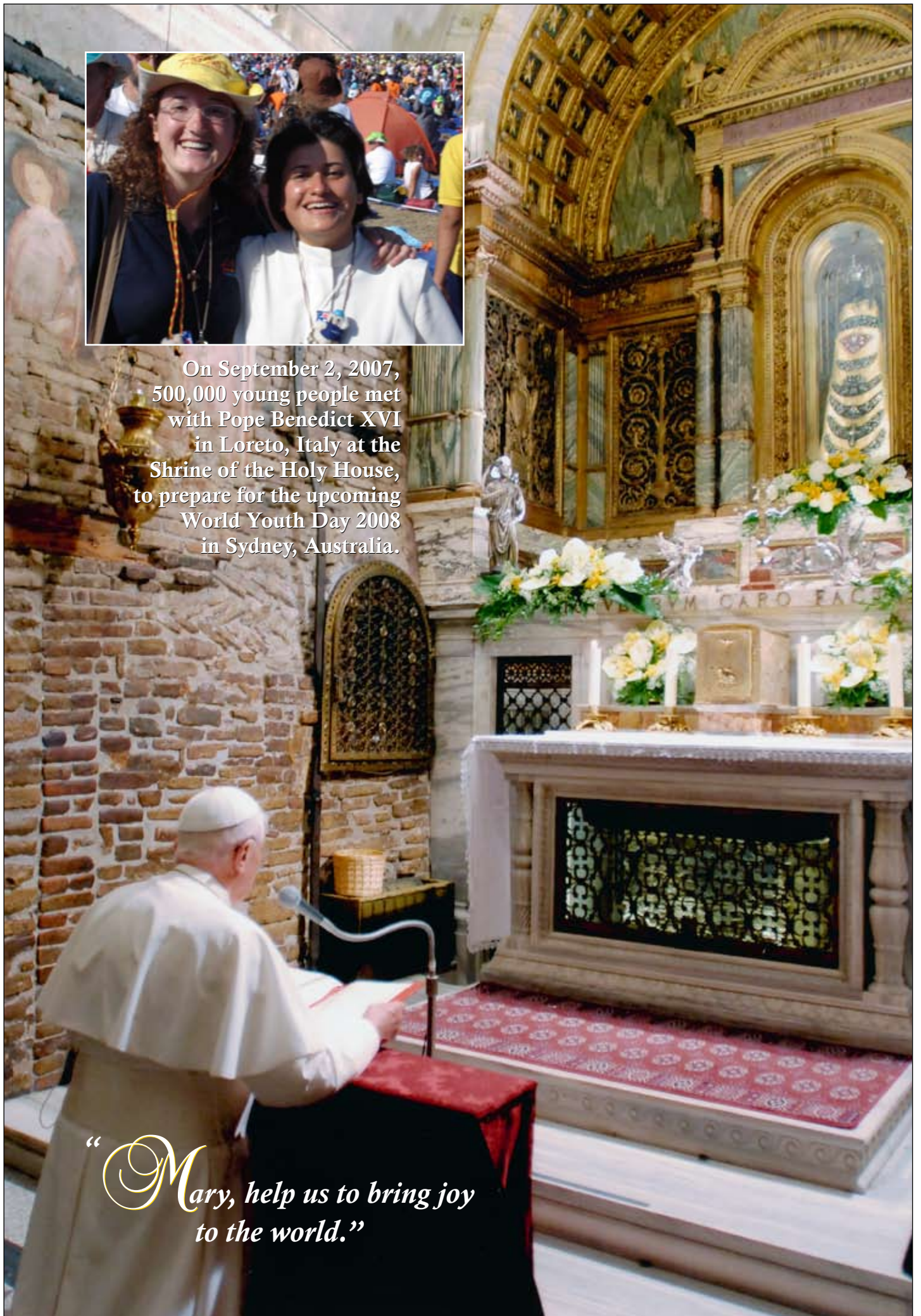


Triumph of the Heart





On September 2, 2007,
500,000 young people met
with Pope Benedict XVI
in Loreto, Italy at the
Shrine of the Holy House,
to prepare for the upcoming
World Youth Day 2008
in Sydney, Australia.



*“Mary, help us to bring joy
to the world.”*

The Beginning of the Russian Mission in Moscow

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, our first missionaries went to Russia and Armenia in the summer of 1991. His Excellency Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, who had just been named Archbishop of Moscow, did not even have his own apartment. He “resided” in the only opened church in Moscow—St. Louis—where a few elderly women took care of him. When we met the Archbishop for the first time after Holy Mass, he was noticeably pleased and allowed us complete freedom in our missionary work since he also had to cope with the chaotic changes taking place.

What an extraordinary beginning in every respect! We had not really mastered the language and everything we did became a mission: from the most varied daily encounters on the subway where our white missionary dresses and crosses gave a striking testimony, to the seemingly insignificant things, like searching for milk or eggs. Back then, Moscow was not the ultra-modern, 15 million inhabitant metropolis that it is today, where you can buy everything.

We very consciously let Our Lady lead us each day, and we never lacked for missionary activity: cleaning and caring for the patients in the hospitals, singing and praying with the Orthodox children at the cancer center, testifying to our faith to the alcohol and drug addicts at a rehabilitation center where, in spite of the Communist atmosphere, you could feel an incredible openness for something new. We had many opportunities to extend a spiritual hand to our Orthodox brethren through different acts of love. The unity grew deeper in the following years through the extensive humanitarian aide that, together with Fr. Philipp Schoenenberger, we were able to distribute to the needy Orthodox through dozens of truckloads of goods organized

by our benefactors in the West. We were able to help with the reconstruction of some impoverished Orthodox monasteries and convents; they express their gratitude to this day through their friendship and unity in prayer.

How touching were the invitations to the evening prayer meetings from the spiritual sons and daughters of Alexander Men, a well-know Orthodox priest who was brutally murdered. In return, we invited these deep and recollected people to join us for the Rosary. It was the beginning of the “ecumenism of love and service” which is precious to us still today.

It is certainly no coincidence that we were working in Moscow in August 1991, in the days of the coup. In Red Square, we handed out hundreds of miraculous medals to tank soldiers and officers, and they accepted them without exception.

Just recently, Archbishop Kondrusiewicz humorously recalled in a thank you letter to our community this beginning in Moscow, where, for example, our apartment in 1992 served for a year as his “Bishop’s seat and Curia.”



Moscow 1995

In 1993, we opened our first permanent mission station in Moscow which has since developed into an extremely diverse and changing apostolate. Weekly meetings and catechism with the street children were as much a part of our daily life as visits to the children in the leukemia ward at the hospital, assisting the sick and elderly at the non-denominational soup kitchen, taking care of the Adoration chapel and distributing goods from shipments we received for the poor. Today, four sisters work at our Fatima House in Moscow. We wrote you a little about their mission in *Triumph of the Heart* issue #41. Our missionaries, who often pay visits to the sick, elderly and poor of the city, see their home as a “Bethany” for the missionaries of different communities and religious beliefs who are passing through and as a spiritual meeting point for families, some of whom we assist with material aide.



Moscow 1995



Since 2003, we have also become a bit of a “spiritual home” for a group of students. Our meetings include the Hour of Mercy, conferences on a spiritual topic, the Rosary, Eucharistic Adoration and, of course, singing and sharing during the typical Russian “Tschaepitie”, a cozy tee-time.

The 25 students are also enthusiastic about night Adoration. Although the group is a colorful mix—new converts, Orthodox believers, those who

are searching or just curious—they all share a great thirst for God. Take Sergej for example. He is in theatrical training and comes, whenever possible, to our “retreats”. This nice young man from the city of Petrozavodsk in northwestern Russia found the Catholic faith on his own when he lost his father at the age of 12. His mother, an atheist, began to drink in her sorrow, but he found strength in the faith. Sergej calls us often and says, “*Believing in God helps me to carry what is heavy and to remain cheerful.*” And he is always cheerful!

Among the 40 Russian pilgrims who attended the Seventh International Day of Prayer in honor of the Lady of All Nations in Amsterdam in 2005, there were 20 Orthodox believers. Some of the youth came from the Orthodox parish Sts. Cosmas and Damian which is cared for by spiritual sons of Alexander Men.

One such pilgrim, Ilmira, a journalism student, has come to our student group ever since. She had been sick, and for a long time the doctors could not diagnose her illness. Her friends began to desert her. As her condition deteriorated rapidly she was assailed by doubts and asked herself repeatedly, “*Why me?*” Her faith was strengthened and she was deeply touched after a visit from Fr. Alexander, a spiritual son of Alexander Men. “*I can believe again in the love of God,*” she said before going to Confession and Holy Communion. The very next day, the doctors made their diagnosis—Tuberculosis. She was then able, however, to accept her illness. Meanwhile, she has returned to health and is an active member of the Orthodox community. Ilmira looks forward to praying with us each month.



Fr. Rolf Philipp, who has always worked for ecumenism and unity in the Church, is pictured here with the superior of the Princess Convent in Vladimir, Matuschka Antonia, and Fr. Jakov, the secretary of the Bishop of Vladimir.



