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It was a cold and damp morning in Tirana as Shpresa walked with her sons through the city streets to attend liturgy on Sunday morning. But this day was different. Instead of stopping at the church in the central square at the heart of the city, she continued on another mile and then turned down a narrow alley. There, the new church of the Annunciation had been built by the Albanian government for the Orthodox community, and this would be the first liturgy in the new building.

While the opening of a new church should be a joyful event; instead, a sense of fear and sadness prevailed. This new church was only a shadow of the one it replaced. The previous cathedral had stood proud in the city square, but now in its place was a high-rise hotel, and the Orthodox community had been displaced to a much smaller and simpler building, inconspicuously hidden down an alley for none to see but those who still had courage to attend services. What would happen next? The fears of Shpresa would not take long to become reality. Just three years later (in 1967), the Annunciation church that the government had built was closed; every church in Albania was closed. Of the churches that were not desecrated or converted to bars or restaurants, gymnasiums or ammunition depots, over 1,600 were completely destroyed. And even that was but a shadow of the greatest tragedy - all forms of religious belief and practice were declared constitutionally illegal and punishable by 7 years in prison for the perpetrator, together with a life of imposed hardship for that person's family. This was life in Albania under Communism.

It had been almost 50 years since Communists had closed the church. The morning was bright and there was an excitement in the air that could hardly be contained. Shpresa was walking to the cathedral again with her sons. But now she was also accompanied by their wives and her grandchildren as well. And this time, she would not have to pass the city center on her way to church. Instead she was heading to the most magnificent building she had ever seen, the new Orthodox Cathedral of the Resurrection, which once again took its place as the most majestic building in the city center of Tirana.

Shpresa wove her way through the crowds, waiting with anticipation beneath the bell tower cross that rose 160 feet into the sky. And then, her emotions overcame her as 16 bells began to gloriously ring, above the murmur of the crowd. Archbishop Anastasios was led in procession by nine other bishops (including Archbishop Demetrios of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and Archbishop Nikon of Boston, New England, and the Albanian Archdiocese of the OCA) and 18 clergy to celebrate the first Divine Liturgy in the new Resurrection Cathedral. After so many years of persecution, the new cathedral stood boldly, proclaiming with...
eloquence to all in Albania and beyond that God is in our midst, that He does not leave us, and that He is Lord and King of all.

This opening of the Resurrection Cathedral on June 24th, 2012, coincided with the 20th anniversary celebration of the enthronement of Archbishop Anastasios in Albania. The new church symbolically crowns the twenty years of ministry of the Archbishop and a miraculous transformation – from a Church that had been nearly destroyed to one that stands as a vibrant beacon and witness to the Faith throughout the world. The building itself embodies the Archbishop's vision which has driven the transformation of the Church. The cathedral is a magnificent structure. The dome of the 15,000 square-foot church stands over 90 feet high and is a blend of traditional and modern styles, built with quality and care. In addition to the cathedral is an entire complex that bodily proclaims Orthodox Christianity, calling believers to live their faith more deeply. There is a chapel, a baptistery, and a 7,500 square-foot administrative center which hosts the

BELOW: In the 20 years since the enthronement of His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios, many people have received the light of Christ. The Church, which by the 1990s had been almost completely destroyed, is now home to many new believers and vibrant ministries that bear a living witness to the Faith.

RIGHT: Under Communism, many churches were converted to bars or restaurants, gymnasiums or ammunition depots; over 1,600 were completely destroyed. Today, about 460 parishes have been opened, and building projects are underway across the country.
offices of the autocephalous synod and numerous departments and ministries of the Church. Then, beneath the main cathedral are a library and bookstore, which offer many of the books that are continually being translated and produced by the Church. Most impressive, though, is a conference and cultural auditorium, quite possibly the nicest and most modern in all of Albania, which can hold up to 850 people and where both teaching and performing arts will be encouraged, demonstrating that Orthodoxy reaches out not only to the spiritual side of humanity, but to the physical, intellectual, and highest artistic elements of the human experience. It is this multifaceted aspect of the Resurrection Cathedral and complex which reflects Archbishop Anastasios’ vision as it witnesses to and draws the faithful to deeper expressions of their faith.

Highlight on the Past 20 Years
Over the past 20 years, since the reestablishment of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania and the election of Archbishop Anastasios, Orthodox Christianity and the situation of the Church in Albania have seen a radical transformation. In 1990 all churches, councils, and institutions were closed. Only 22 clergy remained from the 335 in pre-Communist times, all of them...
above the average life expectancy at that time in Albania. There were no seminaries or functioning parishes, offices, staff, programs, youth groups, available theological literature, or other church ministries in operation. All that remained were a handful of clergy, just a few of the churches that had once been (and most in need of serious repair), and the many faithful who had not given up their hope in God and were seeking to be fed and taught spiritually after so many years of religious persecution and lack of spiritual nourishment. This situation was compounded by an economic crisis; Albania was the poorest country in all of Europe when it transitioned from a Communist to a Democratic government.

In 20 years, there has been miraculous development! The following are some of the highlights of this blessed transformation:

- About 460 parishes have been opened and established
- A Holy Synod was reestablished and now consists of Archbishop Anastasios, 3 metropolitan, 2 bishops, and a clergyman
- 146 Albanian clergy have been trained, ordained, and are serving parishes
- A seminary, 2 ecclesiastical high schools, a university, technical school, 3 elementary/middle schools, and 17 nurseries have opened
- More than 50 youth centers have been established, with annual youth programs that include summer and winter camps, conferences, athletic competitions, and cultural festivals
- The Church has its own printing press and has produced dozens of theological and spiritual books along with monthly adult, youth, and children’s magazines
- A medical center offering contemporary health services in 23 different specialties functions in Tirana, along with an eye clinic, 4 primary health clinics throughout the country, and a mobile dental clinic
- A new generation of artists has been trained to revive the rich tradition of iconography
- A church radio station broadcasts live and recorded programs from Tirana
- The Church provides extensive humanitarian, development, ecological, and agricultural programs
- The Church has initiated more than 450 building projects, of which the new cathedral is just one
- 150 new churches have been constructed, and 220 renovated or repaired
- Over 70 buildings for preschools, schools, youth centers, health centers, and more have been built or purchased

How OCMC Has Participated Over the Past 20 Years
It is important to note that over these past 20 years, OCMC has been intimately involved in the rebirth and growth of the Church in Albania. From the initial reopening in 1991 through today, a host of OCMC missionaries and mission teams have served in Albania including priests, theologians, teachers, architects, medical personnel, businessmen, accountants, engineers, college students, and lawyers. These missionaries have been involved in the opening and operation of the seminary; the training of today’s Albanian clergy and hierarchs; the creation of the humanitarian department of the Church; the opening of the first nursery and health clinics; the formation of the initial catechism and evangelism teams that witnessed the faith and led many people to baptism from the cities to the smallest of villages; the establishment of university, youth, children groups, and summer camp programs throughout the country; the opening of an orphanage; developing educational institutions; shaping

ABOVE: The Eucharist being celebrated in the old cathedral in Tirana, Albania, which was moved from the city center to an inconspicuous alley by the Communist regime. The new Orthodox cathedral has reclaimed its place in the heart of the city.
modern financial accountability systems; and even the formation of constitutional amendments with the government regarding religious freedom and laws in Albania.

