Dear CrossRoad alumni,

A huge part of our vocation is to live life wisely—to love thoughtfully, make sensible decisions, and avoid things that will harm us and others. Wisdom isn’t elaborate philosophy—it is practical lived reality. Its end, its telos, is the well-being of all people.

This world has plenty of information. We all have vast quantities of facts and perspectives at our fingertips. What the world needs is wisdom. It needs us to strive steadily for wisdom in our own lives and in the lives of our communities—to love our neighbors in ways that are truly wise. So how do we become people of wisdom?

Our Scriptures include Wisdom Literature: the books of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, Sirach, Song of Songs, and Wisdom of Solomon. Through these books we are called to live wisely as an invitation to others to see the goodness of our God. We also learn that, while there are clear directives, wisdom must be fully embodied by us and requires our thoughtful discernment. Two stunning verses underscore this: Proverbs 26, verses 4 and 5.

"Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will be just like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes."

These verses advise opposite courses of action! We have to decide what to do. The answer takes discernment and that depends on us. So the question becomes: how do we grow in our capabilities for discernment?

Wisdom culminates in the person of Christ (1 Cor 1:20–31)—St. Paul says in his first letter to the Corinthians that Jesus Christ has become for us wisdom from God. Our liturgy asks us to attend to wisdom as we hear God’s word and are drawn to Christ: “Wisdom attend, let us listen to the Holy Gospel.” Our Scriptures are wisdom. The Gospel is wisdom. Christ, the suffering servant, is wisdom. We grow in our capabilities for discernment by constantly seeking a deeper and richer understanding of who Christ is, in and through His Word, fleshed out in the Divine Liturgy, so that we can make wise choices of love—for the lives of the people around us.

What would happen if we did this, for real? We cannot help dreaming about the good you can bring into the world, our beloved CrossRoad alumni, if you are all aflame with love for Christ and His Church and are becoming people of wisdom—within the beautiful array of occupations and life situations that you find yourselves. It is not easy. And we are praying for you and struggling alongside you, ready to share failures and joys and learning. We love you!

With love in Christ,

Ann Mitsakos Bezzerides, Ph.D.
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Keep up with CrossRoad Online!

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ABOUT

DOWN THE ROAD

Down the Road is the magazine for the alumni of the CrossRoad Summer Institute, published annually by the Office of Vocation & Ministry at Hellenic College Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology.

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Have you ever heard the expression, “When it rains, it pours?” It is the phrase people use when it feels as if every facet of their life is crumbling around them and they just can’t catch a break; when academic/work deadlines pile on top of social stressors on top of familial struggles on top of physical ruts, on top of bad world news, on top of spiritual ambivalence, and so on and so forth. How does one person deal with all of that?

Check out any podcast, self-help book, or business article from the past year and you’ll notice resilience as the suggested way to deal with the chaotic, torrential downpours of life. Harvard Business Review has several articles that recommend building resilience as the best way not only to deal with stress, but also to strengthen relationships, improve business numbers, and become a great leader. Resilience has replaced “innovation” in the buzzword stratosphere.

But what is resilience in the first place? Essentially, resilience is the ability to be persistent in all manner of situations because you are strengthened by strong purpose and a truly critical perspective. For Orthodox Christians, therefore, resilience is our capacity to persist in the face of life’s challenges, by remembering we have a greater purpose in Christ (even when we cannot see it!) and using the perspective that, through His death and resurrection, there is something better to come. It is viewing our life through the lens of our telos, our ultimate union with God.

In my life, resilience takes the shape of facing the downpour of work, familial, and spiritual frustrations by leaning on Christ and my community as my strength, rather than pushing away those who can support me and going at it alone. This has led me to recognize that the Christian life is, in itself, an act of resilience; it is persisting, in relationship with Christ, in the face of the world’s call to do other things with our lives, choosing to serve His Church and His people, choosing to use our gifts not primarily for ourselves but for the life of the world. Why? Because this is the pattern Christ gave us; Christ offers in and through Himself the prime example of resilience.

Even when He was doubted and ridiculed, Christ persisted with resilience. He moved for radical change in a gentle way, He loved and served the marginalized even when it meant risking His life. Christ’s entire ministry was focused on the other. His calls for us to love our neighbor, to alleviate the suffering of others, and to be a healing presence to those around us, invites us not only to bear our own crosses, but, as St. Maria Skobtsova notes, “to be pierced by the Crosses of others.” Our suffering is acknowledged as real and profound, but even through it we are capable of the profound love Christ models for us. Scripture give us several examples of how we will be faced with adversity, mocked, and challenged, but we are reminded that “with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). And we must always keep that suffering in the light of the hope of the Resurrection.

