia to hold and rock babies for a couple of weeks. One day was all she could take.

Malissa went to Siberia\* with eight other area residents and Father Joseph Illo, her priest from St. Joseph's Catholic Church. They left October 17 and returned November 1, traveling to Vladivostok on the southeast tip of Siberia. The plan was to help a sister church, stop at three orphanages and spend time with the housebound elderly.

On their first day in the city of 700,000 people, Malissa, a real-estate agent with Re/Max, went to an orphanage, which was called a hospital. It was full of children under the age of 3. The place looked like barracks that hadn't been touched in 50 years, she said. There was no water available that day.

The children were covered with green splashes of Mercurochrome, a mild antiseptic. Malissa and two others were given 14 children and told to go play on the playground. It turned out to be 'concrete with holes. It looked like a bombed-out parking lot.'

Inside, she picked up one 2-year-old boy who weighed about 14 pounds. Most of the children had glazed eyes. Many had detachment syndrome -- it hurt them to be touched.

'I wasn't prepared for what I was going to experience. When I got to the orphanage, it was such a shock to me that I worked only one day there. I spent the next day literally recouping. I spent eight hours in the church, pulling my emotions together so I could work again.'

The whole trip -- with the exception of one poor but cheerful, well-run orphanage in a village eight hours from Vladivostok -- showed a people full of despair and hopelessness.

'There's a resignation that this is how it's going to be; it's never

going to change. A lot of the old people we talked to wanted the old way (communism) back, because at least they were cared for.

'I didn't have a clue that there was so much degradation for the human body, the human person. I asked the priest over there what he missed most (he's from the East Coast). He said, 'I miss beauty.' They're surrounded by poverty.'

Malissa took about \$1,700 in medical supplies, such as ibuprofen, baby aspirin, cough medicine, prenatal vitamins and Desitin. She also took toothbrushes and pacifiers, plus items for children, such as crayons, tennis balls and bubbles. The crayons were a bust, because paper is scarce, even with school-age children. But the children loved the tennis balls and were fascinated by a ZipLoc bag she had.

Malissa wants to go back. She doesn't know exactly what she will do, 'but I'm going to do something. They need people like us to bring them hope.

'If I can help facilitate adoptions and make it known to people here that there are all these kids, I'll do it. Our pastor worked with Mother Teresa in Calcutta. He has a real heart for things like this. We were talking about how we bring this back to our society and our culture and make each one of us aware in a deeper way of how the rest of the world lives.'

[\*Of course Vladivostok and Primorye aren't located in Siberia, but in the Russian Far East. Most Americans don't know that. They think that Siberia goes all the way to America when in fact it ends at Lake Baikal.--ed.]

### Our Benefactors:

## St Jude's Parish and Parishioners Helping Russian orphans



Lindsay Adams and her family from Allen, Texas, loading up personal goods for the Russian orphans.

St Jude's Parish in Plano, Texas, is planning to hold a drive in the spring to collect toys for the orphans. The Adams family and other parishioners have already held a drive which netted 420 lbs. of personal items and \$3000 for the milk fund for the orphans of Vladivostok. These are some photos of their activities.



*Julia and Lindsay Adams helping sort and pack donated items.*

## News Notes

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

- On January 9, I heard on the evening news that a 17-year old boy had been arrested for shooting at the stained-glass windows of our cathedral in Vladivostok. It said that a passerby saw the shooting and called police. An inspection of the windows showed one bullet hole in the exterior glass of the Annunciation window. Hopefully the bullet did not penetrate the second and third layers of glass, but we don't know yet.

