



Vladivostok Sunrise Russia Mission



Mary Mother of God Mission Society: Reviving the Roman Catholic Church in Eastern Russia
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Participants in the 18th Annual Far Eastern Catholic Youth Conference—July 27 to August 3, 2014

Living in the Russian Far East

By Nicholas Hagen

I have been living in the Russian Far East for five weeks with a classmate from the American seminary in Rome. We have been blessed to join Fr Myron and the brothers in all kinds of work: parish and hospice visits, sick calls, summer camp, a youth conference, communal prayer, building maintenance, and learning the language and history of Russia. I want to be very honest in chronicling some stories from this summer, because my perspective and view of the people, culture, and local church have drastically changed over my time here, and I hope you will benefit from seeing the cause of that change.

For the first week, I was somewhat sobered by what I saw. Despite the incredibly warm welcome by the Catholic community of priests, seminarians, sisters, and parishioners of Vladivostok, it was impossible to shake the feeling of smallness and powerlessness against an overwhelmingly secular culture. Statistics like an 80% divorce rate, rampant substance abuse, lots of red tape for the church's initiatives, and an overall sense that the church was begrudgingly tolerated was difficult to overlook, especially when I had only just started learning the language and therefore could neither understand nor contribute much with my words.

Then, about a week and a half after landing in Vladivostok, I was able to accompany Fr Myron to his monthly Mass in Lesozavodsk. There we were introduced to the parishioners at the post-Mass tea, and our somewhat somber first impressions took back seat to the hope and triumph bursting through the stories they shared with us. First, there was Vladimir. After working as a sailor, he has devoted much of his time to being an advocate for many families in low-income housing, making sure their documents and permits are in order so that they can have some security in their homes. His wife runs the pro-life center in their town, which is actually allowed to be inside the maternity ward of the hospital in order to show



Lydia Pastukhova, our poet

expectant mothers they have support available. Next was Lydia's story. A poet in her nineties, she has become something of an icon in the town; the grandmother to everyone, always ready with a story or piece of Russian

culture to be revived. Little could you tell that she had watched her entire immediate family starve to death under her eyes growing up in a severe famine. Incredibly, she has used this to turn outwards in generosity, giving joy wherever she is able. We also heard the story of the five Vladivostok martyrs—from the very parish we were living—who were shot for praying the rosary in the terrible years of the early twentieth century. What an excitement to see the strength of these parishioners: They had seen the Gospel tried, tested, and proven worthy of trust.



FOCUS visited the mass gravesite which contains tons of bones of those killed during the Terror.

Author Nicholas Hagen (r) with Peter Ascik and Fr Stephen Hansen of Coronation Parish in Kansas City. The locomotive is in Vladivostok, made in Philadelphia.



These stories changed everything. The smallness of the Catholic numbers was no longer an occasion to lose

hope. The little things began to take on huge significance. Far from “hanging on,” the church and the faith are steeled, grounded, tried-and-tested realities that give incredible hope. I began to see with new clarity how even one converted Christian makes Christ present to an enormous set of people. This was the reality that God saw, and in God’s eyes there is always hope.



Volunteers working at the Hospice with the dying.

Vladivostok parishioners at Sunday tea after Sunday Mass



My friend Peter and I saw two examples of this hope in the children’s summer camp and the Far Eastern Catholic Youth Conference. The Lesozavodsk parish opens its doors for one week every year to about fifty local children and twenty college-aged American FOCUS missionaries come to play, pray, sing, swim, eat, learn, and share life together. No matter what their circumstances at home or school, God is alive in these kids and can protect and love them more than any human being, and that is a cause for hope!



Time for discussion and reflection at the Conference

Sharing meal preparation is fun, too—Brothers Luis and Filipus with Nicholas and Sister Esther, SPC from Seoul.



The Far Eastern Catholic Youth Conference, which we also attended with the FOCUS team, likewise exuded nothing but hope, as we saw many young Russians determined to take a stand to love like Christ: selflessly and generously, even in the face of an atmosphere of self-gratification and denial of responsibility that touches America and Russia alike. The young adults here are becoming their country's leaven by grappling with what it means to love, and they are ready to engage every tool available: prayer, psychology, history, leadership, service, and most importantly, the sacraments.

