



ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN MISSIONS CENTER

Sitka & Alaska



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in

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Christ's Divine Love Beyond Words

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On the cover: The Orthodox Faith came to Alaska in the late 18th century with missionaries from Russia who would become great saints of the Church. Native Alaskan people have held fast to Orthodoxy ever since. The Church in Alaska is trying to preserve and grow the Orthodox Christian tradition with the help of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC).



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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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Orthodox Missions

FUJI

in

by Fr. Martin Ritsi

A line of catechumens stand expectantly waiting for the baptism to begin - their dark skin shining in contrast to their white baptismal robes. Joy is radiating from their faces. They stand together before the clergy at the newly-consecrated Church of the Holy Trinity in Fiji and are a sign of the wonderful works God is doing on this tropical island, under the direction of His Eminence Metropolitan Amphilochios of New Zealand. Adult baptisms are so much a part of the Fiji mission vision that a large baptismal font was constructed directly in front of the entrance to the church. Approaching the church, it is the first thing one sees, erected in the middle of the pathway and standing as a mystical entranceway to the church.

BELOW: The Church of the Holy Trinity is a new parish that was recently constructed and consecrated in Fiji. The Church in Fiji also has an orphanage and will soon be opening a shelter for women.



Following his enthronement His Eminence Amphilochios, Metropolitan of New Zealand, traveled to Fiji to bring the Orthodox Faith. Many Fijians have become Orthodox after meeting and spending time with His Eminence, and the body of believers continues to grow.



Christianity was introduced to this region, once known as the “Cannibal Isles”, in the early 1800’s at a time when cannibalism was still practiced between warring tribes.

Metropolitan Amphilochios smiled with satisfaction as we walked up to the church that morning. He stopped to show me, with a glint of pride in his eyes, how the font was equipped with running water and a drain going directly into the earth below. It is intended to be used often, and little did I know that later that day, he would give me the honor of participating in the baptism of 13 catechumens.

Allow me to backtrack a little. This journey to Fiji came after seeing how well the mission there was developing. It was more than coincidence that in the same week I decided it was time for firsthand exploration, an invitation also came from the Metropolitan himself. A series of events followed that showed the completion of a solid foundation for Orthodoxy in Fiji. This included the consecration of a newly-constructed church, group baptisms, the blessing of marriages, tonsuring two nuns, opening an orphanage, and liturgies almost every day with visitors from Australia, Greece, and the United States.

Before I began preparations for the visit, I had little understanding of Fiji and the islands that surround it in Oceania. In retrospect, I see my awareness was founded on hearsay and advertisements of a warm people and luxurious resorts situated in tropical paradise. While I found that Fijians are indeed amazingly gentle and friendly, and the island is tropical, the “paradise” aspect was built for tourists who visit the hidden resorts. Life for the average Fijian is simple. Homes are small, and people work the land or sea to carve out a basic living.

Christianity was introduced to this region, once known as the “Cannibal Isles”, in the early 1800’s at a time when cannibalism was still practiced between warring tribes. Fortunately, history records only one foreign missionary martyred in this way. Today, the population is comprised of two main ethnic groups –

indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians (originating from India). Among the indigenous Fijians, the majority is Christian, while of the Indo-Fijians, only 6% percent have accepted Christ. Surprisingly, many Christian Fijians I met had Hindu backgrounds. There is receptivity among this population to accept the Gospel.

During my visit, I heard accounts of the powerful way God revealed himself to people through Metropolitan Amphilochios. One of the four Fijian priests explained how his mother heard the Metropolitan speak during his first visit to the island. She immediately sensed something special and invited him for dinner. She told her son he had to meet him. The son, now Fr. Bartholomew, relayed that he had felt a calling to ministry early in his life, but began a career and never pursued this further. When he met the Metropolitan, he immediately knew he must join this Church and pursue the calling that had lain dormant.

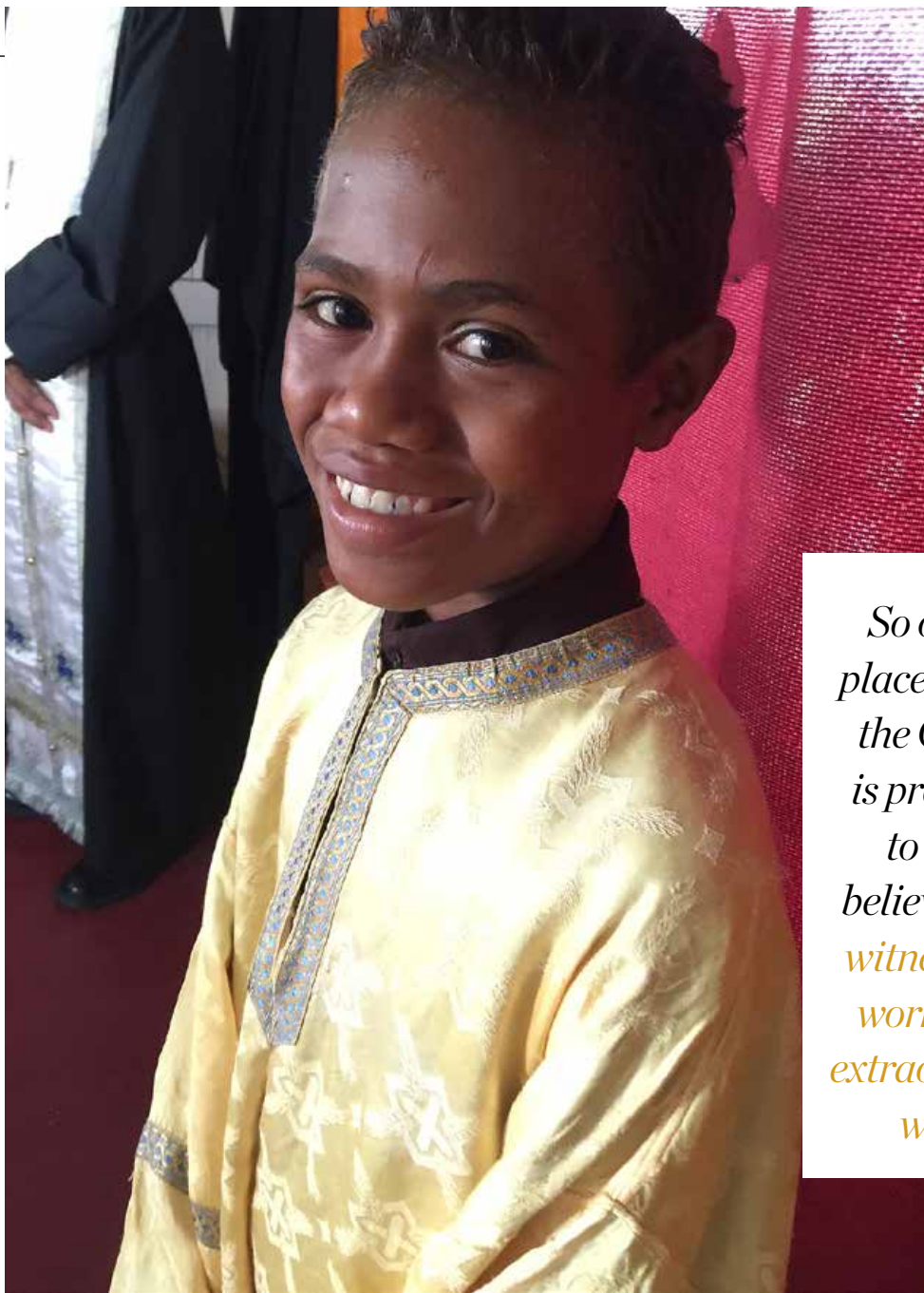
Another example of God working through the Metropolitan was told by one of the two newly tonsured nuns. She explained how she had been working at a shopping center and saw the Metropolitan pass by. She felt drawn to him and left what she was doing. She followed him until he sat down somewhere. Not knowing what to say, she simply offered him a glass of water. That began a relationship that culminated in her embracing a monastic life and taking responsibility to assist the new orphanage.

So often, in places where the Gospel is preached to

non-believers, we witness God working in extraordinary ways. His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Kenya said recently, “In the mission field God, not infrequently, intervenes miraculously. Many other missionaries can give a similar testimony. Our Lord...often miraculously enlightens those who come to receive the light of Orthodoxy for the first time in mature years.” This is the case in Fiji. Many are called out of their daily lives through a powerful encounter with God – similar to encounters we read of when the apostles first met Jesus. Now with 4 clergy, 4 churches, 2 nuns, missionary coworkers from Australia, Greece, New Zealand, and the US, many baptized faithful, an orphanage, and a women’s shelter, the foundation for the Orthodox Mission in Fiji is established.

But now that the mission in Fiji is established, is there still anything left to do? Translations, training, assistance to expand and start new communities, help for the orphans, and other social projects





are just some of what lies ahead. And then, there is not just Fiji, but the other islands of Oceania that lie within the vision of the Metropolitan.

On my way back to the United States, I was asked to visit the Metropolitan headquarters in New Zealand. There I was met by a classmate from seminary, Fr. Paul Patitsas, and his family. Fr. Paul took me around New Zealand

So often, in places where the Gospel is preached to non-believers, we witness God working in extraordinary ways.

and helped me understand how the mission developed in Fiji, the Metropolitan's vision, as well as many of the ministries and activities in New Zealand. We were sitting at the table one evening in his home when the phone rang. I could see Fr. Paul thinking and nodding his head as he listened. "Yes, Your Eminence. In two days? Tonga? OK, I'll be there." Just

after my departure from Fiji, the Metropolitan had confirmed his plans to go to Tonga, where he is also striving to plant the Church. His hopes are to buy a piece of land and erect a mission station so that Orthodoxy will be established there as well. Fr. Paul will assist him. On the same day I left for the US, Fr. Paul flew to Tonga to help with these very first stages of starting the Church anew! And then there is Samoa, another island under the Metropolitan of New Zealand where there are also plans to begin. Yes, there is still much to do so that the Orthodox Christian Faith will spread and so that true paradise may be firmly planted in these tropical islands!



