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OCMC’s Vision is that all people may come to know the saving love of our Lord: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And it’s Mission is to partner with the worldwide Orthodox Church to bring people into vibrant, self-supporting Eucharistic communities.

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On the cover: Harry Boosalis, a professor at St. Tikhon’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, during a 2009 OCMC Mission Team to Tanzania. Missionaries, Mission Team Members, and those who pray for and support Orthodox missions have the opportunity to become better disciples by participating in the work of making disciples.
Vladimir Elias Kronos claimed a long line of pious Orthodox ancestors, some of them priests. His family attended most services and paid their annual parish dues. He had served in the altar since he was ten. He volunteered in the annual ethnic festival, even during college, and participated in the folk dances. Imagine the shock to many in the parish when Vlad announced his engagement to Debbie, a young woman who did not claim to be a Christian, much less an Orthodox Christian. After getting married, Vlad and Deb gave little thought or time to the religion of Vlad's youth, aside from an occasional nostalgic visit during Pascha with their two children. Work, material possessions, professional advancement, and family activities consumed their time and energy for the next 8 years.

One evening, Vlad's parents invited Vlad and Deb to an OCMC banquet, an annual event in their city, sponsored by local parishes. Since his parents had already bought their tickets, they felt obliged to go. At the banquet that night Vlad and Deb heard a missionary quote from the Gospel according to St. Matthew: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations…” (28:18b–19a NKJV). The missionary explained how the command...
of our Lord to His disciples was not to make converts to a new religion. Unlike the Jewish rabbis who made disciples of an interpretation of The Law, Jesus called His disciples into a personal relationship with Himself. The invitation of Jesus to be His disciples began with, “Follow Me,”2 and His disciples did exactly that: “…they forsook all and followed Him” (Lk 5:11b NKJV).3

Vlad and Deb were intrigued to hear the missionary speaker affirm that every Christian is called to become a disciples of Christ, but we become better disciples ourselves. As we receive and experience God’s love, we become witnesses of the reality of who God is and who we are created to become as Persons made in His image and likeness.
a disciple of Jesus Christ. The invitation by Jesus to “Follow Me” was not just for the original twelve disciples. This same invitation initiates Great and Holy Lent on the Sunday of Orthodoxy (Jn 1:43-51). This invitation is read for the Feast of St. Andrew, “the first-called” (30 November). This invitation to “Follow Me” marks the beginning of forty days of preparation for the Feast of the Nativity (Feast of St. Philip), as we contemplate the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, Who brings us back into communion with the Father, by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The ‘Follow Me’ of Jesus is an invitation to personal participation in the most perfect circle of intimate communion. This perfect communion between the Three Persons of
the Holy Trinity is Love. In the words of Christos Yannaras, God is “an ontological fact of love and an outpouring of love: a fullness of good, an ecstasy of loving goodness.” As we receive and experience His love, we become witnesses of the reality of who God is and who we are created to become as Persons made in His image and likeness.

The invitation of Jesus to “Follow Me” is followed by an assertion: “…and I will make you fishers of men” (Mt 4:19 NKJV). We are becoming His disciples as we participate in making disciples, who will eventually make other disciples. This is a strategic plan for growth and spiritual maturity in local parishes around the world. “And you will be my witnesses beginning in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8 NKJV).

That night at the banquet, Vlad felt like he was hearing the invitation of Jesus to “Follow Me,” for the first time. Vlad knew he must have heard those scripture passages read publicly at least 140 times by the time he was 18, but that night he realized the invitation was not just for the twelve apostles, but also for the disciples of the disciples throughout the ages, and that Jesus Himself was extending the invitation to each new generation. That night the Paschal services began to make sense to Vlad as the realization dawned that “Christ truly is Risen!” His Resurrection and Ascension are the context for the concluding lines of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, quoted by the missionary: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations…” (28:18-19a). The prelude to this “Great Commission” at the end of Matthew’s Gospel is a personal call from Jesus at the beginning of the Gospel: “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (4:19).

As Vlad and Deb reflected on the banquet they chose not to ignore the personal invitation of Jesus to “Follow Me,” and they and their children began to attend services in their local parish. It was not long before Vlad scheduled time to make confession even as Deb and the children prepared for Baptism and Chrismation. Pascha 2002 was glorious as they received the Eucharist together as a family for the first time. Their decision to follow Jesus encouraged and enlivened the entire parish. The priest and parish began to experience the reality of becoming Jesus’ disciples as they participated in making disciples through their love for this family.

For Vlad and Deb, serious about becoming disciples, the journey of following their Lord was just beginning. They were learning to pray, “Lord, we want to follow You. We will go wherever you want us to go. We will do whatever You ask us to do. We will give whatever You ask us to give. We want to trust You with every part of our lives and experience what healing (repentance) looks like for us.” Their lives were changed from the inside out.

Two years later an OCMC staff member visited and spoke at their parish. She urged them to consider participating in a two-week OCMC Mission Team to Uganda. After praying and talking with their priest, Vlad and Deb decided this trip was the next step in following the Lord and becoming His disciples. It would be an exercise in faith and trust.

In Uganda the couple encountered what had previously been mere images on the internet or TV. Vlad and Deb were now eye witnesses of the immense suffering that comes with years of civil war, famine and hardships beyond imagination. Yet, in the midst of it all, they found themselves surprised by joy as they stood in a line with dozens of Ugandan Christians to receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the church the Team had helped build.

Being disciples of Jesus Christ took on new meaning for Vlad and Deb. They marveled at how suffering was enabling Ugandan believers to become broken vessels and poured out wine physically and spiritually to their fellow Ugandans. The words of St. Ignatius in his letter to the Ephesians, written on his way to martyrdom, suddenly seemed contemporary:

“I do not issue orders to you, as if I were some great person. For though I am bound for the name [of Christ], I am not yet perfect in Jesus Christ. For now I begin to be a disciple and I speak to you as fellow-disciples with me” (ANF 1:50).

As Vlad and Deb considered the joy and sacrificial love they witnessed in Uganda they recalled a challenge given during Teams orientation at the Mission Center before leaving:

The ultimate test of the benefits of this experience will not be how well you do in the country you visit or how much you are able to express love to new friends for a couple of weeks. The real test will come when you return to your home parish, your priest, your bishop, your family, your friends and neighbors. This is where you live. This is where God has placed you, and how you live there is the real test of the fruit of this Teams experience. Will you allow God to break your hearts there, too? Many of us can act like a disciple of Jesus for a few weeks in a third-world country.
Your home and local parish, where God Himself has placed you, is where disciples are truly made.

Vlad and Deb returned to the USA with a greater desire than ever to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Through their positive witness and prayers, others have been introduced to Christ and joined the parish. Vlad and Deb support their parish and diocese through their enthusiastic service and faithful financial stewardship. In fact, they have helped found a new parish in their home state, all the while supporting OCMC missionaries. And deep in their hearts they are nurturing a tiny seed planted while in Uganda, watered in their home parish—a dream that they might someday go and serve as overseas missionaries. They continue saying to God, “We want to trust You. We want to follow You, wherever You lead.” They are becoming His disciples as they participate in making disciples, beginning in the local parish and continuing, “unto the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8b NKJV).

