

# Vladivostok Sunrise

Mary Mother of God Mission Society Vladivostok Russia St Paul Minnesota

Issue Number Seventy Four March 1, 2007



## My Russian Immersion

By Brian Roche

I studied Russian in my high school and college for a total of eight years, five hours a week, but I knew that that would be no match for the knowledge I would gain by actually embedding myself in the society I had studied from afar. I decided to immerse myself in Russian culture. My fellow Russian Studies classmates at St Louis University agreed with me. Most spent time in Western Russia, having been hired to teach English in Moscow or St Petersburg, and they took some Russian classes on the side.



Brian and his "grandkids" at Baby Hospital #3.

I wanted something different. For one thing, I wanted to be a volunteer. I figured the best way to learn the Russian language was to absorb it from those whom I would serve. Teaching English would be okay, but I was looking for another way: to serve the poor, the elderly, and the suffering in Russia.

In early 2006, my Russian professor at St Louis University mentioned to me Fr Myron Effing and his work with the Catholic Church in Vladivostok and the surrounding regions. I spent days digging through the website of the Mary Mother of God Mission Society, amazed at all the projects and programs that the priests and the parishioners involved themselves in. I remember



Brian and Denis Bondaryev skiing with the Scouts.

the initial excitement of engaging in these programs myself, an excitement that still exists to this day- 4 and a half months into my adventure. The church worked with orphans, street kids, pregnant women as well as the sick and the dying.

One program that really caught my eye was Boy Scout Troop 1860. I joined the Cub Scouts when I was seven years old and followed the path all the way to Eagle Scout. I still use the skills and confidence that I learned through scouting, skills that I was eager to share with the young Russian boys. I have to admit that I was more eager just to see the differences between the Scouting program in Russia and the United States. This is exactly what I had been looking for: an opportunity in a Russian city, other than Moscow or St Petersburg in which to serve the poor

**May 27 is moved to  
August 19!**

Due to lack of funds, we will not be able to complete the church restoration in time, so the new proposed date for the re-consecration is August 19. Pray we'll be done by then.

and the suffering, to not only practice my faith but strengthen it, and finally to improve my Russian language skills. After being helped along the way by some remarkable people, my day had finally arrived, and surprisingly I was more excited than nervous to set out on this year long adventure far from home. I didn't know exactly what to expect, but I always knew that I would make it with God leading the way. I prayed that my heart would open wide and that my mind would become a sponge, soaking up my experiences.

I instantly fell in love with the church and the parish. The history of the church was especially interesting. I was looking at an example of the effects of Communism on the Catholic Church in Russia first hand. It was a great experience being introduced to the people who work tirelessly to make the parish and its charitable programs so strong and effective. Led by the examples of Fr Myron and Fr Dan, the staff here in Russia as well as in America is a group of talented and dedicated people, each one an example of how gloriously good people can be. Everyday, they encourage, guide and teach me about everything from their culture and cooking to their language and our shared faith. I love the fact that I am able to practice my faith with such a great group of people. Through daily mass, daily prayer and conversations with the priests, sisters and the youth of the parish, my Russian improves. But more importantly I see my faith strengthening.



I divide most of my day between the Hospice and the orphanage. Both groups of people, the orphans and the elderly, are very different but at the same time, much alike. They find themselves in desperate situations, completely dependant on the kindness and charity of others.

