



the golden bridge

FALL 2013

BELIEVE THE HYPE

iconography * athletic field * proskinitarion
pool * fr. costa sitaras * basile the comedian
repo(we)r greece

PLUS: reflections from campers and staff
alum nick neofotidis * spiritual odyssey

NEW PROGRAMS: give the gift of
ionian village * iv on-the-go

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VILLAGE
2 0 1 3
summer
in review



Ionian Village is a Ministry of the
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America





“live life like nobody is watching”

Fr. Evagoras Constantinides, Director

There are some inherent benefits to my job. I get to spend my summer working with young people from all over our Archdiocese, doing real, hands on youth work. Alongside our staff, I get to see the fruits of our labors blossom at a personal level, something I do not take for granted. Because I get so much face-time with the campers, I’m always trying to think of things to talk to them about that are relevant to their lives.

Something I came up with for this summer was, surprisingly even to myself, a line from “Can’t Hold Us” by Macklemore, the song that quickly became the anthem for IV 2013. The line says, “*We came here to live life like nobody was watching. I got my city right behind me; if I fall they got me.*” In the middle of this really hype song, this line stuck out. For me, it truly encompassed the mission and goal of Ionian Village.

“We came here to live life like nobody was watching.”

We remove the campers from everything in order to accomplish something *real*. They come to us all the way on the other side of the world. They give us not only three weeks of their summer, but live without their comforts, without their internet, their cell phones, and their technology that connects them to their microcosmic teenage lives. We

remove them from everything in order for something to happen.

Now, I talk a lot about how Ionian Village is a “life-transforming experience.” How Ionian Village is “like nothing you have ever done.” How it’s “the best summer of your life” and “more than just a summer camp.” These lines are not just catchphrases. They are real, accurate descriptions of what takes place at camp: *a transformation*.

The longer I serve this ministry, the more I realize *why* and *how* this incredible transformation occurs. At Ionian Village, everyone gets an opportunity to truly be themselves. Our campers and staff can grow independently, find themselves independently of what their friends want them to be, what their teachers want them to be, and yes, even what their parents want them to be. Our campers and staff have to answer to nobody’s expectations but their own.

We let them live life like nobody is watching. The opportunity and possibility contained in this simple statement is enormous. The stress and pressure on this generation is greater than any generation before. That’s why Ionian Village is so vital

to our campers’ young and impressionable lives. There has to be a place for our young people to go and break free, to let loose and, for once, not worry about grades and scholarships, jobs and careers, and what everyone else thinks of them. They are kids, and we have to allow them a place to be kids.

When, at Ionian Village, they truly begin living like nobody is watching, when they let themselves be innocent, young, and vulnerable, they find themselves. And only when they find themselves – only when they find those unique and incredible individuals hiding inside of whatever persona they’ve created to live up to all the expectations and pressures – only then can they begin to focus on what is truly important: their relationship with God.

At IV, like with all youth ministry programs, we cannot force our campers to believe. Our goal is to help our campers understand that Christ is a part of everything we do and that without Christ in our lives, we cannot be complete. Our goal is to lead them on the path towards Christ. But in the end, it’s a decision that they have to make. They have to *choose* who they want to be, what they want to be when they go home. They have to *choose* to fill that void in their lives with Christ. We

have given them the chance to be themselves, to *live life like nobody is watching*. It is up to them to choose to use the newfound gifts of prayer, silence, and Orthodox friendship to transform their lives.

See, that's the reality. Ionian Village by itself doesn't transform anyone. Our staff members by themselves don't either, nor do the Orthodox Life sessions, or the pristine campgrounds, or even any single trip that we take. Ionian Village simply creates an environment for our young people to make being an Orthodox Christian a real and tangible part of their identities. Ionian Village sets the stage, but in the end, the transformation that occurs is because our campers accepted Christ into their lives. Ionian Village is an *invitation* to change the way you live your life, to cultivate a real conversation with Christ, and to become an individual of faith.


Ionian Village is more than just a summer camp, it is the National camping ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese. It is one of the pioneer camps in this Archdiocese, one of its first camping programs, and the model for many of our camps across America. It is historic and traditional, boasting over 17,000 alumni. Ionian Village is on the move, traveling, expanding, and growing each year. It is at the forefront of programmatic advancement. Yet, all of these things still describe a summer camp and, as we all know, Ionian Village is *more* than that. Ionian Village is an invitation to accept Christ into our lives.


And, at the end of it all, at the end of your stay at Ionian Village, once you accept this invitation, you have your very own city, ready to catch you when you fall. *"I got my city right behind me; if I fall they got me."*


Fr. Evagrios



 **@rubyduffy_**
I'd trade the Internet and the real world for IV any day [#takemeback](#) [#iv2013](#)

 **@thatgreekkid15**
Can't think of a better way to start my adulthood than with these amazing [#IV13](#) people

 **@daniellestavr**
Father was right, this was the BEST SUMMER EVER [@IonianVillage](#) [@frevagoras](#) [#cantholdus](#)


 **@AlekoKontos4**
2 & a half weeks - all it took for 200+ kids to become the best of friends. Everlasting memories, friendship & love. Im thankful! [#IV2013](#)


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 **@sophmams**
#IV2013 is hands down the best thing that ever happened to me and I'm so blessed to have experienced it :)


 **@theNadzzz**
Thank God for all these good people in my life #IV2013


 **@emilydimitriou**
Is it socially acceptable to only post pictures from @IonianVillage for the next 5 years? I THINK SO.


 **@SO_tSIKalas**
What a perfect way to spend my last three weeks of summer. Thank you @IonianVillage for the best experience of my life


