Sharing the Orthodox Faith in Mongolia

INSIDE

Celebrating 25 Years of Orthodox Mission Teams

page 3

page 18
The OCMC’s Mission magazine is published twice a year as a resource to educate and engage people in Orthodox missions.

EDITOR: Fr. Martin Ritsi
MANAGING EDITOR: Alex Goodwin
DESIGN: Cameron Thorp

OCMC’s mission is to make disciples of all nations by bringing people to Christ and His Church with the vision that All people may come to know the saving love of our Lord: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

For more information about OCMC visit our website at www.ocmc.org

Mailing Address
Orthodox Christian Mission Center
220 Mason Manatee Way
St. Augustine, FL 32086

PH: (904) 829-5132 Fax: (904) 829-1635
Toll Free: 1-877-GO-FORTH (463-6784)
Email: missions@ocmc.org

Program Contacts:
Rev. Fr. Martin Ritsi ................. Executive Director
Fr. David Rucker ................... Associate Director
Dn. James Nicholas ............... Missionary Director
Andrew Lekos .................... Mission Teams Director
Jack Klees ....................... Finance Director
Alex Goodwin ..................... Communications Director
Penelope Petropoul ............. Major Gifts Officer
Kenneth Kidd ..................... Annual Gifts Officer

OCMC Missionaries and their families:
Albania: Anastasia Pamela Barkdole; Georgia Gilman
Bend: Nathan & Gabriella Hoppe
Romania: Floyd and Anca Frantz
Moldova: Christina Semen
Tanzania: James Hargrave; Michael Pagedas; Maria Reber; Felice Stewart

OCMC BOARD OF DIRECTORS:
Fr. George Liacopulos ...................... President
Fr. Louis Christopulos ................. Vice President
Mr. William O. Birchfield III ........ Treasurer
Dr. Gayle Woloschak .................. Secretary
Fr. Alexander Veronis ............... President Emeritus

On the cover: Mongolians have a rich culture that perseverance to this day. Traditionally, they have hunted small game with eagles like the one shown here. In 2012, OCMC will begin working in this vast and beautiful country. Only 2% of the population is Christian, but many Mongolians are seeking truth and hope in a faith that they can call their own.
Bayarmaa was born during a time of Communist rule in Mongolia. Even though her country was one of the most sparsely populated in the world, she lived in the urban capital. She didn’t have many of the things that Western children had, but her childhood was happy. As she got older, the society around her began to change. Democracy became the rule of government. The economy began to grow, and then thrive, and the capital city quickly transformed into a densely populated mix of older Soviet architecture interspersed with modern skyscrapers.

Growing up in a communist culture, Bayarmaa was not exposed to religion in a meaningful way. But that began to change, as did her exposure to popular culture, rock bands and other influences both good and bad. Bayarmaa entered a stage of life where she was searching. She was immersed in the youth culture of her times. She enjoyed the thrill of singing in one of the popular rock bands, but she couldn’t get away from the feeling that there was something missing and even something that was not right. Life, relationships, peace, a sense of purpose, and an understanding of her place in the world – these were things she didn’t have, but for which she was yearning. As she later described, “Inside me, my soul was dark.” Bayarmaa didn’t just wait or accept her situation. She searched. She tried various avenues as they were available, but in the end came upon Orthodox Christianity. “In the Orthodox Church,” she explained, “there was something different – a sense of holiness and peace, and an environment for repentance and forgiveness. This is something I didn’t find anyplace else.”

Today, Bayarmaa is an active member of the newly-formed Orthodox parish in Ulaanbaatar, but now the yearning she feels is that others would discover what she has found in the Lord who has come so that this darkness within might be dispelled.

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Bayarmaa’s story is one of many similar examples. Each year there are thousands of lives being transformed through the missionary efforts of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center. Some, like Bayarmaa, speak of a darkness or emptiness that is illuminated, others experience personal, family and even community relationships that are transformed and still others experience miraculous visions, healings, or intervention. Each of them, however, comes upon a personal transformation in response to an initial encounter with God and then...
the developing relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ in the Body of His Church.

This process of bringing people to Christ so that their lives, the lives of their families, and even entire societies might be transformed lies at the core of OCMC’s mission ministries. And, while it might be hard to imagine, in an age of instant global media, there are still many people who have not been presented with an opportunity to turn to the Lord, and there are still over 1 billion people who have not heard the message of Christ. Sometimes, these people are living in isolated regions of the world. Other times, they might be a part of societies and countries where Christianity is not present and therefore exposure to the Gospel is not something that will happen naturally in their day-to-day lives. In some places these peoples are part of cultures that are resistant to the Gospel. But, there are other regions of the world where the fields are ripe for harvest...if only there would be someone to preach the Good News.

Bringing people to Christ in places where the Gospel has not been preached is what recently led the Mission Center to begin work, together with local clergy, among the Turkana people of northern Kenya, where many had still not heard of Jesus Christ and where over 200 people were baptized just last year alone. This is also what is now leading OCMC to enter the new mission field of Mongolia, where only 2% of the population has discovered what Bayarmaa found, but where there is equally a great yearning, receptivity, and readiness to receive Orthodox Christianity.

How did it become possible that we are able to partner with the resident Russian missionary priest to reach the Mongolian people? Why is Mongolia considered a country where the people are receptive to Christianity? And, what can OCMC do in Mongolia? A look at Mongolia’s history, its current situation, and the developing relationship with Fr. Aleksei Trubach can answer these questions.

