



# OYMT REVIEW

## Making Disciples – Being Disciples

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28: 19-20



To show our appreciation to all of you, our stockholders, who helped make the Orthodox Youth Mission Team trip to Alaska possible this past July, **we cordially invite you to join any one of our appreciation events** and enjoy some delicious homemade food.

You'll see a slideshow of our trip and hear from members of our team about the amazing experiences we had on our mission trip.

**We hope you can make it!**

PHOTO ALBUM: If you cannot attend, please view our photo album at [www.oymt.info](http://www.oymt.info).

## Stockholder Appreciation Events

Presentations will be held at the following parishes after liturgy:

### Sunday Sept. 24

St. John's Orthodox Church  
364 Mill Hill Avenue  
Bridgeport, CT 06610

### Sunday Sept. 24

St. Barbara  
Greek Orthodox Church  
480 Racebrook Road  
Orange, CT 06477

### Sunday Sept. 24

Holy Trinity Orthodox Church  
74 Joes Hill Road  
Danbury, CT 06811

### Sunday Nov. 5

Holy Trinity Orthodox Church  
46 Seymour Street  
Yonkers, NY 10701

*All are welcome!*

## 10 Days on a Mission

On July 7, 2017 the Orthodox Youth Mission team started our Orthodox Christian Mission Center trip to Alaska with 24 hours of traveling by bus, plane, car and skiff to the village of Napaskiak. For the next 10 days, our team, lead by Father Luke Mihaly of Holy Trinity in Danbury, CT along with 5 other adult leaders and 19 teenagers from the parishes of Holy Trinity Danbury, CT, St. Barbara Orange, CT, St. John's Mill Hill Avenue, Bridgeport, CT, Holy Trinity Yonkers, NY and St. John's Stratford, CT served in the village by helping run a Vacation Church School and Youth Conference and also in the neighboring village of Oscarville, clearing the land and building the foundation for their new church. Two of our leaders and two of our youth also traveled to the village of Eek where they helped install a cupola on the church there. We were welcomed into the community and the parish of St. James. We worshipped together and were gifted with the most amazing hospitality, being invited to feasts in several homes where we ate salmon, walrus, moose, orca and many other delicious and new foods. We arrived during salmon season and saw firsthand how families catch and preserve fish to sustain their families for the upcoming winter. We made many new friends and felt like family with these brothers and sisters in Christ who showed by their example the beauty of life in an Orthodox community. We also explored the Orthodox directive of mission through devotional activities and what it means for each of us and our parishes. It was a time of spiritual and personal growth for all and one we will carry in our hearts always. If you are interested in joining the Orthodox Youth Mission Team, creating your own team, or have any questions, please come to one of our Thank You events, or email us at [padreluke@aol.com](mailto:padreluke@aol.com).

## Special Thanks to our Generous Team Godparents:

**Bishop Gregory of Nyssa**

**Rosemary Delaney**

**Lorraine Fedyna**

**Holy Trinity Orthodox Church of New Britain, CT**

**The Kulis Foundation**

**Michael and Dori Kuziak**

**Pani Bethany Mihaly**

**Napoleon and Dianne Tsilfoglou**

**Mary Ann Vojtek**

**Jay Woods**

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# Reflections

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**George Antonellis**

As I left to go on the mission trip to Alaska, I did not know what to expect. We were told that the people were very quiet and reserved. That wasn't the case at all. On the very first day we arrived there, everyone was very friendly and hospitable. They helped us with our luggage, waved at us whenever they passed by and several times throughout the week we were all invited to go and eat at someone's house. A lot of the adults shared their experiences with us and some of the teenagers told us stories too. It was so hard to say goodbye to all the people on our final day in Alaska. Going to Alaska on this mission trip was the best experience of my life and I think that everyone should go on a trip like this.