Footnotes:
1 This is a composite of three true stories with names and locations altered in consideration of privacy.
2 This scripture inaugurates Great Lent (Sunday of Orthodoxy) and the Nativity Fast (Holy Apostle Philip), and the Feast of St. Andrew—“the first-called” (Mt 4:18-22; Mk 1:16-20; Lk 5:1-11).
3 St. Paul followed their example (Phil. 3:8, 10a).
5 Acts 1:8 (This passage is read on Holy Pascha and the Feast of the Ascension.)
The first time I saw Shen Vlash Monastery and the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy was about one year before I came to Albania. I opened the website of the Church: wwwORTHODOXALBANIA.ORG and like one looking through a dark glass, I peered into a world as yet unknown, undiscovered. The Church, set on a hill above Durres, was beautiful. The faces of students were eager. An aura of hope seemed to permeate the pictures.

The Lord prepares the hearts of those He calls, and certainly I have heard His voice in the stories of the students I work with at the Academy. I would like to introduce you to two remarkable young women who are indicative of the vitality and character of Orthodoxy in Albania today. They come from two very different backgrounds: Nestilda Dangaj Lapanxa from Korce grew up in a supportive Orthodox home with a church located next door. Gabriela Dalipi, from Gjirokaster, came from a nominally Moslem family and found the Orthodox faith on her own. For me, it has been a sacred privilege and trust to walk with them, even for a little while, on their journey to Christ.

Nestilda Dangaj Lapanxa, Class of 2010

Nestilda has many great qualities, but immediately one perceives her zeal, her joy, and then her determination. After you come to know her, you understand that behind her kind and gentle demeanor is a very bright woman. It was my good fortune to have Nestilda as a student during my first two years of teaching at the Academy. She was so eager to learn everything from faith development theories to educational psychology to catechesis. Every teacher longs to have students who are motivated and interested in their subject. Very quickly, I discovered that Nestilda is a natural born teacher. I have come...
to know and appreciate her journey of faith which she has graciously allowed me to share.

Nestilda is from a small village outside of Korce, in Southern Albania. Her family is Orthodox, and she recalls her grandmother taking her to Church every Sunday, and then, when she was six years old, she was baptized. Her journey of faith is similar to many young Orthodox women her age in Albania. The Church was located next door to her home, but for many years there was no priest, or even a catechist to teach people about God. Then a priest-monk, Fr. Ioanikios, came to her village from Greece with a group of catechists from Korce. She began to go to catechism lessons and to learn about her faith. When she was twelve years old, her cousin invited her to an Orthodox camp for girls in Voskapoja. Nestilda was an awkward tomboy and really mischievous. She was fond of pranks like putting snakes in the girls’ beds. When she told one of the counselors (a seminary student) that when she finished high school she was going to go to the Academy, the student laughed and said, “You? No way!”

Nestilda told me that that summer at the camp in Voskapoja changed her life. When she returned home, she started to go to Church every Sunday. She reached out to Fr. Ioanikios, and he helped her to grow and commit her life to Christ. She began helping with chanting and catechism classes. When she finished high school (with excellent marks) her parents expected her to study at either the University of Tirana or Korce and choose a profession. She took the entrance exams and was accepted at the University of Tirana to study History, Literature and Journalism and at the University of Korce in Nursing, English, and Literature. She had “won” all her exams and had her choice of fields and vocations, but she didn’t want it. She still wanted to go to the Theological Academy at Shen Vlash, even though her parents were adamantly against this.

She asked many people to help her, including her cousin and her priest. Her catechist told her the exam was the next day and that she was just too late. Undeterred, she raced to take her Bishop’s blessing and left for Tirana with another young woman that night. They arrived at 8:00 pm, stayed up all night with a friend cramming for the test, and went to the Academy the next day hoping to win one more exam.

After the test, she was told that they would call her if she was accepted. She told me she prayed so hard while waiting and continued to have terrible fights every day with her parents. They did not want her to study theology. They were afraid she
would want to become a nun and they would lose their daughter. They insisted she enroll in one of the universities where she had been accepted. Other family members told her she was a “winner” and if she went to the Academy, she would be a “loser.” She held her ground, a strong-willed 18-year-old Albanian girl, with determination and a desire to study theology.

She did win the exam and against her parents’ wishes came to study at the Academy. One of the first people she met when she arrived was her former camp counselor, who laughed and said, “You, you are here?” And she smiled and said, “I told you I would come to study here, but you didn’t believe me.”

When I asked her if she ever regretted the choice, she said, “No, I will never regret it. My time at the school was so meaningful for me.” She said she learned about another way of life and to see other people through the eyes of Christ. She developed a special spiritual friendship with Bishop Nikola, who helped her to grow spiritually, and she met her husband Emanuel there. The experience had changed her life forever.

Nestilda graduated in 2010, with honors, and went to work for the Children’s Office almost immediately. She married Emanuel a few months later. Already she has taken a leading role in starting a Kid’s Club that is serving 70+ children in her neighborhood. When I asked her about what the future holds, she told me she is looking forward, God willing, to go to the Theological Academy, but she kept this to herself.

When she returned home, her parents were really concerned that something strange had happened to their daughter. Her life revolved around going to Church. They thought that she was behaving differently from other children, but eventually they saw that she was still a good daughter, a good student, and so they allowed her to continue. Then Bishop Ilia, the Dean of the Seminary, came to Gjirokaster to make a presentation at her high school regarding the Academy; it was then that she told her parents of her hope to study theology. She was a good student, proficient in Greek and English, with very good grades, so her parents expected her, at the very least, to go to the University of Gjirokaster. Gabriel said it was a really big fight! She refused to take the entrance exam for any school or university except the Academy at Shen Vlash.

Her determination won out. It is amazing that, by the Grace of God, this determined young woman was able to convince her parents to permit her to follow her heart on a path that was completely foreign to them. She believes that it may be because of the deeply engrained cultural value of toleranca fetar, religious tolerance, that her parents allowed her to choose to follow Christ. Gabriela told me that once another student at the Seminary said to her that she didn’t deserve to be at the Academy since she was not Orthodox from birth. She said that kind of prejudice isn’t right. The Lord calls all people.

Gabriela will graduate this spring and, God willing, return to Gjirokaster to attend University, studying English. She hopes to become a philologist and translate materials for the Church one day. She does want to study theology, too, and to write her own book about her experiences. She says, “I don’t like being first; I’d rather be a follower and let someone else lead.” Her intelligence and initiative set her apart from others, however, and she is continually called into the role of leadership and responsibility, whether at the Seminary or in other activities of the Church.