Mongolia has the 19th largest land mass. Yet, with a population of only 2.5 million people, it is also one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world. A large portion of the country is covered in steppes, with mountains to the north and west and the Gobi desert to the south. It has a rich history, the most notable period being ushered in by Genghis Khan – a time that saw Mongols dominate most of the known world. The Mongolian people were largely nomadic. Today 30% of the population is still nomadic or semi-nomadic. However, the
the Mongol Empire, in the 14th century, Christianity nearly disappeared and many Mongolians became Muslim. Later, due to the influence from China in the 16th century, there was a large conversion to Buddhism. And while Christian missionary efforts were active in the 18th and 19th centuries, they were short-lived due to the coming of Communism, which lasted from 1924 to 1990, at which time freedom of religion was no longer permitted. Finally, after 1990, the country became open to religious activity and adopted a democratic constitution. The latest demographics show that 53% of the Mongolians are Buddhist, 39% are Atheist, 3% Muslim, 3% Shamanist, and only 2% are Christian.

In this situation, life is changing rapidly and people are afraid of losing their cultural heritage. Some adults are wary of foreign influences being introduced in Mongolia, but the youth are looking to the West not only for culture and educational opportunities but to the Churches that come from the Western countries as well. The Orthodox Church, with its respect for culture and similar Eastern traditions, is also established in the West and has much to offer.

In 1998, under the direction of the Moscow Patriarchate, Orthodoxy was reestablished in Mongolia. Initially, the efforts were mostly focused on meeting the needs of the expatriate Russian community. But in 2005, Fr. Aleksei Trubach, who had a missionary vision, was assigned to Mongolia. Since then, the parish has grown and a beautiful church was constructed in addition to an administrative hall and youth center.

Fr. Aleksei’s vision is to establish a Mongolian church administered by, and that worships in the language of, the Mongolian people. He has already succeeded in baptizing 40 individuals and his parish is now over 25% Mongolian. He yearns for the Church to reach out to the Mongolians, and this is what led him to approach the Orthodox Christian Mission Center. He had been introduced to OCMC’s work through a long-active OCMC team member, Spiro Deligianis, who was working in Mongolia. In a short matter of time, Fr. Aleksei had written a 5-year plan and proposal for cooperation to further establish Orthodoxy in Mongolia in cooperation with OCMC. The vision was mature and touched on significant aspects of creating a Church that respected the local culture and people. It was aimed at raising up indigenous clergy, establishing a training

Below: Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in Ulaanbaatar is the only Orthodox parish in Mongolia. The church is attracting many Mongolians who are curious about Orthodox Christianity, with its respect for culture and similar Eastern traditions. The Orthodox Church, being firmly established in the West, also interests many Mongolians.
On a Visit to Mongolia

The liturgy had just concluded and I had gathered with Fr. Aleksei and the entire Orthodox community in Ulaanbaatar for the common meal that they have each Sunday – a potluck that was a blend of delicious Russian and Mongolian dishes. The fellowship was sincere and the bonds between the people evident. Even though they represented different cultures, the community was united in their common Faith.

One of the Mongolian women, Dzaya, was at the fellowship meal with her children and had a glow and peaceful presence about her. Later, Fr. Aleksei told me her story and how God had been using her to reach others, in spite of the hardships she had endured. He began by explaining that her husband died just recently, and I was shocked. She didn’t look like someone who was going through such hardship. But what came next is what surprised me even more and showed how the Lord works through people in all circumstances to fill the void and make His presence known.

Dzaya had converted to Orthodoxy during Fr. Aleksei’s assignment in Mongolia. Through her influence the rest of her family had been led to Christ and was eventually baptized. She had led some of her friends to Orthodoxy as well, but it was during the funeral of her husband that Dzaya gave her greatest witness to Christ. The witness was not through anything she said in particular; rather, it came from the same peace and strength that I witnessed in her during the community meal. People at the funeral noticed that she had a completely different way and inner strength to deal with this tragedy of death than most people in Mongolia.

This led them to inquire and seek what it was that she had found and from where she derived this strength and hope. Later, when I spoke with Dzaya about her husband, her pain could be seen, but she never stopped emanating a deep sense of peace and conviction which came from the Lord who was carrying her through this difficult time. This is what her friends and extended family noticed and had subsequently led some to inquire into and explore the Faith...with Dzaya’s encouragement of course!

Through her influence the rest of her family had been led to Christ and was eventually baptized.

Center, reaching out to the youth in multiple ways, and then planting new parishes.

This request led to an exploratory visit to Mongolia from the Mission Center, sponsored by a generous donor from California. All that Fr. Aleksei had described was confirmed. Most importantly, a thirst and readiness to embrace Christianity along with a respect for messengers that come from Western societies among the Mongolian people was witnessed. This, then, gave birth to the Mission Center’s initial plans to partner with him in establishing Orthodox Christianity in a country where Christianity is almost non-existent, but where the people are longing for something that can fill their spiritual void.

Two persons have already volunteered and are in training and exploration for upcoming missionary assignments. Monk Job is in...
Mongolia, as this article is being written, on an exploratory visit to confirm his own assignment. In the summer of 2012, a short-term Mission Team will be sent that will focus on evangelism, teaching, and reaching out to the youth. Still others need to be identified who can participate in this exciting moment in Mongolian religious history, bringing not only Orthodoxy, but a strong Christian presence to a country that yearns for what Christ has to offer.

Establishing Orthodoxy in Mongolia will be a long process. It is not simply a matter of translating the liturgy and baptizing a few people to attend the one parish in Ulaanbaatar. It will also involve reaching and moving out to more of the Mongolian population, addressing the youth, showing how the Gospel speaks to the particular situations and spiritual yearnings of the people, training Mongolians to become the clergy and leaders of the Church, and more. The soil is fertile. Entire generations in Mongolia have not had the opportunity to hear, to receive, and to worship Jesus Christ, and it is upon us to respond to this need as the Lord has directed. People, financial support, and prayer will be needed for this work!

As the Lord said: “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Matthew 9:37-38).

For, “…how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” (Romans 10:14-15).

May the Lord guide us, as we strive to carry His message of hope and love throughout Mongolia and on to the ends of the earth.
God was merciful. Vespers takes place on “African time,” and there was nobody at the church when I got there. Some of the neighborhood children followed me into the courtyard, and I spent time just holding Agape, a little girl not quite old enough to walk yet. The priest, Fr. Paul Kagoma, and the chanter showed up eventually. I was able to greet them politely before we went into the church to praise God.

