



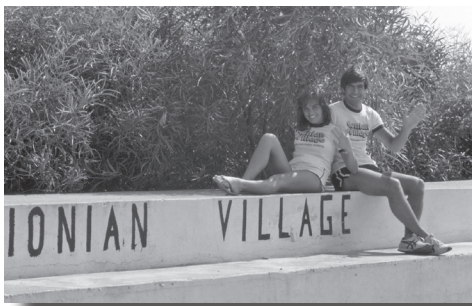
Η ΧΡΥΣΗ ΓΕΦΥΡΑ

the golden bridge



SPRING 2012

THE IONIAN VILLAGE ALUMNI PROJECT



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 just a few short months, over 500 Alumni have registered online with the Alumni Project. This initial response rate speaks to the life-transforming experience that is inherent to Ionian Village, yet 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.

The
**IONIAN VILLAGE
ALUMNI PROJECT**
www.ionianvillage.org/alumni

MESSAGE FROM HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP DEMETRIOS OF AMERICA

Dear Alumni of the Ionian Village Camp,

Over the past 42 years, Ionian Village has affected the hearts and souls of over 16,000 campers, staff and clergy. This promising mission, to have our own camp in Greece, has turned into one of the most beloved and successful ministries of our Archdiocese. As you all know, the participants of Ionian Village do not just attend a summer camp, they have an experience, which, by the grace of God, transforms them as young people and as Orthodox Christians.

It is my honor to present you with the first issue of *The Golden Bridge* - *Η Χρυσή Γέφυρα* - the Ionian Village Alumni Newsletter that will not only inform you about past events and stories of our camp, but will tell you about the exciting things that are happening currently at Ionian Village. I hope you enjoy this newsletter and will continue to stay involved in the Ionian Village Alumni Project. Each one of you is more than just a member of a camp; you are part of a rich and blessed tradition, and a unique life experience which constitutes a great gift from God.

With Paternal Love,

Archbishop Demetrios

+DEMETRIOS
Archbishop of America





A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF IONIAN VILLAGE FR. EVAGORAS CONSTANTINIDES

Dear Fellow Ionian Village Alumni,

It is with great excitement that we present the first issue of the newly established Ionian Village Alumni Newsletter: *The Golden Bridge – Η Χρυσή Γέφυρα*. For over 40 years, thousands of young campers, staff and clergy have passed through the gates of Ionian Village, fulfilling Archbishop Iakovos' dream of establishing a "Golden Bridge" of Orthodoxy and Hellenism between America and Greece. Whether we left with friendships, passion for our Orthodox faith, love for traditional Greek food, or spiritual connection to one of our saints, for so many of us, Ionian Village was a life-transforming experience that we will never forget.

The goal of *The Golden Bridge* is to connect all of us that were blessed to be a part of this Ionian Village experience. In each issue, you will be taken back to your summer experience at IV. We will highlight some of the excursions as well as various aspects of our program while at camp. Also, look for our Alumni Update in each issue. We were fortunate enough to be able to sit with Basil Sitaras, the son of Fr. Costa Sitaras, and talk with him about his experiences at IV and what he has been doing since.

As we all understand, Ionian Village is a very special place. It's not just a camp; it's an experience. It's more than a summer vacation; it's an opportunity to "Experience Greece and Live Orthodoxy." You are a part of something unique, you are part of a legacy that has forever changed the face of Youth Ministry in our country.

I hope and pray you enjoy this edition of *The Golden Bridge*!

Fr. Evagoras

CATCHING UP WITH...

BASIL SITARAS (ALUM, 1981-1996)

We had the opportunity to interview Ionian Village Alum Basil Sitaras about his relationship with the program and his experiences since.

Basil Sitaras is the son of Fr. Constantine Sitaras, former Director of Ionian Village (1981-1996), and Presvytera Val. Basil was not only a three-time camper (1996 STC and BV, 1995 STC), but spent many summers of his childhood at the beautiful campgrounds in Glyfa with his father as the Director.

