

MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS



ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN MISSION CENTER

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TURN TO CHRIST:

MINISTERING TO THE YOUTH OF ALBANIA

ALSO INSIDE: 2016 Teams | Missionary Updates | Mission News

CONTENTS



FEATURES

3 Miracles of Rain: *the Story Continues*

Fr. Martin Ritsi

6 Turn to Christ: *Ministering to the youth of Albania*

Dn. Stephanos & Dkn. Alexandria Ritsi

10 Teach *Them All I Have Commanded You:*

Anastasia Pamela Barksdale

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

OCMC Missionaries13
What it Means to Support a Missionary, **Hosea and Tamara DiLullo**
Missionary Updates

Orthodox Mission Teams.....20
2016 Team Opportunities
The Strength in Your Sisters' Shoulders **Pres. Joy-Anna Corona**

Mission News.....22
Kenya, Guatemala, Korea,

On the cover: His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios gives a younger altar server the Eucharist. As the Orthodox Church in Albania finds itself reestablished, it now strives to strengthen its foundations. The need for well-trained clergy and lay leaders has never been greater as the Church tries to help the Albanian people grow more deeply in their faith.



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As the official missions agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America it is OCMC's mission to make disciples of all nations by bringing people to Christ and His Church.

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LEFT: On a recent visit back to the Turkana region of northern Kenya, OCMC Executive Director Fr. Martin Ritsi (right) visited four communities that are new to, or for the first-time receiving, the Orthodox Faith. As with previous visits, the miracle of rain seemed to follow the team as they served in this drought stricken region.

MIRACLES OF RAIN: *the Story Continues*

by Fr. Martin Ritsi

Will it really happen again, I wondered? Will God reveal Himself again to these people through a miraculous event? We have been ministering in the Turkana region of Kenya. One of our goals is to reach peoples that have not yet heard the Gospel. There are still scattered pockets of villages that have remained isolated in this semi-arid desert. Reaching them involves driving for hours on faint dirt roads and then leaving these tracks to wind even deeper into the desert between the scattered trees and over the sandy terrain into virgin territories.

The first village we approached, six years ago, eventually received the Orthodox Faith. Led by their Shaman, they accepted the Faith. God worked miracles by sending prophecies of our coming, in advance and

then three years in a row sending rain, during a time of drought, upon our arrival. On the third visit, the people were baptized in a river that had actually filled the night we arrived.

After these baptisms, we learned of four other villages that had no Christian presence. Meetings were arranged. We travelled with an OCMC team of Holy Cross Seminary students to present the Gospel message. Our first visit, though, began with strong resistance. There was a heated debate among the village elders. They argued for over an hour. Some were in favor. Others were strongly against allowing foreigners to speak in their village. God opened the doors again. They allowed us to share the message we brought. We slept next to the elders that night on the dry desert wash. Throughout the night, they continued their debate. In the morning, we met. They announced we could return to continue sharing this message.

Below: Ministering to the physical needs of the Turkana people is as important a witness as catechetical teaching. The love of Christ is taught and shared as the Mission Center has dug wells for communities that need access to water.



Above: The Turkana have been visited by several OCMC Mission Teams. The Teams often follow the evangelical efforts of the Turkana priests and help to teach about the Faith to those who have come, or are coming, to Orthodoxy.

Left: The growth of the Church in Turkana has been overseen by remarkable leaders like Fr. Zachariah and Fr. Vladimir, Turkana Orthodox priests who serve under the omophorion of His Eminence Makarios Archbishop of Kenya.

Following that discussion, we went on to the next of the three remaining villages on our tour, but this time the chief of the first village appeared. He spoke on our behalf, telling them to listen to us. One woman, a bit skeptical, challenged us to pray to our God for rain. Later, others with genuine hope also asked that we would pray to this God for them. The villages were suffering. Water was scarce. The animals were too thin and the people were hungry. At the end of the day, we knelt in the sands, under the stars, surrounded by the people. We asked the Lord to reveal Himself, to have compassion and to send rain. Before morning the winds picked up, the clouds rolled in, the temperature dropped and the rain began. It rained so hard that we had to leave because the dry riverbeds would flood and prevent us from getting home.

The next year we returned. Again, we were asked to pray for rain. "It hasn't rained since your visit last year," they said. "We are hungry. Please pray to God again for rain." It rained.

In April of this year, we went back for our third visit. In between, the local clergy had been visiting and teaching them. This time, I travelled with a team of students from St. Vladimir's Seminary. As we drove through the bush and wound our way over the sands, the clouds were already beginning to form. Is this really happening, I wondered. Is God preparing again to send showers of compassion and a sign of His presence to validate our teaching?

We gathered under the large meeting tree. There were greetings and singing. Then, a group from the village made a presentation. They had just completed our catechist training lessons in the far away town of Lodwar. They shared some of their experiences. After we left, they would continue to share what they learned. Next, our team began their presentations. I was seated with the elders on a traditional Turkana stool. By my side was the eldest son of the village chief. The winds picked up. The air was getting cooler. Then it started. Gently the rain began to fall. The young man began tapping my shoulder and pointing to the sky with a big smile on his face. I called over our translator so we could talk to each other. "Fr. Martin," he said. "Every time your group has visited, God has sent rain. We doubted at first. Now, the elders have decided. We see that you are good and that God is with you. We will accept your message. The elders selected a place and we want you to build a church here for us. We want to become Christian."

Yes, it happened again. The first time God filled the river, I was amazed. I felt His presence, but still I wondered. Was this just a coincidence? The next time I marveled again. Then the third



TOP: His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Kenya consecrates a new parish. The coming of the rains coinciding with each visit from OCMC volunteers has been taken by the Turkana people as a sign that God affirms the Orthodox Faith. As a result, many have been baptized into the Faith, and many communities have emerged.

ABOVE: As village after village has been welcomed into the Orthodox Church, these communities have been longing for a place in which they can worship. OCMC has helped build, through financial contribution and volunteer labor, several churches in Turkana with the hope that more will be built in the future.

time when the river filled for the baptisms, I was moved. Still, I wondered. Then it happened, again, and again, and again. While I still marvel, I can no longer doubt this is more than a coincidence. Rather, my effort is now to understand what is God saying. What is He telling the people of Turkana? What is He saying to us? After this recent visit, revelation has also come in a wonderful way. I have come to understand multiple messages that our Lord is sending us.

For the Turkana, it seems obvious that God is confirming our teachings. However, there is something more to ponder. God has power over all creation. He could reveal Himself in so many different ways. He could send an earthquake and shake people into fear and trembling. Powerful winds could come, maybe as a tornado, again revealing His great power and frightening people into submission. A tree could burst into flames or thunder could roar. But, out of all the ways God could mystically reveal Himself, here among the Turkana, He is doing so by addressing the people's greatest hardship and struggle. His presence is being shown by an act of love and

compassion for the physical suffering of the people. In this, He reveals that He is a God of love and mercy. As Jesus said, "Come to Me, all of you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

Just as the Lord has a message for the Turkana, in these manifestations, there is also a message for us. Some have questioned, "Should we really be preaching the Gospel among these people who have their own religious customs? Is there anything we have to offer them? Should we even be doing foreign mission work?" Each time God sends rain to validate the message to the Turkana, He also validates our act of going forth to bring His message.

It is a rare occurrence when God sends a dramatic miraculous event to confirm a message to an entire group of people. By doing this, God also shows the importance of what is being done. He wants the Turkana to be reached. He wants us to carry this message. We are accepted as His ambassadors and He does want us to reach out to the ends of the earth, just as we read in the Gospel when Jesus said: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

There is one other message that God gives us through these miracles that is not so obvious, but equally important. God is revealing Himself as a God of love. He shows His concern for the suffering of the people and does this by addressing their greatest physical needs. We are His children. We are created in His image and likeness. As we see how God responds to the pleas of the Turkana, we are given an example of how we are to respond as well. His love is in us and we are to share that love. While we can't miraculously send rain, our love can be expressed by building a well that will bring water. Our love can pour out to helping them build a place where they can worship God, or a school where their young can be educated. We can assist to train leaders that will guide them to grow in His ways, so that they can also become an expression of God's love to the people around them.

As the last lesson of our mission team concluded, final remarks were made and we sang and danced together. We brought food so that we could all share a meal together. It was ready to be served, but rain had come and soon the dry sandy riverbeds would fill with water that would prevent us from returning for our flight home the next day. So once again, we had to leave hurriedly after presenting the message we were sent to deliver. As we bounced along the sandy road I looked back in the distance to the area where the villages were. The clouds were thick and dark and I marveled. There before my eyes was a miracle in action. The Lord was showering a people with love and mercy. "I am a God of mercy and compassion," He says, "now you go and do likewise."

TURN TO CHRIST:

MINISTERING TO THE YOUTH OF ALBANIA

by DN. STEPHANOS & DKN. ALEXANDRIA RITSI

“Turn to Christ. Love Him simply and humbly, without any demand, and He Himself will free you.”