Still deeply disappointed, I did not sing. It was all I could do to stand upright. Finally I collapsed into a chair as the chanter read what sounded like most of 1 and 2 Kings. Agape sprawled across my lap and went to sleep. I listened with half an ear to the exploits of the Prophet Elijah against the priests of the pagan god Baal, but mostly I just breathed in her sweet, sweaty scent. Breathing in and out, thinking without words: here I am, God is here, it could be worse. Slowly I came to a sense of peace and even gratitude. The stillness in my heart was the voice of God.

I got the rest of the maggots out that night and completed the remainder of my two-month stay in peace. As an Intercultural Studies major...
Upon giving his blessing for Meg’s internship within the Metropolis of Mwanza, His Eminence Metropolitan Jeronymos said, “Let us pray she may find this place worthy to return.” By the end of her stay, Meg felt called to continue to be a part of the mission work in Tanzania and has since applied for long-term missionary service.
at Biola University, I had chosen to complete my required cross-cultural internship by working for OCMC in Tanzania. Missionaries James Hargrave, Maria Roeber, Felice Stewart, and Michael Pagedas welcomed me, along with Metropolitan +JERONYMOS of Mwanza and too many Tanzanians to name. I put my linguistics training to use, learning Kiswahili and making recommendations to improve the curriculum the other missionaries were using to learn the language.

When I arrived in Tanzania, I knew only two words of Kiswahili, and I wasn’t totally sure they meant what I thought they meant. By the time I left, I could carry on a simple conversation (if my interlocutor had the patience of a saint) and I had a number of friendships with local people. I loved learning to communicate with people on a number of different levels. I loved learning the language and the rituals that communicate their culture. I loved trying to understand the thoughts of people who are different from me, and I loved praying with them. Like many people who visit Africa, I had Africa fever: the desire to return, even if I myself didn’t exactly know why.

One of the articles in the Growing Participator Approach (GPA) curriculum that OCMC missionaries use to learn the local language talks about the difference between “us stories” and “them stories.” “Them stories” are the primary way expatriate workers talk about their host cultures. We interpret the behavior of our hosts based on our own cultural experiences and expectations. “You’ll never guess what happened to me today,” we say, throwing up our hands in good-natured dismay. “While I was paying for my new pair of

ABOVE: In order to grasp the language and culture of the Tanzanian people, Meg immersed herself in the daily lives of her hosts. Here, she enjoys a meal with her Tanzanian host family.
shoes, someone came along and stuck his feet into my old pair and walked away. What was he thinking?” We remain perpetually on the outside looking in, and we are frequently perplexed.

When we learn to tell “us stories,” sometimes it doesn’t occur to us that these are stories at all. Of course we bring a kilo of sugar as a gift when we visit someone’s house; that’s just what Tanzanians do. We have learned to see the world, at least in this small instance, as the host culture sees it. We have become able to dialogue within the culture, not just about it.

To me, this is one of the primary goals of missionary service. The missionary often comes to offer more healthcare or make more converts, and these things are important, but the first goal of missionary service is to create an icon of the Church by sharing in communion with aliens. Aliens: foreigners. The people that, the more we learn about them, the less we feel we understand them. Nevertheless, the less we feel we understand them, the more we realize our common humanity. The paradox deepens as we keep learning the culture.

The noise of dancing and singing was barely a breath away in the crowded church. The bishop radiated joy as he addressed a gathering of Tanzanian religious education seminar participants and short-term missionaries in the following words. As best as I can remember, he said: “We are here in Ibale on July 28th, 2011. We are here in Ibale, Kagera region. We are here in the Church of the Resurrection in Ibale. We must love one another.”

I am reminded of a story about St. John the Theologian. When the churches asked him for a sermon, he merely said, “Little children, love one another.”

I witnessed the Church in its fullness as Tanzanian readers and catechists came to be taught more about Christianity and as individuals from America and Finland took their time to do the teaching. It’s a cliché, but a true one, that the missionaries learned as much from the experience as the students did. Christianity is always embodied, never abstracted. There, the embodiment of Christianity was the sharing in communion of people with very different cultures and experiences, serving one another.

“Mjakazi,” said an old man participating in the religious education seminar as he called me over to him. “Mjakazi, can you help me? I lost my pen.” I hurried to dig a new pen out of the box and brought it to him triumphantly. Later, it occurred to me that my real triumph was the title he gave me: Mjakazi. Not mgeni—foreigner—or mwalimu—teacher—but mjakazi—servant girl. I was one step closer to having a real role in this community. I wasn’t entirely sure I liked being called a servant, but the title helped me identify more with the Tanzanians. And that meant everything to me.

I remember that when I sought permission to serve my internship in Tanzania, the bishop welcomed me and added, “Let us pray she may find this place worthy to return.” After my internship was complete, I saw him again, this time in Irvine, California. He gave me a big, joyful smile. When he invited me to return to Tanzania, I heard the voice of God, through his Church, addressed to me. You are welcome to join in this work.

**LEFT:** Meg Englebach went to Tanzania to serve as a summer intern in the Metropolis of Mwanza through the OCMC. As an Intercultural Studies major at Biola University, she also hoped to learn Kiswahili and the Tanzanian culture. She was welcomed by the Tanzanian people and during her stay felt a call to dedicate her life to long-term missionary service.

**ABOVE:** Meg Englebach (top left) with her Tanzanian host family in 2011. Meg lived in Tanzania for nearly two months. During her time there, she began learning the language and culture of the Tanzanian people and enjoyed their gracious hospitality.
SOCIAL MEDIA

and the Dawn of the iMissions Era

by Alex Goodwin

Like Sts. Cyril and Methodios (Orthodox missionaries to the Slavs), Fr. Francis Xavier (Jesuit missionary to Asia), or David Livingstone (Congregationalist missionary to Africa), the Christian missionary experience has always been an epic quest to bring the message of the Gospel "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). These journeys often took decades and spanned thousands of miles inspiring missionaries like William Carey to coin the adage, "To know the will of God, we need an open Bible and an open map."