Among Basil's fondest IV memories were the breathtaking sunsets at Cape Sounion by the Temple of Apollo. He remembers hiking down the cliffs to where the water hits the rocks and, while experiencing the sunset, coming to fully appreciate Lord Byron's passion for the beauty and culture of Greece. (cont. on p. 3)



Basil Sitaras (right) with parents, Fr. Constantine Sitaras (Director of Ionian Village, 1981-1996) and Presvytera Val Sitaras.

"I WILL REMEMBER IT ALWAYS AS THE HOME AWAY FROM HOME . . . EACH SUMMER"



(cont. from p. 2)

A more humorous IV memory is from Basil's first summer as an official camper. Basil had jokingly threatened his counselors that he was getting ready to pull the "ultimate prank" with all of his insider information of Ionian Village. The counselors were justifiably nervous, especially considering that he was in fact guilty of a few minor pranks (including repeatedly taking the counselors' frappe supplies and hiding them in his parents' cabin). One night, the power went out unexpectedly while everyone was sleeping. Despite the fact that the power outage was out of anyone's control, Basil's cabin counselors woke him up and interrogated him, convinced that he was responsible! As Basil recalls, "just knowing I was in their heads like that turned out to be the ultimate prank."

In his post-Ionian Village years, Basil completed a Law Degree from the Beasley School of Law at Temple University (2005) preceded by a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies and Economics from the University of Rochester (2002). He is now a Senior Associate at Day Pitney, LLP in the Labor and Employment Law Division. Previously, Basil worked as an attorney with the New York City Law Department in the Office of the Corporation Counsel where he first-chaired and co-chaired two full federal jury trials to verdict.

Basil's Ionian Village days have followed him into the present as well. His godbrother, Perry Canaras, was a camper with Basil at Byzantine Venture in 1996 where they shared many experiences. They remain close to this day. Perry and his wife, Allison, recently had their first child, Olivia Kathryn, and Basil is honored to have been asked to be her godfather.

We asked Basil how he feels Ionian Village impacted his life. He responded with the love and affection that so many of us feel for Ionian Village: "Given that I spent nearly every summer for half of my life at Ionian Village, it is nearly impossible to quantify or describe the impact it's had on my life. But it is, without a doubt, one of the most unique experiences that any young adult could ask for, and I will remember it always as the home away from home for me and my parents each summer."



Basil Sitaras (second from right) with fellow campers at Ionian Village.

THE LOUIS J. TICHES IONIAN VILLAGE SCHOLARSHIP MEMORIAL FUND HOSTS FUNDRAISING DINNER

On February 26th, 2012 a fundraising dinner for The Louis J. Tiches Ionian Village Scholarship Memorial Fund was held at LJ's restaurant in Hagerstown, Maryland. The almost 100 attendees included past and future campers and counselors as well as Fr. Evagoras Constantinides and Fr. Steve Zorzos of St. Sophia Cathedral in Washington, D.C. The event raised over \$10,000 for the Memorial Fund.

The Scholarship Fund was established as a memorial to Louis J. Tiches, a long-standing steward of Sts. Constantine and Helen Church of Washington, D.C. and a loving promoter of Ionian Village. Beginning with program's first year, Mr. Tiches sent all of his children and most of his grandchildren to Ionian Village. His son and some of his grandchildren have served the program as counselors. He understood the importance of Ionian Village for our young people as it continues to provide cherished memories and the opportunity to live our Orthodox Faith.

The Louis J. Tiches Scholarship Memorial Fund, together with the Parish, Philoptochos, and GOYA, contributes to The Sts. Constantine & Helen Ionian Village Scholarship Fund which has sent two campers to Ionian Village in past years and is sending another camper this summer. The goal of these significant scholarship funds is to be able to continually send a camper each summer so that all may experience the miracles of Ionian Village and rediscover the beauty of their faith and culture.



