

News Notes

by Rev Myron Effing, C.J.D.

- The first glass was put into the first four new window frames in our church on September 30, 1999. It is a sandwich of two sheets of glass with a gas in between for insulation. In October, Fr Myron had to travel to Brest, Belarus, to approve the first of the stained glass windows, which will be the third inner layer of glass.

- We decided to buy an apartment for Annunciation Parish in Arsenyev. Until now the parish has been renting a classroom in a school, but that doesn't allow us to have enough catechetical materials on hand, nor a place for everyday activities. The parish apartment will also allow additional space for storage and distribution of humanitarian aid in this very poor city. Funds came from our sister parish of the Annunciation in Washington DC, from St John the Evangelist Parish in McLean, Virginia and St Catherine's Parish in Falls church, Virginia.

- In August of 1998 we had sum of money in the Russian bank to buy an apartment for ou sisters. After the economic crisis, the bank was unable to pay its debts. We worked a whole year to try to rescue the situation. At last it is resolved: e are now the proud owners of a store that the bank gave us in lieu of the money which it didn't have. The result is that now we will have a place to unload and sort the big container of clothing that was sent from Nativity Parish in St Paul, MN, just in time for the winter season. It means that we will also have a place to receive and store future containers of humanitarian aid.

- We received a grant from Catholic Charities USA to supply aid to women prisoners who are being released from prison into the bleak economic situation in Russia. Some of them have children. We will be able to supply clothing from the Nativity container, and the Catholic Charities' fund will pay for shoes and underclothing, as well as pay for the sorting and distribution to the prisons and prisoners.

- The new priest in our region who lives in Khabarovsk, Fr Yaroslav Visnievsky lost no time in getting to his assigned duty: the establishment of new parishes in Petropavlovsk, Kamchatka and in Chita. The historical parish in Chita was named Ss Peter and Paul, and the old wooden church still survives, so there should be no problem with the "15-year" rule—that no religious group can be registered as a corporation unless they are in existence more than 15 years. The old parish was in existence from 1850 to 1928. Mr Kudryavcev--a young Russian historian and prospective parishioner--has a list of 20 priests who worked in Chita during those years, among them one person who was beatified on June 13, 1999 in Warsaw, by Pope John Paul II, together with 108 martyrs of World War II, Bl. Anthony Leshchynski.

- March 25, is the 2000th anniversary of the Annunciation. We are inviting our benefactors to come to Vladivostok for the event and for the blessing of the new Annunciation Window in the

church here. Dr Kenneth Kemp of St Paul, MN, is putting together travel information that is being posted on his website. The information will be updated as time gets closer.

<http://www.StThomas.edu/Phil/Kemp/Vladivostok>

or you can contact him otherwise:

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- The third stage of CARITAS Russia's Anticrisis Program has come to an end. With this program about 700 indigent people living in Vladivostok and our surrounding cities were able to receive charitable assistance. For money allocated by CARITAS Russia we purchased food products and made food packs consisting of 8 or 9 items—dry milk, flour, sugar, macaroni, grits, stewed meat, soap and vitamins. This food pack is a great help for aged people who are forced to live on a small pension (300-400 rubles per month) and for large families whose monthly income is less than 150-200 rubles per member.

According to the program we were responsible for purchasing, packing, sorting and delivering of food products to those in need. We purchased several tons of food products for every stage of the program. In spite of the difficulties we are happy with the work. Many thanks to CARITAS volunteers who were involved in this program.

- After seven years of volunteer service to our mission Mr Ray Rzeszut of Anchorage, Alaska is gradually turning over his duties to others. In the past seven years I've sent more than 700 letters to Ray by electronic mail, all of them containing various questions, requests, and missions for him to perform! He has always carried on the activities of the mission in a tactful, accurate, and expeditious way. Many donors have received letters and mail from him in our name. He met us at the airport in Anchorage, packed our luggage, and usually was the one to buy us the first orange juice we had seen in a year. Thanks to Ray and his wife Jeannie and their son Michael for this remarkable service to the church. Ray never wanted any thanks. In the next issue I'll fill you in on the new arrangements.

- Thanks to Mr Jeff Lang of Eugene, Oregon we've had a page on the internet in English for a long time already. Now we are working on a webpage in Russian. The work is being done by Mr Alexander Revtsov of Transfiguration Parish in Blagoveschensk, Russia.

- Our Bishop Jerzy Mazur has included Most Holy Mother of God Church in Vladivostok among the five churches of our diocese which will receive special indulgences and relics of the True Cross for the celebration of the Jubilee Year. We are trying to hurry up the construction of the new doors of the church and the new altar before Christmas.

