

# Triumph of the Heart



THE MISSION - PART I

A photograph of Pope Benedict XVI, dressed in white, smiling and embracing a group of children. He is surrounded by other men in clerical attire, including a cardinal in black and white. The setting appears to be a rustic building with a thatched roof. The Pope is holding a young girl in a white shirt and a boy in a green shirt. Other children are visible in the background, some holding small red booklets.

*Christ's mission  
is accomplished in love.*

*So the Church has been sent forth  
to spread Christ's Love throughout the world,  
so that individuals and peoples  
"may have life, and have it abundantly."*

Pope Benedict XVI in Brazil, May 13, 2007

# Dear Readers, Friends and Benefactors,

Many of your replies through the years have shown us that you are especially interested in what goes on in our mission stations. So we had the idea that you might enjoy a whole issue of *Triumph of the Heart* dedicated just to our missionary activities. The numerous contributions which our missionaries sent in for you, however, will not fit in just one issue, so we decided to continue the “missionary journey” in two future editions as well.

This look into our mission is not intended to be a presentation of accomplishments, but rather an expression of our deep gratitude to so many of you who have supported our pontifically approved community and its mission projects for a long time with your prayers, sacrifices, physical work and, not least of all, with material and financial help. Neither our exterior mission nor our community life would have been possible without your energetic support!

We are often asked, “*What is your spirituality? What is your mission?*” You will understand without a big explanation when you start reading about our missionary activities and some of the touching stories. Each example from the daily life in the mission reflects a little about the way we work and, therefore, also a little about our spirituality.

We cannot boast of numerous conversions like you might expect when you think about “the mission”. It is easy to forget that “*our most important mission is often purely spiritual,*” as once expressed by our spiritual father, Fr. Paul Maria. “*It does not consist of bustling activity like on an anthill; the true mission is, at first, only interior, silent. Love has to be the underlying motive for all of what we do: praying out of love, working out of love.*

*We can reach everybody through prayer and the Holy Mass, even when, for example, the trip to a remote village in our Siberian mission has to be canceled because the car will not start at -20°F. Patient endurance, silent acceptance and offering up difficult, often complicated situations become prayer and mission. The secret of a truly fruitful mission, even if it only flourishes later, is ‘remaining in Jesus’, our unity with him who promises us, ‘Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit’ (Jn. 15:5). How consoling!*

“*Our second mission is also an unseen one because it takes place within our spiritual family. It is the sincere effort to love and live unity in the houses of our community. We all know how debilitating disunity can be. Brotherly love and our prayers for one another, however, give us the strength and the necessary credibility for the exterior mission. Did not Jesus pray to his Father after he had given the Holy Eucharist to his Apostles, ‘that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me’ (Jn. 17:22-23)?*

“*Only then, can the third mission begin, the one visible externally. Jesus calls to us, ‘All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age’ (Mt. 28:18-20).”*

# Our Beginnings in the East

*From the outset, the missionary efforts of our community have been directed toward a worldwide apostolate.*

*As the door to the Eastern Bloc was opened through the unexpected collapse of Atheistic Communism and Pope John Paul II's call for a "new evangelization of the Eastern countries," the first path led us to Slovakia, to the city of Nitra.*

"*I am the gate for the sheep*" (Jn. 10:7), were the words of Holy Scripture to which our spiritual father opened when he, together with two of our missionary sisters, was traveling from Austria to Slovakia in 1991. His Eminence, Cardinal John Chrysostum Korec had asked our community to help teach classes and supervise the dormitories of the newly founded boarding school, Sts. Cyril and Methodius. They were accepted with great openness, and the first place the principal took them was the school chapel.

A richly blessed apostolate quickly unfolded with the friendly cooperation of the other teachers. The main goal was to transmit to the students, along with the normal curriculum, a set of Christian values as the basis for a joyful future in marriage and at work. Some of the students met their future spouse in this uniquely Christian environment; others found a call to consecrated life. Since that time, 43 vocations have come to our community from this school: 14 priests and brothers and 29 sisters. Some of them have returned to the school as teachers or supervisors in the dormitory. This fall, another young woman and a young man, who both just graduated, entered our novitiates in Stara Halic, Slovakia and Rome, Italy.

Along with the celebration of the Holy Mass and Eucharistic Adoration, there are two spiritual columns on which the school has rested since its inauguration: the Rosary and the consecration to Our Lady. In October 1991, only a month after the school opened, our missionaries began inviting the students to a weekly "Student Rosary". Up to 120 students participated, along with

the very devout principal, teachers and even the janitors and cooks. After a full day of school, they sang and prayed, filling every seat in the room and even sitting on the floor. To this day, students experience, "*Our school is carried by prayer!*"

Next, our three missionaries began to get together sometimes with the students on the weekend. They would speak about various important topics, like Christian marriage preparation, and they sang and prayed together.

With a special joy, they also prepared the whole school that year to pray an act of consecration to Our Lady. On December 8th, they all prayed it together with Cardinal Korec in his cathedral in Nitra. To this day, the school renews the consecration every year on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Another favorite tradition is the yearly camp, held in the garden at our Motherhouse in Stara Halic. This summer event always includes activities like a field day with games, excursions, group activities, testimonies, theatrical plays, camp fires, etc., all of which are imbedded in prayer, daily Holy Mass, opportunity for confession and the popular nighttime Eucharistic Adoration. Through all of these things, a very beautiful, family-like spiritual atmosphere develops. The crowning conclusion is the consecration to Our Lady which everybody prays. It is also nice that our Slovak priests and sisters, who participated in the camp as students, now help organize it.



**October 1991: The beginning  
of the beloved "Student Rosary".**



**Front row left to right:  
Sr. Veronika, Sr. Chiara and Sr. Maria Marthe  
in their high school years.**



**At the first camp, there were 50 students.  
Now more than 100 come each year to  
"recharge our spiritual batteries,"  
as one of them recently put it.**



divide up the day and each take a half hour adoration time for them.

We are happy to say that a newly ordained priest from our community will soon be named the “Children’s Chaplain” for the elementary school. On Thursday afternoons, up to 100 children participate in the Rosary. They sing, pray a decade of the Rosary and then our sisters tell the children something from

the life of Jesus or the lives of the saints. On the other days, the children interrupt their recess in the school courtyard at 3:00 to sit in a circle and pray “our” decade of the chaplet of Divine Mercy. It only lasts two minutes, but sometimes this is not enough for them and so we pray a second one.

The scope of our activities has broadened somewhat in the last 16 years, and today the 11 of us here in this mission station joke sometimes that we are a “house of teachers”. Most of us either teach in the church’s Sts. Svorad and Benedict Elementary School, and at the high school or assist at the boarding school (see *Triumph of the Heart* #40). Two other sisters are finishing up their theology degree. This year, since we have outgrown our house, we added temporary housing in the garden and built a roomy chapel for pastoral use.

At the boarding school, four of us sisters, together with an aide, take care of around 80 young people between the ages of 14 and 19. As students, we sought and experienced the motherly friendship of the sisters from the Family of Mary in our boarding school, and now we also try to be the same for our students. Former students who are now studying at the university or have already begun working often visit us.