The Challenge Remaining
With all this tremendous growth and vibrancy, along with the numerous ministries that have been established, one might wonder, “Is there still any need or reason to participate in the development and outreach of the Church in Albania?” In fact, a significant challenge still remains, and with the foundation that has now been laid, there are many opportunities for missions that are just beginning. To highlight these opportunities, I can share a moment from my recent trip to Albania. I had journeyed there to participate in the opening of the new Cathedral, described above, and the celebration of Archbishop Anastasios’ 20 years as primate of Albania.

On the evening of my arrival, I sat with our missionary of 14 years, Nathan Hoppe, in the city’s central park. At one point, we looked out at a myriad of people as they strolled through the park or sat on the grass and benches, talking or enjoying themselves in the outdoor restaurants that have sprung up, knowing that the majority of these people are not connected to any church or faith.

In just a few short years, the lives of those living in the capital city have been thrust from an isolated xenophobia to working within an international climate and global economy. But an understanding and connection to the cause and center of life is still absent from most people’s lives, people who must strive to find their way and fill a never-ending void without knowing Christ – the true basis of life, of peace, harmony, and love. Some estimates are that 17% to 25% of Albanians identify themselves as Orthodox, and only 30% of all Albanians identify themselves as Christian. Thus, there is still 70% of the population that does not yet know the love of Jesus Christ. In a capital of nearly 1 million people with just 4 Orthodox churches and a handful of other Christian churches, how many of the city’s population are actually being ministered to? In a country of over 3 million people and with less than 1 million affiliated with Christianity, how many have yet to be reached?

As Nathan and I looked out over the crowds and reflected on the 1 million people estimated to be living in and around Tirana, we agonized over this spiritual void. But in that void is equally the challenge and opportunity for the next steps in Albania, as we build upon the foundations that have been laid. The questions and tasks that we must now apply ourselves to are no longer how to develop the initial infrastructure of the Church, but rather, how are we now to partner with the Church in Albania to engage those who do not know Christ? How will their ears be opened that they might listen to the Gospel? How will other cities and the many rural villages be reached that have not yet embraced Christianity? These will be among the primary challenges ahead for the Church in Albania, challenges which the new Resurrection Cathedral, together with the firm foundation that has been built over these past 2 decades by Archbishop Anastasios, will be addressing.

The Resurrection Cathedral stands again in the central square of Albania and day-by-day it will give a silent majestic witness that God in all His glory has come to humankind, and that through Jesus Christ, all people may be saved. Its impact and the hope for the future in Albania that it brings was expressed by Shpresa the day following the opening services.

Shpresa sat in her son’s flat reflecting on the day and the many emotions she felt. She remembered her feelings when the original church was leveled to make way for Hotel Tirana and then three years later the fear and helplessness when the government closed that church and made her Faith illegal. But now, she beamed with joy that the hope she carried all these years was symbolically validated with the building of the new cathedral. “Even though they tried to destroy it,” she said, “it has come back even stronger and more beautiful than before. You see, God never left us, He loves us and He is in charge!”

RIGHT: For the people who bravely held on to their faith during Communism, and for the many more who are being welcomed into the Body of Christ, the new Resurrection Cathedral in Tirana, Albania, stands as a symbol of light, hope, and salvation to all who hunger and thirst for Christ.
These words come from one of the 36 seminarians from Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, St. Vladimir’s Seminary, St. Tikhon’s Seminary, St. Herman’s Seminary, and Hellenic College who have participated in a special summer class and mission practicum offered by the OCMC and the Missions Institute of Orthodox Christianity through Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology.

As a former 12-year OCMC Missionary and the Director of the Missions Institute, I have been teaching this summer class for the past three years. The class combines a three credit academic seminary course entitled “The Missiology of Archbishop Anastasios of Albania”, where students read the missiological writings of the greatest contemporary Orthodox missionary, with a Class, a Missions Trip, and a Pilgrimage: Impacting Seminarian Education with the Spirit of Missions by Fr. Luke Veronis

“M y experience in Albania has profoundly impacted my sense of priority, of mission, of church,” stated 2010 St. Vladimir’s seminarian Jason Ketz. “What I learned cannot be taught in a classroom, and perhaps it cannot be taught except when a person is removed from all of their familiar surroundings… I am forever thankful for this experience, as an essential, formative complement to my academic and pastoral studies. And I now have a better understanding of a responsibility accepted on my behalf at baptism - the proclamation of the good news of Christ. I went to Albania wondering ‘how?’ but returned knowing ‘why!’”

“This trip confirmed for me that if called to this life, my family and I could embrace it.”

with a mission trip in which they visit and participate in the missionary ministry occurring in Albania. Students spend ten days with Archbishop Anastasios and his co-workers, including OCMC missionaries and Albanian leaders, while interacting with the people from the Church of Albania. Students describe the experience as part academic class, part mission experience, and part holy pilgrimage.

“This class was definitely one of the greatest highlights of my seminary education thus far,” stated Holy Cross senior Jason Falcone. “And my future ministry in the Church will be greatly impacted by it. As I graduate next year and go on to serve the Church in whatever capacity the Lord wills, I will strive to carry with me the apostolic fire of evangelism which I experienced in Albania.”

“This trip has greatly enriched and broadened my seminary education,” affirmed Matthew Brown of St. Tikhon’s Seminary. “It gave me an experience that went beyond the usual boundaries of the classroom. I now have a clearer vision of what Orthodox missions looks like and what is possible with God’s help, and I hope to carry this knowledge of missions with me in my priestly ministry.”

The class and practicum reflects a unique experience for Orthodox seminarians in the United States. First of all, its pan-Orthodox spirit unites students from four different seminaries in America with seminarians from Albania. Last year, two students from St. Tikhon’s University in Moscow even joined the team. Second, the class represents a cooperative effort between the Missions Institute of Orthodox Christianity at Holy Cross School of Theology with the mission team program of the OCMC.

The Missions Institute is a three-year-old entity which has a specific mandate to create and offer inspiring and educational programs specifically for theological students studying at Orthodox seminaries in the United States. Through its programs and courses, the Missions Institute is working toward a goal of having no student graduate from our Orthodox seminaries without having some knowledge and/or encounter of a missions-minded ministry. Lastly, the class strives to challenge students to seriously consider dedicating part or all of their lives to cross-cultural missionary ministry.

“For me,” expressed 2011 Holy Cross participant Rob Spaliatsos, “I don’t know if it would have been possible to embrace the idea of becoming a long-term missionary without first taking this step to visit Albania. This trip confirmed for me that if called to this life, my family and I could embrace it.”

Through the course readings, the students come to understand the imperative nature and need of cross-cultural missions. By witnessing the most vibrant mission field in the contemporary Orthodox Church and talking with Archbishop Anastasios and his co-workers, the students come away with a new understanding of how missions is accomplished. Participating in outreach projects with University of Tirana students, with seminarians at the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy, with teens in the youth groups of the Tirana and Berat Dioceses, and with orphans at the Children’s Home of Hope, the students take part in missions in an
unforgettably refreshing and even life-changing way. And then by attending an all-night vigil at St. John Vladimir Monastery, and walking a 12 mile pilgrimage between two other monasteries, an added spiritual dimension fills out the program.

“This class and trip was by far the most incredible experience of my life,” exclaimed Holy Cross student Anthony Ruggerio. Oscar Sergei Olsen, the first student from St. Herman’s Seminary to participate, agreed. “For me, this class was life-changing. It broadened my perspective of missions and helped me come to a new understanding of how to witness for my faith.”

