

BIG FAMILY

Mission to Children

December 2005

"Worship that is pure and unblemished in the sight of God the father is this: to visit and help and care for the widows and orphans in their affliction and need...." James 1:27 (AMP)



**Meet our new friends from Russia and Kentucky...
Cecil and Betsy, with Nelly, Sasha, and Liza**

Dear Family Friends,

It is always difficult to compile a newsletter after we have just returned from Russia. There is so much to share! Where do we start? We have decided that for this Christmas season we will write you a long rambling letter to share some of the highlights of our journey.

First thing: what a blessing it was to have Vickie Felix, co-captain of our Luga orphanage team, and Carol Salwocki, one of our faithful Family Friends, traveling with us! Vickie's report on the trip is included with this month's newsletter, and we hope to hear from Carol next month.

Adventure, surprises, and lots of meetings

Our journey to Russia during the week of U.S. Thanksgiving holiday was, as usual, full of adventure, surprises, blessings, and lots of meetings. We visited the Kommunar orphanage twice, participated in life celebrations there, visited with Pastor Andrei and his family in Kommunar, shared during the Kommunar church service, participated in a meeting with the orphanage ministry team at Kommunar, spent time with our foster family in Kommunar, participated in life celebrations at Luga and St. Petersburg orphanages, made a first time visit to the orphanage at Tolmachevo, met with leadership at two transitional homes in St. Petersburg, met with leader of ministry team that works with orphans in the Tolmachevo orphanage, visited with widow Sveta and her family in Vsevolozsk, met with leadership at Parental Bridge, and visited children and met with leadership at the Rehabilitation Center in Vsevolozsk. We had Thanksgiving Day dinner with our team at the home of Misha's mom, dad, and grandmother. For Dianne and Ken, this was second year in a row to spend Thanksgiving

with Misha's family. Although Russians do not celebrate the American Thanksgiving Day, we are starting a new tradition!

Transitional homes: a real answer

Now that we are back home and have had some time to digest our visit, we realize that one of the huge blessings during our time in Russia was our visit to one of the transitional homes organized through the ministry of Marina Topoltseva. We will never forget the smiles of Liza and Sasha, who rushed to the door of the transitional home (an apartment in St. Petersburg) to greet us and welcome us to their home. (See photo above.) Before they were invited to live at the transitional home, Liza and Sasha had never had a real home and a real family. The joy of having a home and a family and being able to welcome Americans radiated from Liza and Sasha's faces as they greeted us in English! And following our royal welcome, we met Cecil and Betsy, a couple from Kentucky, who are serving as the home's "mom and dad" for a period of one year. Then we met Marina, who has now started three transitional homes for orphans in St. Petersburg. We didn't get to meet Nelly, Liza's twin sister, because she was working.

Transitional homes teach responsibility

All the transitioning orphans in Marina's programs are expected to work, to help pay rent and expenses, to go to church, to participate in Bible study, and to continue their educations. The two to three years that these youngsters spend in a transition home teaches them the life skills that they were not able to learn during their time in an orphanage. During their stay at the transition home, they are building a family--new brothers and sisters, friends, and mentors-- who can help them when they leave the



Natasha (left) and Marina "graduate" from the Kommunar orphanage in 2006. We are praying that they will be able to join the Transitional Home Program.

transition home and begin their lives as conscientious young adults. As we sat around the big table in this home, sipping our tea and munching cookies, we realized that we were experiencing a real solution to the vicious cycle of the Russian orphan system. These children were being rescued. It is wonderful to know that the 15 children in Marina's program are going to have a good chance to break the vicious cycle, but we feel sad when we realize that less than one percent of Russian orphans will have this kind of opportunity.

We need to get involved!

Please listen, Big Family Friends, we need your prayers for individuals who are willing to get involved in this kind of program in Russia. When we asked Marina how the transitional homes are supported, she shared a profound revelation with us. "In the early days of this ministry, I prayed for finances to support the ministry, and then God revealed to me that I should pray for people... individuals... to come into this ministry instead of finances." Before we departed, Marina asked us to share with our American Family Friends about the need for an individual (lady) or a couple who can take the place of Cecil and Betsy when they return home in the summer of 2006. Will you join us as we pray with Marina for individuals who will become a part of this ministry to Russian orphans?

What's Next?

We always come back from Russia, asking the question: "What's next?" During our visits we see pockets of light where progress is being made, but we also see so many needs. Our November visit helped to underline for us that more things for the orphans and better living conditions in the orphanages will not solve the problems! Big Family Mission will continue to support our ministry teams who hold life celebrations in the orphanages, who visit and take treats like fruit and sweets, and who provide socks, underwear, and personal items that are in short supply. We will also continue to help with projects to make the orphanages more like a home environment. But we are more convinced than ever that Big Family must focus time and resources to help with foster home programs, transitional homes, mentoring programs for orphans, and programs to teach life skills to orphans.

