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Feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius
Valentine's Day
February 14, 2019

Dear Friends and Family,

Greetings from Vladivostok! We're staying warm and are very grateful for this unusual winter (in our area) of almost no snow or ice.

Today is the fifth anniversary of Jesus coming to reside in our convent chapel on Russian Island, the fifth anniversary of the first Mass here, and Jesus as the Blessed Sacrament being reserved in our tabernacle. It is fitting that it is the feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius, who first brought Christianity to the Slavic people, and translated the liturgy and the Bible into the Slavic language, creating an alphabet in the process (aptly called "Cyrillic" after St. Cyril). It is also wonderful that it is Valentine's Day, for Mother Julia always put on our vocation pamphlets: "Would you be mine?," as Jesus' words to us, inviting us to become his spouse.

Soon we'll be replacing the roof on our convent on Russian Island! It's long overdue, but is at last possible because we were able to buy the last apt from the city in October. We'd been advised not to do any major building renovations until the last purchase went through. We have found an excellent architect, and are making final decisions as to how to best renovate each of the five apartments.

Our Brother Nikita was ordained a deacon in August and will be ordained a priest on April 10 at our parish. Please keep him in your prayers. We're praying for him every day, and for our Brother Patrick, who will be ordained a priest on April 2 in Kazakhstan.

There's four of us here now: Sr. Catherine, Sr. Faustina and I, plus Sr. Joanna who joined our community in 2017. It's a great blessing to be growing!

Our student group is doing very well! We're having our first overnight women's retreat at our convent this Friday-Saturday. Our student group meets on Friday nights now on the Island (in Dom Marii, downstairs), and students come from 3 different universities! We have 5-12 students each week, from many different countries, with a core group of 4 Russians that can usually make it. There's a Mass for students at our convent every Saturday evening, and now once a month, on Sunday nights, for Spanish speaking students. We had the first Spanish Mass last Sunday, with confession before hand, and one student said it's the first Mass she's gotten to attend in her native language in 3 years. It meant so much to her. Thanks be to God, Fr. Dan speaks Spanish very well.

In Lesozavodsk, where we work with children every summer, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) recently had a breakthrough. AA from Vladivostok has been trying to establish a presence there for several years. A few weeks ago, medical personnel, the police, and other city officials invited them to hold a meeting, and have now committed to help AA to start there! We have great hopes that someday, the parents of the kids from the summer gatherings will become part of this, too, and the kids' lives can change for the better...

Rachel's Vineyard, weekend retreats for healing after abortion, is starting to grow, too--we had one in October in Vladivostok after 3 years, and now have been asked to bring the retreat to Krasnoyarsk and

Irkutsk in March! The retreats will be March 15-17, and March 22-24. Please pray that the participants will be open to the Holy Spirit and that they can receive deep healing. A counselor who attended the October retreat wants to help start Rachel's Vineyard retreats all over Russia!

We're excited about the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) coming again this summer! We don't know yet where the Young Adult Conference will be this year-just not on Russian Island, because we'll be continuing with renovations.

Unfortunately, we can't visit the hospice at the moment, because it's under renovation and the patients have been moved to various locations, and the orphanage now only allows long-term volunteers out on the playground on sunny days. Thankfully, a patient we know from the hospice has a smartphone, and so we are staying in touch with her that way. Almost every night she sends a little message to us "Good night, sweet dreams!"

We continue to be very active with sacred music and liturgy at Most Holy Mary Mother of God Catholic parish here in Vladivostok, and with an Apologetics group after Mass for adults and Catechesis of the Good Shepherd for children ages 3-6.

Our days here are full and you are a part of everything that we do! Thank you for every time you pray for us and remember us and support our mission.

2019 is a year of milestones: five years in our convent, Dom Marii, as of January, and ten years in Russia as of November!

Happy Valentine's Day!
In Him,
Sr. Maria Stella, CJD

Sisters in Jesus the Lord