(WOUNDED BY LOVE 135)

Imagine a life where the government has outlawed religion. Imagine a place where systematic war is waged against the vestiges of religion. *Imagine a place where the youth are taken and forced to demolish churches brick by brick during school* – a place where people are taught the ignorance of religion, the fallacy of belief. Priests are portrayed as the village idiots throughout the body of films, plays, and books. The act of whispering the name of Christ has become as illicit as thievery. Instead of ushering in a utopia of human enlightenment, this promise of “*freedom from religion*” ushers in a dystopia of emptiness and hollowness.

But not everything is hopeless. Imagine a place where a few dedicated individuals keep the faith through persecutions and imprisonments. Imagine that Communism falls and the Church is reestablished. The Church experiences a miraculous Resurrection.

Imagine a place that is then beset by a whole new series of challenges. The work done by the government to destroy the Church in the hearts of the people has caused far-reaching and long-lasting consequences. Some parents do not allow their children to go to Sunday school or young adult events. Daughters are told they are betraying their family by going to church. Sons are told the same. At the same time, these struggles from a past era entwine themselves with an entirely new danger: the danger of Western secular materialism. The ideals of instant satisfaction and egocentrism shine as alluring sirens leading yet again to emptiness and hollowness.

This place is Albania.

There is a generation of young adults that is thirsting for Christ. A generation that understands that society’s answers have been lacking. That, in reality, it is “love, worship of God, desire, union with God, and union with the Church that constitute Paradise on earth” (Wounded by Love 131). Albania needs youth work to guide this quest that these

There is a generation of young adults that is thirsting for Christ.

young adults have embarked on – a quest that is exemplified in the lives of two Orthodox young adults from Tirana whose story we would like to share with you.

Nikolin Kote is a 25 year old medical student in Tirana. He is originally from the city of Korça and was baptized on the 6th of September this year. His favorite things to do are Latin, ballroom, and tango dancing, swimming, bicycling, listening to music, and reading.

How did we get to know Nikolin?

We met Nikolin for the first time at a young adult meeting at the Cathedral in Tirana. We were struck that this was a young man who took what he did seriously. Our relationship with him has grown as time has passed through his participation in a young adult Bible study we hold in our house. Nikolin will be a witness to those around him that being a successful doctor does not exclude the possibility of being an Orthodox Christian, but rather that being Orthodox makes a person a better doctor.

Nikolin, what brought you to the Orthodox Church?

I was born in an Orthodox family. When I was younger, my grandmother would tell me stories from the Bible as if they were fairy tales. All the stories she told me gave me a sense of wonder. When I was in high school, they asked me to



LEFT: The hunger for Christ among Albanian youth has inspired many of them to serve the Church and to reach out with their faith. Some will answer the call to serve as priests and lay leaders. Missionaries can help train and guide them on their journeys.



ABOVE: Klajdi volunteering during services. Klajdi is just one an example of the highly-educated young adults that are committed to living an Orthodox Christian life. His faith guides his choices and shapes his worldview.



ABOVE: Nikolin addressing fellow young adults at a conference. As a medical student, Nikolin is filled with a profound sense of gratitude for the mercy he sees coming from God for all people. Christ gives him strength and drives him to care for people in need.

carry the Epitaphios, but my mother was afraid because I am their only son, and she did not want me to become a priest or a monk. She thought this because everything I do I take very seriously, and she threatened me to dissuade me from going. Later, a priest who is a friend of my parents saw me in church and told me to help chant. After some time, I told my parents I was chanting at the Church, and they became like wolves. Since that time, my parents would beat me, with fists, cables, and wood. They would not let me leave the house; they sent my aunt to come stay with me while they were at work so they would know if I went to church. One time, I refused to eat for some time, and they became crazy, woke me up at midnight, ripped my shirt, beat me, and made me drink milk. After all this, I did not speak with my parents for 2 years until I left for university. When I came to Tirana, my father was diagnosed with coronary heart disease and came to Tirana for an angioplasty. My mother blamed me for my father's heart disease, so I decided to start speaking with them again. In Tirana, I was living in my aunt's house while attending university. My aunt is an atheist, and my mother spoke with my aunt about my desire to go to church and told her not to let me. I did not know this and I told my aunt that I had been at church for Pascha. She told my mother and my mother called me and threatened me. For a time, I kept it a secret that I go to church. In my 5th year of studies, I found the Orthodox young adult page on *Facebook* and decided to go to the meeting. On the same day I had decided to go, I went to receive anaphora from Bishop Asti, and he told me to go to the meeting. I went to the meeting. There, I found a place where I could discuss matters

RIGHT: Weekly Paraklesis with the young adults of Tirana. Western secular materialism and the emptiness that can follow is a real danger for Albanian youth, which is why so many have found comfort and meaning in the Orthodox Church.



of faith in an open environment. Bishop Asti has become like a friend and recommended that I begin catechism with Miron, the director of the Office of Catechism. I took these lessons extremely serious. Last Christmas (2014), I spoke with my parents about baptism, and they made fun of me, and I became angry. We had a debate, which resulted in my mother telling me not to come to home to Korça anymore. Five months after our debate, I visited my house for the first time. Then, this summer I finished my exams in school and told them I would be baptized and would move out of my aunt's house in Tirana. They refused both of these proposals and told me they would stop supporting me if I did this. After much debate and much stress, and with the support of Miron, I sent them a strong message. After they realized I would not be deterred, they amazingly accepted the fact I would be baptized and would move to another house. I was surprised that they had changed their minds, and I was baptized on the 6th of September.

How does the Orthodox Church play a part in your life?

In every moment of my life, I remember Christ and His words, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (PHILIPPIANS 4:13)

I remember this as I perform operations, through the difficulties of medical studies, and throughout all aspects of my life.

What is the importance of the Orthodox Church in Albania?

The Church helps people find their salvation, which is found in Christ. Also, the example of love that the Archbishop gave during the Kosovo war, where the Church helped all those in need regardless of nationality or creed, is important for our society today. Examples like that are needed as there are still a lot of problems in Albania. The Church is also resurrecting the faith inside of people here in our country.

How would your life be different without the Church?

Without the Church I think I would have been an intellectual atheist. Still a good person, but I fear without the example of Christ, I would have been cold, that is to say, a closed person.

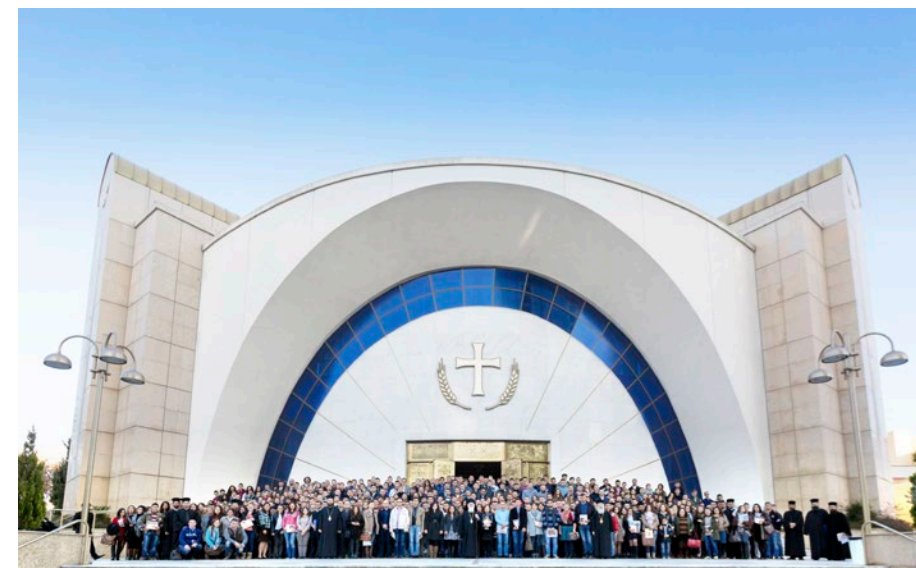
Why is it important to minister to the young adults?

They will keep the Church alive and teach their children to keep the faith, like the real Orthodox Albanians have done during the periods of persecution of the Ottomans and Communists. Like my family that hid Holy Books. For example, my uncle was a policeman and saw a bag of confiscated Christian books. He took one, hid it in his shirt, and brought it to my grandmother. Or my family who would secretly listen to the Easter service on the radio from Greece, and even though they didn't know Greek, they would wait until they heard "Xristos Anesti" and would then light paschal candles and greet each other with the exclamation "Christ is Risen!"

Klajdi Rrasa is a 22-year old Biotechnology student in Tirana. He is originally from Elbasan and was baptized in 1994. His favorite things to do are swimming, playing chess, bicycling, singing, and walking.

How did we get to know Klajdi?

We met Klajdi for the first time at a young adult meeting at Student City in Tirana.



ABOVE: Young adults gathered for a meeting at the Resurrection of Christ Cathedral in Tirana. In spite of Albania's long history of Christian persecution and the continued challenges facing the Church, young people are embracing Orthodox Christianity.

Instantly we knew that this was an intelligent young man. Klajdi helps Dn. Stephanos translate at meetings, Bible Studies, sermons, etc. Klajdi is an intellectual Orthodox. He will help refute the idea of the Christian as the village idiot through his involvement in both the Church and his knowledge of science.

What brought you to the Orthodox Church?

I was born in the Orthodox Church, because my parents were Orthodox. My parents were cradle Orthodox as well. All of my grandparents are Orthodox Christians.

