

## News Notes

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

- Igor Davydov, who has been our Sunday Mass translator since the first mass in front of the church in 1990, was nearly killed in a traffic accident on July 31. He was in intensive care with multiple fractures and bruised heart and lungs. I anointed him and Fr Dan gave him first communion. I know he will appreciate your prayers.

His wife who was with him in the car is also in the hospital, but not severely injured, having been saved by her big dog who jumped onto her lap from the back seat when he saw the approaching car.

- Due to a very late airplane Cardinal Glemp of Warsaw, Poland was not able to complete his plans to visit Vladivostok.

His original intention was to deliver to us four bells donated by the Siberian Society of Poland. The bells were also delayed on their trip from Poland. We will look forward to a future date when the Cardinal can visit us.

- Bishop Jersey Mazur, our ordinary, has expressed his hopes and plans to include former Vladivostok parishioners in the list of saints to be canonized from the Soviet era. We are speeding up our researches so as to include especially Bishop Slivovsky and the last five parishioners who were arrested for saying the rosary together as a group. Historical research takes cash. Donations are invited.

- Blagoveschensk has a new pastor! On August 8 we celebrated the parish patronal feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord. It was a multiple celebration: the patronal feast, the fifth anniversary of the parish, the installation of a new pastor, and farewell to the old founding pastor, Fr Myron. The new pastor is Fr Vladimir Sek whose last pastorate was in Baranovich, Byelorussia. With Fr Sek will be the associate pastor, Fr Joseph Roman from Slovakia. At last, after five years, the parish will have a resident priest, and not one but two! It is expected that they will immediately open new parishes in Svobodni (where the Russian Space Launching Facility is located), in Raichihinsk, and in Byelogorsk. Catholics in these cities have been waiting for their parishes to open, but it was impossible for Fr Myron, traveling to Blagoveschensk once a month, to open the new parishes. He was "spread too thin" over two states. Now he has only the State of Primorye to worry about.

None-the-less, Vladivostok Mission will continue to be responsible for the finances of the new parishes until the new year. At that time the Divine Word Missionaries will take over financial responsibility for Blagoveschensk and its dependent parishes. The new priests are Divine Word missionaries.

- On August 10 the aluminum frames for our new windows arrived in the Port of Vladivostok. They had been shipped in a

container from the manufacturer, J. Sussman Company of Jamaica, New York. On August 24 the frames were transported to our own building after going through Customs. Now the work begins here. We hope to have at least six windows done before winter. Here we go again with dust and mess in our church. In order to install the new frames, we will have to remove the brick and ironwork that were added when the floors were installed in the church. We must remove the added construction to open the window space to its original full length to hold the new frames and windows.

We must order the glass and deal with the artists in Byelorussia who are making the stained glass. The first window is scheduled to be dedicated on March 21, 2000: The Annunciation window. It will be the 2000th anniversary of the Annunciation. The donors, Mr and Mrs Terry Kopp of Minnesota, are hoping to be present for the dedication and for their first visit to Vladivostok. They are wondering if other benefactors would like to come to Vladivostok at that time, too. Check our webpage for further updates on travel plans, thanks to our friend in Minnesota, Dr Kemp.

- A big "Thank You!" to the Mary Stuart Rogers Foundation of Modesto, California which has given us the funds to purchase the second plot of land near the church in Vladivostok so that we can build a home for our priests and seminarians. The first plot was funded by Father McGuire's Mission Share of Fort Mitchell, Kentucky. Now we are looking for funds to build the rectory building itself. That will cost even more than the land. Donors?

- Our first seminarian, Evgenie Peregudov was given the task to escort a group of Russian children on a trip to Milan, Italy. It was the first time outside the former Soviet Union for him. He especially was happy to visit the Cathedral of Milan and be shown the archeological site which contains the original baptistry of St Ambrose where St Augustine was baptized. Evgenie will continue his studies in St Petersburg with the hope to be ordained a deacon in the spring. When he left Italy the parish gave him a computer to use for his seminary studies. It also allows him to have Email to communicate with us from the seminary--nine time zones away!

- My secretary and helper of three years, Evgenie Balanyov, has been accepted into the seminary by Bishop Jersey Mazur. He took up his studies in September, and I know he will appreciate your prayers. Now I have a new secretary, Nicolai, who comes from the city of Comsomolsk-na-Amure. He would probably appreciate your prayers, too, while he gets acquainted with a new job and a new demanding boss!

