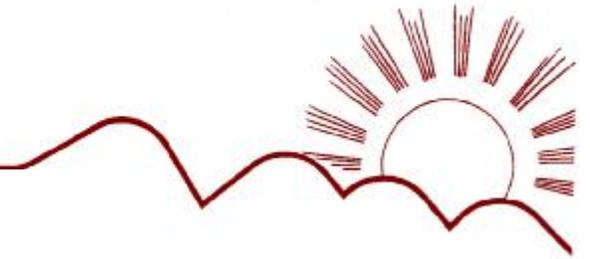


Vladivostok Sunrise

Mary Mother of God Mission Society and Vladivostok Mission

Issue Number One Hundred One September 1, 2011



My life-changing experience in China and Russia

By Morgan Hall

I experienced three wonderful weeks abroad with FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students), and I want to let you know how everything went in Russia (and China . . . I'll get to that), and thank you again for your prayers and support.

Our group met in Los Angeles for a team building day that ended up lasting five days, as one of our flights was cancelled and we ended up spending four unplanned days and nights in China. Thankfully our leader, Tyler, had a Chinese Visa and with that one visa was able to get all of us free hotels for four nights, thanks to Air China. Our travel insurance provided funds for meals and clothes for those whose luggage was lost. We took advantage of the time in Beijing to see the Forbidden City, Tiananmen
(Continued on Page 2)



The FOCUS crew of 2011

What Dangers Awaited Me?

By Hannah Woldum

On the night that I packed my bags for a month of mission work in Vladivostok, I lay in bed wondering *why* I was even going. For the past several years, I had wanted to work at an orphanage abroad. Now, however, I felt only a heavy, foreboding sense that dangers awaited me and that for some unknown reason I might even die in Russia. I also wondered if I had made the right decision to leave my job at a Catholic parish in the Twin Cities, where I had worked as Director of Office & Communications for the past two years, in order to begin a graduate program in philosophy and theology in California.

In the midst of these last-minute doubts and fears, I finished packing, said goodbye to my family and friends, and told myself that since everything had finally fallen into place, it must be God's will for me to go to Russia. It took three full days to travel from Minnesota to Vladivostok. I continued to feel apprehensive but entrusted the trip and my mission work to Our Lady of Fatima, and again and again prayed that God would work through me and lead me. When I imagined my time in Russia, I envisioned stressful travel difficulties, authorities demanding my visa paperwork at every turn, and intense work that would send me to bed exhausted each night.

Thus I was actually surprised when the plane landed safely at the small airport in Vladivostok! Almost as soon as I arrived at the Most Holy Mother of God parish center, I realized that things would be different from what I had expected. Instead of plunging into work, my very first day in Russia was a day of prayer. I spent several hours in Eucharistic Adoration in the beautiful church and attended a classical organ concert there. Even after the Sisters and I began to visit the orphanage *(Cont'd on pg Four, 2nd col)*

The Catholic Church in Eastern Russia

After the revolution of 1917, Siberia became a showplace of the new Communist era, a land without churches and without God. Under Stalin, all Catholic churches were confiscated, and many were turned into the most degrading uses imaginable.

Two American priests, Fr. Myron Effing, CJD, and Fr. Daniel Maurer, CJD, arrived in Vladivostok in 1992 to help re-establish the Church in this region. **They founded or re-founded 11 Catholic parishes in an area covering over 500,000 square miles.** With the foundations laid, additional priests and sisters are joining the work, and parishes are slowly growing and multiplying.

Square and the Great Wall of China, something none of us expected on a mission trip to Russia! It was fascinating to experience and learn about China, and one highlight was Mass in a little hotel room in Beijing. It was beautiful to celebrate the Eucharist in the middle of a communist nation, just sixteen Americans gathering together, praising God for his providential love.

After finally getting out of China we spent a night in South Korea waiting to fly to our final destination, Vladivostok, Russia. South Korea was a breath of fresh air, (literally). It was nice to be in a democratic nation again, as odd as that may sound. Everything was much more ordered and, in general, the Korean people were very sweet, cheerful, and hospitable.

