Computer Training Helps Georgian Nuns Publish Religious Pamphlets

Perched on a cliff high above the Mtkvari River in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, the Peristsvaleba Convent provides a peaceful and traditional home to seven Georgian Orthodox nuns. A church, several smaller buildings—including one that houses a newly-built community center—and well-tended gardens connected by brick paths that wind along the hillside complete the monastery complex, which dates back to the early 1800s. There is an atmosphere of history and serenity pervading the place that gives the illusion that life for the women residing here today is very similar to that of their predecessors from decades long past. But then a laptop, scanner, and printer sitting on a desk in one of the convent’s rooms clearly illustrate that these religious women have their feet planted in the 21st century. They are practicing the Georgian Orthodox religion, more than 60 percent of the country’s citizens are practicing the Georgian Orthodox religion, and while Sister Theona and Sister M arika—signed up for a basic computer skills course to learn how to operate word-processing and illustration programs, as well as some basic desktop publishing applications. "The computer training these two nuns received was very important for our work, especially as we were just getting started with our publishing project. Theona and M arika brought what they learned in the classes back to the Convent and taught other nuns how to use the laptop and scanner—as well as the different software programs we have—which were all gifts to our Order from an American benefactor," M other Tekle continues, explaining that the Sisters spoke so highly of both the training they received at the NILC and their instructor, that she sent her own niece to the Center and a devout Georgian Orthodox, Nino Didmanidze, to teach the Peristsvaleba nuns how to use the laptop and scanner, so the training is on the other side.

Since 1995, AIHA has established a network of 140 partnership Learning Resource Centers (LRCs) that, as of June 2002, have collectively provided information and communication services to more than 95,000 medical professionals, students, patients, and other members of their communities. In addition to meeting the research needs of partner institutions, LRC staff work to ensure the sustainability of the Centers by offering various fee-based services—including Internet access, desktop publishing services, and software training courses—to the general public. This is the story of how a group of Georgian nuns published the computer skills they learned at the Tbilisi LRC to their own community education and outreach work. The story of the woman who provided the training is on the other side.

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As their skills grew, they began to create brochures, flyers, and pamphlets using Microsoft Word and Adobe PageMaker, distributing them not only in the Tbilisi area, but throughout the country and even to the Georgian community living in Moscow. When other convents and monasteries decided to begin publishing religious materials of their own, the nuns at Peristsvaleba provided guidance and advice. These days, M other Tekle is working on a new assignment given by the Patriarch—teaching children and young adults about botany and ecology. And, while Sister Theona and Sister M arika now reside at other convents, they taught the Peristsvaleba nuns how to use the laptop and scanner, so the publishing project is alive and well.

"It is a very pleasant thing to see one's work bear fruit."