



Vladivostok Sunrise Russia Mission



Mary Mother of God Mission Society: Reviving the Roman Catholic Church in Eastern Russia

Issue Number One Hundred Thirty Seven September, 2017

The Beginning of the Path

by *Evgeny Balanyov, Seminarian*
Translation by *Hannah Greb*

The Living Word of Jesus Christ is always renewing the life of man. Jesus says, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” and “Whoever believes in Me does not die but has eternal life.”

God has been filling me with a great gift of faith already over a course of many years. In this short story from my life I will describe only those first bright moments of this gift and companionship with God. I hope that this helps my brothers and sisters to experience a meeting with Christ the Savior.

Some background: I was born into a non-religious family, living on the edge of the earth—on the shore of the Japanese sea, in the East, where the sun starts a new day. The absence of faith and knowledge of God was accepted as normal in that society. In the beginning years of “Perestroika,” religious freedom resurged, together with a variety of choice of beliefs, from truths to fallacies.

In the fall of 1995, in the rising hills on the streets of Vladivostok with old buildings from the start of the 20th century, on which I found the Catholic church building, I was already full of a strong determination to become Catholic. The first question, which arises from many hearings or readings of the story was: “Why become Catholic?” Very few were asking the main question: “How did you encounter God?” or “Why do you believe in God?” or “What happened to change your life from ignorance of God to truly believing and the decision to become Christian?” and so on. Today in our Russia, similar to twenty years ago, the word “Catholic,” for many people, falls behind the times, an unfamiliar word from a vocabulary of international words, strange, negative. Of course, it is necessary to satisfy this curiosity and explain everything in order.



Let’s start with the main thing—belief in God! Belief in the saving action of Christ, of the accomplishment of His Sacrifice for our redemption from slavery of sin and death. Belief in God, unveiling Himself in the Holy Trinity, in the Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

Until I was 18, I did not think about the existence of God. My only perceptions were from classic literature, where this enigma was mentioned. Subsequently, in a total flux of information about the supernatural in mass media, I already was conceding to feelings of something godlike in the world. At 20 years, a new independent life started, the acceptance of everything more complicated, and responsible decisions—all this impelled me to a



Evgeny Balanyov and Fr Myron at a baptism in Blagoveschensk.

private reflection over the outside world, encircling me, and the inside world—the internal. I had time for reflection, since beginning my own business, and I had to often be on the road. Now I can better understand the meaning of these reflections and searching thoughts and the first action in my soul was of the Holy Spirit.

In my life, companionship with God started gradually—day by day. On my end—more sincerely wishing to find truth, the main meaning, and the essence of existence, and from the outside, God—a very soft and warm encouragement, that I should call Him my own. Yes! It was necessary to call God my own, penetrating into the depths of our identities, because the heart itself only belongs to the Creator of His work—man, interconnected in soul and body.

Now I return to that day more than twenty years ago when I didn't have any idea of the Holy Trinity or of the Bible, when I hadn't even read the Gospels, or when I didn't know a single prayer. It is difficult to imagine a man who, without the help of anyone else, opened up himself to God. In my life there was no one who would have told me about God or who would have shared his own experience of meeting with God; for me, Someone became The Lord God Himself. That the Lord is truly a loving Father for His children, who cares even for me, was forming my consciousness. For me, this wonderful and miraculous belief in God was coming naturally, like how He gives man a new day after sleep. This didn't happen in one moment; truth sank into my heart with every new reflection, with new questions and searches, and answers upon them. Truthfully, finding answers was a very complicated task. Twenty years ago there was no internet, computers were not in every home, there were

no mobile phones or smartphones; even finding religious literature was difficult. Christ says in the Gospel: "Seek and you will find, ask and you shall receive." It was precisely these words which took shape in my life. I carried out this spiritual-thought search by the help of God. As I understand it now, the Holy Spirit definitely directed me.

