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September 18, 2012

Dear Friends and Family,

Hello again from our beloved Russia! We have just two weeks left of our three month stay—then, we plan to return in late January. There is a new visa agreement between the US and Russia, and now it is possible to stay six months at a time instead of only three! We will find out more details soon.

Sacred Music as Evangelization

A young organist whom we met at the Catholic young adult conference in Khabarovsk in early August came for a week of organ lessons with Sr. Maria Stella. After the same conference, one of the young Catholics in Vladivostok approached us about starting a sacred music ensemble, for Mass and for charitable outreach, too. She's interested in instrumental and vocal music, especially music of the Renaissance! We've already had several rehearsals.

You may have heard that the APEC (Asian-Pacific Economic Conference) just met here on Russian Island at the new university campus, Sept 2-9. The Catholic Church was open extra hours that week in anticipation of more visitors. Sr. Maria Stella played the organ on several afternoons so that visitors coming into the church could experience the prayerful atmosphere, beautiful architecture, and sacred music, all at one time. One young man came back with his nephew a second day for an informal concert.

Hospice/Nursing Home for the Poor

We've learned through our visits to the hospice that the patients never get fruit unless someone from outside brings it to them. One day, we bought bananas and gave one to each of the 30 patients. For the first time ever, no one complained of being hungry after the midday meal! Another day, we picked an armful of flowers and made a tiny bouquet for each patient and put it by their bed so that they could look at it as they lay there. They asked, "What holiday is it?" We said, "It isn't a holiday. We just wanted to bring you flowers." Tears came to the eyes of one of the men when we told him. Yesterday, we celebrated Elsa's 71st birthday with her. We were able to get her eyeglass prescription filled last winter. She said "Oh, how I wish I were 39 again! But, then I wouldn't have gotten to know both of you!"

More news

We visited two new (to us) orphanages a few weeks ago in other cities. There is such a need everywhere for the children to have one-on-one, loving contact. We continue to visit Baby Hospital #3 here in Vladivostok.

We're helping to lead another Rachel's Vineyard retreat for healing after abortion Sept 21-23 here in Russia.

Today, new windows were put into the apartment on Russian Island that is the future retreat center, student center, and pro-life center, across the hall from our little convent apartment. Next week, a mission team from the USA is coming to work on the plumbing and electricity!

Two Russian jokes: we passed a light-fixture store named "Свет-shop" (Свет pronounced "Svyet" means "light" in Russian)—a fun play-on-words "Sweat-shop". The second joke is that an Orthodox priest asked us what name we have in English for the foods that we are allowed to eat on fast days. He said, could it be "Fast-Food?" We loved it, and hope you do, too :)

We're so grateful for all your prayers, encouragement, and financial support!

Sister Maria Stella and Sister Catherine Marie, Sisters in Jesus the Lord (www.cjd.cc)