The story of Gabriela’s journey of faith is similar to Nestilda’s except that she was not raised Orthodox. She describes her family as Moslem, but not practicing. She is the only member of her family who is Orthodox, apart from a young niece she baptized at the summer camp a few years ago. When I asked her if she thought she might bring the “good news” of Christ to her family, she said, “Not my parents, they both have been too deeply affected by the Communist thinking of the Hoxha era.” Gabriela told me her mother’s father was an Orthodox priest who died before 1967 when all religions were outlawed, and she thinks her mother may have been baptized when she was a child. Gabriela is able to talk about her faith a little with her mother. Her father is from a Moslem family background.

Gabriela was first introduced to Orthodoxy when she studied Greek as a young child with a missionary who came from Greece (and later became a nun, Sister Thekla). In addition to Greek classes, Gabriela went with the other children to catechism classes to learn about God. One summer she was invited to attend an Orthodox summer camp for girls at St. John Vladimir Monastery. She told me that the experience changed her life. She called her parents and asked permission to be baptized, and they agreed. The experience of the services, the prayers, the fellowship, everything spoke to her soul and, although she confesses she didn’t understand many things at the time, she embraced the Orthodox faith with her whole heart. It was then that she first had the thought to go to the Theological Academy, but she kept this to herself.

When she returned home, her parents were really concerned that something strange had happened to their daughter. Her life revolved around going to Church. They thought that she was behaving differently from other children, but eventually they saw that she was still a good daughter, a good student, and so they allowed her to continue. Then Bishop Ilia, the Dean of the Seminary, came to Gjirokaster to make a presentation at her high school regarding the Academy; it was then that she told her parents of her hope to study theology. She was a good student, proficient in Greek and English, with very good grades, so her parents expected her, at the very least, to go to the University of Gjirokaster. Gabriela said it was a really big fight! She refused to take the entrance exam for any school or university except the Academy at Shen Vlash.

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Gabriela will graduate this spring and, God willing, return to Gjirokaster to attend University, studying English. She hopes to become a philologist and translate materials for the Church one day. But for the moment, she looks at the youth in her home Church like lost sheep in need of a shepherd, and her natural sense of leadership and initiative drives her to dream of starting campus ministries, youth groups, and catechism classes while she continues her education.

Albania is a complex country, and the restoration of the Orthodox Church here is faced with many challenges, and yet, “the harvest is plentiful...” There is an ancient faith, sprouting forth from the seeds of Christianity sown over the course of 2000 years that has never and will never die. I see these seeds blossoming in the hearts and minds of so many young people today. I ask you to pray for the “laborers (who) are few” and for the “Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest,” (Matt. 9:37) because your love, your prayers, and your witness are needed.
His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos) of Albania is the preeminent missionary and missiologist in the contemporary Orthodox world. For more than 50 years, he has acted as the standard-bearer for our call to mission within the worldwide Orthodox Church. Five decades ago, not only was little done in missions, but many within the Church even questioned its validity and importance for Orthodox Christians. Certain circles even viewed any mention of “mission” as a sign of Protestant or Western influences infiltrating contemporary Orthodoxy.

Thus, back in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the young theologian Anastasios Yannoulatos began writing both theological treatises and lay articles explaining the scriptural, theological, historical, liturgical, and ecclesiological foundation of missions. His writings began to reveal to the Church at large how mission is essential to our Orthodox Faith. He would write, “Spirituality that is devoid of the element of the universality, of the struggle and agony for the salvation of “all the world” is a crippled spirituality.”

“Church without mission is a contradiction in terms. Mission is a part of the DNA of the Church’s genetic makeup. Indifference to mission is a denial of Orthodoxy. Mission is an inner necessity for the faithful and for the Church. If we refuse it, we do not merely omit a duty, we deny our true nature.”

“We cannot live a genuine spiritual life “in Christ” and worship Him truly if the desire for the salvation of “the entire world” to unite all things in him, the gathering together in one of “all things in Christ” (Eph 1:10), is not burning constantly within us, and if this desire is not daily activated in an effort to spread the Kingdom of God upon earth.”

“A static church which lacks a vision and a constant endeavor to proclaim the Gospel to the world could hardly be recognized as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church to whom the Lord entrusted the continuation of His work.”

These words are only a taste of what you will find in the Archbishop’s latest book Mission in Christ’s Way: An Orthodox Understanding of Mission. This book is a compilation of articles that the Archbishop has written and given from 1964-2003.

The opening article, Thy Will Be Done: Mission in Christ’s Way, was a keynote address the Archbishop gave when he was the moderator of the World Council of Church’s Conference on World Missions and Evangelism in San Antonio, Texas, in 1989. This article lays the foundation of how we should understand mission as a central aspect of God’s will. Other articles, like The Purpose and Motive of Mission spell out to the reader the “why” of missions.

Sometimes in the Church there is confusion about what exactly missions is all about, and some try to equate any and every kind of ministry to missions. The Archbishop, however, clearly differentiates between missions and typical pastoral care ministries in his article Theology, Mission and Pastoral Care.

Other articles, like Orthodox Missions: Past, Present and Future, touch on the historical reality and activity of the Orthodox Church in mission throughout the centuries, while Rediscovering our Apostolic Identity in the 21st Century acts as a challenging call to the contemporary church to wake and fulfill an essential part of her identity.

Overall, if anyone is serious about understanding Orthodox missions and looking for both critical theological and missiological work, together with inspiring and thought-provoking articles, then this book is for you. We do not have many significant books related to missions in the Orthodox Church, and this undoubtedly will become one of the foundational works in English.

**TOP LEFT:** Archbishop Anastasios’s latest book Mission in Christ’s Way: An Orthodox Understanding of Mission is a compilation of articles that the Archbishop has written and given from 1964-2003 explaining the scriptural, theological, historical, liturgical, and ecclesiological foundation of missions.

**BELOW:** Archbishop Anastasios has served to help resurrect the Church in Albania since the fall of communism in the early 1990s. His years of missionary service and theological insights come forward in his new book Mission in Christ’s Way: An Orthodox Understanding of Mission, which can be a valuable resource to anyone who is serious about understanding Orthodox missions.
Missionary Work in the Holy Archdiocese of Mwanza, Tanzania

by James Hargrave

The temple tops a bare hill, crowded by many other peaks. Nearby is a small rectangular house of unbaked brick, with a thatch roof and fresh straw on the dirt floor.

It seems an isolated scene at first. But down this hollow, or over that ridge, are other small homes among banana groves and coffee fields. This is the village of Ibare, and the house is for the priest’s family. The church is called Holy Resurrection, and Divine Liturgy is about to start.

Lake Victoria isn’t quite visible from this hilltop, but that great inland sea is not far. Holy Resurrection is part of the Muleba deanery, south of Bukoba on Tanzania’s northwestern lakeshore. Uganda is only a few dozen kilometers beyond.

The nave slowly fills during Matins. At home in Mwanza I share chanting duties, but as a guest today I can rest my voice. I stand with the chanters who intone hymns in a rich harmony which, despite discernable Byzantine roots, is uniquely Swahili in style.

