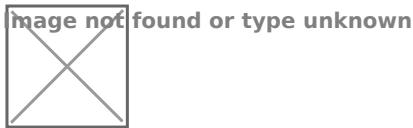


OCMC Parish Ambassadors Participate in First Ambassador Pilot Program to Deepen Understanding and Support of Mission Center



Just before Thanksgiving, five dedicated Parish Ambassadors journeyed to Albania for the First Ambassador Pilot Program, designed to deepen understanding and support for the Mission Center. The team was led by Anastasia Barksdale, former missionary to Albania and current Mission Center Parish Engagement Coordinator, joined by Grants Manager Santhe Loizos. During their week-long stay, the group witnessed the ongoing transformation of the Orthodox Church of Albania from destruction to its inspiring restoration.

Their experiences ranged from observing children's catechism programs and engaging with college students at the Theological Academy, to visiting the Orthodox Logos University in Tirana, local churches and the 13th century Monastery of the Nativity of the Theotokos in Ardenice, as well as the Church's 24-hour radio station. Together with the greater Orthodox community, the team also attended the Enthronement of the new Metropolitan of Berat, His Eminence Asti. The tour culminated in a private audience with His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios.

The entire experience left a deep and lasting impression on the participants, as they were able to witness the impact of the Mission Center's work through its missionaries and programs. Terri Leckas, a Parish Ambassador from St. Mary's Orthodox Church in Minneapolis, MN provided this reflection: "Our missionaries showed us the vibrant Orthodox community in Albania... Cathedrals built where only rubble once stood. Families alive in their faith, a society formed through a shared love of Christ, an Orthodox leadership that committed itself to the restoration of the Albanian economy and education system. We saw proof that our God restores."

The group returned home inspired to not only share their journey with their local communities, but to raise awareness and support for the work of Orthodox missions around the world. It is hoped that this will be the first of many opportunities for current and future Ambassadors to engage more fully with the Mission Center.

To learn more about our Parish Ambassador programs, click the link below.

<https://www.ocmc.org/serve-from-home/parish-ambassadors>

goarch.org