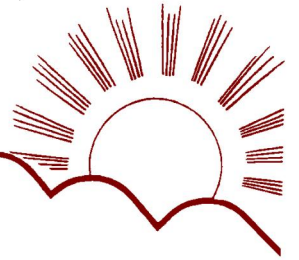


Vladivostok Sunrise

Mary Mother of God Mission Society and Vladivostok Mission

Issue Number Eighty Six March 1, 2009



Thinking Back as Sandra and David Sonnen Retire

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

People wonder why our mission is so active and “successful.” Besides the grace of God, I think it is due to the fact that we are almost totally a volunteer’s mission, depending, not on a bureaucracy or a reserve of funds (We don’t have either one), but only on the commitment and initiative of volunteers. Sandie and David Sonnen typify our volunteers, so I’d like to tell their story as they retire—not from volunteering, but from having a paid position in our Stateside office.

It all started when Nativity of Our Lord Parish in St Paul, Minnesota, was going through RENEW. When they studied how the parish evangelized, they realized that they needed a further outreach, and that perhaps they should become a sister parish with some mission parish in some other part of the world. One of the parishioners, Sandra Sonnen, read in a Catholic newspaper that American missionaries in Russia were looking for help. One of the missionaries, Fr Myron Effing, had worked many years in Minnesota as a teacher in a seminary, and happened to be friends with Father Patrick Lannan, the pastor of Nativity! Fr Lannan readily agreed that Nativity would become a sister parish of Most Holy Mother of God Parish in Vladivostok, Russia, and Sandra became the chairman of the sister parish committee. That’s how Sandra Sonnen and her husband David first became involved with our mission, and how other parishioners eagerly got involved with our work. *(Continued on page 2)*



Sandie and David with their son Tom



Participants gather around Fr Marcelo

Caritas WSC Annual Seminar

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

Our Caritas Women’s support Centers held its annual training seminar for new volunteers and for coordinating efforts of the Centers on January 6 to 10. This year’s seminar was held at Holy Trinity Parish in Khabarovsk. It was supported by the Donald D. Lynch Family Foundation of Raleigh, NC. The theme of the seminar was “Natural Family Planning Methods and Pro-Life Issues.” It was organized by the Centers’ Director, Sister Evgenia Lazaro. The program included a day of retreat with the theme “Praying about the Birth of Christ.” Fr Marcelo Brandan, C.I.W., Pastor of Holy Trinity, was the chaplain of the retreat. The lessons of the seminar were led by our licensed NFP teacher and biologist Yuri Belozorov who gave detailed lessons about the Ovulation Method and the Sympto-Thermal Method of NFP. All but two of the volunteers passed the test of competence in NFP. The remaining two will be tested again the fall. Twenty one Women’s Support Center volunteers and officers attended the workshop and retreat.

After the end of the seminar the WSC’s Council decided to open a new WSC in South Khabarovsk at Holy Trinity Parish. New volunteers and a leader for such a Center were trained in this seminar who are already ready to work. This year the parish is *(Continued on Page 4)*

(Continued from the first column of Page 1)

Our mission started in 1992 with a borrowed \$1000 when there were eight parishioners in Vladivostok in the single parish. For the first years it was coordinated in the USA by Ray Rzeszut, a volunteer from Anchorage, Alaska. As our mission grew in size and importance in Russia with the opening of many more parishes and the increasing size of our main parishes, it was natural to turn to our sister parish in Minnesota for help, especially as the committee was very committed and very capable. It was another parishioner on the committee, Virginia Murphy, who was computer savvy and was able establish email contact with us in Russia. She produced our "thank you" letters to donors, and helped with the printing of the *Sunrise* which we sent to her by the internet.

As our mission grew, it became clear that we needed an American corporation, and Virginia and Sandie worked on a Minnesota non-profit corporation with the help of the Diocese of St Cloud Mission Office Director Fr Richard Wey who volunteered to help. Mary Mother of God Mission Society was duly incorporated and listed by the Archdiocese of St Paul and Minneapolis in the Kennedy Catholic Directory with its office in the Sonnen's home. I asked Sandra to become the National Coordinator of our mission's efforts in the USA on October 13, 1999. And the Nativity sister parish committee has continued to supply help and volunteer labor to our mission every since, admirably fulfilling their wish to have a foreign mission for evangelization. Read farther:

My Parents and the Mission

By Jennifer Sammons

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

These holy words remind me of the way my parents, Dave and Sandra Sonnen, embraced the Mary Mother of God Mission Society. I say embraced, because their zeal and work was no standard good effort. It did not stem from an ordinary desire to serve. This was clear even in the beginning. My mom and dad had always been generous and kind. Charitable works were like a second nature to them. But, when they became involved with this Mission, and gave their time and service there, it was more and made in a deeper way.