The congregation joins in with more familiar hymns, bringing texture to “My soul magnifies the Lord,” “Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord,” and a local setting of Psalm 50 (51) “Have mercy on me, O God.”

At the Great Doxology the nave fills with voices. Men lean against the southwest walls behind me. To their left, women sit together on rush mats. In front of them in the northeast, the children press into a tight crowd, oblivious to the open floor all around.

This is not a typical Sunday morning in the Holy Archdiocese of Mwanza here in western Tanzania. It’s a special day, because a priest is present. Father Eleftherios pastors four other congregations as well as Ibare. On most Sundays he is elsewhere, and this community prays the Typika service.

Our Archdiocese, covering 400,000 square kilometers of western Tanzania, is about as big as California. The sixteen million people of this area belong to about sixty ethnic groups and speak as many distinct languages.

In such a region we have forty priests, 170 communities, and perhaps 40,000 faithful Orthodox Christians. We are responsible for eight of Tanzania’s twenty-six regions, but have congregations in only three. The bulk of the Orthodox Christian presence is clustered around the city of Bukoba, a stone’s throw from Uganda. Our faithful come mostly from only two ethnic groups. We are a small Church; but we are a growing Church.

In February OCMC Missionary Michael Pagedas visited the community of Bugabo to participate in a common occurrence—a mass baptism. Because families, communities and villages make decisions as a group, many of the newly illumined know very little about their new Christian faith beyond the fact that they have embraced it. Baptism is an important first step in becoming a disciple, but it must be followed by many more steps.
As OCMC missionaries like James Hargrave (right) learn the language and culture of the Tanzanian people, they are presented with opportunities to share the Orthodox faith. Many of the newly illumined know very little about their new Christian faith beyond the fact that they have embraced it. Baptism is an important first step in becoming a disciple, but it must be followed by many more steps, including catechetical teaching. 

BELOW: OCMC Missionary James Hargrave (right) sits with OCMC Associate Director Fr. David Rucker (left) and OCMC Mission Team Members to discuss the topics that they have been invited to teach among some of the communities in the Archdiocese of Mwanza. Helping to prepare OCMC Mission Teams is just one of James’ many responsibilities as an OCMC missionary.

LOWER LEFT: The bulk of the Metropolis’ 170 communities, and approximately 40,000 faithful Orthodox Christians, are clustered around the city of Bukoba, a stone’s throw from Uganda. 

OPOsite: Taso Sakkas, a 2010 OCMC Team Member, participates in the lives of Tanzanian Faithful through a game of soccer.
one tent to house women, another for men, and conduct classes under trees. We’d have to truck in tiny stoves, sacks of charcoal, rice, beans, cups and plates to feed the two hundred or so expected participants. The OCMC/Finnish Team could stay at a guest house in Muleba, a forty-minute drive to the east.

Yes, our resources are spare. Even compared to other religious groups in the area, we are poor. Orthodox Christian faithful in western Tanzania are almost all rural subsistence farmers with little cash income and even less access to formal education. Illiteracy prevents many young adults from participating even in opportunities like this seminar.

Back in Ibare, Abel and I watch the children line up for Holy Communion. They squeeze forward to the Chalice, the chest of each pressed against the shoulder blades of the one before. After Liturgy, they race outdoors to feast on little mangoes.

The adults have arranged something special for us. They seat us in the sunshine, on the only two chairs available, and dance. Traditional Haya dance is accompanied by a goatskin drum and by a singer whose verses punctuate refrains sung by the clapping and stamping crowd. On the dust of the dance floor, two or three people show their moves at a time. Everyone is involved—even babies sway on the backs of their leaping and twisting mothers.

The enthusiasm of this dance is visible throughout western Tanzanian society. Of course there are needs. We foreigners often think of obvious material issues, or else of spiritual needs vaguely defined by the concept of winning converts. But the greatest need is for communion. When asked what we foreigners can do to help local people often reply, “Just come be with us. Share in our lives.” This is the example of Christ our God, who did indeed heal the sick, feed the hungry, and preach of the Kingdom. Even more importantly, he took on human flesh and participated in our lives. Our salvation comes not by the teaching or by the healing alone, but by the Incarnation.

OCMC Missionary Mama Charita Stavrou likes to remind me that “We are here to do what God wants us to do.” If we show up, the Holy Spirit will guide us. The global Church is starting to listen.

OCMC has six long-term Missionaries working out their salvation in the Holy Archdiocese of Mwanza. OCMC Missionaries Felice Stewart, Michael Pagedas, Maria Roeber and Katie Wilcoxson are health care workers that have been asked by His Eminence Archbishop Jeronymos to minister to the bodies and spirits of people in the town of Bukoba, as well as elsewhere. We are joined regularly by short-term teams from Greece, Finland and OCMC.

Teams and missionaries come with a task or job description, but our deep role is communion: participation in the lives of our local sisters and brothers. We are supported in this work by the prayers, friendship, encouragement and material generosity of folks in North America and around the world. You are welcome to join in.
MISSIONARIES

ALBANIA

ANASTASIA PAMELA BARKSDALE

During the spring, I was home, traveling from the East Coast to the West and back again, building my support team, sharing the story of the miracle of renewal in the Church of Albania, and seeing old friends and meeting new ones. Immediately upon my return to Albania in May, I had to hit the ground running, with the Missions Institute/OCMC team coming to visit us with Fr. Luke Veronis, and another OCMC short-term team arriving just as they left. What a wonderful and special group of people they were, and the children at the Home of Hope whom they came to serve loved each of them. Summer Camp season began and also the proofreading and final edits for His Beatitude’s book, Mission in Christ’s Way. With the Lord’s blessing, I hope to establish a Christian Education Resource Center at the Academy and equip it with the materials and resources needed to assist and train the students.

GEORGIA GILMAN BENDO

In 2010 I continued my work teaching English to 6th through 9th graders at the Protagonist School. I also oversaw the English program as a whole (1st-9th grades). In May 2010, we worked together with a bookstore to host a special oral English test with a professor from a college in London. Several of our students participated. Aside from teaching English, I also was in charge of the Spiritual Journey after-school catechism group. We used the book Divine Messages, which is the first in a catechism series written by His Beatitude a number of years ago and was recently translated by my husband, Dcn. Anastas. We also introduced our students to other traditions and experiences within the Church through a Christmas party, New Year’s celebration with a Vasilopita (St Basil’s) Cake, and a field trip to the Orthodox Church of Albania’s Theological School at the historic and holy Shen Vlash Monastery. Amidst all of these efforts I continued raising our two-year-old son Vasili, who was baptized in January; and I supported my husband in his service to the Church as a deacon, translator, and chief editor of the church’s intellectual journal as well. When called upon, I also translated articles or documents from Albanian to English. I was blessed to receive a grant from the Farah Foundation to strengthen our English and Catechism program during 2011. In 2011, I also hope to set up a teacher training specifically for the teachers who are involved in the English and Catechism programs.