Thus the first step had passed—belief in God lives in me, but God was still far from my life and still unknown. For many people He was simply some arbitrary God. In the course of my narrative, many things came to me without knowledge and meaning, which in sum led me to the realization of the need for help and, first of all, of God. The launch of a small business at 20 years of age in the "wreckless 90s" was not only an unusual and complicated task but often dangerous. On the other hand, hardships and trying times propel one into finding a loyal helper and the source of the internal world. I did not have economic knowledge, experience with business activities, legal tasks, or contracts. I learned everything along the way. Eventually, my first prayer became, as so often happens, a request. Asking accounted for many things, and myself, I started to notice the help and actions of God, and answers to my requests. Truly, it awed me, that God, unknown to me, but surpassing so much, was helping and answering the requests of an average young man. And it continues to awe me even up to now.

The first three years of interaction with God went this way—request and answer. Going into the fourth year God began to teach me gratitude. This lesson is very important for everyone, to be thankful to God not just for the fulfillment of our requests, but also for His participation in our lives. This significant lesson, which led me to a simple and joyful conclusion: God is a Person! God is living and participating in edifying my life. He is very attentive and knows even the innermost stirrings of my heart. This experience has enormous value! My prayer changed more into thanks for His concern for me every day. For that which I received and even more for that which I did not receive, because then I was already being taught more to trust God than my own desires, which were often erroneous. Now I can say that the prayers of thanks in particular changed my relationship with God, though, of course, the initiative always belongs to the Holy Trinity. Living through the experience of concern and of prayer, I learned to be more attentive to the actions of God and His inspiration.

The second important step, leading me yet to the Church—the impetus of God to a better knowledge of Him. Often I came to realize that it was the voice of God which desired this knowledge from me. It is possible to understand His desire, although even between people whom it is impossible to call friends, those whom you do not know, from whom it is impossible to await help, with



Evgeny Balanyov—second from the left during baptisms in Nakhodka.

those whom you do not strive to be mutually open about help. And so to me it became clear—God Himself wishes that I should come to know him. Where could I find these true knowledges? Christianity was the first answer. All history of our time, from the birth of Christ. With God's help, I accepted Christ as my God, specifically for the sake of His Holy suffering on the cross, as well as for the sake of the majority of Christians handing down their beliefs for two thousand years, and specifically my own martyrdom in Jesus Christ. This means that true attainments are able to be in the Church, created by God. The church, of course, for me was, in Russia, our historical Orthodox church and throughout the whole world, the Catholic church, which I knew very little about, only that it was throughout the whole world, and from that, the name: Catholic—universal, ecumenical, in the translation from Greek. Too, in that moment they already were talking about the actions of Pope John Paul II, who by his own ministry renewed different countries in the world. And, in my life, John Paul II has a significant place on the path to God.

Since I wanted to accept a more objective decision before choosing the Church, I found a neutral source of information, not Orthodox and not Catholic. Once again, those years encountered such hardship (a scarcity of religious literature, the absence of the internet, the unavailability of going abroad) that I started to pray with that intention. One normal day at work, I felt a strong inspiration from God, urging me in that moment to make a decision about the Church. Considering how to do this when I hadn't found a neutral source of information about the churches, I saw a library to which I quickly went; as I understood it, people there know and read more than I do. Entering the library, I headed for the reading hall, because I had some free time for a few hours, and had only just stepped into the doorway of the reading hall when I suddenly saw the magazine UNESCO jump out at me

with “All Religions of the World.” Yes, already, I found that for which I had long been searching. The educational international organization UNESCO, sufficiently, objectively and neutrally described Christianity, consisting of Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Having read this article, I understood that it would not get any easier to make this decision—so far, so good. I urgently needed help! In a short prayer, I suddenly receive an answer: “The Church will be one, and she will be Catholic.” My soul filled up with light and joy!

