

Vladivostok Sunrise

Mary Mother of God Mission Society Vladivostok Russia St Paul Minnesota

Issue Number Sixty Nine May 1, 2006



By Father Damien Higgins

The icon of the Most Holy Mother of God of Vladivostok was painted in the 1993 at the request of Fr Myron Effing, CJD, Pastor of the parish in Vladivostok, Russia. He had sent me a graphic design that the Mission was using for its official parish seal. It was a black and white line drawing that included an image of the Mother of God enthroned with Our Lord and both of them had crowns.

The icon was painted while I was living at Holy Transfiguration Monastery of the Monks of Mount Tabor of the Ukrainian Catholic Church-Chicago Eparchy in Redwood Valley, California. It was painted (or "written", which is the official way to speak about icons) on wood that is from church pews taken from the oldest Roman Catholic Church in Northern, California--St Mary's in Lakeport. The wood was prepared in the traditional manner soaked in rabbit skin glue, covered with a piece of fine linen from an old altar cloth and then coated with layers of gesso (crushed marble and rabbit skin glue). A fine layer of bole (red clay) was placed over the areas to which 23k gold would then be applied. The paint itself is egg yolk imbued with various natural pigments and after drying the entire work was then coated with a layer of oli fa (Linseed and



Why do you seek the living among the dead?

Easter painting by a child from St Catherine's Parish, St Petersburg, Russia.

Explanation of the Icon of Our Lady of Vladivostok

Stand oil with some drier added.)

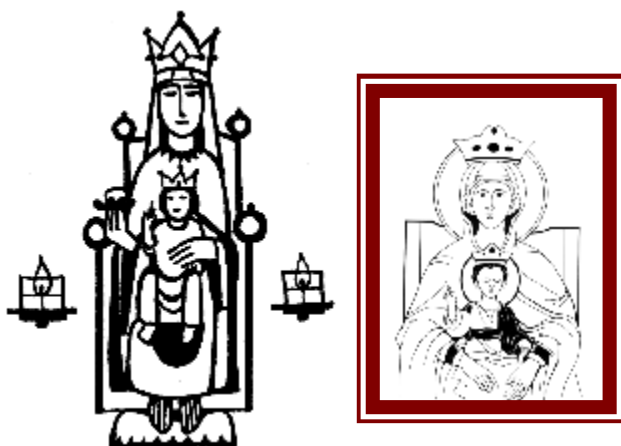
The icon is modeled after a prototype from the Cretan School of Iconography in the 14th century. The Mother of God is presented in a solemn manner with Christ directly seated in front of her while her arms wrap around Him. She is not so much holding as presenting Him. The child is presented in the model of the Pantocrator (Byzantine title for the ruler of the universe). The iconographic type tends to emphasize not the emotional relationship between mother and child but rather the theological. The Mother of God is cloaked in a deep red robe that symbolizes the participation in the divine mystery of incarnation giving flesh and blood to this reality. Her under garment is a rich blue that reveals the glorious nature of relationship with her Divine Son. It has however been taught that the blue represents her humanity while the red represents her participation in the Divine Plan. Christ is dressed in the colors not of His earthly ministry (red and blue) but rather in the colors of heavenly glory and eternal light. Both white and gold represent these realities. The throne upon which she sits is green to reflect both the color of the earth where this mysterious relationship between Mary and her son takes place as well as that in the Slavic tradition--green is the color used for Pentecost and the coming of the Giver of Life. The letters surrounding the figures indicate Mother of God, Theotokos and Jesus Christ. Without the names, the icon would not be authentic. They are both crowned with wooden crowns that are set with jewels.