Service doesn't seem to describe what they gave over the years. Working for the Mission was a way of life for them. They LIVED the Mission. Day and night, day in

and day out. It almost seems I can't remember times the Mission didn't come up in regular family conversation. There was always something to say about an exciting connection that was made between people, money that was donated, money that was needed, the church building renovation, the older parishioners, the younger ones, the orphans, the priests, new mothers, college students, travel itineraries, airport pick ups and drop offs, AA and boy scouts, and the list goes on. The Mission and the people it serves were so far away in such a very foreign place (here in St Paul, even Minneapolis is foreign!) But, engrained in my parents' moment to moment consciousness was always the need of the Russian people they came to love and the countless more they hoped would know the love of God.

There were and are so many needs, always! Often, these needs weighed on them. My parents were so grateful for the many volunteers who gave of their time and talents to help the Mission. They spoke of it first and always. It was their view that the work so many did made it possible for them to pursue more good for the Mission needs. My mom was often heard by her children worrying about how to proceed with some aspect of the mission office and its programs. "Was it the right way? The wrong? Could it be done better? Faster? Different?" At times I would reassure her that things were fine. God was in charge and His goodness was prompt and most evident. His will would be done His way and in His time. All these truths were what my mom and dad had taught us young, lived by, and showed us clearly in our adult lives--here, in this work. Mom would reply that she didn't want to let the Blessed Mother down. That's a reminder for me, and all of us, in daily life. This was Mary's Mission and she wanted to give her all and do the very best she could for Her. I remember joyful talk and sharing of progress and prosperity and of growth and expansion of services. New parishes needed the right speaker and arrangements and there was so much gratitude for the parishes who welcomed the Mission and those who asked the Mission to return. My parents worked all the angles without ever thinking about it. The Mission was a part of them and everyone who knew them, knew about the Mission and the needs. They talked to hundreds--definitely thousands--of people about Mary's mission. "What talents might someone have? What parish were they from? Could they help in any way to expand and support Our Lady's work in Russia? Renovate a steeple? Add a window? Donate a statue? Come to Vladivostok and hold an orphan? Sponsor a new mother? Did they know the story of Fatima?" The list goes on. All the while, mom and dad were here and there taking care of needs and so often helping all of us children with their "treasures" as Mom calls them: the grandkids. Sometimes, at one of our

homes, the phone would ring from some other state, far away, about someone who heard of the Mission's certain dire or specific need and we could get a brief glimmer of what was always happening and of the rewards God was bestowing on the Mission with Mom and Dad's help. I'm glad to share with you--as their daughter I am proud of them--how my mom and dad lived the mission, day in and day out, and planned to do so until they were no longer able. More so, I hope someone is inspired, through this description of their devotion, to do something God desires today and to seek His will in all things.

All things come to an end, in God's way and in His time. My mom had a heart attack in May, 2007. I'd like to impress how deep her devotion was to the Mission, even in that hard time. I remember talking with Mom soon after, while she was in the hospital. Her attention was focused. Not on herself, her situation and suffering, or her future. But she worried that some email would be missed or some task left unattended for the Mary Mother of God Mission Society. I would pull up her email and call her in the hospital and go through hundreds of them. It was amazing! She knew about each and every ciphered scenario and who all the people were. She was prompt at responding about what needed immediate attention and what needed the most immediate attention. Even in her suffering, she was responding to the Mission's needs. Mom and Dad were doing Mary's work and so Christ's work. So, it has not been easy for her to realize that she must "retire" from her full time duties at the mission. It is an inside joke in the family when we hear the phrase, "retire from the mission." We know that the next thought will be about getting home to send an email, label newsletters, or some other task tending to some need of the Mission.

The Mission became a part of my parents, who they are, many years ago. Their dedication, tireless devotion to Mary and Jesus, and intense focus on this Mission in prayer and action has been an example to our family and many others. Christ came to serve, not to be served. This is how they live. We know they will continue to give and push themselves to contribute the most they can in the future as they settle into "retirement." Thank you Mom and Dad!

"Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ." (Colossians 3:23-24)

Some letters by email: Dear Fr Myron,

Thank you so much for the opportunity my parents had to serve the mission of God in Russia. They have felt blessed to be a part of this mission.

What a wonderful idea to honor their service over the past years with an article. They truly have lived with the mission in their minds and hearts and will continue to do so. God Bless your work,

Jennifer

Dear Fathers,

It has been our great privilege and a blessing to our family. We feel we have walked with Saints and Holy People in you and who we have dealt with through the years. We hope to continue volunteering. Now I am crying too. You have been a big part of our lives since 1992. My family grew up with you both in our lives in a big way. Thank you. God love you.

Sandie and Dave

Dear Sandie and Dave,

I just wanted to say how grateful I am to both of you for all the effort, pain, and work that you have put into the mission. It was the right decision ten years ago on October 13 when I asked you to take over the Stateside office. And we pray to God that current decisions are also right. Meanwhile I'm grieving, even though I know that you will continue to support the mission and volunteer for it, and help with the transition as needed, and hopefully we'll see a lot more fruit from your efforts in the years to come. You were inspirations for me during these ten years. No one has done more for our Russian mission than you have. And as is often the case in this world, others do not know how much suffering and pain goes into giving spiritual birth, but you know it from experience. God bless you. Yours truly,

Fr Myron



(Continued from second column of Page 1.)



The Christmas "Play-Prayer"

Sister Evgenia leadings songs with her Spanish guitar.



expecting new sisters from the Congregation of the Incarnate Word who plan to open a family center, which will dove-tail nicely with the Women's Support Center. It seems that Caritas Japan will be interested in supporting the family center. This first year's expenses for the new Center were paid for by the Lynch Foundation.

The Centers are hoping and planning for another seminar and retreat in the summer to include the recommendations of this year's group: "What is Caritas and how does it function?" "Methods of Systematic Social Consulting." "What is Development, and How Can WE Do It?" In the retreat they are hoping for more time for Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, a hour of silence, a hour of questions and answers with the priest-chaplain.

It was also recommended that we again provide Rachael's Vineyard retreats for Center volunteers, as well as clients. The director of the Rachael's Vineyard retreats is Natalya

Anisimova from Vladivostok, who also has experience with group training methods for youth and married couples. The next Vineyard retreat is planned for the Spring of 2009. Rachael's Vineyard retreats are meant to help women who have post-abortion syndrome.

In terms of feedback, Yelena Babina from Nakhodka said, "I'm really glad for this spiritual time together with people who think like I do. It's Christmastime, and a good time to think about our pro-life stance." Galina Galimbiovs-kaya from Khabarovsk said, "It was good to see how people open their hearts for the respect and protection of human life from its very beginning—That is what I saw during the training of our new volunteers." And Natasha Anisimova from Vladivostok said, "Praying and thinking about the Birthday of Christ we learned how to receive Him in our hearts, and we learned how to follow Him during the whole Christmas story: On the way to Bethlehem with Mary and Joseph, while they looked for a place in the hotel, in the manger, out on the field with the shepherds, awaiting the arrival of the wisemen. I especially liked the play-prayer where the participants played the parts that they created themselves and the costumes that they invented. It was a great mini-play for Christmas."



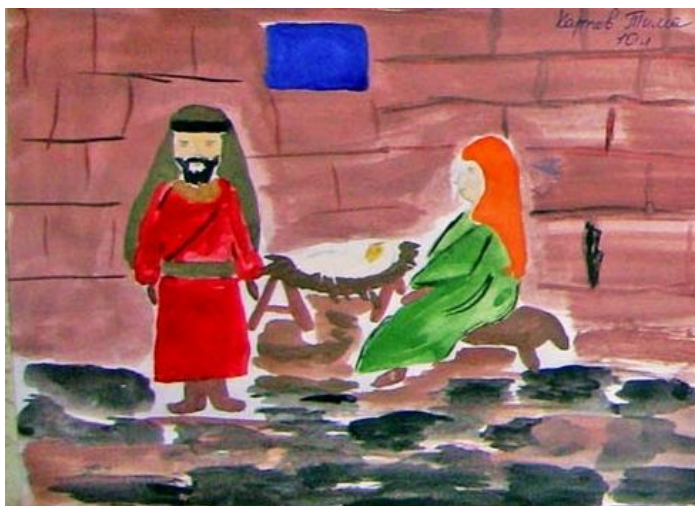
New accredited volunteers were awarded their certificates by teachers Yuri Belozorov and Sister Evgenia.