Today, there remain over a billion people in the world who have not been presented the Christian faith. Thus, modern missionaries are still tasked with reaching the unreached. But, the endeavor of bearing witness to the hope, love, and salvation of Christ that, only a few decades ago, could require the crossing
of oceans and living amongst people of a different culture can now happen with the click of a button.

It does, indeed, seem to be the dawning of the “iMissions” era and “iMissionaries” have the opportunity to share their faith like never before.

The explosion of social media like YouTube, Twitter, and FaceBook has revolutionized the way people communicate and the way that ideas are spread. One need look no further than the toppling of whole governments during the Arab Spring for ample case material proving social media’s potential for affecting radical change.

Though traditional strategies that involve the direct evangelization and education of a receiving people group by a field missionary will always be a vital aspect of missions, social media technologies, at the very least, deserve careful consideration as a new means for sharing the Faith. Especially when, according to Internet World Stats, the number of FaceBook users reached nearly 184 million in Asia, over 37 million in Africa, and 18 million in the Middle East at the end of the fourth quarter in 2011.

Analysis of the same time period also indicated that the ratio of FaceBook users in relation to the estimated total population in these regions is lower than anywhere else in the world. However, the sheer number of social media users in traditionally non-Christian lands warrants the exploration of intentional education and evangelization strategies that make use of these technologies.

In an article on his recent enthronement as the Metropolitan of Pittsburgh in the Pittsburgh Post Gazette, His Eminence Savas was quoted as saying, “In technological terms, there is a wide door open for all of us to bring the Gospel in new ways to new people and new places.” He said, “The Internet cannot be shunned or ignored as irrelevant to the Church.”

The obvious opportunities presented by the proliferation of social media, however, come with their share of dangers. In years past, good missionary work required the careful study of language and culture in order that the message of the Gospel could be properly contextualized for those hearing it for the first-time. Long-term missionaries serving in the mission field through the Orthodox Christian Mission Center spend a minimum of two years learning language and culture when they are first deployed.

iMissionaries may never set foot in the country where they hope to witness to their faith. The speed and ease with which they can reach out to people on the internet can tempt the prospective iMissionary to cut short, or avoid all together, these important foundational facets of missionary service. It is easy to succumb to this temptation because the consequences for failing to understand language and culture seem much less severe online than in the field. It is much simpler for someone on FaceBook or Twitter to just take their message to a new “friend” or “follower” than it
is for a missionary in the field to repair rifts that can be created by simple misunderstandings.

Seasoned field missionaries will be the first to point out, however, that even the most careful translation of scriptural texts and hypersensitivity to the culture of another does not guarantee an effective witness to the Faith. Evangelism, education, and ministry have never been, and will never be, just about linguistics and anthropology. The true message of the Gospel can only be carried on the wings of love. The most powerful witness any missionary can offer to the people he/she serves is the witness of love—a witness that comes through the careful building of relationships. iMissionaries must appreciate the necessity for loving relationships in their ministry as well if they hope to share Christ in the digital world. Otherwise, they will spend their time talking AT people about God instead of talking WITH people about God.

Cultural norms and our world’s diverse socio-political landscape also necessitate that the iMissionary appreciates that he/she does not operate in a vacuum. Field missionaries must often times be sensitive to the social and political climate that exists where they serve. Offering a Christian witness via social media can require the same sensitivities. There are still places where being Christian is a dangerous proposition and it is often much more difficult to hide online than people think.

In spite of the speed and reach afforded by social media, the missiological principles that have been forged over the past 2,000 years remain. The challenges for the modern Christian missions movement will be to integrate these technologies into current missions methodologies in a way that respects these tried and true principles.

As the use of social media grows around the world, effective use of these tools for evangelism and education, the training up of iMissionaries who can utilize these strategies, and discerning how these efforts can complement the work being done in the field will become increasingly essential to Christian missions.

Far from rendering field missions obsolete, social media may force Christian Churches to apply even more resources to the vital work of missions. The increased connectivity of people around the world, and the inevitable discussions of faith that will ensue, could foster an unprecedented discourse on faith—especially if strategies for the effective use of social media in missions can be developed. As we have seen over the centuries, the truth of Christianity will stir the hearts of those who are seeking it. What response can we have but to go and help welcome these seekers into the Body of Christ?

The resources needed for the increased demand of field missions facilitated by social media can be served by these same technologies. Through blogging and media sharing services like YouTube and flickr people can experience the work of missions and the growth of the Church abroad first hand. The dialogue inspired by the intentional dissemination of stories, sights, and sounds from the mission field can help further establish a missions consciousness among Christian communities. Social media has the ability to serve as the bridge between those longing for Christ and those called to share His love.

