**To the Ends of the Earth:** The Missionary Potential of North American Orthodox Churches

**Dcn. James Nicholas, OCMC Missionary Coordinator**

It is the Judeo-Venue classic Journey to the Center of the Earth, Professor Linderbrook replies to his student colleague with perfect coolness, “…our situation is almost desperate; but there are some chances of deliverance, and it is these that I am considering. If at every instant we may perish, so at every instant we may be saved, let us then be prepared to seize upon the smallest advantage.” And so it may be with us as we pursue every advantage in our own journey to the unreachcd corners of the earth today.

Going to "the ends of the earth" is a quest that has been undertaken by countless explorers, scientists, and missionaries throughout the ages who have sought to complete their given tasks. The challenge of reaching new frontiers is an insurmountable drive of humanism: to go further, to climb higher, to finish the job. So here we North Americans stand over 200 years later, the Gospel having spread from shore to shore, asking ourselves the questions: "What now?", "What does God require of us?", "Is our work done?". I would suggest that, in general, we have two options: We can either be like the Sea of Galilee, which is fresh and full of life, or we can be like the Dead Sea, which is truly dead in that no fish can live within it. Interestingly enough, both of these lakes are fed by the same river, the Jordan. So why is there such an extreme difference between the two lakes? What is it that kills one and produces life in the other? The answer is simple – and very spiritual. The Dead Sea takes fresh water from the Jordan and yet gives it back again which, true to its spiritual metaphor, results in the lack of life. The Sea of Galilee, on the other hand, receives its water from the Jordan and yet gives it back out again which, true to its spiritual metaphor, produces life. One can also compare this to the parable of the talents, wherein one talent is buried while the others are invested. The latter one produces the fruit, and the former is ultimately lost.

So if God desires that we give life back and forth, we have to work hard, give and receive, work and receive. But what if every parish produced 8 or more missionaries? That represents over $1 million annually that can be used to build schools, churches, and seminaries where the Church is working diligently to establish itself. And what if only half of our parishes in North America sent just 1 person on a short-term Mission Team through OCMC every 3 years? Then we’d be able to deploy 300 team members yearly to augment our missionary field work offering healthcare, coordinating mission projects, and reaching out...
It is now time for us to give back to the world that which has been given to us.

The Plan

Go ye therefore… either yourself or via an emissary called a “missionary.” If you are a parish priest, then help your parish be a Great Commission parish.

- Educate and activate your parishioners in this call.
- Make it a goal to raise up a long-term missionary within your own parish.
- Send short-term Mission Team members every year to the field, encourage them to share their experience, and challenge every able-bodied person in your parish to eventually participate.
- Form a parish missions committee and appoint a mission-minded person in your parish as an OCMC “Ambassador” to serve as an advocate for missions and invite the community to participate in this vital work.
- Be bold and make missions a part of your parish budget or receive regular offerings for that purpose.

Preparation

Equipping and facilitating churches and individuals to participate in the Great Commission on every level is what we do. OCMC is here to provide ongoing education to your parish on missions; engage parishioners; prepare and send mid-term and long-term missionaries throughout the world.

Take Action

In our brief moment on the stage of history, we have received a precious gift—the faith once for all delivered to the saints and, in turn, delivered unto us by the saints. It is now time for us to give back to the world that which has been given to us, to allow the river that has flowed into us to flow back out again to others, thus keeping it alive while bringing continued life to ourselves.

I truly believe that Christ is awaiting North America’s antiphonal response to the missionary choir of history that helped to spiritually shape and define our land. May we reply in union to them by making ourselves fully available to Christ for His eternal purposes and by using every gift with which He has endowed us.

The missionary potential of our North American Orthodox churches is extraordinary. Just as we, theoretically, have the ability (should we so desire) to help feed the world spiritually. Some have said that our western civilization is entering a period of decline socially, economically, and in other ways. Let us then rise spiritually. Let us choose to be as the Sea of Galilee and give life back. If at every instant we may perish, so at every instant we may be saved. Let us then be prepared to seize upon the smallest advantage.

OCMC MISSION MAGAZINE • FALL 2008

Witness of Christ

“To Those Who Are Far Off and To Those Who Are Near”

His Eminence Ambrosios, Metropolitan of Korea

Christian witness, or Mission, as it has come to be known by the missionary efforts of the Western Church, is undoubtedly the “breath” of the Church. After Pentecost, the Apostles, following the resurrected Lord’s command, became “witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Since then, all true believers and followers of Christ, whether they live within the world or in the desert, have felt the urgent duty to become witnesses of Christ through their lives and their words, to “outsiders” and to “insiders” alike.

