

Vladivostok Sunrise

Mary Mother of God Mission Society Vladivostok Russia St Paul Minnesota

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One Thousand Babies

By Susan H. Gray

Earlier this year, the pro-life community in southeast Russia celebrated a significant milestone. It was the birth of a baby boy named Denis. What was so important about little Denis? He was the 1,000th baby brought into this world through the assistance of the Adopt-a-Birth program in Vladivostok.

The Adopt-a-Birth program is the brainchild of George Riess of Dayton, OH and Fr Myron Effing, CJD, an American Catholic priest who has served in Vladivostok, Russia since 1992. Through the program, people from all across the globe have helped cover the basic medical



Denis and his twin Evgenii in the arms of their sister.

expenses of Russian women who have chosen not to abort their children. The costs are minimal—usually between \$20 and \$30 per birth.

Early Pro-Life Work in Russia When Fr Myron and fellow American, Br Daniel Maurer, CJD (now Fr Maurer) first arrived in Russia, they knew that pro-life concerns would be among their highest priorities. That year, they translated and published the booklet *The Early Church Fathers and Abortion* from the American Life League. Since then, they have overseen the creation of Russian-language pro-life newsletters and materials on fetal development; the delivery of high school seminars on chastity, contraception, and abortion; the training of pro-life counselors; and the establishment of a network of pro-life support centers to assist women seeking an alternative to abortion.

Pro-life work is relatively new to Russia, where abortion was legalized in the early 1920s. Today, the country has the highest abortion rate in the world, roughly two abortions to every three live births. The high rate, coupled with the country's low life expectancy and other factors, is causing Russia's population to drop by approximately 700,000 to 800,000 people every year. President Vladimir Putin once called the slide "a creeping catastrophe."

To put it in another context, Russia is geographically about twice the size of the United States, but with less than half its population. And that population is shrinking rapidly.

Other Factors The imploding population is only part of the story. Only recently in Russia have abortions been linked to women's poor health and high mortality rates. In April 2005, Vladimir Kulakov, deputy director of the Russian Women's Health Center in Moscow, reported that

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.

abortion-related complications are responsible for 30% of deaths during pregnancy. A spokesman for Russia's Health Ministry has also pointed out that abortion is a leading cause of infertility. In response to these and other findings, a law was passed in 2010 requiring abortion providers to advertise the serious health risks that abortion poses to women.

The moral issue is much more difficult to address. Thanks to more than 90 years of virtually unrestricted abortions, many Russians do not see that there is a moral problem at all. In a *MoscowNews.com* article about the situation, one woman makes that point: "What's a little abortion if it makes [my husband] happy?" And Natasha, a university student, says, "It has never occurred to me or my friends that abortion is immoral." Clearly, a widespread sense of abortion's evil and its negative consequences simply does not exist.

A Slow Turnaround Fortunately, there is evidence that a new paradigm is emerging and that hearts and minds are changing. The Orthodox leadership, the small yet growing Catholic Church, and certain government luminaries are leading the charge. Even Russia's former first lady, Svetlana Medvedev, has gotten involved. Her Foundation for Social and Cultural Initiatives publishes pro-life materials and organizes exhibits. And every year since 2009, the foundation has held a national week-long campaign called "Give Me Life!"

Various agencies in southeast Russia have noted the Catholics' pro-life work in the area and have responded favorably. Local hospitals have allowed the pro-life women's centers to place ultrasound machines in their facilities. The hospital gynecologists and obstetricians then provide their services free to the centers' clients, while the hospitals get to use the ultrasound machines at no cost. The hospitals have also allowed the centers' staff to place literature and fetal development displays in their waiting rooms.

Even the government of Primorye State (where Vladivostok is located) has been of assistance. The State Department of Social Services often contacts the pro-life centers to help identify women and families needing help with food, heating costs, and other needs. The Department also helps provide infant formula and baby food to new moms who are the centers' clients—moms such as Svetlana, who gave birth to little Denis.