 **@nicolettaceebz**
I want an IV reunion and I want it NOWWW. #IV13

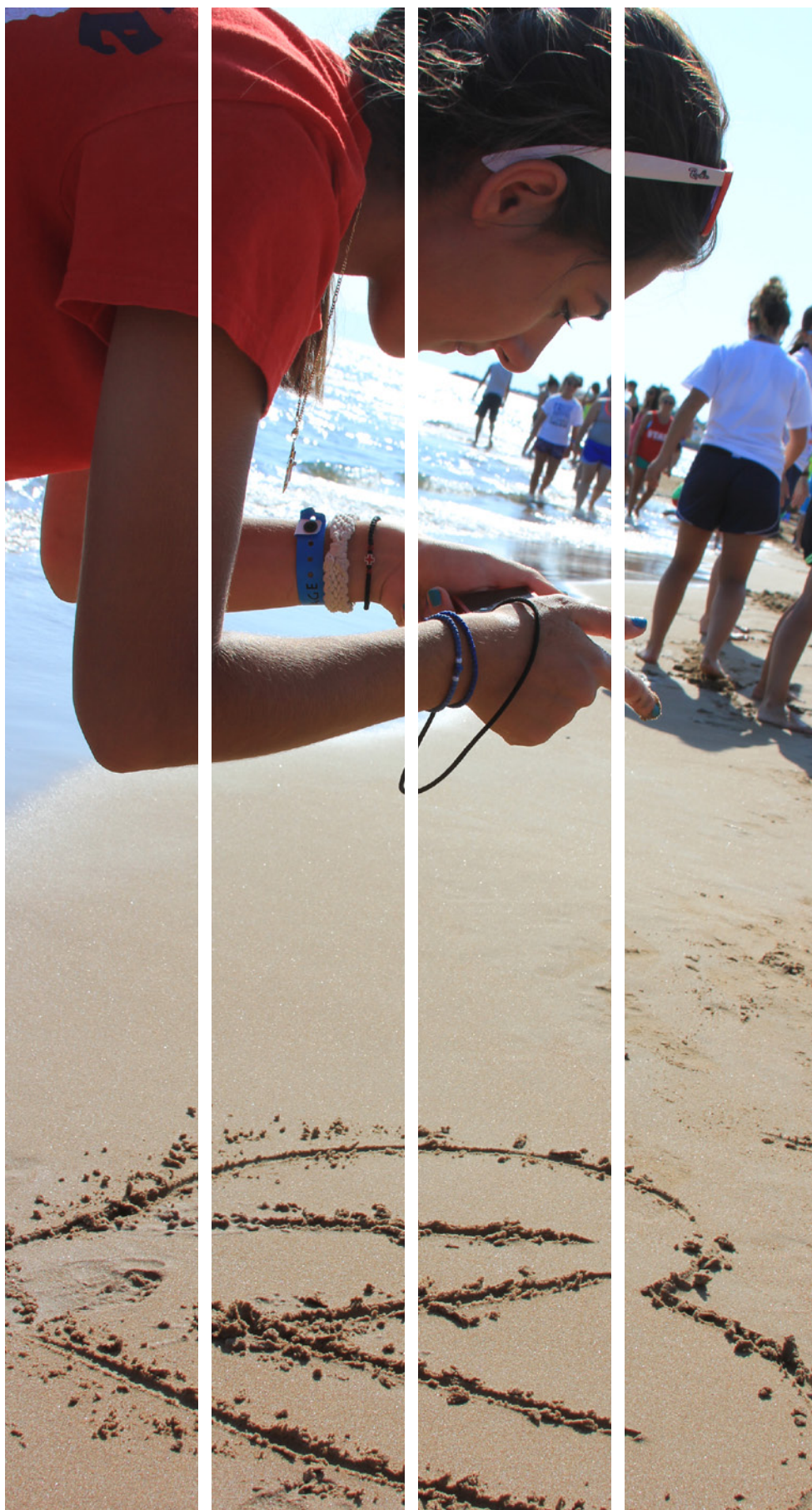
 **@yiannapapadeas**
It's crazy how close you can become with people that you just met in 3 short weeks #IV #Agape #TakeMeBack @IonianVillage

 **@MaryssaMavridis**
When it all comes down to it: -We are a family.- That's as simple as that statement can get.

 **@AMastores97**
Had the BEST time of my life at #IV2013

 **@eleni_elizabeth**
I wish #IV2013 was a school and I was enrolled.

 **greekboy1227**
One week ago I returned from paradise #IV2013





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the pool

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One of the biggest highlights of the 2013 camping season was the Grand Opening of the brand new Ionian Village Pool. Despite his frequent visits to Greece throughout the year to oversee the construction, even Fr. Evagoras was speechless when he first set sight on the finished product. The “oohs and ahhs” of the campers the first day, still tired from their journey from America the day before and not yet adjusted to the Greek heat, were just a small timid expression of their tangible excitement as they looked eagerly at the expanse of blue before them.

The new pool was a game changer. Free Swim at the pool was a completely different experience. Even with almost 250 people jumping and dancing around in the pristine, chlorinated water while DJ Nani Niko (Program Director Nicholas Savas) played all the best songs of the summer, there was still plenty of room to spare. The expanded non-slip and heat resistant deck meant more (and safer) room for activities, and the one-meter perimeter depth meant three and four games of water volleyball happening simultaneously. The traditional Water Olympics? Let’s just say

the bar has been set for camping programs across the world. The cheering, splashing, happiness, and enthusiasm of 200 campers engaging in fun-spirited competition together as a family was overwhelming.

A huge and heartfelt “Thank You” once again goes out to *FAITH: An Endowment for Orthodoxy & Hellenism*, who graciously funded the pool renovation project, the finished state-of-the-art pool is once again a marvel of the Peloponnesos.



@JessicaaSarah

I wish I had a pool like the one at [@IonianVillage](#)



@gabyystav

The pool agiasmos service from IV is front page of the Orthodox Observer [#IV13](#) [#session1swag](#) [#agiasmos](#) [#newpool](#)



@TheMurdakes

At work and the pool is nowhere near as nice as the IV pool plus no beats [#IV13](#) [#DJnaniNiko](#)







In the original plans for the Ionian Village campgrounds, His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos intentionally placed the intimate Chapel at the physical center of the camp to remind campers and staff of the importance of prayer in their lives. The Chapel is the iconic symbol of Ionian Village, and the preeminent place not only for morning and evening Chapel services, but also for prayer and reflection. When campers and staff enter the Chapel to light a candle, venerate the slipper of Saint Dionysios, or hold a devotional, they will now be accompanied not only by each other, but by the Saints of our church.

Ionian Village alumnus Fr. Jon Magoulas of Modesto, California facilitated the beginning of a beautiful relationship between the camp and renowned iconographer Dimitrios Moulras. Dimitri and his Studio are graciously donating their time and talent to fill the interior of the Chapel with iconography. Phase 1 of this project took place this summer and included the first “level” walls of the Chapel. Dimitri was so excited about the project, that he made sure to arrange his busy schedule (he is currently working on other

churches all over Greece and America) to be able to speak with the campers and show them his process. Dimitri, together with his assistants, spent two days at camp during each session, installing the beautiful icons, speaking with the campers about Byzantine iconography, and even teaching iconography sessions. Dimitri understands that watching iconography happen is a unique opportunity and fully appreciates the Ionian Village mission to bring our campers into personal contact with our Orthodox faith.

The addition of iconography has physically and spiritually enhanced our beautiful Ionian Village Chapel. Campers are now drawn inside more than ever before, staying to experience a peaceful moment with many of the beloved saints that we visit.