Being a Christian witness is a demonstration of love for God and for one’s neighbor. Needless to say, being a witness for Christ is not the duty of a small fraction of people only, such as the clergy or lay theologians; it is the work and mission of all the members of the Church, without exception.

What will follow is a presentation of four important points, based on St. John Chrysostom’s missionary methodology and on the long experience of the Church, according to which everyone can become a witness of the word of God (Rev.6:9) in our contemporary world.

Prayer

Praying for the salvation of the world requires great heartache, sacrifice, and a spirit of witness. Prayer “for the whole world” is pre-eminently an act of mission that bears enormous consequences for the redeeming work of the Church. In contrast, praying only for ourselves, our family, and those close to us is a self-centered act, because God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Consequently, “let us not cease from praying for them,” St. John Chrysostom points out! Following St. Paul’s admonition, “I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men” (1 Tim. 2:1), our Church prays for those who are “from one end of the earth to the other” during our liturgical services. The Saints also do exactly the same. They embrace with their fervent prayer the whole world with its problems. “That is how the hearts of the saints are,” St. John comments. “They care not only for themselves, but consider the world as one home, and the multitudes of people as one body; that is how they intercede to God.”

Prayer “for all the people” includes, of course, those of other religions and the heterodox. This implies that in our prayers we should not forget the Muslims, the Jewish, the Hindus, the Buddhists, as well as the agnostics, atheists, and heretics. To those who out of their narrow-mindedness object to praying for the heathen, St. Chrysostom replies: “Do not hesitate to pray for the Hellenes (pagans). . . . If it is necessary...
to pray for the pagans, then we should also pray for the heretics. We ought to pray for all people. If you ask, ‘tell me, even for the pagans?’ The answer is, yes. Christ died for the pagans, too, and you cannot stand praying for them.’

**Preaching**

After prayer, the second means of offering Orthodox witness to the world is preaching. “Preach this gospel to the whole creation!” (Mark 16:15) was the Lord’s command to His Apostles and to their successors as well. Great is our obligation and duty here. “And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations” (Mark 13:10).

This is the wish of the Leader of our Faith. We must make clear from the beginning that, in the Orthodox tradition, the task of preaching the word of God cannot be taken up by self-appointed individuals. The Church alone has the authority to send teachers for the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom, and She also carries the responsibility to see that they “rightly dispense the word of God’s truth.” Those who serve in the spreading of the Gospel ought to accept their calling in obedience and with the fear of God and should dedicate themselves to this sacred task.

Those who have had neither the calling nor the inclination for this high office, to “proclaim the Gospel,” are not, however, released from the obligation of helping to spread the word of God. In the following three extracts, St. John Chrysostom seeks to persuade his audience by making use of some interesting examples from economic life. He stresses that interest in the salvation of our neighbor does not solely depend on eloquence of speech or on being well-read. Instead, he says, everyone can contribute to the spreading of the Gospel by conveying to others—even to one’s enemies—what he himself has heard in the sermon at church.

If the bankers keep the money they collect to their own homes, and do not distribute it to others, all their marketing will be destroyed; the same thing happens with those who are listeners. If you listen to the teaching and keep it to yourself and do not convey it to others, all your hard work will be in vain. Women, too, ought to learn these things from their husbands, and the son from his father, the servant from his master, the neighbor from his neighbor, and the friend from his friend; even with the enemies we must also converse; we are responsible for their salvation, too.

Perhaps you do not have external eloquence? Perhaps you do not have fluency of ideas? You know the basics, however; you do have a son, you do have a neighbor, you do have a friend, you do have a brother, you do have relatives; even if you cannot make a long speech in public, you can admonish these persons privately; this task does not require oratorical ability. Show to them that if you had a word, you would not neglect it.

**The Example of the Christian Community**

The power of example, either from a positive or a negative point of view, plays a decisive role in Christian witness. If, for example, we do not put into practice what we teach, then “preaching did not benefit as much as it did harm.” Even the very young can witness through work, as Dahlia, an Orthodox Christian from Alaska, does in helping with cemetery clean-up in Old Harbor.

