



# *the golden bridge*

FALL 2014



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







## FR. EVAGORAS CONSTANTINIDES, DIRECTOR

My Dear Fellow Alumni,

Back in June, I wrote to each of you using our email listserv right before the campers arrived in Greece. I told you about the summer to come, about how it was going to be the biggest summer that Ionian Village has seen in over 25 years, and about the amazing group of staff from all over the country we had collected. I was so excited for the summer.

And today, I'm even more excited! This was, by far, one of the best summers of Ionian Village in recent history. Now, sometimes when I say things like that, campers and staff members look at me quizzically and ask, "What about my summer? Wasn't my summer good enough?" Of course it was! And, as should be expected, the camp is getting better with each passing moment, with each year. What makes it the "best summer" doesn't necessarily make it "better."

You see, I don't ever think that one summer is better than another. Each summer, in its own way, is an amazing, life-transforming experience for our campers and staff members. Each summer is, to the young people who participate, the "best summer of their lives." I thoroughly believe that

everyone who passes through the gates of Ionian Village comes at the correct time in each of their lives – because at that moment in their lives, they were ready and in need of their very own "best summer."

And so, when I talk about this summer being the best, it is not to disvalue this long history of "best summers" at Ionian Village, but to indicate that the program is continuing to grow and change and adapt to the needs and concerns of the campers. The ability to constantly and creatively grow is what makes each year the best summer!

2014 included several areas of growth. This year, our Music and Greek Culture created a new curriculum that brought our campers in touch with the everyday experience of living in Greece. They danced, they learned about frappes and evzones, and they studied modern Greek culture and society. The Flexivities program was taken to levels above and beyond, and a new evening activity was debuted. Campers and staff ate every meal in a newly covered Trap with new flooring and new taverna-style chairs. The walkways by the Chapel were repaved. And the flowers and trees grew just a little bit bigger, bolder and brighter.

Most importantly, in Orthodox Life, we reverted to where we should have been all along. Sometimes, we try too hard to teach our kids something. At retreats and Sunday School and even sometimes at camps, I have found that we are so desperate to teach the young people about the faith that we forget to allow them to live and experience their faith. In an effort to focus on this core concept of living their faith, we went back to the model of Orthodox Life used in the 70's, 80's and 90's, which focused each session around one open-ended question and then gave each camper a chance to respond honestly and uninterrupted, with their whole heart.

This is so important for our young campers and staff. Many of them in their lives back home don't have a place to go to talk, to be heard. Camp is often the only place where they feel like they can let their feelings and emotions out. In an effort to provide our campers and staff with a safe place to talk and to be heard, we amended our Orthodox Life sessions to create an environment of openness. Now don't get me wrong; this isn't counseling or therapy. We don't do this to encourage crying or to play on emotion, but simply to fill a void in our campers' lives: simply to give them the chance to be heard. This is a very powerful thing, allowing our



campers to simply express their emotions. And it is even more powerful when it happens within the context of Orthodox Life. As priests and facilitators, we are then able to frame the conversation in an Orthodox light and to focus on those campers who might need special attention or more time to talk. Ionian Village isn't Sunday School. We aren't here to necessarily teach, or at least, not in the way many people understand it. We are here to help these campers know and live their faith.

So we are on the move, as I've told you times before. Our Alumni effort is continuing to expand in order to make connections with as many people as possible. Local events to celebrate both our memories at camp and the 45th Anniversary will be popping up all over the country. If you are interested in hosting one, please contact me directly!

Lastly, as always, I thank you. I thank you for your prayers, your dedication and your support of this vital and lasting ministry of our Archdiocese. Ionian Village has touched the hearts and affected the lives of over 17,000 people in the last 44 years, and I would argue is one of the most tangible and successful ministries of this Archdiocese. It is like that because of you, because of your love and support, and because you know the same secret that I know, that Ionian Village was simply the best summer of our life.

I wish you an amazing fall and winter, and hope to meet you soon!

In Christ,

*Fr. Evagrios*



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# IONIAN VILLAGE

# 45 YEARS

*2015 will mark the 45th anniversary of the Ionian Village program. In order to celebrate 45 years of this outstanding and unique ministry, The Office of Ionian Village will host various 45th Anniversary Celebrations in several cities across the country. The goal of these Celebrations will be two-fold: to of course honor the 45 years of Ionian Village and the countless individuals who have contributed to its many years of success, and to continue to build our Alumni network so that our Alumni can reconnect with each other and with their life-changing experiences at Ionian Village. Contact us if you would like to get involved!*











## WELCOME TO OUR NEW DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS!

The Office of Ionian Village extends a warm welcome to its newest member: Nicholas Savas. Nicholas will be serving Ionian Village as the Director of Programs. In this capacity, he will travel throughout the Archdiocese during the school year leading “IV On-the-Go” retreats and representing Ionian Village to prospective campers and their parents at various youth events. During the summer camping season, he will continue in his role as Program Director.

Nicholas has been a part of the Ionian Village family since 2011 when he first served as a Staff Member and is very excited to contribute to the camp’s continued success in this new role. He has spent the past four summers becoming intimately involved with everything Ionian Village. With the exception of learning how to wash his clothes “xorio style,” he has done it all, serving as an OL leader, lifeguarding, DJing poolside under the name “DJ Nani Niko,” coordinating IVPD, and even working on his Greek through his daily conversations with Yiorgo. Nicholas understands the great impact the program has on the youth of our church and looks

forward to living out his passion of youth ministry through Ionian Village, bringing the beauty of Greece and of our Orthodox faith to as many young people as possible.

Nicholas is a graduate of Hellenic College with a B.A. in Religious Studies and of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology with a Masters in Divinity.



## SPIRITUAL ODYSSEY 2015 #takemebacktoIV June 1-11, 2015

In celebration of the 45th Anniversary of Ionian Village, this summer’s Spiritual Odyssey will be returning to the camp itself! We will be based out of the beautiful Ionian Village campgrounds and will visit many of the sites inherent to our summer program, including Zakynthos, Kefalonia, Kalavrita, Patras, Osios Loukas, Aegina, and Athens. The days will be focused on travel and the evenings will include a modified camp program so that participants can both have fun and experience the Ionian Village lifestyle.