A highlight of the class and trip includes time with Archbishop Anastasios, including in-depth discussions on missions. Another memorable event incorporates a 12 mile pilgrimage with Metropolitan John of Korca, a former Holy Cross student. The group spends one night with the Metropolitan in the ancient Monastery of St. John the Forerunner in the village of Voskopoja, sitting around a campfire discussing theology and missions. The following day we hike 12 miles to the Monastery of Sts. Peter and Paul in Vithkuq. Throughout the six hour hike, Metropolitan John shares stories about life under communism, faith and persecution, life in America as an immigrant, his time as a seminarian at Holy Cross, and his return and service in Albania over the past 20 years. In between all of these stories, the Metropolitan challenges the students to dedicate their lives in radical ways to Christ. This past year, the pilgrimage took an unexpected turn when the team hiked the final four hours in pouring rain. A thought-provoking discussion held the previous evening on the theme of “the spiritual danger of complaining”, seemed most appropriate throughout this rain-soaked journey!

“I pondered Metropolitan John’s teachings concerning life as a perpetual quest,” reflected Holy Cross seminarian Jordan Zanetos. “I am thankful for the time we spent on our quest and for the wisdom that was shared on our journey.”

“Unfortunately, local churches are sometimes focused exclusively on their communities without thinking about the Great Commission,” observed Sandro Margheritino, a third year student at St. Vladimir’s Seminary. “For that reason, teaching seminarians about missions and reviving the lost apostolic zeal of proclaiming the Gospel is an extremely important part of our Christian education. By studying the missiology of Archbishop Anastasios, we learned much about missions, the Gospel, inter-cultural relationships and how globalization has affected religions. The most important thing we learned from this class, however, is what it really means to be a Christian: loving our neighbor regardless of his/her race, culture and religion. We bring witness to our Christian faith by providing an example with our own life, a life of love for all people.”

Konstantinos Dimou of Holy Cross agreed, “I have learned never to limit my own understanding of the Church to a small, parochial, ethnic club, but to see the church as a diverse entity that is the Body of Christ.”

Each year, a priest or professor has also joined the team. In 2010, Fr. Paisius Altschul of St. Mary of Egypt Orthodox Church in Kansas City came. In 2011, Fr. Ephraim Peters of Worcester, MA traveled with the team. And in 2012, for the first time, two professors from Holy Cross – the former dean, Fr. Emmanuel Clapsis, and Dr. Bruce Beck, the director of the Pappas Patristics Institute, traveled with the group.

“The idea to recruit faculty to participate on this trip was so wise. I know this trip benefited me in so many ways," observed Dr. Beck, "And will impact the way I teach my students in each of my classes. My own hope is to help promote a mission consciousness as an essential foundation of the Church itself.”

A class, a missions trip, and a pilgrimage. A unique way to enhance our seminarians’ education!

BELOW: His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios with OCMC Board Member Fr. Luke Veronis and the 2012 OCMC/Missions Institute team to Albania. On their recent visit, students were enriched by discussions on theology and missions with Bishop Asti.
Peering out of the rain-streaked window of an overcrowded minivan from Tirana to Elbasan, rocks jut up from a lush sea of green that covers the mountains running through the heart of Albania. Low clouds hide the surrounding peaks, hanging patiently still and quietly stern, like old memories that won’t fade.

As quaint and simple a metaphor as this landscape would be for a place like Albania, the full picture of this land - known as Illyria in Greco-Roman historiography - is much more nuanced and complex. It is all at once incomprehensibly ancient while also refreshingly young, as much a product of outside influence as it is self-defined, having known great oppression yet brimming with vast potential.

It is amidst this extreme dichotomy that the saga of missions in Albania, much like the road that runs from Tirana to Elbasan, winds and bends. It began nearly 2,000 years ago with the Apostle Paul and continues to this day through the Orthodox Church. After two millennia, these endeavors remain of vital importance because, if Albania is anything, it is a crossroads - a place where past and present, old and young, east and west, faith and secularism meet, staring unflinchingly across from one another to present the nation’s population of more than three million people with an opportunity to declare who they are and to choose who they want to be.

Missions in Albania, like anywhere else, is at its core a presentation of the choice of a life in Christ. How is this choice articulated in a place like Albania? Is it possible to demonstrate the Faith’s relevance in a post-Ottoman, post-Communist, modern European context, where the motivation to accept a life in Christ is not necessarily in response to persecution, oppression, or extreme poverty?

The answer may lie with the Apostle Paul himself, who presented the Faith, not just as a response to something else, but as a way of life in and of itself – a sanctification of all things: the harsh, the beautiful, the profound, and the mundane. Though the light of Christianity shines especially brightly in contrast with the darkness of suffering and pain, it also gleams as the purpose and motivation behind that which is good and pure.

One of the greatest paradoxes in Albania at this moment in time may be that it is both unique and common. It possesses a wisdom and openness that can only be accrued by its distinct history, while sharing the same desires often felt by those in the developing or developed world. Indeed, the Faith has a unique opportunity to declare its relevance in Albania – a message that can, in turn, be shared with its European neighbors.

It is in sowing purpose - providing answers to the question “why?” – that the Faith in Albania can play a vital role. There is perhaps no one more capable of doing this needful work than an Orthodox Christian Albanian.

The idea of empowering indigenous people to spread the Gospel is nearly as old as the missionary imperative itself. Guided by the Holy Spirit and its centuries of Orthodox history, the Church in Albania has continued this vital work since its reemergence from under the veil of Communism in the 1990s; and it is well equipped to do so. It is home to one of the oldest incarnations of the Orthodox Church in the world – an autocephalous Church with its own synod of bishops and growing ranks of clergy, many of whom receive their theological training at an Albanian seminary. Under His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios, several offices of the Church, administered by the Albanian faithful and those missionaries currently operating in Albania, coordinate ministries that serve the youth, the impoverished, the infirmed, etc. The potential for raising up even more Albanians to take the Faith to their fellow countrymen is immense.

The ministries of the Church are, increasingly, working collectively to serve...
as a means for individuals in Albania to come to, and grow in, a relationship with Christ. Many of these efforts are focused on the youth, but they minister to them in a very strategic way. For example, children are exposed to the Faith and catechized through kids’ clubs from ages 6 to 13. They can then participate in an adolescent program where the bonds of faith community continue to be forged through fellowship. At university, they can join the college ministry where the seeds of a life in Christ that will carry them into the future are watered. Such a model in education can be seen in the Protagonist School for elementary and middle school-aged children, Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy, and Logos University.

The challenge facing the expansion of the Church in Albania is one of numbers. It would not be an overstatement to call the growth of the Church in the past 20 years—the reconstruction and reopening of over 450 parishes, the establishment of ministries, the increasing body of believers—truly miraculous. Still, Albania is, according to most sources, only 17-25% Orthodox Christian. Many more Albanians identify themselves as Muslim, while the majority of them claim no religious identity whatsoever. This reality presents itself and in the stories of its glorious history. Proof of this exists in the Church and modern, spiritual and secular, Muslim Albania who are the product of a rich culture and presented by modernity.

In the near term, OCMC will continue to sustain and support the four long-term missionaries currently serving in Albania, while training and deploying several additional long-term missionaries to further meet these immediate needs. Six people have already been approved as missionary candidates for Albania and are currently raising the support they need to begin their service.

In 2013 through a partnership with the Center for Family Care of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, OCMC hopes to send a short-term mission team comprised of Orthodox Christian families from North America to join with Albanian families for presentations and Bible studies that teach about family life in the Church. OCMC is also working to send teams that will offer a camp program at the Children’s Home of Hope in Shen Vlash. The Home of Hope provides housing and education to many children in need of a loving home. These teams will also assist in the daily activities and ministries of the Children’s Home of Hope and provide a visible witness of the Holy Orthodox Faith to the children.