*S*ixteen-year-old Polina has also been visiting our prayer group since 2005. We met her in the city of Vladimir where we helped give a retreat. A short time later, she came to our youth camp. After Eucharistic Adoration one day, she wanted to take a decisive step and consecrate herself to Our Lady. That was important because, due to the poor relationship with her own mother, Mary had remained a stranger to her. Little by little she came to accept Our Lady as her own mother. She also began to pray fervently for her biological mother, helping her so

much that she even comes to Holy Mass with her sometimes. Polina spares no effort; she takes a five hour bus ride from her city Gus-Chrustalnyj, 220 miles east of Moscow, to participate in our meetings and draw new strength to remain faithful to her beliefs in her faithless surroundings.

Everybody in the group has their own story. For example, two siblings Lena and Marina from Naltshik in Caucasus found the Church through music. They had both finished at the conservatory when a friend invited them to an organ concert in the Catholic church in December 2002. They happily came and although it was only a synthesizer, the atmosphere at the Christmas Mass impressed Lena and Marina so much that they found their way to the faith.

*W*e were happy that last October Olga (left in photo above) decided to spend some time in our Motherhouse in Slovakia to discern her vocation. She tells a little:

“I lived with my family in the city of Petrozavodsk, close to Finland. At the age of 17, I started studying communication, journalism and French at a famous university in Moscow. In the fourth semester I saw an advertisement: ‘Practice French for a month as a volunteer in France.’ I ended up in La Sallette, where Our Lady appeared, and learned about the Catholic Church.

“My conversion matured slowly by attending Holy Mass, through the testimony of consecrated people there, by my desire to change my life and asking God that he reveal himself to me. When I signed up for

catechism lessons at the cathedral in Moscow, the Catholic Church finally became my home.

“I observed the sisters from the Family of Mary from a distance until finally a friend and I had the courage to ask them if we could visit them. So we went to our first youth meeting and learned how to pray, to understand the sacraments more deeply and to accept Mary as our personal mother.

“It was an enormous joy to meet other students who desired to encounter God and to help one another. In times of loneliness and fear of not being understood, these meetings have been a ray of hope and very helpful on the way to God, especially living in the modern city of Moscow with all its temptations and problems.”



Our summer camps for children, youth and students have become a beloved tradition in our Moscow youth apostolate. Additionally, we assist in the organization of the annual National Russian Youth Day, first and foremost through a spiritual contribution. We also accompanied young people from the former Soviet Union to see the Holy Father at World Youth Day.

Archbishop Kondrusievicz asked last year that the diocesan youth meeting be a celebration of the 90th anniversary of the apparitions of Fatima. Three priests and we four sisters held the youth meeting just outside Moscow from May 10-13 2007. In addition to Holy Mass, the Stations of the Cross, the Rosary and Eucharistic Adoration, there were also conferences, group projects and, naturally, free time and a meet-

ing with the Bishop. Everything culminated on the last day when the 70 youth, with candles in hand, processed in prayer and song to Our Lady's grotto and consecrated themselves to Mary in the name of all the Russian youth. It was May 12th, the vigil of the anniversary of Fatima. The atmosphere during the consecration was indescribable and you could almost touch the grace. Many of the youth stayed a long time, praying in silence before the icon of Our Lady in the brightly lit grotto.

A very deep unity grew among the participants and in the end they all agreed, "*We would like to do this more often.*" Many of them made important decisions for their lives; others resolved to pass on their experiences back home.



Since most summer camps in Russia last three to four weeks, we extended our third children's camp at the beginning of June 2007 to nine days. We chose the theme "Be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful" because the four Russian bishops decided to celebrate 2007 as a "Year of God's Merciful Love." It was an ecumenical camp in a certain sense since 24 of the children came from different parishes in Moscow and two came from the Orthodox parish of Alexander Men.

During these joyful days we celebrated Holy Mass, prayed the Rosary on our walks, held spiritual talks on different topics, but we also had arts and crafts, sports, games, singing and a theatrical production as part of the program. Our priest took time to meet with the altar servers and he led a very personal preparation for Confession during the Hour of Mercy.

All the children who had made their First Holy Communion did, in fact, go to Confession and afterwards the joy was written all over their faces. Even those who had not yet received the Sacrament of Confession participated by asking God's forgiveness through an act of contrition. For some children, the camp was the initiative to going regularly to Holy Mass and receiving the sacraments.

Naturally, not everything went as smoothly in the children's group. Two sib-

lings, 8-year-old Stasiz (photo right) and his 11-year-old sister Nastia, often fought and cried and were not very open. They were a challenge for us to say the least. However, they received help through love, patience, the repeated acts of affection and, above all, our hidden prayers and blessings. After a few days, they settled down and the little one entrusted to one of the sisters, *“You know, my parents don’t love me.”* *“You should pray for your mom and dad,”* she advised him. And this is what they did; they prayed every day for their parents, and their faces brightened up more each day.

We invited the children’s parents to come on the last day. Many of them do not believe in God or practice their faith. We tried to make them part of our lively faith community, from the Holy Mass at the beginning to the eagerly anticipated cook out.

The children excitedly showed what they had made, and since almost all of them were talented musically and could play an instrument, they had a big surprise for their parents in the afternoon: a memorized piano duet and several other pieces which they had practiced and an acrobatic dance which they worked hard to learn.



Talmenka in Siberia

The day we missionaries arrived in Novosibirsk in the winter of 1993, we experienced our first -20° F Siberian day.

Bishop Joseph Werth S.J. had invited us to work in the Curia and to help Fr. Thomas Hoehle, a diocesan priest from Berlin, Germany with the pastoral care of Talmenka, a city 100 miles from Novosibirsk. The bishop had been assigned to develop the Apostolic Administration of Siberia which, back then, consisted of the entire Asian part of Russia, stretching 3000 miles from the Ural Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. With 4.5 million square miles, Siberia was the largest diocese in the world. In 1999, it was split into two administrations, Eastern and Western Siberia, which were made dioceses by the Holy See in 2002.

Since then, Bishop Werth has been the bishop of the western diocese named “Transfiguration of the Lord”, which still covers 1.5 million square miles, about half the size of the continental United States.

We would like to take you back a little to the beginnings of our mission in Siberia, when things were not all that easy. Living conditions were very simple to say the least. A single family home was the church, sacristy, living quarters and parish center. We started completely from scratch and even had to draw water each day from a well. During snowstorms we were cut off from the rest of the world; sometimes the telephone did not work for days or weeks after the storms. Additionally, we had to fight with terribly complicated bureaucracy and all that speaking only a little Russian.

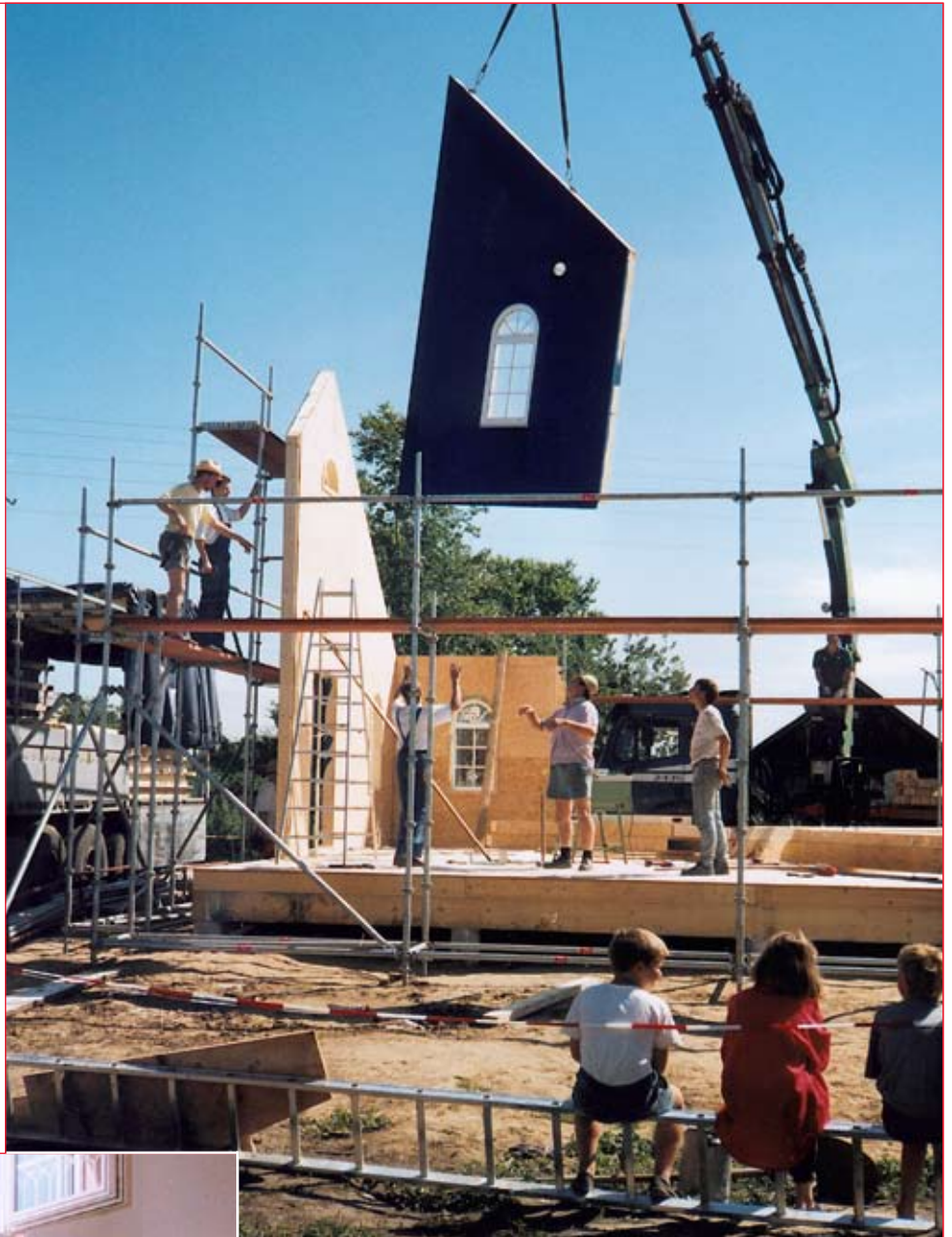
Our assignment was to find the remnant Catholics in Talmenka and the surrounding villages and to prepare children, youth and adults in Catechism groups to receive the sacraments. From the outset, we strove to celebrate the liturgical feasts with nice music, flowers and processions because the faithful had been deprived of these things for decades. Youth camps and outings have been part of our pastoral method for years, as is the annual visit of St. Nicholas, the Christmas Pageant, pilgrimages, children’s days and retreats during Advent and Lent. The five