How to Communicate with Us

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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 any 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:

Mrs Joan O'Rourke
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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
Eugene OR 97405-1633**

My Trip to Russia July 23-30, 1999

By Chris Kahlenborn, MD

This year I went to Russia for the second time with my friend, Mr. George Riess. Our mission was to speak at the Far Eastern Catholic Youth Conference in Vladivostok held at the Most Holy Mother of God Church. In addition, George was to give some general advice and assistance to the CARITAS Crisis Pregnancy Center. (CARITAS is the Russian form of our Catholic Charities). Finally, I also went to evaluate two young men who are brothers and have had a seizure disorders since their teenage years.

The conference was held in the Church of the Most Holy Mother of God whose pastor is Father Myron Effing. About 50 young people came from the surrounding states. The theme of the conference was "The Fatherhood of God". Many different lectures were given including those on fatherhood, apologetics, the priesthood, contraception, post-abortion syndrome and marriage.

I was surprised at the dedication of some of the young people. I thought our flight from the US was long (it takes about 25 hours of traveling time to get to Russia from the eastern US), but some of the young participants traveled over 30 hours on a hot train to get to the conference! These people traveled through longer and more difficult conditions than we had, despite the fact that we had come from a place that was much further away.

Among the talks included a few of the following:

Father Dan, the assistant pastor, gave some excellent talks on the priesthood and an especially good one on apologetics, focusing on how to speak with Jehovah's witnesses, who are quite common in eastern Russia. George Riess spoke about marriage. He lamented the fact that there was such a shortage of good men in Russia, and that women were having a difficult time finding an honorable man to marry. He gave the young adults some solid advice about conducting themselves with care and caution before marriage.

Yuri, the gentleman who organized the conference, gave an excellent talk on the delivery of his son. Yuri's wife gave birth to their son at home in a "water birth" (in the bathtub). It was a very beautiful event although the physician in me thinks that it would be wise to consult with one's doctor before doing this and to be fairly close to a hospital in case of an emergency. After visiting a Russian "birthing center" I gained a greater appreciation of why Yuri and his wife had chosen to deliver in the fashion they did. In the birthing center, the men drop the women off at the front of the hospital and are not allowed to be present at the delivery or to even visit the wife and child until she is ready to leave the hospital. No wonder some people prefer home birth!

I was able to speak on my general area of research, which is the dangers of contraception, especially the breast cancer risk from both abortion and the birth control pill. In addition I spoke on the dangers of *in-vitro* fertilization and the risk of ovarian cancer from the fertility drug, Clomid. I also spoke on the subject of the single person's role in today's society, and celibacy. George and I also spoke on post-abortion syndrome and I covered some of the medical and psychological aspects of post-abortion syndrome.

On Thursday the 29th of July, I was able to receive a tour of various facilities given to me by Nastia (the head of CARITAS in eastern Russia) and her secretary and excellent translator, Olga. We toured a Russian birth center, which is really an obstetrics hospital. The bottom rows of windows had bars on them and I could not help but thinking of it as having prison-like qualities. As I noted earlier, husbands drop their wives off and come back a few days later to pick up the mother and the baby. What an unnatural way to separate the family at a time when God calls them to be close! I was not able to see the inside of the birthing facility and understood that one needs a special appointment to do so. (Imagine needing an appointment to walk within the halls of a hospital!). I also understood that when one does come into the hospital, one needs to gown up and wear a cap, all measures that are considered unnecessary in US hospitals.

I was told me that women needed to buy and bring their own medical supplies to the hospital for their delivery. Bringing a large bag with cotton, alcohol, bandages, iodine etc is apparently common. I could see a real need for a well run Catholic birthing center (see end of letter).

They then showed me their CARITAS crisis pregnancy center. It is located on the first floor of a birthing center. Although it consisted of only a single room, they offered pregnancy tests in addition to counseling and information on the problems associated with abortion and contraceptives. They also have a limited supply of some material assistance such as baby clothes.

Nastia and Olga gave me a tour of a new place in downtown Vladivostok, the conference center. This will be the location of a new type of crisis pregnancy center which is located in an area that is adjacent to three universities and is ideal for counseling and offering pregnancy tests.

George met several times with the volunteers of the crisis pregnancy center (CPC). The women and men have done wonderful things in the last year. There were no CPCs in all of eastern Russia until last year. Then, last year Rose Bucher, and George and Joanie Riess, among others, trained a few Vladivostok men and women to be crisis pregnancy counselors. In one year these fine Russian people had not only started their own CPC, but they were working on starting a second one. People from five neighboring cities had come to the conference this year and all wished to start their own CPCs in their hometowns. The dedication and number of volunteers is really inspiring. For example, the CPC in Vladivostok is open for 40 hours each week, with 8 volunteers covering all of the hours. Despite all their good work, the CPCs definitely need material

assistance such as baby and maternity clothes, and I am sure they could use a copier in their facilities.