Additionally, teams of seminary students from North America, organized in conjunction with the Missions Institute of Orthodox Christianity, will continue to provide an evangelistic witness while immersed in the life of the Church in Albania as part of a missions class and practicum on Orthodox missiology.

To be in Albania is to be surrounded by immense potential. It is a palpable energy that is esuded from its people—a people that are the product of a rich culture and history. Proof of this exists in the Church itself and in the stories of its glorious resurrection. Going forward, Albanians will hopefully continue to have the opportunity to forge their own identity. Many faces have presented themselves—traditional and modern, spiritual and secular, Muslim and Christian. What Albania can be is as complex and nuanced as what it already is.

As Albania’s future unfolds, the light of Christ that shines in and through His Church will continue to beckon people to truth, love, and salvation. In partnering with the Albanians in the coming years, we have the opportunity to help take this light to all corners of this amazing and beautiful country and to help see even more people through the Church’s open doors and into the Body of Christ.
During an evening talk with team members, Fr. Gerasimos offered peace, love, and prayers to all of his Orthodox brothers and sisters in North America. Like many other short-term mission teams, the July/August 2012 Teaching Team to Tanzania was hosted by a SAMP priest, Fr. Gerasimos Mwebesa. The encounter afforded team members the opportunity to experience the daily life of a SAMP priest with all of its struggles and joys.

Fr. Gerasimos serves the burgeoning number of faithful at All Saints Orthodox Church in Kasikizi, a village in northwest Tanzania near the city of Bukoba. Fr. Gerasimos and his wife, Padriha Erica, live on a small banana farm just a few kilometers from the All Saints parish. When not ministering to the faithful of his community as well as neighbors of the surrounding village, he oversees the Archdiocesan Catechetical School adjacent to the parish.

Born in 1949, Fr. Gerasimos grew up near Kasikizi. He met Sosthenes Kiyonga, a man from Uganda who was sharing the Orthodox faith throughout the Kagera region of northwest Tanzania. Drawn to the spiritual depth of Orthodoxy, he was chrismated into the Orthodox Church in 1974. By the early 1980s, he felt called to be an Orthodox priest and moved to Nairobi, Kenya, to study Orthodox theology at the newly-opened Patriarchal Seminary of Archbishop Makarios III, since there was no seminary in Tanzania at that time.

After being ordained in 1986, Fr. Gerasimos returned to Kasikizi to serve the small but growing group of faithful at St. Nicholas Orthodox Church, a small church that sat only about 100 yards from the current All Saints parish, which was completed in 2004 by OCMC in conjunction with All Saints parish in Canonsburg, PA. Much of his early ministry was spent away from his family, sharing the faith in the villages throughout the Kagera region, traveling by foot or by bike through these areas. Since then, ever-growing numbers of clergy have graduated from the Catechetical School (also built by OCMC) in Kasikizi and will soon be joined by 12 seminarians preparing to graduate. By providing financial assistance to indigenous clergy like Fr. Gerasimos and 31 other priests serving in the Archdiocese of Mwanza, OCMC’s Support a Mission Priest (SAMP) program helps to strengthen the infrastructure of Orthodox churches so that such growth can become possible.

Witnessing the faith grow throughout the Kagera region continues to renew and energize Fr. Gerasimos. He observes, “The Orthodox faithful share Christ’s love, through Orthodoxy, with their family and friends, and they begin to ask about the faith.” When Orthodox faithful live with the Holy Spirit filling their hearts, with Christ’s love beaming from their every action, he notices that others are naturally attracted.

God has blessed Fr. Gerasimos’ ministry in a unique way. Serving the Catechetical School in Kasikizi, in addition to parishes, has allowed him to host visitors from all over the world, such as this year’s mission team members. In turn, these circumstances have introduced the faithful of All Saints parish to hundreds of their Orthodox brothers and sisters, showing them the beautiful unity of the Body of Christ.
ALBANIA

This June marked the 20th anniversary of His Beatitude Anastasios’ election as Archbishop of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania. This momentous event coincided with the opening of the newly-constructed Resurrection Cathedral in the heart of Albania’s capital city of Tirana. OCMC missionaries serving in Albania were part of the celebrations that gave glory to God for a church that they have had a major hand in supporting.

Over the summer, OCMC Missionaries Nathan and Gabriela Hoppe returned to the United States to share the wonderful news of their ministry work with their supporters. One of the most vibrant examples of this includes the many Kids’ Clubs they have helped establish in and around Tirana. These clubs welcome children from many different backgrounds to build the bonds of community, teach good morals, and encourage appropriate conduct. The Hoppes have also been involved in various ecumenical movements, including a youth march and rally that featured speeches from His Beatitude and many other Christian Albanian leaders that highlighted the importance of family values. Nathan also continues to train future Albanian youth leaders and teachers at the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy by empowering them to share the Orthodox faith with children who attend catechism classes in local communities near the Academy. In August, Anastasia coordinated three day camps as training sessions for the students of the Academy in Durre, Shen Vlash, and Rushkull villages. She also welcomed an OCMC short-term mission team that ministered at the Children’s Home of Hope, where orphans and children from broken homes come to live and study until high school. Both the Theological Academy and the Home of Hope are located on the grounds of the new Shen Vlash Monastery located near Durre.

OCMC missionary Georgia Bendo continued her efforts this year in her ministries at Protagonists School where she supported the English department and lead 25 middle school students in a group called “Spiritual Journey” to learn about the faith. They used a catechism book written by His Beatitude and a Bible felt-board set, accompanied by games, songs, crafts and field trips. In the spring she began to teach English at Logos University in Tirana, an institution founded and run by the Orthodox Church to aide in the professional development of Albania’s young men and women.

MOLDOVA

Although Christina Semon has been serving as an OCMC Missionary for three and a half years, she has only recently completed her first year serving in the Republic of Moldova. In that time, however, she has helped supplement the ministries of the Church there to reach out to the youth in some remarkable new ways.

Recently, she helped organize and lead an OCMC short-term mission team (Moldova’s first) that conducted a youth camp with the assistance of Fr. Sergiu Aga, a Moldovan priest from Orhei. Each day during the camp, Fr. Sergiu would present a talk, and the team would then follow with lessons related to the topic that was presented. Christina and her Moldovan partners worked hard to bring the youth together for this first-ever retreat.

Earlier in the year, Christina was also instrumental in organizing a retreat for priests’ wives in Moldova. Fr. Sergiu’s wife, Preoteasa Mariana, played a pivotal role with Christina in pulling this event together. The sessions that were held during the retreat included sharing life experiences as priests’ wives, employed women, mothers, and project leaders within the parish community. His Eminence Metropolitan Petru also joined them for part of the program and provided pastoral support and encouragement to them.

MONGOLIA

In late summer, OCMC missionaries Kurt Bringerud and Monk Job arrived in Mongolia. As they begin the language learning and enculturation process, Kurt and Monk Job will also be working with Fr. Aleksei Trubach to identify ways to welcome more Mongolians into the Orthodox Church.

ROMANIA

The St. Dimitrie Program directed by OCMC Missionary Floyd Frantz is now being implemented on three continents. The program empowers local clergy and...
Floyd will continue supporting these efforts by providing flyers and pamphlets on alcoholism and some articles written for the priests in Romania that can be translated into Swahili.

In Cluj, Ancuta Frantz continues her work with the Protection of the Theotokos Family Center (PTFC) for unwed mothers and their children - mothers like Claudia. Claudia found herself on the streets at a young age. She bounced from institution to institution as a child. When she was older she became pregnant, but the father abandoned her four months into the pregnancy.