Open to Young Adults Ages 19-24  
Registration Limited to 45 Participants





# ORTHODOX LIFE

*By Fr. Christopher Constantinides  
Holy Trinity, Dallas, Texas*

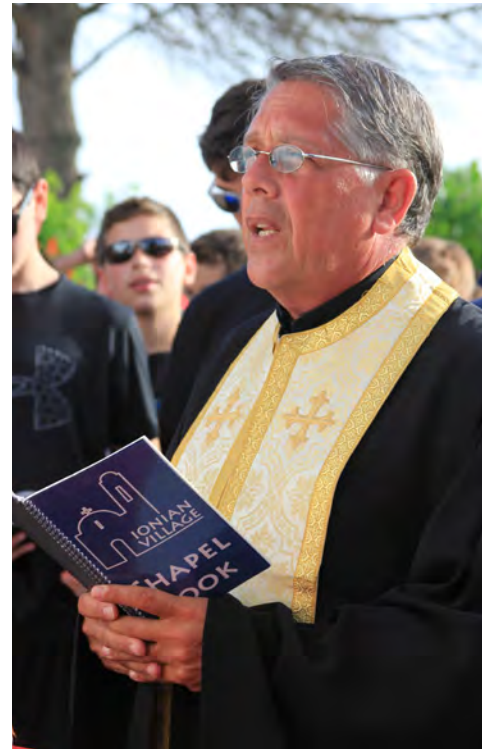
The Ionian Village program as with the many camping programs of our Archdiocese, brings the youth of our faith together in an environment that is a little closer to the birthplace of their immediate relatives. With every and each session it is unbelievably amazing to see how this program has touched and continues to touch these young lives, giving them a deep and rich understanding of their faith, heritage and culture.

If the cabins are not traveling to visit the many spiritual sites close to the camp, the one activity that they always attend is Orthodox Life. This activity engages our young people by allowing them to speak openly about the many questions and concerns that they have and continue to encounter in their everyday lives.

The setting for Orthodox Life is one of tranquility and quiet, not inside some stuffy room, but outside under the pines experiencing the beauty of God's creation. As each cabin meets with its respective Clergy, and this Clergyman is with the same cabin for all eight sessions, the opening question is asked and sets the tone for the ensuing discussion. What does forgiveness mean to you? How have you experienced death? Do we judge others and why? What does friendship and family mean to you? How are you going to own your faith? As the members of the cabin begin to share their particular experiences and feelings about each of these subjects, something truly amazing begins to take shape. The young people begin to realize that they are not the only ones that have these questions and feelings, and a brotherhood/sisterhood begins to form, all under the direction and guidance of their Clergy, explaining and answering the various questions with the teachings and understanding of the Church.

The discussion of forgiveness is always a difficult one for many of our campers. Why should we forgive when somebody intentionally hurts us and doesn't care how we feel? The Clergy now set the spiritual foundation that is needed for the campers to understand that without the Church and God, forgiveness is difficult. The story of the saints which they visit are shared with them, and all of a sudden because they have visited, seen and venerated these saints, these stories which they have heard all their lives in Sunday School about forgiveness become real and start to dwell in their hearts where the Church and our faith need for them to dwell. When our campers shed tears as they approach the saints which have not completely decomposed, I realize that the discussions in Orthodox Life lay a very special spiritual foundation and connection for our youth which for many brings about a change in their spiritual lives.

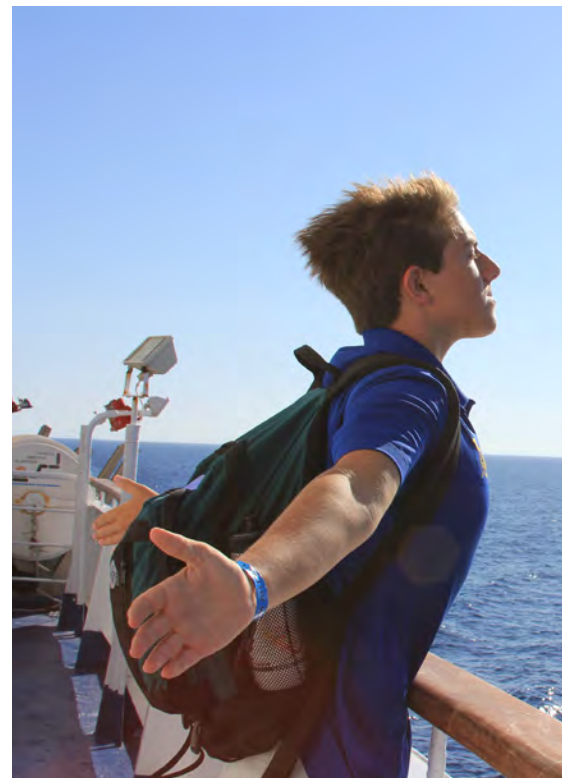
Orthodox Life may be distinctive in the way it is presented and executed, but because of the beautiful and unique setting of being in Greece and close to these glorious saints of the Church, it has touched and continues to touch the hearts and souls of our youth. If you don't believe it just ask any one of them!





# summer a photographic

*The pages that follow contain a glimpse into the 2014 summer camping season, a summer marked by growth, faith, and the unique brand of Ionian Village fun. We enjoyed a second summer in the new pool, and the newly renovated Trap with its taverna-style chairs and shady roof welcomed us at every meal. Summer 2014 had White Parties, Neon Parties, the Olympics, and Greek dancing. It had Kyria Sophia's food and crazy Flexivities. It had bus rides and ferry rides. But, like any summer at IV, most importantly, Summer 2014 had prayer, the Saints, and the Chapel. Enjoy!*