My grandparents saw a lot of Orthodox churches being destroyed. My grandmother

once said that the chapel that you see on top of the hill was nothing compared to the great cathedral that was once in Shtermen. Even during Communism they would try to live as Orthodox Christians. When my grandfather's children were getting married, they wanted to make sure that their future in-laws were also Orthodox. They represented themselves as Orthodox, and it played a big part in their lives.

How does the Orthodox Church play a part in your life?

The Orthodox Church guides me through the right choices in life. It makes me see the world in another way. How? Sometimes

LEFT: Reaching out to the youth and providing them with spiritual enrichment has been a major focus of Dcn. Stephanos and Dkn. Alexandria's ministry work in Albania. Here they host a group of young adults for a regular Book Study at their home.

miraculously, and sometimes with pain. Miraculously- through the technology God grants us the ability to create and the advances in medicine that help people. With pain- ISIS and persecutions of Christians and other groups.

What are some aspects of the young adult group that you like?

Collaboration with the clergy, charitable activities (fundraising, helping at the soup kitchen), serving the Church (for example: conferences where the young adults volunteer, or volunteering to help at Pascha, etc.), everyone in the group is Christian (or wants to become Christian) and we have the same values and do the same things (have things in common).

How would you explain the young adult movement in the Orthodox Church today in Albania?

The desire of the Christian youth to get together and serve together representing the Orthodox Church.

What is the importance of the Orthodox Church in Albania?

It's important because the Church helps people see Christ's truth, and it helps the Albanian society to make the right choices in difficult times and social dilemmas (abortion, peace through religions, stealing, abuse, etc.).

How would your life be different without the Church?

I actually do not know, but clearly something different then what it is now, because the Orthodox Church contains the truth (a whole way of living), and the truth is very important in life.

Why is it important to minister to the young adults?

Even though we are Christians, as young adults we are not mature enough to guide ourselves without a leader and member of the clergy.

In general, young adults have strong passions which, if they are not careful, and not being told when they are wrong (lead on the right path), they might make decisions that would damage themselves and the whole society.

OVER THE PAST 24 YEARS, BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND WITH THE HELP OF OCMC MISSIONARIES AND CHRISTIANS AROUND THE WORLD, HIS BEATITUDE HAS ACCOMPLISHED WONDERS.

TEACH

them all that *I have commanded you...*

by Anastasia Pamela Barksdale

The Byzantine mission was based on certain clear-cut and essential principles. At the forefront was a desire to create an authentic local Eucharistic community ... The importance attached by Byzantine theology to a life of worship and “divinization” did not prevent direct interest in the social and cultural dimensions of life. Together with the gospel, the Byzantines transfused into their converted peoples the whole of their experience – political, artistic, economic, cultural – permeated by evangelical principles and the Christian vision of life.

—“ORTHODOX MISSION: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE,” ARCHBISHOP ANASTASIOS

Education is an integral part of the mission work of the Church. When Jesus Christ entrusted His disciples with the task of sharing the “good news” of salvation with “all nations”, He commanded them to “Go” – to reach out to others, to baptize in the name of the Holy Trinity, and to “teach all that I have commanded you.” For over 23 years, OCMC Missionaries have been assisting His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios in restoring the

Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania by serving as teachers, catechists, and youth workers helping to train the future leaders of the Church.

Although the atrocities that took place in Albania are well documented, many people today still do not know what happened here. Albania is a country with a historical and cultural heritage as diverse and resilient as its rugged mountains and dramatic coastlines. It is a 1st century Christian Church, evangelized by the Apostle Paul and his disciples, which was to become the outer border of the Byzantine commonwealth. This was followed by 500 years of occupation by the Ottoman Turk Empire and systematic efforts for the Islamization of Christians; 60% of the population converted either by violence or coercion. It seems cruel that their hard won battle for independence from the Ottoman Turks (1912) was thwarted so quickly after WWII by a new enemy: Communism and the dictatorship of Enver Hoxha. Forty-six years of persecution followed, and this time, taking no chances, the oppressors outlawed God, faith, hope, and every form of religion that might lift the

LEFT: Anastasia Pamela Barksdale takes a question from a seminary student at the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy. Theologically-trained missionaries like Anastasia are helping the Albanian faithful to grow more deeply in their faith.



human spirit. Today, the Orthodox Church continues to experience many trials and tribulations. Recently, the Church has seen the politically sanctioned destruction of parishes and property (Permet, Dhermi and the destruction of the perimeter fencing at the Cathedral in Tirana). Albanians are now, however, a people with hope, a people who know that their God has not abandoned them, a people connected once again to the universal Orthodox Church.

When His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios arrived in Albania, after the country's nearly 50 years of isolation and extreme hatred of every expression of God, he found a devastated and destroyed Church; he found a people whose spirit had been broken – ravaged by atheism, brutality, and poverty and a country rife with corruption. Alongside the efforts to rebuild and restore churches and train and educate clergy, there was a need to establish schools, train teachers, print materials, and catechize the people.

His Beatitude sought to rebuild the Orthodox Church in Albania by laying a strong foundation based on “clear-cut and essential” mission principles: **1.** Preach the Gospel by translating scripture, liturgical texts, and writings of the Fathers and building churches that “proclaim with the eloquent silence of beauty, that God had come to dwell amongst humanity;” **2.** Create authentic local Eucharistic communities that encompassed the language and culture of the evangelized people; **3.** Transform the whole of their

experience, politics, economics, art, and culture with a Christian vision of life.

Over the past 24 years, by the grace of God and with the help of OCMC Missionaries and Christians around the world, His Beatitude has accomplished wonders. He has established the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy to educate clergy and lay leaders and a 4-year college, Logos, accredited to offer Bachelor's degrees in numerous fields. Logos also offers affiliate Master's degree programs with the Universities of Thessaloniki and Piraeus. There are also two vocational schools, a residential dormitory for high school girls, and two residential high schools for boys in Durres and Gjirokaster.

In the major cities of Tirana, Korca, and Durres, three private schools for children have also been established: the Protagonists Albanian-American School in Tirana has two campuses and offers classes from kindergarten through high school; the Spirit of Love Albanian-Greek School in Durres for elementary and middle school children; and in Korca an ecclesiastical high school. There are also 21 preschools operating across the country. In addition to the formal “schools” there are the catechism, youth ministry, kids' clubs programs, and my own teacher training and field work program at the theological academy.

During the summer months, the Church offers boys' and girls' summer camps, as well as day camps. His Beatitude fondly refers to these programs as “spiritual universities”. These camps, held during the month of July, are 10-day overnight camps, staffed by youth leaders and seminary students that provide an opportunity for the young people to live communally in an Orthodox environment - to worship, eat, and play together. During the final days of the camp, there are baptisms (with parental consent) for those who are prepared. In the cities and villages, half-day camps are also held throughout the summer, with hundreds of children turning out for an opportunity to learn about God in a fun and yet sacred environment and to be baptized.

As wonderful and moving as all these programs are, even more exciting are the



LEFT: Anastasia Pamela Barksdale takes a question from a seminary student at the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy. Theologically-trained missionaries like Anastasia are helping the Albanian faithful to grow more deeply in their faith.

OCMC Missionaries Contribution to Educational Programs of Albania

So many OCMC Missionaries, past and present, have offered gifts and talents on a long-term basis; these are only a few of the missionaries who have served in Albania in order to help raise up a new generation of clergy and lay leaders to spread the Orthodox faith, ... “teaching all that [He has] commanded...”

Fr. Martin and Presbytera Renee Ritsi (1992 – 1998). Fr. Martin: catechist, priest, theology teacher at the Seminary; laid foundation for the catechism programs. Presbytera Renee: ESL teacher at the Theological Academy.

Fr. Luke and Presbytera Faith Veronis (1994 – 2004). Fr. Luke: catechist, priest, theology teacher at Seminary and Campus Ministry. Presbytera Faith: Founding Director, Good Shepherd's Girls' Camp in Elbasan; and with the spiritual guidance of His Beatitude, 1st Director of Children's Office of the Orthodox Church.

Nathan and Gabriela Hoppe (1998 – present) Current directors of the Children's Office which is now in its 15th year; established Kids' Clubs programs and youth worker training programs. Nathan: teacher of Patristic Theology at the Theological Academy; active in campus ministry.

Panayioti and Shannon Sakellariou (2002 – 2006). Panayioti: ESL teacher at the Theological Academy. Shannon: with the guidance of His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios, 1st Director of the Protagonists Albanian-American School in Tirana (2002). OCMC missionaries Pauline Russell (2008-2010), Maria Linderman (2011-2013) also served as principals during some of their years of service.

Presbytera Georgia Bendo (2004 – present). Current principal at the Protagonists School in Tirana and Director of the “Spiritual Journey” Catechism Program.

Anastasia Pamela Barksdale (2008 – present). Teacher Christian Education and Field Work Supervisor at the Theological Academy; Assistant to Archbishop Anastasios; leads Bible study in Campus Ministry.

Dn. Stephanos and Dkn. Alexandria Ritsi, (2013 -). Dn. Stephanos: Teaches theology at the Seminary and works at Youth Ministry office. Dkn. Alexandria: Teaches ESL at the Protagonists School. Both are active in Youth and Campus Ministry.