The Russian novelist Dostoevsky, in his famous “The Brothers Karamazov,” envisions a dialogue between a mysterious “Grand Inquisitor” and Jesus. The Inquisitor accuses the Lord of having denied in the wilderness the three ways in which he could have successfully



Lessons from Sr Juliana Gostkovska, SSpS, with Sr Stella Whittier, C.J.D., interpreting, about family life

commanded our love and attention: providing food, miracles, and authority over us. Why did Jesus refuse? Because of his seemingly irrational fixation that our gift of love be utterly free. The Inquisitor objects that man has never shown himself capable of using this freedom well; his freedom always leads him to misery! And Jesus says nothing; he just stays on the way of the cross. This scene has been paradigmatic of the special gift or insight offered by the Church in Russia: My American mentality can lead me to evaluate the success of the Church in terms of programs, initiatives, the strength of her public voice, her societal respectability, or her ability to command the obedience of her members. But are these Jesus' primary terms of success? Or did he spend his life giving real individuals a radical freedom to love, to live the Good, and to know the Truth? And once that becomes our criteria of success, we can see why Christ's Church has *triumphed* in Russia: He is there, in the Sacraments and in the lives of those baptized into Him.



During the Conference, the weather was just great. It was fun to picnic.

In closing, I will not pretend that everything is just peachy in Russia. Anger and violence, aggravated by alcoholism and drugs, abounds especially in impoverished cities, and many kids are scarred deeply. The church is

often mocked and derided. Fr Myron has had many absurd accusations and threats leveled at him with no other intention but hampering his efforts. And yet these things make the triumph of Christ all the more apparent in the men and women fighting the good fight. Why would we consider cultural disdain a discouragement when it was that very persecution that was the very mark of hope and cause of rejoicing for the apostles? During this brief time in Russia, I have been challenged and blessed, before making any judgments about the Russian people, to learn their history and context, and see with God's eyes their dignity, infinite value, freedom and greatness, their dedication and hard work for their families and communities, and the hope that always remains. This hope is the mindset and mission of the local church here in Russia, and it is the only possible way they could continue their mission of being love—one person at a time—to a world so desperately craving it.

News Notes

by V Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D

- Brother Harben Forte, C.J.D. has been working on a **website for the Philippines** as a project for his novitiate. It's his first webpage design. Have a look! <http://canonsofjesusthelord.wix.com/filipino-cjd>
- Recently a Catholic lady from Romanovka came to get two of her children baptized. Her oldest child was already baptized in Romanovka. As we were talking, it turned out that the children were temporarily living at **Parus Nadezhdi** (like a halfway house for kids) while mom was arranging a move to Vladivostok. The oldest, Gleb, joyfully announced that he already knew our seminarians, because he had played soccer with them last fall at Parus Nadezhdi!
- "It was the greatest camp ever!" said Sr Faustina when she and FOCUS volunteers returned to Vladivostok from **Lesozavodsk**. The 13 students from FOCUS and two seminarians from America came to help us with the children's retreat in Lesozavodsk and with the **18th Annual Catholic Youth Conference**. This year the Conference was held on Russian Island. It was a great money saver to have it here, as places for camps and meetings are getting more and more expensive. Our facilities on Russian Island are not yet in good shape (Frankly, they are in terrible shape!) but the students who attend the Conference adjusted well—Russians, Americans, Indonesians, Filipinos, Vietnamese, and Poles. The theme this year was "God's Family" where we talked about the Church's teaching about family life, and about the Church as a family. The main speaker was Sr Juliana Gostkovska, SSpS from Irkutsk, Siberia. Thanks are due too to Dr Pavel Savchenkov who organized and ran the

Conference. Thank you to **Renovabis** of the German Bishops' Conference for their financial support for the Conference for this year and many years already!

- One of the projects of the Far Eastern Catholic Youth Conference was to encourage the youths to engage in charitable activities in their home towns. For training, FOCUS and the other participants visited the **Hospice** in Vladivostok and the **Hospital #3** orphanage, and worked with the patients.



Conference members playing the harp and singing in one of the wards at the Hospice

Orphans' shoes and outdoorwear waiting for their owners to come out and play with the Conference crew



(News Notes continued on page 6.)

Where there is love...by Brother Patrick Napal, C.J.D.

To be a Missionary is emptying one's self. Many people think that missionary work has to be great work, or in another country, or just preaching the Word of God.