Photos, clockwise from top left:
 Female Saints from the back and left walls of the Chapel (Archangel Gabriel, Saints Helen, Kyriaki, Marina, Anna, Anastasia, Katherine, and Sophia with her daughters, Faith, Hope, and Love); Iconography lessons with Dimitri; Male Saints from the right wall of the Chapel (Saints Christopher, George, Dionysios, Gerasimos, Spyridon, Nektarios, and Andrew); Finishing touches on the icons while campers look on; Morning Orthros inside the Chapel with the staff surrounded by iconography; Iconography lessons with Dimitri; Dimitri at the installation of the icon of Saint Sophia and her daughters.

iconography

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athletic field



For the very first time, the Ionian Village Athletic Field is green. In a moment of what must have been either divine inspiration or insanity, Fr. Evagoras and groundskeeper George Nastoulis decided that together they would conquer the vast expanse of dust and dirt that was the field. George carefully tended to the seedling grass, patiently watering every corner of the field, waiting for the grass to grow. As many of us remember, the ground at Ionian Village is not hospitable to plant life as it is full of salt and sand. Every tree, flower and bush on the campground is grown separately by George in his greenhouses. Filling the field with grass, then, was no small feat. But George

accomplished it. The luscious green field proved a huge asset to the 2013 program – the Athletics staff joked with the campers on the first night, “you can walk on OUR grass!” and utilized the field to its full potential. Enormous games of soccer, capture the flag, and sponge dodgeball took place regularly, and the Ionian Village Olympics were relocated to the Field, lit by huge stadium lights that made campers and staff truly feel like real Olympians. Even Christophoro Nastoulis came out of retirement to admire the field with his son – and cut the grass.

Photos, clockwise from top: Getting PUMPED for Olympics as the sun sets; spontaneous Greek dancing; Sponge Dodgeball is a great relief from the summer heat; Alexandra shows off the grass; yes - they are actually sitting on the field!





proskinitarion to saint dionysios

IV has always felt a special closeness with Saint Dionysios. His resting place on the island of Zakynthos is directly visible from the Ionian Village Beach and the church dedicated to him has been on the travel itinerary since the very beginning. But Saint Dionysios' connection to Ionian Village and to our hearts is not only a geographic coincidence — he is a Saint that teaches us forgiveness and helps us with our own spiritual healing, which is so much of what Ionian Village is about. He was a person that provided a lofty example of Orthodoxy for us to try to follow as best we can.

Like Saints Gerasimos and Spyridon, he is also a Walking Saint. Some of us may have memories or heard stories about the Saint's visits to campers and staff at IV in need of an extra spiritual "boost." As far as we are concerned, Saint Dionysios is always welcome at Ionian Village. His presence and protection has guided the camp now for more than 40 years.

As a symbol of these years of veneration and gratitude, and as a way for our campers and staff to connect personally with the Saint, a Proskinitarion was built by the walkway to

the beach in view of the ocean and Zakynthos. A Proskinitarion is a small worship area that has been part of the tradition of Orthodoxy in Greece for centuries. Small proskinitaria dedicated to favorite saints or memorializing life events can be found all over Greece, dotting the sides of roads and highways and taking up corners of already small backyards. The Ionian Village Proskinitarion to Saint Dioysios is built of stone with a whitewashed back and is surrounded by a grassy area with benches to encourage prayer and devotionals in front of the saint. The Proskinitarion will eventually include a custom icon of Saint Dionysios.

The Proskinitarion and its future iconography are made possible by the over \$7,000 of generous donations received in memory of Fr. Evagoras Constantinides, who passed away last spring and was the grandfather of his namesake, current director of Ionian Village.



Photos, from top: The Proskinitarion made of stone dedicated to Saint Dionysios with the direct view of the ocean, a reminder that the Saint is always near; Fr. Evagoras explains the significance of the new addition to the campgrounds.

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Byzantine Venture campers experienced what so many Greek Americans long for: a night of fun with Basile the Comedian. In a magnanimous gesture of generosity and community, Basile, together with his family, visited Glyfa and Ionian Village to donate a show to our campers. Basile and his family happily immersed themselves in the life and culture of IV, turning around 10 minutes after their arrival to get on a bus full of campers to go

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BASILE: LIVE at ionian village



to Patras! Basile listened attentively to staff member Sophie Burge's wonderful tour guiding skills, even laughing at her jokes.

After a day and a half of getting to know campers and staff, Basile's performance in the Amphitheater was even better, as he was able to incorporate aspects of life at IV into his specifically catered show. Campers laughed lightheartedly as Basile made spitting noises to imitate the "fantastic" water pressure of the IV showers, as he poked fun at Fr. Evagoras, and as he pointed out Program Director Niko's ever-growing command of the Greek language. (If you see him, make sure you ask him how to say "83.")


"BASILE: LIVE at Ionian Village" was a huge success, and Ionian Village is pleased to welcome Basile and his entire family to ours!


Be sure to check out Basile's website, www.basilethecomedian.com, or follow him on Twitter at @BasileComedian for some laughs.

Photos, clockwise from top: Basile posing for the camera; Laughing their hearts out; Making sure his young audience's laughter is up to his standards.



 **@AlexCosto**
μία απίστευτη μέρα, σε ένα
μοναδικό μέρος με 250 εκπληκτικά
παιδιά ... RepowerGreece @Ionian
Village

 **@RepowerGreece**
για σας ... from the incredible
Ionian Village

 **@RepowerGreece**
The heart of Greek American
unique bonds beats at the Ionian
Village with 250 amazing students -
ambassadors of the real Greece!!!

 **@RepowerGreece**
250 students making
RepowerGreece t-shirts ... Amazing !!!



As Ionian Village Alumni, we understand and appreciate the up front and personal experience of Greece provided by the camp. Watching Greece continuing to receive negative attention in the press due to its struggling economy, the Admin Team was driven to bring these issues to our campers and ask them to think critically about their relationship with Greece.


their own photographs to create “windows” to Greece, and engaged in a discussion with Alexandros Costopoulos, a founding member of the RepowerGreece team. The insight and positivity of the campers was astounding as they stood up to the challenge we placed before them.

Inspired by RepowerGreece, a public diplomacy campaign whose mission is to positively redefine the country’s public perception, Ionian Village created a series of hands-on and creative activities designed to challenge campers to put into words and images what continues to make Greece a unique country today. Campers created screen-printed t-shirts that highlighted positive aspects of Greece, worked with

For more information on RepowerGreece, visit them online at www.repowergreece.com or follow the initiative on Twitter at @repowergreece.

Photos, clockwise from top left: Proudly showing off his hard work - the Trojan helmet represents strength and resilience; A masterpiece drying in the Grecian sun; Alexandros Costopoulos leading campers in a discussion; “Self Portrait with Fanta;” “Self Portrait with Watermelon.”

 **@BasileComedian**
Concert Last Night At Ionian Village! Smash hit! London & Birmingham UK ready to ink deal for 2 big shows, maybe more! Stay tuned for more!