At the orphanage, I think my main service is to be a positive male role model for the young kids, most of whom are between the ages of 3 and 5. It's a shame, but the children are starving for attention, mainly from men. It is not their fault, but the odds of succeeding in life are stacked heavily against them. It is my hope that the guidance and love from me can point them down the right track in life so that they do not become another statistic. Also, I hope that my daily visits teach them the importance of commitment. They love spending time out of doors exploring everything from parked cars to snowy hills or just what I happen to have in my pockets that day. They still get a kick out of the size of my gloves compared to theirs. I'm surprised at how well they respond when I quiz them on the days of the week, colors or numbers. When they switched from calling me "Papa" to "Brian" it touched me. When we first went inside the nurses didn't have to show me around, the kids couldn't wait to give me a tour. They were starting to feel more of a connection and a bond with me, which was essential to my goal. I was more than just the guy who brought them candy. I became a friend. I love seeing them bundle up in their little snowsuits, made up of mixed and matched coats and gloves. It's amazing how cheerful and excited they always are. Perhaps they don't fully understand their situation. Sometimes I fail to grasp it myself. Usually on the bus it'll hit me that they don't have a mother and a father to care for them. They don't have a warm loving home like I did. It doesn't always register. Sometimes I slip and ask them if they have brothers or sisters and they respond with blank stares. Above all they long for physical contact. Heading outside, it's common to have ten different kids each grabbing onto one of my fingers. I have to be careful, however. Tanya loves to be picked up and carried, but once I do that, they all start screaming and waving their little arms in the air, aiming to get the same attention. At the end of the day I'm usually tired, hungry and dirty but I feel great!

The hospice is a similar situation. At first I found myself showing up just to feed the patients their lunch. But as time passed I started arriving earlier and earlier so that I could just be with them. That's all most of them long for, just some company and a conversation. In their old age, they naturally speak slowly. For that I am so grateful! It's easier to have a conversation when I can actually understand what they are saying. I usually deliver donations of diapers and clothes from the church, feed the residents their lunch or just sit and watch TV with the men or bring them a newspaper. Most of the patients are just aching for the little things: a massage, a napkin, an adjustment of their pillows or just to know what day of the week it is or what the weather is like. It's great because I never know what the conversation topics will be on any

given day. We've talked about their pasts, sports and even fish recipes. One woman, who must be in her 70's, asked if I could teach her English. At the same time it's heartbreaking knowing that some of them spend their entire day lying in bed, waking only to eat. It's not unusual to find patients crying and asking to borrow my phone so that they can call home and have someone take them out of there. More than once, in the middle of a conversation, a woman broke out in tears because I reminded her of her grandson who she hasn't seen in 10 years. It's a joy to be there but at the same time painful because you have to watch some of them deteriorate in health and you never know who won't be there the next time.

The three objectives I set for this trip intertwine everyday. My faith strengthens and my Russian improves which allow me to better serve the people. It's a wonderful opportunity that I have been given. It reminds me that between my family in the United States and my "family" in Vladivostok, I have been blessed beyond the definition of good fortune

## How to Communicate with Us

**Internet:** Russian: [www.catholic.vladivostok.ru](http://www.catholic.vladivostok.ru)  
English: [www.vladmission.org](http://www.vladmission.org)  
Sisters: [www.cjd.cc](http://www.cjd.cc)

### Office in Russia:

**Phone:** 011-7-4232-26-96-14  
(Six hour time difference from California)  
**E-mail:** [myron@catholic.vladivostok.ru](mailto:myron@catholic.vladivostok.ru)  
[daniel@catholic.vladivostok.ru](mailto:daniel@catholic.vladivostok.ru)  
**Letters** without donations: Catholic Parish  
Volodarskovo 22  
690001 Vladivostok  
RUSSIA

### Office in America:

**Phone and FAX:** 1-(651)227-0208  
**E-mail:** [usoffice@vladmission.org](mailto:usoffice@vladmission.org)  
**Donations and letters:** Mary Mother of God Mission Society  
1854 Jefferson Ave  
St Paul MN 55105-1662

### Office in Canada:

**Phone:** 1-(807) 597-6052 **E-mail:** [gnivall@shaw.ca](mailto:gnivall@shaw.ca)  
**Donations and letters:** Mary Mother of God Mission Society  
PO Box 868  
Atikokan Ontario P0T 1C0

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

assured that we do not sell our mailing list or any other donor information to other organizations.

**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.

### Sisters in Jesus the Lord

**Phone:** (651)230-3337  
525 Thomas Ave  
St Paul, MN 55103

**Vladivostok Sunrise** Edited and produced in Russia by V Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D. Assembled for mailing by Nativity Parish, St Paul, Minnesota.