Progress on the pro-life front is slow, but it *is* steady. Fr. Myron already has plans to open a new center in 2013. This one will be on Russian Island, not far from Vladivostok. Its location makes it easily accessible to thousands of university students. Like the other centers, it

will offer counseling, pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, vitamins, and help with medical costs through the Adopt-a-Birth program. Fr. Myron is excited about the new center and about training its new employees and volunteers. Perhaps, in time, they will be the ones announcing the delivery of Adopt-a-Birth's 2,000th baby.

[Susan H. Gray has worked with the Mary Mother of God Mission Society since 1993. She has visited us four times. She can be reached at susanhgray@centurytel.net]

Helping at the Orphanage in Vladivostok*

[*The faces of the orphans have to be hidden. Sorry!]

By Summer Swisher, FOCUS mission team 2012
And Jessica Connelly, FOCUS Program Director for the Southern Plains

Summer: The mission trip to Russia was one of the best experiences that I have ever had. God truly blessed me in allowing me to go on the other side of the world to help serve His people. Going to the orphanage in Vladivostok was absolutely wonderful. I experienced pure and true joy there. As I walked into the orphanage and little toddlers and babies waddled out to the small playground, my heart literally leapt for joy. I couldn't wait to hold them and love them. Soon after, we were able to follow them to the playground. As soon as I sat down by the sand box, little Vanya walked over to me and began to play with me. Suddenly, he decided it would be fun to put sand all over me!! He was so so happy and just laughed! Vanya, then got bored, and wandered off.

I then turned to a cute little boy with big brown eyes who



Facilities are clean, but human touch is lacking.

was digging in the sand. The entire rest of the time we were there, I spent with him. He was so excited to be held. I then found out that he was not able to walk. Every

time I set him down, he would just cry. He just longed to be held and loved. He was so, so excited to touch the trees. He thought that it was so funny to pick leaves off of the bushes and let them drop to the ground. The simplicity of a child is beautiful. Although he had a little bit of a cold, and tons of boogers were running down his nose, and getting all over my clothes, there was nothing that could prevent me from loving him.



The kids love to be held, something they rarely get.

It is an odd experience to genuinely love someone that you just recently met. That is how God wants us to see everyone we encounter! All of the children there were absolutely perfect. They had no flaws in them.

Going to the orphanage was such an amazing experience. I will never forget all of the kids that I encountered. I think about Russia, and the people and children there almost every day. I pray that in some way, they experienced through me Christ's love. I know, that through them, I truly experienced real love; the love of Christ. Going to Russia will be an experience that I will never forget. I am forever thankful that I was able to meet those babies in the orphanage. Through them, God really changed my life.

Jessica: My favorite memory of working at the orphanage was holding the babies after they had been fed—We had been playing outside with the 2-4 year olds and when the nurses took them inside, we followed. Once inside with the infants, we noticed many of them were just sitting in their cribs, so we took the liberty of going into the room and picking them up. The mood in the room immediately changed when we started holding them—the babies became animated and energetic. They smiled and laughed and started playing more with their toys. Of course, they cried, too, since we could not hold them all at

once, but overall they were simply overjoyed at this simple human interaction.



How nice to be able to go out and swing in the sun.

Every time I was at the orphanage I noticed how the staff seemed worn out and unhappy. I can only imagine that they have a lot of work to do with so little staff. However, I also did not understand why they did not interact more with the children, such as when we were playing outside. I have a feeling that they either do not understand the necessity of physical touch or that they simply do not like working there. These observations made me want to reach out to them, too, to hear their stories and to better understand why they interact with the children the way that they do.



Too much time spent just in bed.

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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.

Our People and Their Lives –

The Kowal-Nawrocki Family

[Originally published in the Russian edition of the Vladivostok Mission newsletter, *Zaria Vladivostoka*, No. 6, 2010. Part of a series on the lives of the parishioners of the Roman Catholic Mary Mother of God parish, Vladivostok, Russian Far East. Written by Parish Archivist, Tatyana Shaposhnikova, and translated by Geraldine Kelley.]