We got to Russia almost a week later than expected but it gave us some great bonding time to prepare our minds and hearts for our mission work. All the waiting in the airports gave us a great opportunity to practice patience and trust in God's will for us. We made the best of wherever God placed us every day, trying to still be witnesses praying in the airport and sharing our joy everywhere we went. And, at times, especially when passing time in the airport, we were just rowdy Americans, playing cards and laughing.

Father Myron Effing met us at the airport in Vladivostok. He has been in Russia for about 20 years now and has done wonders for the Catholic community there, including hosting AA meetings and retreats for women who have had abortions. We learned many interesting facts from Father Myron about Russia. On average, every Russian woman has 7 abortions, and with 80% of marriages ending after the first three years, most children have a broken family and many men become alcoholics. Of the 600,000 people living in Vladivostok, about 400 are Catholics. Most couples live in government housing on low incomes with simply no room for children. Russia is experiencing a net loss of 600,000 people each year due to the low birth replacement rate and, if this does not change, Muslims will become the majority population in Russia as they are producing many more children than the Russians.

Once in Russia, our group split up. Half went by bus to the small town of Lesozavodsk about 5 hours away, where they put on an incredibly successful youth camp. One little girl said she heard at the camp, for the first time, that God loves her. I'm sure some great seeds were planted there and Father Myron hopes to make this an annual camp, which would be great for the broken children. I stayed with my group in Vladivostok at the Church to work at the orphanage and at an adult hospice. We spent three days at the orphanage and one day at the hospice before heading to the Youth Conference. The orphanage doubled as a Children's Hospital for Vladivostok. The facility was clean but incredibly sad

compared to facilities in America, with the bathroom lacking a toilet seat and toilet paper. We spent our time with the orphans, most of whom were 6 months to 18 months and healthy, but less than happy, especially before they got comfortable with us. Understaffed, the nurses did their best to feed them, using large adult metal spoons, and to give them some tea, using an adult cup, not a "Sippy" cup. Two primary nurses care for about twenty children. Volunteers at the orphanage are rare, other than the sisters or other "grandmas" from the Church. Without volunteers, the children don't get to go outdoors and instead are left in a play area inside where they "entertain" themselves. The lack of exercise and regular stimulation is seen in the children's physical appearance and limited muscle tone. One of the saddest things from the orphanage was seeing the children rock themselves to sleep before their naps by turning their heads side to side in their crib, sometimes in an almost thrashing motion.

There were three children who had obvious, major physical impairments. They were all three years old but had developmental problems so they stayed in their cribs while other kids interacted with each other. These three children were rarely held or cuddled. Simeon had club feet and actually had surgery and braces, but no one took the time to work with him or stretch him so his feet were still turned in and he is unable to walk. He has the best laugh and giggled every time his face touched one of the guys' beards. Nastya's parents were on drugs and she has developmental issues and health problems. She was sick when we saw her and so thin. She was able to hold down a little tea at a time before spitting up, and she was constantly chewing on her fingers, making her knuckles raw and tender. Sophia was the last of the three year olds held back with the younger children. Sophia has scoliosis, and when she ate, food would go to her lungs, causing a rasping breathing pattern that was painful to hear. I cannot imagine the pain she must feel with every breath. They fed her three times a day through a nose tube and she was clearly malnourished. Whenever one of us would hold her, or even touch her, her face would light up and she had the most unexpected, big, bright smile that still warms my heart to think about. We spent our time feeding the children and taking them outdoors to play, or staying indoors to hold and cuddle Nastya and Sophia, who were not allowed to go outdoors.

Conditions at the adult hospice were worse than at the orphanage. With wild cats running in and out and pages of books for toilet paper, the hospice was severely understaffed and they greatly appreciated what help we could provide, although no one knew what to expect when we arrived there. There were anywhere from two to four people in a room, most of whom had a diaper and shirt on. Some had pants. Some had a book to read and were able to walk around, but many were not. There was no cost to



Being “Grandma” for the orphans is fun!

the hospice residents to stay there, as much of Russian’s ‘democratic’ nation is run in a socialist way, especially health care and housing. I worked mostly with a kind lady who appeared to be about 85, named Lyuba. I fed her roommate, who could not speak, and then proceeded to rub Lyuba’s back. After about 10 minutes she gave me an Orthodox card of the Resurrection and wrote me a note I later found out that said “I love you.” My time with Lyuba was a touching experience. Due to the language barrier we had to find other ways to communicate love with each other, mostly through physical touch and song. Once I got Lyuba to sing to me, which was fun to hear. It’s amazing how love is the universal language.