One small thing was still missing—to find a Catholic parish, and here I climbed up on the hill to look for it on the streets of Vladivostok. Old private homes, already surviving many years, dilapidated buildings, of course, did not make me glad, but a voice spoke in my soul: “The Church will be one, and she will be Catholic.” I needed to set on towards my goal. “Really, how could it be otherwise?” I am thinking. “God is the one for everyone, and the Church may be just the one for everyone.” Immersed in these thoughts, I come up to the edge of the road and, lifting my head, I see a majestic cathedral of Gothic architecture, standing on the cliff, on stone. And just like Christ says in the Gospel: “You are Peter! And on this rock I will build my Church!” Everyone knows what Peter means in Latin—stone, rock. I am looking at the cathedral (and now stands before me this joyful moment, filling me with wonder) and am asking myself, “How can this be, that I know Vladivostok so well and often visit different neighborhoods, and never noticed this kind of beauty?” So it goes. God is near, but we don't pay Him any attention. He respects our freedom and does not grow tired of recalling us to Himself. So, there was this joyful meeting with the first priests: the pastor of the Parish of the Most Blessed Mother of God, Fr Myron, and his assistant pastor, Fr Daniel. Fr Myron is, for me, one of the first and best spiritual fathers. Subsequently there were long months of training and reflection of my decision, many studies with the pastor before receiving baptism, dismantling of complicated questions, which included a question about the temporary division of the Church, and many other things. It was necessary to acknowledge the experience and knowledge of Frs Myron and Daniel who did not try to get listeners for the courses of training by just any means, but here, with respect for everyone, they deepened Christian belief and helped accept the realization of the decision of choice of a path to God and ministry, in the world and in that country. In 1996 on Easter night by the great Love and Mercy of God, they baptized me, strengthened the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and crowned me by Holy Communion in the Body and Blood of Christ!

This unique experience presents the beginning, but it does not show the end, this process of coming to know God and companionship with Him, which started in my

life more than twenty years ago, and it will continue perpetually. By the providence of God and through my vocation, I continue to see the Loving and True Christ, leading us to God the Father, by the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. My brothers and sisters, I call upon every one of you to go forth by applying this, and pray for each other! To the Lord God be glory and thanksgiving forever and ever!



Evgeny at the tomb of Pope St John Paul II in St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

My Journey to Vladivostok

by Hannah Greb

I was homeschooled for most of my life. Dad taught me Latin and Mom taught me everything else. Like many families, we went to a number of homeschool conferences over the years. In June of 2013, the summer after I graduated from high school, I went to the conference as usual, figuring it would be my last. By this point, I knew which college I was going to and was already interested in Russian music, the language, and the culture itself.

The committee who puts on the conference every year asked a Catholic high school to host it this time. We had plenty of space for all the activities, and there was more than enough room in the gym for the vendors. My favorite thing was to look at all the different vendors because it meant that I could support my friends as well as visit with them. Ambling around the gym, I said hello to the people I recognized, all of them sitting behind tables of homeschool curricula, religious articles, books, or food.

Up near the entrance was one table I had somehow missed on my way in. Draped in red and blue, it had several different articles and stacks of paper on it. On top of one of the stacks were the words *Vladivostok Sunrise*. Curious, I went over to have a closer look. The woman behind the table had a friendly face. Her blue dress had flowers on it and her gray hair was in a ponytail. I greeted her and asked what her table was for. The explanation she gave me could be summed up by the tagline under the newsletter title: reviving the Catholic Church in Eastern Russia. This woman was none other than Ms Kathleen Daniels. She showed me the small rosary bags, bookmarks, and other knickknacks for sale, explaining that the cloth items were made from priests' old vestments.

I bought a small icon replica of the Blessed Virgin and she happily gave me one of the *Vladivostok Sunrise* copies. "We also have a video," she added, which detailed some of the work she had been telling me about—work which involved helping out at an orphanage and hospice center, among other things. "Here, take a copy." She handed me a DVD with Mary Mother of God Mission Society on it and I said I would take it home and watch it.

Sometime after the conference, I put the DVD into my laptop and watched it. The video was from 2002 and although a glance at the website later told me how much had changed since then, I was still able to get a good visual idea of the work the Mission was doing. It is one thing to hear about poverty in countries thousands of

Fall Dates in History

September 8, 1899 Dedication of the first Catholic church in Vladivostok, "The Nativity of the Virgin Mary."

October 12, 1911 Canon Carl Slivovsky appointed pastor in Vladivostok, coming from Kazan.

October 2, 1921 Consecration of the new brick church of the Most Holy Mother of God.