How does the Church teach us to be resilient? The self-emptying nature of liturgical and sacramental life keep us grounded and fed by Christ’s example and self. The community we worship with reminds us we are not alone. Stillness and silence, central practices of the Orthodox spiritual tradition, can keep us centered, calm, and better able to navigate difficult issues. Our theology embraces the unknown and sacramental mystery of Life, reminding us that it is “God’s will” not “my will” that we must seek above all else. And we have countless examples in the lives of the saints persisting in the face of persecution through their deep sense of purpose and hope in Christ.

Life is going to bring some serious storms, but thankfully, resilience is part of the fabric of our Christian DNA. If we allow ourselves to dig deeply into what the faith offers, we will find the tools, strength, and habits that will lead to our resilience, even amidst the greatest downpour, in, through, and with Christ.
Session 1

“Coming to CrossRoad has given me a sense of community that I had not experienced before. I barely knew there were other Orthodox people my age. Without friends that shared my faith, I had been growing away from the Church. CrossRoad has truly been a transformative experience. Being here has changed my relationship with God and with myself. Classes with professors and sessions with staff on theology, Church history, and how to live our lives through Christ have given me an understanding about the depth of Orthodoxy that I had not had access to before this program. Through being challenged in talking to homeless people and those in a nursing home, I have learned to see these people in the image of God, and approach them with openness and love. Through good conversation and connection with my fellow CrossRoaders, I have established relationships with people that fundamentally understand me in a way that none of my friends back home do. I have seen the power and importance of God. CrossRoad is the program I didn’t know I needed, but it has changed my life.”

—Anna Schroedel
Session 2

“...I could tell you every life-changing moment I’ve experienced here and still not do it justice! All of us are at that point in our lives where we start to question things and tend to drift from the Church. CrossRoad truly inspired ALL of us to take our faith by the reins and actively make it a priority in our lives...This summer institute is truly a gift to our generation.”

—Sasha Lang

Session 3

“I don’t want to sound cheesy, but this week has really changed my life for the better. One of the best quotes I heard this week was that all Orthodox Christians, born into the faith or not, are converts because they make a conscious decision sometime in their lives to take charge of their own spiritual lives. This week was when that happened for me...This has been the best ten days of my life so far. I have made connections and friendships that will never go away, but more importantly, I have taken my faith into my hands in these past ten days. I believed in God all my life and I grew up in the Orthodox Church all my life, but over the past ten days I have developed a personal relationship with God and a fire has been lit within me that was never there before.”

—Kosta Pappas
On April 12, 2019, sixty-five CrossRoad Alumni from across the US gathered in Boston for three days of vibrant conversations, thought-provoking sessions, and time for prayer/reflection as we prepared for Pascha. Almost every CrossRoad year was represented, from the inaugural session in 2004 to our most recent expansion to Chicago in 2018!

Our guest speaker was Fr. Justin Matthews, the Executive Director of Reconciliation Services in Kansas City, MO, and former director of FOCUS North America. Fr. Justin offered three sessions that focused on an Orthodox theological exploration of reconciliation and what it means to reconcile ourselves to our neighbor and to God. Throughout his sessions he cited numerous examples of the ways in which Christ, saints, and youth of our church have lived out the Gospel of reconciliation. He challenged our alumni to consider how they could manifest the Gospel of reconciliation in their own lives and live out the “Liturgy after the Liturgy.” Alumni were challenged and strengthened by his message. In the words of John Maletis, CrossRoad 2004, “[Reconciliation] is the breaking down of barriers that separate us from our neighbor and God that takes strength, courage, humility, and patience in order to love and reconcile.”

Amidst the learning, there was time for communal worship, stillness and prayer, and fellowship with fellow alums. One of Saturday’s activities included an exercise in which younger alumni were paired with older alumni to connect and learn about the unique ways in which they are living out their vocation. Naya Burshan, CR June 2018, commented, “I loved connecting with former CrossRoders in all the different events. I met people my sister has talked about for years, and I made new friendships of my own that I hope will last just as long. During the discussions and reflections, I saw that others’ thoughts and perspectives reflected my own, and I appreciated the validation, comfort, and support I felt there.”

The retreat concluded with Divine Liturgy held at the beautiful Holy Cross Chapel, a second home for CrossRoad alumni. What a joy it was to have so many alums back together and their feedback to us conveyed they returned home energized and inspired! Glory to God!
Former CR staff attend the OCAM-PR conference in November 2019.

2018 Session 2 alumni at Project Mexico summer 2019.

Nine of our CrossRoad Alumni served as staff at Ionian Village this past summer!