Dr. Jeffery and Caryn MacDonald (2013 -). Jeffery teaches Church History and Caryn teaches ESL at the Theological Academy.

hopes and dreams for the future. The Church is moving forward with plans for Logos to become a university, with Bachelor's, Master's and Ph.D programs, and for the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy to become accredited to provide Bachelor's degrees in Religious Studies, Teacher Education (to staff the Church's elementary and preschools), Social Work and premiere English and Greek departments on both campuses.

Today the combined annual educational budget for the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania is more than \$1,000,000 a year. By American standards, this is a relatively modest figure when compared to the cost of an average home in many major metropolitan areas. But for the Orthodox Church of Albania, this is an enormous amount of money. Almost all these institutions depend on donations from abroad. With the worldwide financial crisis, especially in Greece and America, they are struggling to remain open. This year the Church has been forced to close a number of preschools because they lack funding.

Private schools like the Protagonists in Tirana, which opened in 2002 with two classes and 15 students, are becoming increasingly sought after and filled to overflowing with waiting lists for most of their grades. With 730 students, they



TOP: The educational outreach of the Church in Albania has helped welcome many people into the Body of Christ. Here a young woman is baptized at one of the Church's girls' camps.

ABOVE: The combined annual educational budget for the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania is more than \$1,000,000 a year. With the financial crisis in Europe, the Church needs support now more than ever to keep these vital programs going.



Anastasios has been a "holy beggar", reaching out to Christians around the world that have been very generous. His Beatitude and the faithful here are so grateful for the generosity of our fellow Christians. But we still need help in order not only to survive, but to thrive, and to fulfill the hope for a fully-restored Orthodox presence and society, educated and transformed by God's love.

OCMC has three specific funds from which donations are transferred monthly to Albania: (1) the Albania Ministry Fund, which helps with operating budgets, scholarship programs, and general needs; (2) OCMC's Theological Education and Training Assistance Program solicits funds for several seminaries and theological institutions around the world, including the Theological Academy in Albania; (3) The Children's Home of Hope, an orphanage located at the Shen Vlash Monastery in Dures, which nurtures children ages 4 – 14. Anyone wishing to donate to these programs can make a tax-deductible donation through OCMC designated to one of these specific ministries.

Making a monetary donation is only one way to assist in missions. We can also teach our children to share God's love by connecting directly with mission communities, missionaries, and programs all over the world. Last year, the Sunday School program at St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church in Worcester, MA, collected and donated school supplies to children in my catechism programs. The gifts brought such joy to the faces of the village children. It was priceless. I am sure the act of sharing also deeply touched the children in Worcester. This year the Sunday School at St. Demetrios Orthodox Church

LEFT: Clergy Laity Assembly at Shen Vlash. Albania is home to hundreds of thousands of Orthodox Christians who belong to nearly 400 parish communities. Training priests and lay leaders is vital to providing the spiritual care that these people need.

are almost able to break even financially. However, scholarships are needed for students from clergy and poor families. All the students at the Theological Academy are supported by scholarships from the Church.

Where will the money to fund these programs come from? In the past Archbishop

in Perth Amboy, NJ, is sending Christmas gifts to the newly established Home for Disabled Children in Dures.

Another wonderful way to assist in missions is to "go" yourself. Join an OCMC short-term mission team! The Protagonists School and the Home of Hope will be offering a joint camp experience in 2016. For college students, Dn. Stephanos and Dkn. Alexandria Ritsi will host a youth ministry and evangelism team during spring break as well. Come and share your gifts and talents!

Please consider all the different ways that you can help. In addition to individual financial support, make missions a part of your church's annual budget, select a ministry of the Church to support with your youth or Sunday School program, or support a missionary!

Archbishop Anastasios continually reminds us that our "glorification of God must echo beyond the limits of our own communities." So as you plan how you will reach out to share the love of God in your local community, please remember also the needs of the Orthodox Christians in Albania and other parts of the world who are struggling to survive in distant places, under difficult circumstances as minority populations of Christians. Good works and acts of love are part of our Christian way of life. They unite us across time and space as the "Body of Christ" and lift us up to become part of something greater than ourselves.

BELOW: Anastasia Pamela Barksdale takes a question from a seminary student at the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy. Theologically-trained missionaries like Anastasia are helping the Albanian faithful to grow more deeply in their faith.



OCMC MISSIONARIES



What it Means to SUPPORT A MISSIONARY

by **Dn. James Nicholas**

Serving as a missionary can be a pretty daunting vocation. Leaving home, leaving family, leaving friends, leaving your parish, leaving occupations, leaving your country, leaving everything behind and devoting yourself to *serving Christ in a foreign land so that others may hear and experience the Gospel*.

But then there's the whole course of preparation that precedes a missionary's departure for the field, including a program of evaluation and training at the Mission Center, which can take over a year when woven in between your job, your time availability, and your other responsibilities. After all, this isn't just an extended vacation or trip, it's a new profession you're planning for, and that means education and preparation.

ABOVE: OCMC Missionary Gabriela Hoppe leads Albanian youth in acting out a skit inspired by a passage in the Bible. Missionaries undergo intensive training before serving in the mission field. The support missionaries raise helps to fund this vital training.

But here's the clincher: After the training program is complete, and you officially become a missionary candidate, where will the funds come from to send and support you on an ongoing basis? Some would argue that the Church (parishes? dioceses? endowments?) should directly fund missionaries so they don't have to waste time raising funds themselves but instead go immediately to the field and begin their work! I certainly would like to see a greater effort corporately within the Church to help underwrite missionaries. However, there is something spiritually significant about the grass roots effort of sharing your mission with the faithful across

RIGHT: Missionaries have to raise the funds they need to live and work in the mission field. Dr. Jeffery Macdonald and his family had to raise a significant amount of funds before they could begin their work in Albania. The support of faithful from the United States is vital to them as they answer their calling.

BELOW: Serving as a missionary is a unique vocation. Missionaries like Nathan Hoppe, seen here teaching a class at the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy, choose to live abroad for years at a time to share the Faith. Nathan has been serving in the field with his family for more than 10 years.



America and engaging them as stakeholders, as partners, in the Great Commission. In fact, most of our missionaries agree that it is one of the most rewarding aspects of mission work. It empowers people to be obedient to Christ's command to "make disciples of all nations", from which none of us are exempt. Everyone can join in and, together, we can do it! And, for a missionary, it's like joining hands with the people, standing in solidarity with them and being sent by them.

Sending a missionary to a foreign field is kind of like launching a rocket. Funding a missionary is like fueling that rocket. The fuel must be loaded into the rocket before liftoff, and there must be enough to launch, exit the earth's atmosphere, complete its mission, and then re-enter the earth's atmosphere and land when the space flight is over.

There are a lot of very generous people in the Church who welcome the opportunity to make donations to missionaries. We thank God for them every day! But I'll tell you a little secret: the best way to get a missionary to the field quickly and keep them there the longest is by having a number of people make regular monthly donations. It is steady monthly giving that keeps the missionary's support flowing consistently to provide them and their families with dependable income to meet their ongoing needs and that of their ministry. The wonderful thing about this method of giving is that it allows virtually



ABOVE: OCMC Missionaries like Dr. William Black are able to bring a higher level of theological education to the mission field that they can then pass along to others. They, however, cannot serve without support from the faithful here at home.

anybody to participate: youth, those in the midst of their careers, retired persons, Sunday school classes, parishes, groups, and societies. Whatever a person is able to give, whether it's \$5 a month or \$100 a month, makes a serious impact when added up over time. If an astronaut needs \$15,000 for a mission to Mars that will take several years, is it easier to expect someone to donate \$15,000 cash for the journey, or to ask 25 people to consider contributing \$25 a month? The financial result is the same, but more people have engaged in the mission with the second method.

And then there is the selfless act of sacrificing for each other in the love of Christ. OCMC Missionary Jesse Brandow, now serving in Guatemala, says, "Raising support was rewarding and humbling. I met people who have had job losses or disabilities, and yet they still send me ten or twenty dollars every month. Their faith is what carries me through my hardest struggles in the field."

Perhaps the greatest benefit of supporting missionaries, besides obeying our Lord in responding to the Great Commission, is the blessing that results. When people and parishes contribute to ministry beyond their own borders, they find that there is a reciprocal blessing that is multiplied back to them.....

"The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered." (PROVERBS 11:25)

"Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap." (LUKE 6:38)

So what can you do to become a partner in a foreign mission of the Church? You can start by connecting with a missionary. Perhaps your parish or organization could invite a missionary to share about their service and its impact on the Church's outreach and work in another country. OCMC is the international missions and evangelism agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the US. As a pan-Orthodox agency, we have been sending missionaries into the field for thirty years. A missionary would be glad to provide more information about OCMC, their own mission, and what the broader plans are for the country or Archdiocese they will be serving. They will also tell you how you can "join" their mission by supporting them in prayer and financial support.

As mentioned before, our missionaries consider donors as stakeholders in their respective missions, and therefore, they keep them apprised of the progress of their mission. Sharing personal stories of what is happening in the course of their ministry also allows a supporter to connect with the field, but the connection works both ways according to Missionary Jesse Brandow: "In Guatemala, two priests have died in under two years, and the partnership of supporters abroad brings comfort to the people. I share pictures of the parishes that support me, and I give the priests personal messages from my supporters. The people 'at home' are giving hope to Guatemala!"