The love found in the Christian community is to be a vibrant witness to the love of Christ for the world. This Orthodox wedding is being performed in Tanzania, where the Orthodox Church has experienced tremendous growth as people search for the fullness of the Christian Faith.
The Language of Love: Agape Canister Program Celebrates 20 Years

Theodore Theodorou, OCMC Agape/SAMP Program Coordinator

For 20 years Agape Partners have worked tirelessly to meet the needs of children, families, and communities around the world. Because of the millions of dollars that has been raised to feed the hungry, provide life-saving vaccines, offer substance abuse counseling in rural areas, empower women seeking new skills for the workplace, and encourage economic development. Though our partners came from diverse backgrounds, they are all driven by a desire expressed by Jesus to proclaim good news to the poor, heal the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind (Lk 4: 18-19). Here, in their own words, are the reasons why our partners volunteer their time and energy, and the strategies that they use to raise and collect these much needed funds.

Question: Why are you an Agape Partner?

I have been blessed with healthy children and grandchildren. The Agape program allows me to help those children who are not as fortunate as mine.

— Barbara Gianiodis (Amherst, NY)

I remember the words of Isaiah 58: “If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness and your night will become like the noonday.”

— Doug G. (Tontay, CT)

It is very simple. If you are a Christian, you must love, and if you love, then you must share what you have with others.

— Nick Pence (Doronia Beach, FL)

I think that every community did something to help the poor, the total effect would be great.

— B. R. (Kalamazoo, MI)

I have been involved in a personal way. Personal dialogue…personal contact…sometimes I drive 55 to 100 miles away from where I am just to pick up the canisters. The most important thing to do is to thank donors for their support.

— B. R. (Kalamazoo, MI)

I was raised in Greece during the civil war. We didn’t have medicine, shoes, or toys to play with. It was not an easy life, but I can remember them as the pain of the poor. Children cannot last without help.

— Father of the Agape Canister Program, Alex Nazarian (Santa Barbara, CA)

We started a missions committee at our church that allows people to get involved. We sponsor mission priests, host fundraisers, bring in speakers. It’s a great opportunity for the community to learn about the program. They might start by giving nickels and dimes, but the key is to motivate others to think about the needs of others who live on the other side of the world.

— Doug G. (Tontay, CT)

I tell people to look into their pockets… it’s not hard to find a couple coins to give.

— Michelle C. (Huntsville, AL)

I recently placed a canister in a Polish delicatessen, and in 30 days there was $81.00 stuffed inside! I put my canisters in strategic locations that are visible and accessible. If business owners don’t want canisters on their counter, I’ll ask them if they’ll make a monthly or daily contribution. Whether it’s a grocery store, restaurant, flower shop, or dentist office, no location is too small or insignificant. The program gives people the opportunity to give.

— Nick Dolis (Tinley Park, IL)

When a person gives, it has to come from the heart. Unless the Lord has opened the hearts of people, they will not give.

— Mary Drakoulis (Naples, NY)

The Agape Canister Program is a development program of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center that is dedicated to meeting the needs of children, families, and communities throughout the world. If you would like to become an Agape Partner, call 1-877-09-FORHIR or email agape@ocmc.org.

What does love look like?

The Agape Canister Program has sent millions of dollars abroad to feed and educate orphans, provide life-saving vaccines, offer substance abuse counseling in rural areas, empower women seeking new skills for the workplace, and encourage economic development. Though our partners came from diverse backgrounds, they are all driven by a desire expressed by Jesus to proclaim good news to the poor, heal the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind (Lk 4: 18-19). Here, in their own words, are the reasons why our partners volunteer their time and energy, and the strategies that they use to raise and collect these much needed funds.

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THE RUSSELL/LINDERMAN FAMILY

to say that this last school year has been trying is an understatement. Working alongside Melanie Linderman, we helped run two private Protagist Schools. Unfortunately, these schools were located very far apart from each other. One school was located at the top of a hill in a lovely park with trees. However, no vehicles were allowed to bus the children up the top of the hill, and so children as young as six were required to walk the half mile, rain or shine, to get to school. The other school was located several kilometers away amidst terrible traffic with huge rats to circumvent. Things could not continue as they were. Thankfully, after many talks with Archbishop Anastasios, it was decided that we could use the building that was being erected next to the Cathedral. It is not finished yet, and in two years it will be used as a high school. Right now it is very primitive, with only walls, cement stairs, and a roof. There is no playground, no windows, door, or tile on the floor. Nevertheless, we had to move in since it was finished though, and in two years it will be used.