**Lauren Fazekas**

This trip has been such an amazing experience. We were welcomed into the village of Napaskiak with open arms from all the locals. There were so many new adventures throughout the week, including running a Bible camp for all of the kids and even riding in a skiff (we're all pros now). We went to Alaska to help the community of Napaskiak and to start building a church in Oscarville. But we quickly learned that what we could do for them could never add up to what they taught us. The people of Napaskiak taught us the true meaning of community. The families were so generous to us. They opened their homes and showed us how grateful they were for us being there. They made us truly feel loved in such a short amount of time, and by the end of the week, we all felt like we were part of their family.

**Nicholas Fazekas**

The people we met have made an unparalleled impact on my life which will never be surpassed. The communities we visited have a subsistence way of life, depending on what they hunt and gather to take care of their families. And yet, they opened their homes to us without the slightest hesitation, and fed us with a hospitality that is beyond our comprehension. To give so generously of the food that would sustain them through a winter makes our own hardships meek in comparison. The people of Napaskiak, Oscarville, and Eek will be in my heart forever. The impact of a church built by our own hands, being part of a community united under Christ and our actions through the youth Bible camp and youth conference that will not diminish with the passage of time.

**Will Fazekas**

No words could be used to describe what I experienced the last 10 days. I can honestly say that it was the best week of my life. At the beginning of the week, we wrote down some of the things we hoped to get out of the trip, and one thing I said was to get a new perspective on my

life and to come back a changed man. And I feel like I was able to do just that. But I didn't just gain something for myself. Although it's hard to see the impact we've had on the people of Napaskiak and Oscarville now, I feel like we left behind our utmost love and compassion, we helped to build the foundation of a church, and so much more. I've also formed lifelong relationships with people on my team that I know will always have a place in my heart. It's crazy to think we only see each other once a month for meetings and then one week over the summer but whenever we get together it's like no time had passed, and we just pick up where we left off. That's when you know you have something real with people.

**Alena Kittleman**

This is my first time doing a mission trip across the country and I was really nervous about going. Once we got to Alaska and met the people I knew I would love it here. Everyone was so welcoming and excited that we were here and couldn't wait to get to know us. I've never felt the presence of God more in my life. Even with my earlier reservations, I feel that God sent me to this amazing village for a reason. I've also never been to church so much in one week and at first I didn't understand why there was so much church, but after going to every service I felt like I belonged and understood the meaning of being one of God's disciples. This week made me realize that I need to let God into my life more and start making a bigger effort to go to church no matter what's going on. As Father Luke said, "You as the youth aren't the future of the church, you are the church." We as the youth need to be as involved as we can and keep the faith alive.

**Alexis Klimaszewski**

I will forever be grateful for what this trip has taught me about myself. I learned that I truly am comfortable around young children and can handle and teach them well. I learned that I can relate well to people of other cultures, and enjoy most talking to people my age and especially the elderly. I learned that I don't have to be great at construction (which I am most definitely not) or the strongest person to be useful on the worksite. I learned, that I can handle taking care of myself, and my friends, when I am sick and away from home. And finally, I learned that without a doubt, no matter what happens in my life, I want to do more mission work. Before this trip I was always interested in long term missions, especially after my experiences with ASP, but I was under the false impression that I would have to be perfect at every aspect of the trip to be good enough to go. I now understand that every single person has something to offer on a mission trip. Wherever God sends us, we should go. This was truly a life changing experience that I will never ever forget.

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# Reflections

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**Ted Maniatis**

At first when we made it to Napaskiak I was concerned that it would be hard to make connections and have genuine conversations with the people. We were told that they were quiet and on the shyer side. However once we started meeting people it was very easy to make connections with them and even after the first day we had developed a relationship with the people. For me building a church in Oscarville was cool but the relationships I made with the people there were the biggest thing. I will never forget the kids that I met and the stories I heard. Not to mention also getting to know the people from our group better too. Over all I think it was an amazing experience.