## Home....\*

*Have you ever...  
Tried to sleep  
When the pain of hunger  
Goes so deep...  
No water to drink  
No food to eat  
And to think  
No father, no mother  
By your side to cuddle  
And if your memory is true  
Today you turn seven  
When you awake  
On Christmas morning  
In a sewer alone.....  
You call home  
No tree... no presents  
And all that is yours  
Are the wastes of others  
Your gifts you call treasure  
But you never complain  
In the horror of your pain  
But today is different  
You have gone to Heaven  
Although you have left  
So many remain  
Without a home  
Without a name.....*



*\*Glenn Ivall, our representative in Canada, wrote this reflection about what it means to be a street kid. Here Glenn and Nancy Ivall with Fr Myron in Las Vegas.*

## News Notes

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

- The City of Vladivostok has added some square footage to the property of the parish to make more room for parking and beautification. The new land basically lays on all sides of the present property, so it will allow us to better control what is near to the church, which is a state architectural monument.
- Our eldest parishioner, Regina Antonovna Savchenko, 96 years old, died on December 30. She lived in Slavyanka near the North Korean border. In her later years she was blind and hard of hearing, so she was never able to come to the church. Fr Myron visited her, heard her confession, anointed her, and gave her the Blessed Sacrament in the Fall. She had not seen a priest or been to church for 50 years. Eternal rest grant to her, O Lord!
- On January 7 our Bishop Kirill Klimovich met with our seminarian Brother Oleg Yelchaninov in Irkutsk. After the meeting the bishop issued a letter of authorization for Brother Oleg's ordination to the diaconate! We don't know the date yet. Stay tuned.
- Our main Christmas Mass took place this year in the Lutheran Church (about three blocks from our church) at 3:00 PM on Sunday, December 24. Fr Myron chose to do it so early because the Lutheran service was at 6:00 PM, so his choices were either 3:00 PM or 9:00 PM. Since night transportation is so difficult in this city, most people from whom Fr Myron asked advice said that earlier would be better than later.

About 160 people attended. Our choir began to sing at 2:30. The mass itself was very nice. Sr Marina prepared the children in a very cute Christmas play, which by tradition in Vladivostok takes place at the beginning of mass after the penitential rite and before the Gloria. This year the children dressed up in various animal costumes to wake up the baby Jesus and sing to Him on his birthday. Some proud parents were in the front row with video cameras as modern consumer technology is growing in Russia. The star of the show was 5-year-old Kirill Anisimov, who played Baby Jesus and woke up very slowly as the birds, bunnies, cows, oxen and donkeys sang to him their respective verses of a song composed by Sr Eugenia.

- In September Fr Dan made a trip to Salzburg, Austria for a high level liturgical music conference. He says, "Attending the liturgical music conference was a great privilege for me, made possible by the generous invitation and funding of Fr Johannes Trummer, the founder of the Department of Sacred Music at the University of Graz, where our parish organist Marina Omelchenko is now studying. It was a relatively small conference: Only 30 attendants from 14 different countries. Many of them were the liturgical music representatives of the bishops' conferences of their respective countries. Several were music coordinators from some of the major cathedrals of Europe (Dublin, Strasbourg, Cologne). The main themes were the "Liturgy of the Hours" and "Liturgies of the Word". For the past several years the organization has also invited one or more representatives of liturgical music programs in former communist countries as a way of learning more about what is happening musically where the church was persecuted and of encouraging our efforts. I planned a presentation of 30 minutes, but with questions and answers my participation lasted quite a bit more than one hour. People were very complimentary and encouraging about the music that we have composed, translated published and recorded. It was really an amazing experience. I kept asking myself, 'How did you ever get here in this elevated group of people?' I'm not sure what it will mean for the future, but I have been invited back."