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

Opportunities

♥ Visitation Parish in **Lesozovodsk** is still looking for a sister parish.

♥ Would you like to be a **guardian angel**? “Project Guardian Angel” is the name we are giving to a program to provide assistance for children who were saved from abortion at our Women’s Support Centers, but whose moms (and sometimes dads) now have trouble supporting them. Or for children of such poor families that they are in danger of being given up to the orphanage. Each case is written up with photos and concrete information about why and what is needed. You can “adopt” such a child by making a regular donation to help him or her. We’ll send you information and a photo of the child and news about what is happening with the child. After your “adoption” you can send the regular donation by check or website—Just make the note “Guardian Angel” and we’ll know to whom to give the aid. (And your prayers for “your” child would be appreciated, too.) If you have a monthly dollar amount in mind or some particular request, please send me this information by email or through our office, and I’ll match you up with a child in need. Christmas and birthday presents for “your child” are welcome, too!



Maybe “your” child will send you a homemade Christmas card if you are his or her “guardian angel”?

♥ Mary Mother of God Mission Society invites you to experience an unforgettable journey aboard **Princess Cruise Line's Diamond Princess** in 2009. You will cruise from Whittier, Alaska to Xingang, China. There will be a full day in Vladivostok, Russia where you will have the opportunity to visit our mission. For more information please contact Barbara Garcia toll free at 866 756-1049 or email Barbara at BarbaraHouplinGarcia@aaawin.com

♥ **Harsh Vineyard: A History of Catholic Life in the Russian Far East** by our parishioner Miroslava Efimova with translation by Dr Gerri Kelly is available from the publisher at www.trafford.com Or you can order it from our office, or go on line to www.vladmission.org.

How to Communicate with Us

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Or you can **donate from your credit card** through our web site. Your donations are tax-deductible. You will receive any required receipt for tax purposes by return mail. Please be assured that we do not sell our mailing list or any other donor information to other organizations.

Donations in kind. If you have items that you think we can use, please contact Mrs Vicky Trevillyan at the Mission Office in California giving a complete list of items.

Sisters in Jesus the Lord: Phone: (651)230-3337

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News Notes

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

● All the tickets for the four **Christmas Concerts** sold out early. They were scheduled for December 26-28. The concerts featured our Concert Choir under the direction of Tatyana Lupach and our organist Marina Omelchenko. On the 27th there was an extra feature: several pieces by

the Vladivostok "Dawn" Youth Choir directed by Galina Potopyak.



"Dawn" Youth Choir.

- The **Christmas Festival of Christian Choirs** was held in our church on January 4. At the current time, there seems to be fewer choirs and smaller numbers of members in them, so they are reluctant to perform. Our choir and the Presbyterian Choir were the best.

Soloists from the Presbyterian Choir



Our parish Liturgical Choir performing at the Christmas Festival of Christian Choirs

- Lubov Sadovnika and the other volunteers of the **Women's Support Center in Artyom** are grieving over the deaths of two of their clients. 25 Year old "Oxana" was killed by her live-in boyfriend. He was earlier sentenced for the murder of his stepfather. Oxana's one-year-old child was sent to the orphanage. "Olga" was killed with an axe by her husband when he demanded money to buy booze. She was 7 months pregnant. Their other child, 1½ years old, was subsequently sent to the orphanage. Lubov says that it shows that the Centers have to do more to help women who are victims of domestic violence. And so the volunteers of the Centers need more training in that area. We have always wanted to found a temporary refuge for victims, too.

- The AA and Alanon meetings have expanded so that now we have six meetings per week in our properties.

- My home parishes have decided to offer help to the **Omega University Student Program**. They are St Joseph's Parish, Vanderburgh County Indiana, where I was baptized and served many years as a server and member of the choir, St Wendel's Parish in St Wendel, which was the Effing ancestral parish, and St Francis Xavier Parish in Poseyville, which was my dad's childhood parish. Many thanks to the pastors, Fr Gene Schroeder and Fr Edward Schnur, for their support of this work.

Meanwhile parishioners are planning a mission trip to Vladivostok in the near future, and are currently involved in regular meetings and fundraising projects.

