



A missionary priest before coming to Long Island and serving as the Diocese of Rockville Centre's Mission Office Director from 2008-2012, Father Joseph McCabe found himself some 20 years ago heading a Maryknoll mission in the town of Khabarovsk, Russia in the remote Far East. He was the second pastor in this "post-Communist" era parish, having been shut tight when Communist forces swept through Khabarovsk back in 1932. All the local clergy—the Orthodox priests, the lone Catholic pastor, the local Jewish rabbi—were rounded up at that time, some destined for labor camps and some, including the Catholic priest, to be executed. The parish was a desolate one, particularly in the long winter months. Father McCabe often braved 40 inches of ice and snow to bring Communion to the sick and elderly, in sub-zero weather likely to



last from October to April. He meant to include one of his oldest parishioners in his visits, but Stanislava Gusha kept putting him off. Others needed him more, she said.

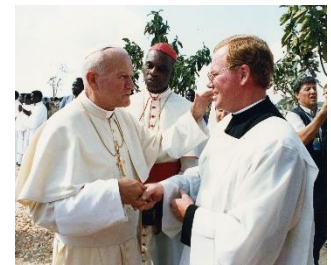
Stanislava clearly made an impression. Born in 1920, she was the daughter of a young officer in the tsar's Imperial Army. She had received all her childhood sacraments in the parish church, built in 1907 by Polish conscripts. Her grandmother acted as a sacristan, cleaning the church, and taking care of the laundry, and, as it turned out, keeping an eye on the future.



It wasn't until Lent of 2003 that Stanislava consented to a visit by Father McCabe and now let us allow him to tell the story from here. "After I had given her communion," he wrote, "she asked me to help her in the small bedroom off the sitting room. There, following her directions, I pulled the heavy iron bed away from the wall, lifted a rug underneath, and knocked the floorboards to find one loose floorboard near the wall. I slowly pulled it up and was amazed to see a wooden box buried just under a small layer of dirt.

"I lifted it out and after covering the hole in the floor again, we

went back to the sitting room where she carefully pried open the dusty lid of this rectangular wooden box. Gently she lifted out and placed on the table cloth a corporal, three purificators, a priest's confessional stole, a small 19th-century missal in Latin/Polish, a candle extinguisher, some prayer cards and a small wall crucifix—all items smuggled out by her grandmother from the original parish in



1932."

Then came the story's clincher. "One day," her grandmother had told her, "the priests will return, and when they do, give them back these articles. They belong to the church."

It had taken 70 years, but the priests had returned. And, in a lonely part of Russia's Far East, a mission was fulfilled.

Fr. McCabe was in Russia from 2001 to 2007.

Prior to his mission there, this Jamaica, NY born priest served in Tanzania. Fr. Joe attended St. Joseph's School in Garden City followed by Brooklyn Prep and Maryknoll College. He also holds several higher degrees from Notre Dame and Catholic University. Ordained to the priesthood in 1977 as



Maryknoll Missioner, Fr. McCabe spent his early years serving in the Diocese of Shinyanga and Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam, both in Tanzania. There he served in vast parishes with up to 45 outstations. He inaugurated a pastoral center for Youth with opportunities for education, was a professor and Spiritual Director to seminarians at St. Charles Lwanga Senior Seminary, where he also obtained funding and constructed a seminary clinic providing medical aid to students and staff. Fr. McCabe's last Tanzanian assignment in 1988 was at St. John Bosco parish where he was the Vocations Director and managed Young Christian Students and Workers. Fr. McCabe served in Vatican City for the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples before heading to Russia.

These days you can find Fr. McCabe serving in Hong Kong at the parish of St. Margaret in Happy Valley. For more on his journey, click on the information link.