 **@BasileComedian**
You know your Greek when you go to the the Doctors office for a check up, then immediately have to go Yiayia's for a second opinion!



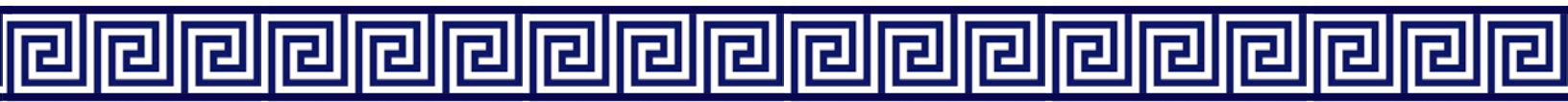
Many of our Alumni reading the Golden Bridge will have fond memories of Fr. Costa Sitaras, past Ionian Village Director who led the camp for 25 years. Fr. Costa is a true Ionian Village hero. He left an indelible mark in the hearts of thousands of campers as well as on the program itself. After 17 years away, Fr. Costa's travels brought him back to Greece and allowed him to return to Ionian Village for the first time.

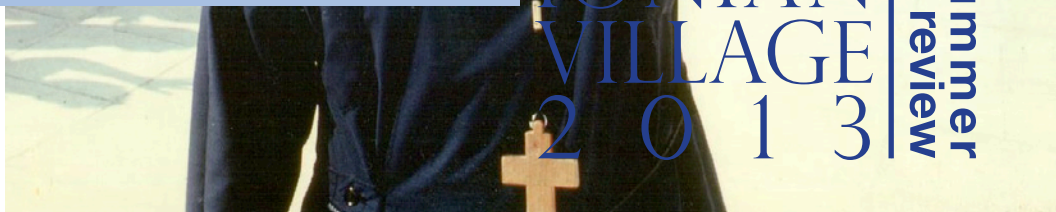
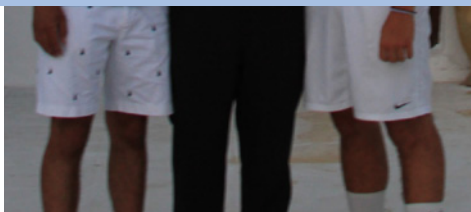
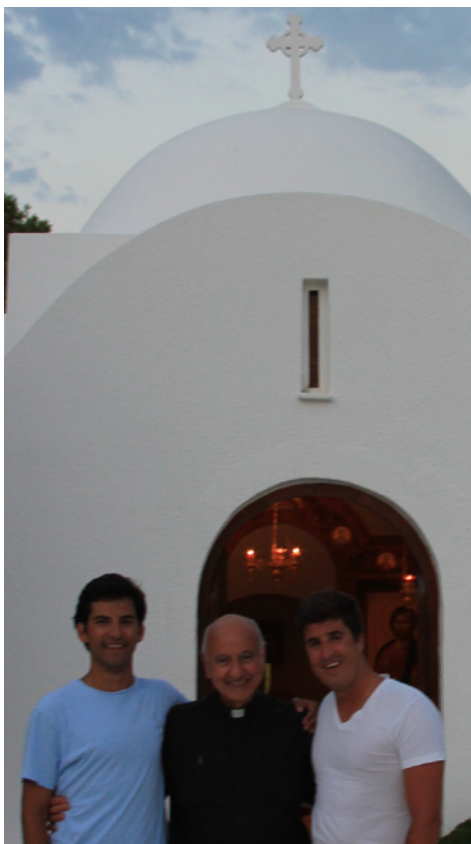
Fr. Costa was accompanied by his son, Basil, who spent the summers of his childhood at Ionian Village with his family. After taking in the beautiful sights and sounds of the campgrounds, commenting on how little had changed, Fr. Costa and Basil tearfully embraced the Nastoulis family that continues to take care of the physical needs of the camp, with Kyria Sophia pinching Basil's cheeks and commenting on how much he'd grown.

Fr. Costa addressed the entire camp in the Amphitheater and gave Sunday's sermon, leaving the campers with heartfelt and inspirational words about the importance of their faith and heritage. In true "Fr. Costa style," he made sure to make one on one time to meet and connect with many of the campers and staff, who were humbled to speak with the legend himself. He looks *fantastic*, by the way!

Photos, clockwise from top: Fr. Costa giving the sermon on Sunday at the Divine Liturgy; Fr. Evagoras warmly embraces his esteemed and beloved predecessor; Sharing a moment with Kyria Sophia; Talking about life with Staff Member Phillip Constantinides, who had been a "PK" at Ionian Village with Fr. Costa as the Director; Staff Members Demetrios Cokinos and Demetrios Buck stealing a picture with the famous Fr. Costa in front of the Chapel - their mothers (who are sisters: Ellen (Tsilimigras) Cokinos and Christy (Tsilimigras) Buck) had been on staff with Fr. Costa as the Director; Fr. Costa waves hello from the Amphitheater in the traditional all-camp photograph, summer of 1979.

fr. costa's trip home



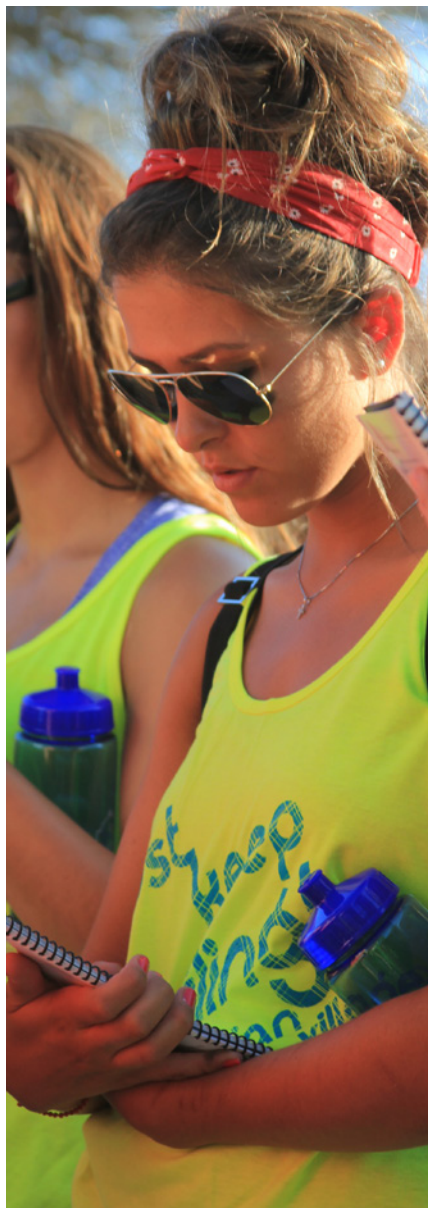


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 **@madelineirene1**
@IonianVillage Divine Liturgy wasn't the same without my IV family, but I met them at the chapel in my prayers #IV13 #cantholdus #somuchlove

