



OYMT REVIEW

Rooted in Love

“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”

John 15:4



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

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

We hope you can make it!

If you cannot attend, please view our [photo album](#) at www.oymt.info or Facebook/ Instagram @oymt1, and on our OYMT YouTube channel!

Stockholder Appreciation Events

Presentations will be held at the following parishes after liturgy:

Sunday Oct. 2

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

Sunday Oct. 9

Holy Trinity Orthodox Church
46 Seymour Street
Yonkers, NY 10701

Sunday Oct. 16

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

Sunday Oct. 30

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

All are welcome!

One Big Week In West Virginia!

This year the Orthodox Youth Mission Team (OYMT) led by Fr. Luke Mihaly of Holy Trinity in Danbury, CT filled an entire Appalachian Service Project (ASP) center in Clay, WV. Our group of 49 youth and adult leaders was comprised of team members from CT, NY and MD -- 6 parishes in all from 3 jurisdictions: American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese, The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese and the Orthodox Church in America. It was truly a unique opportunity for Orthodox high school and college youth to come together across multiple jurisdictions to serve Christ in a mission experience.

Our team assisted 7 families making homes "warmer, safer and drier," which is ASP's mission:

- Building Porches
- Siding
- Adding underpinning and insulation
- Sheetrocking and painting walls and ceilings
- Installing subfloors and flooring

Even more important than the construction work, however, was the chance to bring hope to the families we served by sharing the love of Christ with them. At the end of our workweek, we presented each family with an icon. The team also participated in many social, cultural and devotional activities at the center.

On the way down, we were blessed to visit the parish of St. Mary's with Fr. Andrew Wythe, in Morgantown, WV. We celebrated Vespers and shared time with Kenny Kidd, Executive Director of FOCUS, for discussion about cultural perspectives of working in Appalachia. After Divine Liturgy, we received a very warm welcome and gracious hospitality from the parishioners.

This is OYMT's 10th trip and 12th year of service, and we are grateful to our Lord for this amazing opportunity to make Him present by serving others and to all of you for your prayers and ongoing support.

Special Thanks to our Generous Godparents:

The Adzima Family
Joseph Brown
eVero Corporation
Lorraine Fedyna
Dan Jowdy
Kristine Lownsburry
Mary Ann Vojtek
Pat Soper and James Zeleniak

Reflections

Kallista Berner—This is my third trip to ASP. In past years, I wasn't able to make a connection with my homeowners. This year however, I had a young homeowner. She's a mom of two kids. She had her oldest when she was around my age. I felt like I really made a strong connection with her. She shared stories with me that will stick with me for years to come. It opened my eyes to the fact that even though we are close in age, our lives are so different in ways that go beyond economics. Getting to be with kids this year was amazing as well. Seeing their happiness and utter joy when throwing rocks into a creek or jumping on a trampoline helped me to remember that you can find happiness right where you are, with what you have, and the company surrounding you. This year is one I will remember for the rest of my life. I am always so grateful for ASP.

Luke Berner—This being my 3rd year going on ASP, and the first year since the Covid pandemic was a very special trip for me. I got to return to doing what truly means a lot to me. ASP is much more than just going to someone's house and fixing a porch. ASP is all about sharing the Gospel of Christ and building lifelong bonds with the families that we serve, while doing home repair on the side! This year I had the privilege of working with a homeowner who was truly a wonderful person and radiated the light of Christ to everyone she came into contact with. It was a blessing to be able to build this bond with my homeowner. She taught us many life lessons and gave us so much and this is something that I will hold on to in my life. Christ commands us in the Gospel to be disciples and preach His name to all the ends of the world and by participating in this wonderful mission trip we are doing what we can to live out this calling by our Lord. ASP holds such a special place in my heart, and I look forward to the many years of trips that await us!