Perhaps the most enjoyable event of the whole trip was the meeting of the Richard family [I use a pseudonym so as not to reveal any personal information about them]. Mr. Richard has two sons, Yuri (age 25) and Andy (age 23), both of whom developed myoclonic seizures in their teenage years. These are a type of seizure in which one's body has muscular spasms and jerks although one can remain conscious. The sons as well as the family have had to carry a major cross through their lives. Every morning each son experiences myoclonic jerks that can be disabling enough to cause them to fall down. They experience severe muscle jerks even while sitting to the point that the chair in which they sit, visibly shakes. Yuri has already cracked his head many times and has knocked out all of his front teeth. These two men had really been through the ringer. At one point in their lives, they were admitted to a neuropsychiatric institute. They were apparently tied to their bed for days at a time. Apparently Russian defectors often get sent to these institutes. One day Ed awoke as a number of Russian military men entered the room and pointed their guns at his roommate. Then they proceeded to open fire on his roommate at point-black range killing him instantly. The shock sent Yuri into an instant seizure. What a living hell!

I finally got to examine the boys and noted that they were on a medication called Depakote. Unfortunately, each of them was receiving only 750 mg of the medication a day, when the medical literature states that in order to be effective one must receive between 1,000 and 3,000 mg per day. So for the last eight years each of them apparently has been on the right medicine but at the wrong dose. Its would be the equivalent of having a bad tension headache and simple taking a quarter of an Advil or aspirin. Hopefully their seizures will improve as their dose is slowly increased.

A few days later I was once again humbled by the sufferings of some of the Russian people. I attended a meeting in the small house in which Yuri and Andy were staying. I asked to wash my hands and they looked at me with sort of an inquisitive look. They then explained that they had no running water. "But how do you take a shower?" I asked. "We don't," they replied. So for the previous four days, as I took my daily shower, these poor young men never got a chance to bathe themselves and both were apparently too humble or too used to Russian conditions to ask to do so. I asked Father Myron if they could use his shower and he gladly agreed. The things we Americans take for granted!

If after reading this you have any interest in participating in efforts to start a Catholic birthing center in Russia, let me know. For now, the people in Russia will be forming an estimate of a budget of how much such an effort would entail. It would be nice to form a sort of Russian-American board next year to discuss such an effort and what would need to be included. We'll need advice on funding, hospital administration, law, medical contacts, and people willing to establish "love contacts" with businesses that would be willing to donate equipment or drug companies who would give medical supplies. We also will look for a videographer who could put together a

fund-raising documentary video when we go to Russia next year. Of course if you speak Russian, that's a bonus.

Three CARITAS volunteers who help with the Soup Kitchen [l to r] Yadviga Svitalskaya, Adriana Dymkaya, and Maria Kulakovskaya.

We don't have our own licensed kitchen, so our volunteers use the cafeteria at Dalzavod, a ship repair facility.

With the difficult economic situation in Russia, even children need to come to the soup kitchen for a square meal.

The table may be bare, but the food is nourishing and freshly made.

Father Dan preaching in Arsenyev in the rented hall we use for mass.

Our pilgrims who walked from Ussurisk to Arsenyev stand in front of the "city limits" sign of Arsenyev.

[From the left] Michael and Ray Rzeszut with friends. In front of them, Ray's wife, Jeannie.

Participants in the Far Eastern Catholic Youth Conference listening to Dr Kahlenborn's lecture.

Some moments of relaxation between lectures.

Irina Ilinah [r] passing on an "Anticrisis" packet of humanitarian food aid to a client.

CARITAS' Soup Kitchen

*by Anastasia Potapenko
Director of Caritas Primorye
tr Olga Berdnikova*

On June 9, CARITAS Primorye made arrangements for a charitable meal for people in need to be served every Wednesday at Dalzavod Cafeteria, not far from the church. Though CARITAS Primorye already provides indigent people with food in its other programs, this was the first stage of a new charitable project sponsored by the CARITAS unit of the Catholic Parish. About 30 needy people including those who were already registered at the City Women's Counsel and at the social service agency of Frunzensky county were invited to the meal. CARITAS also invited members of large families to participate in this program.

Thus about 40 persons were able to take part. All of them liked the tasty meal consisting of sea-cabbage salad, soup, meatball, buckwheat, a bun and stewed fruit that was prepared by skillful cooks who work in the cafeteria, which is for employees of Dalzavod ship repair factory.