The Protection of the Theotokos Family Center also recently received its permanent license. In its evaluation report, the Center was recognized as “an example of good practice for an organization that offers services that prevent children’s separation from their families, special protection for children temporarily or permanently without a family, and for promoting the rights of children.” In short, this is why we are here: to help the Church in its efforts of developing these social services to minister to the needs of people, or as we often say at OCMC, “to help the church to be the Church to their own people.”

THE FRANZ FAMILY

The past several months have been very busy for the staff at the St. Dimitrie Program in Cluj. We hosted two OCMC Mission Teams over the summer, and with their assistance gave more than 200 priests, doctors, psychologists, and social workers here in Romania over 300 hours of classroom instruction. Topics of training included domestic violence, alcohol and drug dependency, and Twelve-Step recovery programs.

This work did not keep us from our other tasks of taking the message of recovery to hospitals, institutions, and a prison in Cluj, as well as a TB hospital in Sătămăna and a long-term psychiatric hospital in Borsa. By the grace of God, we’ve also been able to move a Moldovan, the poorest country in Europe.

Anastasia gave us a beautiful new building next to the Annunciation Cathedral to house our schools. We hope to have children in this beautiful building by the end of the year. It will be a huge step forward for us. Please keep us in your prayers.

CHRISTINA SEMON

A s a missionary candidate who is building up a support team, I have been engaged with various things, situations and obstacles that I have never encountered before. In the beginning of the fundraising process, I had to learn that all is in God’s hands and I am nothing without Him. As I once noticed the self-inflicted stress being held from my shoulders, I knew I needed to do the work, and that God would see my effort and He would not abandon me. In this time of building a support team, I have come to realize that though fundraising for my assignment as an OCMC missionary, there is a God-given blessing that makes this whole enterprise worthwhile: that is sharing this service with you. You are working through me to continue doing God’s will by your precious prayers and generous financial support. I would not be as far as I am if were not for God’s grace and your willingness to participate in Orthodox Missions. I ask for your continued prayers as we join hands to finalize the support team that will see me to Romania.

ANASTASIA PAMELA-BARKSDALE

G rinding from Tirana. Although I have only been here for eight months, it seems like a much longer time. My Albanian language lessons are going well. I live in an apartment in the Cathedral where I hear the Church bells calling for services, and I walk to Church to attend frequently. In September I began to work in a number of ministries – conducting teacher training workshops and assisting with the curriculum. I asked not to be too far removed from teaching children, so I am teaching a class of first graders at the Protokatholikion. I also began a women’s Bible study and prayer fellowship. Additionally, I’ve been invited to offer workshops and to be a speaker for a number of ministries. This year, with the Lord’s blessing, promises to be fruitful!

GEORGETA GILMAN-BENDO

A s many of you may have heard, I am indeed married! My husband, Theodor (Todi) Bendo and I were married on January 3, 2008 at the beautiful Annunciation Cathedral in Tirana. True to his name, Todi really is a “gift of God” to me. When we met, Todi was in the midst of law studies and became a translator to Archbishop Anastasios. I was trying to learn Albanian and becoming acquainted to life as a new missionary. Later, at the beginning of 2008, we became engaged.

We plan to continue to live in Tirana at this time. Todi has just finished law school and will continue his work as a translator, along with helping in the law offices of the Church. We will continue to be an OCMC missionary, teaching English to 4th, 5th and 6th graders at the Protokatholikion Elementary School. Recently, Archbishop Anastasios gave us a beautiful new building next to the Annunciation Cathedral to house our schools. We hope that being so close to the church will bear fruit in bringing our students deeper into the life of the Church.

MissiONARIES Updates

THE HOPPE FAMILY

S ummer 2008 proved to be a very productive time here in Albania. One of the highlights was leading summer day camps for children. These camps are a ministry of love to students. They are not religious camps, which enables them to be held in Muslim villages. This year we had five camps lasting four days each, with approximately 1,800 children participating. We pray that our work in Kosovo will help to heal wounds of the past and open a brighter future for all of the people of that region.

Gabriella has worked tirelessly to assist me in my efforts in launching several new programs here. God has blessed me with her as my wife, and Tistan and Katharina are delighted to have a mother again. We are pushing to create a stronger Orthodox community here in Albania, and we are keeping very busy. Please keep us all in your prayers.