[Jesus is holding a piece of bread, signifying He is the Bread of Life. This icon was donated to the mission by Judge and Mrs Don and Angela Wozniak of Saint Paul, MN, in honor of his Orthodox parents George and Anna Wozniak. The icon is now hanging in the Most Holy Mother of God Cathedral in Vladivostok, Russia, a Roman

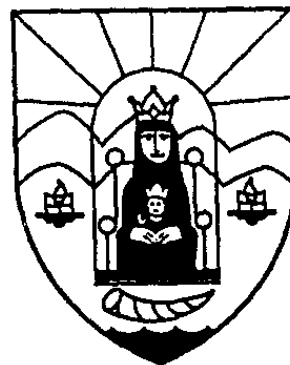
Rite Church. The framing of the icon contains items related to Vladivostok, indicating that it was written specifically for Vladivostok. These include the words, "Most Holy Mother of God of Vladivostok" in blue Russian letters across the top. The frame bottom contains shapes reminiscent of the mountains of Vladivostok, with ocean waves illustrated between them--to indicate the geographical location of Vladivostok: The Pacific Ocean. In the center bottom there is a golden horn, to show that the cathedral is located on Golden Horn Bay which is in the center of the city. The Virgin is shown as if seen through a stained glass window, as if we can see her in heaven through the sky. Around the head of the Virgin, and part of the window, is a sunrise, representing the "East", which is the meaning of "vostok" in the name "Vladivostok", and thus also indicating the geographical location of the city. On the side frames are small crosses, indicating the smaller parishes surrounding Vladivostok, since Vladivostok is the diocesan seat of the Diocese of Vladivostok, and they also represent all Christians who are also the children of the Most Holy Mother of God and who cling to her for protection and help. On the side frames are two candles, indicating the Canons at prayer in the cathedral church, and showing the presence of the People of God at prayer before the Virgin. The icon was blessed by Bishop Joseph Werth S.J. of the Apostolic Administration of Asian Russia on June 13, 1997.

The idea for the seal was taken from the book of Gertrud Mueller Nelson's illustrations (*Clip-Art for Celebrations and Service*, Pueblo Publishing Company, Inc., 1987, pg 66. Mrs Mueller Nelson was a parishioner at our sister parish of the Nativity in St Paul, Minnesota. The seal was designed by Fr Myron, and the pen and ink version used on our stationery was done by Susan Gray of Cabot, Arkansas—ed.]

Mueller Nelson's original model. Mrs Gray's stationery version



The parish seal.



The Icon



A Lion--A Very Quick Friend in Need!

By Rev Daniel Maurer, C.J.D.

It came to the attention of Fr Dan during a casual conversation with Most Holy Mother of God parishioner Alina Drobyazko after Sunday Mass on April 2 that Alina's oldest son Sergei, 19, was suffering from very serious astigmatism and may be in danger of going blind. Fr Dan knew nothing of Sergei's seeing impairment before that. Alina told Fr Dan that an exact diagnosis of Sergei's sight could not even be made in Vladivostok, since none of the clinics here have modern diagnostic equipment. A proper diagnosis could only be made at the world famous Fyodorov Microsurgery Eye Clinic in Khabarovsk, 500 miles north of Vladivostok. She further said that if surgery were indicated by the diagnosis, it may cost as much as 22,000 rubles (\$850 USD), which is the equivalent of more than 2 months of an average Russian salary. Since Alina and her husband Vladimir are the parents of four children they could not even begin to think about paying for their son's operation, should it be needed.

Fr Dan had often heard of the fine reputation that the International Lions Clubs have had for helping the blind and seeing impaired, but he did not know if they were active anywhere in Russia. On Sunday evening (Saturday night in the USA), just a few hours after talking with Mrs Drobyazko Fr Dan did an internet Google search for "Lions Club" and came immediately to the link for their main website. Clicking successively on the Lions website buttons--"English", "Vision Programs", "Sight Services", "Rehabilitation Services"--he came to the email address of their executive services office. (The website is very well laid out! The URL of the Lions Clubs International is: <http://www.lionsclubs.org/> There you can learn about all their programs for the seeing endangered, impaired and the blind, and about their history, including their inspiring relationship with Miss Helen Keller.) With nothing to lose he wrote a short letter indicating the seriousness of Sergei's situation, hoping that someone would answer, but not necessarily expecting anything.