 **@nickieconominaj**
IV friends are the best kind of friends out there. @IonianVillage #ivreunion


 **@rubyduffy_**
Almost got hit by a car. Road blockers where you at?? #iv2013


 **@stosybo**
the word Crete will always mean so much more to me than just a Greek island #IV2013

 **@daniellestavr**
It's wierd not having to make up a good cheer to be able to eat @IonianVillage









 **@tz0rtzis**
I'm pretty sure my cool card shattered when I dropped it #iv2013

 **@kath_in_the_hat**
A little party never killed nobody! #WhiteParty #IV2013

 **@Cass_Mavromatis**
I'm sorry but I've seem to have gotten lost on my way to The Trap, could someone help me get back #IonianVillage #PostIVDepression

 **@ABC_easyyas123**
I just turned on the radio and Can't Hold Us comes on. Why. #IV13 #takemeback #myhappyplace



-  **@MariaAmalie3**
I refuse to drink out of anything but my IV water bottle now [#IV2013](#)
-  **@MikeySaltas**
Singing The Son Of Zakyntos to myself so I can fall asleep [#IV13](#)
-  **@greekboy1227**
I saw a shooting star at the bonfire on the beach [#IV2013](#)
-  **@jesus_crist13**
where are my chocolate covered loukoumades on this sunday morning? [#iv2013](#) [#kyriasophia](#)
-  **@DinaKozanas**
The one piece tan line problem is real [#iv2013](#)
-  **@e11_be11**
Walking everywhere without 200 people << [#IonianVillage](#) [#bringmeback](#)
-  **@christinakeares**
Watching the iv staff application videos after knowing them makes them so much more entertaining! Miss the amazing staff so much (: [#iv2013](#)
-  **@MaryssaMavridis**
Coming back from Greece and only wanting to wear monastery skirts to church [#IV2013](#) [#TakeMeBack](#)





more memories





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@babyitsjustfait

Still can't sleep a wink, maybe it would help if I got tired out by some crazy flexivities... #IV2013



@sophia_lipp

wow I just really want to go back to the insanity that is #IonianVillage #IV2013 #Psara



@ChristoKatsifis

I have nothing to eat at my house, where is Kyria Sophia to feed me?! #IVprobs #IV2013 #bestcookever #dreamwoman



@DemetraKap

@frevagoras @IonianVillage just printed over 500 IV pictures, love every single one of them!! #bestsummerofmylife #IV13



@rubyduffy_

American bugs don't scare me anymore. I've dealt with scorpions #iv2013 #inthewoods





NICK NEOFOTIDIS

2003 STAFF, 2012 (STC) & 2013 (STC)

FILMING PROJECT

A true Greek American from Astoria, New York, Nick Neofotidis has been around the world and back with a phenomenal career as a Freelance Director of Photography (read: he makes movies!). Now, his travels and his career bring him full circle...to Glyfa.

After just one summer as a Staff Member at IV, Nick Neofotidis was hooked. When he left the campgrounds in August of 2003 to return to New York, like so many of us after our own once-in-a-lifetime Ionian Village experience comes to an end, Nick most likely imagined it was the last time he would set foot at Ionian Village. Yet now, just about ten years later, his spectacular and enviable career path has placed Nick in a position to give back to the camp in an incredibly unique way.

A 2004 graduate of Northeastern University with a degree in Communications and a minor in Music Industry, Nick is living the dream as a highly successful freelancer in the field of video production and editing. His work has given him the opportunity to work with major TV channels, such as MTV and Discovery, as well as some of the music industry's most well known current artists.

Most recently, Nick has taken time out of his busy schedule to return to Ionian Village with his incredible skill set, tasked by Fr. Evagoras to capture life at IV as we know it - all the crazy fun, excitement, and emotion - and create video shorts to promote the camp to this new generation of teenagers. If you have not had a chance to see the series produced after the 2012 camping season, they are not to be missed! New videos featuring, among other things, the renovated pool will be released shortly.

YOU HAVE A PRETTY INTERESTING JOB. TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT WHAT YOU DO.

I'm a freelance Director of Photography, or basically a Camera Man! I also edit video and take photos more as a hobby. Best part about my job is the travel. One day I could be in South Africa filming a documentary and the next month I could be at the VMA's for MTV producing a part of the preshow. As a freelancer that's the advantage that I have, going project to project filming amazing people and places all over the world. Whether it's filming a documentary or short film or a news story, each project gives me the chance to experience something new and apply my skills as a Director of Photography, Editor or Producer in a unique way.

FR. EVAGORAS IS OBVIOUSLY EXTREMELY IMPRESSED BY YOUR WORK AND HAS BROUGHT YOU TO IONIAN VILLAGE NOW TWO SUMMERS IN A ROW TO FILM CAMP LIFE. TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THESE PROJECTS.

Fr. Evagoras and I met a few years back when I discussed possibly shooting some videos at camp and specifically the power and impact that these videos might have on the program and its future campers. Father really loves this camp and the kids, so when we were discussing how and what to do it was very clear to me that we were going to get something great. And for us both, the most important thing was telling the story of the camp and the summers at IV in the best way possible. There is so much that goes into a session and capturing it all was the main

focus and I believe we did that in a really fun and innovative way. Once we decided on this vision, it was great to have Father really trust me and let me create and film things without hesitation.

HOW WAS IT BEING BACK AT IONIAN VILLAGE AFTER SO MANY SUMMERS AWAY?

It had been 9 years since the last time I had gone to camp and at first it was such an interesting feeling going back. The last time I was there I was 21 years old, still in college, and still discovering a lot about myself and my faith and religion. Then in 2012 - being 30 years old and having seen so many wonderful parts of the world through my work, having found myself a bit more, and being stronger in my faith - it was really amazing to look back and realize how blessed I have been since the last time I was at camp. Honestly the hardest part of the whole experience was not seeing any of my fellow counselors from '03 hanging in the staff lounge or staying up late for IVPD. But ironically enough a few campers from 2003 had grown up and become counselors! It was wonderful to see that part of camp come full circle.

HOW DO YOU FEEL YOUR EXPERIENCE AT IONIAN VILLAGE HAS HAD AN IMPACT ON YOUR LIFE?

IV has had an immeasurable impact on my life without a doubt. Not only the people and places that I have been with camp, but the personal self discovery and strengthening of my faith that happens while at camp, and when you go home and back to your daily



life. It's a crazy little world out there and every time I go back to IV it's like I can hit the reset button and get my life back in focus. It's something that I remember daily because of IV. To be happy with the things I have, to be humble and thankful and to not worry as much about the petty things. Fr. Evagoras always says, "let go, don't worry" and of course, "Disconnect, Experience, Rejuvenate." I love that saying because it really speaks to what this program is about.