I was so blessed to be a part of the outreach program organized by the Redemptorists last May 19-28, 2014 in Leyte, Philippines, that was hit so badly by last year's typhoon Hyan. The group was composed of many men and women from different religious orders, and even from other denominations, and including Muslims who volunteered to help in repacking the seeds that we were distributing to the people of the area. The group was called Pilgrim Ground Zero. The Idea was that we are pilgrims to this ground where the victims were living, and just like the pilgrims, we didn't know what to expect. So we were asked to just prepare ourselves to journey into the unknown.



Brother Patrick with the local kids

To be with the victim survivors of the typhoon was a very rich experience. It's one of those experiences that is hard to explain. When I was asked by a local fellow what was special in our outreach program, I simply said, "It was the ordinariness of the program that made it special" and the person said, "Yes, it was 6 months after the typhoon, yet you are the first group to be with us, to literally live with us, and for us it is something great."

The mission immersion was centered on two things, 1. to help the victims recover from the painful past that they have been through, 2. to promote organic farming. Some religious had expertise in that area, so they gave input while the team brought with them materials for organic farming, which, at the end, was given to the community for their farming program.

For four days in the area of Immersion, I was in the kitchen almost always with a postulant of the Missionaries of the Assumption, in charge of cooking for 14 of us Immersionist Missionaries, and the people from the area that was more or less 40-50 children and at least 30 adults. It was a really big number to feed.

What was touching in the entire immersion experience was to be able to share the ordinary life of these people, living the life these people were living, to be literally one with them. It was for them a "very extraordinary" happening. They could not believe that we "church people" would actually come to live with them. For most, it was their first time to have a religious sleeping in their house. The religious actually came to visit them. Instead of the hosts providing the needs of the guests, it was the guests who provided the needs of the hosts.

We were housed in different families. I was fortunately housed in a family with no electricity, no water, and no toilet room. I had to go to the neighbor's house to use the room, and I took a bath in the river early in the morning at 5am while no one was there yet, or at 5pm when the water buffalos have already gone—They are usually in the river from 9am to 3pm.

To be a Missionary is not only to go to other countries, or to preach the Word of God literally, but to be a missionary is to empty oneself for the love of God and his people, to do everything and anything for the service of God's people in love. All the pilgrims that made this journey broke the boundaries of their comfort zones--it's all out of love.

Readers, you too can be missionaries in your own world. Just look around you; be sensitive of those people who are near you, in your own house, in your school, in your office; try to look around you, and you might be surprised to know that there are lonely people that need your love and understanding. It is just one step away from you, or just a reach of the hand, or maybe just your seatmate in school, or officemate, or maybe it could be your mother, your father, or maybe your children. Try to spend quality time with them in love, because where there is love, there is God.



Powdering water buffalo manure for fertilizer

(News Notes continued from page 4)

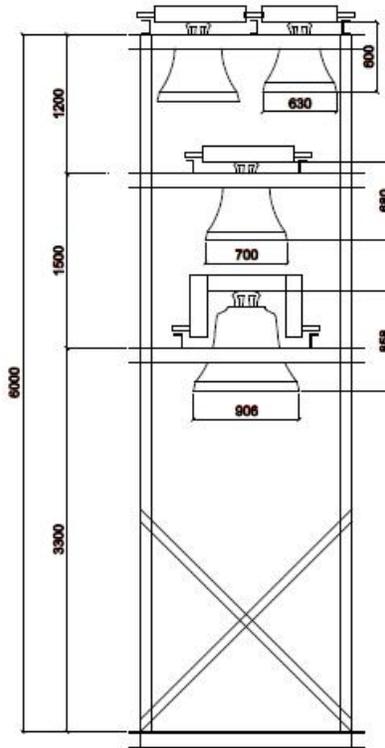


● Fr Sebastian says, “After two and half months of waiting, I managed to get one of the important documents from our city municipality office that is free use of the land for the construction of the **Our Lady of the Pacific Catholic Church in Nakhodka**. That means we need not pay any rent for the use of land for five years. It also means that we have to finish construction of the church within this prescribed period. Now I can start working with the architect and start working on the structural plan for the church. Meantime I have to conclude contract with the city regarding use of the land, get permission from electricity department, water department and department of city heating system and so on--there is a long list of permissions. Once all these permissions are collected, then only I will get the permission from the city authorities, to start construction of the church. Still a long way to go but things are moving in the right direction.”