Are we able to match the words we cast into the digital ether with actions in the world? Are we prepared to meet our online friends in the flesh? Are we willing to help our virtual communities become real communities of faith? The key to strategic and proactive use of social media in the work of missions will be to insure that digital evangelism is grounded in sound missiological principles and that the work of field missions is shared with the faithful through these technologies in such a way that they can respond to the increasing demand for a living Christian witness in the world. In this way, the iMissionary, guided by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, may be able to make tremendous strides in “making disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

BELOW: In 2011, the number of Facebook users reached nearly 184 million in Asia, over 37 million in Africa, and 18 million in the Middle East. This provides a window of opportunity for sharing with those searching for Christ and reaching out to those called to serve around the world.
A Priest Away from Home: The Role of SAMP Priests on Orthodox Mission Teams

by Alex Goodwin

“I will never forget the stories I heard from Fr. Andrew Mondal regarding his travels over many miles to personally visit the few Christians that live in the outlying villages of Kolkata, India. During my visits to Kolkata as part of OCMC mission teams in 2008 and 2010, I heard local people share how rare it is for a Hindu leader to come and spend time in the home of a person. Fr. Andrew’s dedication to loving others in the name of Christ, however, brings him into people’s homes in a personal relationship with his flock, just as Christ ministered. Through this love, people are drawn in and open their hearts to Christ, and the witness of this has had a profound impact on my own life as an Orthodox Christian. I was inspired to work harder on the relationships I built during my mission team, and I gained a new appreciation for the communal worship of our Church as a result.” - OCMC Mission Team Member Kenneth Kidd

OCMC has been sending short-term Mission Teams around the world for 25 years. Team members travel and offer 2-3 weeks of their lives to bear a personal relationship with people around the world.

outreach, healthcare, and more. Each of these teams, however, is ministered to and guided by a member of the indigenous Church leadership. This person is often a priest – a priest that is supported by OCMC’s Support a Mission Priest (SAMP) program.

Since the first Team in 1987, over 1,600 Orthodox Christians have been sent on OCMC Mission Teams. Many of these people have been impacted by the SAMP clergy with whom they have been blessed to spend time during their Mission Team experience. For many, this SAMP priest is the first person they meet from a culture that is radically different than their own, yet someone who, like them, is also Orthodox Christian.

In this way, the SAMP priest is able to serve as a bridge between Team Members and the people they serve. Through the SAMP priest, team members have been able to forge relationships with people in the mission field that have lasted for years. These relationships have helped them to grow in their own faith. Often these relationships begin with the fellowship of worship. Regular prayer and liturgical worship is an integral part of an OCMC Mission Team experience. The SAMP priest brings team members and local peoples together for this prayer and worship.

The relationships that begin with prayer continue through service. OCMC Mission Teams are almost always cooperative efforts between team members and the people of a host community. SAMP priests frequently help coordinate these projects. This work is filled with laughter, joy, challenge, and frustration. All along the way, however, the SAMP priest is there to guide these emerging relationships to grow and flourish.

One of the greatest challenges that SAMP priests face is translating culture between team members and the people they are trying to serve. Over time, the SAMP priest is able to help people to appreciate differences in culture. Through this appreciation, the patience and compassion foundational to good and lasting relationships begins to guide the hearts of all people involved in the mission.

By bringing team members and indigenous people together for worship, by encouraging them to work together, and by helping them to understand and appreciate differences in culture, SAMP priests help facilitate the relationships that lie at the heart of a loving Christian witness. It is through these relationships that the Holy Spirit often works to help individuals grow in their own discipleship and help others become disciples as well. SAMP priests have been, and will continue to be, vital to short-term Orthodox missions. Because of this, supporting clergy that serve in the mission field offers us a unique opportunity to participate in their ministry as we prayerfully serve to share Christ with all people around the world.
MISSIONARIES

Missionary Updates

ALBANIA

Work in Albania continues to strengthen the ministries of the Church, which will help encourage vibrant Orthodox communities and enable the Albanian people to grow in their faith. OCMC Missionaries serving in Albania have had many opportunities to offer Orthodox teachings through the various programs that they have helped to establish or have been asked to direct. Much of their focus has involved ministering to youth and families.

OCMC Missionary Anastasia Pamela Barksdale is temporarily back in the United States to share her work with her supporters. She is still working for His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios, however, and teaching Christian Education at the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy in Durres, where a Resource Center and model classrooms have recently been established. As the Christian Education Instructor and Field Work Supervisor for the Academy, one of Anastasia’s main roles has been to provide teacher training to the students. She directs these future teachers and catechists as they hold catechism classes and day camps and interacts with fellow missionaries Nathan and Gabriela Hoppe in various Kids’ Clubs that are forming throughout the country. Anastasia also offers seminars and Bible study sessions to university students and young women working for the Church.

In addition to their work with children, Nathan and Gabriela Hoppe, with the blessing of His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios, served as coordinators for “Marriage Week” – an international non-denominational Christian movement that began in Britain that encourages Christian communities around the world to focus on the importance of marriage. The Hoppes helped to distribute over 20,000 brochures to households in Albania. Members of the organizing committee were also interviewed on eight television shows and three radio programs.

The Hoppes have become increasingly aware of the need to minister to whole families in Albania. They are looking forward to welcoming more families called to serve on OCMC Mission Teams in the coming years and the return of the Missions Institute Team, led by OCMC Board Member Fr. Luke Veronis, later in the year. Nathan, Gabriela, and the kids will be returning to the United States this summer to visit with their supporters as well.

While on maternity leave, OCMC Missionary Georgia Gilman Bendo has been offering catechism to about twenty-five 6th to 9th graders after school at the Protagonists School in Tirana. Lessons are drawn from a book written by His Beatitude Anastasios. The children participate in crafts or activities that highlight the material being covered. Thanks to a grant from the Farah Foundation in 2011, Protagonists School was able to purchase a number of useful resources for the English and catechism programs, including Bible-themed crafts and a large felt board set for teaching Bible stories.

Georgia is also teaching English to 13 students at the Church’s recently accredited Logos University. Georgia is pleased that, already within the first two weeks of classes, she has had an opportunity to bear witness to the faith among these students, although it is a secular university environment. She looks forward to resuming her regular English classes at the Protagonists School soon.

ROMANIA

The St. Dimitrie Program, which provides substance abuse counseling and education programs, continues its work in Romania. OCMC Missionary Floyd Frantz, who serves as Co-Coordinator for the National Anti-Drug Program of the Romanian Orthodox Church, continues to work to help the Church to establish counseling centers throughout the country. Floyd is accomplishing this by training Romanian Orthodox priests to provide addictions counseling at both the clinical and the parish level. There are currently four centers up and running, with another six preparing to open.

