



Vladivostok Sunrise Russia Mission



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

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By Michael Jacobsen

Last September I fulfilled my dream of going on a mission trip to Most Holy Mother of God parish in Vladivostok. My wife Rebecca and I stayed for two weeks with Father Daniel, Brother Nikita, and Brother Pradeep. The experience was life-changing and, at 57 years old, I wasn't expecting many more life-changing experiences. Before I talk about the trip and what it meant to me, let me explain the origin of the dream.

Thirty years ago I graduated from college with degrees in Political Science, specializing in Soviet affairs, and the Russian Language. In my studies of Russian history, geography, and culture, I developed an affinity for the Russian people and their struggles. I was fascinated at how the Russian culture developed so different from Western Europe, in spite of similar Christian roots. I have actively followed events in Russia over the past 30 years.

Sometime in the mid-1990s I read a short article in *Envoy Magazine* about the restoration of the Catholic Church in Vladivostok. I was immediately intrigued because it merged my love for the faith with my interest in Russia. Shortly thereafter I started to include the mission in my annual financial tithe and began subscribing to the newsletter. This was the beginning of the dream to go there. It never left my mind.

In the Fall of 2010, I did something

Fulfilling My Dream in Vladivostok

random. I took a week off work, got in my car with no plans, and began driving east from Fort Worth, Texas. I needed some time alone as I was going through a personal crisis in my life. So I just started driving. While on the road somewhere in east Texas, I remembered an invitation that I had received to attend

Father Myron's 70th birthday celebration at his home parish in Indiana. I think the invitation was sent to all subscribers of the *Sunrise* newsletter. At that moment I thought: "I'll just drive to Indiana and meet Father Myron." So I did it. I drove to Indiana and attended the party. I knew no one, but recall introducing myself to

Father Myron and saying that I was a long-time supporter who drove up from Texas. I think everyone at I met at the party thought I was crazy. Later, in 2011, Father Dan came to speak at my parish at St Elizabeth Ann Seton in Keller, Texas. I spoke briefly with him after Mass and told him I was a long-time supporter and had gone to Father Myron's birthday party. I really wanted to go to Vladivostok.

In October 2015, my wife Rebecca, who is a travel agent, found round trip tickets from San Francisco to Seoul for about \$700. She said: "Let's finally do it, go to Vladivostok." Yes. The decision was made. I was excited. God willing, the dream would be fulfilled.

When we arrived in Vladivostok Father Dan graciously made us feel right at home. He had our room prepared, gave us a tour of the Church on the first day, and explained what we could expect during our visit. When I first walked into the Church I was overwhelmed with joy at finally seeing the sanctuary with my own eyes. The only experience similar to that was when I walked into St Peter's in Rome for the first time. During our stay, Father Dan ate meals with us, provided detailed history of the Church, and told us of the many near-miraculous blessings that God has granted the Church in Vladivostok. We attended daily Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours—all in Russian—and particularly enjoyed his great sense of humor as he patiently answered our numerous questions. In addition, Brother Nikita and Brother Pradeep each kindly gave us walking tours of the city of Vladivostok.



We also spent much time with Sister Maria Stella, Sister Catherine Marie, and Sister Faustina Marie of the Sisters in Jesus the Lord. Along with Father Dan, they helped plan our schedule. One evening the Sisters invited us to dinner at their convent on Russian Island. It

is located near the university in a beautiful forested area close to the water, and is part of a larger building which also serves as a retreat center, chapel, and Catholic student center. At the time of our visit, the first meetings of Catholic university students for the new school year had just begun. We prayed for the success of the ministry. Rebecca and I were invited to sing evening prayer with the Sisters in their chapel. We were touched by their beautiful voices and the music of Sister Maria Stella on the harp all in praise of Our Lord.