Major Projects for Major Donors:

Some projects we would like to find funding for:

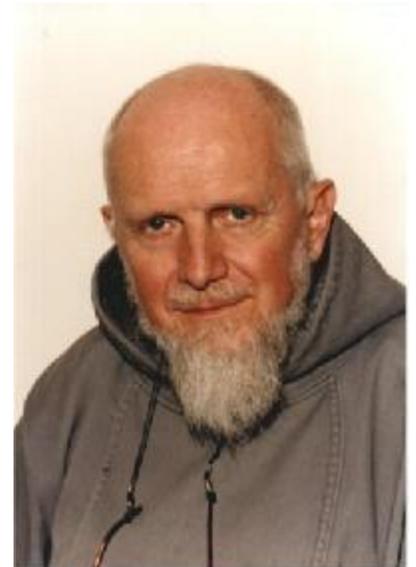
1. A permanent house for our seminarian community in Surabaya, Indonesia.
2. A permanent house for our seminarian community in the Philippines.
3. Repair of the building on Russian Island for the convent of our Sisters in Jesus the Lord who are working at the Far Eastern Federal University here in Vladivostok, Russia.
4. Financial support for the education of our 20 seminarians.
5. 66 electric hospital beds and other furniture for the hospice for the dying here in Vladivostok and for the hospital in Lesozavodsk.
6. Financial subsidy for our six Crises Pregnancy Centers here in Primorsky State in Russia.
7. Funding to purchase space for our proposed Assisted Living Center for the elderly in Lesozavodsk, Russia.



The steel structure to be built inside the steeples to hold the bells

● We were so happy to complete the construction of the steeples on our church, and to at last **install the bells**. The problem was that no one here had ever installed such huge bells before, so we didn't know how it was done. We did the best we could. Then we started to have trouble with the bells. We invited Roster Wu, a bell expert from Indonesia to come give us advice. He said that the bells were really great bells, but they were improperly hung. We have to rehang them. First we have to build a proper support structure inside the steeples which keep the bell vibrations away from the brickwork. Then the bells have to be hoisted into place, and then the ringing apparatus has to be installed. Our Russian parishioners have collected \$3000 so far for this project, which is 10% of the total cost. Anybody want to help?

● We remember a long-time member of our board, Fr Benedict Groeschel, CFR. He died on October 3, 2014. The Cardinal Newman Society says the following about him: “When I last saw Father Groeschel, he was doubled over with back pain, having slept most of his life on a hard floor with empathy for the very poor. His were decades of insightful preaching. His last years have been spent with his Franciscan Friars and Sisters of the Renewal, who showed him the very same love and compassion that he gave equally to the poor and the sinful. May Father Groeschel rest from all his suffering in the loving arms of his Father in Heaven! Eternal rest grant



unto him, O Lord; and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen.” I met Fr Groeschel 25 years ago during a retreat in California, and he has been on our Board and helpful and generous to us ever since.

Opportunities

♥ Give an eternal gift to celebrate the birth of Jesus. **Mass requests** to be celebrated in Russia may be sent to the mission office for your loved ones or special intentions. Suggested stipend is \$15 per mass.

♥ We’ve reached 31% of our goal for **Our Lady of the Pacific** church building project in Nakhodka. To date we have raised **\$124,577**. Watch our fund-raising progress on our website, many thanks to all. Please, let’s keep going so we may build a church!

♥ Might your apostolate or family consider sponsoring one of our **seminarians**? You’ll receive personal email news and communication from your seminarian. We have been blessed with many faithful men to our order of Canons Regular of Jesus The Lord, as well as women in our sister order who have answered the call to religious life. Each of our seminarians (just a few pictured below) is in need of individuals or groups who can sponsor them through prayer and financial support while in the seminary. The annual cost for 1 seminarian for education, books, transportation, and humble living expenses is \$10,774. (1/3 the cost as in the USA.) Julianne Immordino from NY is so kind to provide exquisite hand crafted **Swarovski crystal rosaries** to all who donate \$500 or more for the seminarians.



♥ Congratulations **SHARES** card users! You earned **\$2301** for the mission last quarter just by using your SHARES cards at Save Mart, Food Maxx, Smart Foods and Lucky’s stores. If you live in CA or NV, contact the mission office for your free SHARES card. It costs you nothing to use. Save Mart will donate up to 3% of your grocery bill to the mission when you checkout. Give cards to your friends and family to use. It really works!