# 2014 review



# travel







fun & games



summer







mes



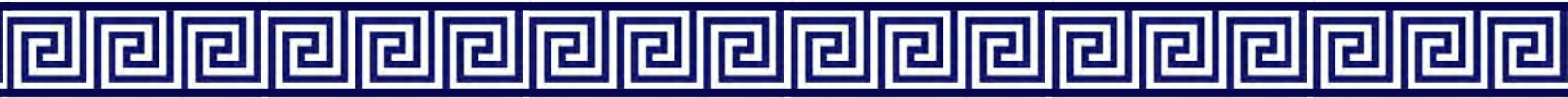
n & swim







food





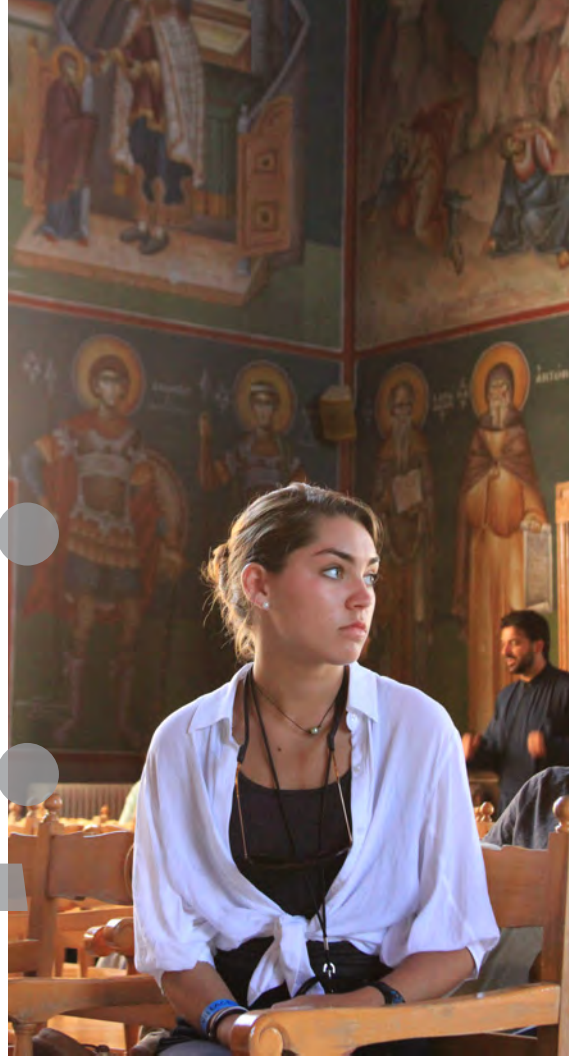


# selfies

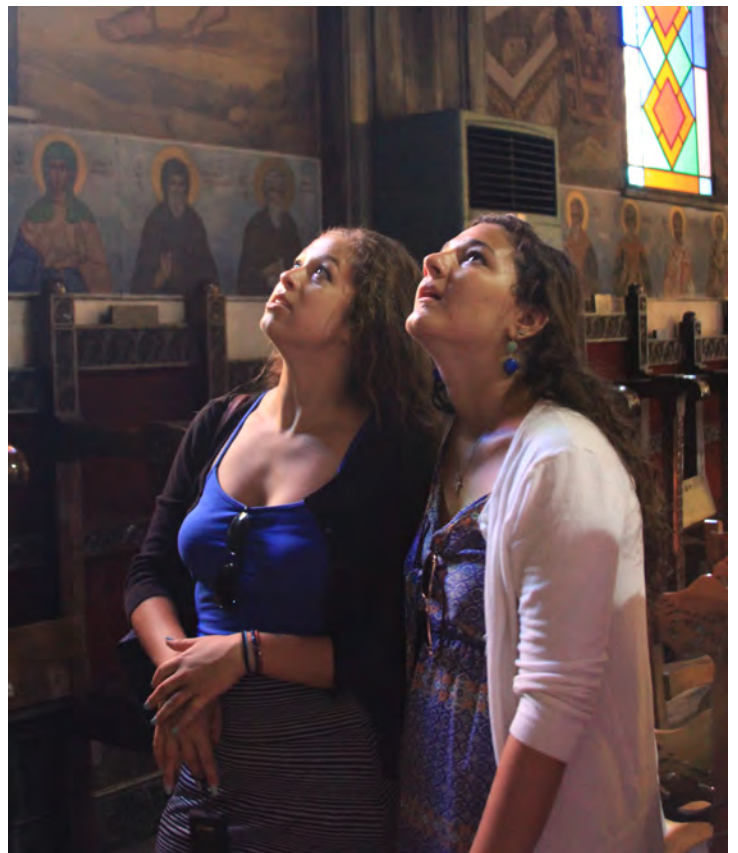




# spirituality









**I hate doing laundry.** Absolutely hate it. If I had one wish, it would be that my mom could follow me everywhere and anywhere I go in life to do my laundry for me. But she can't. So sadly and inevitably I must do it myself. This was one of my main concerns as I prepared for my summer as a staff member for the 2014 Ionian Village programs. (Especially considering laundry must be washed BY HAND at IV.) "How will I ever wash my own clothes?" I worried.

But as the weeks at Ionian Village rolled by, something amazing happened. I actually began to enjoy doing my own laundry and washing my clothes by hand. By the end of the summer it was my new favorite pastime. "How can such a phenomenon occur?" you must be wondering. Allow me to explain.

Ionian Village is full of fun, exciting opportunities such as experiencing Greece firsthand, walking amongst the very



## CHRISTO PAPPADEMOS

ELK GROVE, CALIFORNIA

STAFF: KERKYRA (SESSION 1) & SPETSAI (SESSION 2)

footsteps of numerous saints, and of course crazy/awesome/epic camp activities like Olympics and Neon Dances (DJ'ed by a priest no less).

However, IV comes with its fair share of challenges as well. Packing up and traveling all alone to the other side of the world and being thrown into a mix of hundreds of new people is a daunting task for even the most outgoing people. Waking up at 4am to sit on a bus for hours at a time can be taxing for even the most energetic of people. And yes, washing your own laundry by hand can be unappealing to even Martha Stewart herself.

Yes, IV, such as life, comes with considerable challenges. But what is special about IV is a practice that is often lost in our usual daily life in an increasingly secular world. IV, in congruence with the Orthodox Faith, teaches the importance of a Christ-centered life. When we live a life according to Christ and one focused on coming closer to Him, our problems become much less intimidating. No, they don't magically disappear all together, but with Christ in our thoughts and prayers and souls, they become much easier to deal with and often times even enjoyable.

This was the case for me and my laundry. Although it was taxing, with Christ in mind I began to focus on the enjoyable aspects of the chore. Being out under the Greek sun, washing the sweat and dirt out of my clothes to start anew I thought to myself, "How can I complain about this?" By the end of the summer it was more refreshing than taxing.

In life and at IV there are wonderful things and there are difficult things. After two months of living, eating, sleeping, and breathing all things IV, I was able to discover that through Christ even the difficult things can become wonderful things.

Now that I am in the first year of my seminarian program to become a priest, I find this lesson especially valuable and useful. Furthermore, it is a lesson I will carry with me into the priesthood and throughout the rest of my life. And for that, I will always have Ionian Village to thank.