neighboring villages which we have visited regularly from the beginning and the four other villages where we visit individual families are all a good 20 miles from Talmenka. Fifteen years ago, there were still many German-Catholic families where you could hear in their “church-houses” old German songs and prayers which, despite the gruesome persecution, had not been silenced.

It has not always been easy for us to watch our German parishioners immigrate back to Germany over the years. Some communities have practically died out. Kurotschkino, for example, was an 80 percent German village which formed a lively faith community back in 1993. Today there are only three practicing Catholics left. Although the community seems to have diminished, it has never died.

Similarly, in another village, the main participants of the church left on three separate occasions, but each time it came back to life. Especially middle-age Russians, who grew up in an Atheist environment, are beginning to search for the Lord and are thankful to find a spiritual home in the Catholic Church.

In 1995, volunteer
 “church builders”
 from the association
 “Churches for the East”,
 with financial help
 from the bishops’ organization
 “Renovabis”,
 assembled our
 nice wooden parish church
 consecrated
 to St. Peter
 in just one week.
 At the dedication,
 the grandmothers
 cried for joy
 because most of them
 had not seen
 the inside of a church
 for decades.
 Our Parish house
 was finished in 2004,
 and soon there will be
 a larger house
 for the sisters.



Through the years,
 we have welcomed many guests
 ranging from Cardinal Sterzinsky from Berlin
 and Cardinal Kasper from Rome
 to countless priests and young people
 who have helped as volunteers.
 During a visit to our mission station in August 1999,
 Cardinal Meisner, the Archbishop of Cologne,
 celebrated Holy Mass in our church together with
 Bishop Joseph Werth and Fr. Thomas Hoehle,
 who worked as a loving pastor for 15 years in Talmenka.
 Visibly moved by the faith of all those
 who had remained true despite the long persecution,
 Cardinal Meisner said,
*“Actually, I should kiss your hands
 after all that you have suffered here.”*

Lord Send Missionaries

to your Siberian Vineyard

As of 2005, Fr. Bogdan Kalenzki from Poland has been the pastor here working together with our Fr. Alexander Maria. Our four sisters and two brothers come from Switzerland, the Ukraine, Germany, Slovakia and Austria. In reality, we would need a thousand feet, a thousand

hands and especially a thousand hearts to find all the Catholics in our large parish who have yet to come in contact with the Church. It is true what Bishop Werth always says, *“Earlier, the faithful came to church. Today the Church has to go to the faithful.”*



At the Confirmation ceremony in July 2007, Bishop Werth expressed a wish,
“I would like you to show me a ‘new’ village that I haven’t visited.”

Providentially, we had become better acquainted three months earlier with a large German family with Catholic roots in the village of Kaschelovo. They “coincidentally” chose our church in Talmenka for a family reunion. We found out that the older generation, long before 1993, were secretly baptized and married during the persecution by “nomadic missionaries.” We sisters began to visit Kaschelovo regularly, and each time we saw new faces.

In June, a new family joined us and they now pray the Rosary together every day.

So we took the Bishop to Kaschelovo; truly the Church came to the faithful!

What you did for the least of my brothers...

Since many people here live below the poverty line, they often come knocking at our door. Through your generosity, there are as many ways of helping here as there are needs, among the believers and non-believers alike. For example, we help support students from broken homes; to finance important medicine, hospital stays, and operations; to distribute food, clothing, shoes and wood or coal to the needy; to make tutoring possible; to cover legal fees for young people or to pay the fines for lost passports and documents which are essential for enrolling in schools, hospitals and nursing homes as well as receiving welfare or a pension.



Growing up poor and looking for a little affection, many girls have relationships at a young age and often end up single mothers with no means of support. That was the case for Soya Pedtschenko whose five children Aliona (8), Sacharia (12), Schenja (18), Oskana (20), and Natascha (26) all have different fathers. The whole family was baptized here a few years ago.

When Mama Soya was brutally murdered in October 2006, the two oldest daughters already had their own children out of wedlock. Not even one of the children's fathers stood before the coffin to console his child. Since July 2007, 18-year-old Schenja, who has not been able to cope with the death of his mother, often calls in desperation during the night, "*Sr. Teresa, I am drinking so much and I can't stop.*" When he was admitted for psychological help, Fr. Alexander was the first one to visit him in 14 days. It takes a lot of patience and prayer to believe what Sr. Teresa said to console Schenja, "*In God there is always a solution.*"

Little Works of Mercy

“It seems to me that the most important thing in the missions is to have compassion and to suffer with the others,” says Fr. Alexander. It has always been part of our mission here to visit the sick and elderly, the poor and the lonely (see *Triumph of the Heart* #15). We find it a great grace to meet some very holy men and women who, during the time of persecution in Siberia, suffered indescribably but remained faithful to their beliefs (see *Triumph of the Heart* #9). One of them is 99-year-old, nearly blind, Zita Dechand whom even Bishop Werth is convinced, *“She is a holy woman, a piece of history with a good memory.”*



In April 2007, we celebrated Zita’s 99th birthday with her with a Holy Mass in her home.
“That was the most beautiful gift,” she said happily.

*L*ong before we missionaries came to Talmenka, Zita was a well-respected woman who led the prayer services in the community. She helped many to make the first step into the Church, gathered the believers in prayer, baptized and led funerals and “Silent Masses” (Liturgies of the Word). Everything was dangerous and done secretly.

Born in the village of Witmann on the Volga River, she was deported to Siberia in 1941. Soon thereafter her husband passed away due to the inhumane conditions of the labor camps, and she was left alone with her four children, hiding in the home of a Russian woman. She often told us about this difficult time:

“We were so poor. We had nothing. But God helped us to survive. I accepted any work that came along because I was ashamed to beg; but I frequently had to leave the children at

home alone. The children were often so hungry that they would cry themselves to sleep at night, as did I because I was so worried about not having anything to give them.

“One night, the Russian lady where we lived came into the room and listened to my problems. Afterwards she said to me, ‘Go outside and look at the other houses around here. You will see a cross above every house and perhaps yours is the smallest of them all.’ You can’t imagine how these words consoled me back then.”

Whenever we visited Zita, we always found her with the Rosary in her hand. Actually, she prays it all the time and often looks at the cross on the wall. “I bring everything to the foot of the cross; it is in the best hands there!”

Although she had always taken responsibility for German Catholics, she was remarkably broad-minded: “It is good to take care of the Russians and those who do not share our faith. Our people have moved away, but those who are here have to come to know and love our God.”

The Power of the Sacraments

Time and again we have experienced the power of the sacraments. In May 2007, we witnessed how the Anointing of the Sick can heal both body and soul.

For years we celebrated Holy Mass every week in the home of Ida Schalganova in Novoperunovo. She is now more than 80 years old, and with the exception her neighbor and us, she has nobody anymore. Aside from years of suffering because she could not have children, Ida also lived in fear of being damned. “I’m damned, I’m going to hell!” she would repeat despondently. In May, she had terrible kidney pains which required three operations. Fr. Alexander brought her Holy Communion every day in the Intensive Care Unit. She became more thankful and calm. She prayed with confidence, “My Lord, my Lord, do not abandon me!”

As the illness progressed and she grew weaker and weaker, Fr. Alexander gave her the Anointing of the Sick. Her condition instantly improved to everyone’s amazement. When Sr. Teresa brought her Holy Communion the next day, she placed a cross in Ida’s hand. She looked at it a long time, kissing it over and over again without saying anything.

The nicest thing though is how Ida has changed. She is so peaceful and reconciled with God; she no longer has any fear or bitterness. In June, she returned home where she has been able to take care of herself, and she even walks the third of a mile to church.