OCMC Missionary Dr. William Black recently deployed to Kenya in July to serve as a lecturer at Makarios III Patriarchal Orthodox Seminary in Nairobi. Writing in his recent news update, he states, "...a small army of generous Christians and parishes

made it possible for me to board the Air France jet on July 20 in Washington and then walk through immigration and customs into the Nairobi night and welcoming embrace of friends from the Orthodox seminary here on July 21." Without you, these missions would not be possible. And lives in other countries may go unchanged.

His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios of Albania once wrote, "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".

Our parishes need to be filled with Great Commission Christians who get to know our missionaries, pray for them regularly, and thoughtfully donate to their missions. Would you consider becoming one of them? The eternal reward far outweighs the earthly cost.

To learn more about Orthodox missionaries serving abroad or to support an OCMC missionary please visit www.ocmc.org, call 1-877-463-6784 ext. 121, or e-mail missionaries@ocmc.org.

BELOW: Missionaries like Dcn. Stephanos Ritsi serve in many capacities in the mission field. They have all been welcomed by the receiving bishop to fill a role that the Church could not otherwise fill on its own. By supporting missionaries, Orthodox Christians from the United States are helping the Church abroad grow and minister to others.



MISSIONARY UPDATES

LEFT: The Hoppes continue to be extremely active, in a variety of capacities, within the Church of Albania. Nathan directed this year's boys' camp. Here, His Grace Bishop Nikolla baptizes one of the campers.

ALASKA The DiLullo Family

Since the spring, Hosea completed work in Eagle River, including fashioning a monument sign that holds an icon of the Good Shepherd. Then, between making assessments of the restoration needs of Saint Michael the Archangel Cathedral in Sitka, St. Nicholas Church in Tatitlek, and the Ascension of Our Lord Church in Karluk, Hosea also led orientation for members of the OCMC Alaska Team I that served in Kasigluk.

In that time, Tamara attended the Russian Orthodox Sacred Sites in Alaska (ROSSIA) Board Meetings at the request of His Grace Bishop David of Sitka and Alaska. She also sits on the committee that is planning the future services of the Saint Innocent Wellness Resource Center, and she also assisted with organizing and teaching at the St Herman Weekend Youth Retreat that was held at their home parish, Saint Innocent Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Anchorage, for pilgrims unable to travel to Kodiak.

Sarah and Cecilia continue balancing their homeschool high school work with full participation in youth activities. Typically engaged in a ministry setting, they are both nurtured themselves while they willingly assist other children if needed. At the request of the Cathedral family and clergy members, the girls also chant during weddings and funerals.

Fr. David & Mat. Rozanne Rucker

Two years ago, we were heading south to the Guatemalan highlands for our first assignment as Mission Specialists: making disciples by teaching and mentoring native Mayan church leaders in the Faith.

One year ago, the long-term effects of a particularly nasty (and equally stubborn) parasite Mat. Rozanne acquired in Guatemala rerouted us north to Alaska with a similar assignment: making disciples by teaching and mentoring native Alaskan church leaders in the faith.

Now we are about to trek north again, back to Kodiak, Alaska where we will pick up where we left off in May at St. Herman Theological Seminary, continuing to make disciples among our Seminary students and native Alaskan clergy as we teach, offer pastoral care and counseling, mentor, host informal gatherings in our home, and help rekindle the Church's missionary vision.

We are able to offer our services there because the Body of Christ, the Church, through the offerings of Her members, has sent us out as missionaries.

Our native Alaskan church leaders face daunting challenges as they minister to people facing family chaos, drug and alcohol addiction, suicide, physical and sexual abuse, cultural disintegration, and economic hardships.

We go to encourage and to equip these current and future church leaders to "make disciples" as they minister effectively and holistically in their communities.

ALBANIA Anastasia Pamela Barksdale

OCMC Missionary, Anastasia Pamela Barksdale, is looking forward to another exciting year of intense ministry in Christian Education in Albania. Classes at the Resurrection of Christ Seminary begin in October. The Resource Center at the Seminary will be reaching out to new areas and coordinating 26 students from the 2nd, 3rd and 4th year classes to participate in 18 - 20 different

catechism and kid's club activities. Each year we add new locations to the program based upon need, students' interests and accessibility to the location. Several graduates from the Class of 2015 will be working with their respective Metropolises to transfer our field work programs into full time Church supported programs, such as in Kemishtje and Lin. During the summer, we held four day camps featuring a new curriculum on the Seven Days of Creation, created by Albanian co-workers. The day camps are a preview to the catechism programs the students will develop during the school year, in addition to taking classes on Christian Education, Theoria and Praxis.

The Bible Study at the Campus Ministry Center will start up again in November and Anastasia is planning to offer a course on "Understanding Our Christianity in the Context of Other World Religions". In June, we hosted a really wonderful OCMC short-term team that offered a summer camp experience for the children at the Home of Hope. The camp was titled, "Living with Jesus in Our Hearts", and focused on the themes of prayer, obedience and doing good works. The experience was made extra special by the dedicated teachers who gave themselves completely to the children, offering Bible studies, ESL, music, art and sports activities. Every year we are blessed to have people come and share their gifts and talents. This year "music" became such a prominent part of the camp experience. The donation of a piano keyboard and 12 recorders, facilitated offering music lessons, and by the end of the week, with lots of extra time dedicated to practice, the children were able to perform for the talent show. Sign-ups have already begun for next year's team which will also be scheduled in June. This team seems to fill up quickly, accepting only eight people, so if you have interest apply soon.

In the spring of 2016, Anastasia will be returning once again to America to fundraise for this ministry and to raise awareness for missions and the catechism programs in Albania. It is never too early to start planning for a mission seminar, retreat or fundraising event. Anastasia depends on your prayers and support for this vital mission work of the Orthodox Church in Albania.

Presbytera Georgia Gilman Bendo — The Bendo Family

I thank God for reaching 11 years of service in Albania and all the gifts He has granted me here!

We've had an eventful Spring and Summer 2015! I finished my second year as Principal of Protagonists School. Towards the end of the school year, American Ambassador Donald Lu accepted an invitation to attend our 1st graders' Alphabet Fest. The parents and students were thrilled to have him participate and he and his wife very graciously stayed several hours at our school that day.

Immediately after school ended, I welcomed a small OCMC short-term team (Gerard Pelletier from NJ and Markella Balasis from FL) who worked together with several members of my dedicated staff to create a one-week Bible Camp on the "Fruits of the Holy Spirit" for 80 children from Protagonists School. The camp was a big gift of time, talents, and money from the OCMC team and those who helped send them. The children enjoyed all the lessons and surprises along the way, whereas the parents begged us to make the camp last all month!

In July, Protagonists School had its first high school graduation! We said goodbye to 12 students; some of the students I had known since they were in 2nd grade!

After a much needed rest with Fr. Anastas and the kids in beautiful Korca (southern Albania), we are back in Tirana to continue all our activities. Fr. Anastas continues to translate books and celebrate the Divine Liturgy in the Cathedral. Vasili (almost 7) is excited to start first grade at Protagonists School. Evi turned four, and Maria turned two-years-old this summer. We appreciate your prayers!

The Hoppe Family

The baptisms were planned for the afternoon of Saturday, July 11, 2015. This would be the culmination of the boy's camp, which Nathan directed this summer, when about 25 of the 85 participants in the camp would be baptized, just before sunset on a beautiful beach, in the Adriatic Sea. There was a tremendous sense of anticipation, as we looked forward to rejoicing with these young men, as they entered into the Kingdom of Heaven. The first boys began vomiting about one hour after breakfast. Rapidly more and more boys fell ill until about one third of the camp was afflicted with serious vomiting. As a result, nine boys needed to be sent to the emergency room in Durres and numerous other boys had to be treated for severe vomiting in the camp clinic. It was never determined for sure what caused this outbreak of illness. Some indications pointed towards food poisoning and others a virus outbreak. Regardless of the source, the outcome was the severe disruption of the camp program. With sick boys in every group and camp leaders busy providing care for them we were forced to improvise a new program on Saturday and postpone the baptisms. With many people praying, we rescheduled the baptisms for Sunday afternoon believing that the sudden outbreak of illness was used by the enemy to disrupt this momentous event. Despite a number of the boys who intended to be baptized still being in the hospital, 19 were welcomed into the Kingdom on Sunday and several others subsequently. Please pray for these young men who have begun their journey with Christ. Please also pray with us for those impacted by the family camp and other summer programs that we organized and led. Please pray with us for the many programs of the new academic year which we will be involved in including organizing ministry for children and adolescents and families in Tirana, as well as teaching at the Resurrection of Christ Seminary. You can learn about another program in which Nathan participated during the first week of September, as well as read the paper he presented there at www.loimission.net/loi-2015-papers/.

The Ritsi Family

After being in Albania for 28 months, the Ritsi Family will be returning to the United States for furlough from September-November of 2015. We look forward to raising support for our upcoming term and sharing what life has been like as missionaries in Albania!