Above: Fr. Martin was welcomed by the warmth and friendliness of the Fijian people during a recent visit to this Pacific island nation. Many Fijians work the land or sea to carve out a basic living. They are typically of African or Indian descent. Only 6% of the Indo-Fijian population identifies themselves as being Christian.

Far Left: There are currently four clergy in Fiji. They serve the country's four Orthodox churches. During a recent visit, OCMC Executive Director Fr. Martin Ritsi was able to participate in the baptism of 13 catechumens.

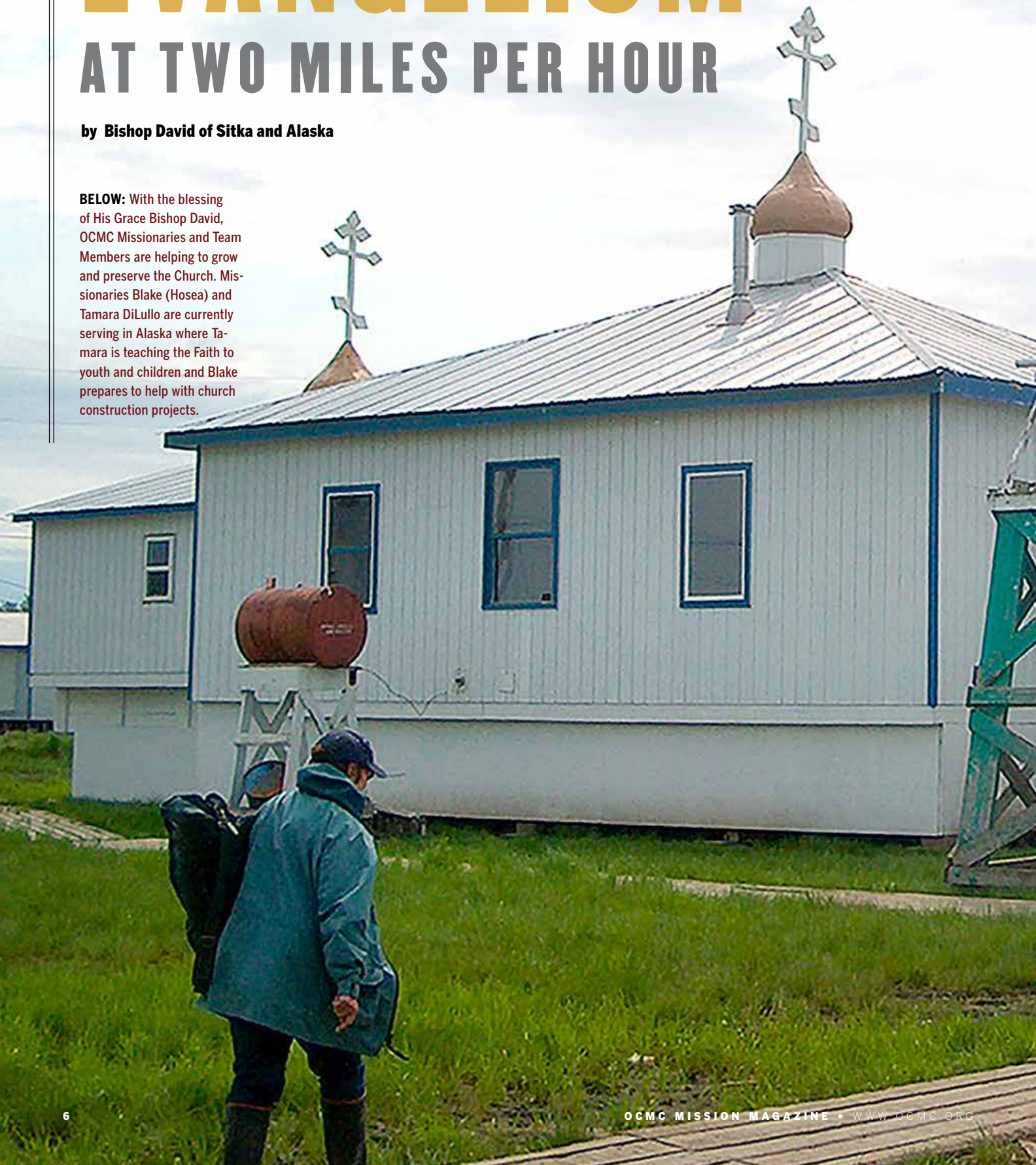
Left: Now that the Church has been planted in Fiji, translations, training, assistance to expand and start new communities, help for the orphans, and other social projects are just some of what lies ahead.

EVANGELISM

AT TWO MILES PER HOUR

by Bishop David of Sitka and Alaska

BELOW: With the blessing of His Grace Bishop David, OCMC Missionaries and Team Members are helping to grow and preserve the Church. Missionaries Blake (Hosea) and Tamara DiLullo are currently serving in Alaska where Tamara is teaching the Faith to youth and children and Blake prepares to help with church construction projects.





In our days of instant action and gratification, I am always amazed at what those early missionaries to Alaska endured just to get here. Today, I can travel from Anchorage to New York (about half of the distance from Valaam Monastery in Russia to Kodiak, Alaska) in about nine hours of flight time. Said another way, I travel in a jet aircraft at a speed of over 380 miles per hour. Even if I drove it, I should still be there in under four days at about 50 miles per hour. The early missionaries left Valaam on December 21st of 1793 and arrived in Kodiak on September 24th, 1794. That's 291 days to travel 7,300 miles! Allowing for stops and layovers, it means they traveled at a lightning speed of about two miles per hour. I travel in a climate-controlled vehicle; they rode on horses or open carts with no protection from wind or weather other than their own clothing. That's dedication!

CONTINUES NEXT PAGE

I am currently developing a long-range plan for missionary activity in the Diocese of Alaska. OCMC will be an important part of that plan.

The Monks of Valaam had nothing more than the stories of promyshlenniki (fur traders) and the ten Sugpiaq natives that traveled with them. Of course, they did have the most important resource for missionary work and evangelism: the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That is the point, actually, that I want to make. You may not have a great experience with missionary work or evangelism. You may feel that you can't do much because you are inexperienced, your group is small, your resources are limited. But you have what you need. You have the Gospel. It is all the Apostles had, and it is all the Monks of Valaam had, but they converted not one, but over ten nations of natives to Orthodoxy covering over 3,000 miles of Alaskan wilderness, confronting less-than-helpful members of the Russian American Company, being robbed of their resources from time to time, and suffering martyrdom. All this in the Name of Christ and Holy Orthodoxy.

Having the OCMC available to us in Alaska is a resource we need desperately. Having Fr. David and Matushka Rozanne Rucker at our Seminary has proven to be a benefit in multiple ways. At first, their coming to Alaska to help at St. Herman's Seminary was simply a tool for missions and evangelism that we wanted and they could fulfill. But once they came and developed a relationship with the seminarians and the community of

Kodiak, as well as increased communication with our own native clergy, they have become a priceless addition to the resources of the Diocese of Alaska. Unexpected developments, not of our own doing, have only enhanced their value and contribution to Alaskan Orthodoxy. I might even say they have been an answer to a prayer I wasn't making at the beginning, but am grateful that they are now here and involved.

Blake and Pamela DiLullo and their children, also OCMC Missionaries in Alaska, are providing help in various ways. Blake with church construction

projects, especially the ones under the direction of the Russian Orthodox Sacred Sites in Alaska (ROSSSIA) and Pamela with the youth ministry, our Anchorage outreach, and future developments aimed at developing a Wellness Center in the area. (Cecelia and Sarah are great pet-sitters for me when I travel.)

Each year OCMC Mission Teams come to our Diocese and provide a valuable service to the local parishes and help develop lasting relationships between the team members and the people in the villages. Now, more than ever, these teams are needed, and if anyone is considering a missionary trip to Alaska, please do so, we'll be glad to have you! In the short term, summer missionary groups provide services we would not otherwise have; church camps, construction projects, and youth retreats are all assets that improve our outreach to our village communities.

But more is needed. Recently, Fr. Martin Ritsi came to Alaska, and we had some important discussions about the future of missionary work in Alaska. He asked me questions in ways that gave me new insight into what we should be looking at in terms of missionary outreach here. I am currently developing a long-range plan for missionary activity in the Diocese of Alaska. OCMC will be an important part of that plan. That is why their support for our projects is so valuable to us. Our own resources are limited, and knowing that I can rely on the generosity of those who support OCMC is a very helpful and comforting thought.

Hopefully, we can move a little faster now than two miles per hour, but at whatever speed, we won't be successful without the aid of the OCMC and their supporters and missionaries like the Ruckers and DiLulllos. I pray you will remember the Diocese of Alaska, and your designated donations to the Rucker and DiLullo Families, and OCMC when you plan your charitable giving.

