

February 21, 2013

Dear Friends and Family,

Joyous greetings once again from snowy Vladivostok! The two of us have been here since early January, and will be here until early April. Then in June, God willing, we will return here to start living long-term!

We would like to share with you a bit of our daily life, especially since we are doing something new this time. We have been traveling once a week to Romanovka, a village 2 ½ hours away from Vladivostok, to help at an after-school center for under-privileged children. Sr. Maria Stella is giving private piano lessons, Sr. Catherine Marie is teaching art and English, and together we are leading a choir. Next week we will go with Fr. Myron to see the parishioners and children in Lesozavodsk, a large village 5 hours north of Vladivostok. We will have our third annual summer camp there in July, with the wonderful help of the American FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students) mission team.

At the present time, the children at the orphanage (ages newborn to 3) have various flus and chicken pox, but we've still been allowed to play with several children each week and have noticed great improvement, especially in the behavior of one little girl. On our first visit a few weeks ago, her face was almost expressionless, and she was only comfortable working with one volunteer. This past Saturday, she turned toward us with a big smile as we entered! She still cannot speak, even though she's almost 4 years old, but she is definitely happier and becoming more expressive.

The residents at the home for the elderly poor loved it when an American volunteer brought them doughnuts the other day. Of course, we checked with the nurse first to make sure we didn't distribute them to patients with diabetes. One elderly woman is especially glad for our visits. She taught English for years here in Russia, and enjoys correcting our pronunciation when we read verses aloud from the Bible in Russian.

We still cannot live on the island in our convent apartment since significant problems were discovered with the sewage system and electricity. The former can only be remedied once the ground thaws in the spring. We are hopeful that we can live there beginning this summer.

We are an active part of the life of the Catholic parish every day—daily Mass, Morning and Evening Prayer with our brother community, the Canons Regular of Jesus the Lord. Also, we join in the parish day of prayer with adoration every Thursday, and Sr. Maria Stella plays the organ for Mass on Thursdays, for feast days, and each evening for Vespers. We both sing in the parish choir on Sunday, often serve as cantors, and continue to go with the priest to provide music to the satellite parish of St. Joseph on Sunday afternoons.

You are in our thoughts and prayers, and we know that your prayers are opening the doors for us here!

Gratefully in Christ,

Sr. Maria Stella, CJD, and Sr. Catherine Marie, CJD

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