ARE YOUR IV FRIENDSHIPS STILL GOING STRONG?

I still speak with a few of my counselors from 2003 and now with Facebook and Instagram and (because I'm still old school) an occasional phone call, it's pretty easy to see how everyone is doing. So many of my friends from camp have grown up, gotten married and have families now. It's always so amazing to go to a baptism or wedding of an IV friend and remember our times together. And even if we don't speak often, I really believe there is this bond that we all feel and conjure up, on occasion, over an ice-cold frappe.

FINALLY, WE HAVE TO ASK: HOW WAS SWIMMING IN THE BRAND NEW POOL?

I mean what can I say, it's amazing! If you didn't know any better you would think you were at a 5-star hotel in Miami! But you don't have to take my word for it. Go check out the Video from this summer, or better yet — *go to camp!*



The exciting not-to-be-missed videos created by Nick Neofotidis are scattered throughout the Ionian Village website, www.ionianvillage.org.

Photos, clockwise from opposite: Nick dancing with campers and staff at the 2012 Panigiri; Filming the Scissor Dancers in Andamarca, Peru; with Cabin Crete in 2003; On site in Tokyo, Japan filming Dekatora Truck Culture; with IV Staff in 2003.



career launch at camp?

Even though Nick Neofotidis and Matt Macris were not at IV together this summer, turns out they have a lot in common! Matt has become a budding amateur videographer, turning footage from the videocamera he wasn't even planning on bringing into a very personal video montage of memories.

BY **Matthew Macris**
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON
BV 2013, CRETE

“Initially, I had no intention of bringing a camera to camp, but my mom wanted me to take pictures. Since I didn't have a still camera, I brought my video camera because it takes some mediocre photos. I don't geek out too much about cameras; I'm more of a production guy. The camera I brought was a rather high-end Sony Handycam that takes absurdly nice video quality for its size and was great for camp (portable, high definition, durable, large amount of hard drive space).

A few days into IV, I decided I wanted to make a video to remember the trip. I thought it would be rather lame if it was just MY video and I decided to share the filming duties with my cabin. As long as I get good footage, I prefer to do the editing anyway. So I told everyone in a devotional that my camera was now the communal camera of Cabin Crete

and to film whatever they deemed worthy. I didn't know what kind of video I would be making later, it all depended on the footage we ended up gathering.

People loved being on camera; they would go out of their way to give a shout-out or a cheer to the camera or to just wave or make a funny face. Although, I remember that Gabby tried to get me off of the camera and go dance on more than one occasion. (#buzzkill)

After camp, I had next to no idea what was on my camera. It ended up being a total of just over seven hours of footage, including the entirety of Basile's stand-up routine and a few time-lapse shots that hadn't developed the way I wanted. In the end, there was about three to four hours of practical footage. Editing is always as tedious as it is fun. Sifting through four hours of footage to find peppy

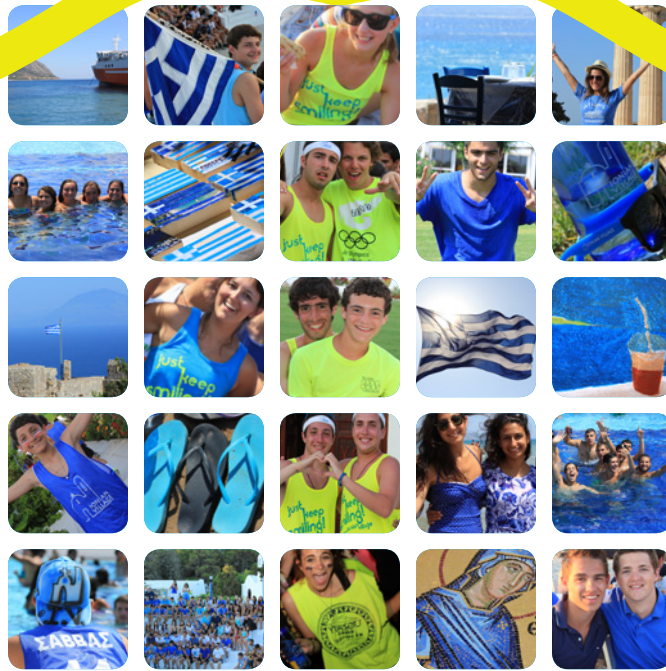
shots that aren't repetitive is a bit of a chore. However, in doing this, I got to relive a lot of the good times from camp, and that made it easy.

After reviewing the videos a bit, I was thinking of the song that Father had chosen to be the theme of this year at IV (“Can't Hold Us,” of course), and I started putting clips together over it....and got to the final product. I was ecstatic when Father shared it on his facebook and the IV page!

You know how they say Disney Land is the happiest place on earth? Well, they haven't been to Ionian Village.”

Matt's awesome video montage can be viewed on YouTube at the link below or by searching the video's title, “Can't Hold Us - IV BV 2013 Cabin Crete Montage.”

www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=c5DQJzD3HQk



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THE BEST SUMMER OF THEIR LIVES

WE ASKED THEM TO TELL US WHY.



Upon returning from another fantastic summer, Fr. Evagoras asked the 2013 campers and staff to reflect upon their time at Ionian Village. So often, we think of our time at IV as the “best summer of our life.” We challenged them to tell us why. The response was nothing less than overwhelming. A few of the responses are published here. The rest will be made available on our website.

ANDRIANNA JONAS

PALOS HILLS, ILLINOIS
BV 2013, PELLA

I have grown up going to Ionian Village and I was beyond excited to be attending my eighth session this summer. I knew it would be amazing because I felt I was old enough to now appreciate everything a lot more.

The people always make Ionian Village *amazing* but this year it was more than that. Ionian Village gives an incredible opportunity that no Metropolis camp could give back home, and that is visiting churches, monasteries, and relics. That is the true beauty of Ionian Village. You become so much



stronger in your faith and it is a humbling experience. The greatest part is that you aren't alone for once. You are *surrounded* with other *young Orthodox Christians* that are as eager and enthusiastic about the faith as you are! The *agape* that is made in only 20 days is indescribable and the most beautiful thing. You create memories and friendships that will last a *lifetime*. Your Ionian Village family will always be there for you and send prayers your way.

If Ionian Village could be described in Macklemore lyrics they would be, “We came here to live life like nobody was watching. I got my city right behind me. If I fall, they got me.” *That* is what makes Ionian Village the *best* experience of your life!

Photo: Andrianna killing it at the water jug race during the Ionian Village Pentathlon!