**Anastasia Radcliff**

My trip to Alaska was an experience I will never forget. The people, the food, the culture are outstanding. We were told that the villagers in Napaskiak were reserved but when we arrived, we were greeted right away. During the next few days, they opened their arms, and fed us so much when they have so little. I never felt so much love with people I had never met before. The kids were absolutely amazing and full of energy. They wanted to play with us nonstop. I grew so attached to the kids, the amazing food, and of course Napaskiak itself. I hope in the future that I can come back and make more of a difference here.

**Grace Radcliff**

Coming to Alaska for 10 days during my summer was the best decision I have ever made! When we came to Napaskiak the people were so welcoming that I felt like I was at home for the first time in such a long time since my dad passed away. During the week I slowly opened up more to the whole team because most of the time I'm reserved and quiet and listen in, but as I talked with the locals and the children it got me to speak more to the team as well. I feel like this trip got me out of the feeling of loneliness due to the hospitality everyone has shown. The trip has made me appreciate my own faith by knowing that putting my religion to work I can change the lives of so many people. I know for a fact that I'm going to miss Napaskiak. Someday I will try to come back here to either visit or serve again in the future.

**Madeline Sulich**

This trip was unlike all others that I've been on. The most moving part came on only the second day. We were invited with open arms to a feast at the priest's family's house. When I was coming up the stairs I heard a radio but as I get closer I realized it was people singing. By the time I reached the room I was greeted by at least twenty people singing "God grant you many years". After a 24 hour flight there was no better gift then the unwavering hospitality of these people who opened their house to us strangers.

This hospitality continued throughout the week with countless feasts, invitations and community. It was truly impactful.

**Joe Symochko**

This was my fourth year on the OYMT, and I'd have to say so far it's been my favorite. The natives had to be some of the nicest people I've ever met, adults and youth. Typically people tend to think of "southern hospitality," but I think the Yup'ik have surpassed that standard by far. For example, when Nick Fazekas and I had the privilege of traveling to the village of Eek to put a cupola on top of their church, the people there fed us plenty and gave us warm beds to sleep in. Unlike my host family, Dennis and Nick's had no idea they were coming, yet offered up their house without hesitation. It is in their culture to share and help each other whenever possible, which is something I think everyone can implement a little more of in their lives. We hosted a Bible camp at the center and gained the opportunity to interact with the kids. Though sometimes they could be a hassle, I learned to love every one of them, and it taught me that the church is not made of altars and icons, but rather the people, for a church without a congregation is no different than an ordinary house.

**Nick Symochko**

This year's trip to Alaska has been an incredible experience, for my faith grew strong during the week. This trip allowed me to experience what it truly means to make a disciple and being a disciple of The Lord. The people opened up their homes to us. The kids did everything with us. God gave each and every one of us a gift and being on this trip, I truly discovered mine of being with kids. I am so thankful that I got to go on this trip. And I hope to go on a mission trip next year.

**Emily Szpynda**

Words can't describe my experience in Napaskiak. Ten days could've been a month from how at home I felt. My favorite part of this trip was connecting with the people. The children immediately opened up to us and made me feel as if I had known them forever. During this mission we spent every day with native adults and children, which really let us form deep connections. This trip truly was a blessing. I learned so much about the people of Napaskiak and about myself. This trip has inspired me to keep doing service in any way I can. It really was a trip of a lifetime.

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# Reflections

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**Adriana Szpynda**

Our Alaska trip this year was unlike anything our team had ever experienced. On this trip, we had to be flexible and patient. We had to go into Napaskiak with our hearts open. Our team was definitely tested from the very beginning with a crazy travel day with hours spent on buses, planes, and boats. As soon as we arrived, however, the village was ready with quads for our luggage and hot dogs for our stomachs. From the very beginning, the people of Napaskiak were amazing. They laughed with us, talked with us, and beat us in basketball all throughout the week. The relationships we built far surpassed any expectations as we were invited into homes and into churches and the kids waited at the front of the school to play with us each day. Our Alaska trip was truly relationship ministry with carpentry on the side, and the people of Napaskiak have become family.

