



Η ΧΡΥΣΗ ΓΕΦΥΡΑ

the golden bridge



FALL 2012



IN THIS ISSUE: A PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY THROUGH IONIAN VILLAGE 2012





A NOTE FROM FR. EVAGORAS CONSTANTINIDES DIRECTOR OF IONIAN VILLAGE

Dear Fellow Alumni,

What an amazing summer we had at Ionian Village. As a former camper and staff member, I know that each and every summer at Ionian Village is a special one. The lives of our campers and staff members are always changed by the Grace of God and the intercessions of our Saints. Friendships are always formed, and fun and lasting memories are always made. In the end, though, there is simply one word that sums up the experience of Ionian Village: "growth." Our campers learn and grow, not only mentally, but emotionally and spiritually.

The summer of 2012 will always hold a very special place in my heart. As my first summer as Director, I witnessed the miracle of Ionian Village from an entirely new vantage point. For our young people, our Orthodox Faith is more than just a ritual or tradition, it is something that they are actively struggling to learn about, grasping to understand, and trying to put into perspective in relation to their lives. Our campers and staff explored their unique relationship with our Orthodox Faith every day of the program, constantly learning and growing.

Some of our campers and staff members are able to pinpoint specific instances where they could feel the presence of Christ and our Orthodox Faith. For Mary and Jerry Benson, their faith became tangible upon visiting the relics of Saint Gerasimos, the patron saint of their father. At the same monastery on Kefallonia, our nurse, Stephanie Meletis, met nuns who had known her great aunt. Staff Member Alyssa Loutsion serendipitously came across the icon of her patron saint, Saint Elesa, for the very first time at the church in the Village of Kastro, just fifteen minutes from the Ionian Village campgrounds. Remarkably, one of her campers, Elesa Poteres, shares the same patron saint. Mike Mazzella was humbled to experience the miracle of Saint Nektarios' tomb on the island of Aegina. Campers and staff alike came to understand the true meaning of forgiveness at the Church of Saint Dionysios on Zakynthos.

This growing relationship with our Faith occurred slowly, over the course of the summer, during our daily morning and evening chapel services, learning the Hymn to Saint Dionysios, or at the close of each evening, singing "Theotoke i elpis." Some of our campers felt this growth through the close friendships formed with each other and with their staff members, relationships nurtured through our Orthodox Life sessions and cabin devotionals. Still others learned how to be themselves, gaining personal confidence and confidence in their Faith.

For the newest members of our Ionian Village Family, I hope you enjoy the photographic journey from this past summer while it is still fresh in your mind. For our older members, I pray that your love for Ionian Village stays strong and that this issue helps you remember your own Ionian Village journey. As I told our campers on our last night together, wherever we are in our lives, we can always close our eyes and meet at the Chapel in prayer.

In Christ,




THE IONIAN VILLAGE EXPERIENCE IN THREE WORDS OR LESS

After the summer, The Golden Bridge utilized social media to ask Alumni how they felt about their experience at Ionian Village. Knowing that the responses would be overwhelming and hoping to somehow calibrate the responses received, we posed a simple question: "Sum up what Ionian Village means to you in Three Words." Although many wished to be able to write paragraphs about the impact of Ionian Village on their lives, we loved the responses! Not surprisingly, the word "LOVE" was the most popular word, over 250% higher than any other individual word or phrase!



*Above: Adjectives used by Alumni to describe Ionian Village.
The size of each word represents the popularity of the response.*

THE IONIAN VILLAGE ALUMNI PROJECT: 1,748 AND COUNTING

1,748 REGISTERED ALUMNI AND COUNTING...

The Ionian Village Alumni Project, which was launched in November of 2011, is an ambitious initiative to establish connections between the thousands of faithful who have experienced Ionian Village since its beginning in 1970.

In less than a year, over 1,700 Alumni have registered with the Alumni Project! This immense response rate speaks to the life-transforming experience that is inherent to Ionian Village, yet our number is still far from the over 16,000 that have participated. The overarching goal of the Alumni Project is to strengthen the shared love and appreciation for Ionian Village by not only reuniting friends from the past, but also by providing the opportunity for new relationships and memories to grow. We hope you will join us!



The

**IONIAN VILLAGE
ALUMNI PROJECT**

www.ionianvillage.org/alumni

ANNOUNCING 2013 SUMMER PROGRAMS

SUMMER 2013 CAMPING PROGRAMS

Ionian Village will again offer two summer camping sessions, Summer Travel Camp and Byzantine Venture. Excursions vary slightly between the two sessions and will include Ancient Olympia, Patra, Zakynthos, Kefallonia, Kerkyra, Aegina, Epidavros, Mystras, and Athens. Each 20-day session is open to young people who have completed grades 8 through 12.