SUSAN ATHANASIA KOURTIS

NEEDHAM, MASSACHUSETTS
BV 2013, DELPHI

I was walking back from confession at the Proskinitarion of St. Dionysios. All I could hear were the waves of the Ionian Sea, paired of course with the sound of crickets chirping in the olive trees. Tonight was my first time ever going to the Sacrament of Confession, and I didn't realize just how emotional it would be. Suddenly I felt my experience at Ionian Village change. I was no longer simply a tourist in Greece, learning about Orthodox Christianity and Greek history. All of a sudden, I was an Orthodox Christian who had been called to this place to experience the faith.

I passed by the chapel. A small light illumined the sacred place we all hold so close to our hearts. It is the center of lives, a beacon of hope through all the things that worry us. A voice stopped me in my tracks. My counselor walked over and asked, "How was confession?" I couldn't help but answer with a smile on my face, even through tears. "It was really great," I replied. It seems those were the only words I could manage.

That night, I went to bed knowing what I

needed to change when I got back home. I knew what I had been missing out on: a conversation with God that had changed me in ways I finally could begin to understand. The rest of my time at Ionian Village was not the same. The saints we visited were all more meaningful, and each time I began to pray, whether it was at their tombs or in front of their icons, tears of joy filled my eyes. Ionian Village had helped me understand why having a conversation with God is so important. I'd say for me, that makes it the best summer of my life.

Photo: Susan (right) with cabin-mate Leah on Aegina.



MADELINE GELIS

CINCINNATI, OHIO
STC 2013, PSARA

When I found out I was going to Ionian Village, the one phrase I kept hearing was, "are you ready?" I thought I was. In fact, every time I talked to someone about IV, they always told me I was going to love it. However, as the trip grew closer, I got nervous. What if it didn't live up to my expectations? What if I don't meet life-long friends and make amazing memories? *What if I'm not ready?*

That last question followed me until I arrived at camp, and I will say this – I wasn't ready. I had no idea what a crazy, sleep deprived,

“WHAT IF
I'M NOT
READY?”

amazing summer I was about to have. I didn't know that the counselors would be like my parents, or that I would dance like a crazy person in front of strangers that soon became the greatest people I know. No one could have prepared me for the amount of fun I had exploring Greece and visiting the stunningly beautiful sights. Most importantly, I was not aware of the impact that God would have on my life. Fr. Evagoras said over and over again, "Ionian Village is not just a summer camp," and it's not. Orthodox life sessions, going to confession, venerating saints, and simply taking the time to feel my faith brought me more peace than I could have ever imagined. IV taught me how to walk with God every second and showed me what true joy and love in Christ is.

So when you ask me what made Ionian Village the best summer of my life, my answer is that it wasn't. It was the highlight of my life.

Everything from campfires on the beach to visiting the Acropolis was perfection. Another camper summed up IV perfectly saying, "From the outside looking in, you can't understand it. From the inside looking out, you can't explain it." I miss Ionian Village all the time, but I am so grateful for the memories I made, along with the family I found in my fellow campers and staff. I will never forget my three weeks in Greece this summer, and I thank God that He let me experience them.

Photo: Madeline all dressed up for a night of fun at Carnivali.



ELENI SABRACOS

TIMONIUM, MARYLAND
BV 2013, DELOS

Take a moment and imagine a place free of judgment. A place where it doesn't matter what you are wearing, how much money you have, what school you go to, who your parents are, who your friends are, what mistakes you have made, what shape or size you are. None of that matters. Imagine a place where you can leave behind all your problems, a place where you don't have any worries, where you aren't constantly being ridiculed and yelled at, a place where you are free to be whoever you want to be. A place where you can meet people, like you, people who are searching for something, people who want the exact same thing that you do. Imagine a place where you can drop your cool card, put on your silly pants, and be nothing less than the best version of yourself. A place where everything you have previously known and have believed in is put to the ultimate test.

This place I am describing sounds almost unreal. It sounds like heaven. It sounds awesome. This summer I went there. I went to this magical place that I am describing. I thought that I had just signed up for summer

camp, you know I filled out a form, paid money, got on plane to Greece, and I was there, right? Wrong. God chose me to be there. Ionian Village is not just any ordinary summer camp, it is an opportunity to change your life. This is one of the hardest things I have ever had to write because none of my words can do justice to how amazing Ionian Village is. I don't know how to explain to you how incredible it felt for once in my life to feel a part of something so revolutionary. To feel loved by so many people. To be constantly surrounded by happiness and positivity. To feel like I could do anything I set my mind to and if I failed I had 200 people who truly cared about me standing right behind me. My summer spent at Ionian Village was the best summer of my entire life and I can keep telling you all the reasons why it was so amazing, all the places we traveled that were so amazing, and all the people I met that were so amazing. But you will never be able to understand how life changing it is until you have lived it.

Every day I look down at my wrist to where I always am wearing my Ionian Village "#areyouready" wrist band and not only is a reminder of everything I had learned there but I like to think that it is my one connection to everyone I met at Ionian Village. You see things at Ionian Village and experience things that you simply cannot experience anywhere else. I have never been so close to God in my entire life, I have never felt so confident and strong about my faith, and I have never felt so right in this world. Three weeks! That's all it took for me to change my life. That's all it took. After 16 years, that is all it took. A leap of faith.

"GOD CHOSE ME TO BE THERE"

Photos: Eleni showing off her blue and white stripes for Greek Invasion; Anthony demonstrating his racket ball skills by the pool.



ANTHONY BALOURIS

PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA
STAFF 2013, SPETSAI (STC)
& CRETE (BV)

It's rare in life to participate in something that requires sacrifice on behalf of others, yet is personally rewarding. It often seems to be a choice between one or the other. To go along with the many other qualities that make it unique, Ionian Village is certainly one of those things. Is the job demanding? Sure. It was arguably the most physically and emotionally stressful experience of my life, but by the end of the summer, I knew that I was there for a purpose. I was called to aid campers in their quest to find God, themselves, and to see what it's like to actually live an Orthodox and Christ-centered life.

The shift in attitudes among the campers was astonishing throughout the summer. What was, initially, just a 20 day escape from the



'real world' became a roadmap to how to live life to the fullest. They were able to go home knowing that the 'reality' that awaited them didn't have to be permanent. Their perspective had changed, and it's something that, as a staff member, you are able to step back and observe like a proud parent. While the campers are sad to leave this meaningful place and separate from the wonderful people they've met, it's almost as if a part of them wants to return home as soon as possible so

that they may take the things they learned and apply them to life outside of camp.

As a member of the staff, it was privilege to be able to show the next generation that life as an Orthodox Christian is possible in our increasingly secularized world, and in turn, their receptive nature helped to reinforce the principle in myself.