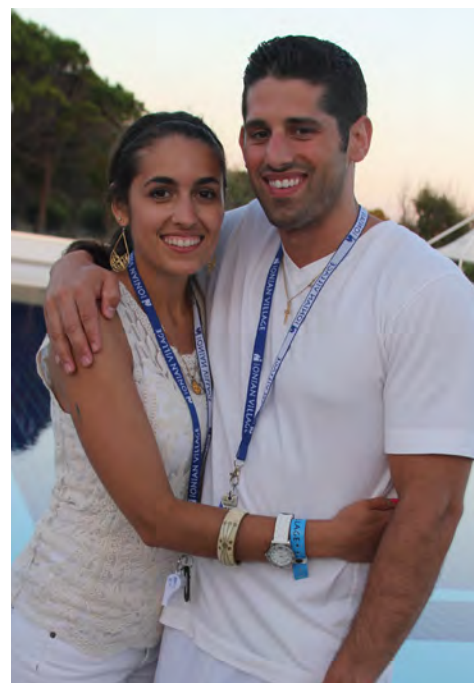
# CHRYSANTHIE YIANITSAS

DALLAS, TEXAS  
PELLA (SESSION 1)  
ABOVE LEFT

What do you get when you take a beautiful country, remarkable staff members, amazing campers and an awesome director who just so happens to also be a priest and a DJ? You get the best summer of your life. I've always heard about Ionian Village throughout high school but I never really knew much about it. I would constantly hear stories, see pictures and tweets about how people who went to IV had the time of their life and how even two years later they still have PCD (post camp depression).

When I registered to go to IV I wasn't really sure what to expect. June 23rd 2014 finally came around and my two cousins and I were on a plane from Dallas to New York then New York to Athens. I will never forget that moment when I got off the plane. Not only was I relieved to have finally arrived in the most beautiful place on earth, but I was greeted by the loudest, craziest and most excited staff I had ever seen. That was my first experience of how the IV hype was real. After the long four hour bus ride, we had arrived at the most magical place on earth that doesn't even compare to Disney World. From the moment I stepped off the bus at camp, I felt a sense of relief and peace. There's just something about the grass, which you do not walk on, the flowers and sky that just made me feel right at home. As I began my journey at Ionian Village, I grew closer and closer to the people and to my faith. I witnessed miracles and experienced things I never thought possible. DJ Holy Skribblz makes the sweat-drenched clothes all worth it and Kyria Sofia makes my stomach the happiest thing on this earth. The sweet sound of "Theotoke i elpis" as the whole camp sang along always gave me chills.

It's nearly impossible to put into words how much Ionian Village has changed my life. Every single person who has been to IV can attest that it is more than what people expect. Leaving IV was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. Leaving meant I was going to have to go back home and begin my journey in college. There would be times I would walk around campus, wishing there were road blockers ready so I could safely cross the street. Ionian Village will always have a special place in my heart and I know I can count on my IV family to meet me at the chapel.



# TRIPODIS SIBLINGS

MARINA, NEW YORK, NEW YORK  
STAFF: OLYMPIA (SESSION 2)  
STAMATI, CLEVELAND, OHIO  
MEDICAL STAFF (SESSION 2)

Marina Tripodis, Administrative Assistant for the Office of Ionian Village, was joined at camp this summer by her brother Stamati, who served as Medical Staff. It was Stamati's first time at camp and Marina's first time returning since she served as a Staff Member during the summer of 2011. When asked what it was like to be at camp with her brother, Marina responded, "Ionian Village is already an experience that is unlike any other. But when you can share it first hand with your best friend/brother, it only makes the already amazing experience that much more unforgettable."





# ELIZABETH COUREY

TITUSVILLE, FLORIDA  
XIOS (SESSION 1)  
ABOVE LEFT

When I think of all the things Ionian Village meant to me, there is one experience that means more than I ever knew was possible. It had such an important effect on not only my faith, but my life. It is something I can go back to at any time for the rest of my life and remember how truly blessed I am.

This amazing experience all started when Father Evagoras told us the story of Saint Dionysios and the miracles other campers have experienced. That night under the beautiful stars, I couldn't keep my sobs in. I was so moved and needed more than anything, to see this miraculous saint, kiss the feet that have remained divinely preserved for hundreds of years, but most of all, I needed to forgive. I had prayed almost every night for help forgiving and to change. I had gone to confession, only to have the effects wear off. There were just so many things I wanted to get off my shoulders.

The next day when I saw Saint Dionysios, **I prayed with more strength and emotion than I ever had before.** I decided to leave my problems, worries, and anger- all of it, with him. Then was when I experienced a miracle all my own. It was not a miracle that anyone

else could see, and something I could've never imagined. But all around me, I felt a presence, and somehow I knew it was the spirit of Saint Dionysios. What I felt then wasn't just relief, repentance, or even an overwhelming change to my faith. All I could say is it was something else, something only the Holy Spirit can bring. I had truly felt a holy presence, there to help me through my struggles.

Later I told Father Demetri that I had felt something that I didn't fully understand, and he made me realize that is what the power of God is; it cannot be put into words. This summer at IV, I have discovered that my true self is a loving follower of Christ. Now as I reflect on my experience, I face the same struggles once again. But when I take time to pray in the silence, I can actually feel the presence of God, hear his wisdom to guide me, and know his love. I can cry those same tears for reasons I will never fully comprehend. This isn't something I would be able to experience if it weren't for Ionian Village and the journey of faith it brought me on. So when I think of what IV meant to me, I think... indescribable.



# PATRICIA BAJIS

GROSS POINTE WOODS, MICHIGAN  
OLYMPIA (SESSION 2)  
ABOVE RIGHT

I can't tell you what Ionian Village is. And in that statement lies its beauty. If I was given all the words in the world and your undivided attention, what this camp means to me and what it has let me discover would not be done justice. Ionian Village means something to every camper, they're touched in a special way by the daily prayer, life long friendships and overall insane hype experience. The best way to describe my time at Ionian Village is to explain what happened when I came home. I was riding in the car with my mother when I started to think of a memory from camp and started to smile. She turned to me and said, "Oh what are you laughing about now? Ever since you came back from camp, I'll just catch you smiling or laughing about something!"

This camp is unlike any other. This being my first time in Greece, I was able to explore the beauty of the country through our trips to monasteries and churches. Not only did these contain the most breath taking views I've ever laid eyes upon, but were another step in my spiritual journey, another part of the program that just can't be explained. Walking through these magnificent buildings and taking silent time to have a conversation with God created such a centered and securing feeling inside me. And on the days





we didn't travel, the camp program was anything but ordinary. The immensely dedicated and high-energy staff always had a day of insane activities planned, up until the moment we went to sleep where we were exhausted, sweaty and having the time of our lives.

Ionian Village was my safe place to land. It provided me a support system like no other and allowed me the blessing of growing my faith with a caring and loving group of friends. The power of all of us singing our prayer at night, believing and having faith all together is unparalleled. I not only was able to come out of my shell at camp, but able to connect with my faith before I left for college, a few weeks after camp. Like I said, there's no way to fully describe what camp does, at each age everyone takes it differently and somehow gets exactly what they need out of it at that time. I thank God everyday that I went.



# JUSTIN GLAVANOVITS

LISLE, ILLINOIS  
STAFF: SPETSAI (SESSION 1) & CRETE (SESSION 2)

Disconnect. Experience. Rejuvenate.