Understanding addiction as a disease is a relatively new concept for many Romanians. Floyd and his co-workers are using the Minnesota Model to train those who are volunteering for this growing substance abuse ministry so that they can serve people who are struggling with this crippling condition. This approach treats addiction by taking people through a 12-16 week outpatient counseling program that reinforces complete abstinence and empowers them with mechanisms for coping with this disease. It focuses on guiding them spiritually toward recovery.

In addition to the training of counselors, those recovering from substance abuse need peer support. The greatest danger that many addicts face is the pressure they feel from other addicts. By surrounding themselves with people who will help them abstain and continue their spiritual journey, dependent persons have a much better chance of recovery. The early years of Floyd’s ministry focused on building these peer networks.
Now, as the clergy get training and the counseling centers are established, Romanians suffering from addiction will have the help they need to get sober and stay sober.

By training priests to treat substance abuse as a disease and by providing recovering addicts with strong systems of community support, the Church is able to help care for both the spiritual and physical needs of her people. Hundreds of people have already received treatment and come closer to Christ through the St. Dimitrie Program and the related community support group meetings.

This approach has been so successful that Floyd has helped establish the program in Moldova. He has been asked to provide substance abuse training in Alaska at the St. Herman Seminary. And, he will be visiting Tanzania later in the year to work with fellow OCMC Missionary Felice Stewart to begin replicating the model there as well.

Floyd’s wife and fellow OCMC Missionary, Ancuta, continues her work as the Director of the Protection of the Theotokos Family Center in Cluj. In addition to providing child care and counseling services to mothers who are at high risk of abandoning their child because of poverty, the Center now provides weekly food and baby supplies for more than 45 Romanian families. They are also helping to provide for the pre-K and Kindergarten schooling of 14 children. Local Romanian parishes fund more than 55% of the Protection of the Theotokos’ budget. Priests from many parishes take regular collections in support of the Center.

The spread and development of the St. Dimitrie Program and its growing base of Romanian clergy volunteers, coupled with the increasing prayer and financial support of the Protection of the Theotokos Day Center by Romanian parishes, all speak to the vibrancy and strength of Orthodoxy in Romania.

TANZANIA

If there is one constant in the mission field, it is that nothing remains constant. Most of the OCMC Missionary Team serving in Tanzania has now been there for nearly two years. As they progress in their language and culture training, many of them have begun their ministry efforts. These efforts may not be what were originally planned before they arrived, but by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, they have resulted in a very fruitful witness of the Orthodox Christian faith.

This language and culture training is becoming very useful as Maria Roeber and Felice Stewart have helped navigate the complexities of getting a health clinic opened in Bukoba. Felice is working with personnel to ready the facility while Maria works with church leaders and representatives from KEDAS (the Greek Non-Governmental Organization that built the clinic) to make sure that the necessary approvals have been received, resources are available, and that everything is in order.

Felice is also beginning a substance abuse program in Tanzania. OCMC Missionary to Romania Floyd Frantz will be visiting Tanzania later in the year to help with these efforts.

OCMC Missionary Michael Pagedas has been developing a public health curriculum that will be delivered to the Orthodox faithful in the Archdiocese of Mwanza. Before completing his term, he hopes to engage the priests of the Archdiocese in educating their own communities. Additionally, Michael has been blessed to become the godfather of four Tanzanian children, including the sons of Fr. Polycarp and, more recently, Fr. Spyridon. He has been using these connections to further interact with the local communities, both as a missionary and as a public health program developer.

Working closely with His Eminence Metropolitan Jeronymos of Mwanza has been OCMC Missionary James Hargrave. James’s work has involved apprenticing under His Eminence and other Church leaders to help coordinate mission teams, including the preparation of programs, venues, and translators; he has begun handling some bookkeeping for the Metropolis as well. Last year, James helped to coordinate a youth retreat that was conducted by local clergy and an OCMC Mission Team. The retreat welcomed hundreds of young people to a rural village outside of Bukoba and offered them daily catechism and religious education. James hopes that what he learns and the relationships he builds will allow him to further assist the Church in its efforts to welcome even more Tanzanians into the Body of Christ.

In addition to these efforts, Maria, Felice, Michael, and James have participated in and helped host multiple OCMC Medical Mission Teams that have visited the region.
25 Years of Mission Teams: A Journey of Love

by Andrew Lekos

The first team was a fulfillment of a dream for many on the missions board because we have envisioned people of our Church in America going to countries like Kenya and offering their services, their love, and sharing their knowledge of the Gospel with other people.”

- Fr. Alexander Veronis, OCMC President Emeritus

In 1986, at a SYNDOSMOS (World Fellowship of the Orthodox Youth) General Assembly, the youth representatives from Africa reported, “We do not want to merely be objects of missions, but rather active participants in missions.” At the same time in Dallas, Texas, members of the Young Adult League of the Greek Archdiocese approached the Archdiocesan Mission Center (now known as the Orthodox Christian Mission Center) to see how they could be directly involved in missions. The director of the Mission Center contacted Archbishop Anastasios, who was in Kenya, and he responded, “Send them!” Thus, the first mission team was formed.

In 1987, the Mission Center sent its first mission team to embark on a journey of love. This journey of love was deemed, Project HOPE (Helping Other People Everywhere). That team, compromised of Americans, Finns, and Greeks, traveled to Loberi, Kenya, to meet the spiritual needs of fifteen Orthodox communities that had no church in which to worship. In addition to building the Nativity of the Lord Church in the remote village of Loberi in the Laikipia District, Rift Valley, Kenya, they also offered health services to those who had limited or no access to medical care.

“Project HOPE was the most ambitious single program ever undertaken by our mission program,” reported Fr. Dimitrios Couchell (Bishop Dimitrios of Xanthos), the former Mission Center Executive Director.