2018 CR Chicago alums. Anna Karos and Peggy Polydoros, represent at OCF’s Midwest College Conference.

CR Alums, Kassandra Ibrahim, Paul Jacobs and Caroline Mellekas on their OCF Real Break trip to Jerusalem in March 2019.

Alumna and former staff member/CR Chicago director, Anna Kallis, with her son (future alum?!) Jonah at CrossRoad Chicago 2019.

CR Alums, Kassandra Ibrahim, Paul Jacobs and Caroline Mellekas on their OCF Real Break trip to Jerusalem in March 2019.

CR Alumni and former staff at OCF’s midwest regional retreat in October 2019.

2018 CR Chicago alums, Anna Karos and Peggy Polydoros, represent at OCF’s Midwest College Conference.

June 2010 alumnus Emanuel Sabau and July 2011 alumna Fiona Sterling at their wedding in May 2019.

2018 Session 2 alumni at Project Mexico summer 2019.

Former CR staff attend the OCAM-PR conference in November 2019.

35 CrossRoad Alumni at OCF’s College Conference East in December 2018.

Nine of our CrossRoad Alumni served as staff at Ionian Village this past summer!
2018 CR Chicago Alums, Mary Johns and Alexia Kouimanis, with alumna and former intern, Marina Dimas, at Ionian Village summer 2019.

CR Alumni, former staff, and Telos director Jenny Mosher at the Youth & Camp Workers Conference in January 2019.

Session 2 2018 alums reunite to ring in the New Year together in January 2019.

June 2010 Alum, Fr. John Tsikalas with his wife and Koumbari (also fellow alum) Demetri Constantine, at his ordination to the priesthood in June 2019.


CR Alumni represent at OCF’s student leadership institute in summer 2019.

True Bryant (Staff ‘14 & ‘17), JT and Sarah Livick-Moses (Staff ‘16 & ‘18), and Demetrios Constantine (’10 Alum & ’16 Staff) a friend’s wedding, July 2019.

July 2016 alums and 2016 staff member, Sophia (Kon) Shadid, at OCF’s College Conference East in December 2018.

Dn. Niko & Dnsa. Ivey Tzetis with Nick (CR ‘05, Staff ‘12) and Amanda Lionas (Intern ‘12) and their children Scotty and Eleni at Dn. Niko’s ordination.
Dear fellow CrossRoad alums,

Greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ!

“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.” (Matthew 7:7) When I applied to CrossRoad years ago, I had a mindset of seeking something from Christ about vocation and myself. This attitude led me to one of my most profound and formative encounters with Him through CrossRoad. The community and education I experienced at CrossRoad helped me glimpse the depth of our Orthodox Faith, instilling in me a desire for more.

In this upcoming year, may the Alumni Advisory Board’s work inspire you to pursue deeper communion with Christ and empower CrossRoad to continue providing transformative encounters with Him. To that end, I hope we can foster opportunities for you to rekindle existing friendships and build new ones, pray for each other, engage with educational opportunities and materials which encourage you to take the next steps on your spiritual journey, and continue building up the Sophia Bambalis Scholarship Fund for the benefit of future alums.

Please contact us with your ideas and feedback so we can better serve you!

With humility and love in Christ,
Jason Oneida, 2006 Alum
Alumni Advisory Board Chair
Community Building Committee
The Community Building Committee of the CrossRoad Alumni Advisory Board has continued working this year on our goal to improve community among alumni. We collected information from our alumni to find out what everyone is interested in, how to improve communications with the community, and how to best promote and support regional meet-ups. The committee has also worked on promoting CrossRoad through presentations to potential participants and actively using our website and social media outlets of Facebook and Instagram to spread information to both potential participants and alumni.

Sustainability Committee
This year the Financial Sustainability Committee has worked hard to continue to meet our goal that no accepted CrossRoad participant is unable to attend CrossRoad because of financial reasons. With this goal in mind, in March 2019 we kicked off a campaign to raise as much money as we could to be matched by a generous donor by the end of August 2019. In the span of less than six months, we raised more than $13,900, and our campaign continues! Our funds raised are matched by our inspiring donor and dear OVM friend, Mrs. Virginia Alex, who joined us at the CrossRoad Alumni Retreat and shared the beautiful story of her family’s faith and what motivates her love for all of us!

So many people were involved in helping us get to our goal and we are incredibly thankful for each and every person’s contributions, big or small. We look forward to kicking off another year of giving to our beloved CrossRoad and ensuring that more high school students have the opportunity to experience the love of God and neighbor in the coming years!