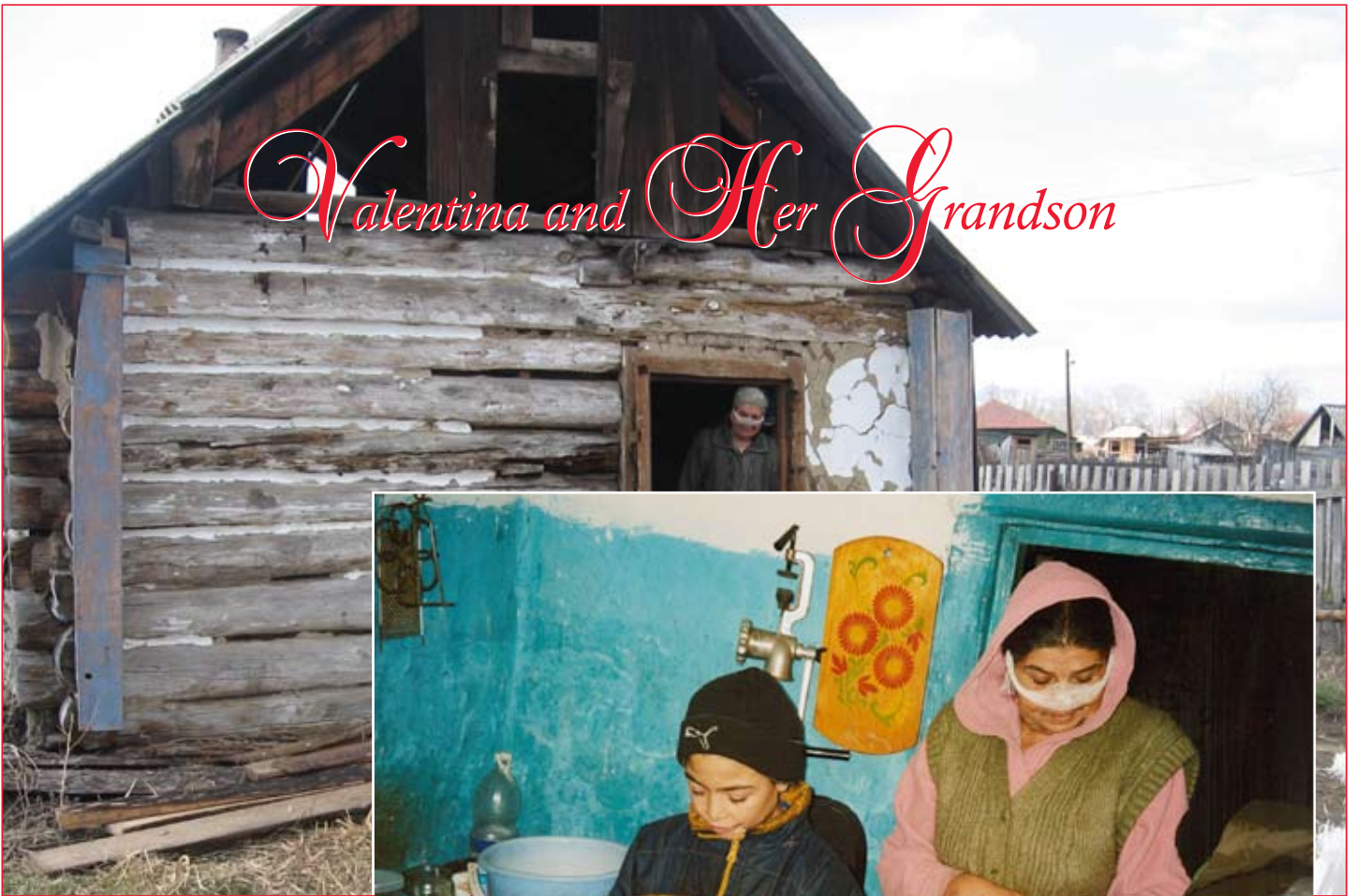


Once, in a drafty wooden hut,
we found a poor old lady who was nearly
frozen and starved to death.
For days she had prayed,
“Dear God, send me somebody!”
Another time, when we went to visit the blind,
80-year-old Maria at the state nursing home;
she was giving the over-90-year-old Pauline a bath.
Pauline should be cleaned,
“at least once every two weeks,” as she put it.
Since then we have taken over this loving duty.

This picture is very unique
because Sr. Angela Merici
is caring for two people
whose age difference
is nearly 100 years—
a newborn baby
and Sabina who died shortly
before her 100th birthday.
For nine years, we cared for her
at our house because she did not
have anywhere else to go.



Valentina and Her Grandson



Valentina's fate has become a part of our every day life. She moved into our neighborhood four years ago from a little region in the south. She came with her family but without any identification at all. Although she has a cancerous sore on her nose which she hides with a bandage, this courageous and generous woman takes care of her whole clan. She tries to straighten out what her family has messed up. Sometimes up to 12 people live in her tiny house eating everything that grandmother receives through begging in other villages. When she makes these trips we give her money for the bus, and she plans her trip so that she is back in time for Holy Mass.

From time to time Valentina's nine-year-old grandson Kolya, who lives with her, goes with her to beg. His tragic fate is like that of so

many. Kolya's mother is in jail for stealing and his father, an alcoholic, is behind bars for beating someone to death. *"I'm afraid of him. I'm glad that he's not here,"* Kolya told us once.

In the meantime, this energetic boy is a "faithful churchgoer" and also the only one in the summer who accompanies his grandmother to gather wood in the forest for the winter. She pulls it home in a rickety wagon or carries it on her shoulders and stacks it in the house so that it cannot be stolen.

In May 2007, we obtained a new cabin for her through a charitable organization and had it built. Actually, it is just a better hut, but it has electricity and an oven. Valentina was also so thankful to have the medical bill covered when the cancer spread to her eye in June.

Abandoned Children

In 2003 for the first time, we saw the devastating conditions in the children's section of the state hospital, where babies and children, taken from parents incapable of caring for them, await an institution or an adoptive family. They are not sick, just disowned and unwanted. For the hospital, they just seemed to be a nuisance. Sr. Angela Merici, who has worked with children in various missions, recounted, "We were shocked when we visited the children's ward for the first time: babies were lying naked without diapers, all wet on a rubber mattress, and freezing miserably.

"Artiom, a two-year-old boy, looked like a five-month-old baby. We found out later that he was severely handicapped because his mother drank heavily throughout the pregnancy. He could not even swallow properly. His mother never came to visit him. The little boy died three months later; they could not do anything to save him.

"The worst part about it is the children had all been abandoned. A bottle was quickly shoved in their mouths to feed them and otherwise nobody took care of them. The one- and two-year-olds lay apathetically for most of the day on their beds because nobody had time to do anything with them. It was the same for the three- to fourteen-year-olds who, left totally to themselves, were just standing around. There was nothing to play with and they could not go outside because they did not have proper clothing. We promptly brought diapers and clothing and then, with your help dear benefactors, renovated a dormitory and set up a pleasant play room with toys for the children. However, what was most important for us was that we employed an aide from the parish to be with the children in this wing of the hospital throughout the day.

"It required a lot of time and patience before the children began to trust us. Due to the

great lack of love and all of their terrible experiences, some souls were so wounded that contact with them was impossible. Beaten as defenseless babies by their drunken parents, some were afraid when we even looked at them. Others were hard and cruel to each other.

"Many accept their suffering with shocking indifference. They do not complain, but their lifeless eyes say it all. On the Feast of All Souls, for example, I lit a candle with little Lioscha at the grave of her alcoholic mother. The little one did not shed a tear. We sisters are often the only ones who show the children any affection, allowing them to experience through our hugs and kisses how much God loves them. Only then do they become interested in what is around them, to play or to ask, 'Who is that hanging on the cross?'

"Two little brothers witnessed with their own eyes their father murder their mother. When Sr. Elizabeth took Denis, the older of the two, in her arms to console him he asked, 'When is my mommy going to wake up again?' It broke her heart. What could she say? She kissed Denis, showed him the Marian medal on the back of her missionary cross and said, 'Look, she is your mother now.' The next time Sr. Elizabeth came, he ran over to her and cried, 'Give me my mom, the Bagorodizy (the Mother of God)!' On another occasion when one-and-a-half-year-old Daniel saw us coming from far away, he quickly stood up in his crib, opened his arms and yelled, 'Mommy! Mommy!'

"It is very trying for us missionaries that we are only able to help the needs of some children. We know in our hearts, however, that trusting prayer before the tabernacle reaches the hearts of all the children and places that we cannot visit."



DANIEL



LIOSCHA



DENIS



Karaganda

In the Heart of Kazakhstan

In Kazakhstan, our missionaries work not only in Astana and Sherbaky (see Triumph of the Heart #43), but also in the Diocese of Karaganda, which was erected in 1999.

At the beginning of January 2001, Fr. Laurentius left our mission station in Sherbaky, where he had worked since 1993, first as a deacon and then as a priest, because Bishop Jan Pavel Lenga MIC had named him the Prefect for Education and Discipline at the interdiocesan seminary in Karaganda, “Mary – Mother of the Church”. It is no coincidence that the only seminary in middle Asia is in the heart of Kazakhstan, in the city of Karaganda which, during the decades of persecution, became the center for the Underground Church.

There were many priests and many martyrs. Numerous Germans settled in Karaganda after the violent deportation. This gave rise to a thriving Church despite the persecution and the death camps.

The priests and nuns who have come from this area were courageous witnesses to Christ in the Underground Church of Karaganda even as children. Now they work in Kazakhstan and Siberia. One of them is Bishop Joseph Werth S.J. introduced in the previous article on Talmenka.

Fr. Laurentius Schamberger from Germany describes his mission.

