

Orthodox church to be built in Norilsk

by Tamara Orlova

Northern News Service

NORILSK, USSR — Local officials have decided to allow the construction this spring of a Russian Orthodox church in Norilsk, a city in the Far North.

The decision was made by the local Soviet authorities in response to an official request filed by 500 city residents, which is only a small portion of the religious community here. The church is to become the Soviet Union's northernmost.

Founded in the severe tundra on Taymyr Peninsula in 1935, Norilsk has had a tragic history. In the course of its first 20 years it was built into a major industrial center by prisoners called "enemies of the people." They had been condemned in Stalin's purges, and many of them died.

Since the late 1950s when the local hard-labor camp ceased to exist, the enterprises and blocks of housing in Norilsk were built by thousands of young people from different parts of the Soviet Union who volunteered to come here.

Gradually, the population of Norilsk stabilized, and when the influx of young people went down sharply, the average age of the city residents increased a bit and is now 35 years.

The town, where only a quarter of a century ago it was difficult to find a

grandmother or grandfather, today has more than 20,000 old-age pensioners.

According to sociological studies, most of the religious people belong to this category, and it is their interest that the local municipal authorities have decided to take into account.

"On the basis of a referendum held among all city residents, it has been decided to build not just a church big enough for a thousand people in the city center, but a whole complex to include a Sunday school, library of religious publications and a memorial center for those who died here in the

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years of mass reprisals," said Father Sergei Shachin, recently appointed head of the Norilsk church.

"For the time being we are baptizing children, marrying people and performing other religious rites in temporary premises. At our request, an

account has already been opened in the bank, and people and organizations have already begun to contribute money for the construction of the church.

"Incidentally, the local ore and mining combine has decided to finance the construction of the foundation for the future church," he said.

Father Shachin expressed gratitude to all those who are helping in the construction of the church.

Another Russian Orthodox Church is to be built shortly in Talnakh, a satellite city of Norilsk.