EDWIN PIER

F rom the outset I would like to thank everyone for their generous support, both prayerfully and financially. Much has already been accomplished in Tanzania, and, by the grace of God, will continue to be accomplished. I had been in Tanzania for 7 months when I received an urgent message from my sister in the States that she and her family had been hospitalized with Acute Myeloid Leukemia (AML). Several days later my sister received the prognosis that my father was in a terminal state and had only 6 months to live. The message she sent me was urgent: “Come now! I am now in Womring looking after my father as he undergoes chemotherapy and transfusions. I’m making this leap of absence from our mission in Tanzania so I can answer this call to a more personal mission. I hope to return and complete the Tanzanian mission, but as always, I will be trying to discern God’s will in the months to come. I request your prayers for this personal mission I must now assume.

The Missionary Opportunities

These specific requests for missionaries have come to the Mission Center directly from Orthodox hierarchs around the world. Our prayer is for each position to be filled by the end of 2008.

Are you one of these “Missing Persons”? Is there someone you know who has talents and gifts for these ministries? Want to learn more? Contact the OCMC Missionary Department today via e-mail at missionary@ocmc.org or by phone at 1-877-463-6784.
Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share... — 1 Timothy 6:18

Share In A Journey Of FAITH...

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

Teaching
Share and teach the Orthodox Faith to youth, adults, catechumens, ministry leaders, and faithful. Clergy, seminarians, teachers, youth leaders, students and those willing to teach the Faith are urged to apply.

ALASKA • KENYA • MADAGASCAR • ROMANIA • SOUTH AFRICA • TANZANIA • UGANDA • ZIMBABWE

Youth Camp
Participate and help organize a youth camp program in communities that have requested religious education for the youth. Camp counselors, youth ministry directors, students and those with camp experience are encouraged to apply.

ALBANIA • GUATEMALA • KOREA • ROMANIA • UGANDA

Construction
Help build an Orthodox church for a growing community by offering your labor and service. Engineers, construction workers, contractors, carpenters, painters, electricians and all hard workers are invited to apply today. Construction experience is welcomed, but not necessary.

GHANA

Health Care
Provide a holistic witness of the Gospel by ministering to the physical needs of children and adults while providing basic health care and education. Health care personnel—doctors, dentists, nurses, counselors—are especially needed.

ROMANIA • UGANDA

OCMC MISSION MAGAZINE • FALL 2008

Apply Now!
All hard workers willing to share the Faith and wishing to participate and serve on an ORTHODOX MISSION TEAM are urged to participate.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS
A completed Mission Team application with recommendation from an Orthodox Priest, or active member of the Church, Spiritually mature individual with good social skills, motivated to learn and serve; at least 18 years of age and in good physical health. All participants are expected to cover costs of their participation and based on the scheduled team dates, Participants will receive packets that provide guidance for mission service and fund raising.

CONTACT
Information and applications are available online at http://www.ocmc.org/teams or contact Orthodox Christian Mission Center • PO Box 4319, St. Augustine, FL 32085-4319 • Tel: 1-904-829-5132 or 1-877-GO-FORTH (463-6784) • Fax: 1-904-829-5135 • Email: teams@ocmc.org.
The question that I have faced countless times since my return from the OCMC teaching mission Team is, “What did you take away from your experience in South Africa?” Each time I hear these words I struggle to find an answer. My initial instinct, and most frequent reply, is, “South Africa is a devastated country in need of much help.” However, I have discovered that this answer is not complete.

Fourteen years ago Apartheid, the systematic and official separation of the races and oppression of non-whites, was the official policy in South Africa. With the introduction of democratic elections and the installation of Nelson Mandela as president in 1994 came an overnight granting of freedom to the multitude of South Africans who had lived under an oppressive government for almost 50 years. Even with this freedom the situation is still oppressive for many people in South Africa. The violent crime rate is so high that walls topped with electric fencing or razor wire have risen around virtually every structure in the large cities like Pretoria and Johannesburg. Many people in these cities live in fear behind their walls and protective fencing.

Another peculiar and disturbing aspect of life in South Africa is the stark contrast between the wealth (often opulence) and extreme poverty that exist side by side. Our Team found itself on a sobering afternoon trip to distribute food and clothing to the people of an impoverished township where residents lived in tin and cardboard shacks and stepped over raw sewage in the streets. Most of our Team members were visibly shaken by the appalling conditions and pain that we witnessed. However, just minutes and a few miles away from this most dire poverty was a very western world of luxury, which included magnificent shopping centers, veritable mansions, upscale restaurants, and luxury automobiles.