Sharon Vogler, a teacher at St Joseph's School, urged the pupils to sacrifice during Advent, and the contributions are being sent to us for the Kids 2 Kids program. I know

exactly which kids here are now the most in need.
Thanks, kids!

- Welcome to the Board of Mary Mother of God Mission Society **Mary Johanna Peyton**! Mary Jo visited us in 2006 and has volunteered on the Sister Parish Committee at St Joseph's Parish in Modesto, California, where she has been a member since 1971. She also volunteers as a speaker for our mission. Grass has never grown under her feet as she has been a very active athlete as well as a music teacher and flight instructor, and even Grand National Jumping Champion in 1970. She is in a whole list of Who's Who's. Her wide experience will be very helpful. Thanks for volunteering, Mary Jo!



*Mary Jo Peyton
our new Board
member*

- The **satellite internet** connection is now functioning. We'll see if our internet bill will be cut in half as expected from \$600 per month to \$300 per month. The prices are so high because the phone company has a monopoly.
- The big **wooden pews** that we've used in a variety of places for 15 years were recently sent to Lesozovodsk where their current pews are breaking from poor materials. They were a gift from a parish in Fort Worth, Texas, 16 years ago. Now I'm the pastor in Lesozovodsk again, as there are no other priests.
- We are financially helping **Our Lady of the Pacific Parish in Nakhodka**, and we are helping the three parishes on Sakhalin Island, in addition to our own parishes, as they have no priests. Fr Sebastian has been alternating between those parishes, and the lay trustees have been running the parishes. So our financial resources are really being stretched.
- The Omega apartment will soon be purchased by the city to make way for the new bridge. We hope to get in exchange an apartment or two on **Russian Island** to

increase our holdings there for a retreat center or rehabilitation center, as well as continuing the Omega program at the new "mega-university" on the island.

- The goal for the **steeple fund** has been reached. Thank you to those who donated specifically to this project. There were 33 donors for an average donation of \$3000. According to my records, 40% of the sum was donated by Russian donors, and 60% by Americans.

Here is today's photo. The steeples have their masonry done. The "skeletons" for the two spires are standing ready to be metal-clad. The crosses for the tops are already being done in Vladivostok. When all the parts are ready, we have to hire a tall, tall crane to lift them all into place, and then there is the process of fastening them to the towers. After that, we plan to do lighting from the ground so that they will be visible at night (for evangelization). The bells blessed by Pope John Paul II are already in place. Now the carpenters are working on the wooden slats for the bell openings.



Metal Cladding and crosses, and the spires will be ready to raise to the top of the steeples.

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God Bless Your
Lenten Season
With Much Grace!

From the development desk...

Dear Friends In Christ,

As we meditate, pray, and sacrifice during this season of our Lord's passion and resurrection, I pray you will remember in your intentions all those in Russia and in all people who haven't been given the opportunity to know Christ. Fr Myron and Fr Daniel persevere with joy and steadfast hope in Vladivostok to resurrect our Faith in Eastern Russia. Russia suffered nearly four generations of atheistic Communist persecution. Even after 18 years since the fall of Communism most in Russia don't know of the joy and love of our Lord.

We need you! There are many ways to help Fr Myron and Fr Daniel in bringing Christ to Russia.

Please pray for the mission!

Prayers for them and the tasks they undertake are paramount.

Parish Speaker or Conference Representative

Our volunteer Speakers Bureau is comprised of over 60 priests, sisters, deacons and lay people just like you! We provide all the materials and information for you to speak about our mission's work at parishes and from conference booths. By becoming one of our speakers or conference

representatives you will help to educate and bring awareness of our mission to a greater number of people.

Become our eyes and ears

Seek out Catholic conferences, retreats or meetings in your area where we may provide a speaker or information booth. Let us know where they are!

Donations

The financial needs to keep the parishes and their catechetical programs and works of charity continuing are tremendous.

Mission Travel to Vladivostok

Join any of the upcoming mission teams or organize a team from your parish or university! Be examples and role models of Christ to those in Russia as you pray and attend Mass together, provide loving care and affection to the orphans, bring desperately needed hugs and friendship to the abandoned elderly, or work and help one another as a team in Christ in construction projects on rugged Russian Island and other areas. Forming mission teams: June - Arkansas; July 1-11 - Indiana; October 1-10 - Illinois; October 18-31 - California.

Thank you. I'll look forward to hearing from you! God bless you and your families!

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