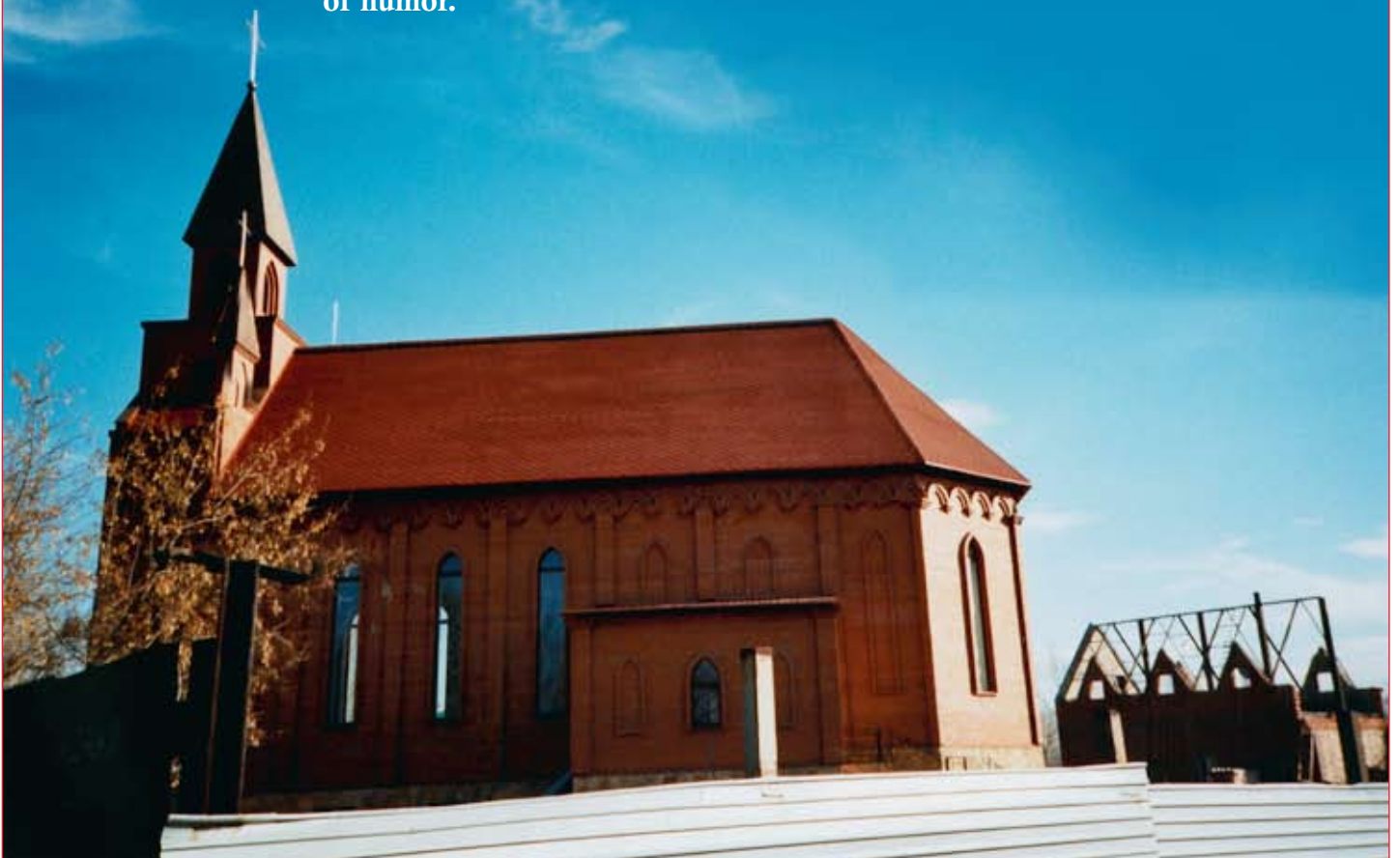


*I*t is an important, varied and at times difficult assignment for the rector and professors here to transmit the human, intellectual and especially priestly formation to the 15 seminarians, aged 18 to 25.. I try to be an example for the young men by the way I live as a Marian priest and missionary. As their father and friend, I strive for unity with God and sanctification through prayer.

Thus, we grow and mature together spiritually. To our great joy, our first two seminarians, Nikolai and Mariush, were ordained priests last year. There is a lot of laughing here, thanks be to God, but also a lot of “fighting”. We go to the chapel to be victorious in the spiritual battles, and for the exterior apostolate, we train in the parishes every week. We also go to the gym or the swimming pool as well. “Be happy, pray and strive for sanctity,” that is my wish for the future priests here.

Part of my weekly pastoral work includes meeting with a prayer group from the *Legion of Mary*. I don't mind driving the 20 miles every Wednesday to Temirtau either, where six sisters from Mother Theresa's *Missionaries of Charity* wait with the poor for confession, Holy Mass and a conference on a spiritual topic. Fridays are similar with the *Servants of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist* who asked me to be their confessor and spiritual director. On Sundays and solemnities, one or two seminarians accompany me to the parish "Exultation of the Cross" in Prischachtinsk. The New Gothic church (pictured below) was consecrated in 2006 under the patronage of Blessed Aleksij Sarytskyj. On the Sunday of Divine Mercy last year, I gave First Holy Communion to my only two altar servers, siblings Maria and Vasilij. I also did my first wedding for a lovely Orthodox-Catholic couple from Lithuania who, after 40 years of civil marriage, desired to be married in the Church so that they could go to Holy Communion.

Sometimes I also make the 25 mile trip to the city of Abai where I visit the two sole Catholics of the city. The city which used to have a population of 50,000 now seems like a ghost town to me since 25,000 people have left for Germany, Poland and Lithuania. A whole area of the city has been abandoned, leaving only empty apartment buildings. Yet when I enter the little "church-house" of Grandma Leokadia, the sun begins to shine for me again. This holy old lady lives poorly in a small room, but I am convinced her deep prayers help me a lot. Leokadia could write a book about all that she suffered in the awful Spassk death camp she survived, only 25 miles away from Karaganda. And yet, when I look at her calm face, I am always amazed at how her faith has helped her to forgive and to remain without any bitterness; she has even maintained a good sense of humor.





This impressive picture shows one of the countless Russian concentration camps located between the Siberian arctic and the steppe of Kazakhstan in the former Soviet Union, where millions of innocent people were imprisoned and forced to do hard labor in inhumane conditions until they collapsed.

A Fight to Survive

In addition to Grandma Leokadia, we know the tragic fate of the many victims of the inhumane and gruesome politics that resulted in the deportation of many to Kazakhstan beginning in the 1930's. Moscow ordered that numbered posts be driven into the ground at set intervals along the railroad. At every post along the way, a group of deportees was simply thrown out of the train. Dumped in the Kazakh steppe, the Volga-Germans began digging holes in the dirt in their fight to survive. These turned into barracks and eventually into hundreds of settlements. Some of the older people we know here still do not use the new name given to the village but say simply, "I'm from number 37."

Many people ended up in the Karlag work camp. It was made up of five main camps and

many little camps comprising an area the size of France. "The worst thing is, we didn't know why we were in the camp," complained those who, without being accused of anything, were simply deported with their wife and children. The prisoners were mostly those who believed in God, artists, intellectuals and those who opposed the regime.

There were criminals of course too and during World War II, tens of thousands of prisoners-of-war from Spain, Italy, Germany, Austria, France, Poland, Finland, Rumania, Korea, Japan and Holland. As "Enemies of the State", they were tortured and worked to death in the camps. It is estimated that over one million passed through "Karlag". Countless starved, froze to death, or were shot.

The Mother's Cemetery



Today, the camps are overgrown with grass, like mass-graves. In 2004, I was permitted to celebrate a moving memorial service with some of the surviving inmates from Spassk on the grounds of the former camp. In the little village of Dolinka, about 20 miles away from Karaganda, a popular commemorative site was opened 5 years ago. Fifty years earlier, it was the site of a notorious concentration camp where approximately 100,000 people died, especially mothers and their children. As a result, it has been called the “Mothers’ Cemetery”.

I noticed early on in the mission that our surviving faithful, through their great suffering, have an especially deep relationship to the Passion of Jesus. Once, when I was preaching about the suffering of Jesus, all the people started to sob. Afterwards a grandma said, *“The Lord suffered so much more. I can certainly carry mine still.”* Many old women could not wait until it was Sunday and they lightened up the minute they realized, *“The Lord comes tomorrow!”*

SANGUIS MARTYRUM
SEMEN CHRISTIANORUM

THE BLOOD
OF THE MARTYRS IS
THE SEED OF CHRISTIANITY



Ust-Kamenogorsk A Door to China

In Kazakhstan, just 180 miles from the Chinese border and close to the majestic 13,000 foot Altay Mountains, lies Ust-Kamenogorsk, our easternmost mission station and the easternmost parish of the Karaganda Diocese. In 1995, there were great obstacles to overcome as the first foreigners given official permission to live there. Until then, Ust-Kamenogorsk had been a closed military city, not printed on any map. Access for foreigners was strictly forbidden and there had never been a Catholic priest. We were initially refused entry by the KGB, so our priests and sisters lived in Pavlodar for six months, in the parish of Jesuit missionary Fr. Josef Schmidlein.

Our Fr. Ulrich from Bavaria, Germany, Fr. Laurentius's older brother, remembers well this period of "exile" in Pavlodar: "It was -20° F as we drove the 75 miles to the village of Katschiry to celebrate Holy Mass with Clemens Ruder and his wife Maria, a Volga-German couple. Their home was also the "house-church" for Katschiry. Even Kazakh children came there to play and pray.