We are pleased to tell you a little bit about our daily life where no two days are alike. At the beginning of the new school year, we always give the children and teenagers of the starting classes Miraculous Medals so that everybody is entrusted to Our Lady. We begin each day with morning prayer over the school’s public address system, and during the longer break, students of any age are invited to pray a decade of the Rosary together in the chapel. Every Thursday there is a brief adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and on Friday mornings, the school chaplain celebrates Holy Mass.

Extracurricular activities for the students in the boarding school include sports, arts and crafts and music—fun and games night and school dances are also eagerly anticipated. We regularly visit the elderly, handicapped children and women in prison.

Each year, before the last day of school, the graduating class prepares an hour of Eucharistic Adoration to which everyone is invited as an expression of their thankfulness. The graduates, in turn, are happy about the good “idea” that, during their final exams, the younger students

Taking time for others is a very important experience for the students—especially for later in life when they are married. We take time for one another, but we also remember to take time for God. Every day there is Holy Mass and prayer in the evening in the boarding house chapel for those who want to participate.



**I**n the inaugural year, 1991, the school also put on a play that has since become an annual tradition. In December of that year, the three missionaries and their students began preparing a Christmas pageant according to an age-old Austrian tradition. Although something completely new for the Slovak people, the play was greatly appreciated with six sell-out performances. His Eminence, Cardinal Korec even attended as did a very special group of children from Chernobyl.

Since then, the beloved Christmas pageant has taken place every three years, and we sisters who first acted in it in 1991 now direct it.

During Lent 2004, we produced a play about Christian martyrs, a so-called “Martyrology”. This year we had the idea to put together an Easter play based on a German novel by Gertrud von Le Fort, “The Wife of Pilate”. It is the story of Claudia Procula, the wife of the Roman governor Pilate, whose life is changed forever when she sees how Jesus, crowned with thorns, looks first full of merciful love at her husband and then at her.

**W**ithin a month, an impressive script was put together and 150 high school students prepared for their first appearance on a real stage, something new even for us sisters. Everybody worked together: rehearsals were held, and songs were composed and taught to the choir and musicians by our sisters and teacher Miro-

slav Sevcik. School chaplain Radoslav Gazdik used his talents for building the set, photography and graphic design. Twenty diligent students did wonders creating costumes, jewelry, weapons and props under the guidance of our sisters from the sewing room. In the performance there were several dances which one of the students, a ballerina, choreographed and rehearsed with three dance groups. The students did everything including the sound and lighting, and all that shortly before their final exams.

**T**o our surprise, the tickets were sold out in four days, well before opening night. We even added a fourth performance because of the great interest. After the dress rehearsal, one of the theatre employees came to us with tears in his eyes and said, “*Sisters, Sisters, I just wanted to watch for a few minutes. Then I heard the first song. It was so touching and I just had to stay till the end! I will never forget it!*” Yes, the 2,000 spectators were really moved, including Cardinal Korec, Bishop William Judak of Nitra, and his auxiliary bishop.

The students prepared spiritually before each performance by praying a decade of the Rosary together. Through this, there was a tangible peace and unity among the actors. Nobody wanted to steal the limelight and so God was able to work through the cast allowing the central message of the play to come through to the audience: only merciful love changes the human heart.







The producer of the regional television station, Joseph Jurik, wrote an e-mail to Professor Karol Zak, the school principal:

*"It is not customary for me to say anything about the presentations which I film, but for the one I saw yesterday I must. I was pleasantly surprised at how well the students performed. The play had the right emotional sparks without being sentimental. I stayed until the end because it fascinated me. To rehearse a play with 150 students is not easy, but in this case it was a success.*

*"Take these words as my personal opinion, my impression of and at the same time my praise for all those involved. These young people weren't spending their free time in bars, they weren't drinking or doing drugs or gambling. Rather they were memorizing lines and striving to make the events of 2000 years ago present. Thank you."*

One teacher, who attended practically every rehearsal, said joyfully, *"Although I haven't decorated or prepared anything with my family at home, I am better prepared for Easter than I've ever been!"*



# Motherhouse

Since December 8, 1993, Stara Halic, a little village with a population less than 600 in central Slovakia, has become a little bit better known. The joy is visible among the inhabitants that during the last 14 years, young people from 16 different countries have found a home there. When our community's first sisters, after several wrong turns, finally found this little place in the middle of the night, they saw it as a sign from heaven when large snow flakes began to fall. And so we began.

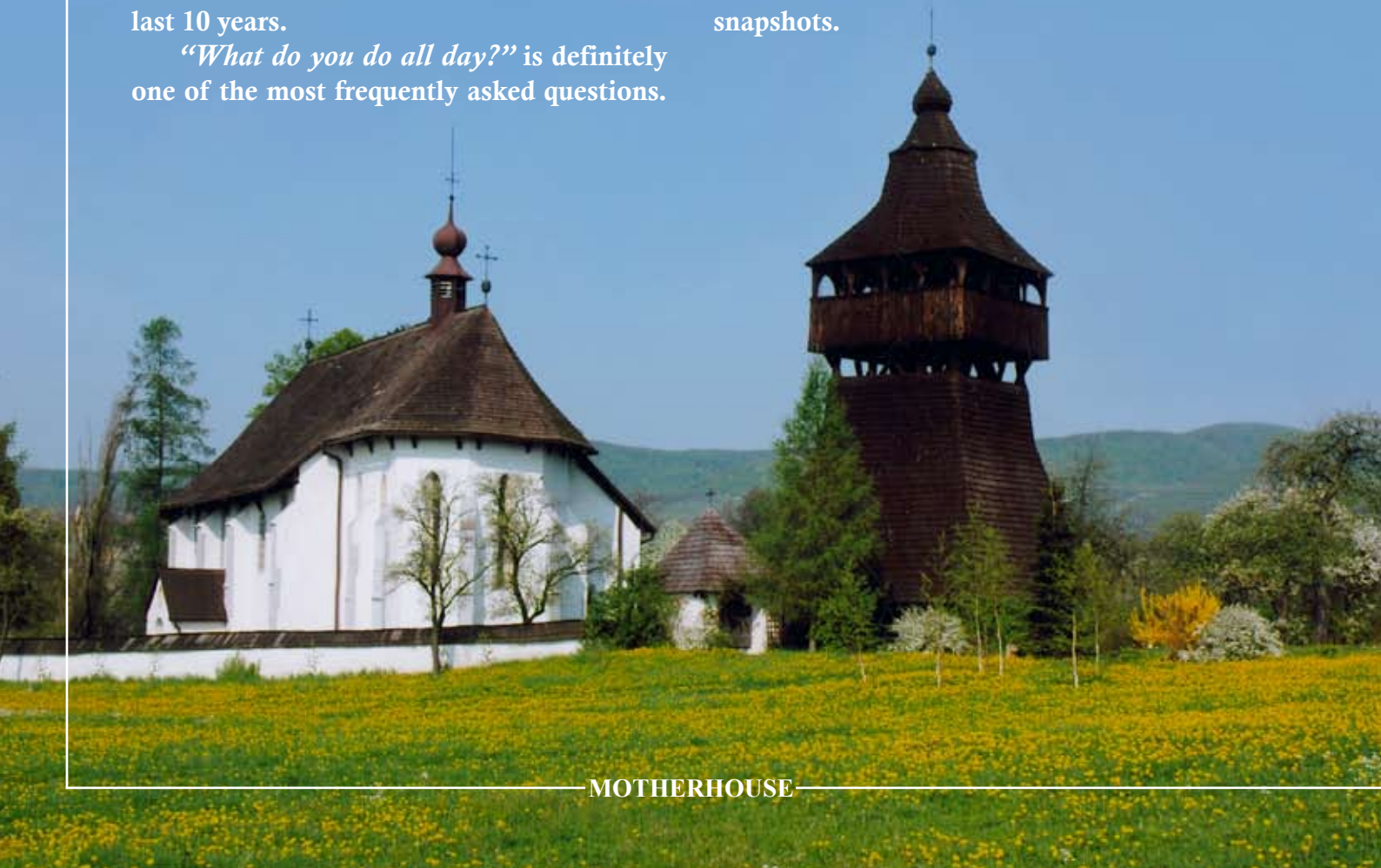
Everything was simple, poor in fact. At first, we lived in two rooms of the rectory before moving down to the Motherhouse. For years, as the house was being renovated, it was like living on a construction site. And we have been building ever since. The most recent project was a small pastoral center. Thanks to the energetic help of friends from our homelands, an old house with three rooms has become a nice Motherhouse from which 105 sisters have been formed in the last 10 years.