- Congratulations to our Parishes of Blagoveschensk, Khabarovsk, Comsomolsk-na-Amure, and Vladivostok! All have successfully completed their first completely independent, self-planned Summer Catechetical Camps for Children! Congratulations, too, to our Sister Parish in Yokohama, Japan who, for four years, provided financial support, staff support,

and their own personal participation, to help us begin our Summer Camps Programs here in the Far East of Russia in Vladivostok! Through these four years the Russians have gained experience and confidence about how to operate a camp and how to have it meaningful as a catechetical experience for the children. Now they can do it themselves--with the help of Russian, American, and Japanese benefactors, and the help of our newly arrived local sisters: The Sisters of the Visitation in Khabarovsk and the Sisters of Charity of St Anne in Vladivostok.

- August 24 was the date when the metal window frames for our church were transported to our own quarters from the port in Vladivostok. Now the work begins here. We must order the glass and deal with the artists in Byelorussia who are making the stained glass. We hope to have at least 6 windows done before winter. Here we go again with dust and mess in our church. In order to install the new frames, we have to remove the brick and ironwork that were added when the floors were installed in the church. We must remove the added construction to open the window space to its original full length to hold the new frames and windows.

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What was new at the camp in Vladivostok this year? The boys outnumbered the girls two to one--that alone should be a "first" for a church program in Russia! Also, for the first time, there were four dads who participated in the program besides the camp leader, Yuri Byelozorov. That was a fitting event alone for "The Year of the Father." The weather was perfect, and the lake was warm, and we had the whole campground to ourselves. Thanks be to God!

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<http://www.pond.net/~jeffclang/mostholy/index.htm>

Money cannot legally be sent by mail to Russia. Donations of money should be sent to:

Vladivostok Mission

225 Cordova Street

Anchorage AK 99501 USA

Your donations are tax-deductible. You will receive the required receipt for IRS tax purposes by return mail.

Letters without donations can be sent to:

Most Holy Mother of God Catholic Parish

Volodarskovo 22

690001 Vladivostok RUSSIA

Please do not mail packages directly to Russia, since every package mailed to Russia costs us \$50. If you have items that you think we can use, please contact us by electronic mail or fax giving a complete list of items. If we accept your offer you will need official inventory information from:

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Remember  
"Vladivostok Mission"  
in your will.

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- 11 - - 12 - - 13 - - 14 - - 15 - - 16 -

Dear Sister Susan,

Please send the photos, when you are done to:

Thanks. God bless you. --Fr Myron

Mr Jeff Lang  
2095 Morning View Dr  
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# My Romanovka

By Rev Daniel L. Maurer, C.J.D.

This story should be told by a writer more skilled than I in treating social and spiritual destitution--a Dickens perhaps, or a Dostoyevsky. It is about Romanovka, a village in the Russian Far East near Vladivostok, where I find myself, by the grace of God, to be the only pastor of souls. My Romanovka--how can I begin to describe her to those who have never seen the bleak remains of atheistic materialism in rural Russia? Romanovka--an insignificant dot in a vast wasteland of suffering; a microcosm of tragedy with no triumph, of agony without even the dream of ecstasy; a village laid waste for nearly a century by a brutal ideology, and now left forgotten to preside listlessly over its own demise. At its founding 140 years ago it was named after the Romanovs, the last, ill-fated imperial dynasty of Russia. Seeing it today, one imagines that even then it was destined to share the fullness of their suffering but nothing of their glory.

The tragedies of Romanovka include the violent deaths of hundreds of people from the other side of the globe. After the Russian Communist Revolution of October 1917 nine thousand American soldiers were stationed in the Russian Far East to protect trade on the Transiberian Railroad during the civil war. Situated along one of the last stretches of the railroad, Romanovka played unlikely host to several hundred of these American Expeditionary Forces in 1918-1919. The American commanding officer had a tacit agreement with the local Bolshevik partisans: "Don't bother us and we won't bother you. We're just here to keep the railroad open for everyone." But a rival for leadership among the many partisan factions, Sergei Lazo, decided to stir up some trouble. Within the village limits of Romanovka, "Lazo... personally led a three-hour assault beginning before dawn on June 22, [1919]. Six hundred partisans surrounded the tents of the two hundred sleeping men of [U.S. Army] Company A, 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion. After garroting the sentinels, the partisans opened fire, killing or wounding most of the doughboys in their tents." (John J. Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History*, page 136. Stanford University Press, 1994.) During the Soviet period (1922-1991) Lazo was considered the Far East's biggest hero. Monuments to his glory are in every city and town. In Romanovka there has never been a memorial to the American soldiers who perished there. Their bodies were transported back to the U.S. for burial. Nothing physical remains to remind anyone of this tragic and unnecessary footnote of American-Russian history.