During our one full weekend we joined Father Dan, Sister Maria Stella, and two volunteers for the five-hour drive to Lesozavodsk to celebrate Mass at the Visitation parish. Here Mass is celebrated and the sacrament of reconciliation is available only once a month. It was nice to get out of the city and see the Primorsky Krai countryside just as the leaves were beginning to turn. We arrived on a Friday afternoon and immediately drove to the pro-life Women's Support Center at the hospital. We met Nadezhda, the Director, and gave her a bag of children's clothes and a breast pump donated by one of my coworkers. It was fun to watch Rebecca explain how to use the pump to Nadezhda through the translation of Sister Maria Stella. They did a great job!

That evening Nadezhda and her husband Vladimir opened their home to us for the night. They provided a feast for dinner and breakfast. Their home was humble and welcoming. We listened to Vladimir tell us stories of life during Soviet times. In his late fifties, Vladimir was born at the site of one of the gulags in northeastern Siberia. His stories and recollections of life were both horrifying and inspirational. We were overwhelmed with compassion for the Russian people and feelings of gratitude for life in the United States. Rebecca and I were grateful beyond words for their hospitality and the experience of spending time with such a generous

Catholic family. Rebecca and I pray for the opportunity to somehow return the hospitality to them in the future.

The next day we attended Mass at the small Visitation church. During Mass, I couldn't stop thinking about how these faithful Catholics were able to attend Holy Mass and receive the Eucharist only once a month. One parishioner told us that sometimes, as Catholics, they feel so alone here in the universal Church. Again, we felt sad but grateful. These wonderful people with such devotion to the faith gave us so much inspiration and hope. After Mass we enjoyed another feast and then helped Vladimir put together packets of food to give the local children who spend much of their time on the streets. The kids lined up for about an hour in anticipation. We were told that the parish feeds about 50 children every weekend.



Back in Vladivostok we visited an orphanage with Sister Faustina and a nursing home with Sister Maria Stella. At the orphanage we played with preschoolers where Sister Faustina teaches Montessori classes. The children enjoyed the playtime with us and seemed amused that they had to teach us adults how to say the names of things in Russian. It was a challenge for us to find ways to communicate. The experience brought forth a variety of emotions. We learned that many children are in orphanages because the parents can't take care of them due to substance abuse or simply a lack of money to support them. On another day Sister Maria Stella took Rebecca and I to a nursing home to help in feeding and comforting the elderly. We were grateful for the opportunity to help and enjoyed listening to their stories. We took two of the residents in wheelchairs outside for a walk. They were both brought to tears at the sight of the sunshine and flowers and told us that they hadn't been outside in months. They kept thanking us over and over for spending time with them.

We met and accompanied Sister Dora and Sister Elma from the Sisters of Charity of St Anne on the two-hour drive to Romanovka to participate in the after school program. During our drive we prayed the rosary and talked about their lives and work in Russia. They stay in Romanovka for about three days a week caring for and serving the children in the program. The program was started because the children were unattended after school as their parents worked long hours. We enjoyed our time with the Sisters witnessing their dedication to the children in the program.



On our last full day at the parish archivist Tatyana Shaparozhnikova gave us a pilgrimage tour of the area which was highlighted by a visit to the memorial for those killed under Stalin. The memorial is in the hills overlooking Vladivostok near a graveyard where about four tons of bones were discovered. Tatyana's grandmother received her first communion at Most Holy Mother of God in the early 1900s before the parish was closed under Stalin. She is so happy that the Catholic Church has returned and we could feel her enthusiasm and joy for the Church.



The mission trip far exceeded our expectations. We felt like we were on a retreat. We wanted to stay and help. We didn't want to come home. Watching the Sisters and Brothers serve others with such joy was a humbling experience for us. We were touched at their ability to be content in giving to others even in the small things. I often sit at home and become frustrated because I can't make big changes to the world. Yet the Sisters and Brothers here are happy and at peace in being Christ in the little things. For example, Sister Faustina visits one orphanage in Vladivostok; there are others orphanages. In that orphanage she visits the children in one classroom; there are many classrooms. In that class she spends time with the children only a few hours a week. Yet she makes a difference in the lives of those children in a small and personal way. She does the best she can do in the time that she has. It became much clearer to me that it's not about making grand noteworthy changes in the world. It's about acting like Christ every day in our individual encounter with others, and being satisfied with the small subtle changes that take place around you.