SPOTLIGHT ON SPIRITUAL ODYSSEY 2012

Each unique Spiritual Odyssey program is open to young adults ages 19 to 28 and is offered for the unbeatable price of \$2500 per person.

Spiritual Odyssey: Cyprus & Constantinople: May 30th – June 9th

In Cyprus, participants will have the opportunity to walk in the steps of the Apostles and learn about the Cypriot struggle and division of the island while visiting sites of historic and religious importance. They will then travel to Istanbul (Constantinople) where they will experience the city's unique culture and explore the center of our Orthodox faith with visits to include Hagia Sophia and the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Spiritual Odyssey: The Greek Mainland: June 10th – June 20th

Beginning with Thessaloniki, the second largest city in Greece and a city rich in Byzantine history, participants will explore Greece's mainland. In Ouranopolis (the "City of the Sky") a boat tour will take them to view the monasteries of Mount Athos. They will also visit Athens, spend time at the beautiful Ionian Village campgrounds on the Ionian Sea, and experience the living monasteries of Meteora that are filled with relics of the saints.

Spiritual Odyssey: The Greek Islands: July 15th – July 25th

Participants will explore the exceptional beauty and tranquility of the Greek Islands. The journey will start in Crete, home to the Minoan civilization and a very unique culture, continue on to Santorini, Patmos, Naxos, and Tinos, and ultimately end in Athens. On each island participants will experience a combination of religious, cultural and historical sites and truly have a taste of the Mediterranean lifestyle.

The registration deadline for all Spiritual Odyssey Programs is April 30th, 2012.

For more information, visit www.ionianvillage.org or call our office!



THE IONIAN VILLAGE WISH LIST

LOUKOUMADA MACHINE Kyria Sophia and her staff currently make the traditional Sunday Loukoumades completely by hand. \$2500

TWO ICON STANDS FOR THE CHAPEL These stands will hold the icons our campers and staff venerate at the end of each Chapel Service. \$500 each

LITURGICAL BLESSING CROSS Our Chapel is in need of a new Cross to beautify the Liturgical experience at Ionian Village. \$1500

BREEZEWAY CHAIRS AND TABLES Everyone has enjoyed the welcome cool of the Breezeway. \$300 for a set of two chairs and a table. Four sets desired.

ORTHODOX LIFE CIRCLE CHAIRS OL under the Pines is a life-changing aspect of our program. \$500 per circle. Four circles needed.

FURNITURE FOR STAFF LOUNGE Our Staff Members work around the clock for our campers. Help us give them some much needed R&R. \$1500

The beautiful Ionian Village campgrounds have provided solace and peace to its visitors for over 40 years. As is expected after so many years of loving use, many of our furnishings are beginning to show their age. Please contact Fr. Evagoras Constantinides to make a contribution to our Wish List or towards Ionian Village!

Visit Ionian Village online at www.ionianvillage.org

Join the Ionian Village Alumni Project at www.ionianvillage.org/alumni

Sponsor an event at your local parish for potential campers or alumni!

Connect with Ionian Village on Facebook and Twitter!

GET INVOLVED WITH
**IONIAN
VILLAGE**

REFLECTIONS ON THE MONASTERY OF AYIA LAVRA



By Konstantine Salmas

Lunch is soon. First we are going to visit Ayia Lavra. The trip tics have our total count at one hundred and something. We need to get to Ayia Lavra before it closes.

There has been a functioning monastery at the site of Ayia Lavra since the tenth century but there hasn't always been a sign that has visiting hours displayed. The monastery was begun in 961 by a monk from the monastery of Ayia Lavra on Mount Athos.

If we move forward in time from the tenth century, the monastery's history is seemingly forgettable because there are not any major challenges. But in this normalcy, God also is active among the doings of the faithful.

The monastery was an important center of Christianity. Then, in the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Turks burned the monastery to the ground. Until the mid-eighteen hundreds, the monastery was an active part of resistance to the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Suffice it to say, there were no visiting hours until well into the twentieth century.