In spite of having contracted tuberculosis, Claudia gave birth to a son named Sebastian. Claudia was having a hard time trusting anyone when she came to the PTFC. Thanks to the love and care she received, Claudia was able to find a home and childcare. She finished her studies and got a job. She now gives glory and thanks to God as she rediscovers her trust in others.

**TANZANIA**

The many long months of hard work have finally paid off for OCMC missionaries Maria Roeber and Felice Stewart with the opening of the Orthodox Resurrection Health Centre in Bukoba.

The clinic is providing much needed healthcare to people in and around Bukoba. They are currently working on adding more staff and look forward to specialists from abroad working in the clinic as well.

Felice and Maria also assisted with several OCMC short-term mission teams that visited the region. Earlier in the summer, Felice joined an OCMC medical mission team as it offered clinics to provide healthcare in the Gulu region of Uganda; Maria helped organize and coordinate a teaching team that shared the faith with dozens of young people who gathered for a retreat at the Kasikizi Catechetical School in Tanzania.

Working with OCMC Missionary to Romania Floyd Frantz, who visited Tanzania this summer, Felice helped further develop a burgeoning substance abuse program in Tanzania as well.

James Hargrave’s duties in assisting His Eminence Metropolitan Jeronimos continued, but the biggest news for James is that in May, he married the love of his life Daphne Cunningham. Their wedding in Canada was attended by many friends, family, and colleagues. Following their wedding, James and Daphne visited OCMC in St. Augustine, FL, so that Daphne could begin training for long-term missionary service alongside her husband.

As the Tanzania team prepared to welcome Daphne, they said goodbye to Michael Pagedas. Michael’s term of service ended this summer, but not before he was able to bear a witness to the Orthodox faith by participating in several baptisms and helping the Metropolis of Mwanza to begin developing a comprehensive health education program.

**BELOW:** Floyd Frantz directs the St. Dimitrie Program, which empowers clergy and church leaders to counsel those in their communities struggling with addictions. In June, he visited Tanzania, where he joined other OCMC long-term missionaries for training.
Serving as a Missionary Teacher in Albania

by Anastasia Pamela Barksdale, M.Div.

Do you often wonder what missionaries do in a country like Albania where the Church has existed since the first century? People often ask: Why does Albania need assistance from the Orthodox Church abroad? It is true, 20 years after the restoration of religious freedom in Albania the Orthodox Church and the entire country have been raised up, renewed and restored, not to their previous state before communism, but to a new life with hope in the future. And yet, they are faced with the same challenges every new community experiences: the need for churches, teachers, catechists and clergy; youth and social ministries and the development of authentic Christian community.

Albania has experienced rapid growth and restoration because of a number of factors: the presence of the Grace of the Holy Spirit, the dynamic vision and leadership of Archbishop Anastasios and also because Albania has been grateful for the help given by Orthodox Christians and others in America, Greece, Finland, England and other nations. OCMC missionaries have been assisting His Beatitude and the Church in Albania for the past 20 years and with His blessing have helped to lay the foundations for the Children’s Home of Hope, the summer camps, the Kids’ Club, a Soup Kitchen and the academic programs at the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy at the new Shen Vlash Monastery in Durres.

This is now the 5th year that I have been working in the “vineyard of the Lord” here in Albania. As a graduate of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology with a major in Christian Education, I found very quickly that I had much to offer in a variety of areas: teacher training, Bible studies, youth ministries and even found a niche for my publishing background working in His Beatitude’s office. It has been an amazing and challenging experience. Below I would like to share with you two excerpts from my work and life here. First, a description of our summer “Boot Camp” for student teachers; and second, an introduction to two of this year’s graduates who are the future leaders of the Church, and in my estimation uncommon modern day heroes.

Boot Camp for Teachers and Catechists

At the beginning of every Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy school year I have the distinct privilege of conducting an orientation and study skills seminar for the new students. As I look at their bright eager faces, I always think “…many are called, but few are chosen.” They are embarking on an incredible spiritual journey, leaving their homes and families to study theology in a monastic communal setting; called by an unseen God to dedicate their selves to become servants of His love. It is the rare person today that answers that call whether it is in Albania or in America. And yet, there they sit; and in a few weeks when the newness of the experience wears off, these bright faced young adults will be struggling to balance academic studies, a full liturgical life and ascetic disciplines with various other duties and family responsibilities. My challenge is to try to prepare them as teachers in just three short semesters and a week of what I have begun to call “boot camp.”

The value of teaching and working with children is always underestimated and often unappreciated. Teaching is a very challenging vocation, but when you add faith development, Christian formation and catechesis into the mix, it becomes a complicated art form. My classes are organized as Theoria, Praxis and Working with Adolescents. Each student participates in a fieldwork teaching assignment during the year and then we return to those communities in the summer to offer a Christian day camp. My students’ summers consist of working with children and youth in boys and girls camps and other rural day camps.

Albania is unique in some aspects. When we organize a day camp in a village, all the children want to attend whether they are Orthodox, Catholic, or Muslim. They open heartedly embrace our teachings about God’s love, learning Scripture verses, hymns and camp songs and lessons. In the plurality of our American culture we have learned to interact with one another, careful to respect and not offend others with our beliefs and so are often publicly silent about matters of faith. Not so in Albania. We share who we are and what we believe, but without forcing the acceptance of those beliefs on others. It is refreshing to feel like I can speak about God when I share my faith.

Are there no problems in Albania? Unfortunately, there is still prejudice and mistrust. At one of our catechism sites where the children are very enthusiastic, our students may have to dodge a raw egg thrown by an unsympathetic villager. Or last year one student reprimanded an older boy, who was from Northern Albania where vendettas are still practiced. The boy gathered 15 friends and came back to stone the student when he tried to leave the day camp. My students’ summers consist of working with children and youth in boys and girls camps and other rural day camps.

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site. He had to be scurried away in a taxicab.

The real teaching challenge for me is helping my students to move beyond the “read, repeat and recite” educational models of communism and instead integrate interactive learning skills and strategies into the curriculum. There is still a very strong resistance in Albania to children learning about God through play, arts and crafts, dramatics and games. This why I have implemented a “boot camp” or teacher training activity in the summers. This past August, 17 students and I gathered in Shen Vlash for a week to offer four day camps simultaneously in a number of different types of communities (rural, urban, catechetical and evangelical).

Our theme was, “The Fruit of the Holy Spirit Helps Us to Love God and Our Neighbor.” We focused on learning to make and use visual aids; asking questions and facilitating discussions and using interactive learning techniques with songs, games, short skits and ice breakers.

It was an intense week: four hours of camp, lunch and then regrouping in the afternoons for a recap, problem solving and evaluation session, and preparation of materials and lessons for the next day. I rotated among the sites, observing the lessons, talking with the children, trying to get a sense of issues and problems.

At the end of the week, there was deep sense of satisfaction that the children had enjoyed the camp, and had learned a lot about God, the Holy Spirit, listening for the “good thought” from our conscience, virtues as good behavior, and the prayer, Oh Heavenly King Comforter…” We used the book From I-ville to You-ville by Mercine Vigopoulos to breathe life into the virtues and all the children enjoyed the stories.

These camps also serve to announce the start up at the end of summer of our weekly catechism program. The next step is to build up youth groups in these communities, but that is another set of skills. Please keep us in your prayers.

