

Mount Athos Foundation of America shares update on its efforts



GREENE, ME – In spite of the pandemic and its ensuing upheaval in our personal lives and around the world, the Mount Athos Foundation of America (MAFA) has succeeded in carrying out its mission of support for the Holy Mountain with great success. The organization shared an update on its efforts in its latest newsletter.

When the COVID-19 crisis hit, MAFA was able to respond quickly thanks to the many donations received this year. They immediately contacted Dr. Michael Christakis, founder of SAMM (Supporters of Athonite and Monastic Medicine) to find out how the organization could help. When Dr. Christakis informed them that the new Mount Athos Health Center in Karyes was in need of diagnostic equipment and supplies, including hospital-quality pulse oximeters and supplies needed for COVID testing, MAFA immediately provided funds to purchase what was needed to prepare the Health Center for the imminent pandemic.

On December 9, the Orthodox Times reported that, according to Mount Athos civil governor Athanasios Martinos, seven monks were being treated in hospital following diagnosis, one monk had passed away, and a number of others were being monitored with pulse oximeters (provided by MAFA) at the Health Center in Karyes. One other monk was being monitored at his monastery, also by pulse oximeters provided by MAFA and distributed to the Monasteries where they were needed by the Health Center. This is exactly the kind of quick emergency response that was envisaged when MAFA was established, and a perfect example of why, in their first fundraising campaign this year, they included among options for giving, contributions toward the creation of an endowed fund to address emergency needs.

MAFA had already begun working to provide the Holy Monastery of Simonopetra with a grant of \$10,125 toward its footpaths rehabilitation project when a disastrous storm struck the Holy Mountain. The storm, widely reported in the press, caused major washouts along the main vehicular road between Daphni and Karyes, leaving it impassable. At the same time, it caused serious damage to the individual vehicular roads and associated footpath crossings of many of the monasteries,

including Simonopetra, whose access was already dangerously steep and difficult. The monastery is now already at work, with planning and design for the repairs and improvements being provided by the Homeotech Environmental Management Company of Thessaloniki, funded in part by a MAFA Grant.

The storm illustrates again the importance of MAFA's mission. Normally maintenance of the roads on Mount Athos is the responsibility of the monasteries and the Holy Community. The scale of the damage was so great in this case that a state of emergency was declared for the whole of Mount Athos, empowering the Greek government to repair both the main Daphni-Karyes road and the monasterial roads. Most of the monasterial roads have now been repaired, and the state of emergency has recently been extended to enable rebuilding of the main road, which requires the laying of a new roadbed. The increasing frequency in recent years of heavy storms on Mt. Athos alternating with forest fire threats - whose scale will not always justify extreme measures by the Greek government - demonstrates the need for emergency aid that sometimes only a non-governmental organization like MAFA can provide in a timely fashion.

As reported in MAFA's first 2020 Newsletter, work is also continuing at the Holy Monastery of Grigoriou, partly funded by a MAFA emergency aid grant, on repairs and rebuilding following the fire that destroyed their electromechanical facility a year ago.

Thanks to the many generous contributions from their supporters, MAFA also was able in 2020 to make a modest contribution to the Friends of Mount Athos for funding the reconstruction of the historic Holy Axion Estin Cell. In December, the fathers of Axion Estin wrote the following letter to FoMA, which follows:

Dear Friends of Mt. Athos,

In these very festive days, we would like to thank all of you for making them even more brilliant and beautiful! The workers house, finally, will be completely ready this Christmas. And what better Christmas present than this? We are all excited

about moving there at first, but most of all because an almost impossible project to our eyes is nearing completion. It was something beyond imagination at first, but with the Grace of God and your invaluable contribution and help we are finally reaching the end. Wholeheartedly we wish you all a blessed Nativity. May the new year 2021, grant to you, our friends and to the whole world “the Perfect love of God” which “drives out fear”. With Love in Christ,

The Fathers of Axion Estin

The work at the Axion Estin Cell is ongoing. Renovation of the Workers’ House was the first step, but the start of renovations to the main building (the residence of the monks) remains for the year ahead. MAFA is hopeful that it will be able to make ongoing contributions to this important and historic project.

More information about the Axion Estin Cell, its history and the famous hymn for which it is named is available online: <https://www.kelioxionestin.com/eng/>.

The progress of the project itself is on the website of the Friends of Mount Athos: <https://athosfriends.org/appeals/axion-estin/>

The Axion Estin Cell was also featured in the film by Peter Bardehle and Andreas Martin, Athos – Mount Athos Monk’s Republic Documentary, available on YouTube, where you can see Fr. Loukianos making stop-gap roof and window repairs and discussing the brotherhood’s dream of renovating the hermitage.

More information is available via email: [\[email protected\]](#), on Facebook and the website: www.mountathosfoundation.org.

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