Let the lives of these venerable laborers on the American Continent be our inspiration and guide. Let their prayers rise to God on our behalf that our work may be blessed and fruitful. Through the prayers of St. Herman of Alaska, St. Juvenaly and his Companion, St. Peter the Aleut and Protomartyr of San Francisco, St. Innocent Enlightener of the Aleuts and All America, St. Jacob of the Yukon, Baptizer of the Alaskan Peoples, the Blessed Matushka Olga of Kwethluk, and all the saints who have shown forth in America, pray for us!





LEFT: Sharing the Faith in Alaska continues the work of American missionaries like St. Herman, St. Juvenaly and his Companion, St. Peter the Aleut and Protomartyr of San Francisco, St. Innocent Enlightener of the Aleuts and All America, and St. Jacob of the Yukon, Baptizer of the Alaskan Peoples, and the Blessed Matushka Olga of Kwethluk.

OPPOSITE TOP: OCMC Mission Specialists Fr. David Rucker (right) and Mat. Rozanne have been serving in Alaska by teaching at the seminary there to train future Alaskan priests and Church leaders.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: OCMC Short-term Mission Teams have been serving in Alaska for years. They have helped offer catechism, coordinate youth ministries, and renovate churches in Alaska. His Grace Bishop David feels that it is important for this work to continue.



BELOW: His Grace David of the Orthodox Church of America (OCA) was recently enthroned as Bishop of Sitka and Alaska. His Grace is partnering with OCMC to help evangelize, catechize, and theologically train in Alaska.



THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE:

Christ's Divine Love Beyond Words

by **Spyridoula Fotinis**

“You’ve changed,” my best friend tells me as we walk down the halls to our next class. “Really?” I respond. “How?” “You’re just different. I don’t know, you can just tell; you’ve experienced something that has changed you forever.” I look in the mirror and I am still me, still the same, but inside there’s a whirlwind of new emotions and experiences. My senses have gone overboard and my heart has experienced love and joy to a degree that surpasses this world. Where can I possibly begin? Every story I have read from other short-term mission teams says that the participants cannot put into words what they have racing in their minds and their hearts. Our human language has boundaries that cannot possibly even scratch the surface of describing the divine.

But here I am again. Going down the same halls, into the same classes, and sitting in the same seat, day after day, after day. It is not the same; I am not the same. My eyes stare ahead at the chalkboard, but my heart is traveling back to Kenya. I am a senior in high school, and it is unusual for someone my age to participate on a mission team. When I saw an e-mail saying that team members were needed to teach English to our brothers and sisters in Kenya, there was no question, only a strong calling. I just had to go.

ABOVE: Like many OCMC short-term Mission Team Members, Spyridoula Fotinis returned from her experience in Kenya a changed person. Though she returned to her life after a two-week stint in the field she perceived life and the world around her differently as a result of her team service.

I had no idea how to prepare, how I would be excused from school, or how I was even going to go because I was still underage. God had it in His plan. Every piece soon fell into place, with my mother even joining me.

When we arrived in Nairobi, we had no idea what would await us. From the moment we stepped off the plane, we were swept into a completely new world. We came to teach, but instead we learned so much more and are still learning to this moment. During our time in

Nairobi, we taught and learned at the St. Clement of Alexandria Primary School, the Orthodox Teachers College of Africa, and the Makarios III Seminary, where we spent most of our time. These schools were on the same compound, but surrounding them was the Kibera slum, the largest in Kenya and in all of Africa.

At the St. Clement Primary School, my team member and I were put in charge of teaching a lesson on the cross and doing a craft. We crowded half of the three hundred children into the cafeteria and taught about the importance of the cross throughout the Old and New Testaments, even teaching a song about how and why we do the sign of the cross. Then, we gave each child a cord plus nine beads and taught them how to make a beaded cross. The younger ones struggled with a slightly more difficult step, and we were bombarded with voices asking for help: “Te-cha!” (Teacher) “Te-cha! Te-cha! Help me please!” Eventually all the crosses were done, but throughout the day the children kept coming back wanting to make even more, and to play, talk, and be with us. It was touching to see the children continuing to wear their crosses four days after making them.

Throughout our time there, we experienced genuine relationships that would take up an entire book, with a few volumes, so that every detail can be written. One experience that specifically stood out for me was when I was invited over for dinner, along with OCMC Missionary Meg Engelbach, to a young woman’s home who had just finished her student teaching at St. Clement School. She lived a little deeper in the slums, and we walked to her house as the sun was setting. We had to walk through hanging laundry and a narrow wet walkway to get to her door. She unlocked her simple wooden door and welcomed us in. When she plugged in her light bulb, I was at first surprised that she did not live with her parents and then at the tiny size of her home. None of that mattered when I saw all the icons adorning her walls. I was humbled in the fact that her home was smaller than my room and that she had had us over for dinner, especially me who was still a newcomer. Her prayer struck me most as she asked God to bless us her sisters and thanked Him for her happiness in having guests for dinner. We remain sisters though we are half a globe away.

It was not the things we taught, witnessed, or learned, but the people themselves who made such a profound impact on me. Not a day passed without everyone having a smile on their faces and doing everything in their power to make us feel

welcome. They would sing, dance, and share their life’s stories. In hearing those stories, it was difficult to believe that these people, in front of you, have experienced such hardships and are still smiling from ear to ear. It is because they have something we take for granted. Christ is their “strength and their song”, literally. Every breath, every word, every note, every moment is to the glory of God. Each person was on fire for Orthodoxy. It was stunning. They had the Divine Love that you only read about in books, but it was fully alive. I will never forget the first vespers services we were blessed to experience at the seminary chapel. The floor was shaking from the voices that were so full of life and love, chanting the hymns of the coming day. And the children, who had very little, some even without parents, were always joyous and their smiles were contagious. They were so curious about everything; life, our Faith, and, of course, America. In the beginning we were strangers, but by the end of our time there, we were family. It did not matter what language we spoke, what we looked like, or where we were from. We are family because Christ is at the center of us all.

The hardest part of the entire journey was not traveling or taking in a completely different world; it was leaving those who I had come to love so deeply and fully, with the knowledge that I might not ever see them again. The relationships we created and continue to foster were friendships I have never made so strongly and quickly before, even at all the camps I have attended. It is because they are grounded fully on our Orthodox faith and life, overflowing and full of love, that nothing can ever break.

My first week back in school, my teacher asked me if I was “back to reality.” This question bothers me still. What I experienced is a reality, truer in many ways, in addition to the life I have here. Our English language limits our boundaries of love to only one word. “Love” cannot possibly define the colorful dimensions of the infinite reality of Divine Love. Words give no justice at all to this reality. With these limited words, however, we must inspire each other to go out and experience the richness of Christ’s Divine Love in every situation, with every person that we encounter in our life’s journey. We do not always have to step out of our own community or country to enter into such a profound relationship. Every moment, every single person around us, brings an opportunity to share the awesome love that has filled our own hearts and is waiting to flow into the hearts of those around us.



ABOVE: While in Kenya Spyridoula and her team mates taught and learned at the St. Clement of Alexandria Primary School, the Orthodox Teachers College of Africa, and the Makarios III Seminary. Here, one of the children they taught wears a necklace she made that was part of a lesson on the cross.



ABOVE: Team members that serve in Nairobi often spend time with the students receiving theological training at the Makarios III seminary. These young men will become the future priests and catechists of the Metropolis.

BELOW: Though the time that team members spend in the field is relatively short (two to three weeks at most) they forge very meaningful relationships with the people they have traveled to fellowship with. It is difficult for them to say goodbye at the end of the team, but they are often forever changed by the people they have met.



BELOW: Nairobi is home to the Makarios III seminary, the Orthodox Teachers College of Africa, and the St. Clement of Alexandria Primary School, where hundreds of Kenyan children are able to receive a Christian education.



HIS GRACE BISHOP NEOFITOS OF NITRIA: *A Life of Service and Love*

by Markella Balasis

"If we had to stand before the Righteous Judge, no one would be worthy. Only the grace of God, whoever heals what is weak and completes what is lacking, transcends and makes man worthy to hear the sweet voice of the incarnate Word and to respond to His highest calling." —HIS GRACE BISHOP NEOFITOS OF NITRIA

On Sunday, December 21, 2014, Orthodox people all over Kenya rejoiced at an important and momentous occasion: the ordination of His Grace Bishop Neofitos (Kongai) of Nitria. For many years as a priest, His Grace has served the Church in Kenya with love and dedication, and he will continue to do so now as an auxiliary bishop assisting His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Kenya.

From his youth, His Grace Neofitos has dedicated his life to serving Jesus Christ by ministering to the Kenyan people. He was born in 1970 in the village of Kesengei, in the Nandi district of Kenya. He learned early on from his parents how, even in difficult circumstances, God always provides hope and comfort to those who seek Him. More often than not, children in Kenya are unable to complete school unless they receive sponsorship to cover the school fees that their family cannot afford. His Grace recognizes the difficult sacrifices that his parents had to make for him. "My mother raised me within the embrace of our Holy Church and guided my steps to the embrace of the Crucified and Resurrected Christ," he recalls, and "[my parents] did

what they did to make sure that we survived."

Children in Kenya grow up in a society where children belong to the community more so than one mother and father. As a young boy, His Grace was sent to live with an older woman in his village to care for her herd of cows; in exchange, she provided for his needs and even helped to educate him. "If it were not for her good heart, I would not have become a priest in the first place," he asserts.