*"What do you do all day?"* is definitely one of the most frequently asked questions.

Let us allow St. Maximilian Kolbe to answer for us, *"Novitiate means taking off the old person and putting on the new."* That is exactly what we try to do by living the daily schedule which from 6:00 in the morning to 9:00 at night alternates between prayer, study, household chores, missionary endeavors, and unexpected events.

All that these young women go through can be a real challenge. They were used to making their own plans and living according to their wishes.

We have to learn everything which may come up in the daily life of a missionary: cooking, cleaning, doing the wash, ironing, picking up, gardening, buying fruits and vegetables for over 30 people, helping lovingly the poor who come to the door or speaking in a friendly way and answering the questions of curious visitors—just to name a few. We would like to illustrate with a few snapshots.







### **Adoration**

Since it is one of the deepest parts of our spirituality to pray for the sanctification of priests, we have Eucharistic Adoration day and night in the Motherhouse. During the Hour of Mercy between 3:00 and 4:00 in the afternoon, we meditate on the Stations of the Cross, pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy and read the Lord's words to St. Faustina.

### **Communion for the Sick**

One of the most joyful missionary tasks is bringing Holy Communion to the elderly and the sick. Afterwards, we always feel that we are the ones who have been rewarded.



### **“Taxi Service”**

Doing an act of kindness for the elderly, picking them up daily for Holy Mass and taking them to the hospital when necessary, prepares the novices for their future missionary work. In the end, each mission is about making a gift of yourself.



### **Lessons**

You cannot live what you do not know. The novices, therefore, deepen their knowledge of Holy Scripture, Church teachings and the lives of the saints. They especially love the daily lessons given by Mother Agnes, a trained religious education teacher. Language studies are also welcomed and taken seriously, if for no other reason than they allow the sisters of different nationalities to communicate with one another.



### **Developing Talents**

We recently finished building a classroom which will be used for artistic activities like gold leafing, painting, decorating candles etc. We will also do other projects here like a sewing course for the older gypsy girls.

### **Church Decoration and Liturgy**

We try to decorate the church festively not only for the solemnities but also for weddings and baptisms. We like to prepare nice songs for the liturgy in order to transmit a little of God's love to the people. At such events you are able to reach family members who otherwise never come to church.

## Children's Masses and Celebrations

For several years now, 80 to 100 children, who live mostly in the villages belonging to the parish, come to the Children's Mass on Fridays. Because of limited public transportation, many of them have to be picked up and brought home. Several times a year, we hold little parties for the children where we can share a little joy by giving them useful gifts which we have received from you benefactors.

The weekly meetings for children and youth are not intended to simply help them use their free time better. We also want to make them aware of the temptations in the world, its false promises and fake happiness, so that one day in the future they may be able to have a happy family based on Christian ideals. Therefore, we find it rewarding to teach religious education because we are able to lead them to God from their earliest years.

The recently completed pastoral center has been a big help for the children and for youth meetings.



## Office Work

Several sisters work in the office for the Slovak edition of our missionary magazine Triumph of the Heart. It is a real apostolate because the correspondence of more than 10,000 readers from every diocese in Slovakia is done here. Readers write or call with their needs and concerns, or they entrust us with their prayer intentions and joys.

## Games and activities

Although so many different activities, especially the children, help to keep us in shape, we try to make time one afternoon each week for sports as well. We are always trying something new. We do it not only for exercise, but also to try out games which we can play with our groups of children.



Mother Agnes is particularly fond of snow because during her years as a university student, she earned a living as a ski instructor.



Sr. Lidvina and Boschena

## Gypsy Mission

Just a few hours by car from the modern city of Vienna, there are many villages that are still very poor. The further east you go, the more visible it is. Even though Slovakia has become part of the European Union, things have not changed for many people, especially the poor. The poverty is worse than what can be shown in pictures. It is not only the bare necessities which are lacking, but there is a hopelessness reflected in so many faces.

More and more people knock at our door: homeless people who have heard that they will always be given something to eat at the Motherhouse and gypsies who live a pitiable life in their dilapidated huts.

We know some of them very well; better said, they have become our friends since they ask for help regularly. Boschena, for example,

actually has a good heart, but at the end of the month when she receives a little money from the state, she is often drunk. With all her worries, she comes to our door and complains to the sister in charge about her suffering. Sr. Lidvina is the right person for such cases. *“She is really my mom,”* says the 40-year-old woman about our young Sr. Lidvina. *“I didn’t have a mom, but she gives me everything my mother would have given me.”* Consoled and peaceful, she returns home.

Another dear friend is 42-year-old Joschka. Adopted by a gypsy family at the age of five, she lives with them as their maid. With an exceptional modesty, she is at peace with her lot. Every few years she receives a new pair of shoes or something else to wear. Day after day she pulls her wagon behind her and gathers up treasures—in reality just things she finds along the road. On her birthday or the feast of her patron saint, she may ask us for something special. All that she asked for this year on her feast day was a particular waffle-like cookie with peanut butter filling.

We are happy that we have such a loving friendship with so many gypsy families because it makes it easier to transmit the Faith to them. Charity and Christian hope are the only ways to draw them out of their poverty. Although they are notorious for stealing, we have never had problems with them. Because of our good relationship, we are more likely to hear, *“Sister, you are so good! Too bad you aren’t a gypsy too.”*

After their three years of formation, some sisters decide to further their studies. This year, for example, Sr. Agatha graduated with honors in theology, and began teaching religion this fall in Nitra. In October, four other sisters began studying at various universities.

The house of formation, where the sisters do their three year preparation for their later missionary activities, serves also as the community’s Motherhouse where each sister can come home and recover from the demands of missionary life.