Leafing through the historical books of the parish registry of Most Holy Mother of God Roman Catholic parish, you will come across well-known family names – Zielinski, Gulewicz, Wojciechowski, Mickiewicz, Kaczanowski, Niewero, Szerbinski, Wysocki, Jankowski, Talko, Midrzelski... The descendants of these families even today live in the Far East. The Bolshevik repressions, merciless deportations and endless fear for their families forced the older generation to bury their faith in God deep in their hearts. Unbeknownst to anyone, grandmothers and great-grandmothers carefully saved their families' religious relics and old family photographs and hoped, and held sacred the belief that their children and grandchildren would return to the faith of their forefathers. The story of each one of them is an example of fortitude, faith and love.

The descendants of the Kowal-Nawrocki family have long lived in the city of Artyom, Maritime province. A granddaughter, Natalia Viktorovna Kisel (Perch), has been painstakingly gathering family historical documents and old photographs for many years. At our meeting she placed in front of me precious albums and notebooks filled with the recollections of her mother about those long-ago days of their family, both joyful and sorrowful, from which have been woven the history of the family. Natalia tells the story:

“My grandmother, Alexandra Ludwigovna Woroszylo, was born in 1882 in Prushki, a village outside of Warsaw. Her mother died when she was two, and her father set off for Warsaw to find work, leaving his daughter with his brother's family. Alexandra lived in her adoptive uncle's family until she was eight, but since her uncle's house was full with his own children, he got Alexandra a job as a common servant for the manager of the village post office. The duties of a servant included all manner of domestic chores – she had to look after the horses, take the children to school, heat the stove, and haul water. The work was beyond the strength of an eight-year-old child. Her uncle took pity on her and found her another job as a nanny in another home. Grandmother worked as a nanny, and later as a maid, in many homes. When she was eighteen, she moved to Warsaw where she continued to work as a maid. She was illiterate but she knew the “domestic arts” to perfection: she was a splendid seamstress, she pressed garments, she was a wonderful cook, she knew the fine points of etiquette and rules of conduct, and she could make any home comfortable and beautiful. She was known for her talent in all of Warsaw, and she enjoyed well-deserved respect in many wealthy homes. In the capital she joined the Union of Domestic Workers and was actively involved in it. She greeted the Revolution of 1905 on the streets of Warsaw, where columns of demonstrators marched with flags. In 1906 she left Warsaw with the family of an engineer who worked for the railroad and was being sent to work on the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railroad. In Harbin she met her future husband, Jan Kowal-Nawrocki, a conductor on the city trains. They married there in 1907 and in the same year moved to Nikolsk-Ussuriisk, Maritime Province, where the administrative offices of the Ussuriisk Railroad were located.”

Alexandra's husband, Jan Kowal-Nawrocki, was a native of Stanislawowka, a village in Kamenetz-Podolsk province, now in western Ukraine. His father was the village blacksmith, and all four sons had the prefix “Kowal” [“blacksmith”] added to the family name. They were poor, and from early childhood the children worked *barshchina* [unpaid required labor of peasants on an estate], and things became especially difficult after the

sudden death of their father. In 1900 Jan was conscripted into the ranks of the Tsar's army and sent to serve in the Far East, where serious military action was becoming imminent. After the end of the Russian-Japanese War (1904-1905), Jan decided to remain in the Far East for good.

Arriving in Nikolsk-Ussuriisk, Jan got a job at the railroad and soon the young couple got an apartment where their children were then born: Wieslaw (1908), Sigizmund (1910), Stanislaw (1912), and Genoefa [the Polish version of Genevieve] (1914). All the children were baptized in the Catholic Church in Vladivostok, as evidenced in the parish registry. The Kowal-Nawrockis were faithful, practicing Catholics – they strictly observed their national traditions, they taught their children Polish, and they cultivated in them the virtues of industriousness, respect for elders, and care for one another. Alexandra could not imagine her life without God. She could spend a whole day in church – there her soul found rest and emotional tranquility.