- From the Salzburg conference Fr Dan made a stop in Gaming, Austria in the foothills of the Alps to visit Dima Kamil, our young parishioner and employee, who is now studying for a degree in Theology of the Family there. He was in very good spirits and reports that he is very happy to be studying at the International Theological Institute of Marriage and Family Life (ITI).

Later we received this letter from Dima: "The new semester has started already. It seems to be much busier

now because of the seven classes I'm taking: Greek II, German, Metaphysics (Aristotle and St Thomas' commentaries); Creator and Creation (mainly St Thomas' Summa); Theology of the Body (taught by prof. Waldstein who translated and edited the book), Gospel of John (also prof. Waldstein), Modern Moral Theory (Fume, Kant, Mill, Nitzsche). My favorites so far are Metaphysics, Gospel of John, and Theology of the body--Really good classes. Christmas break was really nice. I stayed in France for a week at the house of one of the students who is French-American. His family was very welcoming and his mom was cooking such goodddd food! I stayed there over Christmas and New Years with another two students of ITI (a married couple from India) and their child. It's sad what I noticed in France--In the countryside there are no young people at mass AT ALL. My friend's mother says that every priest has about 15-20 parishes or even more because there is a lack of vocations. In their town Sunday Mass is held only once in two months.

"In the beginning of January I went to Morocco, Africa for a week with a friend of mine from school. I went for two reasons: a nice country which I've always wanted to see, and because it's very cheap there. I would have been quite expensive to stay in Austria during the break because we don't get food vouchers during the break, and we're supposed to be on our own. It turned out that going to Africa was cheaper than staying in Gaming ☺. We stayed there for six days and visited quite a few places. In one town we even met catholic nuns. It was strange to see them, because it's a Moslem country. It was a great experience, but now I'm totally ready to start this semester."

- The removal of the Communist-added interior floors and walls of our church building went much faster than we thought, thanks to our great crew of happy, hard working Chinese (and lately 4 Vietnamese). Everything was removed within 6 weeks and at the same time they started patching walls and pillars where gaping holes remained. Then they poured the bottom layer of the new ground floor. Soon they will lay the pipes for the in-floor heating system and then pour the top layer of cement. On top of that will be the floor covering. We do not yet know if it will be tile or stone. We were not able to keep up the pace of the work as we hoped (lack of money) so all the Chinese went home early for Chinese New Year, thus setting back our plans for a couple of months. We hope that the interior will be in good enough condition to allow us to celebrate Easter Mass there. Meanwhile in the spring we hope to build the towers and steeples, and have everything ready for the re-consecration of the building and of the rectory in August. It was originally planned for

the Feast of Pentecost. It hardly seems possible that this 15-year old dream will be realized at last!

It is interesting to note that the Archive Bureau left our building 13 years ago, moving to a new building downtown. Now their new building is already too small and they are planning to move again. And we still haven't completed the restoration of the church!

- On October 15 our parishioner Oksana Peretruchina began her novitiate in Rome with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart.

- The street kids problem in Vladivostok has been drastically reduced. At the present time there are only occasional kids to be seen on the streets. This is because the government is doing a much better job of working with kids, and the government itself has been better funded due to high gas prices (Russia is the world's leading producer now of oil and gas.) So fewer kids find themselves in bad situations. Denis, our parishioner who works with the kids, together with a social worker, go to possible places to find kids about once a week: to the market, to the main intersections, to the train station, and to places where kids lived previously. Nobody is usually turned up.

- The City Social Commission asked if we could help some troubled families, seeing that there are fewer street children, but we reminded them about our work through the Women's Support Centers. It was suggested that we continue to work with poor children, like through the Scouting program where we are taking orphan kids who can't pay on our Scouting trips. We could also provide some medical and dental needs of poor kids, for example.

- Our Youth Group loves to do plays. Here is the Annunciation as performed on December 10 as the parish youth were preparing for Christmas.

*The cast takes a bow.*





*The play was held in our new Our Lady of Fatima Parish Center*

- People ask how the construction is going on the rectory. The building is livable, but not finished. Here is a photo taken from the North. We hope to finish it by August.