Uncommon Heroes

To aspire to be a teacher is a noble goal, to aspire to be teacher or catechist in Albania and share God’s love with children and young people is to truly take up the cross and follow Christ, offering yourself for the love of Christ and one’s neighbor. The students who answer this call and come to the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy in Durres, Albania are uncommon and unknown heroes of our faith.

Every Christian life is a journey, a story of ever deepening understanding of faith, of hope and of God’s love for humanity. I would like to share with you the stories of two of my uncommon heroes who will graduate this Spring: Sofia Prifti and Alban Petro (Class of 2013).

Sofia Prifti is 20 years old and her family, originally from Fier, was Orthodox and she was baptized when she was 3 years old. Her mother died when she was 12 years old. Mother Theressa’s Sisters of Charity referred Sofia and her two brothers to OCMC Missionary Fr. Luke Veronis for placement and they were referred to the Home of Hope, Sofia Prifti wanted to study theology at the neighboring Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy. She was one of OCMC Missionary Anastasia Pamela Barksdale’s bright and committed students at the academy who is catechizing children as part of her training to prepare for future service to the Church.

LEFT: Each year, OCMC Missionary to Albania Anastasia Pamela Barksdale prepares her students to become teachers by asking them to participate in a field work teaching assignment during the year and then to return to those communities in the summer to offer a Christian day camp.

AFTER: Having grown up at the Children’s Home of Hope, Sofia Prifti wanted to study theology at the neighboring Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy. She is one of OCMC Missionary Anastasia Pamela Barksdale’s bright and committed students at the academy who is catechizing children as part of her training to prepare for future service to the Church.

ABOVE: Alban Petro is one of the future teachers that OCMC Missionary Anastasia Pamela Barksdale has been working with through the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy. Upon completion of his theological education Alban would like to be a catechist and work with students and eventually serve as a priest in his village.

ABOVE: OCMC Missionary Anastasia Pamela Barksdale’s student-teachers have the opportunity to share Christianity with and impact the lives of many children. They are raising up future generations of Orthodox believers who will be able to take their faith to all people of Albania.

in the newly opened Children’s Home of Hope. They were among the first children who came to live at the Home of Hope.

Sofia is a hard worker, not afraid of a challenge and seems so serious until her joyful smile and giggle of a laugh breaks through to the surface. When I asked her why she decided to attend the Seminary she was very honest. “It was the only opportunity available to me, but it was an opportunity I wanted.”

The Home of Hope, the Academy and Shen Vlash have been her home for the past eight years. She became engaged this past year to Emiliano Lito (Class of 2010) and they plan to be married after her graduation. Emiliano hopes to become a priest one day and Sofia will be well prepared for the life of a priest’s wife because the Church is her home. She has grown up cradled in the love of Christ and looks forward to a life of faithful service.

Alban Petro is 21 years old, from a small village, Këmishtaj, near Lushnjë. His family is Orthodox, but he wasn’t baptized until the age of 16 at the Church summer camp. He felt called to study theology by the witness of the teachers and theologians he met at Camp. They helped him to find Christ and a Christian life and he wanted to be part of the work they were doing. He is an eager student, with a delightful sense of humor and winning smile. This past summer Alban volunteered to work with the OCMC Short-term team that came to the Home of Hope. He took the program very seriously and I was able to see how easily he communicated with the children, using his humor to gain their trust. The American team appreciated his translation efforts and all around helpful spirit.

When I asked Alban about the future, he said he wanted to be a catechist and work with students; and would love to be a priest in his village. “My parents are Orthodox, but don’t know anything about the Church. I would like to be able to teach them all that I have learned.” Alban feels like four years has been too short and would like to study more, but for now he hopes to be “a good and faithful servant.”
For me, the hardest thing about the Moldova mission trip was not the culture shock or lack of sleep, but that it was a “first”. I’d just graduated high school, and this was my first mission and my first real life experience. We were also the first OCMC team in Moldova, running the first Orthodox Youth Camp in the country. We were building from the ground up.

Throughout the process, we were constantly improvising. Our schedule changed multiple times a day, and as counselors, we had to constantly be on alert, because there was always a new unforeseen task that somebody had to take care of. As a former student, I was used to long hours of careful preparation that would lead to a guaranteed “A”. But what our camp really needed was flexibility, people willing to do whatever needed to be done for the kids.

One of the biggest assignments we were given as a team was to teach lessons on Christian virtues to supplement an hour-long lecture that Fr. Sergiu Aga, the Moldovan priest of St. Basil Orthodox Church in Orhei who helped organize the camp, would give. We were each assigned a partner and given an hour time limit.

My partner and I were assigned to talk about the virtues of faith and courage. I immediately wanted to jump on the lesson plan prior to our team’s departure to Moldova, but my partner was overseas, and it was difficult for us to communicate.

I started treating the lesson plan like it was another big school assignment. My partner, an experienced teacher, used a more intuitive approach and understood the need for flexibility. I was constantly writing new-and-improved lesson plans. In my mind, nothing I brainstormed seemed good enough.

So when we arrived in Moldova, I still felt completely unprepared. We had two days before our lesson, but we also had a brand-new, unpredictable camp that demanded our attention.

The night before our lesson, we finally had a rough outline of what we wanted to do, but we were still unsure of how it would go. I craved certainty that our lesson would be “A” worthy. “You know what?” I finally said, “I’m going to bed. At this point, we’re not going anywhere. It’ll be fine.” This is what the other team members had been telling me for the past hour while I’d continued to pace and mutter that we...
weren’t ready. I wanted to believe these words, but I honestly couldn’t bring myself to let go.

The next morning, I did not say anything, but I carried my notebook around anyway, ready to plan at a moment’s notice. Fr. Sergiu gave his talk first thing after breakfast, and we immediately followed with our lessons. I listened to the translator as Fr. Sergiu talked about how important it is in life to have faith, because as humans, we are incapable of doing anything without it.

This was something I’d been hearing throughout years of Sunday school, but for the first time, I realized how correct it was. I was absolutely incapable of giving this lesson by myself. I got a good look at my partner’s face. She was calm and ready, but exhausted. I realized that I’d been ignoring the fact that my partner cared about the presentation just as much as I did. Looking around the room, I also saw the kids for whom we were running the camp. Most of them were listening attentively, drinking in Fr. Sergiu’s words, unlike any Sunday school class I had ever seen. I was supposed to be teaching them, but I’d barely given them a second thought. Until that moment, I’d been entirely focused on myself.

I paused, sat back, and shut the notebook in which I’d been frantically scribbling. There was only one thing to do.

In the middle of the lecture, I began to pray—not that the presentation would go well, but that I could let it go, that I be given the strength to allow His will to be done, and not mine. I prayed for my partner and for the kids. I tried to stop caring about what these kids would think of me and start caring about how to help them.

Suddenly, it was time for the presentation.

I looked at my partner, whispered for her to introduce it, and quickly sat down. This was my defining moment. We’d had a list of eight things we wanted to go over, including witnesses, discussions, and activities. We got through three. I was rarely in charge.

We ended with an activity where we paired campers up and had them discuss ways to demonstrate faith and courage in their everyday lives. From the beginning, I’d thought this was a stupid idea that we wouldn’t have time to do. But it turned out that this was the best way to

end the lesson. We got a good idea of what the campers understood, and it gave us the chance to clarify where they had doubts. My partner ran the activity, and I helped. At least one camper came to better understand faith and courage because of what we taught them.

It seems odd that instead of stepping up and taking responsibility, my biggest moment of the trip was when I had faith enough to sit down and let go. But it was exactly what I needed to do.