In less than two days, Ms Deborah O'Malley, Coordinator of the Program Development Department for Lions Clubs International answered Fr Dan's initial inquiry, writing that she would forward his letter to Mr Peter Hupperten, the Coordinating Lion for Eastern Russia, and ask him to contact Fr Dan to let him know if the Lions would be able to provide assistance.

The next day Fr Dan received a very nice letter from Mr. Hupperten indicating that Sergei's sight problem sounded very serious to him, even sight-threatening if an operation were not done quickly, and that he was already in the process of requesting the necessary funds for Sergei's medical attention in Khabarovsk. Mr Hupperten is a member of Lions Club of District 49A in Anchorage, Alaska, and the Coordinating Lion for the Russian Far East. He wrote that there were no Lions Clubs in the Russian Far East but that he had already forwarded Fr Dan's letter with his recommendation to the Lions District 49A Foundation "to consider a modest donation for the treatment (of Sergei in Khabarovsk." The District 49A Foundation approved the grant request, and within the week enough money for all transportation, eye examinations, doctors' consultations and operation were transferred to our mission office in St Paul.

The speed with which all this took place left the often "sadder but wiser" Fr Dan speechless.

With the reception of funds in St Paul, we could proceed to make arrangements with the clinic. On April 11, just one week after receiving the first response from the Lions International, Fr Dan called the Catholic pastor in Khabarovsk, Fr Joseph McCabe, M.M. for assistance with the clinic there. Fr Joe reported that there was often a very long waiting list at the clinic for diagnosis and even longer for operations. In typical Russian fashion (although he is an American) Fr Joe continued in his next sentence, "But I have three members of the parish who are doctors and who have connections at the clinic, so I'll see what they can do." He called back the same day to say that the clinic had made an appointment for Sergei on the Tuesday after Easter. He also said that he would be happy to give Sergei and his mother a place to stay in Khabarovsk at one of the parish apartments while they were in the city. We put them on the train on Easter Monday evening and Fr Joe met them when the train arrived in Khabarovsk 14 hours later, got them settled in their apartment and then took them to the clinic in time for five hours of eye examinations on Tuesday.

The eye examinations showed that the astigmatism was already very serious, especially in the right eye, and that if an operation were not performed soon he certainly would be in danger of losing sight in one and perhaps both eyes. More examinations were performed on Wednesday, and the decision was made to admit Sergei to the hospital and perform the first operation very early the next morning (today, as this news note is being written).

Sergei's dad, Vladimir Drobyazko, who is a fisherman away at sea until September or perhaps even November,

called his family from out on the ocean last week just after the grant money from the Lions was received in St Paul and was told of the upcoming surgery. Both he and Mrs Drobyazko and their children are amazed at the generosity of foreigners who one week earlier had never heard of their son. Mrs Drobyazko repeated several times that she just does not have words enough to express her gratitude. They are also thankful to Fr Joseph and his parish staff in Khabarovsk for helping them in a city that they had never been in before during a very stressful time.

As this report is being typed Sergei is in surgery. We are praying for the success of this delicate procedure, and in thanksgiving for the generosity and quick service of the Lions who made it possible for another young man not to lose his eyesight. We are also grateful to Fr Joseph for taking such good care of our parishioners. He has promised to visit Sergei in the hospital after his surgery and to give us a full report when he visits us this Monday (April 24). With luck, Sergei should be out of the hospital and back in Vladivostok the next day, Tuesday, April 25, just three weeks after the Lions first heard about him.

News Notes

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

- Ever since the tsunami and Katrina our income has taken a major nosedive, with the result that we had a really nerve racking winter this year! I even thought that this was probably the time I'd get an ulcer, although I've never had one. We haven't been able to meet our obligations so that we've had to borrow money from Americans and from Russians just to make it through. I was days at a time without a ruble! Of course God is faithful, and somehow we will make it through, even though many of our projects got delayed. We've had to delay our construction projects, which almost resulted in canceling our contract for work on the rectory and church. Most importantly we tried to make sure that the poor did not suffer, and we've fed the street kids and elderly and seen to their dental needs without fail. A big, big thanks to those who made loans to us to get us through.