Especially we would like to note the CARITAS volunteers who were involved in the charitable meal program. They tried to talk to everyone in need and determine their main problems. We appreciate Yadviga Svitalskaya, Adriana Dymkaya, Nina Peretrukhnina, Maria Kulakovskaya, Nadezsda Shulga, Irina Ilinah and Liliya Silina, Director of parish CARITAS for the great work they are doing.

Now we are able to arrange regular charitable meals for indigent people, so the number of persons who participate has slowly increased, with about 57 persons most recently. For the CARITAS volunteers, it was also a new experience in arranging of charitable meals. They organized new forms of rendering assistance to people in need. Thus a mother of many children and an aged man, a veteran of the Great Patriotic War [World War II], who has a disabled wife, are able to receive charitable meals for members of their families. Also those aged people who spend their small pension for housing and medicines and have no ability to purchase food were able to get food packs consisting of sugar, rice, buckwheat, flour, vegetable oil, stewed meat, concentrated milk and vitamin tablets.

Liliya Silina is happy with the new work she is doing. She says: "The holding of charitable meals is an effective and concrete assistance to people in need. We are ready to render assistance to the people who are left in need--to aged people who have given their strength and health for the good of our country, to the veterans of the Great Patriotic War and to the aged people who are among the guests invited for charitable meal. Every time we try to do something good for this people."

We would like to arrange charitable meals more often because starving people need valuable nutrition every day. Now we are planning to arrange charitable meals twice a week,

but that will depend on charitable donations. Thanks to American benefactors we will be able to offer used clothing and possibly even medical services in conjunction with the meals in the future. We hope that our assistance will help aged people to live through this difficult time.

CARITAS Volunteers

*By Anastasia Potapenko,
Director of Caritas Primorye
tr Olga Berdnikova*

In a previous article we told about the employees who are engaged in CARITAS on a professional basis. They are not very many as you saw. But CARITAS has much more those who give their heart and soul to charities at leisure--These are our volunteers. The work of volunteers the most important at CARITAS. Rendering material assistance is not the only purpose of our charity, because sometimes spiritual support is more important and it may be rendered by volunteers who come to the first summons of suffering people. Besides, the volunteers themselves get "energy" by taking part in charitable actions--it is the "reverse effect" of charity. Therefore, every paid employee of CARITAS Primorye also has his or her own voluntary assignment—This is a matter of principle.

To decide from whom we should start our story is a very difficult! More than 120 volunteers work at CARITAS Primorye, and each of them is wonderful! Perhaps it is logical to start from the very beginning, from the days when our CARITAS took its first steps. At that time all of us were volunteers. We took turns being on duty at the office; we gathered clothes for people in need; we delivered medicines and food products to aged people to their homes and toys to children's hospitals.

One of the women who shares duties at the charity shop, sitting and mending clothes, accepting people in need at the door is Nadezhda Vasilyevna Shulga. Being a very kind and responsive person Nadezhda was one of the first who responded to the call to take part in charities. She has never insisted on her favorite work, but has done everything that was necessary: cleaning the office, ironing clothes and receiving the visitors. She is a shy woman of few words but she is a very painstaking, and a person whose help can be count on. She is charming and pleasant. When she was on duty one can be sure that everyone will be satisfied with the service she renders. Besides her office duties Nadezhda has a rather difficult task--arranging Sunday Tea at the parish. Thanks to her efforts the parishioners have a chance to rest and talk with each other over a hot cup of tea or coffee before they face the brisk winter trek home.

Nadezhda is also involved in another difficult work: She helps children of the younger group at the Corrections Kindergarten. She brings books, toys and games to them, and helps in conducting parties on Christmas and Easter. Maybe, this is a case when not only a person has found his place but the place has found its person. Children keenly "feel persons" and Nadezhda has made herself a home with the children.

At the very beginning of CARITAS' activity in Vladivostok Yadviga Sigizmundovna Svitalskaya offered her help. Being a doctor and having a great life experience she tries to help

people with kind words and a piece of advice. Every time when we meet with the great needs of indigent people we hear about Yadviga's new talents. When the administration of the Hematology Department of the City Children's Hospital applied to us for help, Yadviga thought of knitting warm and light woolen slippers. Now all the children from two leukemia departments, as well as orphans from Hospital #3, are provided with the knitted footies made by her kind hands. All the items she has made for charity, gifts for the aged and disabled persons, for orphanages and boarding-schools are impossible to list: bags, pillows cases, pot holders, etc. In spite of the fact that Yadviga is not in sound health she is always ready to help everybody in need, give medical recommendations or a prescription. It is very pleasant communicate with her and it is wonderful that there are such kind and sincere people in the world.

(To be continued)