Ionian Village is not just a place. Ionian Village is not just a summer camp. Ionian Village is a way of life and a spiritual awakening for all those who attend; camper or staff member.

Ionian Village teaches us that it is okay to be who God made us and not some false version of our self back home; that our Orthodox faith is one to celebrate and be proud of.

**Ionian Village shows us what is important in our lives – Jesus Christ.** Between early morning Orthros and many different historical and theological excursions, the campers who attend Ionian Village get to truly “Live Orthodoxy” and see in person what we hear about within our Sunday School classrooms.

Ionian Village helped me realize that I can be the best version of me all of the time, and not just in Greece on the Ionian Sea. Ionian Village has taught me that the best friendships we make

there, happen in the Pines for Orthodox Life, and that they will be forever strong, no matter how far we are away from each other. Ionian Village has fortified my faith in ways that I could never explain. Ionian Village has reinforced who I am as a person, and has been a beacon to a future path that I am so very excited for.

This amazing summer experience is something that, I believe, is an essential part of our Orthodox faith. This program takes us to see the three ‘Walking Saints’ of the Ionian Sea, where we see and are able to venerate the incorrupt bodies of St. Dionysios, St. Gerasimos and St. Spyridon, which always leaves campers and staff members alike bewildered and amazed at what they just witnessed.

From the amazing leadership of Father Evagoras and the Administrative Team, to the spectacular 2014 Staff, I am proud to say that I attended Ionian Village and had, quite literally, the best summer of my life. He helped me in so many ways, and I will never be able to thank him enough. He taught me that being an Orthodox Christian did not limit me from anything, but that it empowered me to be able to do anything. He helped in solidifying my faith and he, above all, loves everyone who comes into the program. Without him, I am certain that I would not have had the same experience as I did and I am so thankful that God gave me the opportunity to meet him and his wonderful wife.

Ionian Village is:

Life changing.  
Amazing.  
Love.





## ELEFTERIA GAROS

PALM HARBOR, FLORIDA  
STAFF: OLYMPIA (SESSION 1)  
& DELOS (SESSION 2)

emotional, and most importantly, spiritual well being. And that is not easy to come by.

When I got home I kept thinking over and over again about what exactly it is that IV gave me. Weeks later I finally figured it out. It came to me after remembering one particular night in Glyfa when I had a profound conversation with another admin staff member. I realized that IV gave me two very important things: 1. A city of people behind me, made up of campers and staff alike, who I have to lean on and who understand the importance of spiritual health over everything else. 2. It gave me hope. Because you see, during that conversation in Glyfa, we determined that hope was greater than love. You may not agree. I get it. Love is amazing, unconditional, and essential. But our faith is one of only a few that offers hope. Hope is the center of our relationship with Christ from which everything stems. And then I finally understood that **hope is what I feel the most when I think about Ionian village.** Hope that everything is going to be okay. I have never felt that way after any experience. I feel now that, no matter what happens, everything is going to be okay. I'm not quite sure yet why that is or how that will manifest itself. I just know that because of the things I saw, the people I met, the conversations I had, and the guidance I was given, I have a better understanding of what that word means and everything it truly encompasses. It made its way into my life when I needed it most.



## GEORGE JAVARAS

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS  
KERKYRA (SESSION 2)  
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What is Ionian Village? Ionian Village is a camp, but it is more than just that. For me, it was the best summer of my life.

I'm going to start off by touching on how I created friendships with some of the most amazing people you could ever

Where is it socially acceptable to start clinking a fork on a plate and then hear 200 people break out in a symphony of silverware banging for 5 minutes during dinner? Or to show up to vespers wearing a pink tutu and war face paint? Or to model down a runway in "clothes" made of cardboard boxes, milk jugs, and bubblewrap? Not many places, I can tell you that. I lived a ridiculous life for two months. Ridiculously challenging, exhausting, and draining. AND even more so, ridiculously beautiful, reviving, exciting, blissful and exhilarating. All experienced in one big adventure.

I came to camp forgetting what it was to feel. After a difficult year I shut down and built up walls. The girls in my cabin that I was responsible for brought me back to life. They helped me feel again. Feel happiness, sadness, joy, heartache, curiosity, peace... everything. Through them, because of them, I felt my heart and soul learn to love life again. I was able to confront and then let go of the year's stress, anxiety, and disappointment. Building relationships with these girls is one of the greatest gifts of the summer.

As the end of the summer came closer, I became terrified to leave our Ionian Village bubble. The bubble in which I never stopped laughing, learning, growing, and healing. My life outside Ionian Village that I would be returning to now seemed foreign. I was even a little angry and bitter that I was being torn apart from the new happiness I had finally found. It wasn't fair. But then I realized that this is where "the life-changing" part came in. I recognized that this bubble expands across countries and seas, back to the U.S. where we were all going. **Even more so than being the place that changed my life, it was the people.** You begin to learn the ins and outs of peoples' hearts and souls while living with them for two months. How can you not? You are with them every single day for 2 months. They become your family while you are far away from your own. They start to care for your



meet - friendships that I know will last a lifetime. What amazed me the most is how quickly you grow towards these people. I vividly remember arriving on the first day of camp and meeting my cabin-mates and counselors, who I now consider my brothers. As we sat down together for dinner it was as if we had all known each other our whole lives. Our ability to converse with one another was remarkable. We talked about our families, high school experiences, our colleges of choice. The reason we were able to get along and bond with each other so quickly is because **God picked each and every single one of us to be there.** We all had an open mind and most importantly we all were ourselves.

For the first time in my whole life I was able to get away from all the stereotypes and gossip that was very much a big part of my four years in high school. I was able to just be myself because I knew no one would judge. This is why throughout the entirety of camp we were able to have and share such beautiful memories together. I cannot express the importance of how crucial it is to just be you at Ionian Village.

The camp also allows you to clear your mind and grow spiritually, so that you can grow closer to God. I personally have never had an issue believing and have always known He is there to help and guide us. But what I did struggle with was praying to Him. I simply did not know how. I learned this summer that prayer does not mean you need to get on your knees and put your hands together to talk to Him. Ionian Village and Fr. Evagoras taught me that, instead, praying is more about talking and conversing with God. This has really changed me and how I am able to live my life. If I ever need help or am feeling down or just need to talk to someone, I find myself talking to God

regardless of where I am.

I am not the same person as I was going into camp that I am now, after camp. I have gained new friends and a new relationship with God. Not a day goes by where I don't miss or think about Ionian Village. I feel so blessed to have become a part of this family and experienced this feeling that some people call "IV Agape."