Zach Berner—ASP was a really awesome experience. This year was my first year and I did not know what to expect. As the week went on I gained confidence and learned how to not fear the unknown. ASP grew my connection with God and really showed me that my life is in God's control. I also learned that we should be grateful for the little things in life because some little things are some peoples big things. I will always remember this trip and the memories that came with it.

Maria Hathaway—During the ASP trip I learned a lot. For example, I learned that by turning on a simple light it can make the homeowner really happy. Sometimes we just turn on a light switch because we are used to it but for other people it can really make their day and it made my day, by seeing the homeowner happy--it was incredible. Another thing that I learned during the trip was that we should appreciate what we have because maybe other people may not have that. One of my favorite memories was really connecting with the homeowners that we had and listening to their stories and what they have to say about their past. It was quite fascinating to listen to. Our relationship that we built with the homeowners was amazing and you do take in those moments and really enjoy them because you may never see them again. I really did enjoy this trip and I hope I will be able to do it again and meet amazing people and build new friendships :)

Aidan McVeigh—This year was my first trip on ASP. I wasn't expecting it to be a fun trip. But I later learned that it was really fun. I made new friends and learned that values mean more than anything. At my work site there was a kid named Zach, he is 16 years old. He always had a smile on his face no matter the circumstance. He helped us build a porch for his grandmother. He and his family were also very welcoming. They gave us watermelon, pepperoni rolls, ice pops and a place to sit and eat lunch. Zach's Dad Lee also had a smile on his face no matter what. They lived in not the greatest conditions, but their bond was so tight nobody could break their happiness, not even the conditions they lived in. On the last night they came back to the center to play basketball, bond with more kids and really make an impact on all of ASP as a whole.

Markus Soennichsen—ASP was a really fun experience which had many opportunities. Being that it was my first year, it was going to be an exciting trip with lots of unknown things. It was surprising to see that lots of the things that we take for granted are valuable here for the people. Overall, it was a really fun trip that was an eye-opening experience. I will always remember this trip.

Youth Leader Reflections

Jamison Dunne—Every mission trip I have ever been on has left me with a feeling of peace. There's so much joy in helping others, growing closer to Christ, and building strong relationships with the people you serve with on mission trips. These trips feel like "thin places" where it is as if the separation of heaven and earth feel thin, and it is easier to feel the presence of God. This trip, my first with the Appalachian Service Project and OYMT, was so much richer than other mission's trips I had been on. The motto for ASP is "A relationships ministry with construction on the side" and they live into this well, making the central theme of all that we do building relationships and friendships with those whom we are helping. Equally important is the emphasis of OYMT, that we cannot live into the mission of ASP without have Christ with us.

Almost everything we did on this trip was structured around these key themes: relationship with Christ, and relationships with others. Night one in Morgantown, WV was a beautiful Vespers service, followed by building a relationship with Kenny Kidd. Kenny, a West Virginia local and Director of the Fellowship of Orthodox Christians United in Service, gave all of us clearer picture of the people of WV. Once we got to the center every day was bookended with prayer. We were constantly reminded that our relationships with the families and the physical work of building homes had to be grounded by Christ. Without this foundation our trip would have been hollowed out.

The real highlight of this trip for me was getting to know the family we worked with. On our first day on the site Zach, one of the kids of the family we were working with, came out and spent the whole day working with us. From then on he spent every workday with us, becoming an integral part of our team. Over the week the whole family opened up to us. We learned about how they had been on their land since the 40s, that Zach is on the hunt for a 450-pound bear, that they are really good at arm wrestling. As the week carried on it transitioned from a family we were serving to just helping our friends build a new porch.

While other mission trips I have been on have had elements of relationship building, both with Christ and the area we are working, none have done it as well as Appalachian Service Project and OYMT. Every day the separation between heaven and earth felt a little thinner. Through the inclusion of a rhythm of prayer and such strong friendships with our family to this trip I left feeling as though I truly knew Clay County and its people, and through that came to know Christ better. Clay County is now a place that I can count as one of those "thin places" where it felt so much easier to know God. Without the support of OYMT and Appalachian Service Project I don't know if that would have been possible.