At the mid-point of our visit I was still overwhelmed by the poverty, the culture of crime, and the climate of fear, so I asked our gracious host, Archbishop SERAPHIM, his thoughts about the problems in South Africa. His reply struck a different chord. “These people,” he said, “are lacking, first and foremost, Christ. This is what we need to bring to the people of South Africa so that we can move beyond this phase of violence and unrest.”

Until this point I was constantly considering what the country needed in order to move forward. I identified things such as dignity, love, selflessness, and respect for others. But Archbishop SERAPHIM was right. Until the people of South Africa embrace Christ, either personally or in their neighbors who are made in the image and likeness of Christ, there is no hope for healing and peace in this wounded country. The people of South Africa learned, through the Apartheid government, a way of life that stood in complete contrast to Christ – it will take time for these people to learn the way of love and self-sacrifice that is in the Gospel of Christ unto salvation.

I approached the remainder of my time in South Africa with a different perspective. While I was still discouraged by the conditions in the country, I was hopeful that the strides being made by the Church in South Africa were a good beginning to a very important work. With the arrival of Archbishop SERAPHIM in Johannesburg seven years ago, the mission of the northern Archdiocese of South Africa began to evolve. His Eminence saw fit to expand the Church beyond the boundaries of expatriate communities of Greeks and Slavs. In short order a seminary was established with the intent of training Africans from the southern part of the continent for leadership positions within the Orthodox Church. Mission communities were established in townships such as Sashangue and El Dorado.

The evangelical nature of the Church is continuing to expand in South Africa with a different perspective. Where liturgical services are now being sung in the tongue of the parishioners. The evangelical nature of the Church is being revived in South Africa. Every mission and parish that we visited exhibited a zeal for Christ and His Church and a desire to learn more. Those with much material wealth exhibited a desire to help those with much less.
need. Those with very little material wealth were zealous for the faith and desired to see the Church grow. In a place where the Orthodox Church was, not long ago, almost entirely white and “ethic,” we now see black missions, white parishes, and parishes where blacks and whites worship side by side.

The diocesan seminary, the Catechetical School of Alexandria Petro II, will be graduating its second class of seminarians and future priests next year. The students are full of earnest questions and a desire to bring Orthodoxy to Africa. They are zealous for their faith and desire to be conformed to the image of Christ. These students, along with the clergy and laity of the South African Church and the missionaries who commit to helping the Church in South Africa, are the conduit that can revive this embattled nation with the Good News of Christ Jesus.

Even with the knowledge of the good work being done in South Africa, it is hard to forget the country that I saw. It is a place where walled fortresses and fear have been normalized, and the ever-present reminders of the country’s insecurity are appropriate symbols of the situation in South Africa. What I saw in those walls and the fearful population was precisely the absence of Christ. South Africa has indeed been devastated, but if we truly believe that God is love, and that perfect love casts out fear, then the remedy for theills of this devastated country is nothing less than Christ.

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Becoming a Steward of Missions:

Answering Christ’s Call to Missions through a Deeper Understanding of Stewardship

Kenneth Kidd, OCMC Annual Gifts Officer

As each of us is called to be a steward of the Church, we are also to be stewards of international missions. Missions is our ultimate response to Christ’s sacrificial love for humankind, and it is a primary function of the Church. We find inspiration for this in the life of the Theotokos, who was obedient, opened her heart to God’s will, and through her faith brought Christ, the New Covenant and hope of salvation, into the world. Our missionary call is to take part in this same task, to be participants in God’s plan for the salvation of the entire world. Fr. Alexander Schmemann articulated this beautifully when he wrote, “The Church is a reality of the love of God for this world. It is not man’s response to God, but His gift to us. It is not to be self-centered but precisely a missionary community whose purpose is not salvation from the world, but salvation for the world.”

Each of us must prayerfully consider our personal response to, and participation in, Christ’s call to missions. Fr. Thomas Hopko provides a wonderful foundation for reflection on stewardship as a vital aspect of our faith and its connection to Orthodox missions in his writing “On Stewardship and Philanthropy – Forty Sentences.” This writing is presented in God and Faithful Servant: Stewardship in the Orthodox Church, edited by Fr. Anthony Scott. In this dissertation, Fr. Hopko presents the following teaching regarding stewardship: “A steward is a bonded slave who manages his master’s affairs. A steward in the ancient world was a superior slave in a household who acted in the master’s name, accounted for the master’s possessions, distributed the master’s goods, and often governed the master’s other servants. But the steward was not the master small; Hagar who bore his born son of God to Christ continues as text as stewards, freezing that their sonship is God’s gift of which they are not worthy to accept. Pneumatically, therefore, it may be said that Christians understand themselves as stewarding their divine sonship in Jesus as their most precious gift and possession from God. In this sense, they imitate the “Son of God’s love” who is sent into the world “not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (1 Cor 15:3).”