- While I was in the States during Lent I went to Canada at the invitation of two parishes, St Basil's in Brantford, Ontario, and the Parish of the Most Holy Name of Jesus in Laval, Quebec. The parishes were very generous and interested, and I gave a parish mission at St Basil's. On my trip I also received a wonderful welcome and response from St John Neumann Parish and from Joseph Husband of Mary Parish, both in Las Vegas. St John's has decided

to become a sister parish, and St Joseph has invited us to come to Las Vegas for our annual conference in the Fall.

- Just before Easter one of our wonderful parishioners died, Lilia Nikolaevna Shevchenko. She was the one who did so much sewing for us, including vestments and altar cloths. She mended our garments and was always ready with a helping hand and a good word. It was she who loved to make Russian puppets, and she did many "Good Shepherds", Nativity sets, and even caricatures of Fr Daniel and I! She sewed the banners for our sister parishes in America, and helped with costumes for our catechetical plays. She was such a remarkable woman that I couldn't feel much grief at her passing because I know she is better off with the Lord, and this is Eastertide! Oh, for more parishioners like her!



Lilia Shevchenko holding the Fr Myron doll, with Lilia Timofeevna. Good thing there were no pins handy!

- Our Omega Student Center is having a special retreat at the end of April for all the Catholic youth of college age in our deanery, to help them be missionaries among their peers at school. To help us with this project, four people are coming from FOCUS in the USA, a program gaining followers on many college campuses in the States. The program will be under way while this newsletter is being printed. Please pray for the further success of this program. So much hinges on it! Evangelization is the most important thing of all.

- Update from Sisters in Jesus the Lord: Thank you for all your prayers! We greatly enjoyed our visit with Fr Myron the first few days of March. We had our first "Silent Day of Reflection" for young women interested in discerning a religious vocation on March 24-25. Seven women came and all enjoyed the opportunity to have time to rest and pray in silence.

At the end of March, Sr Maria Stella was part of the support team for a Rachel's Vineyard Retreat here in St. Paul (Post-Abortion Healing), helping behind the scenes and also by playing the harp for the memorial service and Mass on Sunday. She played the organ for several Holy Week services and sang with the choir at St Agnes Church on Easter Sunday. On April 21-23, Sr Julia, Sr Maria Stella, and Nicole led a vocation trip to Chicago for the national meeting of the Institute on Religious Life, with more than 25 young people ages 13 and older going along with us. The theme this year was the writings of Pope Benedict XVI (of course mostly as Cardinal Ratzinger). Our group led the singing of the Divine Mercy Chaplet on Divine Mercy Sunday, and Sr Maria Stella played the organ for the closing Divine Mercy Sunday Mass! You might enjoy this annual trip—always the weekend after Easter.

Several young women have come to stay with us since January for a week at a time, considering our community for their vocation. Exciting news: Nicole, our postulant, will become a novice on June 18th this year here in St Paul, Minnesota, at a Mass celebrated by Fr Daniel Maurer, CJD.

Our next "Silent Day of Reflection" for young women will be June 24-25 here at St Agnes Convent. Please call 651 291-7777 or see our website www.cjd.cc for more information.

- The next stained glass window to be installed in our church is this "Flight into Egypt" donated by Mr John Mahoney of Brisbane, California, who for many years helped us without our shipments from California to Russia.



- We are starting a "Grandma Program." For \$40 a month we can send a grandma into an orphanage for 12 hours a week. This program was suggested by Americans who have adopted children at orphanages in our area. They say that the kids, besides needing more and better food (See our "Fruit and Milk Program") also need more socialization. The program is designed to also aid pensioners who need additional income—they become the "grannies". Fr Myron offered to set up the program if the adoptive parents would donate a year's worth of funding for the program at the orphanage of their choice. After our volunteers jumped through the bureaucratic hoops, the program is now beginning to function at all three of "our" orphanages, Baby Hospital #3, Artyom, and Ussuryk.