♥ Like us on our new **Facebook** page! Find us at Mary Mother of God Mission Society

♥ Unique Christmas Gifts Will Help Our Mission

Receive one free music CD *Christmas in Vladivostok* with every gift item purchased. Produced and performed by Fr Dan and the St Augustine Music Society in Vladivostok.



♥ **Our Lady of Vladivostok Pendant** in 3/4” or 1” sterling silver or pewter medal with 18” or 24” stainless steel chain. For men and women. A prayerful reminder of our mission. “Our Lady of Vladivostok, Pray For Us”, encircles our icon. The Most Holy Mother of God Church in Vladivostok is engraved on back.

Please contact our mission office for pricing.

♥ Final call for our *Vladivostok, Russia* **hooded sweatshirts!** Vladivostok, Russia is silk-screened on the front in the Cyrillic alphabet. Fabric is med.-hvy weight, 50/50 content. Adult-Lg-3 X, Youth-Med.(10/12) Black, Navy and Maroon \$36 each for adult sizes, \$28 for youth, + shipping.



♥ Abundant Blessings



International Cookbook. We have received 2nd and 3rd re-orders for our mission cookbook. People love the wide variety of recipes from our mission families all over the world. Colorful three ring design, thickly padded and washable cover. Contains cooking helpful hints, space to write your own notes, and an added personal touch of our mission pictures. \$25 for each cookbook (includes S/H in the continental US) benefit our seminarians’ education and Women’s Centers. This month’s recipe peek is from our **European Cuisine** section.

- **St. Christopher Soup** – France, Br William Richardson, S.F.O., Washington, D.C.
- **Kapusta Zas Halushski** (Slovak Fried Cabbage with homemade noodles) – Slovakia, Fr Dan Lapollo, Ontario, Canada
- **Best On Earth Carrot Cake** – Sr Rose Walatka, Poland

Please contact the mission office at 209-408-0728, usoffice@vladmission.org, or see our website, www.vladmission.org for information or to donate.

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ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS	Page
Living in the Russian Far East	1
News Notes	4
Opportunities to Help	7
Development Desk	8
Where there is Love	5
Major Projects for Major Donors	6
Unique Christmas Gifts	7

From the development desk...

Dearest Friends,

A blessed Advent to you and your families! In October, the Mary Mother of God Mission Society Executive Board met for our annual meeting in Modesto, CA. Thanks to you our mission has continued to grow in spite of a crippling US economy. With that, we were very pleased to welcome several new board members to our ranks. New members are Fr Steven Bauer, Chicago, IL, Tyler Kolden, from FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students), Denver, CO, Prof. Robert Moran, PhD., Methuen, MA, Jeff Lang, Eugene, OR. We are blessed to have such a faithful and talented team to move our mission into the future. Present also, was a special guest, Victor Anisimov, Parish Trustee for the Most Holy Mother of God Parish in Vladivostok. This year we missed the presence of Mr Terrence Kopp, past Vice President. Terry has been an integral part of the mission and we thank him for his many years of valuable contribution to our board. The good news is, though Terry is retired from our board, he still remains involved behind the scenes. Following a full day of collaboration and planning, the board enjoyed a family potluck dinner with nearly 40 mission friends and benefactors from the local area.

We all send our deepest gratitude to Tom and



MMOG Executive Board Left to right: Prof Robert Moran, Fr James West (VP), Fr Myron Effing (CEO/Pres), Fr Steven Bauer, Tyler Kolden, Victor Anisimov, Vicky Trevillyan, (National Coordinator), Fr Doug Grandon, PhD., (kneeling:) Susan Gray, (Secretary). Not Present: Fr Daniel Maurer, Russia (CFO), Lynn Grandon, CO, Jeff Lang, OR

Barbara Fitzsimmons, Mary Jo Peyton, John and Lulu Homes, and Ruben and Sue Castaneda for opening their homes to our board members during their stay in Modesto and to Mason Trevillyan and Jessica Hoke for dedicating their days and nights chauffeuring our guests. Stay tuned for lots of exciting development for our mission society!

May God bless you and your families. Have a very merry Christmas! Vicky Trevillyan, Mission Desk