SUMMER TRAVEL CAMP (STC) June 23 – July 12, 2013

BYZANTINE VENTURE (BV) July 20 – August 8, 2013

SPIRITUAL ODYSSEY PILGRIMAGE

The Spiritual Odyssey program offers young adults the opportunity to intimately encounter our culture and faith through focused pilgrimages. Spiritual Odyssey is open to young adults between the ages of 19-28.

SPIRITUAL ODYSSEY: CYPRUS AND CRETE May 30 – June 9, 2013

While in Cyprus, participants will experience our faith and culture first-hand, visiting sites where the Apostles once preached, also learning about the Cypriot struggle and ongoing division of the island. Participants will also explore the beautiful beaches, food, and culture of the island of Cyprus. Participants will then travel to Crete where they will marvel at the ancient ruins in Knossos and experience the island's rich religious heritage.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING ANY OF OUR 2013 SUMMER PROGRAMS
OR TO APPLY TO BE A STAFF, MEDICAL, OR CLERGY MEMBER
PLEASE VISIT THE IONIAN VILLAGE WEBSITE AT WWW.IONIANVILLAGE.ORG**



The Office of Ionian Village would like to extend a warm welcome to its newest member! Marina Tripodis has been a part of the Ionian Village Family since she served as a Staff Member during the summer of 2011. In Marina's words, she was "instantly hooked!" Born and raised in Ohio, Marina is a graduate of The Ohio State University where she studied Strategic Communication. Before coming to Ionian Village, Marina was a counselor at the Metropolis of Pittsburgh Camp for six summers and also worked in the Metropolis of Pittsburgh Youth Office.

She joined us over the summer as the Administrative Assistant and has been working diligently with Father Evagoras on the Alumni Project in addition to already beginning preparations for the upcoming 2013 summer camping season. Marina is very excited to be joining the Office of Ionian Village and to see the ministry continue to flourish and enrich the lives of young people across our Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.





IONIAN VILLAGE 2012: DISCONNECT, EXPERIENCE, REJUVENATE

Summer 2012 welcomed almost 350 people into the Ionian Village Family with open arms. Between Summer Travel Camp and Byzantine Venture, 274 campers passed through the gates of Ionian Village, supported with love by thirty-three dedicated staff members, three doctors and two nurses with their loving spouses, four clergy members and their families, our Assistant Director, Konstantine Salmas, and Father Evagoras and Presvytera Maria Constantinides. Additionally, 22 young adults ventured to islands across Greece with the Spiritual Odyssey Program, under the guidance of Father Nathanael Symeonides and Alex Magdalinos.

Several new and exciting destinations were added to the Ionian Village repertoire this summer. Summer Travel Camp spent two evenings on the island of Kerkyra, the northernmost of the Ionian Islands and home to the relics of Saint Spyridon. On Kerkyra, campers experienced the beautiful beaches, unique culture and Venetian architecture of the island, the only part of Greece that was never conquered by the Ottoman Turks. They celebrated Divine Liturgy at the Church of Saint Spyridon and venerated his 1600-year-old relics. En route to Athens, Byzantine Venture campers journeyed to the Byzantine fortress town of Mystra where they walked through the city's labyrinthine paths, visiting three of the most important monasteries, all of which were important centers of Orthodoxy and iconography in the 13th and 14th centuries. One of these monasteries continues today to be the home and spiritual center to a handful of nuns. From Mystra, campers continued to Epidavros, the impressively enormous 15,000-seat ancient theater built into a breathtakingly beautiful backdrop.

Our at-camp days opened and closed with morning and evening Chapel Services, always in front of the beautiful whitewashed Chapel at the exact center of the Ionian Village campgrounds. The days were filled with Orthodox Life sessions under the pines, arts and crafts projects, Greek dancing in MGC, all sorts of fun athletic games, and, of course, our Evening Activities each night.

The following pages of are filled with glimpses into the 2012 Summer Program in the form of photographs and personal memoirs from a few of our participants. We hope you enjoy!



WELCOME TO KERKYRA!



IONIAN VILLAGE . . . THE BEST SUMMER OF YOUR LIFE

By Christina Loridas

The sun peeks slowly over the tiny white chapel, gently breathing life into a gray morning. Slowly giving warmth to all it touches. I close my eyes and allow it to scorch my skin, kissing my soul. I drink in the smell of the sweet IV air, a mix of peace, of hope. Of His presence. A touch of oregano and sea breeze, of olive trees blowing softly in the wind.