THE HOPPE FAMILY

January through August 2010 we were in the United States. Our son Daniel was born on January 19. During the winter and spring I traveled, visiting churches to build our support team. I also spent a week in Albania with the short-term team led by Father Luke Veronis. Dr. Jeffrey Macdonald accompanied me on this trip to investigate further the
calling of his family to Albania. On August 4, we returned to Albania. About 10 days later, we led a team of 25 young people to Kosovo for our annual summer day camp program there. Because of our tight schedule and limited funding (Agape canister grant was reduced for 2010), we were only able to do camps in three schools with the participation of about 1200 children. Leaving the camp in Gabriela’s capable hands, I traveled to Cyprus for a few days to attend a meeting regarding the YBC catechism book program which we publish in Albania. In September, I participated in the official dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church as one of two delegates from the Orthodox Church of Albania; and, in October, I resumed my duties at the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy, teaching two courses in Patrology with a total of 20 students.

I continue to direct the work of 11 Albanian seminary graduates at The Central Children’s Office of the Orthodox Church of Albania and the campus ministry at the University of Tirana. The Children’s Office runs weekly programs at eight locations in Tirana, involving over 400 children. We also provide programming, curriculum, and training for children’s ministries all over Albania. Gabriela works closely together with me in the children’s ministry. She is also continuing work on her Master’s degree in Children and Family Ministry from Bethel seminary. Gabriela also received her US citizenship in November.

THE RUSSELL FAMILY

Pauline began 2010 in the hospital on three separate occasions for pancreatitis. She then traveled back to the States for surgery. This was the fourth time she had been separated from the family and the second year in a row that she missed Maddy’s birthday. Upon returning to Albania, she was able to continue her work at Protagonist School, participating in the Character Traits program for all grades. It is headed up by her mother, co-missionary Melanie Linderman, who puts a lot of time and effort into her student assemblies and teacher character training in order to raise awareness of the need of love, tolerance, and respect for one another. A library was also established in the school through your generous donations. I (George) have been busy with the website company which develops competitive websites for Albanian businesses. Through this venture I have been able to spread the Word with many business-class individuals. The children continued their amazing educational experience at GDQ. At the end of 2010, we made the tremendously difficult decision to leave Albania to avoid another long separation as Pauline receives treatment for her ongoing health issues. The task and cost of beginning our lives again in the States is very daunting. We humbly ask for your prayers and support as we make this life-changing transition for the second time. Thank you for the prayers and donations during our time in Albania. Nothing could have been accomplished without you.

MELANIE LINDERMAN

2010 has been a year of closure. After almost eight years in Albania, it is time to finish those projects I can, and hand-off the projects to those who are able to take on further responsibilities. The radio programs for learning English and reading the Bible in English have been concluded. One of our team members has carried on with my “after work/school” English learners class. The Character Development program, at Protagonist School where I taught, is established and is becoming an important part of the curriculum in the school. The parents, students and teachers have realized the importance of developing positive core traits (which by another name might be described as Christian values) at a critical time in the students’ lives. The work is never done, nor are the prayers and feelings for the beautiful people I have grown to love and respect over these past several years. Glory to God.

ROMANIA

THE FRANTZ FAMILY

At the St. Dimitrie Program, with the help of the Cluj Archdiocese, we were able to upgrade our heating system and to do some remodeling at the Protection of the Theotokos Family Center (PTFC) day-center. Our work has progressed at the Gherla maximum security prison. We are trying to collaborate with the national prison system so that we will be able to visit all of the prisons in Romania and to give the prisoners information about spirituality and recovery from addictions. Through our work in the National Anti-drug Program of the Romanian Orthodox Church (the “PNA”), priests are being trained on how to work in the field of addictions. Some of the priests are prison chaplains. The PNA has also now completed our course on addictions for the seminary faculty in Romania. Related to this, I have begun teaching about addictions at the St. Herman Seminary in Kodiak, Alaska, where I will be returning in 2011. Requests for aid from poor mothers increased at the PTFC. The day-center for small children was at full capacity all year. The program is helping many of the mothers go to school or find work. It serves more than 40 families on a regular basis, thanks to the increased donations of money and basic supplies by the local community. At this time, our total budget is 55% funded from Romanian sources. We hope that this increases in 2011. Additionally, the Church has sent us a social worker who will help both of our projects to identify grants and local funding opportunities, so we are optimistic of making progress in the area of these projects becoming more self-sustaining.

CHRISTINA SEMON

I continued in my language study throughout 2010 and worked hard to be a learner of Romanian culture. I also became acting coordinator of the international clothing drives for the Protection of the Theotokos Family Center (PTFC). Over the last two years, there have been several parish communities and individuals that have helped clothe young mothers and their children by participating in the international clothing drives. In the Spring, I began to re-direct my primary focus center to the St. Dimitrie Program. The goal was to offer my services in occupational therapy and transportation. I helped to organize and establish therapeutic recreational activities like croquet, ping-pong, mounting icons, frames, and making Christmas decorations. I helped train Romanians to lead the occupational therapy sessions. I also helped transport staff and volunteers to the tuberculosis hospital in Savadisla and the psychiatric hospital in Borsa as needed. In July, I led a short-term Mission Team from the US that ministered to a group of teenagers at a church youth camp which focused on becoming disciples of Christ and helping others to become disciples of Christ. In August, I visited the OCMC missionaries in Albania and
JAMES HARGRAVE

The biggest accomplishment of 2010 may have been successfully finding a place to live! Mwanza is a rapidly growing city with a severe housing shortage. Even our Archdiocese has been searching for three years for a site to construct our Cathedral and Archdiocesan headquarters. My housing search was a time-consuming and sometimes frustrating process, which served as a great introduction to the realities of life for ordinary urban Tanzanians. Through your prayers and through the hard work of local Archdiocesan staff, God has given me a small apartment in the neighborhood of our temporary Archdiocesan headquarters, together on a secure compound with a trustworthy landlady and her family. I am safe (the Archbishop’s greatest concern on my behalf) but not isolated (my own greatest concern). I participated in language and culture study for a good portion of 2010. I also assisted with OCMC Teaching Team that served in Geita, and the language studies and transportation of my fellow missionaries serving in Tanzania. His Eminence Archbishop Jeronymos has asked for a paper proposing an Archdiocesan youth program by the end of 2011. We would also like to begin publishing our newsletter before the end of this year. Preparation for short-term Teams is ongoing.

MICHAEL PAGEDAS

As I write this, I am closing in on my seven-month anniversary in the field. Even when I was away for college, graduate school, and working a job in a different state, I was never away from “home” for this long. Despite the separation from the familiar, I couldn’t be happier in doing the work I need to be doing in a place I enjoy for people I love. My mission focus so far has been to adjust to a new culture and learn a new language. In addition, I am trying to form as many new relationships as I can, both within the Church and out in “the world.” Many of these have been served up to me without effort, and they have developed into strong friendships. I am excited to continue moving forward with my ministry and further mastering Swahili and adapting to Tanzanian culture.