October 1921 Vladivostok Minor Seminary of St Charles Borromeo founded.

October 28, 1923 Consecration of Bishop Slivovsky in Harbin, China.

September 17, 1935 The new brick church building was confiscated and given to the State Archival Bureau.

miles from your own, but it is something else entirely to hear about it when people such as Frs Myron and Daniel bring to light, for instance, the lives of the street children and the hospice center residents so starkly yet with such tenderness. In awe, I watched the whole thing without stopping, and when the video ended, I went downstairs to find Mom. I said to her, “I want to go there. I’m going there after college graduation.” “Cool!” she replied, a great big smile on her face.

I started my freshman year at St Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota that autumn. I took Russian as my foreign language, having taken an audio course the year before, and had plans to be a music major. But God had other ideas and when the music program turned down my second audition, I was surprisingly relieved. On St Patrick’s day of my freshman year, I declared my major which now is my degree: a Bachelor of Arts in Russian language. Since the previous year had been so monumental for me, I returned to the homeschool conference after my first year at St Olaf to revisit and say hello to Ms Daniels at the Mission vendor table. Throughout those four years of college, I never changed my mind about coming to Vladivostok. Besides that, everyone kept asking me about the Sisters in Jesus the Lord because that was often the first, and only, association that people of the Catholic community back in Kansas had with Vladivostok. Studying abroad in St Petersburg during the first semester of my senior year strengthened my desire to return to Russia, even though I would be coming to the Far Eastern coast instead.

In January of my senior year, I emailed Ms Vicky Trevillyan, the mission coordinator in California, saying that I thought God wanted me to come to the mission. A week later, on January 16th, she replied, “Yes!” I got in touch with Sister Maria Stella, CJD, whose joyful demeanor and helpful advice put me, and more importantly my parents, much more at ease. With prayers from friends and family behind me, and my visa in hand, I boarded the first of three planes on June 9th, 2017--only a week and a half after graduation--that would take me to Vladivostok. Getting there was an ordeal, and I was very grateful to see Fr Myron’s cheerful face as I came through the customs exit.

When I arrived at the house and met the others living there, I felt as if I had come home. I am here in Vladivostok for as long as God wants me to be, and I have learned so much from so many people. Even when I first decided to come, I was still surprised at myself, because I, to my shame, have never considered myself to be what my idea was of a “missionary type”—someone who willingly and joyfully lived in poverty while spreading God’s love to people. There have been a handful of challenges, but seeing the smiles on the faces

of the hospice residents or the children at the orphanage makes those challenges less painful. Everyone I have met so far—the staff, the Sisters in Jesus the Lord, Fr Myron, my Russian friends, and all of the brothers and other volunteers—has been so warm and welcoming and helpful. No matter how much time I end up spending here, I will be forever grateful to everyone here who has helped me, to everyone whom I’ve served, and to everyone who supported me in getting here. Praise God for this Mission and its great work!



Hannah Greg at our parish in Lesovavodsk

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

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News Notes

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



- Here is another joyful picture for us, besides the ones you've seen in the *Vladivostok Sunrise* #136! It is our **Brother Reminus Hambur, C.J.D. being ordained a deacon** in Maumere, Indonesia by the bishop of Ende on June 18. Congratulations, Bro Remi! Hopefully he will be ordained a priest in the Fall. Bro Remi is interested in spiritual direction and healing ministries. We hope to give him some specialized education in those areas, too, if we can find the proper place to do it.

- The first of the **new novices** have started to arrive. We are expecting seven this year, from Indonesia, India, Pakistan, and the Philippines.

- As of August 25 we will have **completed our 25th anniversary year!** We didn't have a big special day, but commemorated that big year of events, 1991-1992, each day as it came along. Usually on January 1—the Feast of the Most Holy Mother of God—we think about the graces we received during the previous year through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, and then we think about what we need to ask for the year to come. If we do the same for the 25 years, we can say that freedom of religion was granted in Russia, we got one of three of our church buildings back in the Diocese of Vladivostok, we established 7 parishes and 2 charitable organizations, and have begun to attract vocations. So for the next 25 years? Vocations, other missions in Asia and elsewhere, growth of our parishes as the young respond to the faith, and to receive the two remaining Catholic churches back! In 25 years I would be 101 years old, but I'd sure like to see the

progress of some of those years!! Especially more vocations. Remember us in your will!