He eventually gained entrance into the "Archbishop Makarios III of Cyprus" Orthodox Patriarchal Ecclesiastical School, the Church's seminary in Nairobi. The seminary school covers all of the expenses for the students who are accepted, so students attend at no cost to themselves. From the very first week of being at the seminary, Bishop Neofitos immersed himself eagerly

in the beauty of Orthodox worship on a daily basis:

This [encounter] lit a deep flame within me. I respectfully went to my archbishop and told him that I wanted to dedicate myself totally to the Church. His Eminence began to smile, seeing how young and innocent I was, but he blessed me and told me to pray and to be obedient to the omniscient will of God.

BELOW: Though he has been elevated to the rank of the episcopacy, His Grace will continue to serve the Church in Kenya in many of the same capacities that he had assisted as a priest. His Grace will work closely with His Eminence Makarios to tend to the administrative, liturgical, and catechetical needs of the Archdiocese.

Archbishop Makarios was one of Bishop Neofitos' teachers at the seminary, and His Grace remembers how inspired he was by Archbishop Makarios' fatherly love from the beginning. "My goodness, he listens to everybody and helps everyone! This is a very difficult thing to do for many bishops—even myself, I cannot be everything for everybody—but Archbishop Makarios was and is."

In 1998, His Grace was ordained to the holy priesthood by His Eminence Archbishop Seraphim (presently the Metropolitan of Zimbabwe and Angola), and he graduated from the Patriarchal seminary the following year. He spent several years serving parishes in and around Nairobi. Archbishop Seraphim recognized a special potential within His Grace and submitted a request for him to receive a scholarship to pursue further academic studies. With the sponsorship of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center, His Grace journeyed to the United States to attend Holy Cross School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts. His Grace treasures many fond memories of the time he spent in the United States: "Everything was new and exotic, but I loved it because I found that Americans want you to relate to them, and I did so." He adds, "My exposure to the [greater] Orthodox world came through America. I learned to be effective, constantly conscious, and know your friends. Above all, I found God, I saw God, and I lived God."

After receiving a master's degree from Holy Cross, His Grace served as an interim priest at Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in Kansas City, Missouri, for several months with the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver. Later, he received the blessing to undertake doctoral studies at the Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, Greece, through a scholarship. While there, he served at the Moni Vlatadon monastery in Thessaloniki under the abbot, His Eminence Metropolitan Panteleimon of Tyrolia and Serentium.

In 2007, he was tonsured a monk by Archbishop Makarios at the Holy Transfiguration monastery in Veria with the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan Panteleimon. He returned to Kenya and was assigned to the parish of Sts. Nicholas and Anastasios in Riruta,



a suburb of Nairobi. The OCMC was able to begin offering monetary assistance for him through the Support a Mission Priest (SAMP) program, which includes over 160 priests in Kenya. Around the same time, he was appointed to direct the Office of Archdiocese Affairs and also began serving as a lecturer at the seminary. Through his guidance, the parish of Sts. Nicholas and Anastasios has experienced tremendous renewal, so much so that an additional mission parish has been established, dedicated to Sts. Nektarios and Irene, in order to accommodate all of the faithful. He is inspired and overjoyed to witness such growth guided by the Holy Spirit.

Over the past few years, the needs for the Church in Kenya, in order to minister to their growing numbers, have remained a priority for His Eminence Archbishop Makarios and the Archdiocese. For this reason, the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Alexandria agreed to elect an auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese. The election of Bishop Neofitos brings an especially great sense of joy for Archbishop Makarios: "It is a great blessing in my lifetime to see the fruits of my work, because [he was] my student. He is very committed; at the same time, he has the charisma [i.e. spiritual gifts] to assist the Church."

His Beatitude Patriarch Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, along with His Eminence Archbishop Makarios, His Eminence Metropolitan Gabriel of Leontopolis, His Grace Bishop Meletios of Naukratis, and numerous other clergy, celebrated the ordination of His Grace Bishop Neofitos at the Patriarchal Cathedral of St. Savvas the Sanctified in Alexandria. His Beatitude Patriarch Theodoros offered these words to His Grace Neofitos:

St. Porphyrios the Kafso-kalyvite [said], "However great our fall and our bitterness from the other problems of life, we must never lose our inner joy, which we have, because Christ is alive and present in our lives!" These simple words alone are enough to express the truth of the Gospel, to give wings to the Missionary, hope to the distressed, joy to the desperate, courage to the sick, meaning to the contemporary confused... The Apostle orders of his disciple Timothy, "As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:5). It is as if he is telling him, in other words, do not seek an easy and comfortable life, but prepare yourself for the torment. And indeed, it is then that our work as Missionaries is justified, when we give ourselves unconditionally to



ABOVE: His Grace Bishop Neofitos serving with His Beatitude Patriarch Theodoros (middle) and His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Kenya (left).

the will of the Lord, to His Holy Church.

His Grace Bishop Neofitos, upon his consecration, was given the title of Bishop of Nitria.

This title holds great personal significance for him, along with all of the Kenyan Orthodox people. The very first native Kenyan bishop, Bishop George (Gathuna) who served as an auxiliary bishop in Kenya during the 1970's, was also the Bishop of Nitria. His Grace is humbled to be following in the footsteps of Bishop George of blessed memory and ministering to his beloved Kenyan people.

As the carpenter forms a piece of wood into a wonderful piece of work, so I pray and hope that the merciful God will have compassion on my unworthiness and will transform me into a useful worker in His vineyard. I pray to serve the Church with all my heart and my

mind. I want to give it all! All this will happen with humility and obedience in place. [Through] all these, the name of the Lord shall be glorified!

Though he has been elevated to the rank of the episcopacy, His Grace will continue to serve the Church in Kenya in many of the same capacities that he had assisted as a priest. His Grace will work closely with His Eminence Makarios to tend to the administrative, liturgical, and catechetical needs of the Archdiocese. Because of the difficult circumstances that he endured growing up, His Grace is especially dedicated to ensuring the Church provides educational opportunities to those in need; in particular, he still devotes much of his time teaching at the seminary in Nairobi.

Most of all, His Grace Neofitos constitutes the presence of a local African bishop, which is an important distinction. Archbishop Makarios acknowledges, "It is definitely appropriate to see Africans given the responsibility, and the people have responded very positively." Not long after the ordination, His Grace journeyed home to the Nandi region of Kenya, where he was offered the honor of becoming an elder of his tribe through a traditional ceremony. Truly, the Kenyan people have embraced His Grace with great love and affection.

RIGHT: After receiving a master's degree from Holy Cross in Brookline, MA, through an OCMC scholarship His Grace received the blessing to undertake doctoral studies at the Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, Greece, through an additional scholarship. He is the only Kenyan currently serving as a bishop in the Metropolis of Kenya.



BELOW: His Beatitude Patriarch Theodoros presents the newly-consecrated Bishop Neofitos with a pectoral cross at his ordination.



ABOVE: His Grace Bishop Neofitos presides over a service with local clergy in Kenya.

RIGHT: The Nandi people performed a traditional ceremony to bestow the title of elder upon His Grace Bishop Neofitos (seen here accompanied by His Eminence Archbishop Makarios).



WAQAA!

by Hosea and Tamara DiLullo

After receiving a blessing from His Grace Bishop David of Sitka and Alaska, we headed back to our place in the cathedral's nave. Here, we were greeted by a native priest with a kind smile. After the customary three-kiss Slavic greeting, he took me by the hand, the rest of the family following behind, and led me back to His Grace. "Your Grace, these are my Tyonek people; they have returned."

Yes, we had returned. After almost three years of support team-raising, we were back in our beloved Alaska. And after a hard move that took the majority of a month, this warm greeting confirmed what we had hoped- we are where we belong. A few months later, this would be repeated as we met Fr. Elia Larson from Bethel for the first time. He greeted us in much the same way- the Slavic three-kisses and a big, kind smile. Fr. Elia then told me of what OCMC meant to his village- how they had helped to finish building a church. The parishioners had suffered from burn-

are their spiritual lifelines. They are connections to past generations and the hope of the life to come. The local faithful gather to celebrate life's important moments- weddings, baptisms, and funerals- within their walls. The people come to work out their salvation through the Church's sacraments and take her teachings home to their families.

As Orthodox Christians, we have a duty to both preserve and share the Faith as it has been taught to us over the past two thousand years, unchanged, and always relevant to each new generation.

AS ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS, WE HAVE A DUTY TO BOTH PRESERVE AND SHARE THE FAITH AS IT HAS BEEN TAUGHT TO US OVER THE PAST TWO THOUSAND YEARS

out and were not able to determine what else was needed to complete the project. Rallying the local troops, the 2011 OCMC short-term mission team, led by Hosea, helped complete the work, and the village's parish life began seeing more growth than ever before. Where before there had been more funerals, now there are more weddings, baptisms, and chrismations. St. Sophia's is a flourishing Orthodox community.

When people visit Alaska, they are immediately awed by the rugged beauty of her land, rich heritage of her people, and the historic significance of Russian Orthodoxy seen in her churches. And while these beautiful structures are just that- beautiful structures- to those who do not call Alaska home, to the Orthodox native Alaskans, these churches

Part of this is accomplished by making sure that the faithful have a spiritual place to come home to. We are called to help them by assisting with the building and renovation of their churches, not just in the easily-reached cities, but in the remote villages accessible only by plane or boat. Currently, Hosea is inspecting and assessing the structural needs of parish churches that can be reached during the ever-changing winter weather, with more remote visits planned at later dates. After his inspections are complete, he reports back to Bishop David with preliminary suggestions of what can be done to preserve the historic nature of the buildings in a way that is economically feasible for the community.