- The Russians say that the way you spend the New Years Holiday is the way you will spend the year! So it looks like lots of trouble ahead! Our year surely started off with a bang:

1) A major computer failure in our office in Minnesota, 2) a major crisis about visas here in Russia, 3) illness, and 4) water problems. The computer problem took several experts to figure it out, but the final solution was provided by our good friend Jim Weatherly who is always ready to help. Thanks to Jim, our webpage is up and running again! On December 27, I traveled to celebrate Christmas with our parishioners of Visitation Parish in Lesozovodsk, and began to get sick on the return trip and was in bed for nearly two weeks. Gradually I've improved. Thanks for your prayers. I guess it was a kidney inflammation. We are in a major water crisis here in Vladivostok, because there were no typhoons to fill the reservoirs last summer. Water is being rationed. We receive water only two hours every other day here at the church. And finally:

- On February 15 our Parish of the Most Holy Mother of God voted to change our legal constitution to allow a trustee to be officially in charge of the parish before the government rather than the pastor. That is because of complications in the Russian law making it very difficult for a foreigner like me to be in charge. It is potentially a dangerous step—in case the trustee is not honest, as has happened in some other places in Russia—but it seems to be the only way for the parish to operate normally. The Methodists had a problem with their trustee who sold the church building out from under their parish!! The parish appealed to the court and the court decided that the trustee didn't act in good faith as a guarantor of the rights of parish, so they gave the church back to the parish. But what a struggle! And the buyer had already made many changes, including selling the steeple to another church! There are also examples in Russia where the trustee was elected by the people, and then he decided that he had to answer to the people who elected him and not to the pastor! We sought to avoid similar messes by having the bishop appoint the trustee. That way, if the pastor isn't satisfied, the bishop can unappoint the trustee. We were also afraid that the pastor's appointment of the trustee wouldn't hold up in law because the pastor is a foreigner, as are all the rest of the pastors in our half of Russia.

Now all the other parishes in Primorye are voting about changing their constitutions, too, and beginning the process of re-registering with the government.

- The city was ablaze with fireworks at the stroke of midnight on January 1. Trade between Russia and China is growing, so many more Chinese products are now available in the city, including fireworks.

- You've probably heard about the terrible accident in Florida involving Fr Benedict Groeschel, who is on our Advisory Board. He was crossing the street and was struck by a rapidly moving car. It will be a long hospital stay. We're continuing to pray for him.

- We've passed through the deepest part of winter, as has most of America. The warm and dry fall was changed by cold, blowing wind and lots of snow. We knew that the cold air was hiding somewhere last fall, which was very warm, and then it sure put in its appearance! It also means that it is a hard time

for the street children. I met with Dr Alexander about their problems, and one of the big problems right now is dental care. The regular clinics won't take them without an insurance policy, or the kids have to pay cash. Naturally, most of the kids also don't have documents nor parents' permissions, but they are suffering. Thankfully many of our American donors specified "Street Kids" on their Christmas donation, so I was able to give Dr Alexander Barsukov \$200 to start the process. When that has been used up, he will bring me the receipts, and then I can give him another \$200. We can continue like that until the \$1000 that was specified for street children by donors will be gone. Of course they can't do orthodontics on that money, but we can take care of abscesses and do filings. Larisa Kalininchenko, who also works with the program, described how the kids came for their meal during the coldest weather: They all waited in their warm spot and came running one by one to get the hot food, and then quickly returned to the warmth. Usually they swarm the foodwagon, but not in the cold. Of course their outerwear isn't sufficient for this weather, either. We are working on it.

- In Lesozovodsk we continue to feed a group of about 20 children every Sunday. Vladimir Pisorenko, the Parish Trustee, describes how some of the kids come to the chapel wearing "valenkies". These are very inexpensive winter booties made of felt. They are quite warm but not very sturdy. Many of the kids wear patched valenkies, and some still have holes so that basically the kids' valenkies fill up with snow, thus the kids are walking with cold wet feet. We will look for money to buy new valenkies for these kids.

- The Donald D. Lynch Family Foundation made us a grant for the production of our chastity materials for our youth programs. After the 2<sup>nd</sup> issue of "Love And Common Sense" was published, we got the following comments:

"The 2nd issue of Love and Common Sense was so interesting that I couldn't put it down. I sat down and read it all the way through."

"Love and Common Sense makes a bigger impression on the younger population--late high school students--who are not cynical and set in their impressions. They report that they enjoy it and pass it out to their friends at school, and it is a topic of conversations."

Some older people reported, "Too bad we didn't read this years ago. It is too late for us now."