- **2007** should be an interesting time for Vladivostok! They are planning to build a high bridge from the center of Vladivostok to Churkin and then another one to Russian Island. The first will be one of the largest bridges of its kind in the world, they say. So traffic will be worse than ever this year with all the construction. There are again complaints in the national media about why there is so little development here in the Far East. Investments here should be more long term, but people are into quick money, even though the Far East has tremendous resources that could be developed over time.

- President Putin has decided close most of the orphanages in Russia and begin a program of foster care for children. One in twenty children is an orphan in Russia! It is mostly a result of years of Communist dogma, easy divorce, and abortion, all of which have weakened the family to practically nil. The institution of the family has to be rebuilt from scratch. Unfortunately, Russia tends to look to Europe, and the situation there isn't any better! The Orthodox Church has been compromised somewhat in this area, too, but they seem to be waking up. Hopefully, Christianity will have much to say in this area in the years ahead. It will take several years for the plans to close orphanages to be realized, so meanwhile we will continue to work with orphans and try to figure out how to support family life in Russia, including our Women's Support Centers.

- Suddenly the birthrate has taken a jump here. The government now gives \$10,000 to every woman who gives birth to her 2<sup>nd</sup> and further children. She gets the money only after three years—to make sure she doesn't give the child up for adoption—and the money can only be spent to buy a larger apartment, for the child's education, or for the mother's pension. As I've been mentioning in my sermons in the States this past year, the low birthrate throughout Europe and the former Soviet Union is the most worrisome thing often on my mind! People went from being afraid of a population boom to having no kids at all! Once again our Church has been the prophet in all of this, even if the birthrate in Catholic countries is among the lowest. So it seems that the Catholic people haven't believed the Church on these issues. Now it is becoming clear. We hope, not too late.

- Right now the Women Support Centers are \$33,007.94 in debt! The Centers try to help women save their children instead of going for abortions. Through them we also are able to promote chastity in the public schools and universities here. Can you help with this debt? Last year the Women's Support Centers received the opportunity to provide a new service for young women who use our programs: The ultrasound equipment donated by Americans. One ultrasound was installed at City Women's Consultation Clinic #7, where our WSC #2 is located. It's not a secret that medical insurance is not a guarantee for free medical service for the Russian people. Many medical tests and consultations provided by gynecologists and urologists are very expensive for most Russians. For example, ultrasound exams are now about 500 rubles, or \$20. It goes without saying that the young ladies who are students of local universities are not able to pay such high price for this test.

One year ago “Tatyana,” a student of the Vladivostok State University of Economics and Services, came to our Center for the first time with the aim to get a free pregnancy test. Though the result was negative we started to work with her because the girl really needed information about the harm of abortion and oral contraception. Then, when she was faced with a health problem, we suggested to her that she get a free ultrasonic examination. One week later she came to us again with bad news. Tanya told us that she was in big trouble--the ultrasonic test found that she had a subserous myoma in a pre-cancerous condition. The girl also told us that she had been examined before in her local Women’s Consultation Clinic but the doctors hadn’t found any pathology in her womb.

Then Tanya, who was married recently and dreamed of a baby, visited her local gynecologist and showed him the results of the examination, but this doctor ignored the results of our test and insisted that the girl have another test, on the machine of their local Women’s Consultation Clinic. This doctor also told her that she always had to be examined only in her local Clinic, not others! It’s very difficult to understand the reason for her doctor’s requirement. (Maybe he didn’t trust his col-leagues from another clinic or maybe he just wanted to get more money--who knows?) Tanya had to pay him 500 rubles for the test and the result was the same--subserous myoma, in a degenerate condition.

We helped Tanya to get the consultation of a skilled and professional oncologist-gynecologist. She had surgery and proper medical care. We are praying for her and hope that her dream of a baby will come true!