# Alexejevka

*“Russia still has not converted. Do not be deceived by the freedom of religion and the revival of church rituals,” wrote 45-year-old Bishop Clemens Pickel to Catholic News Service on the Internet in May 2007.*

*His diocese of St. Clemens-Sacratov, the southern part of European Russia, is about 20 times the size of Ireland, twice the size of Texas or about the size of Australia’s Northern Territory. In spite of its size, there are only 21,000 Catholics. He writes further, “Looking back on nearly 17 years of experience in this country, I have to say that it has become more difficult for the young priests and religious who have come here to follow God’s call. Russia has become more and more expensive. We see this in the parishes when it comes to paying bills, when we plan events or just need to build something... I have to allow my priests to travel abroad often to raise money, even though the parishes suffer from the absence of their pastor just as a family does when the father is away.”*

We often speak about the German-Russian faithful in our missions, so we wanted to give a brief background. Catherine the Great, a German princess who ascended to the Russian throne in 1762, promulgated a manifesto the following year inviting Germans to live and cultivate the vast expanses of fertile Russian land which was practically uninhabited. They remained mostly German-speaking colonies until their massive deportation to Siberia and Kazakh-

stan during World War II.

Since 1994, we missionaries from the Family of Mary have been caring for the only two registered parishes of the Republic of Bashkortostan: Alexejevka in the Ural Mountains and the parish of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross 50 miles away in the city of Ufa. Sects often fill whole stadiums there. Our parish is about one-third the size of England and we easily travel 30,000 miles a year to make regular pastoral vis-



Elisabeth Dajtche



its to the numerous villages in the parish. When you consider that the circumference of the earth is about 25,000 miles, a year's worth of travel can seem like we've driven around the world!

In the capital city of Ufa, a roomy chapel in an apartment building was consecrated in 1996. Initially, we only had 8 Catholics in our congregation. One of them was 92-year-old Elisabeth Dajtche with her coveted collection: a stack of hand-written prayer books which would have been forbidden during the many years of communist religious suppression.

Since she was German, she was deported from the Ukraine in 1941. Her husband had already been dragged off to a work camp in Siberia. He wrote to her in the early days of his imprisonment, *"At -75° F, 500 people started the march into this uninhabited area, but only 70 people arrived."* We rarely meet anybody with such a trust in God like Elisabeth's.

Our blue wooden church in Alexejevka was built in 1995 and named "The Church of the Assumption". It is hard to describe what it means for the people to have a church here in a country where churches are often hundreds of miles apart. The church was built by volunteer "church builders" from the organization "Churches for

the East", which receives financial support from countless friends and the "Renovabis" organization. Thanks to numerous volunteers from our home countries, we also have a new house for the brothers, one for the sisters and a chapel where deanery meetings and retreats are held for priests, sisters, young adults and altar servers.

The boys and girls look forward to the so called "Vacation with God" summer camp each year. In the children's house, which serves as a soup kitchen in the winter, our poor children receive what often turns out to be their only meal of the day. Often we are able to help with material goods when we visit nursing homes, children's homes and orphanages.

Our Alexejevka parish has changed a lot over the years. The majority of our German Catholics have returned to their homeland since after the fall of the Soviet Empire and communism in 1989, German-Russians were invited back to Germany. Their homes have been bought by Bashkirs, Russians and Tatars, the majority of whom have no religious confession and no interest in the Faith. We see it more and more as our primary responsibility to accept and help the children and youth who are threatened by alcoholism and criminality.



A meeting of all the altar servers in our deanery took place for the first time in Alexejevka last August.

Fourteen servers, ranging in age from 7 to 27, took part.

We were all excited when Bishop Clemens Pickel also came to participate.



## *Under the Protection of John Paul II*

*Brother Martin Johannes, who normally lives with the students in Rome, has been “lent” to our mission station five times. Recently, he was here for six months. That is fine with him because, as he says, “My heart belongs first to Our Lady and then to the children in Alexejevka.” He tells a little about “his kids”.*

When the children come to us for the first time, they are often malnourished and poorly dressed. More than anything, they are poor in the amount of love they have received from their parents who, unfortunately, are often victims of alcoholism. At home they see and experience things which hurt them deeply and can even make them sick. They stay out as long as possible and only go home to sleep. How much they appreciate, therefore, playing in our children’s home or eating in the soup kitchen.

One of the children is Maxim. He is 15 years old, was baptized at the mission station and received First Holy Communion from Fr. Johannes. Both of his parents are alcoholics, and his father is so violent that even the police are afraid of him.

In spite of everything, I saw how much Maxim missed his mother when she left to work in Siberia. He became more and more difficult and everybody started to suffer from his unpredictable behavior. A great struggle was going on inside of him. On one side, he was an altar boy and wanted to participate in the so-called “Boys’ Days” camp. On the other, he did some terrible things. It seemed to me that he wanted to draw attention at any price so that the others would no-

tice and help him. He wrecked our fence, pulled out the flowers around the church, trampled the flower beds, stole fruit and more than once made racket the whole night outside the house.

That was not enough for him. He coerced other youth from the village to do evil things too. They did whatever he wanted because they were afraid of him and his hard fists. They were there when he threw rocks and painted graffiti on our church. However, after every misdemeanor he would go to confession, and so Fr. Johannes always accepted him back in the church. He was up front with me too and told me that he had behaved unacceptably.

Having come to know Maxim better with time, I always try to be a friend to him, to be patient and not to bear any grudges. It has not always been easy, but what else can you do? He had been yelled at and beaten enough at home. How can you teach him to be good other than with goodness? I always had to find the strength for this goodness in prayer since it was not something that I could do on my own. One example of this forgiveness is the time he rode over on a horse named Malish which he borrowed from a

farm where he helped as a shepherd in the summer. Without saying much, we made a trade—he lent me his horse and I lent him my bicycle. And away we rode!

In February 2007, Maxim's mother fell ill and died within three days from liver cirrhosis. Her son showed no emotion, shed no tears, and made no complaints. Completely hardened, Maxim was taken to a children's home since his father was completely incapable of caring for him.

I had been back in Rome for a month when Fr. Johannes told me the news on the telephone. *"Martin, I have placed him and his conversion completely in the hands of John Paul II."* After the phone call, I felt really sorry for Maxim. He did not know anybody in this home, and even though he did not show his emotions, I knew he must be suffering terribly. So I decided to make a pilgrimage with one of our brothers,

Andrej, to the tomb of Pope John Paul II. On his gravestone, I placed a picture I had taken of Maxim on his horse Malish and prayed:

*"Please, Holy Father, help Maxim to change and that something good comes of him. He cannot do it on his own nor can he do it in his current surroundings. I entrust him to you."* I wrote something similar on the back of the picture. It was around noon.

When I returned home, there was a surprise waiting for me, an e-mail from Fr. Johannes. *"I have something nice to tell you. Out of the blue, at about 4:00pm today, Maxim called the sisters. He was so kind and asked in detail how we are doing, if the roads are covered with snow, etc. He had never done anything like that before."* When I calculated the time difference, it was exactly the time I had been praying for Maxim at the tomb of John Paul II. What a beautiful sign!

## *I* Romka and Liana

would still like to tell you about two children who are like so many here. Little Romka, who has found a special place in my heart, was just three when he visited us the first time in early 2003. His aunt Liana, who is only three years older than him, was with him. I will never forget the terrified looks on their faces.

The two of them stood at our door frightened with scratches and lice, dirty from head to toe and smelling terrible. They begged for something to eat and somewhere to hide. We took care of them of course. First we gave them a thorough washing which they noticeably enjoyed. Eventually, we learned a little bit about their situation.