The Civil War of 1917 laid a heavy burden on Alexandra's shoulders. From the very first days, Jan went to fight in the partisan detachments of the Red Guard. He was well-known among the Japanese under the pseudonym Jan Janowicz Janiszewski. Alexandra, deeply believing in the justice of the cause, courageously helped the soldiers of the partisan detachment. Risking herself and the children, she took part in operations on assignment from partisan headquarters. She conveyed weapons and pamphlets, contriving to hide them in a child's blanket or at the bottom of a bag with schoolbooks. Those were difficult times. During the Intervention, the families of the partisans were deprived of all necessities – food, medical assistance. In search of any kind of work, the mother left the younger children alone at home, and the older ones (who were only eight and ten) looked for work as well. When Alexandra and the children fell ill with typhus, it was simply by a miracle that, with the help of acquaintances and forged documents, they managed to be admitted to a hospital.

In the 1920s they transferred Jan to Vladivostok and Alexandra followed with the children. They got settled on the military post – Gnilyi Ugol [Muggy Corner], which was what they called the place along the Obiasnenie River. These sturdy brick barracks even today are still standing on Borisenko Street. Right next to them were hills covered with thick forests, and large gardens grew along the river. They befriended the Chinese – who helped a lot of people in those times. It was impossible to buy food in the city – on a foreigner's ration card they would give you only crumbs – a family got only five kilograms of beans and three kilograms of herring for a

month. There wasn't enough clothing, especially in the winter when the children had nothing to wear to school. What gave people the strength to live, to raise their children, to look to the future with hope? Alexandra and the children often went to church. The moral support of the parishioners and faith in God helped them to endure all the trials of their fate.

They witnessed the entry of the Red Army into Vladivostok. On a hill above the church the city's citizens accepted the arrival of a new power – no one knew what lay ahead, what kind of bright future lay in store for them. With the arrival of Soviet power Jan again went to work as a conductor on the railroad and he actively participated in the work of all kinds of commissions that were struggling with economic ruin, famine, poverty, and abandoned children. He was always out front, not thinking about himself but about others, about a future without grief and suffering. That frightful year of 1937 drew close. They arrested Jan in April. He disappeared without a trace. Later on they told Alexandra that her husband was in the basement of the business school (today, one of the buildings of Far East State University on Sukhanova Street), where, under torture, they extracted from the prisoners confessions of their connections with foreign services. Like thousands of others, Jan, who had participated in the partisan movement and risked himself and his family – was shot. He was exonerated in 1960.

Whether it was possible to survive without faith in God and without God's help – left alone with the children, now ranging in age from twenty-nine to twenty-three, Alexandra prayed. All her children were saved by her prayers.

Wieslaw was the oldest and more befell him than any others. After seventh grade he went to work as a switchman at Vladivostok station. But the desire to learn never left him. He earned a specialization as an electrical technician at Khabarovsk Railroad Technical School, then returned to Vladivostok and worked as the chief mechanic of the seaport. He was arrested and imprisoned twice. The prison conditions were insufferable – it was difficult to understand this unjustified cruelty. In stuffy, overcrowded cells, people awaited their fate for months, many were dying, interrogations lasted for days. When they released him, on a friend's advice he immediately left for Krasnoyarsk, where he was conscripted into the Red Army. He fought on the northern front and was decorated for his military service. He returned from the front to Vladivostok.

Sigizmund, upon completing sixth grade, enrolled in the railroad technical school at First River Station and

worked at the steamship depot. After finishing the technical school he continued his education at the Communications Technical School in Irkutsk. He went to



Ukraine, and in 1941 he was conscripted into the Red Army. He was in the war through its whole duration – he defended Moscow, fought in the Battle of Stalingrad, and was seriously wounded. He too was decorated for his military service. After the war he returned to Vladivostok.

Stanislaw, after finishing school, enrolled in the Viazemskii Railroad Technical School. He worked at the local railroad station and was considered one of the best workers. He later moved to Khabarovsk.