If we move forward in time, the monastery took its present form in 1950. Ionian Village began visiting Ayia Lavra soon after. Going into a monastery like this during the day is a lot like going to a library – you're not really sure what anyone is doing or if they know what they're supposed to be doing. Two monks are speaking to each other a little ways away. Two other monks pass one another and say nothing. The person who greets you is extremely jolly but after one or two questions you realize that, even though he is a monk here at Lavra, he really doesn't know much about how things work. He smiles a lot, though, and conveys hopefulness that whatever your request as a visitor is, surely it will be satisfied soon.

One minute and thirty five minutes are the same to him, even as he stares at a pool of one hundred something teenagers and staff filling the outdoor area in front of the church, then the staircases, then the bookstore, and finally, like a river, the walkway extending from the entrance to the small upstairs chapel where the skulls of Saint Alexios and Saint Philaretos are kept. The smiling greeter monk goes back to his post at the front doors and waits with the same fervent smile for other visitors, many of whom don't know why this monastery even has visiting hours.

"GREEK INDEPENDENCE AFTER FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF SERVITUDE WAS THE RESULT OF THE LIVING CHRISTIAN FAITH OF THE PEOPLE..."

The pose of the statue outside is impressive. Courage and standing up for something are depicted in the tall black figure of Bishop Germanos. The statue is outside the gates that enclose the outer courtyard in front of the ever-ready-to-smile monk. The presence of the statue of Bishop Germanos, added on to the empty church next to the present functioning monastic complex, added on to the visiting hours sign on the gates, added on to the large tree in the courtyard with the large sign in Greek nailed to its trunk all communicates that something deep happened around here. These historical markings – the boarded up church, the statue across from it, the hours of operation sign, the long explanation about the very large tree, and the smiling greeter monk all add up to something penetrating. (*cont. on p. 6*)



(cont. from p. 5)

Ayia Lavra, in a way, guards the event of Greek Independence and, for those whose curiosity deepens after walking through Lavra and its sites, the monastery also houses the items that, if followed, lead us to the story of what happened in the generation after 1821. Ayia Lavra, by housing the portraits of the bishops, priests, and generals, by housing the banner with the icon of the Koimosis of the Theotokos, and the photo of the people who gathered here on this ground in 1821, clearly preserves from distortion the idea and reason for the Revolution.

My questions become flimsy in the face of the man holding the skulls of Saint Alexios and Saint Philaretos. He is the tallest abbot of a monastery I have ever seen, at least six foot five. His beard is probably forty of those seventy-seven inches. When I see impressive people, I don't really ask myself, where is he from or how did he get to be abbot of this small but significant place. I think more in terms of qualities of the person than in terms of biography.

The path of the annual late morning visits to Ayia Lavra starts at the Zafiropoulos buses and ends usually with the veneration of these relics held by the Abbot. Informally, by walking, we move into something and towards a sort of solar system of comprehensive Christian strength. These sites, or stopping points, in Ayia Lavra are presented and bound invisibly to one another by a reason. Seeing the smiling monk, walking up the staircase and into the bookstore to see walls of portraits, framed lithographs of the mountainous Peloponnesian geography, even larger frames that display the vestments of Metropolitan Germanos of Patras, the Lavra, or banner, the veneration of the relics of the saints, and the early Byzantine scroll of the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great are a tour of the mind of the Church. All before lunch, the spread of time becomes real through bones, drawings, embroidered vestments, and letters and liturgies written in varying scripts and materials.