Into this depressing place of squalor, endemic alcoholism and sadness, a small light is struggling to shine, the light of faith of the new Catholic parish of the Most Holy Trinity. Canonically erected by Bishop Joseph Werth on April 25, 1996, it is the first and only officially-registered religious organization to be formed in the village after the Russian Orthodox church was destroyed in the 1920's. Numbering about 25 baptized Catholics and also serving a handful of

Russian Orthodox, Most Holy Trinity is a parish in the middle of unsolvable problems and unmeetable needs. How it must struggle against the relentless darkness not to be overcome! St Thomas Aquinas reminded us that grace builds on nature. In Romanovka nature and its surroundings have fallen about as low as middle-class Americans can imagine. But although human nature is fallen, our Catholic faith teaches us that it is not entirely corrupted. So we Christians of Romanovka, a tiny minority, fight against the effects of sin in ourselves and against the results of sin in our society to build a community of faith, hope and charity.

In what would become typical Romanovka fashion, the history of the parish began in conflict. 6 years ago Valentina Demyanovna Baranovskaya came from Romanovka to Vladivostok, the only Catholic parish in a radius of 2000 miles, to ask a priest to baptize a group of Romanovka village residents. She claimed that they wanted to become Catholics and that they were ready to be baptized. Intrigued, Vladivostok pastor, Fr Myron Effing, C.J.D., agreed to go to the village that same week to look into the situation. After a jarring, two-hour car ride through the beautiful hills of Primorsky Krai (Maritime State) he and driver Anatoly came suddenly upon the dusty Romanovka central square containing a bus stop and some open-air vendors' stalls. The square is actually a triangle formed by a bend in the old, two-lane highway. There he found Valentina and a large group of people dressed in their Sunday best waiting for the priest who would come to baptize them that day. Fr Myron had never promised them baptism. In typical Soviet *Babushka* fashion Valentina insisted, saying that they were all well prepared to receive the sacrament. She kept trying to pressure him into the trap that she had laid. The assembled crowd became disgruntled when they learned that Fr Myron was not a Russian Orthodox priest as they had supposed. Gradually they dispersed, grumbling and unbaptized. In some respects, one could say, things have gone downhill from there.

Valentina Demyanovna was born on February 4, 1940 into a devout Roman Catholic family in exile in the large Soviet Central Asian republic of Kazakhstan. Her parents were Poles from northwestern Ukraine. In 1938, two years before Valentina's birth, her entire family, along with all the Poles in that Polish border region, were forcibly exiled from the Ukraine to the interior of the Asian part of the Soviet Union by decree of the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. They were only allowed to return to their hometown in 1947 after World War II. But before that, in 1946, while Valentina and her family were exiles in a strange and faraway land, Stalin outlawed the Catholic Church in the Ukraine (both the Roman and Byzantine rites), and gave all of its property to the Russian Orthodox Church. He imprisoned or murdered all priests and religious who refused to convert to Russian Orthodoxy. Millions of Ukrainian Byzantine rite and Roman rite Catholics who wanted to remain true to their faith went underground. In 1981 Valentina moved from the Ukraine to Romanovka to live with her daughter Ludmilla whose husband, a Soviet

airforce pilot, had been transferred to Romanovka Airforce Base.

After the misunderstanding on the Romanovka village square Fr Myron learned that Valentina had been baptizing people on her own authority. Defending her actions, she said that Catholics in the Ukraine were taught to do this during the last 50 years when the Catholic Church existed only

There is a certain school of Christian spirituality that considers baptizing people to be similar to branding cattle: Strike while the iron is hot and they will belong to you. There will be time enough to prepare them later when they are already yours. Valentina is a member of this school. She ~~wants people to belong to the Catholic Church and she is~~ willing to go to some lengths to get them in, whether they want in or not and whether they are prepared or not. But the situation is more complex than it may seem. In Russia after the fall of Communism people were told through the mass media that baptism was now necessary, that it was no longer dangerous to their life or career, and that it could be obtained immediately from a Russian Orthodox priest for a fee. In the ruins of Communist ideology, which was the religion of the great majority of Soviet citizens, millions of people, completely uneducated in any other religion, accepted this simple message as they had accepted countless decrees from above throughout their lives.