Genoefa with classmates at their First Holy Communion

Genoefa received her First Communion from Bishop Karol Sliwowski. This moment is captured on an old photograph taken after the Mass in the church courtyard – a little girl in black shoes, full of joy and pride. Upon finishing school, Evgenia (it was easier to live with this name) studied at the Vladivostok Geological Technical School. She became a geologist and worked with the family of Vladimir Arseniev.¹ She took part in many expeditions in remote and hard-to-reach places in Maritime province. She lived in Dalnegorsk, where she saw the mines constructed by the well-known industrialist Boris Bryner.² She was astounded by the ease and efficiency with which the mines were built. In 1937, soon after her father’s arrest, she married and the young family left Vladivostok for Artyom, about 20 miles from Vladivostok. They took her mother with them, since it would have been difficult for Alexandra to be alone. The repressions more than once threatened Evgenia, as was seen as a “daughter of an enemy of the people.”

With what warmth and gratitude Evgenia Ivanova spoke of the ordinary people who supported the family

¹ Well-known ethnographer who described the lives and ways of the native peoples of the Far East; harassed during the Purge of 1937, he died of a heart attack just before his interrogation; author of *Dersu Uzala*, which was made into a film of the same name by Akira Kurosawa.

² Father of the actor Yul Brynner.

and helped them at this difficult moment. Her daughter proudly says, “My mother lived a worthy life. She was a participant in the Great Fatherland War and a Veteran of Labor.”³ She earned awards for her conscientiousness and industriousness. Our grandmother, Alexandra Ludwigovna, was a true believer and therefore I am certain that she also baptized me. But those were the “Pioneer” times⁴ and it was better not to speak about religion. With all my soul I hope that my own children will come to have faith in God. The Lord teaches humility and patience – which everyone now is lacking.”

Evgenia Ivanovna died December 16, 2005 in Artyom in the presence of a Catholic priest, Fr Myron Effing, who had anointed her. At the decision of her family her body was cremated and the remains buried in Artyom. Her funeral Mass was said by Fr Myron at the church in Vladivostok. [Our benefactors may remember her from the mission video, where she was speaking to Fr Myron about her memories of her First Holy Communion.]



Genoefa 1986

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

³ An award established in 1974 and given to retirees.

⁴ The Pioneers were a children’s organization and it was common for the adult leaders to ferret out information about the private lives of the children’s families – with dire consequences for those who revealed the family’s religious practices.

News Notes

by V Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D

- **Poor Visitation Parish in Lesozavodsk!** A thief broke in and damaged things, and stole a heater and some other things. On top of that there was a fire on the floor beneath us a month earlier which was set by a thief who stole the major electric cable to the building. Then we lost at the auction for the purchase of the building where the parish is located. Someone else richer than us bought the building, so now we are wondering what will happen to our poor parish there. Perhaps the new buyer will sell us some space. Or maybe we'll have to move out to different premises completely! It will be expensive.

- The big **summit meeting** of Asian Pacific countries in Vladivostok is finished. We'll see what the results are. Russia was represented by President Putin and America by Mrs Clinton. Brother Edwin Intan, C.J.D. saw her and President Putin when he was working as a volunteer translator at one of the banquets. He was an official translator, as he speaks Cebuano, Tagalog, English, Japanese, and Korean! Meanwhile we are trying to get used to the new traffic patterns and bus routes necessitated by the new bridges. And the Sisters in Jesus the Lord are anxious to make progress on their home on Russian Island and at the university, now that the bridge is finished.

- The first Sunday of October we always celebrate the **Sacrament of the Anointing** of the Sick in Vladivostok. It is a special time of grace for our elderly and infirm. Fr Daniel Maurer, C.J.D. was the celebrant this year, as I was in the USA on a preaching tour.

