

Vladivostok Sunrise

Mary Mother of God Mission Society and Vladivostok Mission

Issue Number One Hundred Two November 1, 2011



One Child at a Time

By Bruce Gnatowski

She was standing on the corner wearing a bright purple blouse and black slacks, a thin, diminutive woman with dark hair. She waved us onto the parking lot in front of the concrete gray, dilapidated, Soviet-era apartment block where she lived. Through the Guardian Angel Project my family began sponsoring Masha [names changed for



anonymity--ed] and her daughter Natasha in January 2010, when Natasha was only 9 month old. Now here we were, meeting face-to-face in September 2011, me, "her benefactor" as she called me in letters.

Masha and Natasha



Kids from the Kolomeitsev family of Annunciation Parish in Arsenyev decked out in their Russian school uniforms with the required bouquet of flowers for the teacher for the first day of school!

Natasha's mother, Masha, became pregnant in 2008 at the age of 34. She refused to have the abortion demanded by the father, who abandoned Masha during her pregnancy. Instead of having the support of a loving spouse, Masha endured a difficult and lonely child birth; one that caused both her and Natasha a prolonged stay in an intensive care unit. By the grace of God both mother and daughter survived the ordeal. Masha was from Sakhalin Island, she had come to Primorye Krai in 2006 looking for work, and she had no relatives. There was an itemized list of income

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.

and expenses which indicated that she was living on \$240 per month and coming up regularly short. The file picture was only of Natasha, whose face wore a surprised and troubled look for the camera.

We exchanged several letters and photos by mail. One letter arrived in August, at a particularly trying time for us, and I distinctly remember feeling much better knowing that we were doing something worthwhile for someone in need. While we contribute financially, and we pray for the sponsored individuals, it is really humbling to know that they are also praying for us and our intentions.

Inquiring as to what I might purchase and bring as a gift for Natasha, Father Myron's very brief email reply was "winter clothes." Luckily, our local Target in Virginia was just starting to bring out children's winter coats, so I was able to get a nice purple ski jacket. Figuring all little girls need a doll; I purchased a small, girl rag doll with blonde pig tails. Since I didn't know where in Primorye Masha and Natasha lived, my plan was to leave the coat and doll at the parish for someone to deliver.

Father Myron picked me up at Vladivostok airport, and he surprised me by asking if I was interested in meeting Masha and Natasha. Naturally, I was very interested, but I did not know where they lived, so I left the final decision up to him and his schedule. Imagine my surprise the following Monday when Father Myron offered to make a four hour drive north to the town of Arcenyev, just so we could visit our Project Guardian Angel family. I jumped at the chance.

Primorye, north of the town of Ussurysk, about two hours out of Vladivostok, is beautiful country. It is somewhat flat and open grass land with some cultivated fields. To the east were some low, tree covered foothills that reminded me of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains. As we traveled north on the Federal Highway, we came to a fork in the road. The Federal Highway continued to the left to Lesozavodsk and Khabarovsk, and to the right it veered into the foothills leading to Arcenyev, a town of 80,000 people. There were several small towns and villages along our route. The villages consisted primarily of dirt roads and the ubiquitous, small, dark brown, Russian log cabins called "dachas." The day was clear, blue and dry, so all of the farm families were out digging potatoes, storing their harvest for winter.

Masha met us in the parking lot of her apartment building, typical of what I had already seen in Russia, it was very run down, with no color anywhere, not outside, or in the stairwell or hallway, just gray concrete. There were two young women, smoking in the first floor landing. Masha

mentioned to Father Myron that the cigarette smoke in the stairwell always caused Natasha breathing difficulties. The little girl apparently has a sensitive respiratory condition, something I was learning for the first time.

We walked up three flights of stairs to the third floor landing and Masha unlocked the big, thick steel door to her apartment. Everyone living in a Russian apartment lives behind steel doors. They make the apartment complex feel like a jail when you are in the hallway, but they also provide a sense of security once you are safely on the inside. We were in the one room of the apartment and Natasha was asleep in her wooden crib. She was such a pretty little blonde thing! Her crib was old and sturdy, and of a design that would have been banned in the United States for child safety reasons long ago. These cribs must have been mass produced throughout the Soviet Union, as Natasha's crib was identical to the ones I had seen in Children's Hospital #3 in Vladivostok. There was a small, narrow bed placed perpendicular to the crib where Masha slept. There was also a bright yellow tricycle next to the crib. The only other furniture in the 9' x 12' space was a single wooden chair and a small TV. We did notice a framed picture of our family on a little shelf, together with a few other pictures. It was nice to know they were thinking of us.