- The economic situation in Russia is such that we are getting a lot more business at our **Women's Support Centers**. It means that moms are in need of more help, and but also means that the birthrate has increased recently! Now we have six centers. We are grateful to our benefactors of the Centers, because we couldn't operate without them! I enjoy doing the "Baby Talk" pictures in the *Vladivostok Sunrise*—the kids are so cute, and it is fun to imagine what they are saying by the expressions on their faces. Here is one of my favorites!

- Sunday, August 20, was a special day. We had the first ever **wedding at Sunday Mass**. It was such a treat for the whole parish to attend the wedding of our parishioners Yanina Grushkevich and Emil Aliyev.

- **Bro Patrick Napal, C.J.D.** wrote from Armenia that both his laptop and his telephone bit the dust in the same week! A friend has loaned him a telephone, but he needs to buy a new laptop. Want to help?

- Sunday, August 20, was a special day. We had the first ever **wedding at Sunday Mass**. It was such a treat for the whole parish to attend the wedding of our parishioners Yanina Grushkevich and Emil Aliyev.

Opportunities

- ♥ Ask your pastor to place a few copies of our bi-monthly *Vladivostok Sunrise* at your parish to share the news of the important work of the Catholic Church in Russia. We'll be happy to send them.

- ♥ Our **5 Women's Support Centers** continue to help families and women in crisis. Our 6th center will open soon. Our long running **Adopt A Birth** program within the Women's Centers has helped **save well over 2200 babies from abortion**. Mothers can receive the help they need to keep their babies pre and post delivery. Your help of \$25 will pay for the medical supplies needed in the hospital to deliver the baby. Fr Myron will send you a picture of the newborn you helped save! \$125 towards the **Adopt A Mother** program provides help to the mother and baby in the first weeks supplying them with nutritious food, formula, diapers, baby clothes vitamins and medical aftercare.

- ♥ Here is **Fr Myron's visit to the USA** and parish speaking schedule. We hope you have the opportunity to hear him speak.

Sept 2/3 St Paul/St Michael/St James, Douglas, WI

Sept 9/10 St Clement of Rome, St. Louis, MO

Sept 16/17 St John the Baptist/Good Shepherd,

Montello, WI
Sept 23/24 Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monona, WI
Sept 27 MMOG Board Meeting, Las Vegas, NV
Sept 30/Oct 1 TBA
Oct 7/8 Immaculate Conception, North Little Rock,
AR

♥ Planning for the future. Fr Myron and Fr Dan are getting older and are and/or will be incurring medical debts. As you, as religious they have taken a vow of poverty long ago, so have nothing. You can assist them with their health and medical needs throughout their senior years and during retirement. Mary Mother of God Mission Society has set up a **Priests' Health and Retirement Fund**. If you wish to help, please send your donation to the USA mission office and note, "Priests' Health and Retirement Fund" on your check or online donation. Thank you!

♥ Become a **Guardian Angel** for one of our **seminarians**. We are blessed over 30 seminarians still to support. Thanks be to God. Might you please consider a one time, monthly, or yearly sponsorship of one of our seminarians? You'll receive personal email news and communication from your seminarian. Each one of our seminarians 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 approximately **\$10,774**.

♥ If you shop Amazon.com, remember to enter "**Amazon Smile**", and enter **Mary Mother of God Mission Society** as your charity of choice. Amazon will donate .5% of your purchase to the mission. Sign up is very easy and there's no cost to you! The mission has received \$956 from Amazon Smile, so far. Many thanks!

♥ Fr Myron and Fr Daniel request **Mass stipends**. You can give an eternal gift to your loved ones through Masses celebrated in Russia. Please send your special intentions or Mass requests to the mission office. Mass cards will be sent. You'll be supporting our priests too! Suggested stipend is \$15 per mass.