Since the construction of that stone church in remote Kenya, teams have helped in the construction of over 30 building projects, including fifteen churches, homes, schools, and clinics, which have contributed to the infrastructure of the Church. Teams eventually began to offer other services. Medical teams provided services to tens of thousands of individuals who had limited access to health care. Team members have become witnesses of the Faith in action and exemplary role models for thousands of children. They have taught and preached the Gospel around the world, to neophytes, catechumens, youth, adults, lay leaders, and clergy.

In the last 25 years, over 1,600 individuals (from different parts of North America and Europe) with diverse skills, representing various Orthodox jurisdictions, have visited countries like Albania where all religion was outlawed. Team members, like the ones seen here, have been able to share the faith with whole generations who have emerged from the oppression of communism.
28 countries, serving on over 180 projects around the world.

The efforts that began twenty-five years ago with the building of the church in Kenya have grown and continue to reach new areas. In recent years, the OCMC has been invited to assist the emerging Church in Mongolia. Mongolia is a country where Christianity is a minority religion, where the Gospel has not been preached to much of the population, and where an Orthodox presence is just beginning to take root and grow.

The community, Holy Trinity Orthodox parish, in Ulaanbaatar was founded in 1998. Fr. Aleksei Trubach has been serving as Holy Trinity’s parish priest since 2005. His ministry work has increasingly focused on bringing non-Christians to the Faith. Fr. Aleksei hopes that, “Orthodox Christianity (in Mongolia) is seen as the true faith for all nationalities.” His goal is to continue to share the Faith and to ordain indigenous clergy and establish parishes outside of Ulaanbaatar. The Church is also interested in administering to the social needs of those in need.

Creating effective discipleship and developing Mongolian Church leaders are keys to strengthening the Church. In dialogue with Fr. Aleksei, the Church in Ulaanbaatar needs assistance in reaching out to the Mongolian community at large. These discussions include the development of a team to assist with outreach and evangelism. Thus, an OCMC Mission Team has been invited to assist in these efforts. In 2012, the Mission Center will send its first short-term team to Mongolia. The team will proclaim the Gospel and share the Orthodox Faith during this historic first visit. The team will help plant the seeds of Christianity and reach out to those who have begun to respond to the Gospel.

OCMC Mission Teams will be vital in realizing the Church’s vision for Orthodoxy in Mongolia. Teams, in partnership with local Orthodox Christians, will help bring non-Christian Mongolians into the Body of Christ, recruit and prepare long-term missionaries, and support social ministries that provide a loving witness to the Orthodox Christian faith.

Twenty-five years after OCMC’s first Mission team to Kenya, a new team to Mongolia will go and share Orthodoxy’s message of love and salvation by living out the mandate of Christ outlined in the Holy Gospels (Matthew 28:18; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:21-22, 21:15). They will grow in their own discipleship by participating in making disciples through their witness, service and love.

Since that historic team, teams have had an impact on the Church and the growth of Orthodox Missions from Albania to Zimbabwe. As the Church strives to share Christ with even more people in some of the most remote regions of the world, teams will play an increasingly vital role in building relationships with our new brothers and sisters, and serve as the bridge between communities at home and new communities abroad.
In my mind’s eye I could see my 1987 teammates moving around the compound like busy ants, carrying heavy stones for the church walls, deciding on how the apse could be constructed and trying to build concrete forms, etc. Two years later everything was tidy and neat, no construction rubble was visible anywhere… and the inside of the church had been neatly plastered and painted, with a beautiful iconostas constructed out of local wood, with small icons hung on it, perhaps in hopes of having full-sized ones in the future.”

- Dimitri Shrekengost (Kenya 1987 and 1989)

Since 1987, the Orthodox Christian Mission Center has sent Teams around the world to help grow the Church through various types of service. Each Team is a unique response to a need that our host has identified as a priority. Each Team member has an experience (or experiences) that impact them in various and even life-changing ways.

The highlight of the Team members experience is often meeting and working with vibrant Orthodox leaders from different walks of life. Recently Dimitri Shrekengost, of Atlanta, GA, reflected,

“There could not have been a greater blessing for any of us than to have worked under the auspices of His Eminence, Archbishop Anastasios, (then the locum tenens of the Holy Archbishopric of Irinoupolis (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania), now Archbishop of Tirana and Albania). His gentle words and strong example of a leadership of love for his flock were and are a lasting inspiration. Seeing little kids running to greet him and watching His Eminence squatting down with his arms wide open to gather them close, his face alight with joy and love is a sight I will never forget. He is truly a holy man. I was also lucky enough to have my Holy Cross Seminary classmates Phil Yamalis, Raymond Philip Zymaris on the 1987 team. His Eminence is one of the main reasons I applied to be a member of another OCMC Team, two years later. I hoped for, and was assigned to, the 1989 team to Kenya, much to my delight”

Dimitri continued.

“I was amazed at the daily worship, but being there during the first two weeks of August meant that we had Paraklesis services, which were held in English. I had never heard that service chanted in English before and was drawn to it. It remains one of my favorite services in the ecclesiastical year.”

Most often, the services in the mission field are done in the language of the people,
but as a way to offer hospitality to the 1989 Kenya Team members, the Paraklesis services were offered in English.

In 1989, Dimitri went back to Kenya on another OCMC Team to help build the St. Nicodemus Catechetical Center. He recalls being able to travel back to Loberi, where his first Team had served.

‘In 1989, I was blessed to be assigned to the Team that went to Kenya, to a village called Gachika, at the foot of Mount Kenya, where we built an Orthodox school, and added on to a convent. One day we got into our vehicles and took off for parts farther north. As I recall, it had been mentioned that if the recent rains hadn’t ruined the roads, we might be able to go to Loberi. I didn’t have much hope for that, because there had been a lot of rain up that way and I didn’t want to get my hopes up. I was very curious to see what our little Church of the Nativity of Christ looked like! We had left it with the main structure completed, but the interior was only rough stone walls and there were no window frames or windows in their openings just yet. All the interior work was to have been finished by local villagers. We kept getting closer and closer until the landscape looked very familiar to me. All of a sudden I could see the roof of the church and then the entire building, next to the mission house! I was speechless when I got out of the van, and couldn’t believe my eyes. Loberi parishioners had planted flowers all around the church and they were in full bloom with bright colors.”