~~Russians themselves will tell you that they like to be told~~ what to do. But they were never told that they had to prepare for baptism by attending a course of catechetical instruction. Valentina evidently thought that, if she could only get a Catholic priest to baptize the entire village for free before the Orthodox priest got there, she would be doing them a big favor and would make for herself and her family an instant Catholic community where none had ever existed. And anyway, a Catholic or Orthodox ceremony should be all the same to these people who did not know the difference and who simply wanted to be baptized, especially since they would receive no instruction from the Russian Orthodox Church in any case. After her original plan was foiled by Fr Myron's refusal to cooperate in baptizing uninstructed adults, she has tried in various ways to manipulate complacent or indifferent villagers into the Catholic Church, including signing their names falsely in the attendance book of our baptismal preparation classes. As pastor I have to be vigilant that the people I baptize are well prepared, that Valentina, for example, doesn't smuggle someone in and bend his head over the font before I see who it is.

Some of her tactics may sound duplicitous, but at least they are evidence of a laudable zeal to share her Catholic faith with others. Despite its complications this zeal has made a positive difference in Romanovka. With help from other members of her family (an adult daughter and two granddaughters) Valentina has evangelized a large part of the village. Not surprisingly a number of villagers have responded. Numbers are not the most important aspect of our mission, but the

underground. Fr Myron reminded her that lay baptism is reserved for emergency situations when a priest is not available. As pastor of the territory since religious freedom had been returned, he told her not to perform further baptisms because there were now priests living in the area, who, in fact, pass through Romanovka every month on their way to their other parishes.

following table shows that something BIG is happening in Romanovka.

### Percent of Local Population Regularly Attending Catholic Mass

City/Town	Parish Established	Percent
Vladivostok *	1992 . . . . .	.02 % (150 of 1 million)
Khabarovsk *	1993 . . . . .	.004% (40 of 1 million)
Bolshoy Kamyen **	1993 . . . . .	.01 % (7 of 50,000)
Nakhodka **	1994 . . . . .	.01 % (30 of 300,000)
Blagoveshensk ***	1995 . . . . .	.009% (35 of 400,000)
Romanovka **	1996 . . . . .	1.6 % (40 of 2,500)
Arsenyev **	1998 . . . . .	.03 % (20 of 70,000)

\*Weekly Sunday Mass; \*\*Monthly Saturday Mass; \*\*\*Twice Monthly Sunday Mass

On the evidence of these statistics, Romanovka with 1.6% regularly seems to have 53 times more people *per capita* at Mass than the next highest (and newest) parish of Arsenyev with 0.03%!

Numbers, though instructive, are much less interesting than the people they represent. I wish you could meet the forty-or-so regular mass-goers of Romanovka. They are a sight to behold, and every one of them is dear and unique. Valentina Demyanovna's daughter Ludmilla is our parish trustee, the person responsible for the daily organization of the parish in the absence of its absentee pastor. Ludmilla is a highly trained and very capable lawyer with a practical and positive disposition. One of her duties is to keep some of her mother's initiative in check. She was born, raised, educated and married in the Ukraine. She came to Romanovka with her husband Gregori, a Soviet airforce fighter pilot. To get an officer's wife to agree to be uprooted and flown 8000 miles from home with a widowed mother and two baby girls, the airforce promised her a large apartment with hot running water near the airbase. She agreed. It turned out to be three cramped rooms in a fourth-floor walk-up. 18 years later she is still waiting for the first drop of hot running water. In 1986 Gregori was involved in the rescue and clean-up mission in Chernobyl, Ukraine immediately following the worst nuclear disaster in history.

After suffering for many years he died in Romanovka in 1994 at the age of 36 from cancer caused by nuclear radiation. By the time I met him in 1993 he was a mere shadow of the handsome, muscular, young officer seen in photographs of the family taken in happier days. At his death he left Ludmilla with two small daughters, Julia and Anna, now age 14 and 9. Because there is only one mass a month in Romanovka, they all attend Sunday Mass in Vladivostok every Sunday, traveling a total of six hours by electric train to do so. Even when I celebrate mass in Romanovka on Saturday, the next day they are at Sunday Mass in Vladivostok. Such devotion is simple to explain. From a traditional, Catholic family, they love the Lord and remember the long years when it was impossible to receive Him in Holy Communion in a Catholic church.