♥ Ask your pastor to place a few copies of our bi-monthly **Vladivostok Sunrise** at your parish to share the news of the important work of the Catholic Church in Russia. We'll be happy to send them.

♥ Want to know more about how you can fit in with the mission? **Volunteer?** Fundraising? Attending conferences? Parish speaking? Mission program needs? Graphics design? Contact the California office! We need you! usoffice@vladmission.org

♥ Do you enjoy Filipino cuisine? Try these super recipes from our **Abundant Blessings** cookbook!



Ginataang Manok (Coconut Chicken), **Pancit Sotanghon**, **Leche Flan** or **Maha Blanca** (Corn Pudding). Choose from these or 494 more mouth watering international recipes submitted from the many cultures and countries of our

priests, seminarians, sisters, and mission families in celebration of our abundant blessings. Many repeat orders have come in as buyers discover the delicious, diverse and beautifully arranged collection of recipes. Our 9x7.5" cookbook is tab divided into 8 int'l geographic areas. The quick notes about the families and mission throughout the book make interesting reading for your coffee table and an excellent idea for gift giving! Proceeds from our 596 cookbooks sold so far have gone to our **seminarians' education fund** and our **Women's Support Centers, helping pregnant women and families. \$25 per cookbook** covers cookbook and shipping in the continental USA.

♥ **Fatima 100th Anniversary suggested reading.** *Fatima For Today* by Fr Andrew Apostoli, CFR *The 2nd Greatest Story Ever Told* by Fr Michael Gaitley, MIC. \$14.95 each, plus \$2.75 S/H. To order, please contact our USA mission office 209-408-0728, or usoffice@vladmission.org.

(Continued from Page 8) reports on his health and any leftover funds after medical bills are paid. Should there be an excess of donations intended for medical expenses, benefactors will be offered a refund on their portion of the excess. If a refund is not chosen, surplus funds (if any) intended for medical expenses will be placed in a newly established **Priests' Health and Retirement Fund through Mary Mother of God Mission Society**. This fund will provide for not only Fr Myron's and Fr Dan's medical and retirement needs (they are getting older!), but also the future retirement of other CJD priests.

If you wish to give to the Priests' Health and Retirement Fund, you may send your donations to the USA mission office. Please note "Priests; Health and Retirement Fund" on your check or online donation.

We are grateful for 25 years of blessings and look to the next 25 years with much faith, hope and love. God bless you.

Sincerely, Vicky Trevillyan, USA Mission Coordinator
usoffice@vladmission.org, 209-408-0728

**Remember Mary Mother of God
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137th ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS	
The Beginning of the Path	Page 1
My Journey to Vladivostok	Page 4
Dates in History	Page 4
News Notes	Page 6
Baby Talk	Page 6
Opportunities	Page 6
Development Desk	Page 8
25 Years of Blessings.....	Page 8

From the development desk...

Dear Friends, Peace to you.

We have so much to be grateful for. We're thankful for twenty five years in Vladivostok, for the people we work with and serve in Russia and the USA, for you our supporters, for the sisters, seminarians and priests of our mission, and for the ever widening scope of outreach. All made possible through this entire Vladivostok family and God's blessings.

After twenty five years, the order of Canons Regular of Jesus the Lord (CJD) founded by Fr Myron and Fr Dan is growing rapidly. You've read about the several recent priest ordinations and many vocation candidates coming forward to assist in the many responsibilities and service of the Church.

Fr Myron still works tirelessly caring for his flock in Vladivostok and guiding and mentoring future priests in the CJD order. Recently, however, Fr Myron experienced some health challenges. While he is doing better now, Fr Myron will need future visits with doctors in Korea for follow up. Thank you to those of you who have sent your prayers and well wishes. Due to the great outpouring and generosity of many responding to help Fr Myron, his current medical bills have been taken care of. He will need to return to Korea in October for follow up. Donors who have

given to Fr Myron's medical expenses will be contacted after his appointment in October with *(Con't pg 7)*

25 Years of Blessings



Caring for the orphans. We installed hot water heaters and industrial laundry equipment in the orphanage.