We got to sightsee around Russia one afternoon. We went to see the port and main train station on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. We also visited an Orthodox Cathedral. We witnessed vespers, which included a 5-part harmony chant of prayer. We all loved the icons and other items at the gift shop there. During the nights in Vladivostok we did Bible Studies, made M & M cookies and talked. It was great bonding and debriefing time after our emotion-packed days.

After four days in Vladivostok, my half of the group traveled by bus to Nakhodka, a little city four hours away for a Catholic youth conference, while the other half remained at the youth camp. No one knew what to expect, and none of us expected what we experienced. The Conference was a big deal, with some of the Russians traveling four days by train to come. There were fifteen Russians, compared to our sixteen Americans. At the Conference, it became clear that Catholicism is discouraged in Russia, with the Orthodox criticizing and oppressing Russian Catholics. Most Catholics we met in Russia were not Catholic by birth, but by choice. Those at



The kids can go outdoors only when there are volunteers.

the Conference were the cream of the crop, people who believe in the Church and who were willing to back it up with their actions in the face of disapproval and without significant support from family or friends. Each story I heard was special and unique, a few were happy but most were sad. From the women’s stories, it became clear that the prospects for a good Russian husband are slim. . . and I thought I had it hard in America! Nevertheless, these were some of the most joyful, loving, thoughtful people I have ever met.

The second half of our group joined us at the Conference after two days. We still were confused as to our role at the Conference. We were ready to work! We wanted to DO something, but God was calling us to BE . . . be present, be joyful, be patient, be obedient, just be. This was a hard concept for many, especially me, to grasp and come to terms with. After a day of angst, I accepted this role as the meat and potatoes of this part of our mission trip, to witness the joy and love we had for each other and our faith to our fellow Catholics in Russia, who are still fearful to witness their faith after the fall of communism.

Bearing in mind that all the activity at the Conference required translators, as the Russians did not speak English and we did not speak Russian, a typical day went something like this: breakfast, morning prayer, talk (about abortion, modesty, history of Catholicism in Russia, etc.), then small groups to discuss the talk, meetings as a group to discuss the small groups, then another talk, small group, meeting session, lunch, one hour sports break (volleyball or nap time, one day we went to the beach), group work and presentations (either skit, liturgy, or journal), dinner, evening prayer, and finally American time to debrief. Personal time was slim to none, which was hard for me as I thrive on having time alone to think and process my thoughts. It was helpful to remind myself that God’s will

apparently wasn't for me to connect with Him through prayer at my convenience, but rather to connect with Him through the people He placed with and around me on our mission trip.

Due to the language barrier, we all felt frustrated at times with the lack of easy meaningful conversations, but with God's grace we found other ways to connect to the Russians, be it through translators, music, physical touch, hair-braiding, volleyball, or playing in the ocean. The fellowship and community we formed by the end of the week was awe-inspiring. It was great to see everyone open up to us by the end of the week and freely show affection and love towards one other. My favorite part of the conference was the talent show, where both Russians and Americans expressed themselves and delighted in each other's abilities. The love and respect everyone developed for each other was contagious. Russian youth staying at the same camp joined our campfire talks and s'mores session. I formed a special connection with one 12 year old, Nastya, who spoke great English. Her love and warmth humbled me. She always made a special effort to hang out with us and talk. She enjoyed practicing her English (all Russians do).

We were able to spend two more days in Vladivostok, visiting the hospice and orphans one more time each, before having to say our goodbyes and depart for America. Thankfully our way out of Russia was much smoother than our way in and we got home to America without too much trouble. Many hugs were shared on the bus ride to everyone's different airport locations. After three challenging, rewarding, wonderful weeks together in great fellowship, it was sad to leave my amazing friends with whom I was blessed to spend so much time and get to know so well.