These four people, transplanted from the Ukraine, are almost the only normal looking people in the parish of the Most Holy Trinity. All the others are local villagers who appear to be about half the normal size or smaller. Sometimes I refer to the locals endearingly as "my mutants" because most of them seem physically or mentally stunted. I think it comes from endemic poverty and generations of alcohol abuse. It is true to say that there is not one normal man or boy in the parish. There are only four men who attend mass regularly. One is Yevgeny,

There are also women alcoholics who attend our monthly mass in Romanovka. They are not Catholics. One of them, Yevdokia, stands about three feet high, walks bent over and has lost one eye, I don't know how. I have never seen her drunk. Most of the other women who come regularly to Mass look normal enough. Many are quite dirty because they live a hard life of backbreaking fieldwork and have no running water.

The few who have running water at home are always clean and presentable for mass. One of these is Galina, the only pediatrician in Romanovka. With her scientific-atheistic background it was hard for Galina to believe in God. She debated within herself for many years. When she was ready, and after more than a year in our baptismal preparation program, Galina was baptized this past April at the first Catholic Easter Mass celebrated in the village. (Before that Romanovka's parishioners were baptized in our older parishes in Bolshoy Kamyen and Vladivostok by Fr Myron, Bishop Werth and myself.)

After more than half a century of the suppression of religious instruction replaced with universally enforced atheistic propaganda in the public schools the majority of Russians know nothing about Christianity. This is glaringly evident in small villages with poorer historical and cultural resources. We priests in Primorsky Krai can only visit our outlying parishes such as Romanovka once a month, so it is an ongoing challenge to know how to teach Catholic doctrine and morality thoroughly to our parishioners. We have learned from experience that it is important to treat not only what Catholics believe but also what Catholics do not believe. Over the years a number of my parishioners have been involved in various sorts of witchcraft and pagan and syncretistic healing rites. Most of them do not know (or do not want to know) that

age 28, who is certified by the government as a mental invalid.

He sometimes talks quietly to himself during Mass and stares at the movements of his hands. He answers when spoken to. Sergei, age 40, is the father of three retarded children. Three months ago he drank up his early retirement pension and all his family's cash reserves and then hanged himself. His wife came home early, found him and cut the rope in time to save his life. Pyoter is a baptized Orthodox who attends our mass when he has nothing else to do. He does not know how old he is, but his mother told me that he is 38. He looks 68. He drinks whenever he can find any alcohol, and when he is drunk, which is every day, he beats his mother, who, with her one milk cow, is his only means of support. She is afraid to turn him in to the police because she thinks other inmates would kill him in prison. She encourages him to attend mass because she hopes that a blessing and Holy Communion may help his disposition. He is welcome to the blessing but I refuse to give him communion until he demonstrates some awareness of his sins. I've been waiting for three years. There is no alcoholic treatment program or AA group in Romanovka or anywhere near that can give Sergei and Pyotr and the hundreds of other villagers like them the help they need.

these are incompatible with their new Catholic faith. For some these practices are a source of much-needed money.

Whenever I learn that a parishioner is involved in such rites I teach them what Catholics believe about them using Scripture, Church documents and tracts that we have prepared. I also advise them not to receive communion until they can assure me that they have not been practicing these rites for some time.

Once a 16-year-old girl whom I had baptized a year earlier came up to me before mass in Romanovka and asked when I would baptize her new baby. Taken by surprise, I said that I did not know that she was married and had been pregnant. She replied that she wasn't married, and had not come to mass the whole time she was pregnant. She didn't seem the least bit embarrassed, so I asked a few more questions and discovered that she had no idea that Christians should not give birth to children out of wedlock. She said, "I thought we can do that now. Lots of girls do." I told her I would be happy to baptize her baby after she had attended another set of preparation classes, since the classes she had attended for her own baptism the year before seemed to have left her with some wrong impressions. That was four years ago and she still has not completed the short series of 10 lessons, and her son is still not baptized.

