

OCMC Mission Teams

2009 OCMC Mission Teams are now posted at: www.ocmc.org. A team will be going to Romania September 15-30 to conduct woman retreats. In addition, other teams will be traveling to many other countries providing catechism, health care, youth ministry, and construction assistance for a period of two to four weeks. Applications and information are available at www.ocmc.org/programs/teams or by contacting the teams department at: teams@ocmc.org.

Long-term Opportunities

OCMC is prayerfully seeking dedicated Orthodox Christians to answer the call for long-term missionary service in many countries. Please join us in praying for more laborers in the harvest, including those opportunities in Romania listed below:

- Youth and young adult ministry workers
- Substance Abuse Counselors



Christina Semon

Missionary Serving in Romania

June 2009

Reflections on a Year of Transitions

I learned many things about myself during the past year. During the first week of Great Lent, we read in the Book of Proverbs, "Trust in God with all your heart and do not exalt your own wisdom" (Proverbs 3:5). This past year I learned that I am powerless. I had to let my own agenda – my own will – be dropped and smashed to pieces as a glass hits a cement floor, and change my frame of mind to trust in God's will alone. The work that I had to do was challenging. I kept reminding myself that I am not in this alone, because God gave me confidence from Sunday to Sunday to do what I had to do. He gave me this confidence through my interactions with all of you, which were like a breath of fresh air to me. During each week, I would spend my time preparing for the following Sunday, and by the end of the week I was usually nervous. Then Sunday would come, and I would present my missionary plans despite my nervousness. Something joyful and unexpected would happen--all of you opened your hearts to me and encouraged me to continue facing the challenges of building a support team. While I may have arrived feeling nervous, I always left strengthened for the challenges ahead.

And so, I proceeded in faith to build a network of supporters for this work. Through God's grace and your support, my goals for departure to Romania were met. The next step for me was a transition from thinking about fundraising to starting to think about the destination. But



Christina (second row, far right) was hosted by Fr. George Gartelos at the OCF at the University of WY.

it was difficult to slow down from the active traveling schedule to a more stationary schedule of studies on Romania. However, before I could truly begin this transition, I had to catch up on many items which, until then, I did not have time to focus on. During this time, as well as earlier in my journey, I was blessed with opportunities to visit a few monasteries. At the monasteries I was able to sense how fast my thoughts were going and the amount of effort it would take to slow them down. I left from these holy places rejuvenated and more centered in Christ. I was ready for my next challenges.

And now, the initial support building phase has passed, and you and I are ready to go for a journey to Romania. Thanks to your support and prayers, I am transitioning. The first three goals for the field are to: 1) learn the language 2) learn the culture and 3) love the people. All of these goals take time. I am grateful we have missionary Saints who have gone before us and laid this path we can follow to help us integrate into another culture. The Gospel has been preached in Romania for many centuries, and so we will learn how the Good News is being lived out among the Romanian people. I am excited and humbled to join the existing team of Romanians involved in the Protection of the Theotokos Family Center and the St. Dimitrie Program, and all those people whose paths I will cross while in Romania.



Serving since 2009

Contact OCMC:

P O Box 4319
St. Augustine, FL, 32085

1-877-GO-FORTH (463-6784)
1-904-829-1635-FAX

www.ocmc.org
missionaries@ocmc.org

Missionary Christina Semon

Contact Christina:

Str.Calea Floresti, No. 1
Bloc T1, Scara 2, Etaj 3, Apt. 53
3400 Cluj-Napoca ROMANIA

c.semon@ocmc.org



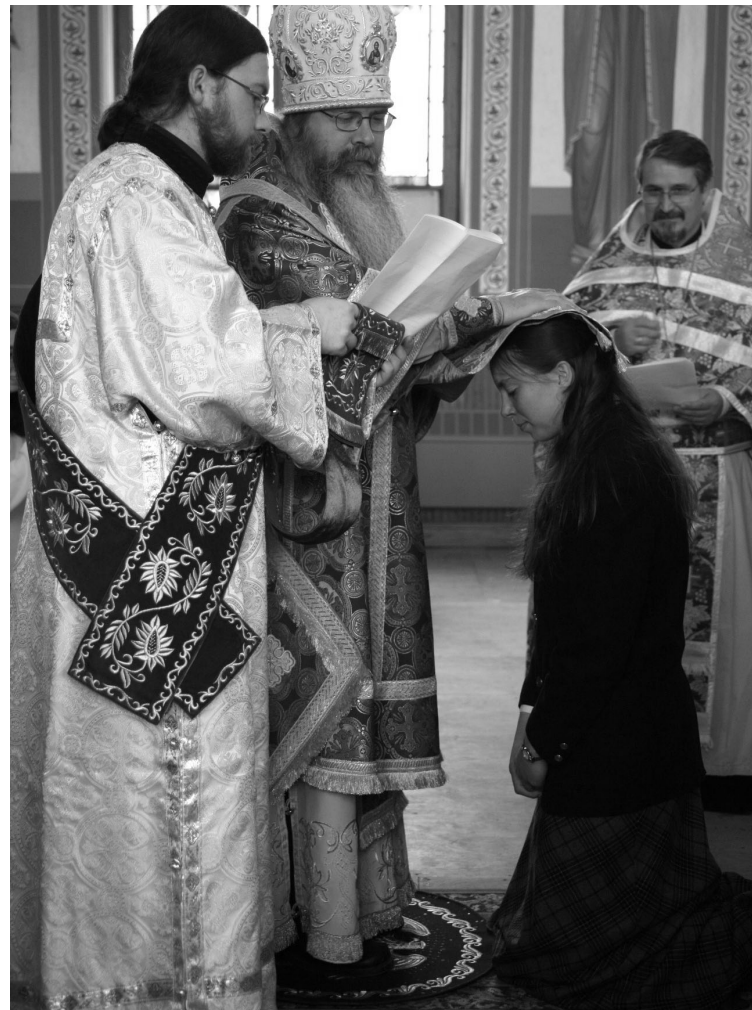
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The Commissioning Service