What is the effort we are remembering in this heat? The abbot points with his long stick at the tops of the wall where there are photos of General Kolokotronis and Makriyiannis. He points at the banner, the Lavra, which is an embroidered icon of the falling asleep of the Theotokos. Strangely, but not without reason, this was the emblem of the hundreds of skirmishes in mountains that led to the overall weakening of the systematic Ottoman control. I look at the lithographs and I look wherever the tall abbot with the long black beard points his walking stick. He goes through a litany of historical facts, almost all of which children who participate in Greek School have heard by sixth grade. I hear, "Eleftheria i Thanatos," and "Ali Pasha." What stays with me is the long name, Makriyiannis. (cont. on p. 7)



The commanding statue of Bishop Germanos near the entrance to Ayia Lavra. While his right hand is blessing the faithful, the banner in his left hand reads "ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑ Η ΘΑΝΑΤΟΣ."



The Reliquary housing the skull of St. Alexios, Man of God, within the Monastery of Ayia Lavra. The Monastery also houses the relics of St. Philaretos.

(cont. from p. 6)

As quickly as he started speaking and pointing around the square room filled with Ionian Village Byzantine Venture participants, he stopped and stood by the exit door. We exit the monastery over the next few moments. We are like pools of water that have quickly evaporated. The difficult sun has licked us off the cement in the courtyard, the base of the stairs inside the monastery proper, the river-like line waiting to kiss the saints.

The effort that was made under the call, “Eleftheria i Thanatos” – Freedom or Death – was a bold, lengthy, and holy effort by large groups of people in Greece. Do we have bold reasons for what we do? Do we have reasons that do justice to our baptism? The present day theologian Christos Yannaras writes about the Greek Revolution and Greece since the Revolution. He speaks about those who were the seeds: “Greekness was identified with Orthodoxy.” Soon after victory, the reason the Greek people had for the revolution got pushed aside, along with the Ottoman Turkish rulers. After freedom, the reason got pushed aside and Europe set out to make a Greece without the Church. The generation after 1821 set the course Greece would take. Other people wanted their hands on the land. During this time General Makriyiannis was still alive. He is a reason why what we learn until sixth grade Greek School should not be the last thing we learn.

Greece won a weird sort of freedom. I remember the abbot of Ayia Lavra pointing around the room. There is so much that happened and so many opinions now. This is why Ayia Lavra has to preserve the original intent and catalyst of the Revolution, as time passes. The reason was bold. “Greekness was identified with Orthodoxy.” The Ottomans were removing the Orthodoxy of their Greek subjects and thus, their “Greekness.”



The reason, then, is preserved here in this solar system of invisible strength that is the complex of Ayia Lavra. The reason went away so quickly. I am shaken at how fast Orthodoxy was pushed aside following Greece's victory. Yannaras continues, “But when the revolution spread and hopes began to grow for its success, the clergy and the captains began to be marginalized in the search for more effective political control.”

The details of the lives of the saints are often lost and invisible, like the places in the Peloponnesian mountains where the loud and lengthy events that constitute the initial fights. The lithographs of the Greek geography only show dark lines, creases in skin, where the mountains descend into sharp valleys. The geography can't help but show its age. I read bits and pieces about General Makriyiannis. (cont. on p. 8)

“AYIA LAVRA, IN A WAY, GUARDS THE
EVENT OF GREEK INDEPENDENCE...”





The Courtyard at Ayia Lavra Monastery.

(cont. from p. 7)

Ionian Village trips to Ayia Lavra have deepened my curiosity over the years. The relics, the statues, the smiling monk at the entrance who probably knows we will be waiting forty five minutes for a person to greet the group. We learn to move in those creases, too, carrying the same reason as General Makriyiannis and others did then, in the early and mid-eighteen hundreds.

The General's journals were found after his death. Christos Yannaras, author of *Orthodoxy and the West*, writes, "This second manuscript could be described as an Orthodox saint's autobiography or Synaxari. The revolutionary fighter, tough garrison commander, opponent of politicians and Othonian despotism, and famous general who was condemned to death and had spent years in jail, had led a discrete life of ascetism, prayer, and charismatic tears." This discrete life, this way of Orthodoxy, is the reason.

"...THIS WAY OF ORTHODOXY, IS THE REASON."



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