Another aspect of sharing our faith is caring for those in need who live among us. The St. Innocent Wellness Resource Center, a new ministry of the Diocese of Alaska, is being developed. The SIWRC will assist those seeking help within the Anchorage area, both residents and those visiting from the villages, by providing a safe and inviting environment in which individuals can receive spiritual counseling and access to other necessary treatments. Tamara is currently assisting with tasks related to the establishment of this much-needed resource within the community.

As a family, we are all involved with parish life at the St. Innocent Cathedral. Tamara teaches youth catechism to second and third graders, both those who live in Anchorage and those whose families are visiting from outlying villages while traveling with relatives to restock supplies and attend to appointments made with professionals not available to them in their home communities. Hosea attends to parish needs as requested by His Grace or the parish priests and occasionally serves as a chaperone for church-sponsored youth outings. Sarah and Cecelia are active in church school programs, the choir, and charity fundraising, while encouraging others their own ages to participate alongside them.

By your prayers and support, we have been blessed with the opportunity to serve in America's cradle of Orthodoxy, the land where Saints Herman, Juvenaly, Innocent, and Jacob planted and cultivated the seeds of our Faith. As Orthodox Christians, it is our responsibility to share our faith with each new generation in a way that they can understand and that is meaningful to them, and it is this responsibility that we as a family are striving to fulfill as best we can.



LEFT: OCMC Missionary Tamara DiLullo and her daughter working on a craft for Sunday School students in Alaska.

BELOW: The DiLullo family is serving as long-term missionaries in Alaska as part of a continuing effort to preserve and grow Alaska's rich Orthodox tradition. Alaska's younger generations are key to these efforts and a significant focus of the DiLullo's missionary work.



ABOVE: OCMC Missionary Blake (Hosea) DiLullo seen here with an Alaskan youth. Blake is preparing to help with construction projects throughout the Diocese of Sitka and Alaska. Many of the churches are old and in need of restoration and repair.



ABOVE: The DiLulos are helping to educate and catechize the Alaskan youth as part of their long-term missionary ministry work there. The entire DiLullo family is involved with parish life at the St. Innocent Cathedral in Anchorage.



LEFT: The DiLulos are serving as OCMC Missionaries in Alaska with the blessing of His Grace David. Here Blake (Hosea) and Tamara's son Dillon assists His Grace during the Liturgy.

Missionary *Updates*

BELOW : Students who have received teacher training from OCMC Missionary Anastasia Pamela Barksdale are seen here with the children they serve as part of their training.



ABOVE : OCMC Mission Specialists: Fr. David Rucker (right).



ALASKA

DiLullo Family

The DiLullo Family, in-field since September 2014, is located in Anchorage, Alaska, and is currently involved with ministries connected with the OCA's Diocese of Alaska. Hosea is working in the field of construction and has been conducting inspections on church buildings in the south central part of the diocese to determine what restoration needs they have. Tamara is home schooling their two daughters while teaching youth catechism in the St. Innocent Russian Orthodox Cathedral's Sunday Church School program. She is also assisting with the formation of the St. Innocent Wellness Resource Center in Anchorage - an outreach of the Diocese of Alaska for the less-fortunate seeking spiritual, psychological, and physical care. Sarah and Cecelia are active in parish life - participating in youth catechism and the Cathedral choir.

Rucker Family

When Mat. Rozanne's doctor asked her not to return to Guatemala due to ongoing treatment for Tropical Sprue, a condition caused by parasites which infected her last fall, the invitation immediately came from His Grace Bishop David of Alaska to come teach at St. Herman Theological Seminary on Kodiak Island. In August 2014 we had been in Eagle River, Alaska, speaking at the Eagle River Institute, and also in Kodiak for the annual St. Herman Pilgrimage, at the invitation of His Grace Bishop David. During that time, we discussed the possibility of bringing together indigenous (native) Alaskan clergy with newly-ordained indigenous Central American clergy for mutual benefit and training. Facilitating collaboration between people of different cultures

is a great privilege for missionaries and would be beneficial to all. We were blessed by His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon to accept the invitation to serve in Alaska for 2015, and we arrived in mid-January to begin teaching at the seminary.

It is an honor to assist in the formation of future clergy and hopefully even of some future missionaries. Since its foundation, St. Herman Theological Seminary has produced 167 graduates, including 34 priests and 5 deacons. Students often are multilingual and have been speakers of Native Alaskan languages including Aleut, Alutiiq, Athabaskan, Tlingit, and Yupik. In our teaching and mentoring, we attempt to address pastoral challenges specific to Alaska, including substance abuse, cultural loss and despair, heterodox proselytism, and poverty stemming from an economic shift from subsistence to a cash economy.

Alaska has over 100 Orthodox parishes but fewer than 40 priests. Because they are without a priest, we have been invited to St. Paul Island in the Pribilof Islands (in the Bering Sea--picture the "reality" show, Deadliest Catch) during Holy Week and Pascha, making it possible for the faithful there to have services. We will travel and work there with a seminary couple, the newly-ordained Dn. John and Mat. Ana Kudrin, who will be experiencing their first Pascha in the diaconate.

At the completion of commencement activities at St. Herman Seminary in mid-May, we will return to "the lower 48" for meetings throughout the summer, including All American Council (OCA). Your prayers and continued financial support will make it possible for us to return to Kodiak and St. Herman Theological Seminary for the Nativity semester (September through December).

ALBANIA

Anastasia Pamela Barksdale

Anastasia Pamela Barksdale's ministry in Albania continues to grow and take on new dimensions. The Christian Education and Resource Center at Shen Vlash is in full swing this year with 27 students participating in 18 different catechism and kids' club activities. We have begun new programs in the village of Zvalina (a distant village in the mountains above Elbasan) and Lin (located in the Korca Metropolis). Thanks to a generous donation from an anonymous donor in Chicago, we were able to distribute 200 children's Bibles at Christmas in the villages of Kemishtje, Dalluous, Deviake, Metish, Zvalina, and Lin. In addition, St. Mary's Albanian Orthodox Church in Worcester, MA assisted in publishing 1,000 copies of a children's prayer book for use in our catechism programs. Thanks also to St. George Orthodox Cathedral in Worcester, MA, for the school supplies that were distributed in Rushkul and Shen Vlash villages. The children were so delighted by receiving gifts and cards from children in America.

The Bible study at the campus ministry center continues to grow, and there are many new students and catechumens seeking baptism. We just completed reading an Albanian translation of the book, "Are You Saved?", by Barbara Pappas. Now that spring is here, it is time to begin to prepare for the summer activities. We are looking forward to the OCMC short-term team that is coming in June to once again offer a summer camp experience for the children at the Home of Hope. This camp provides the children with an opportunity for new experiences and to make new friends, as well as learn and grow in their faith.

Our work in Albania continues in an atmosphere of relative peace, but recent events

have given us concern, and we ask for your prayers for the Church of Albania and for this country. March began with the City of Tirana forcibly and illegally removing all the fencing surrounding the new Cathedral Complex to make way for a new Urban Plan. The Church has protested the actions, but to no avail. We count on your prayers to help us to continue to build an environment of peaceful coexistence and religious tolerance and respect for others. Please keep us and the work of the Orthodox Church in Albania in your prayers.

The Bendo Family

Fr. Anastas and Presbytera Georgia Bendo continue their efforts in Albania as they get used to their roles, Father as a priest, and Presbytera as director of the Protagonist School. Their responsibilities are widening in different directions. Fr. Anastas serves in the Liturgies and translates for His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios in a number of situations - at the church for the faithful, in meetings with dignitaries, etc. Lately he has been translating at the monthly Intellectual Meetings that the Archbishop has started. A considerable amount of his time is spent in translating spiritual books; presently he's updating the Albanian translation of the Psalter, and his translation of a four volume set of the Synaxaria (Lives of the Saints) is just starting to be published. Georgia learns something new every day in her role as the school director! With over 500 students and 60 staff members at the school, there are always meetings with students, parents, and staff. She has instituted a group that carries out a more consistent over-seeing of the staff with classroom walkthroughs and formal observations. This year she created a hand-washing campaign for the preschool through fifth graders. Georgia participates in the directors' meetings of the Tirana Association of International Schools, which seeks to bring cooperation between several international schools - both in sports and academics. In January the Protagonist School staff welcomed His Beatitude for a New Year's Celebration where he spoke about the importance of the teacher's role and cut the Vasilopita. Meanwhile the three Bendo children are growing! Vasili (6) and Evi (3) attend Protagonist Kindergarten and Pre-School. Vasili is on a soccer team, and Evi loves to draw. Little Mia (1½) is just beginning to talk and is quite a jokester! The Bendo family greatly appreciates your prayers and support.

The Hoppe Family

The rain started just as we began to unload boxes from the truck. There were 100 boxes to be unloaded. We had expected the truck to clear customs in the afternoon, but it had just happened, and it was now evening and already dark. As each box was passed down to me from high on top of the truck and I loaded it into our Volkswagen van, I felt a tremendous sense of excitement and gratitude. The boxes contained 2000 copies of a beautifully illustrated Orthodox Children's Bible published by the Inter-Confessional Bible Society for the Orthodox Church of Albania. This was the

second printing of this Bible, meaning that we have already distributed several thousand copies, which has been a very effective tool for teaching the Bible to all ages, from young children through adults. It is a rare occurrence in Albania for a religious book to reach a second printing, but in this case, the distribution of the first several thousand children's Bibles cultivated enough interest that we needed to publish more copies.