Stephanos continues to work in the Young Adult Office in Tirana. He has led group meetings on Sundays, Paraklesis on Fridays, Bible Studies, and movie nights at Student City. He also continues to serve at the Cathedral as a Deacon. He is also preparing to begin Doctoral Studies, through a distance learning program, at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Alexandria continued to teach English at the Protagonists School until the beginning of April. She led a women's book study up until Pascha, where 5-7 young adults gathered once a week. Alexandria also continued to serve as one of the Church photographers up until the week before Moses Anastas was born. Right now she is focusing on taking care of Moses Anastas. She has recently started to take pictures

for the Church again.

On April 23, 2015 we welcomed Moses Anastas to the world and he was baptized on August 7th. He enjoys listening to Byzantine chant music, going to church, and walking around Tirana. He looks forward to going on furlough to meet most of his family in the States!

In July, we traveled to Elbasan where we spoke about marriage to 60 participants at the Girls Camp at St. John Vladimir. We then made our way to Family Camp where we worked with the Hoppe Family. The theme for Family Camp was "Celebrating the Orthodox Family."

GUATEMALA

Fr. John & Presbyteria Sandy Chakos

Since returning to Guatemala in May, then again in July, our major focus has been on the critical need for medical care. During this time we oversaw the completion of the medical clinic in Aguacate, making it fully operational for the OCMC medical team that treated 434 patients in August. Another OCMC team, arriving at the end of July, helped to renovate a second clinic in the bustling town of Nueva Concepcion. We were also able to make presentations to many enthusiastic students of the large Orthodox School in the same town, as well as visiting and interacting with children from three rural Orthodox communities in the surrounding area that were established by the Church's founder- the late and much beloved Father Andres Giron. These communities, until recently, were served for many years by Fr. Antonio Pata, who like Fr. Andres succumbed to complications from diabetes. In between the visit of the two dynamic OCMC mission teams, we participated in the medical mission of Surgicorps, a Pittsburgh based surgical team that offered specialized surgery to many uninsured Guatemalans unable to afford such procedures in the private hospitals. Among those treated were six patients from our Orthodox villages, who were graciously housed and cared for during their stay at the Hermano Pedro Hospital in Antigua. Many of the patients who came never visited a big city before coming here. The American doctors, like our OCMC team members, showed great respect, compassion and love, making a profound impact on the often neglected Mayan patients that they treated. All of these dedicated health professionals were living icons of the great tradition of medical care pioneered by the Church's holy, healing unmercenaries, touching body and soul as Jesus did.

Jesse Brandow

Jesse Brandow began his two-year term in Guatemala on April 21st of 2015. As a lay seminary graduate, his missionary focus is religious education among the hundreds of Guatemalan communities that converted to Orthodoxy in 2010. Currently, he lives in Nueva Concepción - a small city on the Pacific Coast of Guatemala. This part of Guatemala is full of banana fields, palm trees, and millions of lizards scurrying in all directions. Jesse travels to the parishes in these coastal areas to teach basic classes in theology, sacraments, and Scripture. He also prepares catechetical resources for the priests and community leaders, such as a Spanish language booklet on baptism. In addition, Jesse works closely with the priests to provide them with liturgical guidance as they continue learning the services of the Orthodox Church.

The biggest challenge of Jesse's first six months was the death of one of the Guatemalan priests. Fr. Antonio Patá passed away on June 19 at just 42 years of age. This was a great cause of sorrow to the remaining priests who only one year earlier lost their spiritual mentor, Fr. Andres Giron. Yet, the

first six months also revealed tremendous sources of hope. At the end of August, the mission in Guatemala opened a brand new medical clinic in Aguacate—probably the first Orthodox clinic in all of Central America. An OCMC medical mission team staffed the clinic for four days and treated 434 patients. A second OCMC team also began construction on a future clinic in Nueva Concepción. Despite the challenges, there is tremendous hope in Guatemala!

KENYA

Meg Fotini Engelbach

Fotini continues working with the AGES Liturgical Workbench Software on producing a Liturgical Service Book for priests Africa. The software's online repository of liturgical source texts (original Greek and translations) allows collaborators to share their work, review, and generate new translations in localized, mother tongue languages. Along with English and Swahili, the priest's service book will include Kikuyu, which is spoken by the largest ethnic group in Kenya.

In the Archdiocese of Kenya, work has begun on turning the seminary into a university. Fotini helped to host Fr. Rauno Pietarinen when he came from Finland to help Fr. Evangelos Thiani with the beginning of this long project. Kenya also recently received OCMC Missionary Dr. William Black, who will be teaching at the seminary and helping to make it into a university, with all the curriculum changes and material changes that will be required.

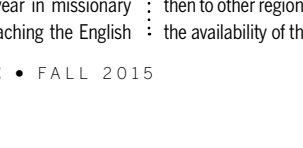
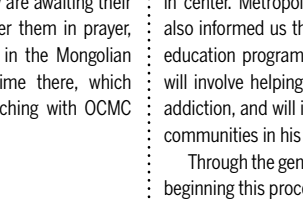
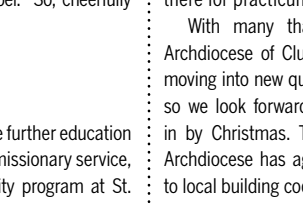
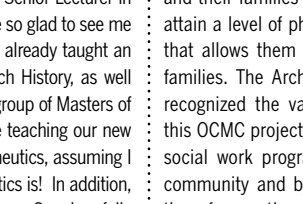
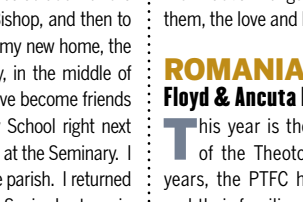
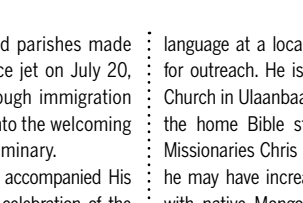
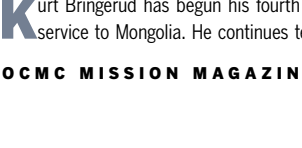
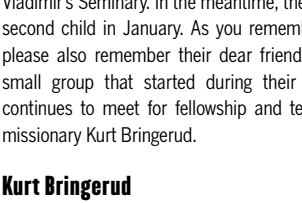
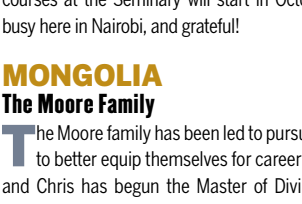
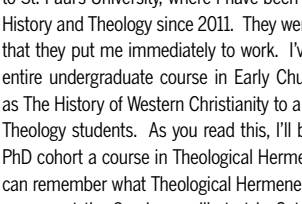
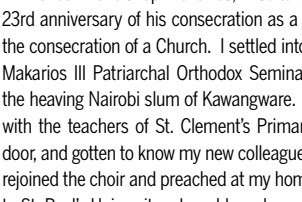
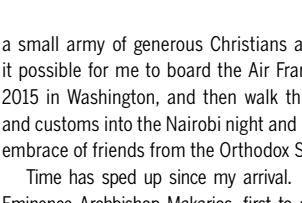
In July, Fotini had the opportunity to visit St. Mary of Egypt Convent in Uganda for one week. There are three sisters and five novices, as well as a number of orphans they take care of. The Abbess decided to become a nun at age 13, despite the fact that there were no Orthodox monasteries in Uganda. Seventeen years later, St. Mary of Egypt is one of two Orthodox convents in sub-Saharan Africa, the other one being in the Congo. Anyone wishing to support the monastery should consider ordering an icon from them, as the sisters write the icons themselves.

The Colburn Family

In preparation for the development and testing of a Translator's Handbook on the Canons of Theophany, Michael completed a year-long Modern Greek class. The next phase is analysis of the Greek text of the Canons, which date to the 8th century. During a visit of His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Kenya to Thessaloniki in June, the Colburns had the opportunity to meet with His Eminence and discuss the translator's handbook project, which will assist translators in Kenya, throughout Africa, and in other countries. It will likely be tested first in Kenya. Work is also progressing on a web version of a Translation Management System (TMS) that will allow users to enter liturgical translations into a database using a web browser. The work is a joint effort by Michael and John Daley, a graduate of the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. Once the web TMS is available, the Colburns plan to provide access to the Metropolises of Albania, Hong Kong, Kenya, Korea, Singapore, and others who want it, so they can enter their translations. The web TMS database will feed into the AGES Liturgical Workbench for the generation of liturgical books and services. The web TMS should become available by early 2016.

Dr. Joseph William Black

New Beginnings in Nairobi - I fall asleep to the trilling of a night jar singing the boundaries of his territory. I wake up to the distant blarings of bus and matatu horns in the chilled morning darkness. I must be back in Nairobi. Against hope, the way opened for me to return to Kenya after an absence of more than two years. And



1: OCMC Missionary **Anastasia Pamela Barksdale** with participants in the 2015 Christian Education Students and Field Work Program.

2: **Pres. Georgia Bendo** continues her role as Director of the Protagonists School in Tirana which is growing steadily. The School is so popular that there is now a waiting list for enrollment.

3: **Dr. William Black** has returned to Kenya as an OCMC missionary to serve as a professor at the Makarios III Seminary and St. Paul University in Nairobi.

