

COMMITTEE TO SUPPORT THE ST. PETERSBURG CHURCH

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Dear Friends,

Wonderful news! On August 30 we received full registration as a church in Russia. The reason that this letter is getting to you so late is that on August 31 Hildegard and I arrived in St. Petersburg and I just returned yesterday.

We can now move ahead with the purchase of a church home with no reservations. Without full registration it was not legal for us to own property or conduct classes and lectures and distribute literature. Thank you for your prayers during this long legal action.

While I was in St. Petersburg we investigated two sites that looked promising, and taught us a great deal. The first site was a second floor communal apartment that was in a very good location. It was near the center of town just a few minutes walk from the Metro on a beautiful tree lined boulevard three buildings from the US Consulate. We could afford to buy the space, but could only afford part of the renovation required to make it usable. A second floor reading room is also not as desirable as one on the street. From an 'Historical Buildings' book we learned that the building was built in 1886 by the Russian Orthodox Church. We immediately called an expert on these matters in Moscow and learned that we could be sitting on a 'time bomb' if we purchased this space. The Orthodox Church is very friendly with their old communist allies in the Duma, as witnessed by the law they passed two years ago limiting religious freedom in Russia to them, Islam, Judaism and Hinduism. We decided to look further.

The next space we looked at we could afford to buy and renovate, and even have a little money left over for chairs and the proverbial 'Sunday School curtains'. It would also have provided a small space for a rental apartment which would be very desirable for security while the space was not used, and to pay the monthly electricity and maintenance fees of R 2000; about \$80.00. Due to the severe economic depression in Russia right now, it would be a large demonstration for the members to come up with that much money each month. The space was on the ground floor with a private entry and arched windows that looked as though they were made for a church. I was sure that we had found the space until we reported to the membership and they pointed out that it was on the very edge of town in an severely depressed industrial area, and right next door to a bar. It was decided to look further.

From these two considerations we learned some useful financial data. The economy has brought the price of real estate down to the point that we can now afford a smaller space closer to the center of town and reasonably close to a Metro. We have just over \$82,000.00 in the bank here and in a safety deposit box in a German bank in St. Petersburg. We have enough there for a down payment, and can now transfer money electronically with charges smaller than the price of a ticket to carry the money over. We learned that there will have to be an ongoing financial support for the Society until economic conditions improve and the membership can pay for the monthly charges every space demands. There is a manager for each building that provides maintenance and custodial services for common entries and stairwells.

I am sure now that the purchase of a space is 'just around the corner' and I will be writing to you soon with a picture of it. Registration has been a big accomplishment and all in the Society felt they should wait with the purchase until it was certain. We are very grateful for the support you all have given us, and especially for those of you who have been sending us support on a regular basis. The movement in Russia is facing some of the same trials that Mrs. Eddy faced in her struggles to establish the Church. Your metaphysical support is also greatly appreciated.

On behalf of the Society and the Olympia committee.....a most loving 'thank you'

William T. Arnesen