"This deeply pious couple even had the privilege of reserving the Blessed Sacrament in their home, in a 'room for the Lord' as they called it. When it was time for us to leave in the evening, our old car wouldn't start and so we had to spend the night. As a young priest, I was surprised that our 75-year-old hostess Maria wanted to wash my feet. Ashamed by her humility, I protested, 'You can't wash my feet!' She smiled at me and responded simply, but with great poise, 'But I do it every night for my husband, and Clemens does it for me, as an expression of our mutual love.'

"You could really see how much they loved and cared for one another. You could sense their holiness from praying together as

a couple and from all the sacrifices they had made in life. In the time of the Communist persecution, Clemens was a courageous, yet intelligent, defender of the faith. Observing the devotion of this great man of prayer during Holy Mass left a deep impression on us. He also knew every word of the Catechism by heart. Clemens is now 90 years old and, together with his wife Maria, still reserves the Blessed Sacrament and gives lodging to the priest who comes at least once a month to celebrate Mass."

On February 2, 1995, Archbishop Pavel Lenga could finally entrust the four of us German missionaries with the "Queen of the Rosary" parish in one of Ust-Kamenogorsk's poorest quarters. Back then, it covered an area about one and a half times the size of Ireland. Today the population is over 300,000. It was not easy in the beginning. We slept on mats for over a year. The sisters' bedroom served as the church, office, and visitor-, dining-, laundry-, and ironing room. "Looking back, it is practically a miracle that we managed and had the nerves for it!" smiled Sr. Gertrud.



At first, there were not more than six visitors for Sunday Mass, but it did not take long before we ran out of space. A time of renovation and building followed and we rejoiced that our pastoral work was growing. We opened a children's home where we give retreats to children and young people during their holidays. Most of them come from broken homes and are used to taking care of themselves.

The people here live a difficult life. Unemployment remains around 50 percent and the living conditions are terrible. In some parts of the city, houses are not heated and have no running water. The health of some children is affected during pregnancy because of high contamination from the local heavy metal industry. We know an unusually high number of sick people who, remarkably, often carry their suffering without complaint.

One of our nicest duties is to seek out the forgotten, the sick and the dying, accompanying them spiritually and administering the Sacraments to them. We regularly visit the Catholics in the three villages and two towns within the

120 mile radius. We celebrate Holy Mass with them and hold catechism classes.

Through your faithful support, dear benefactors, it has been possible for us to distribute humanitarian aid such as clothing, food and medicine to the poor, unemployed, families, young single mothers, etc. who, in their destitution, overcome their shame to knock at our door. In the icy winter, some children can leave the house only after we have given them a pair of boots. For others, their only chance of going to school is if we pay for their books, paper and pencils.

We have been able to help a number of social organizations in the city, two Orthodox parishes, a Muslim community, an orphanage and a homeless shelter. This "ecumenism of love" through prayer and charity lies close to our hearts. The Orthodox priests, who are particularly open to us, express their gratitude with friendship and esteem.

Over the course of the last 13 years, a lively and dynamic parish family of all ages has developed here in Ust-Kamenogorsk. Although there are not thousands, each soul here is precious.



The four siblings Katja (14), Aleg (9), Sveta (7), and Maria Anna (5) travel an hour and a half each Sunday without exception to participate at Holy Mass. Even sub-zero temperatures, or last year's

blizzard cannot stop them. Covered in snow and wearing wet ski outfits, they came blustering in, late but happy. The young ones cry if they cannot attend. The three youngest siblings call the eldest "mommy" because she does everything for them. Their real mother is an alcoholic.

Each one of children has its own story, most of the time a sad one. Little Nikita comes to the children's home every day. His drunken uncle Vitja brings him over. Once, Nikita said, "Everybody loves me except my mom!" Sr. Mirjam gave him a picture of the Lady of All Nations and said, "Look, she is your mother in heaven. She always loves you and looks after you." The little one began dancing for joy and kissed the picture over and over again.



At the soup kitchen, the children are not just looking for a warm meal, but for love and closeness.



Auxiliary Bishop Athanasius Schneider wanted to celebrate Easter with us in 2007 to see the most distant parish of the diocese. Fr. Seraphim Weikmann from Germany, seen here taking a flame from the Easter fire for the Easter Candle, began building the first Catholic Parish in Ust-Kamenogorsk in 1995.



Tears of Joy in May

Although Vera Blinova is Orthodox, she comes regularly to our Sunday Mass. She is the principal of a leading kindergarten in the city where many upper class parents want to send their children. Nevertheless, Vera also accepts children from lower income families who only have to pay half the tuition.

At the beginning of July 2007, parents, as well as us missionaries, were invited to the graduation celebration of the students who would be beginning elementary school in the fall. After congratulating the children, Vera added,



“I also want to thank the Catholic Church. For years the sisters have been teaching a religious education class which the children love. On the days the children have this class, they all act differently; they are calmer and more well-balanced, a fact which our psychologist and aides will confirm. Without their help, our kindergarten would not be what it is today because the Catholic Church also helped us to build things up amidst the initial difficulties in 1998.”

Religious education is actually forbidden in the schools and kindergartens in Kazakhstan. It is understandable if you consider that at present in Ust-Kamenogorsk alone, there are 256 registered churches and sects. However, Vera wanted her students to learn about God so much, that she has made it possible for the sisters to come and teach every Tuesday for eight years in the public kindergarten. At the beginning of the school year, the principal asks the parents if they allow their children to participate in a class where Catholic sisters speak about God. This year, 16 children from a class of 30 participated.

The last class of the year in May was very special. For the 90th anniversary of Fatima, Sr. Imelda brought along a statue of Our Lady to speak about the apparitions:

“Full of admiration and joy, the children gathered around the statue on which Miraculous Medals hung from Our Lady’s hands, each on its own string. When I told the story of Fatima, the six-year-olds listened carefully. They were all quiet and I was surprised by the

peaceful atmosphere.

“I finished by explaining to the attentive little children that Our Lady will always stay close and protect them. Then I told them a little bit about the Miraculous Medal and asked them finally, ‘Who would like such a medal? Then you would have Our Lady with you always; you can talk to her and say, ‘Mary, protect me, help me, I love you!’” They all raised their hands, came forward one at a time and

carefully took a medal from the hands of the statue.

“Suddenly, one girl started to cry and the teacher’s aide explained to me, ‘Today is a big day for Aljona. In tears, she begged her atheist parents all year to let her come to this class, but they never permitted it. They let her come to this last class though. That’s why she cried for joy

when she was allowed to take her medal from Mary.’ Naturally, I told Aljona how nice it is that she came to this class for the first time today when Our Lady gave such a beautiful gift. In that moment, one girl asked shyly if she could kiss ‘mother Mary’. It was so touching to see the children gather around the statue and kiss it carefully.”

Finding the Whole Truth

Denis came to our parish for the first time in September 1995. Since then, the 21-year-old has changed his convictions and is now Catholic instead of Orthodox. He told us, “I liked reading the Bible when I was a teenager. I was 19 when I carefully studied St. Peter in the Gospel of Matthew: ‘You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church and the powers of the underworld will not prevail against it.’ Suddenly it was clear to me, it is really Peter whom Jesus chose to be the rock of his Church. I understood that the fullness of redemption is found in the Catholic Church.”



Denis (second from left in the picture) currently works as a volunteer at the hospital in his hometown Syrjanovsk,

three hours east of us. Bishop Athanasius advised him to do this so that he would become more independent and mature. Denis feels a call to the priesthood.

Since we are not able to travel very often to his pretty hometown in the mountains, which also belongs to our parish, Denis visits us now and again in Ust-Kamenogorsk to receive the Sacraments. He once showed us the street where he grew up in Syrjanovsk. It was the same street where we met our beloved grandma Anna Stang, a wonderful lady, who prays especially for priests (see *Triumph of the Heart* #31). It is certainly no coincidence! During the persecution, Anna gathered the faithful for 30 years to pray for vocations to the priesthood. Although bedridden now, she is very lively spiritually, and most certainly prays for Denis, just like she has done for decades, “Mary, our beloved mother, look how poor we are. Give us priests, teachers and shepherds again!”

The Motherly Blessing

*I*n the winter, it is not unusual on Wednesdays, St. Joseph's day, that as many as 60 needy people knock on our door. Everybody knows that they can come here for clothing, shoes, food, medicine, etc.

Even though we are far from fulfilling every wish, we have made the resolution to give everybody a Miraculous Medal at least and a little sign of the cross on their forehead with the words, *"I bless you, (name), with the special motherly blessing of Our Lady."*

Nobody has ever turned down this grace-filled blessing which Our Lady revealed in Medjugorje. The numerous homeless people, who come almost every day during the cold times of year, are particularly childlike. When we ask if we can give them a blessing, they bow their head simply and say, *"Yes, please bless me."* We often feel ashamed by their great humility.

*S*r. Maria Anna recounts: *"Victor has lived on the streets for years. You cannot imagine what that means in our -20° Kazakhstan winter. It doesn't matter who opens the door, Victor calls us all Mother Teresa. In May 2007, he came and asked for a new pair of pants because his were dirty and bloody. While he was waiting, he pulled out of his plastic bag two bibles he found in a bathroom, a large bible and a children's bible."*

"He asked, 'Are our sufferings entrusted to us by God? Does he entrust to someone only what he can carry? Is it true sister?"