The physical conditions in which most of the villagers live are appalling. Their homes are hovels. Most have not had a coat of paint or roof repairs in decades. There are running water and indoor toilets only in the three or four largest apartment buildings, airforce housing left over from the days before the airforce base pulled out. It was in Romanovka that I realized that there exist two and three-story buildings with no

toilets. Before that I just assumed that only one-story buildings were without indoor plumbing. Once I visited the parish organist, who lives on the second floor, for a longer time than I had planned. When you visit a Russian home you have to drink tea or you are not considered polite. After some time I asked where the bathroom was. With great embarrassment, he took me down the stairs and out to the street in the pitch dark, mid-winter evening to a one-hole outhouse which was meant to serve all 12 families living in the building. Luckily, I did not need to sit. That would have been impossible because of the frozen pillar of you-know-what higher than the hole. It is a good thing I always carry a flashlight in my coat pocket because there was no electricity on the street and none in the outhouse.

Conditions in Romanovka will get much worse before they get better. There are no jobs. Most people are completely dependent on their small garden plots to keep themselves alive and to sell some vegetables at the market for necessary cash. But because no one has any experience with capitalism and cooperative farming, and because the laws and courts are still controlled by anti-business Communists, there are no middlemen to stabilize prices by buying produce in advance.

For all the difficulties and frustrations in the uphill struggle of establishing a Catholic parish from scratch in a village where poverty, neglect and ideology have destroyed lives for generations, there are many occasions of great reward and heartfelt joy. I could write about hundreds of them, but instead I would like to tell you one small story about Olga. This year she celebrated her 16th birthday. I had baptized her a number of years ago at the parish in Vladivostok. She is from a broken family and has never known her father. She lives in dire poverty with her mother who is an alcoholic and with her three brothers and sisters. She is tall and scrawny, with a broken front tooth and a plain but pleasant, freckled face. Despite her many disadvantages she has a sweet disposition and is not noticeably lacking in normal mental ability. Her family has nothing extra, not even enough clothes to go around, and no inclination to prepare Olga for a bright future. One of the new parishioners to be baptized at our historic first Easter Mass in April of this year asked Olga to be her godmother. She was thrilled to have the honor. On the big day Olga came early to our rented hall in the former Officers Club in order to go to confession. We don't have a confessional with a screen. We use a little room off the stage in the main hall, so I could see her as soon as she came in the door. She was dressed in a third or fourth-hand, black and white tailored suit, not the cleanest but not bad, a lilac blouse with a lacy ruff at the neck and a dramatic (for her) black *chapeau*. She had also put on a touch of lipstick for the occasion. Looking at her, so grown-up and dressed-up and proper, so radiant with the joy of the occasion, almost brought tears to my eyes. I said, "My, don't you look pretty." She fairly beamed and responded shyly, "Thank you," and began her confession. It was probably the first time in her life that she had any reason to get dressed up.

Everyone sells their produce when it ripens--all at the same time, when the prices are the lowest.

The two organizations that provided most of the jobs during the Soviet period have both closed in the last five years. One was a military collective farm which controlled 90% of the land in the area. Most of this land now lies fallow, though some has been rented by the military to North Korean immigrants who grow food for export to their own famine-ravaged country. The other major employer was the airbase, closed for over a year now. It is because the airbase closed that we were first able to celebrate Mass in the village in 1998, though the parish was founded two years earlier. The only building with a room large enough to hold over 20 people is the former Officers Club. (The only exception is the local school, which by federal law is forbidden to host religious gatherings.) When it was run by the atheistic airforce the base also refused to rent space for any religious purpose. Now that the airforce has pulled out the village leaders are happy to rent us a room there for a modest fee. It is probably the only income that the building receives.

My Romanovka! Please pray for her residents, for her parishioners and for her pastor. Pray for vocations so that these wonderful, needy people can have the consolation and the strength of daily Mass and regular instruction in their faith. When people in America ask me, "What does Russia need?" I always answer: Russia needs to know Jesus and how much He loves them. This is beginning to happen--even in Romanovka.





## Oasis '99 Impressions from participants.

*tr Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.*

Evgenie Balanyov: The summer children's camp which is organized by the Parish of the Most Holy Mother of God is called "Oasis." An oasis is a place in the desert where there is water and vegetation, so birds, animals, and people congregate there. It is a place of joy and laughter, where tired travelers find new strength.

Those are the qualities of our children's camp Oasis, especially for the spiritual life of our children. Preparations began already a week before we left. Olga Zotova and I met and planned the themes of the day, decided about duties of staff members, and we learned how to work well together. Thanks be to God Olga and I quickly found common intentions, and we found some new and interesting ways of working. Our goal was that the children would learn to love God and neighbor, and that we would have to ourselves be examples of that love.