Stewardship extends to every aspect of our life and work in the world. “The Church is a reality of the love of God for this world…whose purpose is not salvation from the world, but salvation for the world.”

Stewardship is not limited to any one aspect of ministry but extends to “every aspect of our life and work in the world.” Our faith and our love and concern for our brothers and sisters in Christ lie at the heart of what drives our stewardship. In regards to our individual gifts from God, not all will have the ‘means’ to give donations of ‘money or goods,’ nor will all be able to ‘work and serve, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many,” (Mt 20:28). Not all can give money or goods. Not all can work and assist. But all can pray, all can weep, and all can express co-suffering love with mercy for all, not all will have the means to give donations of ‘money or goods,’ nor will all be able to ‘work and serve, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many,” (Mt 20:28). Not all can give money or goods. Not all can work and assist. But all can pray, all can weep, and all can express co-suffering love with mercy for all, without discrimination or condition.

Spiritual poverty is for all Christians. Wealthy Christians must be poor in spirit. They must know that their wealth is from God even when they have earned it through hard work and not simply by good fortune or inheritance. The opportunity to work, the intelligence and diligence to succeed, and the good fortune to be successful are all gifts of God’s providence. When riches increase, the righteous do not set their heart on them or trust in them. They know, with St. Paul, how to abound and how to want (Phil 4:11-13). They do not allow their possessions to choke the word of God in their life (Mt 13:22, Lk 8:14). And most important of all, they use their wealth for the growth of the Church, the edification of the ignorant, the enlightenment, healing and comfort of the sick and suffering, the care of the poor and needy, and the salvation of souls.

References:

Building Missions:

Help Complete the New OCMC Administration & Training Center

Thanks be to God and to all of the faithful who, through your prayers and donations, assisted the OCMC in the development and construction of the new Missionary Training and Administrative Support Center in St. Augustine, Florida. Upon its completion at the end of 2008, the new Center will serve the Orthodox Churches of North America with a single home to recruit, train, and host long-term missionaries as well as short-term team members. An interactive learning and resource center will allow visitors to learn more about Orthodox mission ministries as well as how to participate in the ministries of those who have answered His call to serve our brothers and sisters around the world.

As the new Center nears completion, multiple opportunities remain to participate in this historic endeavor, one of which is to help us furnish this new building. We ask that you prayerfully consider your ability to assist us at this exciting time by sponsoring all of the furnishings for one of the following rooms:

- Missionary Dormitories: $2,500.00 each
- Administrative Workstations: $3,000.00 each
- Administrative Offices: $5,000.00 each
- Missionary Dining Room: $10,000.00
- Missionary Training Room:
  - Furniture: $15,000.00
  - Audio/Visual Equipment: $25,000

Join OCMC as it enters a new era in its call to be a resource for your response to Christ’s Great Commission to “make disciples of all nations.” To sponsor one of the rooms at the new Missionary Training and Administrative Support Center, visit www.ocmc.org, or contact us at 877-GO-FORTH to find out how.

The Lord reminds us: “I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.” Acts 13:47. May this new Center enable you and your parish to shine with the light of Christ before all people on Earth.

ABOVE: Begun in 2007, construction on the new OCMC Administration and Training Center is nearly complete. When finished, the new Center will serve the Orthodox Churches of North America with a single facility to recruit, train, and host long-term missionaries as well as short-term team members.

RIGHT: After years of hard work and generous support from Orthodox Christians across the country, the new OCMC Administration and Training Center will serve as the hub of the North American Orthodox Churches’ witness to the world. The quiet and picturesque setting will prove to be a place of prayerful preparation and reflection as we continue the work of making disciples of all nations.