One week in China and two weeks in Russia was definitely a lot to take in. I learned so much about the history of China and Russia and experienced the reality of communism and socialism. I went to Russia to help Russian citizens and Catholics and to change their hearts, and, by working with the hospice, playing with the orphans, and participating in the Conference, the Russians changed me. My prayer life has been transformed, along with my attitude towards people, in general. What I realized from this trip is that God's will is at hand and I need to let His will be done, trusting that He will provide the grace for me to get through each day and to be joyfully present in my current situation, to worry less about the future and embrace difficulty and success as both come from God.

Thank you for making my Russian trip and its opportunities possible for me, whether through your personal encouragement, financial assistance, or prayers. I had a life-changing experience that allowed me to better know God in my life and to see Him in others.



The Men's Side of the Camp in Lesozavodsk

The Girl's Side



(Continued from Page One)

and hospice, to me the days felt quiet and slow, although full of variety and spontaneity—a real change from the fast-paced, scheduled lifestyle I had just left behind.

I also realized that mission work is a way of living and being, in addition to doing the work that needs to be done. Each day we went to Mass and prayed the Liturgy of the Hours in Russian (a difficult thing for me at first, with my limited knowledge of Russian), and on Sunday we joined parishioners for coffee and conversation after Mass. We ate our midday meal as a community with Fr Myron, the brothers, and the parish workers. We even had a chance to see the city on several occasions, walking by the harbor and beach on Vladivostok Day, taking a small ferry to a remote part of Russian Island, and attending a beautifully chanted Vespers service at the Russian Orthodox Cathedral. The Sisters and I also celebrated the Fourth of July by attending a party on a US Navy ship docked in the harbor. On all of these occasions we encountered people who wanted to know who we were, where we were from, and what we were doing in Russia.



Dr Pavel Savchenkov organized the Conference.

Victor Anisimov was the major translator for all the events.



Although I am thankful for all of these experiences, most of all I loved our visits to the orphanage. We were able to take the babies outside on nice days (always bundled up in pants, sweaters and bonnets even on a hot day!), feed them lunch, play with them, and give them attention and love. On my first visit, I took 16-month-old Elsie outside. Although she was a serious baby who made no sounds and rarely smiled, she was very curious, pointing at the sky, the trees, the bushes, and at anything colorful. She even picked a weed from the playground and carried it around all morning. When I had to put her back into the crib, she looked up with huge tears rolling down her cheeks and began to sob. By the end of the month, however, she seemed more content, smiled a lot more, loved to play with my necklaces, and could make all kinds of baby sounds. Elsie was just one of the many babies I came to know and love. Some of them, like Simeon, Sofia and Nastya, suffered from physical handicaps, while most of the others were fairly healthy but physically small and developmentally delayed due to a lack of consistent, individual attention. On my last day at the orphanage, I tried to say goodbye to and pray for each baby. May Mary always take care of these children who have no mother of their own!

If the first few weeks in Russia passed by slowly, the last week sped by. An unexpected blessing at the very end of my trip was the arrival of a group of American college students who came to Vladivostok on a FOCUS mission trip. We joined other young adults from all over the Russian Far East for a Catholic youth conference held at a kids' camp on the Sea of Japan, where we heard wonderful talks, went to the beach, and made friends despite the language barrier. The things I will remember most, however, are the times of prayer and faith that we shared: enthusiastically singing song after song, in both Russian and English, on our first night of the conference; attending Mass in a makeshift chapel decorated with souvenir icons; praying the rosary together in one of the small dorm rooms; listening as different people, both Americans and Russians, talked about how they first found God; the FOCUS group praying for those of us who had to leave halfway through the conference.

By the end of the month, I realized that God gave me what I had asked for (volunteering at an orphanage) and even what I hadn't asked for (time to slow down, reflect, and "just be" with God, and the chance to participate in the FOCUS mission trip and attend the youth conference). My time in Russia turned out to be, in a sense, quite different from what I had expected—for one thing, I am still alive! I know that God was at work in everything I experienced—the new, the difficult, the unexpected, the joyful—and in the friendly, generous people I met. Thank you, Jesus; your plans are always far better than my own.