## SOTIRIOS MICHALATOS

ELMSFORD, NEW YORK  
STAFF: EPIROS (SESSION 1)  
& SPETSAI (SESSION 2)

As a second year grad-student at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, it was a great blessing for me to have been given the chance to serve at Ionian Village this summer. I was given the chance to help create an awesome and unique camp program. At camp we were asked many times to think outside the box and when we, the staff members, had a new idea to better the program, the administration gave us all the tools and resources to run with it. We were not just given a program and told to stick in the confines, we became the program.

One of my favorite parts about Ionian Village was Orthodox Life, where campers and staff were asked questions that truly forced one to think and encouraged self-reflection. Campers often presume that the sessions and questions are only for them to answer. Yet I found myself struggling to answer the very same questions they puzzled over. The questions asked were simple but if taken seriously, they help you to reach inside your heart to search for the answer. **To truly know oneself can take a lifetime.**

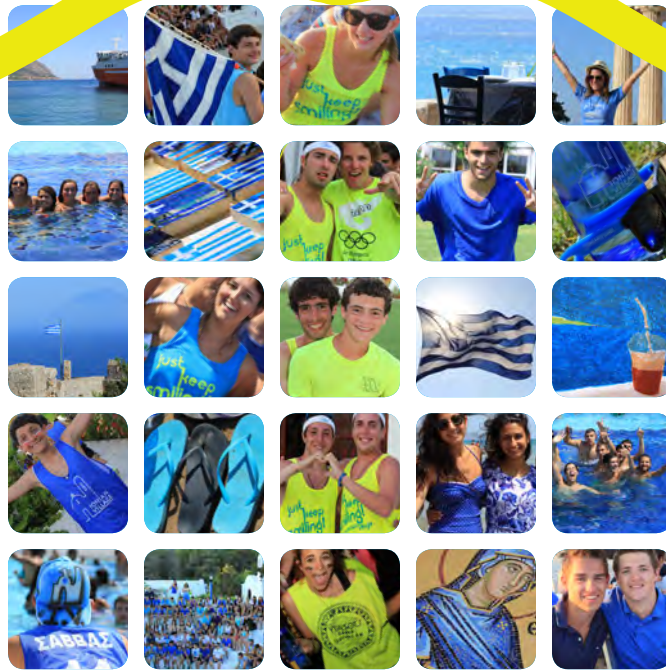
At the end of the day, Ionian Village has given me much more than a "nice" experience or something to do with my summer. Ionian Village has been a huge reminder to me why I am a seminarian at Holy Cross. It reaffirmed my desire to devote my life to the Church. It showed me how much I truly care for the youth of our Church to make a real connection with our alive and thriving faith. As I start my new school year at Holy Cross, I have a real sense of why I am doing what I am doing. If I can help others come closer to God, as evidenced from this summer, I know that it will be worth it.





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# SPIRITUAL ODYSSEY



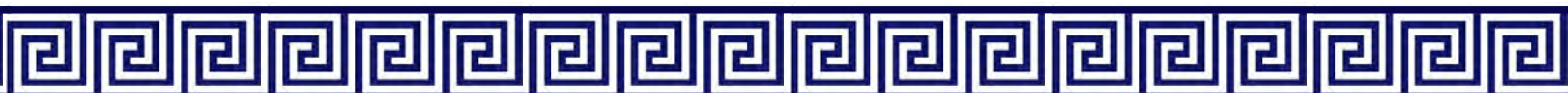
*By Fr. Peter Salmas  
Holy Cross, Belmont, California*

In July of 1974, Turkey invaded the island country of Cyprus. While the full effects of this invasion would not be felt for a long while, my life was immediately changed by the timing of this unfortunate circumstance. So that my proistamenos at the time, Father Spencer Kezios, could be free to act on behalf of the Greek Cypriots, he informed me that the time had come for my ordination. While Father Spencer began the process of organizing significant relief efforts, I was ordained to the Holy Diaconate in September of 1975 and then, a mere two months later, to the Holy Priesthood, thereby assuming the formative responsibilities at Saint Nicholas in Northridge, California, my home parish, while Father Spencer spent several months at the helm of the production of a film entitled, “A Boy Named Panagiotis,” an award-winning film which was shown in the United States to raise awareness and financial support for the plight of the Cypriot people suffering from the devastating turn of events in 1974.

Nearly forty years later, it was my privilege to visit this war-torn country whose history affected my own life. This past June, I was honored and overwhelmed to be invited to be the Spiritual Advisor for the Spiritual Odyssey trip to Cyprus. With anticipatory joy, I joined in New York the young people with whom I was to travel to this distant country that I had come to know only vaguely through readings, through Cypriot friends, and parishioners over the years. I am grateful to Father Evagoras and to the Archdiocese for offering me this unique opportunity to travel with him to Cyprus with young adults whose lives were to be forever transformed through this short but profoundly meaningful ‘spiritual odyssey.’ Permit me to note that the opportunity to travel with my son, Konstantine, was the most special of blessings.

We arrived at the small, modern and beautiful Larnaca Airport. As I had come to know over the years and now visually saw, the Greek Cypriots did not allow the invasion to put their lives in limbo, neither did they choose to stagnate. They forged a new way of life in the Southern portion of Cyprus, a Cyprus filled with beautiful cities and towns that are connected by modern roads, homes, hotels, restaurants, and tourist destinations that are bustling with activity.

The Greek Cypriot portion of the island is alive...unlike the Turkish North. How sad and shocking it was to view, from afar, the once busy port city of Famagusta...now a virtual ghost city. Over 50,000 people lived in Famagusta in 1974, before the invasion. Today, no one lives there except a few Turkish soldiers, fewer than one hundred. The city looks very similar to the way it was the day of the invasion with high-





rise condominiums, hotels, businesses and office buildings, all empty, empty for forty years. It was like looking at a deserted Oakland or San Francisco with only the buildings, no people, no traffic, no life. The invaders have left it empty - once the busiest and largest port of Cyprus, now empty and abandoned for forty years.

Limassol and Larnaca have taken Famagusta's place. They are now the ports that receive and ship goods from all over the world. And the famous Green Line...the guarded line that separates the two sides of the island...simply stated, the Greek Cypriot side is alive with activity, the Turkish side eerie and silent.