- Maria Gurusova and Alexei Dyouzhev were married in our temporary chapel on January 20. Masha is well known to our guests, as she often serves as a translator for them. Alexei is a member of our professional choir.



- The devil still keeps us busy with various problems. On Orthodox Christmas night thieves broke three locks,

and among the stolen things was a welding machine which we need to do the stairways and piping in the church. In Europe someone killed an Orthodox priest on Christmas night, stole all the icons from the church, and then set fire to it. So we don’t have it quite as bad as some others. But we’ve had a lot of these break-ins lately. We’ll have to decide what we can do to ward it off. A full-time night watchman is probably the way we will have to go. That’s another salary to pay, unfortunately, but it might be less expensive than replacing locks and stolen articles.

- The Sisters in Jesus the Lord have started back to school. Sister Maria Stella is taking a class on Patristics at St Paul Seminary. She received an A on her paper last semester. She wrote about what union between the Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church might look like at this stage in the history of the scism. She really enjoyed researching the topic. She is going to enlarge on it and make it her paper for her Master’s Degree.

Sister Catherine Marie is starting her third semester in her major of Catholic Studies at the University of St Thomas. She received all A's in her classes last Semester. Sr Collette has a course in the Fundamentals of Philosophy. All three of them are studying Russian. They are studying one day a week with Vladivostok’s former parishioner Yelena Hardkopf. Sister Catherine Marie is taking the last semester of Russian that St Thomas offers, so we don't know exactly where she can continue her Russian after this semester.

Sister Julia is taking a 9-lecture series on the encyclicals of Pope John Paul II given by Dr Bushman from the Ave Maria University in Florida. My assignment is to attend his lectures and pass them on to the other three sisters in our in-house classes.

Our beloved and most helpful supporter in the archdiocese, Monsignor Schuler had a stroke in early January just after his 86th birthday. No one except his own family is being allowed to visit him. We already miss his help greatly.

## Opportunities

- ♥ Mr Will Cossairt, Executive Director of Total Life Care Centers (28 centers in Minnesota!) suggests the possibility of some of their Life Care Centers becoming "sister centers" with Women's Support Centers in Russia! Many Mission supporters also work with Pro-life in various capacities. Anyone want to be first to be a sister center?

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

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage Paid  
St Paul Minnesota  
Permit No. 6732

Address Service Requested

### From the development desk...

Dear Vladivostok Mission supporters,

- We continue to staff tables at **Catholic Conferences**. Participants have a chance to win a beautiful framed icon print of Our Lady of Vladivostok. The year started off great at the Cardinal O'Connor Life Conference at Georgetown University on Jan 20. The icon was won by Colleen Gibson from New Jersey. At the St Louis Marian Conference, the icon was won by Roger Matthews of Illinois.
- We visited 18 Catholic Conferences last year. We would like to visit one in your area. Please contact me if you hear of one in your area.

God love you all, David and Sandra Sonnen  
Mary Mother of God Mission Society  
1854 Jefferson Ave, St Paul, MN 55105  
Work: 651-227-0208 Home: 651-690-1933  
[usoffice@vladmission.org](mailto:usoffice@vladmission.org)  
[www.vladmission.org](http://www.vladmission.org)

### Las Vegas Conference 2007 October 19, 20, 21!

**News:** Saint Joseph, Husband of Mary, Parish and Father Bob Stoeckig have again invited us to hold our annual conference in Las Vegas, Nevada. Father Dan will be coming this year and we hope you will be able to make it too!! Last year's conference was very rewarding and informative. It was a blessing for so many people. Any comments or suggestions for the conference can be sent to me, Jo Hannah: [vegasgrammie@hotmail.com](mailto:vegasgrammie@hotmail.com)

**Tips:** Book early and check online for package deals for airfare and lodging.

**Did you know?** 7000 *Sunrise* newsletters are published each issue. Check with your parish to see if they can be made available for pick-up by others in your parish.

**Trivia:** In the US what is the most popular charitable thing we do in Russia? (Answer will be in next issue.)