It was not a perfect presentation. We had a couple of flaws, which we discussed afterward; the critique didn’t even bother me. I knew that I could have never taught a successful lesson on my own. My prayers had been answered, and we had said what these children needed to hear. It was a lesson in faith for me, too.

That was when the trip ceased to be a high school drama for me, and became a mission. I began to perform my duties as counselor with the kids in mind, instead of myself. I recognized that I was there to help the kids, not to impress them. The mission was never really about me. I just didn’t have the ability to realize that on my own.
Orthodox Mission Teams: Fostering Relationships

by Andrew Lekos & Pres. Renee Ritsi

When sending Orthodox Mission Teams, OCMC asks: How is this trip going to help the long-term ministry of the host church? How will our Mission Teams impact the Church we are seeking to serve?

During Mission Team orientations, team members hear that hearts will be changed and people will be transformed by this mission experience. Often we are met with a look of disbelief by new team members. Twenty-five years of Mission Teams have proven to us, however, that lives are changed in significant ways. Team members, those to whom they minister, and those with whom they share the experience when they return home are all influenced by team service. Like ripples made by a stone skipped across a calm lake, team members’ experiences touch others by crossing continents, languages, cultures, perceptions, and expectations for years to come.

Often when we ask ourselves about the impact that a team has on an individual, we begin with feedback from the team members themselves. As part of our evaluation process, OCMC also asks the hosting church how to improve the short-term Orthodox Mission Team program and seeks insight to help the overall ministry and witness of mission teams. Not only do we learn about servanthood, relationships, and leadership, but also about the strategic and influential role teams play in ministries of the Church abroad.

Team members may not realize that the majority of the work they hope to accomplish is actually completed as soon as they get off the plane! The fact is, their mere presence is often the most pressing need for the churches abroad, beyond any planned project or objective. In many cases, these relationships are garnered in adverse places: culturally different, geographically dispersed, and economically challenged.

Kenya

In the northwest region of Kenya, a nomadic people, the Turkana, have lived for centuries. OCMC has sent multiple short-term teams to the Turkana people in recent years. Their ancient culture remains marginally touched by the rest of the world. Even the British, during their decade-long colonial rule of East Africa, did not impact them very much. Families still live in tight-knit tribes ruled by elders and influenced by traditional medicine men. Homes are made of sticks and grasses, easily taken apart when grazing is exhausted in an area and moved to a new place.

Fr. Vladimir Paul Lowyuduk, a native Turkana mission priest, has hosted over 70 OCMC team members participating in evangelism, teaching, and building projects in this region. Fr. Vladimir reflects on how one team encouraged and taught many new converts to the Orthodox faith: “The team used the words of love from the Gospels, lived as Christian witnesses, and appreciated the local way of life and the local scenery. They interacted freely with the communities and helped us to construct our local church, but most importantly, the team taught our faith and helped to strengthen the efforts in Turkana.”

Fr. Vladimir’s reflection on that team’s witness exemplifies how an attitude of willingness to learn from those we go to serve allows the Gospel message to be heard. Our witness, our use of words, and our appreciation for the way of life of the people allows others to see that we have “put on Christ”, regardless of our cultural differences. Hearts will be changed and lives will be transformed by a willingness to learn from those we have gone to serve. This is often the case in Africa, but it has also proved true in Mongolia, where an OCMC mission team served for the first time this past summer.

Mongolia

Community, family, and relationships are central to Mongolian culture; the changing economy of Mongolia has impacted these traditional...
values. According to Operation World (Biblica Publishing, 2010), large-scale emigration is occurring as many thousands of Mongolians seek employment abroad, departing from the traditional pastoral and agricultural life. Western or urban values conflict with the traditional values of a developing nation.

Fr. Aleksei Trubach, the parish priest of the Holy Trinity parish in Ulaanbaatar, invited OCMC to assist with outreach in bringing the saving message of Christ to Mongolia. In his evaluation of this first mission team to Mongolia, he notes, “The team came with attitudes that showed a willingness to serve in preaching and learning about Mongolia.” This attitude translated into actions that did not need an interpreter to decipher. Team members recall Mongolians saying things like, “You care about who I am; you care about my history and my future; you want to share something you value — your faith, your story.” This spirit of serving others and meeting their needs is paramount to team members leaving with changed hearts.

Albania

Pamela Pamela Barksdale, OCMC long-term missionary to Albania Anastasia Pamela Barksdale (1st row, center), along with OCMC short-term team members, participated in a youth camp at the Children’s Home of Hope. Here, they formed lasting friendships with one another.

ORTHODOX MISSION TEAMS 2013

Alaska • Albania • Kenya • Moldova • Mongolia • Tanzania • Uganda

Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share… — 1 Timothy 6:18

“Share in a Journey of Faith…”

All Orthodox Christians seeking to share in a journey of faith and fulfill the mandate of our Lord Jesus Christ are invited to participate on OCMC Orthodox Mission Teams.

Teaching: Share and teach the Orthodox Faith with youth, adults, catechumens, ministry leaders, and the faithful. Educate and encourage mission communities by teaching the Orthodox Faith. Offer a living witness of Orthodoxy through religious education, seminars, catechism, bible studies and retreats. Those willing to teach the Faith are urged to apply — students, teachers, seminarians, youth leaders, clergy, Sunday school teachers, Bible study leaders.

Alaska: catechism retreats (Napaskiak)

Albania: family ministry (Shen Vlash); Mission Institute (Tirana)

Kenya: evangelism (in northern Kenya); catechism seminars (Loisar)

Moldova: campus ministry (Ulaanbaatar)

Mongolia: catechism seminars (Ulanbator)

Tanzania: catechism seminars (Mwanza)

Uganda: stewardship training (Kampala)

Construction: Help a growing community by providing labor and service on a building project. Teams provide labor while working with members of a local Orthodox community to help construct or repair churches, schools, clinics and other projects. In addition, help build bonds between Orthodox communities. Construction experience is welcomed, but not necessary.

Guatemala: seminary housing (Huehuetenango)

Youth Camp: Participate and help organize a youth ministry program in communities that have requested spiritual and religious education. Serve as an example of God’s love to youth by offering bible studies, sports, arts and crafts, teaching activities, camps and fellowship. Provide a positive witness by engaging youth around the world. Those willing to work with children and teens, with or without youth ministry experience are encouraged to apply — camp counselors, teachers, youth ministry directors, students.

Alaska: youth camp (Kodiak)

Moldova: youth camp (Orhei)

Tanzania: vacation Bible school (Mwanza)

Health Care

Provide a holistic witness of the Gospel by ministering to the physical needs of children and adults while providing basic health care and education. Health care teams play an integral role in the holistic mission of the Church by offering medical care and providing health education in regions where health services are scarce. Health care personnel - doctors, dentists, nurses, pharmacists, counselors, HIV AIDS specialists, therapists - are especially needed.

Uganda: health care and education (Gulu)

Tanzania: health care outreach (Bukoba)

Applying Today: All hard workers willing to share the faith, willing to participate and serve on an Orthodox Mission Team are urged to apply today.

Participation Requirements: A completed Mission Team application with recommendation from an Orthodox Priest; An active member of the Church; Spiritually mature individual with good social skills; motivated to learn and serve; At least 18 years of age and in good physical health.