When the missionary candidate is well on his or her way to completing the support building, one of the last events to schedule is the Commissioning Service. On February 8th we held the Commissioning Service, during which special prayers were prayed over me. At my home parish of All Saints Orthodox Church, His Grace, Bishop Tikhon of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania, visiting priest Fr. David Rucker, Associate Director of OCMC, parish rector Fr. David Cowan, and the faithful, all celebrated the Divine Liturgy together. Then, at the end of the Liturgy, was the Commissioning.

God opened our hearts that day and in flowed the love of Christ. I felt the synergy flowing through the Divine Liturgy. That day, God showed me the joy that comes from stirring up our hearts to give honor and glory to Him. It made me aware that God is truly merciful to



Christina with Clergy and her family at the Commissioning Service

me, unworthy though I am. It seemed that worshiping in that Divine Liturgy were far more than those visibly present. Through the love and prayers of everyone I had met on my travels this year, I sensed that we were all united in that Divine Liturgy. Is this different from any other service? That unique experience made me aware of the intensity and significance of the Divine Liturgy. It is truly a gift from God.

One of the parishioners at All Saints compared the Commissioning Service to that of a wedding. Oh what joy that brought to my heart! It's probably the cheapest wedding a daughter could ask for from her parents. But seriously, our Bridegroom, Christ, unites us together as His bride, the Church.

I want to say thank you to all I met, and all I have yet to met, for your decision to participate with me in the work of the Holy Spirit in Romania. I am grateful for my family and friends who gave me assistance. My thankfulness extends to those who gave me hospitality and support in various ways which encouraged me to continue on this missionary path. Everyone's prayers and embraces are vital to me because they provide me spiritual and physical strength. I know that I am not alone in this mission field. Thanks be to God!

His Grace Bishop Tikhon commissioning Christina at her home parish of All Saints, with Fr. David Rucker, OCMC Associated Director looking on.

Pre-Field Training at OCMC First impressions of the Field

My last training session, called "Pre-Field Training" (PFT) took place at OCMC headquarters in St. Augustine, FL, from February 23-27, 2009. Coming from Pennsylvania, I had enough of the cold. I was ready for some spring-like weather in Florida, and I wasn't disappointed.

This week-long session targeted the following: language training, how to maintain communication with your support team, communication tools to use while in the field, sessions on culture shock, and physical and spiritual wellness, a review of the budget, dialogue with the field leader, and, finally, purchasing a plane ticket! It was extremely important for me to be trained in all these areas so that I could understand better how to "fit into the picture" over in Romania. As a result of this orientation, I felt prepared and ready to make the transition to Romania.

During the first day, one of my sessions was on language training. I am interested to begin learning Romanian with the help of the method I was taught. Language acquisition will be my number-one priority, as it will enable me to interact with the people of that culture much more intimately.

On the last day at OCMC, Fr. David Rucker and OCMC staff said a prayer over me, with the laying on of hands, in front of the icons of Saint Herman of Alaska and Saints Cyril and Methodius. All of my associates make me feel that I am part of the team at OCMC. They are all experts in their departments, and they give me the best advice and suggestions on how to manage during this transition period.

Also on that last day of PFT, my departure date was confirmed with the travel agent. I was happy to announce that I would be departing for Romania on March 17th, Saint Patrick's Day. I traveled through Munich, Germany, to Cluj, Romania. I asked for your continued prayers that day and throughout my journey. I was grateful to travel on a day in which we commemorate a missionary saint who worshiped the Trinity in his daily life and participated in making disciples of Christ.

Holy Saint Patrick, intercede for us!

Living in Cluj, Romania is a wonderful experience. I live with a widow named Anica. We live in the eastern part of the city in a sixth-floor Romanian apartment. She and I get along very well. Although she doesn't know English, we are finding ways to communicate. Cluj has a population of approximately 317,000 people, and the mass transportation system works well. I use the buses daily to travel around the city and walk all over the place. My primary work at this time is to learn the Romanian language and culture. Many people here are able to speak some English, so it is challenging sometimes to speak Romanian with people. In spite of this, I am striving to respond to them in Romanian. I am taking lessons with a tutor five days a week for 3 hours each day. I am also working with the Romanian staff several times a week at the Protection of the Theotokos Family Center to enhance my language skills and begin to integrate into the ministry.

It was a great blessing and joy to celebrate Pascha in Romania. The parish I attend is St. John the Theologian Romanian Orthodox Church, and it is the same parish where Floyd and Ancuta attend services. It is a small wooden temporary church with many people coming to worship. The majority of people have to be outside because of how small the church is. For example, at Pascha, there were probably over 500 people with only 120 packed in the church. It was a wonderful experience and the Paschal Divine Liturgy was filled with jubilation for Christ and love for each other.

Glory to God for all things!

Christina dyeing pascha eggs and practicing Romanian; "Hristos a înviat! (Christ is Risen) Adevarat a înviat! (Truly He is Risen)



Christina pictured with (clock-wise) Kriss and Geoff Whiteman and Luke Beachum at St. John's Winter Retreat in Bedford, IN.