**Victoria Szpynda**

Having the opportunity to go to Alaska this year was amazing, but being able to meet and connect with the people in Alaska was even better. I love all of the people that I met in Alaska and I was shocked at how quickly they opened their arms and took us in when we first came. The people of Napaskiak sacrificed their resources for us. The children would laugh and play with us and had no problem connecting with us. I definitely developed a strong relationship with a lot of those kids. I love Napaskiak and all of the people from the bottom of my heart and I would give anything to go back. This was a life changing trip and I would love to do it all again!

**Melissa Tartaglio**

When I heard that we were going to Alaska I knew this year was going to be amazing. From the moment we landed in Bethel I was overwhelmed by the amazing hospitality and the willingness of the community to help the OYMT get settled. I really enjoyed the fact that the entire community was Orthodox. It made embracing my faith comfortable. We had gone to Napaskiak to teach the children however I felt as though I was learning just as much, if not more, on how to truly embrace a Christian lifestyle. This has truly been one of the most rewarding trips I have been on and I can confidently say this will not be my last short term mission.

**Annie-Jorden Tomaszek**

The community in Napaskiak loved having people visit. They loved having people of the same faith join them in prayer. Father Vasily and his family hung around with us a lot and we started to have relationships with their kids after the first day. When we had our Bible camp the

relationships I made with the kids will last me a lifetime. Just thinking about leaving makes me sad because they welcomed us with open arms and made us feel like one of their long lost friends. Even though I wasn't really close to one specific kid they all impacted me in ways words can't even explain. I wish that I could stay in Napaskiak forever. Their way of life is so influential to me that I want to start living exactly like them. Napaskiak, Alaska will forever hold a piece of my heart. I hope that the people there will remember us a long time from now.

**Robbie Wagner**

Not only is Alaska very far from home but it was the longest amount of time I have ever been away from home. This experience was great because I got to see such a different culture. The lifestyle there was very quiet and easygoing. Nobody was ever in a rush to do something; plans were never final and could always change. The town didn't really have a schedule, unless of course it was Sunday and church was happening. It was astonishing that almost everyone in this town was religious. The culture of this town is built around religion, something you don't see so much in Connecticut. If you go to a public school, religious people are rare and hard to identify and often are seen as a joke to the growing population of atheists. But in this town religion was a key part of everyone's culture, and it was a beautiful thing to see. Another highlight of this trip was building the church in Oscarville. We always hear in church, the priest asking God to bless the builders of the church and I really never thought about that until I was privileged to build this church in Alaska where marriages, Holy Week and baptisms could happen. Overall this trip was a once in a life time experience.

**Olivia Wislocki**

At church one of the first nights, we met the priest's children and his daughter, Sophia, in particular, was very shy. At first she would not talk to us. However, the next day some of the children performed their cultural dances and she came up to me and began talking to me and showing me her costume. This moment began our friendship. We became very close over the rest of the trip and we were both able to open up to each other and teach each other about our own cultures and languages. We formed a bond that I will hold in my heart forever and I am so happy that I was able to meet her and become friends. Also, I've been able to try so many new foods including walrus, moose, caribou, and orca. Being able to live with all the people here, forming relationships with them, serving them, and loving them made this trip so special and one of the best experiences I've had.

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Pictured on the far left is Fr. Vasily Fisher, priest in Napaskiak. Front row left is Presbytera Renee Ritsi from OCMC, and on the far right is Olga Mesak, "Bishop" of Oscarville.

## We're ready for next year!

OYMT will be participating in an  
Appalachian Service Project Trip  
July 7-15, 2018

If you are a teen or adult interested in joining us, or you'd like to find out how to form an OYMT crew at your parish, please attend one of our presentations or contact:

Fr. Luke Mihaly [padreluke@aol.com](mailto:padreluke@aol.com)

Susan Sulich [ssulich@yahoo.com](mailto:ssulich@yahoo.com)

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For more information about our team, visit [www.oymt.info](http://www.oymt.info)  
and for the ASP organization, visit [www.asphome.org](http://www.asphome.org).

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Thank you again for supporting us, and we hope you will invest in our success again next year!