Since Natasha was asleep, we passed into the kitchen through a short hallway. Masha pointed out two small closets, one with a toilet and one with a shower. She told Father Myron that the toilet worked, but the shower did not. The kitchen was tiny and it was all we could do to squeeze into it. We sat on stools around a small table that was placed under a window sill. The window was open with a nice breeze coming in. The day was still bright and blue, which made the facing apartment building, the uncut grass, and the rusting playground seem not too bad. Masha leaned against the counter and made tea and offered us snacks of chocolate and shortbread cookies. It was obvious these were not items she normally had around, and that she had purchased these luxuries on our behalf.

A seemingly quiet, private woman, Masha shared a little more about her life in Sakhalin and about how much she liked the relative peace and quiet of Arcenyev. In response to questions about work and how she was getting along, we were all surprised to learn that she was living solely on the Project Guardian Angel money and whatever she could make doing odd jobs. The money she received from the state for being a mother ran out in the spring when Natasha turned two, and her unemployment money had also run out. If she still is without permanent work after a six month period, she could reapply for

unemployment benefits, which she intends to do this winter. Her vocational training was in dairy technology, a skill not in demand in Arcenyev. Natasha woke briefly while we were having tea, came in to the kitchen to say hello, got scared of the strange men and went back to her crib and finished her nap.

We finished our tea and returned to the main room for pictures and good-byes. I gave Masha a gentle hug and we left the apartment. She walked us down to the car and waved us good-bye. Two days later Father Myron received a call from Masha telling him she wanted to have Natasha baptized on the coming Sunday, and she wanted to know if I would be the godfather. This call was a great grace and I readily agreed. The woman in charge of the Women's Support Center in Arcenyev was to be the godmother. An American Franciscan priest, Father John Gibbons, is the pastor of the parish in Arcenyev who would do the baptism. These souls are in his and Our Lady's hands. Please pray for the conversion of Russia, one child at a time. May Mary's Immaculate Heart will triumph!

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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.

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

News Notes

by V Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D

- We've been busy buying two apartments on **Russian Island** for the Sisters in Jesus the Lord who are planning to open their first community in Russia in January. Luckily both apartments became available right near the university site where the sisters want to work, so we acted quickly. They are planning to work among the 100,000 students of the new federal university. And one apartment comes fully furnished!



"Babba Shura" is the guard for our apartments on Russian Island until the sisters can take up residence.

- We've done the installation of our **new printer** that was donated to us by *Our Sunday Visitor*. They also donated the old one to us several years ago, but we ran it ragged with all of our printing of evangelization materials, religious textbooks, pro-life materials, thank-you letters and what have you! The new machine is much faster than the old one, and doesn't "eat" so much paper. We traded the old one in on toner for the new machine. Thank you, *Our Sunday Visitor*!

- Here is an interesting fact: According to surveys, 56% of **Russians believe in God**. That is more than any other European country, including Poland! Perhaps it will mean a rebirth of interest in Church and religion in general. We hope so! We are counting on it. Meanwhile, less than 1% of Russians go to church regularly.



The new printer being admired by our mail clerk Igor Lukin, who will have the most work to do on it, and the representative of FARTEC, the company whose sold it to us and will do the servicing. In the foreground is a paper cutter.

- I was sad that the building we wanted to buy for **Visitation Parish in Lesozavodsk** had an asking price of \$200,000, so there was no way we could afford it. Real estate prices are going up. The parish is growing, and needs more space. But I heard today that the auction was cancelled because no one would buy it for that price. So there is hope again that we might be able to buy the building. The price would have to be a lot lower!

- We were saddened by the death of one of our eldest parishioners, **Leopold Kulga**. He was 91 years old. His parents were married in our church in 1920 and he was baptized there, too. During the bad years he changed his name from Leopold to Leonid as a way of avoiding their making him “an enemy of the people”. He became an engineer and professor of engineering, and was responsible for much of the electrification of our State of Primorye. He joined the parish again after we opened, and received the Sacraments of First Confession, Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick, and the Holy Eucharist many months ago. He was a grand man and a great Catholic.

- **Virginia Murphy, R.I.P.** Virginia died at age 82 in Cold Spring, MN, on September 15. She was so important to our Mission Society as our first Secretary. It was she who worked on the incorporation of Mary Mother of God Mission Society, together with Fr Richard Wey of the Diocese of St Cloud Mission Office. A member of the Nativity of Our Lord Parish in St Paul, she was on the first sister parish committee. Her knowledge of computers and

work with the internet allowed her to send out our thank you letters in those days before the internet was well enough developed that we could send them from Russia, and she was involved in the sending of the *Sunrise* newsletter. In her generosity, it was she who “adopted” two of our parishioners from Russia, one whom she helped to get an education at Hamlin University in St Paul who has since received his Ph.D. in biochemistry. The second parishioner had won a green card in the lottery with the Department of State, but had no connections or acquaintances in America. Virginia welcomed her and her daughter into her home.