I sat in pews all my life and wrote checks to the various Catholic missionaries that preached in Church. For the first time I was able to actually visit and participate in the life of one of the missions. We are incredibly grateful to Father Dan, the Brothers, the Sisters, and the staff for opening their hearts and lives, giving us the opportunity to serve with them, and fulfilling my dream. Our lives were changed for the better. We feel that we received much more than we gave. As I near retirement, this was a perfect time in my life for the experience. I think I will have some busy retirement days ahead. May God continue to bless the work of the Most Holy Mother of God parish in Vladivostok.

Three Times with FOCUS in Indonesia

By Samantha Breiten

In October 2015, I got a call from our FOCUS mission trip director, Joe. He said, "You have been chosen to go to Indonesia on a mission trip in July!" I was so excited and so surprised! I had never been to Asia before but was excited for this mission trip that was all the way across the world! My name is Samantha Breiten and I was a missionary with the Fellowship of Catholic University Students for the past 2 years in Colorado.

We arrived in Maumere on Flores Island on July 12th, myself and 3 other missionaries and 5 other college students. I will never forget our first meetings with the

brothers of the Canons Regular of Jesus the Lord. They all had big smiles on their faces and wanted to know more about us. Then when we got to the house and met the other brothers, we were welcomed right away and instantly felt at home. Playing games, eating meals, dancing native dances together, and discussing our faith with one another was such a beautiful experience. These seminarians all inspired me so much and were such great examples of what it meant to be a true servant of God.

While on Flores, we did a number of different things. We visited orphanages and villages, and shared our faith with a number of different groups around the area. I loved being able to dance with and meet all the villagers in Dota and Walonmagot. They were so kind and their faith was inspiring to all of us too. I truly felt the love of Christ through all the people we met in Flores.

I remember sitting in a beautiful church with some of the other high school students for adoration and thinking this is the same Jesus in the Eucharist here as it is 10,000 miles away in America. The universality of the Catholic Church was very tangible then. The same when receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in mass, being reminded that this is the same God received in all masses around the world. It was a great reminder that we are truly one body in Christ.

We came on mission to serve and encounter Christ. We were also served while on mission by the amazing hospitality from the brothers, the villagers, and our host families. I will never forget the people we met while on mission. I had such an incredible time that I felt called to direct this mission trip this summer of 2016! I can't wait to bring a new group of students and missionaries to encounter Christ on this beautiful island of Flores again in July of 2017, too!



Villagers welcoming us

His Father's Sandals

By Fr Inosensius Hetu, C.J.D.

Do you believe that good is manifested from every experience that comes into our lives? I believe that there is a purpose for everything, whether we know what it is or not.

Four months ago, Mr Robertus Reda came to our community in Maumere with his son, Filipus. It was time for Filipus to experience religious life to see if he wanted to join. Filipus shared that from his father's house they were went together by motorcycle to our community. Before arriving, they stopped in Maumere to buy all his needs such as soap, shampoo, a note book, sport shoes, etc. That was really a great moment for Mr Reda to share fatherly love for his son.

Time then went so fast. Two months later his father visited Filipus in our community, and I received him who came together with his brother. Then we shared about their trip from home to the monastery, and about Filipus' life after he came to us. We could see from the father's face that he was so happy listening to me when I told the story about his son. Filipus just smiled--He is a kind of person who always smiles.

When his father was ready to go back home, Filipus asked his father, "Dad, could you give me your sandals?" His father directly gave his sandals to Filipus without any comment or consideration. I myself was confused at that moment--It was a strange request. Then I said to Filipus, "Hey, Filip, you can buy some for yourself later." But what was Filipus' reply? Spontaneously he said to me, "Father, these are worth much more to me!" And then his father left, happy without his sandals, with his brother.