FELICE STEWART

I arrived in Tanzania on July 9, 2010, and spent 10 weeks in Kiswahili classes and enculturating in Dar es Salaam. I then went to Mwanza for a brief period at the request of Metropolitan Jeronymos, along with my fellow missionaries, to visit the Archdiocesan office and become better acquainted with him. I have been in Bukoba, our final destination, since October 12, 2010, and continued with my language studies. Much has been accomplished by way of enculturation here in Bukoba. I am looking forward to beginning to serve in the hospital here as well during 2011.

KATIE WILCOXSON

I knew mission work is one of the hardest jobs, because not only are there the known and unknown physical obstacles, but also the spiritual ones. While in Dar es Salaam (our first stop in Tanzania for language study), I got a crash course into the Tanzanian patient care and healthcare systems as a result of an emergency appendectomy I had to undergo. I am still healing physically, mentally, and spiritually from this event and ask for your continued prayers. I am amazed, though, how with God and no one else, that I was able to stare my worst fear in the face and continue to walk on and leave it behind me. All I can say is anything is possible with God. I never truly understood or grasped that concept until I experienced having emergency surgery in Tanzania. Since arriving in Bukoba, our final destination, I have to say that language learning has also been a great struggle due to a high turnover of teachers. I ask your prayers for this as well. When I arrived here in Bukoba, it brought with it relief and a new beginning for the next year. Like when I was here eight years ago, I stepped on the shores of Bukoba and knew I was back home.
by Kenneth Kidd

Good Morning, Brother!” will forever and joyfully resound in my head as the first words that greeted my team members and me each day as we walked to morning prayers in Bakeswar, India, just outside Kolkata. Surrounded by over 70 Orthodox Faithful, many of whom traveled by train, taxi, and/or bike to spend these five days in Bible Study with us, we prayerfully opened each day as brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ. Gatherings like these are few and far between, as Christianity continues to face harsh political and social oppression throughout the State of West Bengal, India.

Even though St. Thomas first brought the message of Jesus Christ here almost 2,000 years ago, India remains 75% Hindu, 20% Muslim, and only 5% of everything else, including Christian. The Hindu religion has more than 330,000 deities. Many Hindi recognize Jesus Christ as one of these Hindu gods. This is easier to understand when you realize that, for all intents and purposes, it is illegal to evangelize and baptize anyone as a Christian in the State of West Bengal. It is much easier for someone living in this culture to absorb Christ into their mainstream Hindu beliefs rather than face political and social oppression for professing Christ alone and being baptized a Christian. Many people we met at the Bible Study are estranged from their families, and some had lost their jobs because they became Christians. Despite these legal and familial hardships and the extreme financial poverty that persists in the region, many of the people we met that week continue to express great strength and hope for their life as Christians.

It has now been five months since my return from this short-term mission team, and I find myself reflecting not so much on the memories of my service there, but more on the strength and faith that radiated from these people. What I discovered from many of my conversations is that what helps them to carry on in this environment is their understanding of the Body of Christ. What this means is that they recognize the fact that each of us are “brothers and sisters” in Christ, constantly praying for one another’s salvation. This reality, which was never a part of their lives as Hindus, provides amazing strength to them now as they live their faith in these oppressive circumstances. They know that they are spiritually connected with many others throughout the world who are with them in prayer at all times.

The slow but sure growth of the Orthodox Church in West Bengal over the past 30 years has been led by a line of faithful Orthodox missionary priests and monastics. These individuals have worked to bring the Gospel to those yearning to hear it in this part of India, and today there are 10 indigenous Indian Orthodox clergy serving approximately 7,000 Orthodox and/or potential Orthodox in the few hundred square miles that surround Kolkata. Many of the 70 Faithful who attended the Bible Study came to the Faith through the missionary efforts of these church leaders, and they are now part of the core group that will help shape the Church’s future here. With legal limitations as to how the Church is able to evangelize, many conversions take place as the result of one-on-one relationships. Understanding this, many of our discussions at the Bible Study focused on living a life in Christ within our community, as well as understanding the tenets of the Faith so that they could answer questions when people
**Kasianni**

Kasianni (birth name Srabanti) is a 20-year-old college student at Kolkata City College. Kasianni was one of the first young girls to move into the Theotokos Girls’ Orphanage, operated by the Philanthropic Society of the Orthodox Church of India, when it opened in 1999. From a large Hindu family, Kasianni was the youngest of 8 children. When her father died in the late 1990s, her mother was left to raise all of the children by herself. Her mother worked long hours in rice fields and in a local fish market, but the family remained in a very impoverished state. Seeing such ambition and drive in Kasianni, her mother feared that she would not be able to provide everything Kasianni needed to utilize her talents, including an education.

Kasianni moved into the orphanage at her mother’s request. She began to attend services at the chapel and began to feel a close relationship with Jesus Christ. She approached one of the local Indian clergy, Fr. Nektarios, and began to discuss the Faith and what it meant to have a life in Christ. Kasianni’s godmother, Christiana, remembers that the hymns of the Church were very meaningful to Kasianni and she always supported throughout Kolkata.

**Below:** Kasianni (top right), here pictured with OCMC Team Member Christine Gilbert (center). She is currently a student at Kolkata City College, and she continues to grow in her faith.

**Rafael**

Rafael, born Shambu in Kolkata, thinks that he is 32 years old but has no records to confirm that fact. He grew up in a large Hindu family with two brothers, one sister, both of his grandparents, and one of his aunts. He describes his family as being Hindu and going to the temples once in a while, but states that they were not very ‘fanatic’ about the Hindu faith. Rafael’s family struggled because his father fought various addictions while Rafael was a child, including drug abuse, and was unable to provide much for the family, either in the form of financial support or in love. He described the family as being in constant disruption; this was very unsettling to him.

As Rafael grew older, he sought a peace that he was unable to find in any Hindu temple. He was drawn into a Christian church down the road from his school, which happened to be Holy Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church. He sat in the back of the church and listened to the message of Fr. Ignatios Sennis, a Greek monastic and missionary priest to India (Fr. Ignatios is now His Eminence Ignatios of Madagascar). He returned a few times and began speaking with Fr. Ignatios about Christ and the Orthodox Christian faith. Rafael began to volunteer alongside other people in the parish as they reached out to serve the impoverished people living in the streets around the church. He was amazed at how the Faith emanated through love for all of our neighbors around us. This was especially surprising in the Indian culture, because the Church was reaching out to those who traditionally were from lower castes and were deemed ‘untouchable.’

In 1997, Rafael was Baptized an Orthodox Christian and has continued to serve the Church in Kolkata as well as all of its philanthropic ministries as a paid employee of the Church.

Rafael finds inspiration in Matthew 25: 31-46, where Christ describes that when you serve your brother and sister, with food, clothing, and visitation, that you are serving Him: “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (vs 40). Though on some days it is overwhelming by the work that needs to be done at the Church, Rafael feels called to obtain theological education and says, “If it is God’s will, and with God’s help, I will become a priest one day.” He is praying to be an integral part of the Church’s future in West Bengal.