This was an emotional return for Dimitri.

“I stood next to the fence and just wept for a moment. I guess that deep down inside, I thought I’d never get to see this place again, but here I was! One of my teammates said to me, ‘Now we can see what you’ve been talking about ever since we got to Kenya all these weeks ago’! I had been talking incessantly about that little church and hadn’t realized how much a part of it all of the team had become.”

Dan Christopulos (OCMC’s first long-term missionary), in the fall 1987 edition of ‘Mission’, the periodical published by the Archdiocesan Mission Center, looked back on that historic first Team and celebrated both the work they accomplished and the lives they impacted.

“The month of August proved to be a historic one for the Archdiocese of East Africa and indeed for the Mission movement as a whole. It may well have been the first time in the history of the modern Orthodox mission movement that so many Orthodox Christians from different Churches worked together in such a concrete way.”

Twenty five years later, the Church of the Nativity in Loberi stands as the only permanent Church in that region of Kenya. Where only one priest struggled to minister to 15 parishes, there are now four clergy, serving not only those original communities, most of which worship in temporary structures, but each of them have planted seeds for newly emerging communities that in turn will raise up more clergy and more communities. Looking back on the lives that have been impacted, it is fitting to say ‘Asante Sana’ (thank you) to the individuals on that historic Team that served in Kenya. The effect that the Team experience had on the 29 individuals who made a bold decision to respond to the call to participate on “A Journey of Love” 25 years ago helped to pave the way for thousands of Orthodox Christians to experience their Orthodox Faith thriving in many places throughout the world.

Dimitri admits, “I still have a photo of the Church of the Nativity on my wall at home. It is as beautiful to me as any Orthodox Cathedral could be.”
B y listening to God’s call, one person can lead to a successful Mission Team. Who is that person? Is it a hierarch or priest who hears the call and assists with establishing a mission team? Is it a lay person who hears the call and decides to become a short or long-term missionary? Is it the person who hears the call and helps to financially support missions? Is it the person who hears the call and bears witness in a local parish to advocate for missions?

It is through the Holy Spirit that all of the above are possible, essential, and needed for a successful Mission Team. This article focuses on one individual who has answered two calls—one to serve as a short-term missionary and one to help support missions financially.

On June 23, 2009, With the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan Jonah of Uganda, a team of 10 individuals left for a two-week medical ministry for the Archdiocese of Uganda. Armed with medicines, medical equipment, and icons, this Team also traveled with the prayers of Dr. Savvas Mintatos, who helped offset the costs of the medicines with a generous gift that supplemented the funds raised by Team members.

Dr. Mintatos is a practicing dentist from Connecticut who has participated in and provided funding for many mission teams and supplies. Service and sharing his talent and treasure have always been an important part of his life. He attributes this spirit to having witnessed the generosity of his grandmother, who never hesitated to share with those in need, even though she did not have much herself. He recalls how she would send trunkloads of needed items to Greece, and she supported loved ones in her village for years. Her actions “showed me the way,” he adds. Now, Dr. Mintatos is trying to live the lessons he learned.

His grandmother’s example led him to look into helping the Orthodox Christian Mission Center, and his experiences serving on a short-term mission team to Guatemala transformed that interest into a deep passion to spread Christ’s love and teachings through mission work. In conjunction with Orthodox Dental Outreach, Dr. Mintatos served on several dental mission teams to Guatemala, where he and his fellow team members performed dental work for the children at the Hogar Rafael Ayau Orphanage. This orphanage, which provides housing, love, and an Orthodox witness to the children in its care, has benefited from the help of OCMC mission teams for years.

As Dr. Mintatos notes, words cannot fully express the significance of the experience of serving on a mission team, particularly to Guatemala. “The experience of a child having nothing and putting all his/her love and trust in your hands is one I’ll never forget. It changes you. You learn to live in gratitude and humility.” Serving on a mission team has deepened his faith, fueled his spiritual growth, and planted a dream in his heart to serve dental missions full-time upon retirement.

His dream countries are Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and of course, Guatemala. Until then, photos of the children in Guatemala line Dr. Mintatos’ office and provide daily inspiration for him.

Dr. Mintatos is also grateful for the opportunity to have financially supported the work of teams. He explains, “As you do...
Becoming a Mission Team Sponsor

There are many costs associated with each Mission Team, including housing, food, transportation, insurance, supplies, and training. These costs vary depending on the type of Team, its duration, and where it will be serving. The OCMC seeks to raise $10,000 from sponsors each year. Sponsors are able to share in the Team’s journey and will be provided with photographs and updates from the Team. Though not all of us are able to go on a Team, being a sponsor provides an opportunity to be a part of a Team by making the work possible.

To find out more about becoming a Mission Team sponsor, please contact Major Gifts Officer Penny Petropoul, or Associate Director Fr. David Rucker, at 877-GO-FORTH.
Share your excitement for, and commitment to, international Orthodox missions through service as an OCMC Ambassador!

OCMC Ambassadors work with their local priest and parish communities by inviting others to answer the call to missions through the programs of OCMC. Ambassadors regularly promote the work of the Mission Center by spreading the word about all of the ways that their fellow parishioners can become involved in missions, including direct participation on short-term mission teams, long-term missionary service, and through gifts of support.

Think about how the programs of OCMC have impacted your Christian walk and please prayerfully consider your ability to offer your service as an Ambassador! Contact Kenneth Kidd, Annual Gifts Officer, at kenny@ocmc.org or at 904-829-5132, ext. 161, for more information about the program.

Become an OCMC Ambassador!