"I said yes, and then we had a very nice talk. I was astounded how God reveals the mysteries of heaven to simple hearts."

"He repeated pensively, 'God only en-

trusts people with as much suffering as they can handle.'

"In the middle of August 2007, Victor came to us again. His feet were swollen and bloody and he asked to be taken to the hospital. They did not admit him because he was dirty and smelly, 'Clean yourself up and come back,' they told him."

"He stood before me in despair, and I said, 'Victor, if I can be honest with you, we sisters were afraid of you before, but not anymore. You have changed a lot; you are so friendly, respectful and peaceful.'

"He replied, 'Well that is because I have converted to the Lord. You know that I had a bible, but once when the police picked me up, they beat me and took away my bible, my only joy. Do you have a bible for me? Please give me another one, it is my only friend. The fact that my life now is so difficult is probably a trial for all my past sins. But God only permits as much suffering as one can handle. Did I remember correctly?"

"I told him a little bit about God's love and mercy, and he was totally surprised that God also loves him infinitely. Naturally, I encouraged Victor to come to church, but also that he wash up a little beforehand. I gave him soap and some fresh clothes."

"Fr. Martin Maria recently took over the responsibility for our mission station in Ust-Kamenogorsk. One afternoon, as he began to celebrate Holy Mass, Victor came through the door. He was all cleaned up and wearing fresh clothes; he paid careful attention to everything that was happening."

“As you see, our beggars are also believers. Sometimes they have only a limited understanding of the faith, like Sergej for example. In an accident at work, both of his feet were severed to the heel. He lives from his minimal worker’s compensation. He came to us last winter wearing his tennis shoes and asked, ‘Do you have anything better for me? Everybody laughs at me when my stumps slip out of my shoes.’

“We had a pair of taller shoes, in fact, which fit Sergej so well that he could almost walk without a cane. ‘Thanks a lot,’ he said happily.

“We quickly responded, ‘Don’t thank us, thank God and pray for the benefactor who sent you the shoes.’

“He hesitated a moment and then said seriously, ‘Okay, I will just pray as I know how, in my heart.’ Since then, Sergej comes to Holy Mass once in a while.”



In the Homeless Shelter

It is always enriching for us missionaries too when we visit those suffering in the hospital or in the homeless shelter in Belousovka 20 miles away. In the summer, about 50 people live there and in the winter, as many as 100 men and women. Many living there are blind, deaf or impaired, or they have maimed or amputated limbs from frostbite. Through music and multimedia presentations we try our best to teach them the faith, especially the value of Jesus and Mary's redeeming suffering. We are not sure how well they



understand, but one thing is certain, they rejoice like children that somebody cares about them, comes to visit, tells them about God, prays with them and gives them a bless-

ing. For many of them it is the first time in their lives.

On our first visit, we made acquaintances with the shelter's manager Asem, a young Kazakh family father, who has a strict but loving demeanor with the homeless. He knows each of his residents personally. *"The state helps us with food and medicine, but not with clothing,"* he complained. He was pleasantly surprised and very thankful a few weeks later when we brought 10 boxes of clothing. With the help of our benefactors, all the residents received new clothes.

When the first three wheel chairs rolled in, the joy was indescribably. Fr. Ulrich found sponsors at home during his last vacation. It was so disturbing to see the paraplegics sliding around on cushions or moving around on boards with wheels screwed on them. At the beginning of June 2007, the fourth wheel chair arrived for Valentina, who just recently had her leg amputated. Naturally, it is much easier for these people to open up to God's mercy after experiencing concrete acts of love.

Three Hours at the Women's Prison

*O*n March 16, 2006, we paid our first visit to the women's prison 100 miles to the west. The corrections officer Tatjana (40) had been trying for a long time to get the Catholic Church to work at her prison because she had seen the positive effect that pastoral care had on other inmates. It often led to a fundamental change in the way the prisoners treated one another. Fr. Stefan explains how apprehensive he and the three sisters were before the first meeting:

"None of us had ever visited a jail before. We were warmly greeted by the guards and after the security checks, long hallways and iron gates we finally reached the women's living quarters. Most of the 300 prisoners, of all ages, came from eastern Kazakhstan and were convicted of murder or being an accomplice. We had no idea how they would react. Would we just see them from a distance behind bars?"

"They were all wearing normal clothes with a nametag, and they could move freely about the building and courtyard. We were led into a large room where we placed a picture of Jesus of Divine Mercy. About 30 women gradually gathered in the room.

"We would not have guessed that they were prisoners if we had not already known. Most of them stood along the wall, anxious like us about what was coming.

"We handed out song books and, after a short greeting and introduction, sang a song accompanied by the guitar. Then we gave a conference with pictures of creation, the fall from grace and the merciful love of God. We were interrupted by a role call in the courtyard. From the window we watched the check to see if everybody was

accounted for. When they all returned, we were happy to see that the number in the room had grown.

"We sang another song and then told them about the Good Shepherd, the Prodigal Son and Jesus of Divine Mercy as revealed to St. Faustina. At the end, the guards allowed the women to take the nicely prepared pictures of Jesus of Divine Mercy. The women kissed them and the pictures disappeared in no time. They also accepted with notable joy the Miraculous Medal and the prayer card of the Lady of All Nations.

"Some of the women asked if they could give us Mass stipends for the deceased. Two prisoners asked to go to Confession and you could see how much they desired to be freed from the weight of their guilt. 'From now on I will trust only Jesus,' said one 25-year-old.

"Some prisoners who had never been baptized asked if they could talk to us and others lined up for a special blessing. We never expected such open, grateful hearts, so well disposed to the faith. Afterwards we were given a tour of their cells and were astonished to see that in some of the well-kept, four-bed cells the women had already hung up the picture on the wall or laid it with the prayer card on their pillow.

"We were overjoyed with the visit; it was a gift for us missionaries to bring the women prisoners a message of hope and consolation. Contrary to what we expected, our visit lasted three hours. We made a firm resolution to remember the women's intentions in our prayers and Holy Mass."

A Kazakh Café and its Owners

One of the most beautiful things you can do as a missionary is to help people trust in God. We saw this so well with our friends Nadja and Vova whose son Aljoscha was baptized here in 2003 at the age of seven.

The two of them wanted to open a café in the fall of 2006, but for months they only encountered corrupt bureaucracy. They finally received all the necessary documents, and only one final, decisive signature was needed. One evening after Mass they said dejectedly, *“If the lady in this office doesn’t sign soon, then all the other documents will expire. We leave her office every time without accomplishing anything and it makes us so mad. If we bribed her, she would sign the papers immediately, but we don’t have that much money. And besides, it is wrong before God.”*

Sr. Imelda explained to them, *“Don’t let your hearts be overcome with anger, pray for her instead.”*

So they began praying the Rosary daily at home for her. Ten-year-old Aljoscha rode his bike to Holy Mass every day for this intention. He even made it for the early morning mass! Nadja then found the strength to remain composed on the telephone with this official, and the tone of voice on the other end was also very different. At the end of the week, the lady even called and said, *“Everything is okay. Come pick up the signed document.”* To show God their thankfulness, the new café owners gave everything they made on the first day to our mission.

In January 8, 2007, the two of them told us an impressive story. A group of Satanists had come to their café on New Year’s Eve. Vova and Nadja were scared to death as the dark figures walked in, their black clothing covered with

diabolic symbols. They acted obnoxious, laughing and dancing on the tables. The worst part was when an eerie woman started doing magic.

The café musician, an Orthodox, was also scared and asked Nadja and Vova to pray with him. They went straight to the kitchen and wanted to pray the Our Father together but were almost unable to do so. They had to start over many times, but when they had finally prayed it, they came to the realization that God also loves those who have gone astray. Shortly thereafter, the eerie woman yelled angrily, *“There is something wrong with the spirit, with the energy in this house. Let’s go.”* Nadja and Vova could not have agreed more.

They asked us to come with Holy Water and blessed oil, to re-bless their house. Since the experience with the Satanists, the couple begins each day by praying the Our Father together with their employees. That is probably a one-of-a-kind in the Kazakh business world.

Last year Nadja told us about her childhood and it touched our hearts:

“At first my family lived in a village outside of Ust-Kamenogorsk. We had two houses and a lot of cattle. My father died when I was ten leaving my heartbroken mother with us four children. She sold everything and moved to the outskirts of the city where we did not know anyone. We didn’t make it any easier for our mother because we were so disobedient. Almost every night she told us a Russian fairy tale about a mother who always warned her children, ‘If you don’t obey, I’ll leave you.’ We realized too late, unfortunately, how serious she was.

“It was a rainy day when our mother finally left. In desperation, my 10-year-old

brother pulled on his rubber boots and chased my mom to the bus yelling, 'Mommy, please come back, we will be obedient. Mommy come back, come back.' At 14 years of age, I was the oldest. We felt so guilty because of our disobedience.

"It was November and winter was closing in. We wanted to start the furnace, but there was neither wood nor coal in the shed. So we burned everything that was flammable, from

the shed to the fence. We pushed two beds together and the two youngest slept in the middle and we two older ones on the outside. When we had eaten everything in the house, we remembered that there was a hatch in the basement where mom used to dump the potato peels.

"If we were asked where our mother was, we didn't say anything or we made up a story: she works the night shift at the hospital and there is a lot to do there. We were afraid to tell anybody the truth because we felt so guilty.

