

OCMC Moldova 2015

Conference and Retreat for Preotese (priest wives), “On Marriage and Family Life” & Youth Outreach in Three Cities

Overview:

From April 29-May 6 2015 I had the privilege of serving as the first OCMC Orthodox priest in the Republic of Moldova, teaching on the subjects of the Sacrament of Marriage and educating children in the Orthodox Faith, as well as speaking to youth at three high schools across Moldova. I was assisted by my two very talented and Christ-loving teammates, Theresa Duro and Eugenia (Nitsa) Vasiliadis. The Holy Spirit was truly present with us from start to finish as we worked alongside Fr. Sergiu Aga, the indigenous Romanian Moldovan Orthodox priest, and his gifted preotesea, Mariana. As team leader, my goal for the trip was to encourage us to work



1: OCMC Conference Participants with His Grace, Antoniu.

together as one, prayerful, humble and united voice in all our presentations of the holy Orthodox Faith and in all our encounters with the people of Moldova. As a team, we sought to edify, encourage, and equip the preotese and the indigenous Church in their own ministries and service to Christ, and to embolden the youth in applying the Orthodox Faith to their own struggles and the many societal problems Moldova faces.

Conference with the preotese (priests' wives) on marriage and family life:

The first part of our Mission was a two day conference and retreat with the priest wives focused on the Sacrament of Marriage, what it means throughout married life, how a committed, loving, Christ-centered Orthodox marriage witnesses not only to the church but also lifts up the whole community. Integral to this witness is also the education of our children in the Orthodox Faith—not just the truth *about* the Faith but also how to *live* the Faith in our daily lives as husband and wife and as parents modeling that Faith to our children.



2: Our OCMC team addressing the priests and preotese.

Americans might be surprised to hear that we'd be spending so much time educating and encouraging priest wives in an Orthodox country on these issues of practical pastoral theology. Priest wives (preotese) in Moldova, Europe's poorest country, have little access to further education and discipleship in the Faith. Yet many of the *preotese* are extremely active in their respective churches, serving as examples for the other women of the parish, leading the chanting or directing the choir, while often also holding down a job and taking care of their children. It is a heavy and often under-appreciated sacrifice!

The *preotese* were visibly moved and motivated in the course of our time together: given opportunities to share, be fed, ask questions, and learn from one another. Participation this year was double what it was the previous year. Already, the women are looking to increase their participation next year and to put into practice what the Holy Spirit inspired them to do in their own lives and in their own churches, as they assist their husbands, the priests, in their pastoral ministry to their communities.



3: Moldova is Europe's poorest country. These girls were on the highway selling flowers to make money.

The success of the conference was easily seen in the smiling, eager, and thankful faces, gestures, and words, not only of the women who came, but also of His Eminence, Metropolitan Petru and His Grace, Bishop Antoniu of the Metropolie of Besarabia, which hosted the Conference. We were urged to return next year to help them continue to build, encourage, and stir up their flock.

Part II of our Mission to Moldova: Sharing the Orthodox Faith in Moldova's Public Schools!



4: *Inspiring the youth to apply the Orthodox Faith to their daily lives.*

addressing their and Moldova's many societal needs.

Our OCMC team answered questions posed by the youth on such important topics as: sex, suicide, homosexuality, abortion, pornography, marriage, and many others. We spoke with one, unified voice, answering all questions asked.

It needs to be stressed that OCMC makes this ministry of building up the Church in Moldova possible. It was very evident, that without OCMC's involvement, this conference for preotese would not have been nearly so successful or, perhaps, would not have come together at all. Moldova is Europe's poorest country and struggles with many complex, post-Communist problems, but as important as OCMC's financial support is to putting together the logistics, housing, transportation, and dissemination of information for and about the Conference, OCMC's biggest contribution is its "missionary spirit," which inspires her missionaries in the fervency, urgency, and transparency of their message and 'can do' spirit, which, in turn, has the potential to truly impact and inspire the people of God OCMC serves.

God was truly present in all these encounters and opportunities to serve and give of ourselves to God's glory. I'm so thankful for the opportunity to have served OCMC and the Church in Moldova, alongside her hierarchs and priests and the wonderful and gifted women who served with me. I'm looking forward to bringing this missionary zeal back to my own parish and pray that our experience may inspire others in our Church in North America.

With thanksgiving, your
servant in Christ,

Fr. Robert Miclean
Rector, Holy Archangels
Orthodox Church (OCA)
Chaplain, Annapolis Pan-
Orthodox College Ministry



7: *Our last youth outreach-- in the capital, Chişinău*

Our OCMC team also had the amazing and *unexpected* experience (we did not know ahead of time that we would be doing this!) of speaking to several assemblies of high school-aged youth in three cities from North, Central, and South Moldova. Despite Moldova being 95 percent Orthodox, it was stressed to us, that for many of today's youth, there is a general lack of understanding of the relevance of the Orthodox Faith in their lives. Not surprisingly, the youth are confused, bereft of a deeper understanding of the great treasure that their Orthodox heritage and faith is, of their own value before God, of the healing and strength found only in Christ and experienced through His holy Church, of the vital difference that the Church alone can make in



5: *Nitsa addressing students with Fr. Robert translating*



6: *Handing out OCMC icon cards to some of the school children we met.*