I tried to ask Filipus, "What do you mean by saying that your father's sandals are worth so much to you?" "Pardon me, father, I really love my father. I know that he loves me as well wholeheartedly. He was so happy when he heard from my mouth a few months ago that I want to become a priest. By asking for his sandals that he was wearing, I wanted to make him happy and joyful. Then I saw that he was happy while giving me this beautiful sandals. He gave me all that he has with all his heart. I think, I will wear these sandals as my love for my father. This is a gift of love that I will not count or combine with anything."

I reflected that the experiences of life, especially the experience of love, always make us strong to live our life and continue our journey in this world. Love is a self-giving, a sacrifice, an experience of faith that we live in our daily lives.

News Notes

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

- A big project is nearing completion! We have managed to convert our heating system in Vladivostok from **fuel oil to compressed natural gas!** We think it will help us realize a saving in fuel costs each winter. Actually, the conversion is done, but as of this writing we still don't have the bugs out of the system. I had to apologize to parishioners on Sundays for the cold. Now things are fine. Our thanks go to the Papal Foundation for providing funds to make the transition!
- In Vladivostok we were **struck by lightning** during a storm in late August!--probably through one of the bell towers of the church, or maybe through the high tension lines that run near the church. About 30 light bulbs were blown out, the internet connection was ruined, the telephone system was damaged, some electric receptacles were blown off the walls, and the electronic keys for the church doors don't work. The transformer for the electronic organ was damaged, so we've had to replace it. Thankfully, it seems that the organ and my computer weren't damaged! Lightning is really rare in Vladivostok, so it was quite a sudden surprise. At least it was nice that the storm brought cooler weather. Meanwhile our electrician scrambled to restore all the services.
- On August 28 we had the first celebration of **the 25th anniversary of the rebirth of our parish**. So many things happened in those 1991-1992 years that we decided to not concentrate on one day, but spread the celebration over the year. So August 25 was the 25th anniversary of the first meeting of parishioners to form an official religious corporation. The meeting minutes was signed by 14 people, of whom most have moved away or deceased since then. They had a sample parish constitution from St Alexander's Church in Kiev, Ukraine, which they used and voted for, just changing the name. It was the very beginning of the official parish. They then wrote to the newly appointed Bishop Werth to announce what they had done and to ask for a priest. I just happened to be in Novosibirsk with the bishop at that time!!
- In September I visited **parishes in Wisconsin**, St John the Baptist in Edgar, which is a sister parish to my Parish of the Visitation in Lesozavodsk, and then St Mary of the Immaculate Conception in Springville. Both parishes seem to be in good condition with good priests, so they are growing parishes. I especially appreciated the time to rest in beautiful Wisconsin, which is so like our state of Primorye in Russia, with lush forests, grain fields, and hardworking people. I needed a rest after all the

difficulties of this summer in Russia, with Fr Dan gone to America, and I'm not as young as I used to be!



Walls waiting for a roof in Nakhodka

- **Construction** continues on the Our Lady of the Pacific church in Nakhodka, Russia, and on the seminary dining room and kitchen in Maumere, Indonesia. The chapel building is also under construction there. Additional funds are needed.



Dining room with attached kitchen to accommodate up to 60 people in Maumere.

- **Ordinations** to the priesthood are scheduled for two of our brothers in Maumere in Indonesia for January 13, and ordinations to the diaconate for two of our brothers in Las Vegas, Nevada on January 25. Vows of our sisters in Indonesia are scheduled in Jakarta about January 20, or whenever I can get there! Hopefully we'll have pictures in the next *Sunrise*!

- **Novitiate** has started in Vladivostok for the school year 2016-7 for our Canons Regular of Jesus the Lord seminarians. This year we have five novices, two from India, two from Indonesia, and one from the Philippines. We continue to pay for vocations, as I hope our benefactors do, too.

- The City of Vladivostok expressed its gratitude for our help to the poor elderly via our **Soup Kitchen**. Here is a copy of the certificate.