**ABOVE:** Though few in number, the Orthodox Faithful in West Bengal strive to offer a living witness to the Faith through their prayerful support of several philanthropic ministries. These philanthropic ministries include: a Girls’ Orphanage housing over 100 young girls, a new Boys’ Orphanage that currently has 6 boys, 5 elementary schools, 7 medical clinics, a monthly dental clinic, as well as daily breakfast for children living on the streets near the church in Kolkata.

responded and inquired about their faith. Even empowered with this understanding, however, the ongoing social and political pressures work to slow Church growth. Orthodox Christians in India remain in need of prayer.

Two young adults we met while serving in India, Rafael and Kasianni, had been baptized as Orthodox Christians and feel a calling in their hearts to serve the Church and see that the Gospel continues to reach more people throughout West Bengal.

All of our brothers and sisters in India remain in need of our prayers as they continue to struggle within the social and political climate that exists in West Bengal. They feel and appreciate our prayers. Through these prayers they find the strength to continue to bear a living witness to their faith and to grow the beautiful philanthropic ministries of the Church in India. These philanthropic ministries include: a Girls’ Orphanage housing over 100 young girls, a new Boys’ Orphanage that currently has 6 boys, 5 elementary schools, 7 medical clinics, a monthly dental clinic, as well as daily breakfast for children living on the streets near the church in Kolkata.

Each day, our short-term Mission Team to India began with the words, “Good morning brother.” Our trip ended with the words, “We love you brother.” My fellow Team Members and I left Kolkata and our new friends only in the physical sense. Each Sunday, as I approach the chalice, I am mindful of my brothers and sisters in Christ around the world with whom I am sharing the Eucharist.

To learn more about the ministries in India and about short-term Mission Team opportunities, visit www.ocmc.org. To find out more information about the ministries of the Philanthropic Society of the Orthodox Church of India, and specifically the Girls’ Orphanage, visit www.theluckygirlsmovie.com.

To visit www.theluckygirlsmovie.com.
DEVELOPING MISSIONS

Setting The World Ablaze:
OCMC’s New Hunger Strike Program

by Carolyn Kouracos

Our young people are ever-increasingly plugged in. They’re plugged in to cell phones, computers, iPods, television, video games, and the like. They’re plugged in but run the risk of becoming disconnected from their family, community, Church, and Faith. There can be a tendency to think these young people are more focused on themselves, more likely to be concerned with what song they want to download next or what their friends are chatting about on their computer-based social network or the latest fad — certainly not thinking about the injustices and inequalities in our world today or sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Maybe teenagers, however, will be the ones to set the world ablaze with the love of Jesus Christ.

Last year during Great Lent, at St. Paul’s Greek Orthodox Church in Irvine, California, a group of 66 teenagers gave up an entire weekend, including the comforts of home, their cell phones and iPods, to participate in a Hunger Strike retreat. What motivated these young people to make this sacrifice? It was the desire to feed the hungry and bring the hope of Jesus Christ to children, families, and communities on the other side of the globe. I had the great privilege to participate with them as a youth leader.

Hunger Strike takes place within local parishes, where teens fast for 30 hours while they participate in activities that raise both awareness and money for the needs of those throughout the world who suffer the effects of poverty and who hunger for the hope found in Jesus Christ.

“Every Orthodox Church should have their youth group participate in Hunger Strike,” declared Fr. Steven Tsichlis, pastor at St. Paul’s Greek Orthodox Church in Irvine, CA. “This event has really galvanized our youth program here at St. Paul’s.”

Last year, when the teens arrived for the retreat they were given passports depicting Orthodox Christian children from Tanzania. The passports included a photograph of a child in Tanzania and information about the child’s home, family, school, health, and daily life. (These passports were given to the children to thank them for their sacrifices and to help them feel connected to our children in Africa.)

Hunger Strike participants are shown the resourceful ways in which people live and play in some of the world’s most economically challenged countries. Here they make a ball — the same kind that kids in places like Tanzania use to play soccer.

Here participants in a 2010 Hunger Strike at St. Paul’s Greek Orthodox Church in Irvine, California, making Prosporhia (Communion bread) and Kolyva (memorial wheat), which they enjoyed as a special snack after a candlelight vigil and memorial service at the end of the first day.
passports were a result of previous mission trips in which interviews and photographs were taken of the children. The passports help to open a window into the lives of these African children and illustrate the harsh reality of living in a third world country for our children here in the United States.

John Chase, a senior high school student and member of St. Paul’s GOYA, said, “The passports are really eye-opening, and they made me appreciate what blessings I have here. Hunger Strike gave me a clearer idea of how others live and how important it is for me to be an ambassador for Christ.”

Broken into five “villages,” the teens competed against one another in a spirit of fun through activities that emphasize the need for clean water, adequate food, reliable energy, and the hunger for the Gospel of Jesus Christ that exist in developing countries. Paired with the relays and games, the teens were given a clearer understanding of their Orthodox faith through special workshops as they shared in making Prospohora (Communion bread) and Kolyva (memorial wheat). They learned about the preparation for Holy Communion, Holy Water and Baptism, and participated in a midnight memorial service and candlelight vigil. They also participated in a community service project by collecting canned food from the surrounding neighborhood to be given to Saint Innocent’s Orphanage in Tijuana, Mexico.

“The relays and games really make you think about the hardships in other countries,” said Jimmy Parker, a junior in high school from St. Paul’s. “And the workshops really gave me a deeper understanding of our Orthodox faith.”

As the first day of the Hunger Strike retreat came to an end, the teens prepared to make a presentation to be given in church after Liturgy. A group of them worked on their talks, while another group made picket signs and finalized a large banner showing 29,000 fingerprints representing the number of children that die every day from the effects of poverty. The teens also watched a video about OCMC’s mission work around the world. They learned how people live in different countries, about their needs, and their hunger to know the Good News of Jesus Christ. They learned about OCMC’s work to train seminarians, build water wells, support indigenous priests, develop soup kitchens, and educate children.

The day culminated in a candlelight vigil and memorial service. The teens lit a number of candles determined by the donations they raised through sponsors. Alone in a darkened church, the teens were reverent and still. The candles were lit in silent procession. Each one of the 156 candles represented life, and their significance wasn’t lost on the teenagers who had gathered together that cold night in March.

Continued on next page
2010. These courageous young people continued to light candle after candle as the Jesus Prayer was recited in steady repetition, reminding all those present that the world waits in darkness for the Light that only comes from Jesus Christ. Once the candles stood in flame, the entire church was aglow in candlelight, and the gathered youth stood in humble homage as the priest gave a memorial.

According to Matthew Klados from St. Paul's, “The best part of the weekend was the candlelight vigil and memorial service. I never felt so close to God.”