Other: Participants are expected to cover costs of their participation and travel. Members must travel on the scheduled Team dates. Participants will receive packets that provide guidance for mission service and fund raising. Inquire at OCMC regarding:

• Sponsorships opportunities: OCMC projects need financial support, including: school, church construction; youth camps, seminaries; medical supplies; other (bibles, translators, field personnel)

• Parish mission team projects

• Family and youth participation

• Seminarian student scholarships

• How to support OCMC Mission Team members

• Additional mission team opportunities

Contact Information and applications are available online at www.ocmc.org/teams.php, or contact: Orthodox Christian Mission Center; 220 Mason Marine Way, Saint Augustine, Florida 32086; Tel 1-904-829-5132, Toll-Free 1-877-GO FORTH (463-6784), Fax 1-904-829-8625, Email teams@ocmc.org.

Apply Today!
Moldova

In July, OCMC long-term missionary Christina Semon hosted the first Orthodox Mission Team to Moldova, outside the city of Orhei. According to Christina, “All other camps held here that have been organized by Americans were from other confessions and never by Orthodox Christians.” She reflects, “This is the first spiritual camp that the Church has been able to offer. The results were beyond our expectations: the spiritual aspect was reinvigorating. The teens showed interest to return for future camps and to invite their friends, because they felt joy and openness throughout all the workshops. The Team gave them a closer identity to their Faith and made it possible to organize the youth for the Metropolia of Bessarabia.”

Whether in Kenya, Mongolia, Albania, Moldova, or wherever a Mission Team serves, they need to do everything possible to ensure that they are partnering with churches, organizations, and missionaries who are involved in life-changing work with those they serve. It is these long-term relationships that will most contribute to creating lasting positive change. Team members can effectively build connections directly, through first-hand experiences, when they see their primary purpose as fostering relationships. This is how a pressing need is met, and long-term impact is realized.

In these cases, Mission Teams offer a sign of solidarity and love between Orthodox communities of very different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and they bolster our brothers and sisters abroad in powerful ways. This Christian love and concern, shared across continents, initiates the change and transformation in hearts — not only the hearts of the team members, but equally in the hearts of those who receive the service and ministry of the teams. Pray for changed hearts and transformed lives!

Dr. John Demakis, St. Katherine Greek Orthodox Church, Falls Church, VA

In the greater Washington, DC, metropolitan area, Dr. John Demakis, OCMC Ambassador and Board member, shared that it is exactly what the Gospel shares in Acts 1:8 that inspired his parish, St. Katherine Greek Orthodox Church in Falls Church, VA, to grow their local parish mission outreach to include the larger Orthodox community. Prior to 2009, the parish had a small missions committee which regularly invited OCMC mission speakers and recruited team members for teams to Brazil, Alaska, South Korea, and Tanzania. However, inspired by a visit from past OCMC Missionary and fellow Board member Fr. Luke Veronis, Fr. Costa Pavlakos, priest at St. Katherine, began to share their parish mission activities with other local clergy in the Clergy Brotherhood. Soon many other parishes expressed an interest in becoming involved in the work.

What had been the St. Katherine Mission Committee grew into the Metropolitan DC Missions and Outreach Committee. The group is now a catalyst for community and international outreach that involves everything from coordinating a monthly homeless meal program, to collecting food for local food pantries, to participation in Habitat for Humanity, to organizing an annual spring banquet/fundraiser supporting the international mission ministries of OCMC. All of this activity enhanced the Committee’s ability to continue the recruitment of OCMC short-term mission team members as well as raise support for
the ministry of a long-term missionary to Bukoba, Tanzania, Maria Roeber, who is from the DC area. They are finding that those who are called to answer Christ’s call to missions internationally inspire those that feel called to serve locally, and vice versa.

**Maria Kelmis, St. Spyridon Greek Orthodox Church, San Diego, CA**

For the past two years, Maria Kelmis, OCMC Ambassador at St. Spyridon Orthodox Church in San Diego, has maintained a deep relationship with both the San Diego Orthodox Clergy Brotherhood as well as Orthodox San Diego (OSD), a pan-Orthodox initiative that annually coordinates pan-Orthodox Lenten Vespers, which include presentations from national church ministries like OCMC, Project Mexico, FOCUS, and IOCC. Through partnership with OSD, Maria has been able to coordinate a pan-Orthodox missions retreat, “Renewing the Apostolic Vision,” involving 6 different Orthodox parishes, with Anastasia Pamela Barksdale, OCMC long-term missionary to Albania. She also helped coordinate 2 Mission Walks assisting the ministries of OCMC that involved multiple San Diego area parishes; as well as a Hunger Strike Youth Retreat which raised awareness for hunger issues in the local community. To further highlight the interconnectedness of international missions and local outreach ministries, those participating in the OCMC Mission Walks traveled with sandwiches that they offered to homeless individuals they met along the walk route. They recognized a wonderful opportunity that through their Mission Walk, even though it was raising funds for international missions, they could also offer a beautiful Orthodox Christian witness to their neighbors throughout the community.

Maria sees the formation of Orthodox San Diego through the local Clergy Brotherhood as being one of the top factors that awareness of international missions is growing. Missions recruitment and fundraising has been a natural result of this cooperation. Maria concludes “Where there is unity, God commands a blessing.”

**Antonia Adams-Clement, Ss. Peter and Paul OCA, Phoenix, AZ**

This past May, Orthodox communities in Arizona came together for the 1st Annual Walk for Missions. The Arizona event saw Orthodox Christians from several jurisdictions work side by side to fulfill the Great Commission. OCA, Greek, Antiochian, Romanian, Coptic, and Serbian Orthodox parishes participated together in the event, which had 61 walkers and raised $5,000 in only one hour for OCMC ministries and Project Mexico. Antonia Adams-Clement (past OCMC missionary and current Ambassador) shared that the walk had four components: 1) including all Orthodox parishes and missions in Arizona in a project to financially support international missions and evangelism, 2) promoting awareness of Orthodox missions and evangelism opportunities through the ministries of OCMC, 3) creating connections and support for Arizona’s Fr. Nick Andruhow and his missionary work as full-time priest at St. Innocent Orphanage near Rosarito, Mexico, and 4) showcasing Arizona efforts in foreign missions through a series of posters highlighting OCMC ministries.

When asked about the most significant impact of the Mission Walk, Antonia shared “Coming together as a planning committee and praying for missions with Orthodox Christians from other parishes added to our Lenten Journey in a very special way. We created a large prayer base for our first Mission Walk. We discovered that there were well over twenty-five Orthodox Christians who had served as long-term missionaries or on short-term mission teams through OCMC from our state! Before this event we had never come together in fellowship to pray for missions. The Pan-Orthodox vision for our mission project served to strengthen the spiritual ties between parishes and we are now, more than ever, ready to be God’s vessels in being a Light of Orthodoxy to our Arizona communities, and to the ends of the Earth.”

These three reflections are just a sample of the many pan-Orthodox missions initiatives taking shape throughout North America. OCMC Ambassadors are also participating in similar movements in Chicago, Denver, St. Louis, Dallas/Ft. Worth, New Jersey/Delaware and southern Pennsylvania where Clergy Brotherhoods and pan-Orthodox missions initiatives are enhancing the local parish’s ability to reach not only their own community, but the world, with Christ’s light. All of these activities provide a strong Orthodox Christian witness to our non-Orthodox brothers and sisters that Christ’s Great Commission to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19) is truly at the heart of our faith.
Support a Mission Priest (SAMP)

Support clergy serving in the mission field with a gift to OCMC’s SAMP Program. Your prayerful offering will help these priests share the Faith and minister the physical and spiritual needs of people around the world.

For more information, or to make a donation, visit www.ocmc.org, or contact Markella Balasis by phone at 1-877-GO-FORTH (463-6784), or by e-mail at SAMP@ocmc.org.