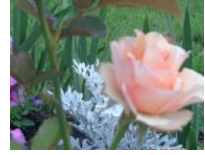


Easter 2018

Dear Friends and Family,

Христос Воскрес! Во истину воскрес! Christ is risen! Indeed, He is risen!
Happy Easter!



How are you? I hope you are well and enjoying the spring. Here in Vladivostok, we can feel spring coming and are just waiting for the green buds to appear. We did have beautiful pussy willows for Palm Sunday, that Brother Nikita from our brother community cut from bushes on Russian Island. In Russia, as in several countries in Europe, they don't import palms, but rather use pussy willows which are usually in bloom around Easter time.

So many blessings have happened lately—our two postulants, Sara and Maria, came to join us here in Russia in October, which has transformed our community life, since we've grown from 3 to 5! They're joining us for our various ministries at the temporary orphanage on Wednesdays, at the hospice on Saturdays, with the students on Wednesday nights, for parish choir, for visiting the small parish in Lesozavodsk once a month, and for assisting with the new student Mass at our convent on Saturday evenings. They're getting to know the parishioners and making progress in Russian, too. They're both musical and debuted here at the Christmas Festival of Christian Choirs, held at our church here, with Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Methodist choirs participating with our Catholic parish choir. A short video of four of us from that event is on our Facebook page—[sistersinjeshusthelord33](#) ("I Wonder as I Wander").

Two weeks ago, we were all in Khabarovsk for the annual Chrism Mass with our bishop, who is based in Irkutsk, a four-hour flight northwest of Vladivostok! Religious and priests came from as far away as the Kamchatka peninsula, Sakhalin Island, Magadan, and Blagoveshchensk. It was 13 hours for us on the train (10 hours if driving). It was so encouraging to be together. One priest, who's been serving on Sakhalin Island for 9 years, shared that the hardest part of his mission has been to be without the Sacrament of Confession for sometimes an entire year at a time, if he can't get away, and no priest comes to visit. We realized anew what a blessing it is to be in Vladivostok, where there is another order of sisters and our brother community, including two priests, Fr. Myron Effing and Fr. Daniel Maurer. It is very rare for us to be without Mass, and we can go to confession every week.

Our outreach to the Catholic students from the nearby Far Eastern Federal University (FEFU) is developing well. Several students inquired about starting a Mass on campus, but unfortunately, we learned that it is not possible. It is against the law in Russia to have religious services on government property. Under the law, it is legal to have religious services in your home, as long as no one is pressured to come. So, we've started having student Masses in our convent once a week. Everyone who comes has to be our guest, so open invitations are not possible. But, we have two "WhatsApp" groups now for students we've met, one in Russian, the other in English for those still learning, and the word is getting out. There are especially many Catholics here from India, Colombia, and Africa. At a student day on campus, we met Catholics from Brazil,

Vietnam, Indonesia, and France, just as an example. Many foreign students are here on scholarship, often paid for by their home government. Others say that the relatively low cost of studying here is what drew them, combined with the high quality of education. There are schools of medicine, engineering, business, law, and many other majors here. They even offer some degree programs entirely in English, although most students are studying in Russian.

We're getting ready for the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) annual mission trip in mid-July, when 15-20 American college students come to help us with kids' camps and a young adult conference.

The Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Vigil) was beautiful this year! A mother and son were baptized during the Easter Vigil Mass, and the church was full! Both Fr. Myron and Fr. Daniel preached about the ancient tradition that when we're present at the liturgy, we are actually present at the event; that even though we didn't live in Jesus' time, we are actually with him at the Crucifixion on Good Friday, and that we are with the women when they discover the empty tomb, and with the disciples when Jesus appears to them after the Resurrection. It's an amazing thought, isn't it?

We're so grateful to be able to be here in Russia. Thank you for all your prayers and support that keep us going and keep the doors open.

May you have a most joyful and blessed Easter season!

In Christ,
Sr. Maria Stella, Sr. Catherine Marie, Sr. Faustina Marie, Sara and Maria