

COMMITTEE TO SUPPORT THE ST. PETERSBURG CHURCH

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Subject: Christian Science Society, St. Petersburg, Russia
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Dear fellow Christian Scientists,

It has been a year since we last wrote to you with an update on the progress toward buying a space for the Society. We have discussed sending you a letter at each of our committee meetings, always deciding to wait just a little longer because it seemed that something would happen very soon. Much has happened, but not as we expected, so we will send this letter explaining why no property has as yet been purchased and what is taking place.

In our Dec. 7, 97 letter to you we mentioned that we were to hear about the new policies by Jan. 1, 98 and were to hear shortly about the decision on re-registering the Society as required by the Sep. 97 law. From time to time we received e-mail saying that the matter was still being considered, and this has gone on the whole year. One of the last stalling tactics was for the Ministry of Justice to tell us that they could not find the documents that the Society presented, and that the time that the Society existed before the revolution could not be counted because the members were all foreigners. The latter is not true and other documentation has been found and submitted to disprove this. We have requested a decision in writing to the director of the Ministry of Justice and he told us that he will make a decision on registration as soon as he sees the documents.

In Moscow two members of the Russian Parliament, the Duma, have formed a Christian Legal Center specifically to help all Christian religions with their legal concerns and are contesting the Sep. 97 law which restricts foreign religions. They are both lawyers and are challenging the law in the Constitutional Court. Members of the Society have met with these lawyers many times and received some good advice from them, one being to demand a decision from the Ministry of Justice in writing, as provided by the law if no decision has been made within six months of submitting our re-registration. Another recommendation was to get a lawyer and demand our rights. They were also instrumental in getting Hildegard a one-year multi-entry visa. Because of all the help they have given us, at our last committee meeting, we decided to make a \$1,000.00 donation from the accrued interest of our account to the Christian Legal Center to help them in their work.

Since the new law does not go into effect until the end of this year the Society can still legally rent or own property, hold lectures and receive class instruction. If they are not recognized as an official religion, it is our understanding that these rights will be lost. For that reason we are holding back on any purchase until we have clear legal authorization to purchase. If they do not get official recognition, they will have to register annually until they will have been in existence for 15 years as required by the new law, and then petition for full legal status. Until that time they will have to meet in a private space, which should present no problem. They currently meet in a class room at a technical institute, but have already outgrown that room, and will need a larger space soon.

From Dec. 24 thru Dec. 26 the Society participated in a Health Festival of alternative healing systems and the reports about it are wonderful to hear. More than 600 Russian Heralds were given out and 12 S&H were sold. With the current economy, that is a large number. It was the first experience for them to present Christian Science in public and they were excited with the results. They also mailed out many S&H's to various parts of Russia in response to requests from radio listeners. As a result of the radio programs, informal groups are being formed in several areas. Lectures have been given in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, Riga and Uktah thus far. With the economic turmoil in Russia, it is a perfect time for the "leaven" of Christian Science to be introduced and there are many people in great need reaching out for help.

After the donation mentioned above, we have a little over \$80,000.00 in the bank, with donations still coming in from time to time. We are deeply grateful for every contribution that has been made and for the prayerful support many of you have given. We are especially grateful for the metaphysical committee from the churches in Olympia that continuously stand by with their prayers. You may have noticed that we have added a fourth member to our committee: Kay Osmanski. Kay is the chairperson of the metaphysical committee and keeps them informed on all the meetings with the Russian bureaucracy.

As soon as anything definite is learned, we will let you know.

Sincerely,

William T. Arnesen