They were from a Muslim family which had moved from Oktjabrsky to Alexejevka. Romka's mother was just 17 years old when he was born. In spite of her age, she was already an alcoholic and one day, without saying anything, just left her child with her mother. Nobody has seen her since. So the baby grew up at Grandma's with Liana, his mother's youngest sister. Grandma was also a heavy drinker and her violent partner was no better. In his drunkenness, he often grabbed the children and beat them. It was the worst when they were both drunk. During these times, the two children would often run away to our mission station.



**Brother Martin and Romka**

After these binges, his grandma was as good as dead for two days. There was nobody else around, as is often the case here, to care for the children. Sometimes grandma even went as far as simply locking up the house and taking off with her boyfriend for a couple of days. Liana and Romka come running to us upset.

Every time that Romka comes he has wet his pants, and he even sleeps in them too. Whenever he was especially wet, the three-year-old seemed to be the most affectionate, always wanting to sit right away on my lap. Naturally, I put the little boy on my knees, but I always had to change my clothes afterwards.

Once, Liana rang the door bell repeatedly. When I came to the door, she just begged, “*Will you play with me?*” She acted like a drunkard and swaggered to and fro. Then I realized that was supposed to be the game. Shocked, I picked her up and said, “*No, we aren’t going to play that.*” I put her on my shoulders and carried her around like a little princess.

When the conditions at home became unbearable in 2005, we called the police. I can remember the day well when the children were taken to a special home. It all happened while we were at Holy Mass. Romka was sleeping, but Liana understood what was going on right away when the mayor led them out of church and handed them over to the police. It was horrible to watch. Half the congregation cried with Liana. We missionaries would have loved to take them ourselves, but Russian law does not allow it.

In the children’s home they both had it good, all things considered. For me it was hard though, to see Romka so seldom. Once we brought some toys to the home and he jumped into my arms yelling, “*My friend, my friend!*”

We prayed hard that good parents would adopt them, and our prayers were heard. Later that year, a childless couple, good people, from the neighboring village adopted first Romka and then Liana as well. For the first time in their lives, the children were able to experience a family, a home and a much needed security.



Two years ago, Svetlana moved to Alexejevka from Kazakhstan with her husband and their three children Olga, Constantin and Anatolij. Through the painful loss of her husband, who died a few months after they moved, she found God. Shortly thereafter, she was baptized with her children; and this year, on the Sunday of Divine Mercy, they made their First Communion. The two boys have become enthusiastic altar servers.

# An Unexpected Consolation

Told by Fr. Johannes Nepomuk

*Normally, you go to the mission with the wish to build something for the Kingdom of God and to change something for the better.*

*One forgets too easily that the most important mission begins with yourself.*

*We should first change ourselves for the better. God looks at the heart, at our attitude, on our love and good intentions; he does not look at our achievements like the world does. That being said, we missionaries also experience dry periods like everyone else, when you simply have to persevere in blind faith.*

*In this struggle, however, the Lord does not abandon us.*

*I experienced this in the winter of 2004.*

In Bashkortostan, the winter is long and very cold with temperatures reaching -40° F. It starts to snow as early as October and sometimes it stays on the ground until May. That alone is hard to live with sometimes. In addition, I was going through a time of great inner struggle. It seemed to me that I was not receiving from the faithful and my co-workers what I, in my way of seeing things, had expected. I caught myself thinking more and more often, “It’d just be easier to give up this mission. It’s not worth it anyway.”

Discouraged as I was, I still did not have the courage to pick up the phone and tell this to my spiritual father. God, however, “thought” of a very special consolation for me. One winter’s day in February, during the quiet preparation for Holy Mass, the church door suddenly opened and a group of children entered. I knew these five or six children from the neighboring village. Their eyes were so full of joy and anticipation; it was as if they wanted to say, “See, we are here now!” The amazing thing is that the children had trudged three or four miles through the snow and icy cold.

Yes, that was a great consolation just when I needed it. And as if this one surprise visit had not been enough for me, the children made the strenuous visit to the church several more times that week. Of course, I brought the children home with the car each time after Holy Mass.

Christmas is also a very special experience for our children.



# Nobody Lives for Himself

*In our parish, it has become a beloved tradition that during Advent a statue from Fatima goes from house to house. On one evening, we missionaries gather at the home where the statue resides and pray the Rosary with the family. Once, Our Lady came to one family along a totally different path. To do so, she made use of an 11-year-old boy named Radion, who today is our most fervent altar boy and parishioner.*

When we met Radion in 2002, he was living with his mother and grandmother in Novonikolsk. His father, a severe alcoholic, did not live with them. Since this first encounter, Radion has come to church regularly. He never misses Holy Mass during the summer although he often has to walk the six miles to our mission station. Radion learned the Rosary quickly and it was soon his favorite prayer. He was always very talented and inquisitive, and he enjoyed reading the children's Bible and other religious books. So, he already knew everything when it came time to prepare him for Baptism and First Communion.

After a while, we also met Radion's spirited mother, Valentina, who had been baptized as a child, but grew up without practicing the Faith. His grandmother, Nina, who was not baptized, also lived in their dilapidated little house. She was lame and could only move around with great difficulty. On top of that, she suffered from depression. It was difficult for her in the beginning to open up to God. She did, however, listen attentively whenever we sat down to pray with her, and she always accepted a priest's blessing.

One night, Radion started something new. He began praying the Rosary on grandma's bed, often all five mysteries. When she was doing poorly, his grandmother would regularly invite him, "Radion, come and pray for me!"

His mother Valentina observed all this, and slowly she too became interested in the Faith. Like her son, she learned the Rosary first, and then she even accompanied Radion to Holy Mass, "to check everything out," as she said.

The family was filled with new hope. Enkindled by the fervor of her grandchild, Babushka Nina even had the courage to ask for baptism. She received the sacrament together with Radion on the Feast of Pentecost 2003. Nina, who chose the baptismal name Mary, had to be carried into the church, a sight which was very moving for everyone. Her grandson received St. Joseph as his baptismal patron saint.

Even though the severe depression and bodily

We have Eucharistic Adoration on the first Thursday of the month. People can sign up for their own time between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. Radion had a decisive experience during one of his visits. He entrusted to one of our sisters, "You know sister, during Adoration I felt a fire in my heart, and I clearly understood that God wants to make me a priest."



pain remained, sometimes so intense that she cried the whole night, now the grandmother no longer rebelled against her suffering as she did earlier. It was consoling for her to know that she could offer it up, for her family and for those who do not believe in God, like she was for 70 years. She was able to witness a small miracle in her own life. After she received the anointing of the sick, her depression gradually disappeared.

Nina held the Rosary, which we gave her for her 72<sup>nd</sup> birthday, in her hand until the very hour of her death. She repeated over and over, “I’ll never let it go!”

Valentina, who did not receive any help from her family in caring for her mother, sought refuge in prayer and in the Holy Eucharist. She made her First Communion with her son on Christmas Day 2003. Since then, she has become one of the most faithful parishioners in our mission. She often says, “*I could no longer live without the Church and without Jesus.*”

Radion is the happiest one of all. Fr. Johannes said recently on the telephone, “*At the age of 16, he is still our greatest joy! He remains firm in his decision to become a priest, as he understood during adoration.*”

## Prayer in the Barn

*Once a month during our road trips to the outlying villages of the parish, we call on an elderly couple, Babushka (grandma) Emma and Dedushka (grandpa) Jorig Mumber from Beriosovska where they have lived for 41 years.*

*Without exaggerating, you could write a book about Emma when she begins to tell the moving story of her life.*

*She is one of those women who has changed the world around her through her silent prayers and years of humble submission.*

“**I** was in the hospital in Ufa in 1966 with a serious infection. That is where I first met Jorig, who had often come to visit his wife, who had a brain tumor. When she died, Jorig started coming to visit me. I was 37 at the time and Jorig was 32.