"In the spring, we wanted to plant potatoes like every year so that nobody would get suspicious, but we didn't have any to plant, just the peels. So we planted them in the garden. The potato harvest that year was terrible for the whole village. However, when we four children dug up ours, they were big and firm, and there were so many we almost couldn't close the hatch. I know it sounds un-



believable, but that is what happened. I am sure it was a miracle. The following year we planted some potatoes and, in another place, some of the peels again. The miracle didn't repeat itself, probably because it was no longer necessary.

"Since the neighbors didn't know us that well, we managed to live like this for four years without them knowing that our mother was gone. It wasn't brought to the attention of the authorities until I was 18. When they found out, they wanted to place the two youngest in an orphanage, but since I was then legally old enough, I could keep the children.

"When I married at age 22, I longed so much for my mother, probably because I was expecting myself. I began to look for her, and after a long time I found her 60 miles south of Ust-Kamenogorsk. I forgave her for everything and invited her to come back with me."

The Monastery of Divine Mercy in the Czech Republic

The first priests and sisters of our community arrived at our new mission station in Nove Hrad, Czech Republic, on August 15, 2005.

In many ways, the mission here is quite different than others.

For one, we were entrusted with five parishes from the Diocese of Budweis, a pilgrimage site called Maria Bruennl and a monastery.

It is also unique that we came solely at the wish of a long-time friend, Fr. Bonfilius M. Wagner, a Servite. He not only left us his beloved flock and a renovated monastery, but a spiritual inheritance as well.

We would like to tell you a little bit from the life and work of this missionary priest and how it came about that he confided our community with the continuation of his mission.





For decades, Fr. Bonfilius M. Wagner had a very blessed apostolate as a Servite priest and prior in Innsbruck, Austria. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, his superior sent him back to his Bohemian homeland in 1991. The Servite monastery, which had been reduced to ruins during the Cold War, was to be rebuilt. The region had been a part of Austria when Fr. Bonfilius was born, but following World War I, it became part of Czechoslovakia, and Czech was made the official language. So Fr. Bonfilius had to start studying this difficult language at age 65, no easy task considering all of his other work. He and his three confreres also strove to revive the five parishes, which had been greatly neglected during Communism.

Several village churches and chapels, along with the pilgrimage site “Our Lady of Consolation” in Bruennl, had to be renovated. The biggest challenge, however, was the dilapidated Servite Monastery which was the only monastery which survived the secularization under Emperor Joseph II. For 40 years it served as the barracks for the border patrol police. They even trained blood hounds in the garden to not only find refugees, but to kill them. It was given back to the Servites in 1990, but the monastery was in total disrepair.

The Tyrolean province of the Servites had to bear the full financial burden of the renovations.

Untiringly, Fr. Bonfilius sought help in Austria and Germany from friends and those who, like him, had been driven out of their homeland. Although he felt overburdened by this responsibility from the outset, he never gave up. He placed his full trust in Our Lady and was willing to make any sacrifice for this people.

The following experience shows the great personal cost involved in the whole restoration process. He had just arrived in the Czech Republic and was celebrating his first Holy Mass. From the altar, he saw a man in the congregation which had caused his family much suffering during their deportation. *“At that moment, I would have liked to return to Innsbruck. It was such an inner struggle to forgive this man with all my heart. However, I knew that God’s will for the monastery could only be done... when I take the first step and show mercy and forgiveness.... In that moment, as I brought myself to forgive him, I received new strength to joyfully set about the difficult, almost hopeless task of renovating the monastery.”*

With his open and friendly manner, Fr. Bonfilius touched the hearts of believers and non-believers alike. He had a few maxims which he made his own and liked to repeat, for example, *“I have everything I need. What I don’t have, I don’t need!”*

Please, Let my Mission Continue

*F*r. Bonfilius' apostolic zeal did not change, even when cancer left him bedridden. Now, he was effective through his suffering. He was a son of the Sorrowful Mother through and through, and he deeply understood the mystery of coredemption. He offered all his sufferings for the future of the monastery and for his parishioners, but he was also realistic about the future.

Since there were no priests available from his order, he wished that our community take over the care of the monastery. He had known us since our early days in Innsbruck where he was prior of the monastery. He was one of our beloved confessors, and his sincere friendship was a consolation to us in difficult times.

In September 2004, he visited our Motherhouse in Slovakia to express his wish to our superior. Fr. Bonfilius was overjoyed when our superior, after prayer and several meetings with the superiors of the Servites, accepted the invitation. With the renovated monastery, the order has given us above all a rich spiritual inheritance. It is a gift and a responsibility at the same time, and we cannot thank the Tyrolean province of the Servites enough.

In his last months, Fr. Bonfilius witnessed the arrival of our first missionaries at the monastery and the beginning of their work. For us, he was a radiant example of a happy priest who, despite great pain, made his sacrifice with joy. Our Br. Manfred, who cared for this holy man until his death on October 11, 2005, can testify to that.



The Monastery of Divine Mercy

The Servites officially handed over the monastery to the “Family of Mary” on October 1, 2006. Since our community assumed the complete responsibility for the use and care of the monastery, it was decided, in agreement with the provincial, Gottfried M. Wolff OSM, to give the monastery a new name: “The Monastery of Divine Mercy”. This is fitting since the monastery lies in a spiritual desert left behind by Communism: 68% of the population of the Czech Republic professes no faith and only 28% claim to be Catholic. Therefore, it is our desire to build a spiritual center here and to offer retreats for Czech and German speakers. It should be a place of peace and intimacy where one can encounter God’s mercy in silence and prayer.

Currently, two priests and four sisters work at this mission station. It is a rough mission though. Those who preserved and passed on the faith during Communism feel very alone today in an environment where many are atheists or indifferent to the faith.





Our missionaries see this in the schools especially. *“In the classes, there are often only one or two children who believe in God, and they have to tolerate the skepticism and disrespect of their classmates. That is why working with the children is so important to us.*

“Our priests celebrate a children’s Mass each week, so we drive around and pick up all those in the vicinity who would like to come. In the time leading up to liturgical solemnities, we have an intense preparation for the children with prayer, crafts, theatrical pieces and games.

“In summer, we offer them a camp where they can spend a week of their vacation with us. Our main intention is to transmit Christian values to them through games, catechism lessons and the Holy Mass. We work with young adults as well by organizing trips, prayer meetings, volunteers to help us with the children or organ lessons.”



*O*ur priests visit our parish retirement homes each week where they anoint the sick or bring them Holy Communion.

Even during our free time we occasionally run into someone and have to say, only God could have arranged that. Fr. Rado had one such encounter recently:

“As I was out riding my bike on Good Shepherd Sunday, I saw an old lady sitting outside a dilapidated old chapel. I went over to her and asked, ‘To whom is this church consecrated?’

“‘I don’t know,’ she replied, ‘I just take care of it.’

“I was wearing a sports outfit, but when I told her that I was a priest, she asked immediately, ‘Please, may I go to confession?’

“Since she is too weak to go to the neighboring village for Holy Mass, I visit her on the first Friday of each month so that she can make her confession and receive Holy Communion. She cries every time that a priest would come just for her.”



The Lourdes of South Bohemia

We are particularly pleased that the pilgrimage site “Our Lady of Consolation” in Bruennl, the so-called “Lourdes of South Bohemia”, is part of our parish. In front of the church’s Baroque steps, water flows forth from a spring which has healed many believers over the centuries.

During Communism, pil-

grimages to this famous site were stopped, but since 1991, faithful and art-lovers alike have been coming in increasing numbers. Taking them through the Baroque church and telling them about the history of the region gives us the possibility to speak about Jesus and our faith.

Sometimes those who have come as tourists, return home as pilgrims.



A Thank You and a Request

Dear friends and benefactors, thank you very much for all the donations you have sent since the last issue of Triumph of the Heart. In this issue, we have given you even a little more insight into our mission stations. How much need and misery our missionaries encounter each day. How thankful they are, therefore, when they can offer a little relief and help through your financial support.

This time as well, we would like you to make a donation to a mission of your choice: Moscow, Talmenka, Karaganda, Ust-Kamenogorsk or the Czech Republic. Every mission station has its unique needs.

In Moscow, for example, our missionaries would like to help Marina, a young family mother, by covering her medical expenses for an important test and then the necessary medication. Through a

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Milan, IL 61264 / USA
or to the Editor listed at left

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

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doctor's error, she received a virus that has weakened her so much that she cannot digest her food normally.

*I*n Ust-Kamenogorsk, a strong storm ripped off part of the roof from the houses of two families. The families are so poor that they could cover only a small part of the costs with earnings from their first potatoes and gathered berries. Could you help them cover the rest of the expenses?

They also have begun to work on the inside the church, and it too will be very expensive. The car that our priests and missionaries use to visit the poor and needy is in such bad shape that we will have to buy a new one soon.

There are many other examples from the other missions as well, but the stories and pictures in this issue speak for themselves. The donations which we receive without a specified recipient will be used where help is needed most at the time we receive it.

*May the Lord repay
the kindness you show
to those who are in need!*



At the diocesan youth meeting last year in Moscow, which took place in remembrance of the apparitions in Fatima 90 years earlier, many young people processed with burning candles, singing and praying, to a Marian grotto where, in the name of all the Russian youth, they consecrated themselves to Our Lady.