Virginia was a computer programmer for the Veterans Administration in Minneapolis until her retirement. She was also in the US Navy Reserves. Virginia was an avid bridge player and loved golf and taking care of her many pets, but she has been ill for several years. We will continue to pray for her, and I’m sure she will continue to pray for us!

- Our **soup kitchen** for the elderly poor was saved by an American benefactor last Fall who donated support for the program for the whole year! So we spent some time reorganizing the program to make it more effective and useful. The folks are so grateful that somebody cares for them! You know, probably, that the Russian pension is so low that most elderly people have to continue to work. A parishioner recently told me that she happened to be on a very early morning bus, and it was full of elderly, sometimes handicapped, people who were returning from work as night watchmen. She was amazed.

Now the year has gone by, and again we are looking for a sponsor for the Soup Kitchen. Current costs are about \$1000 per month.



Pensioner reading the sign that the Soup Program might soon end.

- People were so generous to our appeal to repair the **church roofs**. We did as much as we could this season, and next summer we plan to finish the job when the weather allows. Here are some photos.



New Roof

Old roof



- On August 15 **Brother Arnulfo Undona, C.J.D.** took his first vows as a Canon Regular of Jesus the Lord for three years. He had completed his year novitiate and is looking forward to completing his work in Vladivostok to enter the seminary to study for the priesthood.



Brother Arnulfo

Br Arnulfo is from Davao City, Philippines, San Lorenzo Ruiz Parish. His family includes mom, two brothers and three sisters, his dad already deceased. He completed his Bachelor's Degree in the Filipino language at St Peter's

College of Toril in 1995 where he also served as Student Council president for two years and placed 2nd in the Intercollegiate Mathematics competition. He was a volunteer in Jamaica for the Missionaries of the Poor for three years, and then worked in a variety of businesses in the Philippines. He loves cooking, too, so we often have occasion to sample his work.



Br Arnulfo began his novitiate on August 14, 2010 so as to finish on the Feast of the Assumption in 2011.

- People who have seen our video have gotten acquainted with the Victor **Anisimov family** who were featured in it. Someone asked what the family looks like today. Here is a photo for you.



Victor and Natasha Anisimov and their children Veronica, Kirill, and Alyona.

Recently Victor was interviewed by an American Catholic newspaper, and he had this to say: "I am Victor Anisimov, 37. I met Fr Myron Effing the first time twenty years ago in 1991 when he was serving mass outside the catholic cathedral in Vladivostok. Since then I started thinking about becoming a Catholic. In 1993 Fr Effing and Fr Maurer invited me to work for the mission. It was an amazing experience that changed my life. I was witnessing the life and work of two missionaries starting great things for God. They founded catholic communities in different places and I traveled with them as an interpreter. They began restoration of the church and I followed all the stages until restoration was completed. They started charitable activities and I brought many foreign guests to see the people they were helping. Looking back at those 18 years that we have worked together I am still amazed to see their energy and creativity in mission projects. It seems like they never stop working and never run out of new ideas how to serve God on this mission in the Russian Far East.

"My work at the mission has been changing with time. I was editor of *Vladivostok Sunrise* newsletter in Russian. I was a volunteer of the Women's Support Center. I translated many different official documents and articles about the Catholic faith from English to Russian. I worked as a guide for mission groups of Americans. For many years I was the trustee of the Vladivostok Catholic Parish visiting government officials, attending court hearings and public meetings. I worked at the Catholic summer camps and the Catholic Youth Conferences. Also as a catechist I was teaching children and adults preparing them for different sacraments. For three years I have been participating in the Alpha Course evangelization program and for six years I have been organizing the Film Discussion Club for the Omega Project. And I am still working for the mission helping Fr Effing in different mission programs.

"In the Vladivostok parish I met Natasha who became my wife. My three children now go to Sunday school and my son is an altar boy. And I am still working for the mission."



● A big "thank you" to the great **team from Nativity of the Lord Parish** in Saint Paul, MN which has assembled and mailed our newsletter since 1995!! We've grown older together, and it is time to move that operation to another site. We haven't decided where to yet, but the November issue of the Sunrise will be the last one from Minnesota. Haven't they been great volunteers!? I really choked up as I said thank you to them. They were so dependable, and so thorough. They said that they had a ball doing it, and looked forward to each issue so as to be together again. One regular volunteer is 103 years old!! Now that is commitment! Here is a photo of most of the crew.