“When I was younger, I prayed a lot for a good husband, but I never thought about marrying Jorig. Although I hadn’t fallen in love, I understood quite clearly that God wanted me to go to Beriosovska with Jorig. And that was it. We were married outside the Church even though Jorig had been baptized by his grandmother. It was a bitter wedding! My husband didn’t say a word about his seven children whom I was supposed to take care of. The oldest had just turned 11 and the youngest was only two. And my husband drank so much!

“Right from the start, I wasn’t allowed to pray my Rosary in the house. Jorig didn’t want me to. So for many years, whether hot or cold,

I went out to the barn every day to pray. I did it secretly when I had finished my work; I couldn’t have survived without prayer. Yet, all the difficulties had a bright side. My faith grew deeper, and for 40 years I prayed the Rosary for Jorig, that he too may find his way to God. When a priest started coming to Sergejopo every two weeks to say Holy Mass, I dared to ask Jorig to drive me the 12 miles. ‘*Such nonsense!*’ he would always say, but he drove me anyway.

“It took a long time, but things started improving in the last five years. Suddenly, I was allowed to pray in the family room. The television was blaring, but when I pulled out my Rosary Jorig quickly turned it down a little, and eventually, he turned it off completely. If I prayed, he would lay on the couch and pretended to sleep, until one day when he said, ‘*Emma, pray a little bit louder so that I hear something too.*’ Since then, I have happily prayed aloud because Jorig doesn’t hear so well any more. Being al-

most blind myself, God has shown us in our old age that one of us cannot survive without the other.

“Although Jorig is much better than he was, he has never actually wanted to pray with me. He thinks, *‘I was born on Christmas. That is like a guarantee that I will go to heaven.’* He did, however, accept a little cross from me. He wears it around his neck, and if he’s misplaced it, he is troubled until he has found it again.”

*I*n May 2007, Jorig’s health rapidly began to deteriorate and he unexpectedly asked us for the anointing of the sick

*“The Reverend Father said you have to be a believer!”* insisted his nearly blind Emma.

*“What do you think? I don’t believe?”* he retorted. When Fr. Johannes administered the sacrament, Jorig cried. Then, for the first time, he prayed the ‘Our Father’ with his wife.

They were both touched and Emma said joyfully, *“How long have I prayed for this day!”*



**“May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.”**  
From the rite of the anointing of the sick when the hands are anointed.



# Kazakhstan - A Huge Mission Territory

*With more than one million square miles, Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country in the world and the largest land-locked country. For comparison, that is about the size of Western Australia, or more than one-third of the continental United States.*

*More than 130 nationalities live together peacefully in this huge, multicultural Central Asian country. The majority of the population is Kazakh, and although Kazakhstan is officially considered a Muslim country, only a few of the Muslims which account for 43% of the population actually practice their faith. Only 1-2% of the inhabitants are Catholic.*

*Throughout history, Kazakhstan has been a country of suffering, drowned in the blood and tears of countless martyrs. In the 1930's and 1940's, people from many other countries, especially the German speaking, were deported to the steppe of Kazakhstan where forced labor, work camps, hunger, cold and disease claimed thousands of lives. Those who survived were often left with only their faith. After Kazakhstan became independent in 1991, the dioceses of Karaganda (1999), Astana (2003), Almaty (2003) and the Apostolic Administration Atyrau (1999) were created. Today, they all draw from the spiritual inheritance left by the martyrs.*

*The Apostolic Administration of Astana was set up in 1999 and made into an archdiocese in 2003. Pope John Paul II named Monsignor Tomasz Peta the Archbishop of Astana, the capital city of Kazakhstan, and the Metropolitan of the newfound Kazakh province.*

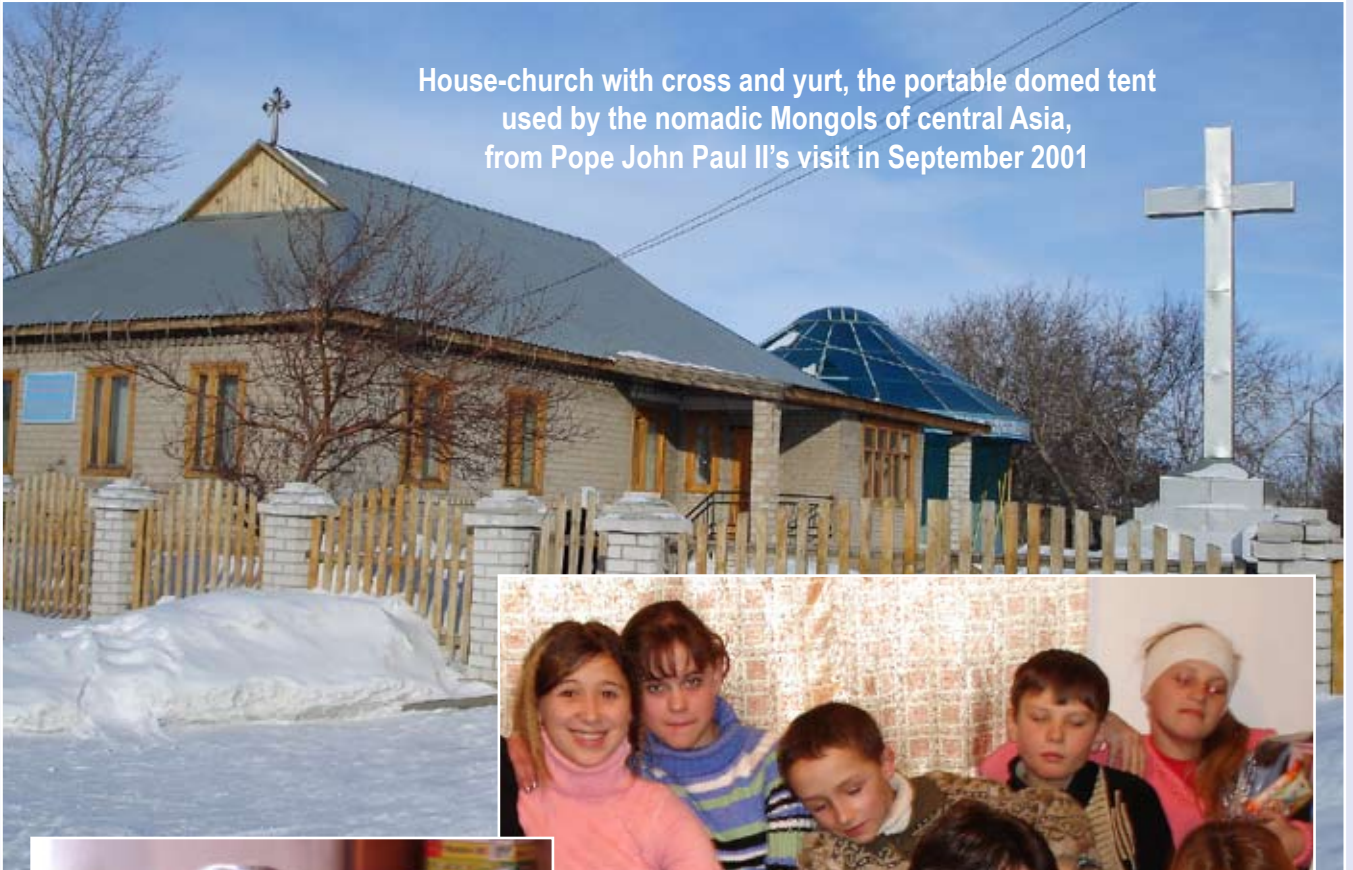
*I*n the fall of 2003, three sisters from our community "Family of Mary" began a mission in Astana at the invitation of Archbishop Peta. The bishop intentionally entrusted us Astana's former Catholic "house-church" where the faithful gathered secretly for prayer and liturgy during the times of persecution.