I relish in the quiet, for soon I know I will hear the scamper of feet, coming in all directions. Old navy flip flops and Adidas shoes will cover the small area outside our chapel and the beautiful sound of young voices will carry softly through the air, down towards the kitchen, where Kyria Sofia is preparing our morning meal, made always with love. Voices chanting the morning Orthros, heads bent gently over little blue hymn books in preparation for the day ahead.

No, the quiet won't last. Because today we are headed to Kalavrita and Mega Spilaio to see an icon of the Panagia, made with mere tree sap centuries before. Where we will go to the church of the Kimisis Tis Theotokou to hear a ninety-year-old priest speak of the Greek massacre which occurred in that very village years before. Where we will learn a hymn whose lovely melody will bring our camp together each evening as we gather before bed. Or perhaps today we find ourselves on Aegina, venerating Agios Nektarios, the saint's footsteps heard with one ear pressed gently against his grave, which encases mere relics. Maybe the ferry will carry us across beautiful blue waters to the island of Zakynthos, to the patron saint of forgiveness and of Ionian Village itself, Agios Dionysios. Today could be the day we board the buses and traverse the dusty roads for our two-day venture on Kerkyra, to attend liturgy at the church of Agios Spyridon, tucked away on a side street amongst tiny shops filled with preserved sweets in bright colored bottles. No matter where we go, we will go together. Always a family, always as one.

And each day, I learn something more. That the life bestowed upon us is the most valuable possession we own. That each day is one more to live to the fullest, yet another chance to love until we feel we can burst. That our ability to live and to love is our thanks to our Him. That our Lord is the reason we breathe and with every breath He wants us to live His words. Simply to love.

I begin to see our dear campers with bright smiles and happy eyes, as they too realize this. As they find peace, and slowly find their beating hearts filled with life once more. As they cease to feel pain, confusion, fear. As they venture past the rocks, feet cut and blistered, souls tired. As they continue on bended knees towards the light. As they begin to feel our Lord guiding them. Yes, today was wonderful but wait until tomorrow. You'll see, I tell them.

The sun is slowly setting; the cross atop the chapel becoming less illuminated as the light gradually vanishes. The brightness of the tiny church is dimming. Wait until tomorrow, it whispers, you'll see.

I already know, I reply back.

To Father Evagoras Constantinides, Presbyteria Maria Constantinides, and to the dear staff and campers who brought so much love and life to our beautiful Ioniko Xwrio, my experience this summer would have been nothing without you. I owe you my heart, and for this I thank you.



Christina Loridas graduated from Suffolk University in 2010 with a degree in Journalism. Christina has traveled to Greece many times and has a deep love for the country of our ancestors. She eagerly shared this love with her campers as an Ionian Village Staff Member.



ZAKYNTHOS, KEFALONIA, PATRAS, KALAVRITA, AEGINA, MEGA SPILAION...



MYSTRAS & EPIDAVROS!





CHAPEL: "THE SON OF ZAKYNTHOS..."



WHITE PARTY!!



FUN DAYS AT CAMP

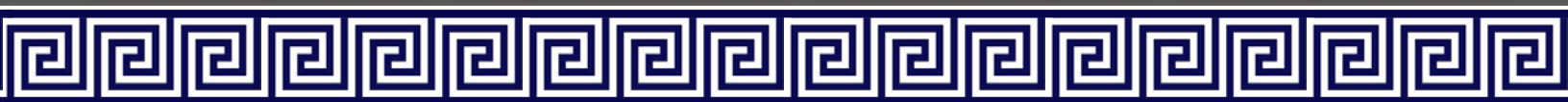


CABIN SKITS!



WATER OLYMPICS!





STAFF REFLECTION



Jimmy Heracklis is an Engineering student at N.C. State University. Jimmy is proud to be a "double Epiros Alum," having been a counselor for Epiros during both STC and BV this past summer.

By Jimmy Heracklis

"Why are we here?" This was the first question that was posed to the Ionian Village staff during our Staff Orientation Orthodox Life session. For the greater part of three hours, each staff member contemplated, struggled, prayed, and finally released our emotions and concerns to the group. It seems like such a simple question, but it had such a deeper meaning. Why were all of us truly here, in a Grecian paradise? Silently all of us had to come to grips with the reason for being at IV, whether it was to get away from a bad personal situation, or whether it was to learn more about their Greek heritage, or whether it was to experience the Church in an attempt to renew their relationship with Christ.

I remember quite vividly that Father Evagoras waited as our OL session dragged on and on, each person pouring their heart before this group of relative strangers. After all the staff finished their explanation, Father calmly and kindly told us that we were all wrong for our reasons for being there. I was so confused as to why my reasons were wrong. Had I misunderstood the question, or was there a deeper question that I hadn't considered? Father stood before us and told us a sentence that has stuck with me to this day, "We are here to change lives."

