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Christmas 2013
Vladivostok, Russia

Dear Prayer Partner,

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from Vladivostok, Russia! We fondly remember the many ways you have encouraged us in our mission work, and we will be united with you in prayer, especially on Christmas Eve. We continue to be active with music here—Sr. Catherine Marie is leading the parish choir, and I am the lead alto, and occasional organist and harpist.

We are so grateful for your prayers. So many new doors have opened since we arrived in Russia again this June. Most of you know that we received our three-year residency permits in August, enabling us to stay here and begin to “put down roots.” New ministry opportunities keep coming—restarting the parish young adult group, teaching music to the PSR children on Sunday, bringing Communion to the sick and homebound (in Russian!), giving some spiritual direction, helping start a new sacred music ensemble at our parish, and helping the novices from our brother community with music and English. It is such a blessing to be getting to know and help the residents better at the city’s home for the elderly poor, and to be helping at-risk children at a children’s center in a nearby village. Soon, we hope to be able to lead another Rachel’s Vineyard Retreat. We look forward to holding the babies again at the orphanage when the winter quarantine ends. We have been given much encouragement regarding the opening of our convent on Russian Island! The progress on renovations is continuing and we hope to be able to live there soon. This summer, all the heat pipes and radiators and the entire sewer system was redone in the building, and now we are trying to solve the leaky roof. It was a tremendous help to have the “Friends of the Missions” volunteer team from the US work on our convent for 10 days. As you might remember, there is a new university for 70,000 students down the road from us on Russian Island. God is already helping us to find students—one young woman came to the parish a few weeks ago and told us that she has wanted to be Catholic since she was ten years old, but never lived close enough to a Catholic church. She has started coming to classes to become Catholic at the main Church here, but she is a freshman at the new university, and cannot wait to have a place to pray that is closer to campus. She was very excited to hear that soon we will have a chapel and a place for students to gather on the Island. We are looking forward to being able to offer retreats and to have a pro-life center, too. If our plans become a reality, we will be able to do much more for the orphans by giving them Montessori lessons at the orphanage. Another need recently expressed to us is for a pre-school for the children of all the faculty and staff at the new university. It will become clear over time where we are most needed and what the Holy Spirit is calling us to do.

We are eagerly looking forward to having Sr. Faustina Marie with us, even though we know you will miss her. You are in our hearts and prayers and we ask you to continue your great work for the Lord through your life of prayer and holiness.

As we welcome Jesus into our hearts in a renewed way this Christmas, here is a beautiful thought from the Advent preface II of the Mass: “The Virgin Mary longed for him with love beyond all telling; John the Baptist sang of his coming and proclaimed his presence when he came.” May we all long for him with love, sing of his coming, and proclaim his presence this Christmas in our home, school, place of work, and parish.

In the joy of Christ’s Holy Birth,

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