Prayers for two great benefactors



Deacon Bob

Deacon Robert Huber, a great benefactor and speaker of ours died at age 56 in Clinton, Washington on June 7. Originally from Wisconsin, he received a master's degree and a doctorate in international relations from American University in Washington, D.C. He taught at the University of Washington for the Jackson School and was currently president of the N.C.E.E.R. (National Council for Eurasian and East Europe Research) in Seattle for 13 years, as well as serving the Church as a deacon for nine years, currently at the University of Washington Newman Center.

Deacon Bob was a faithful and enthusiastic servant of our mission. He spoke fluent Russian and traveled to Vladivostok to visit the mission in the early years. During our priests' visits to Washington, Robert would host them, chauffeuring them from location to location. He was a mainstay of our speakers' bureau in the Pacific Northwest. Both Robert and Lois actively gave of their time at weekend conferences to distribute literature and educate Catholic communities about our work. Lois said about Robert's involvement with the mission, "He thought the mission was a good one to support."

We enjoyed his visit to us in Vladivostok, and he attended prayers with us. When he left, he left his Russian breviary with his name written large on it, and said we could use it until he returned. Deacon Bob loved our mission so much, and we are sure he will be praying for us from heaven. As a benefactor, he named us in his estate.

Deacon Bob will be missed. Grant him eternal rest, Oh Lord. Our prayers are with Lois, Joshua and Jeremy.



Jim O'Donnell with a group of parishioners from St Joseph Parish of Vanderburgh County, Indiana. Jim drove the truck loaded with items for our mission to California. Jim is in tee-shirt and shorts, 3rd from left in the front row.

James O'Donnell

February 1, 1933 – August 9, 2011

A long-time friend and zealous helper of our mission and other missions passed away. He was Jim O'Donnell of Oregon City, Oregon. He first heard about our mission for the rebirth of the Catholic Church in the Russian Far East in 1999 when Fr Dan was assigned by the Portland OR Archdiocese to preach a weekend mission appeal at Jim's parish, Saint Philip Benizi in Redland, a rural area east of Oregon City.

When St. Philip's pastor, Fr Ted Weber and parishioners decided to become a Sister Parish of Fr Dan's small, rural parish of Most Holy Trinity in the village of Romanovka, 3 hours by train from Vladivostok, Jim, ably assisted by his wife Doris, became the chairman of the Sister Parish committee and the driving force of the Sister Parish relationship. In his capacity as Sister Parish chairman, Jim spearheaded a successful fund drive to raise money for the Romanovka parish which was used to purchase and renovate a building for a Children's Center by the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne. It is the only such children's center in the entire state, and has made a huge impact on the lives of the needy children of Romanovka.

Jim, a life-long truck driver, also used his professional skills on many long drives to help Fr Myron to collect and ship to Vladivostok several containers of important goods from the United States, including farm machinery, life-saving medicines, and the large church organ that has become the cornerstone of our parish's successful program of sacred music concerts.

Jim O'Donnell is a great example of the influence for the good that one Christian can have on uncounted others when one is faithful to the vocations that God gives him: husband, father, grandfather, active parishioner, hard worker, mission volunteer, participant in community activities.

We are grateful to Jim for his untiring dedication to the Russian mission, and we will miss him very much. Our prayers and thoughts are with Doris, their 5 children and in-laws and grandchildren. We ask *Vladivostok Sunrise* readers to pray for his eternal happiness. May the Lord reward Jim for his immense generosity and kindness of heart.