It was so simple to go to IV without thoughts of how we were changing not only our lives, but more importantly the lives of the campers. All of my friends laughed and said that I was going to Greece for the summer to become a "true Greek." In reality, Ionian Village and

the campers changed my life in ways that I can't begin to describe. Father Evagoras emphatically told everyone that each person was called to IV for a reason, and it is the most beautiful thing I have ever heard. Maybe it didn't matter that the staff and campers came to IV for different reasons. In the beginning, we started as a random group of individuals with many different qualities and talents. Although we were from many different parts of the country, we came together as a staff family, with the goal of impacting the lives of Orthodox Youth. And, with each session this past summer, the staff and the campers formed a family, a family of people whose lives will never be the same.

So, I feel the reason we were called to Ionian Village was not only to change lives, but also to become the example of love and compassion for the world. We can never go back to what we were, we can only move forward on our spiritual path. So, I will close with a quote that we have all heard at some point during IV. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." - John 13:35



SPIRITUAL ODYSSEY 2012: THE GREEK ISLANDS WAS GOD THERE?

By Donna Elias

After returning home from Ionian Village's 2012 Spiritual Odyssey, I met up with a friend to tell him about my trip through the Greek Islands. With vivid detail, I described the beautiful places we visited and the amazing people we met. He listened attentively, and after I finished, I looked at him for a validating response to my reflections. Instead, he paused, and asked what I thought at the time was a very simple, and somewhat small-minded question. He asked me, "Was God there?" Initially, I found the question not only easy to answer, but also a bit odd. Of course God was there! Was he even listening to my stories about venerating the relics of St. Marina in Crete, meeting the Patriarch of Alexandria, sitting in St. John's cave in Patmos, or walking through the humble home of St. Nektarios in Aegina? Nonetheless, I answered him with a small eye roll, and a simple, "Yes, of course."

Later, while glancing through the many photographs I took during the trip, my friend's question drifted back into my thoughts. "Was God there?" I sat back from the computer, closed my eyes, quieted my mind, and focused. I believe it was in this moment where I understood that what my friend proposed was not a simple question at all. It was an invitation to reflect on my experiences in a more sincere way. It was a challenge to remember the details of where I felt spiritually moved. It was a gift to recognize that the whole journey was embodied within the beauty of Christ and His Church.

My experience on Ionian Village's Spiritual Odyssey trip through the Greek Islands was unbelievable. Though an attempt has been made, words cannot adequately express just how spectacular those ten days were. I was often moved to tears in those quiet moments where I could almost feel God revealing Himself to me. No matter where our travels took us, Christ's love was present.

On behalf of all those who participated in Ionian Village's 2012 Spiritual Odyssey, I would like to personally thank Fr. Evagoras Constantinides and Konstantine Salmas for coordinating the trip, and Fr. Nathanael Symeonides and Alex Magdalinos for guiding us along the journey — it truly was a tremendous blessing.



Donna Elias (right) & Elena Economopoulos (IV Staff 2008, 2011) on a boat to Patmos. Donna is a graduate of Hellenic College in Brookline, Massachusetts. She served as an Ionian Village Staff Member in 2008 and currently works at the National Orthodox Christian Fellowship Office.



SPIRITUAL ODYSSEY: THE GREEK ISLANDS

2012 ITINERARY

CRETE

PATMOS

SANTORINI

AEGINA

ATHENS

Spiritual Odyssey is a longstanding member of the Ionian Village Family. The Spiritual Odyssey pilgrimage-style journeys are designed to give young adults the opportunity to explore Greece and learn about our Greek Orthodox Faith from a unique perspective, all within an exciting atmosphere of Christian love and fellowship.

*Clockwise from Top Right:
Spiritual Odyssey Participants at the Parthenon on the Acropolis; enjoying the fresh sea air on board a ferry boat; a picturesque Santorini Sunset; (opposite) view from Saint John's Cave on the Island of Patmos.*



SUMMER TRAVEL CAMP: JUNE 23 - JULY 12, 2013

BYZANTINE VENTURE: JULY 20 - AUGUST 8, 2013

**SPIRITUAL ODYSSEY: CYPRUS & CONSTANTINOPLE
MAY 30 - JUNE 9, 2013**

REGISTRATION OPENS ONLINE JANUARY 1ST, 2013

STAFF APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE NOVEMBER 5TH, 2012



IONIAN VILLAGE 8 EAST 79TH STREET NEW YORK, NY 10075 212.570.3536



WWW.IONIANVILLAGE.ORG