Below: The scheduled completion date for the new OCMC Administration and Training Center is December 2008. As cables are run and carpet is laid, we write of the Center to be a part of this historic North American Orthodox accomplishment by helping to furnish and equip this witness of the Church.
OCMC SPIRITUAL ODYSSEY TEAM VISITS ALBANIA

This September, a small group of Orthodox Christians from around the country traveled with OCMC Executive Director Fr. John Ritsi to Albania as part of an OCMC Spiritual Odyssey (a new opportunity sponsored by the Teams Department of the Mission Center). This excursion brought participants to Tirana, the capital city of Albania, and surrounding regions to experience the mission renewal that has occurred in this country since the fall of communism. Participants witnessed the resurrected Church of Albania first-hand and observed the many ministries that continue to be a living witness to the Albanian people.

From the left: OCMC Board Member Cina Daskalakis, OCMC Missionary Family Tristan, Gabriella, and Katherine Hoppe, OCMC Board Member Helen Nicozisis, and Carrie Colis during their time together in Albania. OCMC led several Orthodox Christians from around North America to fruits of mission and faith in Albania.

In a beautiful enthronement service at St. Nicholas Cathedral in South Korea, His Eminence Archbishop Andrew of Metropolitan of Korea was enthroned as Metropolitan of Korea. The mission-minded Archbishop has been serving the Church as a member of the clergy since his ordination as Deacon in 1995. May God grant him many years.

In July 2008, His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios was enthroned as Metropolitan of Korea.

In the process obtained a glimpse of the Albanian Church which they serve. They were also able to witness the fruits of their many ministries first hand. Of the nine day tour, OCMC Board Member John Collins reflected, “I gained an appreciation for the difficulties our missionaryries face in their work and lives. We spent some meaningful time with them and in the process obtained a glimpse of the struggles they endure.” Fr. Martin hopes that similar Team experiences, aimed at exposing the faithful in North America to fruits of mission work, will be held on an annual basis.

May God grant His Eminence many years as spiritual leader of the Orthodox Church in Korea.

As part of its 25th anniversary celebrations, the Orthodox Church in Ghana recognized OCMC for its part in planting the seeds of Orthodoxy there, for over twenty years OCMC has supported Ghanaian priests through the Support a Mission Priest (SAMP) program and has sent eight OCMC Mission Teams to help build churches and offer catechism.

The Orthodox Church in Tanzania has grown tremendously under the leadership of His Eminence Jeronymos, Metropolitan of Mwanza. In the past 10 years, the number of parishes has more than tripled, and the number of faithful has more than doubled. His Eminence has maintained a missionary spirit that helps the Church in Tanzania thrive.

The increasing growth of the Church has resulted in the need for more priests and catechists. In 2006, there were only 34 Albanian priests serving more than 41,000 faithful. The Kasikizi Catechetical Center, located in Tanzanian Metropolises of Mwanza, seeks to meet this need, offering both seminary classes and seminars for those who desire to learn more about the faith and to continue the work of the Gospel.

Professors and priests are needed as missionary catechists and teachers around the world. There are a number of urgent needs at this very moment. Contact the Missionary Department of OCMC if you would like to learn more about these tremendous opportunities.

During his six-week term of service as Mission Specialist to Tanzania, Fr. John Erickson, St. Vladimir’s Professor of Church History and Canon Law, taught seminars at the Kasikizi Catechetical Center. Fr. John began teaching at St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary in 1973 and is currently the Peter N. Gramovich Professor of Church History. He is also a scholar of Canon Law.

Lekos said, “Your Grace and all my brothers and sisters in Ghana, please know that it has been your witness that has contributed to my personal growth in Christ, and I cannot thank you enough.”

OCMC MISSIONARY SPECIALIST FR. JOHN ERICKSON COMPLETES HIS SERVICE IN TANZANIA

This year, Fr. John Erickson served as an OCMC Mission Specialist in Tanzania to teach seminarians at the Kasikizi Catechetical Center. Fr. John served as missionary catechists and teachers around the world. There are a number of urgent needs at this very moment. Contact the Missionary Department of OCMC if you would like to learn more about these tremendous opportunities.

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OCMC invites you to engage the young people of your parish in missions by participating in the 2009 Coin Box & Lesson Plan Program. The program is an opportunity to open your students’ minds and hearts and to teach them how to pray for Orthodox Missions as they collect money throughout the Lenten Season. Lesson Plans designed for Mission Sunday, March 1, accompany the coin boxes to enhance the educational experience!

Sunday School Directors – To order Mission Coin Boxes and/or Sunday School Lesson Plans for the 2009 Lenten Season, please contact OCMC at 877-GO-FORTH or coinbox@ocmc.org before Wednesday, February 4 for a guaranteed April 30 delivery!