

# MY OCMC MISSION TRIP TO MOLDOVA

BY LESLIE HANSARD

The thought of reflecting on my time in Moldova has been somewhat overwhelming since my return. My entry back into the States was full of emotions: I was happy to be home but hated the thought of not being with my wonderful OCMC team and the amazing yet chaotic group of teenagers with whom we spent the week. I am simply unable to put into words how this experience changed me. I am no stranger to the mission experience; this trip to Moldova was my sixth, but this trip touched my heart in a way that nothing ever has.

I prepared for this trip the best I could. I raised the necessary funds, researched the current situation in Moldova, and planned lessons for our time at camp. I learned quickly after my arrival that even the best made plans do not go as you think. I have never felt as frustrated as I did on this trip, in a country where I didn't speak the language and in a situation where I was put in charge of many activities without full control being mine. Even through



my frustration, my primary goal was clear: make a lasting impact on the campers in order to keep them engaged in the Church. That goal was met through a very sweet and wonderful teenager named Alexandra.

Alexandra is a very brave and special young woman who I had the immense pleasure of meeting during my time in Moldova. She was someone who I was immediately drawn to during the trip because of her smiley personality and her ability to speak English really well. We hung out as much as we were able, at meals and during free time, but the

transformative opportunity came while we walked back from a group pilgrimage to a nearby monastery. We began talking about American culture, our likes and dislikes of popular

music and movies. We discussed the sensational “Bieber fever” and her personal love for Katy Perry.

Throughout our talking, the conversation became more and more personal and serious in tone. It wasn't long before Alexandra was in tears as she spoke honestly about her time spent as an exchange student in the States in which she felt drawn to another denomination of Christianity, wondering if Orthodoxy was still right for her. It was something that she was still ashamed of; she felt as though she had betrayed her faith. She still felt distant from Orthodoxy and the Church she was raised in, and she was unsure how to fix what she had lost. I prayed for the right words that would comfort her and bring her peace. I was reminded of the verse in Philippians 1:6 that reads that “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”. I told her we are works in progress; one decision or doubt does not decide our eternal fate. We are constantly working towards the goal of “theosis” in which we are like Him and united with Him. The doubts we have, when reconciled, only bring us closer to Him.

At the end of camp, Alexandra approached me and handed me a letter as a thank you for being there for her at camp. It wasn't until I read through her words that I realized the full extent of what my words meant to her. She said that she needed someone to talk to about these doubts that she had never shared with anyone. She stated that she sensed kindness, a clear vision of the Orthodox Church, and a lot of grace from the Heavenly Father when she first met me, and she knew I would be the only one with whom she could share her thoughts. I cried as I read her words, feeling both humbled and unworthy that a complete stranger would recognize those things in me. As many faults as I have, Christ worked through me and allowed my words to encourage her and shed His light in the dark place she had been living.

Every time I read over her letter, I am reminded of the verse I shared with her that day walking back from the monastery in Lalova. He has begun a work in me, one that is in progress and incomplete. He has promised me that He will continue this work until He returns. Until that day, I may never know the full extent of the ways in which He works through me, but I do know that as long as my goal is to be more like Him and to love His children as He does, there is no limit to the wondrous light He can shine on even the darkest of places.