- It was quite a **trip I had in the United States**. I had wonderful visits with benefactors, and especially have good memories of certain outstanding parishes, like the Vietnamese parish and St Thomas More parish in Denver, and St Vincent Ferrer parish in Delray Beach, FL. In Colorado Springs I had a whole hour radio program with Bishop Sheridan. After I returned back to Russia, so many people called and asked for help and expressed their respect for all that we do for the folks here. What can I say, except that our benefactors make it all possible! Thank you so much! When I spoke with Bishop Thompson in my home city of Evansville, IN I was able to tell him how generous people have been to support our mission, spiritually and financially. Right now our financial need is pretty great because of having vocations to educate in the seminary. We have such good seminarians, but it takes a lot of money to pay for their education. That in addition to all of our work in Russia.

We are grateful, and will continue to pray for our benefactors!

Opportunities

- ♥ Regular **seminarian sponsorship** is urgently needed. Contact the mission office for more information on how your monthly support will provide for a seminarian's journey to the priesthood. Julianne Immordino from NY is making and donating stunning Swarovski Crystal rosaries for all those who can give \$500 for seminarian support!



- ♥ You can form a **mission team to Vladivostok** from your parish or university! Or, join a team already forming! See first hand and participate in the blessed and exciting work to revive the Catholic Church in Eastern Russia!

- ♥ **Project Guardian Angel and Guardian Angel – St**



George are 2 programs of the mission where you may directly sponsor the poorest children in Russia. In the **Guardian Angel Project**, you may choose a child to help monthly as you receive a portfolio and picture for those in the program. You may write to your child through the mission and

receive correspondence from them or the families in return. In the **Guardian Angel – St George** project, you may become a prayer warrior for an individual child in one of our poorest villages. You will receive the name of the child who you are helping through prayer. Your \$20 monthly prayer stipend will go to the child's village lunch program to feed the hungry children.

- ♥ Are you a religious or lay person who would enjoy speaking about the Vladivostok mission in parishes a time or two each year? You are invited to join our mission **speakers' bureau!** The 2013 speaking year begins in the Spring.

- ♥ Another **SHARES card** milestone! The mission received a 3rd quarter check for \$3190.50, thanks to SHARES card users! Please contact the mission office for your FREE SHARES card if you shop at Save Mart, Lucky's, FoodMaxx or SmartFoods. Present your card at check out and these stores donate up to 3% of your grocery bill to the mission. It costs you nothing! It's a great way to help!

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From the development desk...



Dear Friends, Our new year begins with renewed hope in Christ to help us accomplish all He asks of us. Through your prayers and ours, we work together

to bring the gospel to Catholics in Russia and to those who still have yet to hear His good news. Our parishes have grown slowly, but surely.

Jesus tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves. In doing so, we not only come to know Him more deeply, but we bear witness to others of His presence. Our work in Russia touches all people, young and old, believers and non-believers, rich and poor. Each year, thousands are reached through our work. Over 1400 babies have been saved from abortion through the **Adopt A Birth Program**. Over 36,000 men, women and children have been helped in the 14 years of our **Women's Support Centers**. Our centers have helped men and women struggling in the aftermath of abortion through the

Rachel's Vineyard program, and taught Natural Family Planning, just to name a few of the services provided.

Over 180 **orphans and other poor children** each month are given food and clothing by your support. Volunteers spend their time holding and loving orphaned babies who desperately need loving human touch. Children living in orphanages experience grandmotherly love and attention in the **Grandma Mentoring Project**. Over 60 sick or abandoned elders are visited throughout each month, as we provide love, friendship and hugs during our visits to the **Hospice Hospital**. We have been able to furnish the hospital with hot water heaters, industrial washers, medicines and nutritious meals.

These works have been accomplished by the blessings from God and your help. You may find out about other programs such as the Alcoholics Anonymous program, Soup Kitchen, Medical Assistance Program, Omega Project (Newman Center), Seminarians, and more on our website. www.vladmission.org

As we all continue our efforts through our love for one another and the hope all God's children will be in heaven, we thank you for being a dedicated and faithful part of our work. A happy and blessed New Year to you and your families. Sincerely,

Vicky Trevillyan, Mission Coordinator 209-408-0728