Happy Thanksgiving Everyone!

Opportunities



Bill Kiffie delivering Sunrises to US Post Office

Since February, 1995, Nativity of Our Lord Parish in St Paul, Minnesota, has been a sister parish to the Most Holy Mother of God Catholic Parish in Vladivostok, Russia. Nativity sent financial support, clothing, vestments, and many prayers to Russia. Arrangements were also made for the Russian organist to come to Minnesota for three months of organ lessons at the St Paul Seminary. Jerry Alfveby, chairman of the team said, "Because of Mary's appearances at Fatima, we prayed for the conversion of Russia in grade school, and here you are dedicating your lives to doing the work of conversion! It's been an honor and privilege to help. God bless you."

● We love having **volunteers in the summer** to help with our work. Here is a summary of this summer:

Categories of work	Hours
Orphans	429
Hospice	177
Music	182
Cleaning, hospitality, cooking, guest laundry	160
Kids Camp in Les.	954
English Lessons	19
Gardening	1
Rachels Vineyard	135
Free Meal for Elderly	16
Youth Conference	1738
Website	2
Romanovka	8
TOTAL HOURS	3822

23 volunteers--Sisters in Jesus the Lord, Katherine Griffith, Hannah Woldum, 17 FOCUS Team members, and three parishioners—were involved in these hours.

♥ Share a bit of your family history with us! The mission is collecting recipes from all over the world for the Mary Mother of God Mission Society **International Cookbook!** We especially would like old family favorites handed down from generation to generation! Send your recipes to us. Please include your name, city and state and the country of the recipe's origin. Add any a sentence or two about your recipe's history, if available. Proceeds from our cookbook will support our seminarians and Women's Support Centers.



♥ CA and NV residents, please remember to use your free **SHARES card** for your holiday grocery shopping! Shop at Save Mart, Lucky, Smart Foods and Food Maxx and present your card at checkout. The mission receives up to 3% of your grocery total! It costs you nothing! You earned \$2568.37 for the mission for last quarter's use of the cards. Thank you! Call us for your free cards to pass on to your friends, family, and apostolate members.

♥ We now have children's size medium to adults 3X in our **Vladivostok hooded sweatshirts!** 50/50 medium heavyweight. Available colors are Black/Burgundy lettering, Navy Blue/Burgundy Lettering, Burgundy w/Navy lettering. **Great Christmas gifts!** See our website for ordering.

♥ We are well on our way to reaching the half way mark for the funds needed for the final phase of our **roof repair** project. Many thanks to all have helped meet our needs to complete the roof repairs in year 1! Our goal is to raise a total of \$88,799 by next spring in order to complete the repairs to the roof You can track our progress and donate on line at www.vladmission.org

♥ Here is a simple idea for you: When you get foreign stamps on letters, cut them out and put them in your Mary Mother of God donation envelop. We'll be collecting them when we get your donation!--even Fr Myron's Russian stamps from the thank-you letters that he sends.

Contact the mission office for more information on our opportunities! 209-408-0728 or email us.

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From the development desk...

Dear Friends, We give thanks to God for your prayers and support throughout the year and for His many gifts. Look at just some of the blessings to the mission through your help!

1. The 1st half of the roof repairs on the Church were completed.
2. Fire Safety equipment installation started.
3. We added a fourth seminarian.
4. Br Patrick and Br Arnulfo took first vows!
5. Orphans At Play group started to help the orphans.
6. FOCUS group helped do first ever retreat for kids in Lesozavodsk.
7. Over 1100 babies saved from abortion!

The light of our faith is brought to Russia through your gifts, helping poor children with food and medical needs, the orphans, feeding the poorest of the poor, providing shelter and medical care to abandoned elders, and much more.

The faces of some of those lives you've touched are on our special ornament enclosed with this issue of the Sunrise. It is Thanksgiving, and we want to say thanks to you! We hope you will hang it on your Christmas tree and

accept the gratitude of all God's children whom you've helped. This gift is a bookmark too. Use it for your bible or prayer book. We ask you to keep in your prayers, the people, priests, and Church in Russia.

We need your help for the work to continue. You can find out more information about the projects and programs and how to help revive the Catholic Church in Eastern Russia on our website, www.vladmission.org
A blessed Thanksgiving and very merry Christmas to you and your families!

God bless you! Vicky Trevillyan - Mission Desk
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*Twins saved
from abortion
through one
of our
Women's
Support
Centers.*