At the end of September 2003, the Nuncio and the Archbishop came to consecrate the newly renovated church. Our church community has diminished in the last 15 years since nearly 60% of the Catholics have left, emigrating primarily to Germany. The few Catholics left behind now go to Holy Mass at the Cathedral in the middle

of the city because it is much more easily accessible. For four years, we sisters have lived here on the outskirts of town in filthy surroundings where the dust hangs in the hot summer air and where you sink in the mud every time it rains.

In these slums, we have always taken care of our neighbors: poor Kazakhs, Russians, Gypsies and above all, neglected children. Most of them live in decrepit barracks. Many of them are sick and it is not unusual that already at the age of ten, they reach for the bottle or fall into the drug scene. A life of crime is seldom far away, since the children witness so much violence in their own families or see it in movies.

House-church with cross and yurt, the portable domed tent used by the nomadic Mongols of central Asia, from Pope John Paul II's visit in September 2001



We began telling the boys and girls about Jesus of Divine Mercy, the motherly love of Mary and the lives of the saints. It was important for us to give them at least a couple joyful hours, to take for time for them and give them a little motherly love, to play with them, to learn a new song or to do something together.

Naturally, hungry children love something sweet; but they are just as happy with a loaf of bread that they can take home with them. They get excited over a pair of new shoes, a jacket or a scarf, cough syrup or crayons... over everything really which we have received from you, our benefactors. We see the same joyful reaction in the two children's homes which we visit regularly.

Occasionally, we are asked to help out in the parishes. So we have taken turns the last years driving to the neighboring villages to teach catechism and to prepare children for Baptism and

First Holy Communion. Most of them are from families that do not know anything about God.

Our apostolate has taken on a new twist since the summer of 2006 when Archbishop Peta asked for our help in the chancellery. Our daily duties now consist of answering the phone, keeping correspondence, parish administration, writing documents, etc.

In addition, one of us three sisters works the whole day as the Secretary of the Kazakh Bishops' Conference. That entails multi-lingual correspondence with other bishops' conferences and with the congregations in Rome, preparing papers for meetings and much more. Unfortunately, we do not have as much time as before for our children, but we dedicate a few hours during the week, and Sundays and holidays belong totally to them!



When the Holy Father visited Astana on his pastoral visit in September 2001, Bishop Thomas Peta introduced his Vicar General, Fr. Jean Marc Stoop, who worked as a missionary priest of the Family of Mary in Scherbakty from 1994-2001, before receiving his current assignment.

# Scherbakty - “The Bethlehem of Kazakhstan”

*In the Archdiocese of Astana lies the town of Scherbakty, out on the great steppe of northeast Kazakhstan and not far from the Siberian border. Germans who were driven away from their homes near the Volga River settled here and registered the first Catholic community in 1979. Brother and sisters from our community were invited here for a summer mission in 1992 and 1993. Monsignor John Paul Lenga, the former Apostolic Administrator for Kazakhstan and Central Asia, entrusted this parish to us in 1994. Our first act was consecrating it to Our Lady. The numerous Volga-Germans were elated. “They’ve finally sent us somebody,” we often heard them say. Since then, however, most of them have moved away, and our parish has become multicultural. In Scherbakty alone there are approximately 30 different nationalities.*

A priest, a brother and four sisters currently care for Scherbakty and 12 surrounding villages. Here, a shovel is a bare necessity for the times when the car gets stuck in the snow on the way to catechism class and the temperature outside is -40°F. The villages are full of poverty, and many have developed into “artists of life” to win their fight to survive. Who would be surprised that they knock on our door with every possible request? Helplessness is written on so many faces. Someone drinks in every family. Consequently, caring for those in need is an important part of our apostolate.

More and more Muslim-Kazakhs and non-believers are coming to ask us for help. Of course, we want to support them too. In this way, we are able to contribute to the peaceful coexistence of the different nationalities in the region.

In the colder months, people ask every day for wood and coal. The winter lasts nearly six months. Weeks can pass where the temperature does not rise above -20°F, and some families have to spend the winter living in a single room because they cannot heat the whole house. The heating cost for the winter averages out to the equivalent of three months pay, but most of the people are unemployed.

We often help the poorest people pay their electric bills. Many times they come and ask for candles because the electricity has already been shut off and they have to sit in the dark. Sometimes we can help a family by buying them a sheep or a cow (see *Triumph of the Heart* #32), an important start in becoming self-sufficient.

The sick people we care for are always very thankful because they are otherwise left totally alone. We are the ones who feel rewarded though when we bring consolation and help to the souls and are able to prepare them for a Christian death (see *Triumph of the Heart* #33). Thanks especially to your help, dear benefactors, we can buy medicine which is too expensive for them or even make a life-saving operation possible.

Luckily, we have a good relationship with the office of social services. We are happy to help them and the orphanage with clothing, shoes, toiletries, mattresses, toys and everything which you send us from the West.

We are often shocked by the insufficient living conditions of some families. They are so thankful when we cover the repair costs or even help them to find a better place to live.

The children and youth are especially close to our heart. That is why, in the last years, we



We hope that we will no longer have to divide up into groups for lunch since the basic construction of the new children's house is complete.



have really become a “children’s parish”, which Bishop Tomas Peta happily called “the Bethlehem of Kazakhstan”. It all started with four hungry children begging for bread.

We missionaries opened a soup kitchen in 1995 to help keep the children from stealing. At present, up to 100 children receive a warm meal here, and the children’s kitchen has become a refuge and a home for many of them. It is a challenge for us missionaries to be loving fathers and mothers for the little children, and for the older ones as well, who often do not have parents.

Sports, games and music lessons are an opportunity to teach them social and religious values, because at home they have never learned how to be nice to one another, to share, to say thank you or to ask for forgiveness.

We pray with the children every day before they eat; the Muslim children pray with us too in their own way. Naturally, Holy Mass and all religious activities are open to anyone, so even the young Kazakhs come and listen with interest when we read something from Holy Scripture or tell a story about a saint.