I also felt very grateful for our van, which was purchased through generous donations about two years ago. Its ample space and reinforced suspension made it the perfect vehicle for transporting this precious cargo. Driving across Tirana, I was careful to avoid large potholes and manholes without covers, an all-too-common sight in the city. I did not want to hit one of these major obstacles with such a heavy load in the vehicle. I arrived at the University ministry center where we also have our storage facilities. There was a university meeting in progress, together with members of a short-term OCMC team. I mobilized all of the young people to help unload the Bibles.

Please pray for the distribution and use of these Bibles, that they would be received eagerly and read carefully, and that through them, Orthodox Christian life would be formed in many people. Please also pray for our family as we continue to work in the many ministries in which we have the privilege to serve, including directing the Central Children's Office and teaching at the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy.

The Macdonald Family

Dr. Jeffrey and Caryn Macdonald are teaching at Holy Resurrection Orthodox Theological Academy in Albania. This year, Jeffrey is teaching Church History and Patrology, while Caryn continues to teach English. The Macdonalds will be finishing their first two-year term this spring and will travel in Texas and the eastern United States over the summer, seeking support to continue their work at the seminary in Albania. The Macdonalds are currently preparing their travel schedule for the summer and ask that parishes interested in having them visit please contact them at j.macdonald@ocmc.org.

The Ritsi Family

After being in the mission field for 22 months, Albania is beginning to feel like home. After countless hours of language learning, we are both able to participate in meetings (in Albanian) and understand the majority of what is going on! It feels like a big accomplishment and makes work easier. Following local customs is also becoming second nature and takes less conscious thought.

Here is an update on our ministries:

PHOTOGRAPHY: Part of being a missionary is being ready to work hard and master new responsibilities. A perfect example of this is Alexandria's job as photographer for the Church. It is amazing to



ABOVE: OCMC Missionary Pres. Georgia Bendo (left) with her husband Fr. Anastas (center) and His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios (right)



ABOVE: OCMC Missionary Tamara DiLullo (left).



ABOVE: OCMC Missionaries Dr. Jeffrey and Caryn Macdonald with their children.



ABOVE: OCMC Missionary Gabriela Hoppe.



ABOVE: OCMC Missionaries Dn. Stephanos and Dk. Alexandria Ritsi.

think that one year ago Alexandria did not know what an aperture was, how it was related to shutter speed, and why shooting in RAW is best. So, why is this important? The Archbishop says that the internet is the pulpit of today. To have an effective presence in today's Internet, you need quality pictures. This job dovetails nicely with Stephanos being a deacon, as we can travel with the Archbishop and both have work to do. One of our most memorable journeys was when we traveled to southern Albania for a weekend to serve and photograph not one, but two consecrations! We borrowed the Macdonald family's 4x4, did some research to find the GPS locations of the churches, and then found a campsite in Ksamil with a view of the Ionian Sea as our base camp for the weekend. We arrived back in Tirana exhausted but also renewed. (Visit www.OrthodoxAlbania.org for more coverage of the consecrations.)

BEING A DEACON: The culmination of this past year was Epiphany. Epiphany in Albania is an amazing experience. There is a cultural memory that lies deep within the Albanian people that this is a holy day. The Cathedral was full for Liturgy. After the services, the Archbishop had the deacons take shifts at the Cathedral to help give holy water to the people and to explain what this feast is about. I was amazed at the constant flow of people who streamed into the Cathedral, coming to fill bottles with holy water and receive a blessing. This cultural memory extends even further than that. Later that night while walking home, a group of men on the side of the street saw me in my robe and asked if we could sit and drink a cup of tea together. They all knew about Epiphany, but were from a Muslim background. Despite that, they wanted some of the holy water. We spent the next 1/2 hour discussing Orthodoxy. What a blessing to be here!

OCMC TEACHING MISSION TEAM: This spring, we hosted a short-term mission team from OCMC that was sent to work together with the University Student Ministry here in Tirana. During the week, the mission team learned about the Orthodox Church of Albania, tabled outside of the Cathedral and Student Center, worshiped with the youth, and formed lasting bonds with each other and the young adults here in Albania. The team also helped to organize a retreat for over 170 young adults from the Diocese of Tirana, which was held at the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy.

DIAKONIA AGAPE AND YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY: Over the last few years, young adults from around the country have met for weekend workshops about community mobilization, fundraising, and stewardship of the environment organized through Diakonia Agape (the Church's philanthropic office). The fruits of these trainings have been cleanups and fundraising initiatives carried out by the young adults around the country (in 2013-2014 the young adults raised over \$5000). This year, the focus will be on training the students in some basics of pastoral care. After this training, we will fundraise for the Church's soup kitchens and then

attempt to forge a regular partnership where the young adults will help serve at the soup kitchens.

MISSIOLOGY AT THE SEMINARY: This step of training the future leaders of the Church of Albania in Missiology is a key step in maturation of the Church. The students in Dn. Stephanos' mission's class have been engaged by the topic, and all of them are averaging above 80% in the class. This is an amazing experience: one day of the week teaching the Missiology of Archbishop Anastasios, the next day serving Liturgy together with His Beatitude.

BIBLE & BOOK STUDIES: One thing Dn. Stephanos especially remembers from being a child here in Albania was Bible study at the Ritsi house. After a 17-year hiatus, this tradition has begun again. Through the Archbishop's guidance, we have started a Bible study and a women's book study in our house. It is already apparent how much deeper of a relationship this form of ministry can give. It is humbling to hear the life stories of some of these youth – such as one becoming Christian and being fired from their job at a Halal Pizzeria, or another who had to sneak out of the house on Sunday to not anger their atheist roommates. Such stories remind us that being a missionary involves much sacrifice, but so does being a Christian in Albania.

YOUTH OFFICE: Work continues at the Zyra Rinise. One of our major goals for this year is to restart the publication of the Kambanat magazine for young adults. We are also working on creating a web site with resources for young adults as well as information about the weekly meetings. Attendance at Sunday meetings and Paraklisis has steadily grown over the past year, and now we have a group of about 40-70 at our meetings.

RESURRECTION: THE ORTHODOX AUTOCEPHALOUS CHURCH OF ALBANIA, BOOK II: We have begun to work on the Addendum to this book. We have collected thousands of pictures from the Synodical offices and are categorizing them. This spring we hope to start forming the chapters and writing the text for the book.

ALEXANDRIA'S ENGLISH CLASSES: Alexandria continues to teach English at the Protagonist School in Tirana. She is teaching 6th and 8th grades. Teaching 8th grade has been a challenge, but Alexandria enjoys being in the classroom and helping the students. Learning languages is a point of emphasis in Albania, and the Protagonist strives to remain on the cutting edge of the private school sector by employing as many native language teachers as it can.

BABY: As many of you know, Alexandria is pregnant! It is difficult being away from family and friends during the pregnancy, and so much is different. However, many of the hardships end up being blessings. Not having a car is a great way to stay active. Lacking access to so many of the foods we are accustomed to means we eat less processed food. One of the biggest differences is the health care. The care that is given is very good, but it is

also very different than what is expected in the US. The glucose test here consisted of half a cup of table sugar, they don't weigh you during your appointments, there are no blood pressure tests, etc.! Through all this we thank God that the pregnancy is going well. The baby is really moving, and we are convinced he is going to be a better runner than Dn. Stephanos!

FURLOUGH IN THE USA-FOLLOWING GOD'S WILL: It's hard to believe, but we have been in Albania for almost two years now! We will be coming back to the States for furlough in September/October 2015. We look forward to visiting as many of your communities as possible so that we can share the work that God is doing in Albania.

GUATEMALA

The Chakos Family

Upon returning to Guatemala in late January, our initial outreach took us back to the village of Aguacate, where construction of the medical clinic continues, with funding from the One World, One Community NGO of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Mexico. During these first few days, with the help of our five-member medical team, we were able to purchase dental equipment, offer dental and medical treatment for the villagers, deliver medical supplies, and meet with the community health workers and midwives of the village. We also provided instructions on the use of laptop computers donated by Computereach for the students attending the secondary school of the Orthodox Church in Aguacate.

The next three weeks took us on a whirlwind tour of numerous villages to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the falling asleep in the Lord of +Father Andres Giron, who led the Mayan people under his spiritual care to canonical Orthodox Christianity. In each village there were tearful testimonies, heartfelt tributes, original poems and songs, somber processions, and elaborate floral arrangements adorning the churches in honor of this priestly servant of the longsuffering Mayan people. Sandwiched in between these many visits was a pre-Lenten retreat and instructional period for the many village catechists, who eagerly desire to learn more about Orthodoxy. We also distributed the quarterly edition of the "Calenario Ortodoxo," which provides the catechists with the daily readings, lives of the saints, teachings about the major feasts, and hymns of the Church.

In addition to this outreach, Presbytera Alexandra manages her expanding mission of filling orders for ecclesiastical vestments and adornments with her trained staff of village seamstresses, who not only benefit economically, but also help their church. Other projects underway include the construction of the San Andres Church on the Pacific Coast and the expansion of two other temples to accommodate church growth. Most important of all are the relationships that we establish with our Mayan brothers and sisters, who are coming to realize that they are no longer alone in their struggle, but part of a Church that truly cares for them.

KENYA

Meagan Fotini Engelbach

Fotini continues searching for Bible translations in Kenya's forty-two languages to facilitate her work in translations. She works with local translators to collect and produce the translations of divine services for publication online, using the AGES Liturgical Workbench software www.agesinitiatives.org/initiatives/ages-workbench, while collaboratively meeting translation project goals set with OCMC Mission Specialist Michael Colburn. Under the direction of His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Kenya, Fotini also assists with various administrative tasks and helps host those who visit the Archdiocesan headquarters. Fotini does find time to visit various parts of Kenya, enjoying time with friends near and far.