Lexi Klimaszewski—This year I was fortunate to be able to return to OYMT after five trips in high school followed by a four-year break in college. I won't lie, it was a challenge to be able to take 10 days off from work in the middle of moving for law school, but I'm so glad I was able to figure it out and join the group for our first trip back with ASP in two years.

On the way down to West Virginia, Susan and I were reflecting on OYMT's 12th anniversary and this being the team's 10th trip (2 years were lost to covid). I have been fortunate enough to be a part of 6 of the 10 trips. Even without participating in the trips before I turned fourteen, I've been able to meet over 100 incredible pan-Orthodox youth and adults. That in itself is an accomplishment. I consistently appreciate Susan, Fr. Luke, and Beth's efforts to create opportunities for Orthodox kids in the Tri-state area and beyond, to meet other Orthodox youth in a challenging environment outside of camp and across dioceses.

This year was all about adjusting to a new role as a young adult leader within the team. While I've been a leader among youth on previous trips, this year I was four years older than any of the youth participants and was given more responsibilities. I was able to be a bridge between adult and youth, foster communication and channels for feedback, and be a resource within my own work crew. I was able to build relationships with adults on the team that I've worked with for years on a much deeper level. At the end of the week, I had one of the proudest moments of my entire ASP experience. I had four different team members tell me that this week wouldn't have been possible without me there. Fourteen-year-old me on my first trip could never have imagined the growth I've been able to experience through OYMT.

Another special aspect of this year's trip was the relationships my crew was able to develop not only with our homeowner, but also her neighbor. Despite ASP's focus on relational ministry first and foremost, my families in previous years (with the exception of Alaska) have been more reserved and have never come to the family picnic. This year, I had the opportunity to get to know our homeowner at the picnic. She spoke about the deaths of her husband and disabled sister and was brought to tears as she told us she didn't deserve the work we were doing to make her home warmer and safer. Shaun said it best: "Everyone deserves God's love." The homeowner was dealing with a horrible landlord and was struggling to make ends meet despite working full time at a medical clinic throughout the pandemic.

Youth Leader Reflections

Lexi Klimaszewski (Cont.) I also had the opportunity to sit and talk with her neighbor, Benny, for almost two hours at the picnic. Every day, twice a day, he brought us popsicles at the worksite and offered up the use of his own tools. He was in a safer financial situation than our homeowner and operated a small woodworking shop. I arranged for him to sell his cutting boards at the picnic, despite his fears that they may not be good enough. He got a little emotional when I told him, "See Benny, you sold out in 5 minutes! Everyone loves them!" He's been through a lot in his life and visiting with us throughout the week was definitely a much-needed social outlet for him. But he was also so proud of the life he's built for himself, while remaining so humble, and went out of his way to build a relationship with us and help us help his neighbor.

I'm not sure what the next few years will hold for me as I head into law school. But, taking this week to "re-center" or "re-focus" my life, as I always say about ASP, was so necessary and so appreciated. I always come back to a need for ASP to reset my outlook on life, make me appreciate all that I have, and humble and re-energize me. And I always need some time with the incredible people of the OYMT to renew my faith and reorient it as the central focal point of my life.

Nick Symochko—This was my eighth year of ASP. It was a blessing to have gone on this trip to Clay County West Virginia with a great group of people. While on the trip as the week went on I made new friends. I got to chant the Epistle which I have never done before. While working on Sandy's house I learned new construction stuff that I never knew. I am really blessed to have worked on Sandy's home with an amazing team this year. When Sandy came out to see what we had done she said she was so blessed. I am blessed that God has called me to go on this trip.



For more information about our team, visit www.oymt.info



For the ASP organization, visit www.asphome.org



We're ready for next year!

OYMT will have our own center for an
Appalachian Service Project Trip
July 8-16, 2023

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

Susan Sulich ssulich@yahoo.com

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