Following the candlelight service the teens joined together in a special snack of memorial wheat and Prosphora just prior to going to sleep under the dome of the church. The next morning the group was tired but energized by all they had experienced the previous day and by the bonds of friendship they had forged. Following Liturgy the next day, the teens gave the parish the presentation they had worked so hard on the night before. They shared all they had learned from their participation in Hunger Strike. The presentation was lively and moving.

“These young people are a huge inspiration to our parish,” said Alex Gorbenko, a member of St. Paul’s parish council and the president of the missions committee at the parish.

At the conclusion of their presentation, the students invited everyone to a pancake breakfast, where parishioners had an opportunity to donate to OCMC’s mission efforts, pick up a Hunger Strike tee shirt, and talk to the teens about their experience. St. Paul’s Hunger Strike retreat has raised more than $7,000 for OCMC over the past two years.

As I watched the retreat come to a close, I couldn’t help but think of the transformation of these young people. They grew in their compassion for the poor by identifying with their suffering. They embraced their Orthodox faith and learned to share the Gospel. I am certain this one weekend will provide a lifetime of inspiration for these teens as they set the world ablaze with their enthusiasm and love for Jesus Christ.

Dozens of teenagers like the ones at St. Paul’s Greek Orthodox Church in Irvine have participated. “Hunger Strike is amazing,” according to Amanda Fields a 17-year-old from St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church in Northridge, CA. “It changed us.”

Hunger Strike is now an annual youth ministry of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) and a growing youth movement of the Orthodox Church. If you are interested in learning more about Hunger Strike, making a donation to this ministry, or registering for next year’s national Hunger Strike please visit our website at www.OCHungerStrike.org or email us at HungerStrike@OCMC.org.

By Amy Pierce

As a woman of intense faith, Cina Daskalakis was recruited for service on the OCMC Board of Directors in 2002 by board member Helen Nicozisis. Cina’s impact on OCMC has been enormous. Sadly, we had to say goodbye to Cina too soon, as she was called to the Lord on February 27, 2011, but her legacy will live on in our hearts and through her good works.

Cina and her husband John generously supported the Orthodox Christian Mission Center in many ways. They were major donors to the OCMC Capital Campaign and underwrote a large portion of the dedication event that introduced the new Archbishop Anastasios and Archbishop Demetrios Training and Administrative Building to the world on May 21, 2009.

The Daskalakis’ also helped to provide in-field training to our missionaries in Albania by sending staff abroad to offer teaching and pastoral care. Additionally, they underwrote the first in-field missionary retreat that gathered missionaries from across Europe so that they could all share ideas, trials and blessings. Cina and John also sponsored an edition of the OCMC magazine to help spread the call to missions within the greater Orthodox community.

Cina also felt it was important to support OCMC through her actions, both on the board and in her own parish community. As a board member, she served on the Development Committee and on the Dedication Committee. In 2008, she joined three other board members and went into the field to participate in a Spiritual Odyssey to Albania. During their trip, the board members had the opportunity to spend time with OCMC missionaries and see firsthand how vital their ministry has been to the resurrection of the Church in a country that had outlawed all religion under Communism.

Cina’s missions activities extended beyond the auspices of OCMC as well. She sat on the board of the Endowment Fund for Orthodox Missions based in Lancaster, PA and was a major contributor to the Missions Institute for Orthodox Christianity at Holy Cross Greek School of Theology in Brookline, MA.

In addition to missions, Cina’s other great love was children and offering them the joy of growing up with Orthodoxy. Cina and John helped to found the Chesapeake Youth Council Summer Camp, a Greek Orthodox camp in the Baltimore area. They also helped to fund the Day School at St. Demetrios in Baltimore and have been generous contributors to the St. Innocent Orphanage located in Mexico.

St. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 3:9, 16: “For we are God’s fellow-workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building (literally house or temple). OCMC has been privileged to be a “fellow-worker” with Cina, in ministries that will truly be eternal. Therefore, it is with hope and expectation we sing: May her memory be eternal!"
A goal of OCMC is to bring the life saving message of Christ to places where it may have never before been heard. OCMC does this by sending missionaries who evangelize and witness through philanthropic ministry as well as by training up indigenous church leaders. The Support a Mission Priest (SAMP) program supports this effort by offering financial assistance to Orthodox priests around the world who nurture growing Orthodox communities while also sharing the Good News with those who may have never heard it. This fulfills the command of our Lord to "make disciples of all nations" according to St. Matthew’s Gospel (28:18-20).

SAMP donations supplement a priest’s stipend enabling them to serve the parish full-time. Many of these priests plant multiple new parishes because of this. This support from the SAMP program means that hierarchs are able to ordain more clergy to meet the growing numbers of parishes in their diocese. Since many of these priests are responsible for the spiritual needs of more than one parish, they often must travel by bus, foot or bicycle many miles to offer the Divine Liturgy, and to teach and baptize new members.

SAMP support helps priests serving these emerging communities to bring new people to Christ and provide the pastoral care that they need. They are becoming disciples (followers) of Christ, as they participate in making new disciples.

Many individuals and parishes across the United States have given generously so these priests can continue to offer the fullness of the Orthodox faith to new people and plant new parishes. Many supporters have thought of creative ways to get involved with the SAMP program. For example, as part of their annual Saints Festival, the children of St. John Chrysostom Antiochian Orthodox Church in York, Pennsylvania, assembled jar mixes as a fundraiser. According to Timm Wenger, Saints Festival co-coordinator, "Members of the parish donated jars and ingredients for three-bean chili, corn bread, and short cake. The children measured the ingredients, attached the recipes, and sold the jar mixes during the Nativity Fast." The proceeds were used to sponsor a mission priest.

Nikolia Rallis, 2010 OCMC Team member to Romania, organized a choir to record a CD of Orthodox hymns. All net proceeds from the sale of this CD will benefit the SAMP program. For the past four months, her choir named the "Panagia Koukouzelissa Choir" has worked diligently to record a CD containing the hymns of Holy Saturday. The CD, which is in the final stages of preparation, is entitled Arise, O God. According to Nikolia, “Our desire to make such a CD grew out of several goals, including: to support Orthodox missions, to help the faithful understand the service of Holy Saturday, and to expose people to traditional Byzantine music in English.” Arise, O God is available for purchase by visiting www.koukouzelissachoir.org.

Through their creativity and the sacrificial giving of their time and funds, people like Nikolia and the children of St. John Chrysostom have made it possible for the SAMP program to help our brothers and sisters around the world "make disciples of all nations."

If you would like to learn more about the SAMP program or find out ways that you can be involved, please contact us at samp@ocmc.org or 904-829-5132 ext. 163.
Helps provide much needed support to the nearly 400 Orthodox priests in 20 countries who receive financial assistance through the Support a Mission Priest (SAMP) Program with a gift to the Orthodox Christian Mission Center.

Contact Michelle DeAngelis by phone at 1-877-GO-FORTH (463-6784), by e-mail at SAMP@ocmc.org, or visit www.ocmc.org for more information or to make a gift.