[The theme of the camp was to be "God our Father", the theme this year of the preparation for the 2000th birthday of Christ.-ed.] So every day we were to tell the children about the fathers of the Israelite people, and show how they expressed for us the love of God. We would talk about our father in the faith, Abraham, and his love of the God who made everything, visible and invisible. About Joseph of Egypt who showed us the mercy of God when he forgave his brothers and took care of his whole people and nation. About Moses who was the mediator of the covenant between God and his people. About David who wrote such beautiful and favorite prayers, and whose descendant, Joseph, who was to be the husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary who gave birth to Jesus, our Lord.

[The children at the camp were divided into three groups, the elder, middle, and young group.] The middle group, which turned out to have only boys, chose for themselves the name "Knights of the Holy Spirit". It is great to see that most of the boys already knew a lot about Bible stories. They could answer questions, guess riddles, and day by day learned new things. It was especially interesting to see how they could think about questions of the faith and about service to neighbor. The boys quickly made friends with each other, loved to swim in Lake Khanka, and tried to obey their leaders. I'm looking forward to working with them again next year!

Olga Zotova: The Camp was my first experience of working every day with kids. I can't say it was easy or simple! My group had only boys! Also, they were extremely varied, only some having earlier been in Sunday School, some were very energetic and active, others were shy.

I tried to find a way to work with each of them while not showing favorites, so that no one would feel left out or unjustly punished. I had to learn a lot, but it was interesting that the more difficulties and struggles there were, the more I was able to find a new approach, so that my enthusiasm continued, so that I didn't feel the need to quit and just be passive. Now, looking back, I understand that it was a gift of the Holy Spirit. Even though I feel that my activities weren't a complete success, I'm satisfied with the results.

I think that lesson planning on the themes of the camp went well enough to be useful, not only for the kids, but also for adults. And I still have a big impression after our goodbye bonfire when we were all so joyful, but still somewhat sad at the same time. After that I forgot all the problems and hurts, and it seemed to me that there is nothing better on earth than our camp.

I'm grateful to Yuri Byelozorov that he gave me the possibility to be at the camp, and to Zhenya Balanyov for our work together with the kids. I think we all helped one another. All things have to come to an end, but now I'm sad our camp had to end. But let's look forward to Oasis-2000!

Nikolai Perminov (11 years old): After Sunday mass Fr Myron blessed us and we went to the bus where I met old and new friends alike. During the trip we talked about our books, movies, and toys. Our leaders Zhenya and Olga proposed that we think about what we wanted to name our group. Zhenya collected from each of us a proposed name, and we voted and chose the name "Knights of the Holy Spirit". It didn't take long until we saw the waters of Lake Khanka and got to the camp. We ran to choose our bunks, and then made a sign for the door with our group name on it. The days at the camp just flew by, maybe because everything was so interesting. One time we hiked to an old battlefield where Vitaly, the father of one of the boys of our group, told us about the battles and showed us the old military equipment which was still on the field. We climbed up to the top of the hill where there was still a cannon, an old tunnel, and saw the view that the soldiers had of the battlefield. After returning from the battlefield we got to practice shooting with some airguns.

One of our lessons was on the theme "David The Great King". Olga told us about various events in David's life, where he was born and how he became king. We watched a film about David, which was followed by a test. That lesson was the most memorable.

To end the camp there was a bonfire party. It took a long time to get it ready. We had to prepare our play to present to the whole camp, we practiced a song in Japanese, and made shields and swords. We wanted to tell everybody why we chose the name Knights of the Holy Spirit. Finally we made our presentation to everyone, and I think it came off well. The

leaders gave us gifts and we thanked our leaders. We photographed everything and played games. The trip back to the city was mostly in silence because no one wanted to leave the camp. I very much hope that next year there will be a camp again, and I definitely want to participate.

*There's nothing like a romp with dad, or with somebody else's dad at the camp, if you don't have one of your own. Andre Martinyouk, general "dad" at the camp.*

*Baptismal garments decorate those who celebrated that special day in Romanovka, Galina, Olga, Ludmilla and little Sergei.*

*The Romanovka parish and friends gathered after Easter mass which was celebrated in the old, nearly abandoned Officer's Mess of the former air base.*