4: Guatemala welcomed a new OCMC Missionary, **Jesse Brandow**. Jesse has been hard at work documenting the incredible growth of the Church among Guatemala's indigenous Mayan People and teaching the Faith whenever he can. Sadly, the Church had to say goodbye to another one of its leaders, Fr. Antonio Patá. May his memory be eternal!

5: As the **Moore family** transitions back to the United States, OCMC Missionary **Kurt Bringerud** will continue the weekly meetings held by the study group they helped establish.

6: **Fr. John and Pres. Alexandra Chakos** have been focusing on medical care for the numerous Orthodox communities that have emerged in Guatemala. They have helped to open a clinic and welcomed an OCMC Medical Mission Team to begin addressing the great healthcare needs that exist among the Mayan people there.

7: In May, **Dr. Michael Colburn** attended the first international Digital Media and Orthodox Pastoral Care Conference, where he met with His Eminence Nektarios of Hong Kong (making presentation) and His Eminence Metropolitan Konstantinos of Singapore to discuss their requests to make use of the AGES software to generate services.

8: **Tamara DiLullo** assists **Fr. John Zabinko** and **Dcn. John Kudrin** with the reading of the children's books of commemoration during the Proskomedion on August 9th. The Divine Liturgy held on the Feast Day of St. Herman of Alaska concluded the three-day summer Youth Retreat that Tamara helped coordinate at the St. Innocent Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Anchorage.

9: This year is the 10 year anniversary of the **Protection of the Theotokos Family Center** (PTFC) in Cluj, Romania! OCMC Missionary **Ancuta Frantz** has helped see countless women and their children to a better, more independent life through this ministry.

10: **Fr. David and Mat. Rozanne Rucker** have returned to Alaska so that Fr. David can continue teaching at St. Herman's Seminary.

11: Though excited about pursuing continued theological education at St. Vladimir's Seminary, the **Moore Family** said difficult goodbyes to the wonderful people in Mongolia.

12: In addition to continuing to serve the Church and ministering to the youth of Albania, **Dn. Stephanos and Dkn. Alexandria Ritsi** welcomed their first son – **Moses Anastas!**

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2016 MISSION TEAMS

MARCH

Albania:
Tirana: Campus teaching outreach

Kenya:
Turkana: Evangelism outreach

APRIL

Guatemala:
Aguacate: Health care and education

Kenya:
Turkana: Teaching outreach

MAY

Albania:
Tirana: Mission Institute

Indonesia:
Medan: Health care and education

Uganda:
Kampala: Health care and education

JUNE

Albania:
Shen Vlash & Tirana: Home of Hope & Protagonists School youth camps

Guatemala:
Nueva Concepcion: Youth outreach

Indonesia:
Medan & Bali: Teaching and family outreach

JULY

Alaska:
Napaskiak (Kuskokwim): Youth retreat ministry

Alaska:
Old Harbor: Youth camp ministry

Mexico:
San Esteban: Teaching and youth outreach

SEPTEMBER

Albania:
Tirana: Protagonists School teacher development

Guatemala:
Aguacate: Health care and education

OCTOBER

Albania:
Tirana: Women's outreach retreats

TO BE DETERMINED

Alaska:
Bethel: church restoration

Alaska:
Pilot Station (Yukon): Teaching outreach



To participate, Mission Team Members must...

- Complete an Application and a reference from an Orthodox Priest.
- Be at least 18 years of age; in good physical health; and an active member of the Church. Children may participate on Family teams if at least one parent participates.

- Travel on the scheduled dates.
- Be able to cover team participation costs (preparation materials, orientation, expenses while in the field, including transfers from airport, meals, lodging, and project expenses).

Information

Space is limited. Team dates, costs, locations and project details are subject to change. Contact OCMC for availability for 1 week option. Domestic travel to orientation and international airfare is not included. Team members are encouraged to raise support, create awareness and engage others as participants in the work of missions.

Visit www.ocmc.org for more opportunities, to apply, and to fundraise online.



His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios with the women who participated in the Priftereshas' (Presbyteras') Retreat, which welcomed speakers from the United States who were part of an OCMC mission team.

THE STRENGTH *in Your Sisters' Shoulders*

by Pres. Joy-Anna Corona

“Feel the strength in your sisters’ shoulders,” remarked Pres. Renee Ritsi as she presented the concluding remarks in the Priftereshas’ (Presvyteras’) Retreat gathering at Shen Vlash Seminary in Albania last fall. We had shared a few very full and spiritually uplifting days together, exchanging stories, encouraging one another, teaching the Faith and listening to each other. In our final large-group gathering, we stood together in a circle and prayed, then turning to the side we placed hands to back, each Presvytera rubbing the shoulders of her counterpart and expressing words of gratitude and farewell as we fell into embraces.

Last fall, a short-term mission opportunity with the OCMC (Orthodox Christian Mission Center) coordinated this visit of 5 American Presvyteras and 2 lay leaders to this far-away country located just North of Greece. Our task was to lead 2 back-to-back Presvyteras’ Retreats, the first of its kind in 10 years.

Of course, we Americans (the ones doing the “presenting”) were the ones doing much of the learning as well! The ecclesial history of the Church in Albania goes all the way back to the “beginning” (St. Paul ministered in the port city of Durres) and includes many martyrs. Christian tombs and basilicas reinforce the fact that Christianity came to the country very early. Yet, Albania suffered great trials in its occupation by the Turks for nearly 5 centuries, and then hardships under the Communists for 5 decades.

His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios, the presiding hierarch in Albania, has been there hard at work since



His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios requested that the OCMC Team offer sessions that would accomplish everything from basic Catechism of the Orthodox Faith, to the vocation of a prifteresha, how to support and encourage one's husband, and how to maintain one's physical/spiritual/emotional health.

1991. In the last 24 years, more than 370 building projects, as well as health initiatives, schools, rural development and aid, publications, and education programs have come to fruition via his faithful efforts and God’s grace. By his invitation, our small group of Americans travelled outside of our comfort zones to witness first-hand the ongoing Resurrection of the Albanian Orthodox Church!

We realized that, while over 1600 Churches and Monasteries were destroyed and virtually all of the clergy killed during the Communist persecution of the Orthodox Church, not all of the “icons” were destroyed! By this I mean the faithful “icons” of the faithful Orthodox of Albania. We witnessed the “strength in their shoulders” – both of those believers in the days when any expression of Faith was forbidden, as well as the “new generation” of church leaders – female and male, clergy and laity, old and young.

During our time with the Albanian priftereshas, we met women who, like their American sisters, exhibited a great diversity. Some of the women had been raised in the Faith – others, not. Some completed their initial education, some continued on to further education, and for some, life did not provide them those opportunities. It seemed that for many, even probably most, work was an essential element of life – in addition to home and family responsibilities, some tend animals in the fields, others teach in schools, others have “professions” or clerical work, etc. These were very busy ladies! Due to their great diversity, Archbishop Anastasios had lofty goals for our team. He requested that we offer sessions that would accomplish everything from basic Catechism of the Orthodox Faith, to the vocation of a prifteresha, to how to support and encourage one’s husband, and how to maintain her physical/spiritual/emotional health in the midst of (at times!) a very demanding life. The theme for our Retreat was aptly titled, “Mary and Martha: Being Servants and Students of Christ”. Certainly, these are themes that resonate, no matter how long we have served in the Church!

All of us Americans were very struck by the amazing dedication of these women – devotion to their husbands and families, dedication to their Churches, the incredible amount of work to be done, and their willingness to leave all of their commitments and responsibilities for a few days, in order to fellowship and to learn and grow in the Faith.

An inspiring unplanned incident occurred on the first day of our second Retreat. Many of the priftereshas had already made their way to Shen Vlash, but we had not yet begun, because we were waiting for one more group to arrive. Sitting around large tables together, the Albanian women began singing Albanian hymns and folk melodies, to pass the time. What beautiful voices, and what sweet melodies! Then—a pause... They wanted the Americans to sing! A quick deliberation ensued, and we decided to sing, “O Pure Virgin”, the hymn by St. Nektarios. Then – a beautiful thing! On the second verse, the lovely priftereshas picked up from there, singing the same hymn in Albanian!



His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios knows that Orthodox Christian women are important and that the role they play in the life of the Church is vital. He welcomed the OCMC Mission Team that came to minister to these women last year.

Joy of all joys, with the third verse, we all sang in Greek together, united in worship and praise. This memory is for certain one of the most powerful that we took back home with us at the end of our 2 weeks. Joining in song, praising our Lord, together in one place for a time, we were able to connect and encourage, bless and inspire.

Such encouragements, by God’s grace, we hope will benefit the Church in Albania. The work at hand is significant for them. Most of the country’s population identifies itself as non-Christian. Post-Communism recovery, alongside the enticements of the “Western” world each present their own challenges to the Orthodox Church.