Here is a photo of one of the many recipients of the gifts.



● The Leaders of the Women's Support Centers (crisis pregnancy centers) gathered on December 3 to evaluate and update, and to take into account some new Russian laws which may impact on their work. The leaders have really worked hard, some already for 15 and 17 years! More than 2000 kids have been helped to avoid the surgeon's knife in abortion! Congratulations, leaders!



Besides the sisters, in this picture the leaders of the Women's Support Centers (l to r): Anastasia Kanarskaya of Romavovka, Tatyana Dzhikaeva of Arsenyev, Julia Fidenko of Vladivostok, Lubov Sadovnikova of Artyom, Nadezhda Morozova of Lesozavodsk, and Olga Merkulova of Nakhodka.



Opportunities

♥ You are invited to visit the **mission in Vladivostok!** We will help you form a team from your parish or you may join a group already going. See where it all started, learn the history of the church and area, and experience first hand the charitable works and many services of the mission. The experience is life changing!

♥ A new school year has begun! We have been blessed with many vocations our order of **Canons Regular In Jesus The Lord** (www.vladmission/vocations) as well as our sister order (www.cjd.cc). We have **40**

seminarians to support now. Thanks be to God. Please consider 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 **\$10,774**.

♥ Please help our growing number of priests while giving an eternal gift! **Mass requests** celebrated in Russia and may be sent to the mission office for your loved ones or special intentions. 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.

♥ You have the opportunity to help the mission while shopping at no extra cost to you. When shopping Amazon, use **Amazon Smile!** Designate Mary Mother of God Mission Society as your charity of choice. The mission will receive 0.5% of your purchase from Amazon. It costs you nothing to participate. Please see our website www.vladmission.org for more details on how to sign on. Thanks to you, we received \$403.22 from AmazonSmile. (And remember our mission web store too, www.store.vladmission.org)

♥ You can save a life by purchasing our *Abundant Blessings Cookbook*.

Proceeds from the 551 cookbooks sold so far have gone to our **seminarians' education fund** and our **Women's Support Centers, helping pregnant women and families.**



Choose from our 498 mouth watering recipes. Excellent for gift giving to all the cooks in your life, or better, all those who don't cook too! Many repeat orders have come in as buyers discover the diverse and beautifully arranged collection of recipes that are tab divided into 8 international geographic areas and submitted from the many cultures and countries of our priests, seminarians, sisters, and mission families in celebration of our abundant blessings. Interesting reading for your coffee table too! **\$25 per cookbook** covers cookbook and shipping in the continental USA.

For more information on all our opportunities contact our USA office usoffice@vladmission.org, or 209-408-0728 and visit our website, www.vladmission.org.

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From the development desk...

Dear Friends, Happy New Year!

2017 is the year we reach some important milestones to share in celebration and give thanks for!

- We will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the appearances of Our Lady of Fatima to three children in Portugal. We have a special team of mission representatives who are available to speak at your parish or conference regarding the Fatima messages and the Church in Russia today. (See our website for portfolio of speakers and more information). Mary Mother of God Mission Society is working on a special Fatima event for the Fall of 2017. Included will be some of our speakers and very special guests! Stay tuned for more info as we finalize the details.

- **Fr Myron Effing, C.J.D.**, will be celebrating the 45th year of his ordination on May 27th! Congratulations Fr Myron!

- **Fr Daniel Mauer, C.J.D.**, will be celebrating his Silver Jubilee on September 20th. Congratulations Fr Dan!

- **Mary Mother of God Mission Society** celebrates 25 years! We were officially recognized on May 9th, 1992 as a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization.

If you would like any information regarding the mission, I invite you to contact me at 209-408-0728 or usoffice@vladmission.org. I will enjoy speaking with you!

May you and your families have a very blessed New Year! Thank you all for your prayers and support to the mission.

Sincerely, Vicky Trevillyan, National Coordinator



Jacinta, Lucia and Francisco, the three children to which the Blessed Mother appeared at Fatima, Portugal in 1917.