## *Thank You Tolik!*

*For years now, we missionaries drive through the Kazakh steppe to Malinovka every Sunday afternoon to bring Holy Communion and to pray with the German-Russians.*

*Three years ago, in the summer of 2004, we met Babushka Galja and her severely handicapped 38-year-old son Tolik († 2005) whom we visited regularly.*

*W*e were deeply touched the first time we walked through their door. Tolik, unable to move since childhood, lay miserable in his bed which he had not left in 20 years. He smiled at us

despite the terrible pain caused by the progressive crippling of his limbs. It was apparent that his mother suffered with him, heightened by the fact that her husband had died only a few days



earlier. In tears, she explained that Tolik, who was used to the selfless care of his father, simply could not understand why his dad could not do it anymore. *“He refuses anybody’s help and prefers to wait until dad brings him his usual tea and cookies, shaves and washes him.”* Tolik was able to accept his father’s death only three months later when he had a memorable dream about him.

Mother Galja did not grow up practicing her faith, although she was baptized in the Orthodox Church when she was young. Through Fr. Bonaventura, she came to understand something new and important. She learned that she could offer up to Jesus all her suffering, and she had a lot in her life. Even past afflictions, every pain is valuable and, united to the suffering of Jesus, infinitely valuable. Astounded and overjoyed she said, *“Nobody ever told me that I can offer up my suffering!”*

When Fr. Bonaventura asked Tolik in simple words if he wanted to give the Lord his pain and suffering for the salvation of souls, he answered spontaneously and clearly, *“Yes”*. We

do not know exactly how much he understood about the good news of coredeemption; but one thing is certain, Tolik acted like a lamb.

He was almost always smiling when we visited him. He would look at each one of us and say, *“I love you!”* He liked to pray with us, and he enjoyed it when we sang something for him.

When his health worsened, Tolik looked with exhaustion at image of Jesus of Divine Mercy which we had given him, but he never complained. On the contrary, he radiated a great peace, and we often felt ashamed because he carried his suffering with such surrender and patience. Mother Galja did not leave Tolik’s side until he departed for heaven at the age of 40.

We are not trying to canonize Tolik, but we missionaries are convinced that many blessings were given for the village of Malinovka, our mission station and all of Kazakhstan through this loving person’s hidden, offered suffering. To prove just how likeable Tolik was, our First Communion children who, hearing about his pending death, wanted to spend the final hours with him.

## A Lightning Ball

*Galja has lived alone since Tolik’s death. After a good preparation, she received her First Holy Communion in the spring of 2006, at more than 70 years of age. She has not only a good heart, but a believing one, which has learned to trust in God’s omnipotence and love.*

**T**errible storms devastated Kazakhstan in the summer of 2006. Several shepherds were killed in these storms while tending their great herds of horses, cattle, goats and sheep on the vast Kazakh steppe. Galja also had an unusual and dangerous experience in this storm which, at our request, she told the faithful about one Sunday in our church:

*“It was a terrible storm, and suddenly my neighbor was standing in my doorway, her knees shaking. Beside herself, she gasped, ‘A ball lighting hit my house! It came in through the electrical outlet. It is circling around the*

*walls and can’t find a way back outside!’ I immediately grabbed the holy water and ran over to my neighbor’s house. When I saw the big ball of fire flashing along the wall, I was also terrified and afraid to do anything. I had never seen anything like it before. In fear, I started praying out loud, ‘Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...’ and sprinkled the holy water in every direction. There was a horrendous bang! The lightning broke through the wall and burst outside. I tell you, I saw God’s help with my own eyes!”*

# Finding God through the Children

*Natasha Almuchambetova, also from German descent, has been helping us missionaries since 2003. She hands out clothes and helps the poor in various ways. We trust her like our own sister. She has two older children, Sarina and Marat, from her first marriage. After getting an annulment and remarrying, she had two more girls, Almira and Dinara. It was Sarina and Marat's faith that eventually led their mother and their two half-sisters to the Church.*

All four children have been coming to the soup kitchen for four years, and the two older ones, who had been baptized Orthodox, began to really pray that their mother and younger siblings would also be baptized. It seemed unlikely because Natasha's second husband, Nurlan, is a Kazakh-Muslim.

Up until that point, she knew nothing about the faith, but she was so open to God's grace that the desire to become Catholic gradually grew in her. She was so interested in learning about God.

Even before her baptism, we saw her praying for long periods of time before the Blessed Sacrament.

With the permission of her Muslim husband, the day had finally come. On her birthday, June 26, 2005, she received the sacrament of Baptism together with her daughters, four-year-old Almira and six-year-old Dinara. She was overjoyed. Her daughters were so excited that, already days before, every time little Almira woke up she asked, "Mommy, am I already baptized?"







*Such a celebration is always a consolation and a joy for us missionaries. The story continues though. Catherine, Natasha's 80-year-old Baptist mother, told us in May 2007, "After my daughter's baptism, I read all your books about Mary. I understood more and more in my heart that Mary is no ordinary woman, but that she was chosen by God to bring us the Redeemer. There came a point when I did not feel like I was in the right place any more as a Baptist because I could not understand why they did not want to accept Mary. A mother belongs in the family!"*

*When Babushka Catherine saw her daughter and grandchildren praying the Rosary, she was finally sure, "I want to be there where Mary and my family are. It is so nice when we all belong to ONE Church."*

*At the age of 80, Catherine has been coming to the Catechism classes since Christmas 2006, and she will receive now the sacraments as a Catholic.*



# A Thanks...

This little look, dear friends and benefactors, at our daily life and the lives of some of those dear to us and entrusted to you here in the mission station is intended, first of all, to thank you for all the goodness you have shown us priests, brothers and sisters in the Family of Mary. We offer our deepest gratitude most especially in the name of all the people here who have benefited from your faithful support over the years. Some of you have even brought our mission station's projects to the attention of friends and acquaintances. They, in turn, discovered ways to help our community through benefit concerts, street sales, raffles or special collections.

*May the Lord repay you for each and every, little or big, spiritual or material support, effort and collaboration!*

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Publisher: © Copyright Pro Deo et Fratribus – Family of Mary

Editor: Familie Mariens  
Via Ombra, 1  
64010 Civitella del Tronto (TE)  
Italy  
Fax: 0039/0861/91 85 30  
e-mail: familiemariens@web.de

Checks: Family of Mary  
P.O. Box 477  
Milan, IL 61264 / USA  
or to the Editor listed at left

Printing & Mailing costs average \$5.00 US per issue.

*If you wish to support us, we would be happy to provide a tax deductible receipt upon request.*

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## ... *And a Request*

**H**opefully you were touched by a story or two in this edition of *Triumph of the Heart*. Now you know why we, as young priests and sisters, need your prayers. Even before your material support and generosity, we need your spiritual help, your prayers and sacrifices, without which we would not be able to hold out in the mission. This inner bond helps us to grow more and more into one spiritual family.

Our community does, however, continue to depend on your donations. The majority of the dioceses where we work are very poor. Since we trust in divine providence and intentionally work without being paid, we have nothing to fall back on and the community carries the entire financial burden. Once again, we kindly ask your material support for our missionary work, our care for the poor and suffering, children and families as well as the often tedious renovations of our churches and chapels.



We missionaries ask for your help as well because, as you can imagine, our living expenses have to be paid too, not to mention the costs of filling up the car and having to annually renew our visas and insurance.

You are more than welcome to designate a project or a mission on your donation, but we are also thankful for those donations which are undesignated and can be used to help whichever station needs it at the time.

*May God repay your generosity!  
Your missionary brothers and sisters  
from near and far*





*“Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine,  
you did for me.” Mt. 25:40*