The Colburn Family

The Colburns have settled into life in Thessaloniki, Greece, where Michael is studying Modern Greek in preparation for research to develop a translator's handbook for the Canons of Theophany through the auspices of the School of Pastoral and Social Theology at Aristotle University. The plans are to test the handbook in Africa. This is a project that will take 3-6 years to complete and hopefully will become the pattern for other such handbooks to assist translators of the liturgical texts. Michael also continues to maintain AGES Liturgical Workbench software for the generation of liturgical services and books in a variety of languages (www.agesinitiatives.org).

MONGOLIA

The Moore Family

Our ministry has just begun here in Mongolia. We arrived in Ulaanbaatar in October 2014 and had a couple months to get settled into life in the church and the city. Holy Trinity parish has welcomed us warmly and our fellow missionary, Kurt Bringerud, with his wife Marina, have been vital in helping us settle and providing good fellowship. During our first 3 months we began working on language, making new friends, teaching English classes at the Anima Art School, and Chris has been singing in the church choir. Chris also had the chance to play his sax in a few places including the UB Jazz Club and the American Embassy's Christmas Party. Christmas here was a blast, literally! The service of Holy Unction was celebrated 2 days before Christmas; then we had a midnight liturgy with a big meal afterwards; and finally, we wrapped up with Vespers on Christmas Day, giving gifts to all the kids and launching fireworks to celebrate the Light of the World.

In January, we traveled to Seoul to switch from tourist to work visas for our re-entry into Mongolia. This was a refreshing time for us, staying at the mission center of the Korean Orthodox Church. The Church in Korea is very active in missions and

we have many ideas to consider as possibilities for the future. In February we began teaching at Mongolia International University, which provides our visas and a chance to build into the lives of our students. Please pray for us to continue to invest in language learning and that we can live holy lives. Please pray that we can begin to offer services and fellowship times to help Mongolian brothers and sisters and inquirers grow in and learn about their faith.

Kurt Bringerud

Kurt continues to teach English, which brings Khim into contact with Mongolians, both adults and high school students, on a daily basis. Please pray for the relationships he develops. He and his wife Marina have been meeting with the Moore Family for evening prayers weekly, as they seek God's direction for helping the Church in Mongolia open its arms to more Mongolian members.

ROMANIA

The Frantz Family

A few days ago (from the time of this writing) the Protection of the Theotokos Family Center and the St. Dimitrie Program submitted their annual reports to the Metropolitan Andrei of Cluj. In reading over them I (Floyd) was quite astonished at what all our staff members have been able to do over the past 12 months. Ancuta's program, the Protection Center, provided quality day-care for very young children so that their mothers could work or go to school, gave food support and clothing each month to more than 40 families, and offered professional counseling services to each of the mothers and families that needed it over the past year. All of this while moving the Protection to being nearly 100% supported by local governmental and private donations. I was greatly moved while attending the Christmas party for the kids (see photo) this past Christmas. I could not help but to be moved by the joy of these kids when they received their packages of toys and goodies. For many of them, it was the only Christmas celebration that they had this year.

The St. Dimitrie Program has also been busy and maintains its addictions counseling programs in Cluj, while also helping to start a new counseling program in the northern region of Romania, Moldova. This new program is very exciting, as we see that there are several Orthodox priests who are willing to be involved in our project. Alcoholism is a very serious problem in this part of Romania, especially in the villages, and these priests are quite dedicated to the task of helping to reduce its effect in their parishes. I will be spending much of my time this year in helping this program to develop.

Thank all of you for helping us to do this work, as we could not be here without your prayers and support.



ABOVE: OCMC Missionaries Chris and Jen Moore with their son Andrew visiting a Mongolian family.



ABOVE: OCMC Missionary Fr. John Chakos (right) with Guatemalan clergy and His Eminence Athenagoras Metropolitan of Mexico, Central America, Columbia, Venezuela, and the Caribbean Islands (center left).



ABOVE: OCMC Mission Specialists the Colburn Family.



ABOVE: OCMC Missionary Ancuta Frantz (right).

Going From the 'Lower 48'

by Pres. Renee Ritsi

Alaska holds a breathtaking, sometimes formidable, experience for both the visitor and those who call it home. Even though Alaska has been a part of the United States since 1959, some feel that travel to the 49th state takes them across cultural boundaries far beyond what a cross country trip would hold in any of the "lower 48" states. Active volcanoes, avalanches, glaciers, wild storms, long, dark winters, regions so isolated that they can be accessed only by water or air—these are but a few of the things that have shaped the culture and people that call Alaska home.

Perhaps because of the allure of the wilderness, the hunting and fishing lore, or because neither passports nor a visit to a travel clinic are needed, Alaska Mission Teams have proven to be extremely popular and are often the first on the list of OCMC Teams to fill up. Over 15% of all OCMC team members have had an Alaskan team experience. The first team to Alaska was sent to assist with a youth camp in the village of Old Harbor in 1992, and eight years later, a second OCMC team was sent. Since then, OCMC has sent at least one team to Alaska every year.

A mission trip to Alaska can be considered a "perfect trip". But in reality, even if every detail is planned, checked, and rechecked, charts are designed, and lists are made, a short-term project

is not designed as a perfect package! If Murphy's Law applies anywhere, it's certainly in the context of short-term mission trips. Maybe that is why there are so many documentaries or reality shows produced about Alaska.

Consider the odds of nothing going wrong on a mission trip with its mix of variables: communication across cultures and languages; fluctuating travel; schedules; parental expectations versus spiritual descriptions; accommodations; food preferences; team members; age ranges; theological ranges; lack of staff; differing tolerances; and not least, perfectionism. All of which exist in the New Frontier.

Teams offer a brief glimpse into the world of missions, and, as it is often mentioned during orientation, one must always be "fluid and flexible"

BELOW : Over 15% of all OCMC team members have had an Alaskan team experience. It is a very popular destination, and the work that team members do there, from youth ministry to construction and restoration, is important.



because things change at a moment's notice. Rain, fog, and floods can change travel plans of a mission team and have even been known to delay flights by a number of days. An unplanned event can offer insight into the relationships and customs of a village; a funeral becomes time to mourn in the Orthodox Aleut or Yupik way; a baptism becomes a time to rejoice with people. Many Alaskan families are dependent on fishing, and the days leading up to, during, and after the running of the salmon have a list of tasks for the entire village: repairing tools, building drying racks, fishing, cleaning, and drying or freezing fish. These tasks need many hands and sustain many families for months to come. The early or late thawing of the river does not happen according to a date on a calendar or the plans of man, yet it determines when the salmon will return to their birthplace to spawn the next generation of fish. Sometimes team members have a rare opportunity to watch or assist in these life cycle events of our brothers and sisters in Alaska.

There are two important points to remember about the unpredictability of short-term trips. Things go wrong because there are so many variables, and a large part of what goes "wrong" is one's own "expectations." Alaska is not simply a reality show or a cruise destination. It is a place where one must be ready for anything.

No two Alaskan teams are the same. Some teams arrive at their destination by small fishing skiffs, eat native food, and are hosted in people's homes in villages. Some stay in larger towns, and others are in villages that boast less than 200 inhabitants and no running water.

BELOW : The Orthodox Church has been a part of Alaskan culture since the late 18th century. The Faith continues to be handed down from one generation to the next. Here, a mother joyfully celebrates the baptism of her children.



Others fly to the village, stay in tribal centers or schools, and shop for and cook their own meals. Sometimes parishioners from the community bring homecooked meals. Team members

BELOW : OCMC Board Member, Fr. John Parker, teaches the Faith as part of a short-term mission team to Alaska.



picking berries; others help by offering tours of the local church for cruise ships in their spare time. In each situation, team members have an opportunity to both serve the community and embrace the culture and life of Alaska.

Individuals often apply for a certain type of mission project because they are familiar with the ministry that the team has been asked to accomplish. If an individual has taught religious education, volunteered at a vacation Bible school, has been a camp counselor, or can do minor repairs and painting, they are good candidates for a team that will be offering that type of ministry. Alaska teams are most often called upon to teach, offer youth camps, or assist with renovation work.

An often unspoken blessing of participating on a team happens within the life of the team members themselves. Alaska is the “Holy Land” of North America, a place where the saints have walked and worked. Team members apply for a team with the intention of ministering to others, but so often they return home and share with us, “We returned home with the understanding that we were not the same people that we were prior to the team.” Perhaps this is because the work that they have gone to accomplish is an answer to the prayers of those who dedicated their lives to establish and build up the Church in Alaska.

Alaska’s unique history has been wrought with different struggles that continue to impact especially those who live in some of the more remote areas. With eight times the rate of drowning deaths and double the average rate of



ABOVE : Alaska is the “Holy Land” of North America. People who serve on a mission team to Alaska are able to walk in the footsteps of and continue the work of great North American saints.



ABOVE : Mission teams to Alaska bring hands-on, direct contact with cross-cultural missions and an opportunity to see God at work. Often OCMC team members work with Alaskan youth by coordinating activities and providing catechism.

suicide when compared with the lower 48, there are very few Alaskan families that haven’t lost children or parents. This last decade has seen the strengthening of the Church and the role of the local tribal councils. St. Herman Theological Seminary in Kodiak continues to equip men and women in their quest to spread the Orthodox Faith, and more priests are available to serve the numerous communities spread throughout the expansive state. The tribal councils serve and protect the Alaskan native and American Indian people and, in many cases, work side-by-side with the faithful to preserve the historic faith of the Alaskan people.