The young adults with whom I travelled were from all over the United States. They were young people either just finishing their college education or starting careers, a perfect time to take a break and travel. I learned many things about them and their lives and they, in turn, learned a few things about me. But, it was the common thread of our faith and heritage which quickly made us one family, even as these two components are the indisputable foundation of this small but vibrant country. Our conversations remain vivid in my mind. Whether they were during our mealtimes, that began with tahini sauce and tzatziki, or on the bus, driving past groves of carob trees, or while enjoying one of the most beautiful beaches I have ever seen, Nisi Beach in Agia Napa, or tasting various types of Commandaria. This time to share thoughts and ideas, to banter, will remain for me a truly blessed memory. Our guide, Kyria Maria was fantastic, knowledgeable, and passionate about her country. She shared with us her childhood as well as her remembrances of the day life changed for all of Cyprus. They have never forgotten but have chosen to use the emotion of that day in a positive and constructive way, perhaps as motivation to steadfastly carry on both faith and tradition.

We visited many monasteries, including the famous and beautiful monastery of Kykkos and the memorial for the late President of Cyprus Archbishop Makarios. We also spent time at ancient Kurion and the amphitheater that looks out toward the sea, all giving deeper meaning and eloquence to our faith and tradition. We prayed in churches established and protected by Saint Lazarus and those who would follow him. We were also inspired and blessed to visit churches established and built by Saint Helen after her inspired and historic pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the finding of our Lord's Cross. With each of these visits we venerated the relics of many saints including Saint Phillip the Apostle, Saint Barnabas and Saint Lazarus as well as the Rope that tied our Lord to the His Cross when crucified.

Alas, our visit concluded appropriately on the Feast of Pentecost, motivating us again with the message of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the same Gospel preached on Cyprus from the time of the disciples. Serving in the Cathedral of Saint Lazarus in Larnaca with His Eminence Metropolitan Chrysostom of Kitiou will remain a memory of enormous breadth. A few days prior, we had the opportunity to walk along the port of Larnaca and watch as the city prepared for "Katakleismos," the festive ushering in of summer, a tradition somehow connected to the mythical birth of Aphrodite and the tumultuous sea.

Though it was with sadness that I left Cyprus, I did so with the desire to return and immerse myself in her history and continue my pilgrimage to more of the ancient sites, churches and monasteries. I also left Cyprus humbled by my personal encounter with young people whose lives reflect their love for Our Lord Jesus Christ. I was exceedingly blessed by this trip which, though short in days is one which I believe will bear much fruit for all who were blessed to share in this Spiritual Odyssey, this opportunity for further growth in the understanding of our Holy Orthodox faith and of our beloved and sacred tradition.







## UPDATE

Ionian Village On-the-Go, the newest ministry of the Office of Ionian Village, is entering its second year with a record number of retreats lined up across the country. During the 2013-2014 academic year, IV On-the-Go visited seven parishes in six different metropolises. This year, our goal is to visit all nine metropolises with as many retreats as our scheduling allows.

IV On-the-Go participants experience a fun, exciting retreat run by former and current members of the Ionian Village Staff and Administration Team. Just like at camp, participants encounter our Orthodox faith in an up close and personal and unforgettable way. As we recognize that not everyone has the opportunity to attend Ionian Village in Greece, IV On-the-Go is focused on bringing the Ionian Village experience to each retreat, including activities like Music & Greek Culture, Arts & Crafts and, of course, Orthodox Life, all infused with full IV energy, enthusiasm and originality.

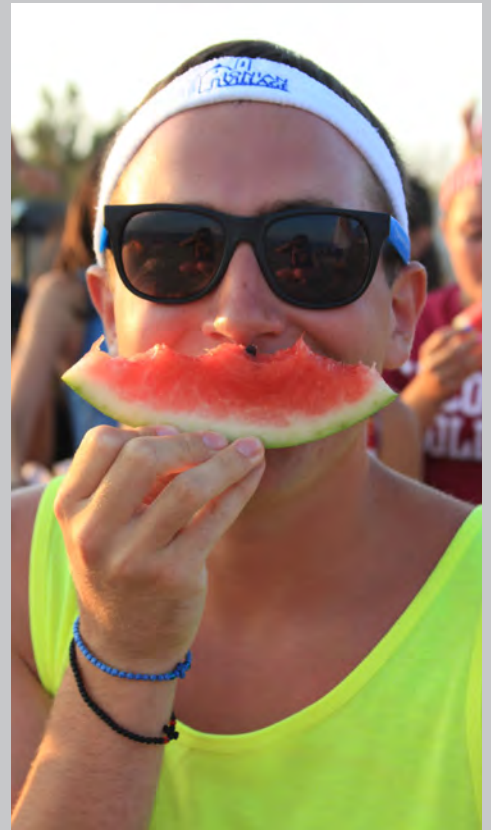
IV On-the-Go has proven to be significant not only in the lives of the young people of the parishes we visit, but also for members of our Staff that volunteer for these retreats. As Alumni, many of us appreciate that Ionian Village, whether as a camper or staff member, is often a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Including our talented Staff in our IV On-the-Go programs gives them the opportunity to further their involvement and connection with Ionian Village while continuing to make an impact on the lives of our Orthodox youth.

Information about IV On-the-Go is available at [www.ionianvillage.org](http://www.ionianvillage.org) or by calling the Office of Ionian Village.





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



**because some things  
just don't change.**

**2,630 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.

**We hope you will join us!**

**[www.ionianvillage.org/alumni](http://www.ionianvillage.org/alumni)**







"THIS IS GOD'S  
BEAUTIFICATION  
PROJECT"

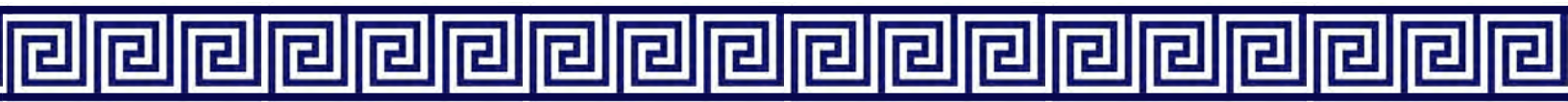
# OSIOS LOUKAS

*By Konstantine Salmas*

Cities undertake beautification projects. Architectural drawings of buildings with their measurement markings are displayed in parking lots as visions of approaching beauty. The message is: This city will soon be an even better place to live because we will have newer buildings and a new layout.

The Ionian Village experience is a beautification project for campers. Our 2014 trip to the Monastery of Osios Loukas allowed campers to experience salvation as a beautification project undertaken by God. It showed the Session Two campers and staff that the narrow way can be a beautiful way. Saint Luke, or more properly Blessed Luke, engaged in salvation, this narrow way, as a beautification project. God has since shown him to be blessed and memorable and given the world a beautiful monastery to visit.