"Something big" is about to happen

"Something big" is about to happen in the government system that controls Russian orphanages and programs which impact orphans. Everywhere we went in Russia, the directors of orphanages and those who work with Russian orphans were talking about the changes that are expected to occur sometime early in 2006. Most of those we talked with were optimistic that the government would provide more resources for orphan programs. At Kommunar orphanage/internat school, there are rumors that the orphanage will be closed down and the children moved to a town that is about 15 miles away. Tatiana,

director of the Kommunar orphanage, predicts that, even if the orphanage remains open, she may be replaced an individual who has more political ties than she. Please pray that the "something big" that is about to happen will be a manifestation of God's power and might at work to place his orphan children in families.

Another focus area for prayers

There is another focus area that needs the dedication of many prayer warriors in the U.S. One of the biggest causes of children being abandoned by their parents is alcoholism. It is estimated that 30 per cent of Russian men and 10 percent of Russian women are alcoholics. Alcoholism is not a new problem in Russia. During the Communist regime, the government waged an all-out war to put an end to this plague that so handicaps day-to-day living in Russia. We need prayer warriors to put on their "whole armor" and wage an all-out war to tear down the spiritual wickedness that surrounds and blankets Russia. Like Marina, we must pray for the people who will join us in the war to end the vicious cycle of Russian orphans. Through your prayers and support, we are changing lives in Russia. We see children being rescued, lives being turned around. Please join us in a prayer that God will send us more individuals who have a heart for Russian orphans and who will join us in this huge battle!

Prayer and Partners Needed for 2006

Much prayer is needed in the year ahead. We have mentioned some of the important needs you can pray about in this letter. We are also preparing a "prayer calendar" (with updated photos of the children) for each of the orphanages where we are working: Kommunar, Luga, and St. Petersburg. We hope to have these calendars out to you by next month. If you would like to bless this ministry during 2006, help us find opportunities to share the needs of Russian orphans with churches, youth groups, Sunday School classes, and anyone who might be interested. We are so thankful for the Family Friends who are partnering with us, and now please help us to find more of you to come along side us!

At this wonderful time of the year when we celebrate the birth of our Saviour, we thank you for your support and prayers during the past year! We wish you and your family a joyful Christmas and a blessed New Year!

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Big Family Mission is an inter-denominational mission outreach of Lighthouse Community Church



Vickie (third person from right on back row) with Carol Salwocki (6th person from the right) and some of the children at Luga. Vickie's friend, Tania, is fourth girl from the right on the front row.

A letter from Vickie Felix

Greetings, Big Family Friends!

I would like to give a brief summary of my first experience in Russia. One thing I must say is "Praise God", he is so faithful. The day before we left it snowed a good bit in Russia, so when we got to St. Petersburg at the hotel, all the electricity and water was off. That was quite an experience to find a bathroom by candlelight!! On this trip we met with several organizations that work with orphaned children to see how we might be able to work together to help these children. The one organization I personally thought was very good was Transitional Homes, where Christian adults live in an apartment with two or three teenaged orphans for two years (or longer) to teach the orphans the living skills they need. Husband-wife teams or single ladies from the U.S. could serve. We got to meet the Garret family who were in their 70s and moved to Russia from Kentucky, USA, to do this work for the Lord. It was a blessing to be with them (they spoke English); it was nice to be able to communicate with our friends. We also went to Kommunar Orphanage. The conditions were so much better than the pictures I saw a year ago. Praise God for his work through the members of Big Family Friends that were able to make the conditions better to live in. Please keep praying for Luga; the conditions there are in great need of repair. We got to go to several life celebrations at

different orphanages. That was a refreshing especially at Luga where they sang songs and were encouraged that they were special to God and to keep studying. My heart really connected to the children at Luga. God answered a prayer, and I got to see Tania who I sponsor through Big Family. She had been missing for some time. God in his faithfulness allowed her to be there both Friday night and Saturday as I was there. God also did some very special work in my life that is too long to explain, but he is my Rock, and my Fortress, the God who delivers and Heals. He also taught me to pray and to wait for him to work and not go ahead of him and try to do things my self. I would say I am a changed person because of this experience to Russia, and I hope to go back soon and develop relationships with the children. Please pray for foster and adoptive parents for these children. One little note, since I have come back I have decided to try to take Russian so I can communicate and understand the children better. Praise God! I found someone to teach me, and I start my first lesson tonight. Now I just pray that my older mind can understand and be able to learn this difficult language. As I am learning NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD!!

**By God's Grace,
Vickie L. Felix**