OCMC begins planning for teams to Alaska with the blessing of His Grace Bishop David of Alaska and Sitka. “How can teams assist in the efforts that the clergy and laity are hard at work accomplishing? In which villages should the teams assist?” The tasks of deciding which villages, what type of ministry, who will be coordinating, and what type of team member can do the job begins. It is important that the team members do not take responsibility for things that the parish priest or faithful could accomplish, but that their role is one of building up

the body of Christ and affirming that we are the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

As team members fly over the eternal snow-covered peaks on their arrival to Alaska, they bring a greeting from their home community to every city, village, and person they go to serve. As St. Paul says to the Corinthians, “Encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.”

Short-term missions continue to contribute to the Lord’s Great Commission in Alaska and around the globe. These teams bring hands-on, direct contact with cross-cultural missions and an opportunity to see God at work; create a desire to serve more significantly in their home churches and with a more global perspective; witness the impact of evangelism; provide the foundation for potential long-term commitment; and many other significant benefits. Short-term missions have the greatest impact when work is integrated into long-range plans and programs. Missions in Alaska need that strategic partnership with short-term teams and long-term missionaries to have the desired short-term and long-term effects.

Coming from “the lower 48,” the team members bring an Orthodox link to our Alaskan brothers and sisters in Christ. Their presence states that we are one Faith, one Church, one caring community; Christ has come to bring us that same peace and love that changed the world two thousand years ago and continues to change individuals all around the world.

In 2015, Orthodox Mission Teams have been invited to assist with youth camps and teaching in the villages of Kasigluk, Pilot Station, and Nanwalek. Please contact OCMC for Team opportunities to Alaska.



Creating a Culture of Missions

among Youth: *The OCMC Coin Box and Lesson Plan Program*

by Kenneth Kidd

In my travel and service to parishes throughout the United States, I am often surprised how profound many individuals find it when they discover the work of Orthodox missions around the world. Many share that they had no idea that the Church was reaching out with the Gospel to those who have never heard the life-saving message of Jesus Christ. This is changing, however, as more parish priests, Sunday School Directors, youth directors and missions advocates are planting the seeds of missions early in the hearts of young people in their community. Through teaching children the Holy Tradition of Missions in the Orthodox Church, and encouraging its practice, they are creating a culture of missions within the parish community where missions is becoming an everyday part of parish life.

One tool that parishes are finding useful is the OCMC Coin Box and Lesson Plan Program, offered annually during the Paschal Lenten season. Each year, the OCMC produces a new set of

missions-related lesson plans, targeting three age groups: Pre-K through 3rd Grade; 4th-8th Grade; and High School/Adult. These lessons highlight the Holy Tradition of missions through the study

of missions-related Scripture verses as well as the lives of Orthodox missionary saints and missionaries. Lessons are accompanied by coin boxes used for raising money throughout the Lenten season to assist OCMC in furthering the spread of the Gospel and the growth of the Church throughout the world.

The following are comments from parishes that utilized Lesson Plans and Coin Boxes:

Fr. Rastko Trbuhovich, Priest, & Ms. Diane Sullivan, Church School Superintendent
St. Stephen Orthodox Church (Serbian), Lackawanna, New York

“As we approach Great Lent here at the St. Stephen Serbian Orthodox Church in Lackawanna, NY, we help our stu-

ABOVE: Through the Coin Box Program, young people here in North America directly assist the training and preparation of missionaries who are taking Christ’s Gospel “to the ends of the Earth.”

dents to think about increased prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Discovering the OCMC Coin Box project was a wonderful way for us to give our time, talents and treasures beyond the people in our community. We all deal with coins, or 'spare change,' on a daily basis. Having our children put these coins into their collection boxes helps them to frequently remember the treasure of our faith, the importance of sharing our Orthodox faith and the thanks due to God for all the blessings we have. It is important for students to understand that the Church and the opportunities to learn and practice the faith are blessings that are not readily available to children everywhere. By donating to OCMC, our students feel they are helping children around the world to learn of God's love."

Fr. Matthew Stagon, Priest

St. Mary's Orthodox Church (Carpatho-Russian), Morgantown, West Virginia

"Our parish has for a number of years participated in the Lenten Coin Box Collection. It is always an exciting time, people start asking for their boxes far in advance of the start of Great Lent. It's beautiful to see in both our adults and young people a desire to give a part of themselves to the furtherance of our faith across the world. Missions are important for young people because it exposes them to the faith, our Orthodox faith, in an unfamiliar manner. It forces a person to take their faith out of the box and to begin to act on it and put it into practice.

One of my favorite things is to speak with a young person who has recently returned from a trip, wherever they may have gone and to personally be lit up by the fire they have for their faith and furthering its practice in the world."

Helen Rankin, Sunday School Director

Annunciation Orthodox Cathedral (Greek), Columbus, Ohio

"OCMC has opened the hearts and minds of our parish. Our relationship with OCMC began with participating in the Coin Box and Lesson Plan Program, but this grew to then host missionaries including Father Paul Patitsas and family, Christopher & Jennifer Moore, and OCMC staff/mission team member Kenneth Kidd. Suddenly, we understood that people were going

into foreign countries like New Zealand, Mongolia, and India to share their love for Jesus. We were seeing people leaving the comfort of home and traveling to unpredictable housing and circumstances because they loved Jesus. We were transformed. We now understood that God is at work in our world in ways that we could not imagine. We learned that so much goes on that the news doesn't tell us in terms of poverty, hunger and effects of war. We learned how to pray and give. We began to deepen our understanding of our own baptism and our church family. Just listen to a couple of the quotes from the youth here at Annunciation:

'We are called to use our time and talents to fulfill the Lord's direction in Matthew 25- visiting the poor and feeding the hungry' Anastasia Peratopoulos, age 16

'Imagine walking 5 miles to get water for your family and having to carry it home' Thomas Stathulis, age 11

The beauty of this awareness is the call to action that our children have led. What started as an annual collection for OCMC through the coin boxes has grown to include other initiatives (both inside and outside OCMC) including the Rice Bowl Project, Clothing Drives benefiting the Navaho Nation, the Orphanage in Fiji, continued support for OCMC and God willing, our first mission trip to Appalachia. All of these activities are preparing the youth for the opportunities that OCMC offers when they are at the appropriate age. The biggest challenge we have before us now is how we can support all the ideas our children bring to us!"

Is there an opportunity here for your parish?

Hundreds of Orthodox parishes participate in the Lesson Plan and Coin Box Program each year and raise over \$30,000 annually for this vital work. While most participate during Great Lent in the spring, these lesson plans and coin boxes can be utilized at any time during the Church year. Likewise, if you are interested in having a full missions series using the lesson plans, OCMC has close to 10 years of lesson plans archived that we would be happy to offer your parish.

To brainstorm ideas of how to utilize the lesson plans and coin boxes in your community, contact Kenneth Kidd, OCMC Annual Gifts Officer, at 904-829-5132, ext 161, or at Kenny@ocmc.org.



ABOVE : For years, participation in the Coin Box Program has been seen as an important way to plant the seeds of missions in the hearts of young people at Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Columbus, Ohio.



ABOVE : Last year, OCMC raised over \$30,000 through the efforts of Sunday School children and their families with the Coin Box Program.



LEFT : Many families have made the OCMC coin boxes and missions awareness part of their personal Lenten journeys, like this young girl from Cincinnati.

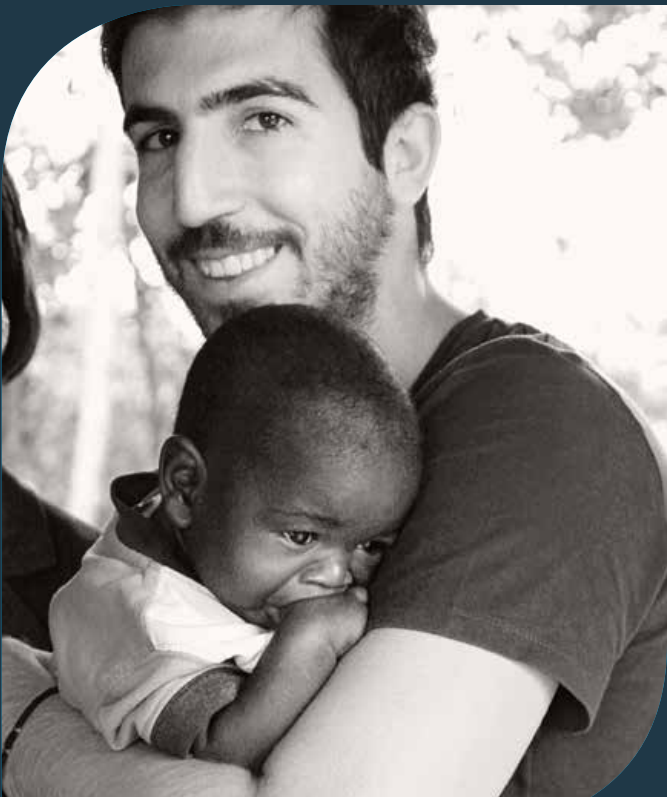


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Contact: 1-877-GO FORTH (463-6784), Email teams@ocmc.org.

Contact OCMC regarding: additional mission team opportunities; seminarian scholarships; family and youth participation; parish mission team projects; sponsorships opportunities—for projects and support for Team members.