The first printing of 2<sup>nd</sup> issue of Love and Common Sense was 2000 copies. Yuri Byelozorov has been giving lectures in January and February at public schools in Nakhodka and in Vladivostok on Pro-Life, NFP, and Chastity. He passes out these booklets, and they are well received and popular reading for the young people.

- On February 13 our parishioner Irina made the first communion breads on equipment that was donated to us by the Carmel in Wales, Great Britain. It means that we can not only

make our own communion breads, but can supply them to other parishes in Russia. Until now priests had to bring their altar breads with them. Ours were often donated by the Cathedral parish in Anchorage, from Nativity and St Agnes in St Paul, MN, but now we will be able to make it locally. Hopefully it is a further step toward helping the Church in Russia be less dependent on foreign aid. We already produce our own altar candles, and souvenir candles. Thanks, Sisters, and thanks to Irina who is beginning production.



*Irina pouring the first batter into the oven.*

*The Russians have a joke that the first pancake is always a mess, and sure enough!*



*Further production seems to go fine after the first "blin".*



- At last we are hoping to begin working again on the façade of the church in April, and also to build the first floor of the rectory/parish center. Naturally we would like to build the whole building, but we don't have the funds. Funds or not, we have to at least do the first floor so as not to lose the right to build on the land next to the church. The government only gives two years to begin a building project after permissions to use the land have been authorized. We couldn't begin last spring because of SARS in China just a few miles away so that the borders were closed and no Chinese summer workers could come to Vladivostok. Now we are hoping to begin on April 1. Naturally I'll keep you informed about progress. We need about \$100,000 per floor for the rectory/parish center. If you know where we might be able to find a benefactor to help us with the building project we would appreciate it very much. If we had the money we could complete the second and even third floor this summer!

- There is a fantastic website that they offers foreigners the opportunity to support Russian orphans. It looks too good to be true, and sure enough it is. Please don't donate on the internet to Russian orphan websites. It is a racket. The kids get nothing. Better to make use of organizations such as ours who are on site and who can offer better accountability. Our Seattle friend Janet Clark was here following up on the various orphanages in the city for her friends in American who donate to Russian orphans. She can tell you the horror stories about some of the orphanages who ask for money on the internet. Yes, the kids need help, but for crooked orphanages, it is in the interest of fundraising that the kids stay hungry and poor. What you donate goes out the back door into someone's pocket, not to the kids.

- News from Brother Oleg in Slovakia: In spite of the language problem his grades are good, and we can hope he will continue in good spirit and health for the rest of the school year

when we returns home to Vladivostok. He recently renewed his temporary vows, and sent us photos of the event. Because he is so many time zones away from us while he is in the seminary, I asked the local abbot of the Norbertines in Slovakia to receive his vows.



*Brother Oleg taking his simple vows before Norbertine Abbot Tomas Barthal in Kosice, Slovakia, December 8, 2003.*

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## From the development desk...

Dear Friends and Family,

- We never give your name or address to any one. Your privacy is protected by us. Also your donation is secure. We wire the funds to Fr Myron and he receives them safely.
- We have a mission team of 14 persons from Franciscan University of Steubenville Ohio traveling to Vladivostok for 2 weeks in May. Pray for the success of this mission. We hope many more universities would offer mission work to their students in our parishes in the Russian Far East. See our updated web site.
- We scheduled our summer programs this week. It means you can come and participate! Here is part of the schedule:

June 26-July 4 **Pilgrimage on Foot** from Ussurysk to Arsenyev (nine days' walk).

July 11-18 **Bicycle Pilgrimage** from St Joseph's Parish to Lesozovodsk.(seven days).

July 26-Aug 1 Far Eastern Catholic **Youth Conference** in Khabarovsk (seven days).

August 8-17 **Children's Catechetical Camp** in Sod-Gorod (ten days).

August 17-22 **Boy Scout Camp** in Sod-Gorod with trip to the mountains near Novolitovsk (five days). We especially need experienced scouts to help with this camp.

- Our prayers to you all.

God love you and your families,

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