First "Grandmas" start work in Artyom.

Here is a letter from one of those benefactors:

"Dear Fr Myron, I have become aware of your work in the Baby Home at Artyom, after having been aware of the work of your parishes for several years. My husband and I adopted biological brothers from Artyom, our son David in 2001 (now 5 S years old) and our son Michael in 2004 (now 4 years old). The boys were adopted at separate times, as the birthmother was pregnant with Michael when we adopted David, and he was not relinquished until he was over a year old. We also have a four year old daughter adopted from Belarus in 2003.

"I have sent in an initial donation of \$100 for the Artyom baby home Milk and Fruit Program, and will send more monthly. Our sons were both malnourished when we adopted them, and I have been praying for a secure, trustworthy organization through which we could donate to the orphanage. We actually think well of the orphanage, and feel that the care there was fairly good for

an institutional setting, except for the meager food resources.

“Thank you for all that you do for the people of the Russian Far East, and particularly all of those who are vulnerable and alone. God Bless you for all of you do.”

Lisa Brown, Danville, CA

Our Benefactors:

St Joseph's Parish in Modesto, California

by Vicky Trevillyan

The Sister Parish Project committee is striving for strengthening our family bond with our Russian Sister Parish in Vladivostok, Russia. We pray the teachings in our Catholic faith of social Justice and solidarity with all nations can be realized in the work with our Sister Parish. We pray to revive the Catholic Faith in Russia.

Our support can be expressed in our prayers and our works. If you know anyone, near or far--brother, sister, mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, spouse, friend, you--who might wish to help out in any small way with the following, please contact us. Woodworking projects at home making small wooden icon plaques. Crochet or knitting projects of baby blankets, clothes, mittens, caps and scarfs.

The above projects are done at one's own leisure. A couple of our seniors in the parish have already volunteered their skills. Clothes items will be sent to the mission for street children and orphanages--caps and scarfs will be given to the poor elderly. Icon plaques will be sold here and shipped to parishes in the US to be used in fundraising for the mission. Materials will be provided for these projects. Donations of unneeded yarn and wood will be gratefully accepted as well.

We need a facilitator for the KIDS 2 KIDS program-- A program teaching prayer support and organizing simple fundraising projects to feed the street children and orphanage children of our mission. A dentist who may be willing to donate dental equipment or supplies. The mission has been given authorization by the local Russian government to open dental offices in Vladivostok. The city will even provide the office space. Any and equipment is needed to furnish the offices.

Please continue to pray for the conversion of souls in Russia, and the priests and religious there. Thank you for your attention and love. God bless you and your families.

Sincerely In Christ, Peace and Joy to you! --Vicky



Vicky Trevillyan, Sister Parish Chairman at St Joseph's, Modesto, and her family.

Sisters in Jesus the Lord:

Young Woman Symbolizes New Concept of Nun

By Katherine Kersten, Star Tribune January 26, 2006

Kelly Whittier has the makings of a successful career woman. She's got degrees from two prestigious institutions, the College of William and Mary in Virginia and Emory University in Georgia. She's poised, articulate and well-traveled, and radiates the "sky-is-the-limit" look of a young woman with big plans. When I met Whittier this week in St. Paul, she was dressed in the full habit of a Roman Catholic nun.

For many Minnesotans, the word "nun" conjures up a character in a farcical dinner theater production or, at best, an elderly relic of decades past. But Whittier, 29, represents a rising generation of young Catholic women who are picking up the centuries-old tradition, often in new ways.

A native of Virginia, she first considered joining a religious sisterhood in college. She cites a range of influences -- a strong Catholic student group, a choir that introduced her to the riches of sacred music. Last year, after several years of indecision, she moved to St. Paul to

join Sisters in Jesus the Lord, a new order of nuns in the early stages of formation.