Two hundred and thirty campers and staff found him in early August. We found a







beautiful area of valleys darkened by tree groves. But from one perspective, the trip was out of the way for us. Instead of a straight line, the trip to Athens from IV through Osios Loukas is a diversion. We go diagonally up towards Delphi and then slant down from Osios Loukas to Athens. From another perspective, though, it was like driving straight to heaven.

There is a staircase down into the courtyard. There, through an arch on the other side of the courtyard, is the Saint. When Luke was living here, these famous buildings and icons were not yet built. He was here to follow the narrow way, which Christ says, leads to life. He lived his mature adult life in this place. He experienced his temptations, his failures, and his successes as a monk. His challenges didn't lead him to change his occupation or his status in life. He didn't undo his commitments when he faced challenges. He faced challenges as Luke the Ascetic.

We move through the large courtyard. We



have venerated the body and seen the church. I think of these phrases from the Gospels: "He who loses his life for my sake, will find it" and "The light was in the darkness and the darkness could not overcome it." Restlessness, struggle, and conflict - which are human experiences - did not cause him to change his profession, blame outside causes, or reevaluate what he was doing with his life. Many of us do this. These seem to be obvious solutions. He didn't do this. I don't want our campers to do this with their lives. It's like, during his life, his name was being chiseled into this Greek ground. The outcome of his way of life was his salvation and this amazing monastery in which we all stood and, for a few minutes, relaxed and laughed.

Campers don't know him biographically by kissing the glass over his body and walking around the monastery named after him. Yet campers find calm here. Seventeen year olds are excited to be in the courtyard, showing one another newly purchased icons for mom or papou, sipping on freddo cappuccinos.

This is God's beautification project. The saint's displayed body once streamed myrrh. Pilgrimage here results in miracles. Osios Loukas tried to make for himself a life of alone time. People found him. Unlike the prominent churches, the inviting courtyard, and the crypt which also has the original tomb of Saint Barbara, the dressed skeleton of Blessed Luke is nearly hidden in a passage that connects two churches. It's as if he is still trying to stay out of the way. Yet, the Lord has made sure that even a thousand years later, people know where to find this Saint. We found Osios Loukas and experienced, as a program, a wonderful sense of happiness.

IV is an experience that beautifies because, with one another, teenagers experience life influenced by an experience of the saints. IV is anthropological. Campers see human beings in rare form. They venerate the bodies of Saint Dionysios, Saint Gerasimos, Saint Spyridon, Saint Theodora, and Osios Loukas. Rome displays what people can do with marble. Seattle shows what people can do with coffee. Ionian Village shows what God does with people. IV campers see human beings in rare form, vested, approached, prayed to. Together, they experience the bodies of the saints as miracles of God.

I hope the monastery of Osios Loukas lights up in their mind. The Church directs us to his holiness and to this place that keeps his memory alive. The Church says, this is Blessed Luke the Ascetic who lived here and was victorious here in this sparse but beautiful area of Greece. Come and see the Heaven on earth that developed and is displayed for the visitor pilgrim because of a quiet, ascetic life. We began Session Two with trips to Kastro and Olympia. We went together, as a camp. We concluded here, together, trees shielding us from the sun's heat, changed.

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*The 11th century Monastery of Osios Loukas or "Blessed Luke" is a UNESCO World Heritage Site with some of the best-preserved examples of mosaics from the Macedonian Renaissance period of the Byzantine Empire. Although the journey from Glyfa to Athens does not pass directly by Osios Loukas, the detour into the foothills of Mount Helikon has been a part of the Ionian Village experience for decades.*





Photo by Dean's Photography



# ALUMNI EVENTS

Make sure to take a photograph of the Alumni at your next event and send it to us at [ionianvillage@goarch.org](mailto:ionianvillage@goarch.org) to be included in the next edition of *The Golden Bridge*!

## WEDDINGS

Congratulations to the following Ionian Village couples, where both husband and wife are a part of our Alumni Family!

### NA ZHSETE!

*Top:* Christian Stamates ('08, '09, '12, '14)  
& Calliope Copoulos ('05, '11, '12, '14)  
*January 19, 2014*

*Middle:* Demi Klonaris ('08, '12)  
& Maria Tiches ('05, '11, '12)  
*May 25, 2014*

*Bottom:* Phillip Constantinides ('08, '13)  
& Alexis Imprescia ('13)  
*August 23, 2014*







# 1987 STAFF REUNION

By Alexandra Manolis

One long weekend in September, 25 former counselors from 18 states and abroad (Paris!) joined together for a staff reunion. The idea started earlier in the summer with a “what if...” comment on Facebook and ended with us locating everybody from an era before social media and gathering for an amazing weekend!

Fr. Tom and Presvytera Pat Tsagalakis together with Eleni and Mike Semandaris hosted the staff of the summer of 1987 in spectacular Seattle where the sun was shining all weekend. Special guests were our beloved Fr. Costa, Ionian Village Director for 25 years, and his Presvytera Val Sitaras. Upon our arrival, former Staff Members were met at the airport in true IV-style with signs, banners, trip tics and clipboards. The schedule for the weekend included lunch on the water front, exploring Seattle’s glorious landmarks and amazing restaurants, and a boat cruise.

The weekend was incredibly special for the 25 alumni. The miracle of friendship and love made it possible for us to reunite and pick up with one another as if we had been together last week, and not 27 years ago. For many of us, serving at Ionian Village was a highlight of our lives and renewing relationships over the reunion weekend was a remarkable event. Fr. Costa commented that he loved seeing where we are in our lives and how much he “loves seeing people fly.”



What we learned about ourselves and each other under the pines and on the beaches of Greece all those years ago allowed us to reconnect with love and to feel awake and alive. 27 years ago our hearts were opened to each other and with God’s grace we connected then and were able to do so again now. Despite what life had thrown at us in the interim, we were open and joyous with each other and we talked, laughed, cried, sang and most importantly worshipped together as an IV family. Some of us had seen each other in the intervening years and some of us had not seen each other since that tearful airport goodbye so many years ago. It was a weekend every IVer dreams about - one that proves that camp lives on forever and that we will see one another again.

Worshiping together at Divine Liturgy at Holy Apostles in Shoreline, Washington with Fr. Costa and Fr. Tom as co-celebrants was a true spiritual experience reminding us that, while we can always meet in the Chapel in our hearts, the opportunity to share in the sacraments together in person is still so meaningful.

The staff of 1987 produced two marriages and eight sets of koumbari. We have continued to support the camp and the church by serving as active members in our parishes and sending our children on their own Ionian Village experiences.

*Photos: Opposite: Staff gathering around Fr. Costa by the Seattle Waterfront; Above, top to bottom: The entire 1987 reunion group in September 2014; The entire 1987 Staff in front of the Chapel.*





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