Yet, witnessing the Resurrection of the Albanian Church, the joy of the Orthodox faithful whom we met, their perseverance, faithfulness and piety, urged our own small group to continue to seek for ourselves spiritual growth and maturity! We each felt so blessed and challenged to return home with a dual purpose – to wholeheartedly serve the communities where God has placed each one of us, and also to pray for and support the Albanian Orthodox Church.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I would request your prayers for our sisters and brothers in Albania. Indeed, if you go to orthodoxalbania.org, you will find wonderful information about the challenges and God-given blessings they are experiencing! Additionally, I would ask, on their behalf, for your financial support. You can imagine how dire the economy, the spirituality, the living conditions, and the overall circumstances were for all Albanians after their recent times of tribulations. Our dollars go “further” there, and every donation is greatly needed. OCMC

During the retreats, His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios reminded the women that had gathered for the retreats, “You are stronger in communion than privately.” Both Albanian and American participants felt the strength of this communion with one another through the prayer and fellowship they enjoyed during their time together.



Some of the women who participated in the Priftereshas’ Retreats had been raised in the Faith – others, not. All of the American OCMC team members who also participated in the retreats, however, were struck by the amazing dedication of these women.



Pres. Renee Ritsi urges the women gathered at the Priftereshas’ Retreat gathering at Shen Vlash Seminary in Albania to “feel the strength in your sisters’ shoulders”.

is, by God’s grace, doing wonderful work, and you can easily familiarize yourself with the ministry in Albania by visiting www.ocmc.org. You will also be able to acquaint yourself with the long-term missionaries who are devoting their energies and lives to living and teaching the Orthodox Christian Faith in Albania.

I finally encourage each one of you to consider participating in a short-term mission trip with OCMC, whether to Albania or elsewhere. There is great challenge and blessing in going beyond what is familiar, with a desire to obediently follow our Lord’s call to “Go, therefore, to all nations”. This challenge and blessing inevitably shapes us, our families and our communities, drawing us all together more closely into the Body of Christ.

One word which His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios shared with us presvyteras, which is true not only for the relationship between husband and wife, priest and presvytera, but also for our Orthodox Christian communities at large is this: “You are stronger in communion than privately.” Let us all take these words to heart, seeking to foster and grow in communion with each other, clergy family to parishioners, Orthodox community to Orthodox community, jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and American Orthodox to all of the Orthodox throughout the world. In this way, the “Strength in our shoulders” grows so that the Light of Christ may be spread throughout the entire world, to His Glory!

MISSION NEWS

KENYA

This fall, His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Kenya embarked on a three-week pastoral visit of different areas of the Republic of Kenya. His Eminence celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the church of St. Luke in Nandi together with four other priests of the area. The day was dedicated to the Mothers' Union of that area, where a good number of them arrived very early from different parishes. At the end of the Liturgy, His Eminence elevated the new Director of the Mothers' Union, who is also the parish priest of St. Luke, to the office of father confessor. After the Liturgy, His Eminence officially opened the seminar for the day. Speaking to them, he expressed first of all his joy that once more he was with them and at the same time witnessed, because of the large number of attendees, the love and the dedication not only of the Mothers' Union but also of the papadhias who were present. He said that the Archdiocese appreciates the contribution of women towards the development and progress of the Orthodox Church in Kenya. He congratulated the leaders of the Mothers' Union for their good efforts and their love for Christ and His Church. On behalf of the Mothers' Union, the Chairlady, Presvytera Stylianos, expressed the feelings of all the mothers present and their appreciation for the presence of His Eminence in all such meetings of the Mothers' Union.

His Eminence was invited to address the Mothers' Union for the second time, analyzing and emphasizing how they should live, how they should participate in the life of the Orthodox Church, and how to understand spiritually their role as mothers through their participation in the sacraments of our Church. At the end, all the mothers, together with His Eminence and the clergymen, had a common meal outside the church.

From there, His Eminence proceeded to another parish,

that of St. Stylianos in Moronyo, where hundreds of people, especially the youth and the children, but also the parents, were waiting to welcome His Eminence. In this parish, addressing the congregation, His Eminence expressed his joy at seeing so many people, although he came late. They had been waiting for several hours after the Liturgy to see His Eminence and to listen to his message. Speaking to the congregation, His Eminence emphasized the importance of

"This is now your time. ... be faithful, and have confidence in our Lord Jesus Christ, ... this will assist you to become useful instruments of the grace of God."

unity in the Church of Kenya, the love which each and every person should show to his neighbor, and forgiveness. At the end, His Eminence was invited to bless the new musical instruments of the Orthodox youth group of that parish.

From there, His Eminence went to the parish of Holy Transfiguration in Chepkegwen, where there was a meeting of the Orthodox youth in the area of Nandi. His Eminence was very much delighted to meet so many youth. In his speech and address, he emphasized mostly the importance of our young people of today, as they will be tomorrow's leaders in the Church and in this nation of Kenya. He said to the youth:

"This is now your time. Don't waste your time at this age by doing evil things. Dedicate yourselves to Christ, to His Church, and to your education. This is the only way to prepare yourselves for your future. Be strong, be firm, be faithful, and have confidence in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is always with us and will be with us forever. Open your hearts and your minds to him. You will never regret it, because in the end you will witness the fruits of your good work during your youth. This will assist you to become useful instruments of the grace of God."



▶ GUATEMALA

On Saturday, June 19, Fr. Antonio Patá Tuctuc fell asleep in the Lord. Fr. Antonio was one of the six indigenous Orthodox priests serving in Guatemala. In May, Fr. Antonio had required a leg amputation due to complications from diabetes. The amputation left Fr. Antonio weakened and struggling to recover his full health. Sadly, Fr. Antonio passed away at the hospital in Tiquisate, Guatemala. His funeral was held in Málaga on Tuesday, June 23.

Fr. Antonio's death presents another challenge to the growing Orthodox Church in Guatemala. In 2010, thousands of Guatemalans were received into the Orthodox Church under His Eminence Athenagoras, Metropolitan of Mexico and Exarch of Central America. Through the tireless efforts of the local clergy, these communities continue to grow in the Orthodox Faith. Yet they also have faced challenges. In 2014, the communities lost their beloved leading priest, Fr. Andrés Girón. That loss has been amplified by the loss of Fr. Antonio. Now, with only five

Please pray for the repose of the soul of Fr. Antonio and for the encouragement and peace of all the Orthodox faithful in Guatemala.

priests to care for thousands of faithful, the Church in Guatemala is in even greater need of prayers and support from the broader Orthodox Church. Please pray for the repose of the soul of Fr. Antonio and for the encouragement and peace of all the Orthodox faithful in Guatemala. Also, please continue praying for His Eminence Metropolitan Athenagoras as he addresses the needs of the Church in Guatemala. Finally, please pray for the OCMC missionaries who are working in Guatemala to meet the needs of the faithful.

ABOVE: On Saturday, June 19, Fr. Antonio Patá Tuctuc fell asleep in the Lord. His death, following the passing of Fr. Andrés Girón, has been very difficult for the faithful of Guatemala, who hunger and thirst for local leadership as they continue their Orthodox Christian journey.

BELOW: The Orthodox Metropolis of Korea held an annual Summer English Camp and Young Adult Retreat, with the main theme, "Come and See". 70 elementary-aged children, 55 middle and high school students, and 25 young adults participated in the Camp.

KOREA

From July 27th through August 9th, the Orthodox Metropolis of Korea hosted its annual Summer English Camp and Young Adult Retreat, with the main theme, "Come and See" (Jn 1:46). Three different age groups participated from parishes across Korea: elementary (70 children), middle and high school (55 students), and Syndesmos (25 young adults). In addition, many volunteer staff members, teachers, and assistants contributed their time and talents to this very meaningful and successful ministry program. All who participated reported that the camp was very uplifting and meaningful. They loved experiencing the Sacrament of Confession, the Divine Liturgy, the daily communal worship services & prayers, the theme lessons, English songs and learning activities, a variety of sport games and swimming, and delicious meals and snacks prepared by volunteers from the local churches of the Orthodox Metropolis in Korea. All of the reflections and discussions focused on the joy of "coming and seeing" Christ in prayer, in the Liturgy, in the saints, and in one another, as well as on our calling and responsibility as Christians to invite others to "come and see" our Lord and Savior through the life of the Church.

His Eminence Metropolitan Ambrosios of Korea, with the participation of the local clergy, supervised all the programs which were planned and executed by the directors of the summer camp retreat, Rev. Antonios Lim and Eleni Cho. Teaching staff included Sr. Athanasia Kontos (Korea/Greece), Spiro Deligiannis, Evangelia Pagones, Katerina Rallis, and Julia Schroeter (Metropolis of Chicago), and two American English teachers living in Korea, Chris Anthony Jonker and Erik Spiridon Lionberger. Drs. Pat and Perry Hamalis (Metropolis of Chicago) also contributed from their areas of expertise, and their children participated in the high school camp. His Eminence expressed his deep gratitude to all the volunteers and the participants, and he emphasized that this summer camp retreat is enormously valuable for the social and spiritual growth of our younger generations. Several non-Orthodox Korean children also participated in the camp, drawn especially by its English language instruction. This shows that the camp is an effective way for the Orthodox Church in Korea to engage in missionary outreach.

The clergy and lay leaders of the Church in Korea will continue offering spiritual retreats in summer and winter seasons, as well as other creative programs to uplift and engage our younger generations.



ABOVE: In addition to growing in fellowship, the children and young adults who participated in the Metropolis of Korea's annual Summer English Camp and Young Adult Retreat loved experiencing the Sacrament of Confession, the Divine Liturgy, and the daily communal worship services and prayers.





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