How did her friends and family react? Whittier describes a favorite college professor's response: "I'm so disappointed," he told me. "I'm sorry your life is over. I had such high hopes for you." That professor, like many today, saw being a nun as the ultimate confinement, a way of life completely inconsistent with the modern world's greatest value: freedom.

Whittier disagrees: "For me, being a sister is about freedom -- the freedom to be totally available to a great number of people, to live wherever I need to minister, to work and pray exactly as I'm called to." Ordinary people understand the importance of such freedom, says Whittier. She describes a young friend, also a sister, who was startled at the reaction she got when she first wore her habit in public. "When people saw her habit," Whittier says, "they didn't seem to care what her name was or where she came from. She was just 'Sister.' People asked her questions, shared about their lives, asked her help. They were comfortable coming up to her because, just by looking at her, they knew that she's given her whole life to God."

Whittier acknowledges that her vocation requires sacrifice. "But being a sister isn't saying you want to hide from the world, or you're not attracted to men. In fact, a sister or a priest should be someone who would also be a wonderful wife and mother, or husband and father, but who has chosen a different path."

As a Sister in Jesus the Lord, Whittier will spend coming years in a place even colder than Minnesota -- Vladivostok, in eastern Siberia, Russia. There she will join two American priests who have a mission at the city's Most Holy Mother of God Catholic Church. Whittier will feed street children, care for abandoned elderly people and help build a music ministry. In the process, she says, she will assist in reviving a church that had about 12,000 registered members in the 1920s, but was shuttered in the 1930s after the Soviet government murdered or exiled thousands of parishioners.

Whittier is confident that Sisters in Jesus the Lord will flourish as more young women learn of its mission. Every week, she says, she helps review the names of about eight young women who have a potential interest in its work. Roman Catholic nuns are generally thought to be a vanishing breed. But young women like Kelly Whittier, with their intelligence and energy, are bringing the vision flickering back to life.

Katherine Kersten • kkersten@startribune.com

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Opportunities

♥ Miroslava Efimova's book on the history of the Catholic Church in Far Eastern Russia is ready for publishing. Would you like to help with the costs of printing and distribution? Or maybe help with a translation and publication in English or Polish?

♥ We'll need the help of a cabinet maker as we work on the church building this and Summer and Autumn. Any volunteers?—contact Sandie in Minnesota.

From the development desk...

Dear Vladivostok Mission supporter,

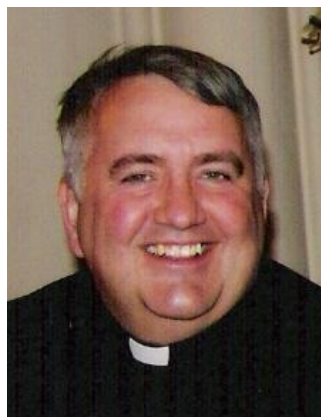
● October 20-22 are the dates for our annual conference for 2006. This time it will be in Las Vegas, Nevada, at the invitation of the Parish of St Joseph Husband of Mary. With over 9000 parishioners, it is a very large parish. Their Pastor, Fr Robert Stoekig, was in Vladivostok in January. Local parishioners have volunteered to host us in their homes if we like. There is a Holiday Inn and several other motels within the parish boundaries. Thirty parishioners have signed up to help us as a sister parish. I will have been there May 3-4-5 to meet them and plan the event. St John Neumann of North Las Vegas has also offered to be a sister parish and will help with the conference. I'm sure it will be business with pleasure. So plan now, circle the dates on your calendar, buy your tickets if you find a good price. Watch for the schedule of events in the next newsletter.

● If you have a special fund or program in mind for your donation, please mark it on the memo space of your check.

● The winner of the framed Most Holy Mother of God icon from the FOCUS conference was Sr Raymond Maria from Queens Village, NY.

● God love you and your family,

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Father Robert Stoekig, Pastor of St Joseph Husband of Mary Parish, Las Vegas—Our host for the annual conference