**"IT WAS A
PRIVELEGE TO BE
ABLE TO SHOW THE NEXT
GENERATION THAT
LIFE AS AN
ORTHODOX
CHRISTIAN,
IS POSSIBLE"**



**ELENI
SALTAS**
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH
STAFF 2013, DELPHI (STC)
& PSARA (BV)

There is no way to accurately sum up summer 2013 for me, because it was not only the best summer of my life, but also the best experience of my life. From visiting beautiful sites throughout Greece to the late night devotionals with a cabin full of eager to learn young women, I grew spiritually and emotionally in just two short months.

I've never felt more at home in a place that was 7,000 miles away from my actual home back in the states. From day one as a staff member I felt so unbelievably welcome in a group of people who were all so different in strengths and abilities yet so similar in goals and the way they lived an Orthodox life. I never believed it was possible to feel so close to so many people so quickly, but that's the magic of Ionian Village, it just happens. And

the kids hadn't even arrived yet—and that's where my life truly changed.

I was blessed to be the camp counselor of Cabins Delphi and Psara this summer, one was full of soon-to-be college girls, and one was full of girls ready to get their drivers' licenses. The group dynamics were worlds apart, but each cabin became a family in just three weeks, and that's something I'll always remember. The girls taught me far more than I ever taught them. At our outrageous evening activities they taught me how to be a teenager again, dressing up in wild outfits and cheering cabin counts. During Orthodox Life sessions and devotionals they inspired me to open up along with them and awed me with their knowledge of our faith.

Ionian Village is something I wish everyone could experience, and Father Evagoras has done an excellent job making it what it is today. From one of his late night talks surrounded by candlelight, he told the campers and staff that we are all the light of the world. If our light (or candle) goes out, we will always have someone to reignite that flame. Thanks to Ionian Village I now know that my candle will never burn out, and if it does there is a huge alumni family that will always be there for me.

Photo: Eleni pumping up the crowd with Ionian Village spirit at the Olympics.



a truly spiritual odyssey

A REFLECTION BY Fr. Evagoras

You know, Young Adult Ministry has long been a puzzling thing for many in our faith, and indeed in faith traditions across the spectrum. The same question always returns: how do you get these young people, these college students and young professionals to “buy in” to the Church or to the faith? With so many other things constantly being offered to them, on top of the fact that they have more of a sense of identity, what are we as the Church to do? We offer conferences and retreats, and while we have seen those make some progress, the “young adult ministry”





is a very real issue that we must face. I will admit: heading into this trip, even I had some doubts. I had never been on a Spiritual Odyssey before, and I was frankly scared that the participants would not react with the same joy and innocence that we see with our younger teenage campers at Ionian Village.

And I was right. They didn't react with joy and innocence, they reacted with their minds, their intellects and their hearts. In Cyprus, the reality of the Turkish invasion truly left a visible mark on many of the participants, and this showed in the many questions that they asked at the sites, at the churches, on the bus and at meals. When we stumbled into a tiny church where the priest was kind enough to show us a piece of blood-soaked rope used to tie Christ to the Cross and a piece of the True Cross itself, left there by Saint Helen on her journey back to Constantinople in the 4th century AD, they were moved to silence and tears, without me even having to interpret the significance. At a monastery on Crete where hundreds of freedom fighters gave up their lives in an explosion rather than giving themselves up to the Turks, they were humbled and reverent. They digested everything that we gave them and processed the information in a much more mature and adult fashion.

We didn't try to force feed them the faith or even an experience, all we did was lead them to water. From there, they were amazing. They toured the monasteries and churches, the museums and exhibits, full of questions and curiosity, loaded with yearning to find

out more than just facts, yearning to find out who it is they are, who they are becoming. This trip, this Spiritual Odyssey, is exactly what Young Adult Ministry is meant to be. We have to offer our young people an opportunity to grow, while being careful not to try and force-feed them the church. We have to help them discover, *to want to discover*, their faith, and why it is important to them. They are ready, willing even, to take those next steps, but simply need to be shown where to start. If we walk that delicate line, then we will most assuredly be doing right by these young people.

I want to thank each and every one of our participants: thank you to Julie and Irene, Krista and Nicole, Demi and Alexis, Laura and Helen, Dionna and Amalea, Charissa and Alexis and of course our three amazing young men, Alex, Andy and Leftheri for opening your hearts and minds to this amazing experience. Thank you for embracing everything we threw at you, for challenging us to make this the best trip possible, and for making this adventure so much fun. We couldn't think of a better way to start an Ionian Village summer. Spiritual Odyssey...see you next summer!



Spiritual Odyssey 2013 visited Cyprus and Crete.

Photos, clockwise from opposite: Some of the girls posing on a quintessential Grecian step; Fr. Evagoras and the 2013 Spiritual Odyssey group; Looking out at the clear blue Cypriot sea; Statue of Archbishop Makarios of Crete; Stroll through Rethymnon, Crete; The Arkadi Monastery in Crete.

INTRODUCING



WELCOME to **IV On-the-Go**, a new program of the Office of Ionian Village that promises to give the young people of your home parish a taste of our unique and interactive approach to youth ministry.

Ionian Village has always been a travel program. While we can't possibly transport the entire country of Greece, we realized that we **can** travel with our enthusiasm, our energy, and our crazy ideas to bring the Ionian Village experience to as many young people as possible!

IV On-the-Go participants will experience a fun, exciting retreat run by former and current members of the Ionian Village Staff and Administration Team. Just like at camp, participants will encounter our Orthodox faith in an up close and personal and unforgettable way.

Each **IV On-the-Go** program is catered to the individual needs and availability of your parish. We can coordinate anything from a one-day retreat, a lock-in, an overnight trip, or even a full weekend-long retreat. All we ask of our host parish is to provide a venue, food, and the participants and we will do the rest! Our **IV On-the-Go** Team takes care of everything from creating a schedule, writing content, and bringing all the supplies for our exciting faith-centered

events. Best of all, each **IV On-the-Go** program is supervised and led by experienced members of our Ionian Village Team from all over the country. **As an added bonus, there is NO COST to our parishes for this amazing ministry!**

The goal of Ionian Village is simple: to bring the young people of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America into a close understanding and love for both our Orthodox faith and Hellenic heritage. While the Ionian Village summer camping programs aim to reach as many campers as possible each year, with **IV On-the-Go** we are excited to provide the opportunity for even more young people to interact with the amazing Ionian Village Ministry here in America throughout the school year.

the **IONIAN VILLAGE** **ALUMNI PROJECT**



because some things just don't change.

2,210 registered alumni and counting...

The Ionian Village Alumni Project, 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.

Now, over 2,000 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 not only by reuniting friends from the past, but also by providing the opportunity for new relationships and memories to grow.



To schedule a personalized
IV On-the-Go event for
your parish, contact the
Office of Ionian Village!

We hope you will join us!

www.ionianvillage.org/alumni





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