How to Communicate with Us

Internet

Russian language: www.catholic.vladivostok.ru

English language: www.vladmission.org

Sisters in Jesus the Lord in English: www.cjd.cc

Office in Russia: Phone and FAX: 011-7-4232-26-96-14

myron@catholic.vladivostok.ru

daniel@catholic.vladivostok.ru

Office in California: Phone and FAX: 1-(209) 408-0728

Mary Mother of God Mission Society

1736 Milestone Cir

Modesto CA 95357

usoffice@vladmission.org

Sisters in Jesus the Lord: 1-(816) 353-2177

7049 Blue Ridge Blvd

Raytown, MO 64133

www.cjd.cc

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Vladivostok Sunrise gives you up to date information about the Church in Eastern Russia. Contact our office for your free bi-monthly copy.

Opportunities

♥ We're looking for volunteers to be "Captains" in their home state area and Canada to help schedule Catholic conferences and booth representatives. Please contact the mission office for more information. 209-408-0728

♥ We are in need of volunteers to help spread the news about our mission. Attend Catholic Conferences in your

local area to distribute mission literature from conference booths. Contact the mission office for details.

♥ Our hooded sweatshirts have been very popular throughout the year! They have "Vladivostok, Russia" in Cyrillic letters on the front. They come in a variety of colors and sizes, 50/50 cotton/polyester blend, medium-heavy weight. You can contact the mission office at 209-408-0728, or you can now find them on our website www.vladmission.org.



♥ Join a mission team to Vladivostok in 2012, or organize a parish or university team! Contact the mission office for information!

♥ These are tough economic times for all. Here are ways you can help the mission in Vladivostok without costing you money.

● Send your canceled foreign stamps to the mission office. Russian stamps from Fr Myron's letters too!

● Use Good Search as your internet search engine. Go to Goodsearch.com, download the toolbar, enter Mary Mother of God Mission Society as your charity and you're ready to go. The mission earns 1 penny for every search you do and .5% to 5% of your purchase when you shop on line at your favorite store through Good Search.

● California and Nevada residents can use the free SHARES cards at any Save Mart, Food Maxx, Lucky or Smart Foods stores. Save Mart Corp donates up to 3% of your grocery bill to the mission. MMOG just received a quarterly check for \$2568.57! Contact the mission office for your free card!

● Collect old cell phones and used ink cartridges as a parish or class project. Contact the mission office for details on where to send them to earn funds for the mission!

● Volunteer to help the mission office – pass out mission brochures or newsletters at your apostolate meetings.

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

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From the development desk...

Dear Friends, Congratulations to the many students and faculty starting a new school year!



We're going to talk about Advent already! Teachers, families, office teams, apostolates and individuals can participate in and teach the Corporal Works of Mercy by distributing and filling Advent Offering boxes to help the mission. Participants prayerfully place their spare

change in the box during the 4 weeks of Advent. Each box holds approximately \$25 of your sacrificial coins. Boxes will be collected after Christmas. Your almsgiving can be directed to any of the mission projects such as Soup Kitchen (Feeding the hungry), Elder Hospice (Sheltering the Homeless), Women's Support Centers (Pro-Life), Seminarians, Grandma/Orphans, and others. Contact the mission office for your Advent Offering boxes!

- Our deepest thanks to those who have helped with the roof restoration project so far! Fr Myron is \$15,168 away from what is needed in this 1st year of the 2 year roof

restoration project. We're praying to meet his goal before the snow and rain come! More prayers to have the funds to finish the restoration in year 2. Please see our website for the itemized budget needs for the roof restoration.

www.vladmission.org

- Four very dedicated and special men, **John Woodhall, Kevin Rick, Mike Weaver, and Neil Dodds**, from California peddled for an incredible six weeks and three thousand miles to raise awareness and funds for our mission. From California to Virginia, they endured blistering heat along the plains and freezing temperatures and snow across the mountains. During impassible snowy roads, driver **Bruce Dodds**, who drove along-side our four bikers the entire journey, assisted the team by loading them up and driving to the closest area safe enough to bike. These five men raised \$6754 and connected with hundreds of people about our mission. We are very thankful to John, Kevin, Mike, Neil and Bruce and their families for the sacrifice and service for God. We are very grateful too, for the many individuals who cheered them on and sent in donations, and to the many families, parishes and pastors who hosted the team along their journey. THANK YOU!

God bless you! Vicky Trevillyan - Mission Desk
209-408-0728 usoffice@vladmission.org