Education Committee
This year, our committee wanted to focus on an initiative that can be used for years and years to come. This is how the “Resource List” came about. Based on your responses from the Community Building Committee’s Involvement Survey, we searched through articles, books, podcasts, and videos to select reliable resources on the topics you’re interested in. We hope these Resource Lists help you to continue your CrossRoad journey—no matter how much time has passed—and that you may use them to help teach others. We are excited for you to join our newest initiative—a virtual book study on the writings of St. John Chrysostom with former CrossRoad Director, Fr. Michael Tishel.
For the last year, our Telos pilot parish teams have been bringing young adult ministry ideas to life. Teams have hosted dinners, retreats, lectures, icon-painting classes, sandwich-making for the homeless, trivia nights, book study groups, Lenten cooking classes, how-to-buy-a-house workshops. They’ve arranged mentoring partnerships, both of the kind where young adults can find professional and personal mentors for themselves in their congregations, and opportunities for young adults to mentor younger parish members. They’ve done all this in response to the real needs and interests expressed by young adults in their particular communities, with the goal of deepening young adult religious and spiritual lives.

In the process, they all learned how hard it can be to get stuff done in a parish! Consequently, the May 2019 consultation focused on how to build strong and sustainable ministry teams, and drew on the profound insights of remarkable Orthodox professionals: Gabriel Otte, CEO and Co-founder of Freenome, Inc., and Mark Moraitakis, Senior Director, Customer and Market Insights, Chick-fil-A. Telos is also growing! Inspired by the national project, the Hellenic Foundation Chicago has funded a new expansion of the Telos Project for GOA parishes in the Metropolis of Chicago. We’re calling it Telos Gamma. Designed on a regional scale and led by our CrossRoad alum Anna Colis Kallis ’05, it will allow us to further test and refine the Telos process for the learning and benefit of the entire Church.

"Unique and Ongoing—we know the words and we remember the call. As the years go by since CrossRoad, our lives grow and change; it is rare that we are reminded to re-evaluate how our vocation has changed with time. Blessed with an opportune reminder through the Telos Project, I find myself again evaluating my own unique and ongoing call to serve Christ within my own parish. We are provided with chances to assess how our vocation extends outside of our professional lives and into our parish communities. Learning to engage our fellow young adults within our parish communities, the Telos Project can become a way for us all to ask how, in prayer and patience, we can continue to redefine the reach of our vocation within our beautiful Church."

—Andrew Abboud, July 2011 alum and Telos participant
As a student, sometimes you have to choose between truly learning, or just skimming and convincing people you learned. With a company, sometimes you have to choose between doing a project well, or doing it poorly to meet a deadline. Professors, chefs, entrepreneurs, and all of us often face the same dilemma in our professional lives: we must choose between being versus appearing.

Sometimes we settle for appearances—in order to look good, to save face, or just to survive. But we know that appearances only go so far. None of us wants to travel across a bridge that only appears to be a bridge, or to trust a surgeon who only appears to be a surgeon.

As Orthodox Christians, we believe our vocation involves making those same choices with regard to our humanity: we must choose to be truly human rather than to simply appear that way. This means continually making the hard decision to follow Christ when He calls us to love God and our neighbor.

Difficult as that is, the people who succeed become healing presences in the world, radiating God’s grace through their words, their actions, and their very existence. We call them saints. And while saints have all responded to Christ in a unique way, they also seem to have something in common: they honed their vocation in a period of intense growth and incubation.

Saint Anthony spent decades withdrawn in the Egyptian desert. Saint Mardarije spent twelve years in prayer and study before organizing the Serbian diaspora in Illinois. Saint Maria of Paris spent nearly a decade quietly serving the poor and learning theology before establishing her urban convent.

Some saints had a choice over their circumstances and willingly endured deserts and caves. Others did not: they lived in Nazi-occupied territory, or had cancer, or they were hunted by governmental forces. But all of them continually chose to love God and their neighbor throughout all circumstances. That repeated choice made the difference. Like a caterpillar in a cocoon who emerges transformed,
each saint exercised their vocation during a period of intense exertion and incubation, and emerged transformed by God. While spiritual growth never stops, that phase laid the foundation for their futures. Their lives after that were so powerful because they were so truly human.

Our goal is to be rather than to merely appear. But to truly be, we must become. We must also go through periods of deep transformation, choosing to love God and those around us ever more through all the circumstances we find ourselves in. Our growth may not involve a cave or theology books. It may involve parenthood, or illness, or grad school, or injury. The process will involve forces beyond our control—awe, wonder, crushing pain, madness, beauty and silence. It may take months, or years, or decades. But our spiritual ancestors show us that the process is worth it. We, too, can become healing presences in the world, showing people Christ through our very existence. With the saints, and with each other, we will make it.
July 2015. “I still don’t like turkey. I remember my mom would burn it every year for Thanksgiving and it was like tire rubber.” I sat next to this man with no teeth, imagining his memories of burnt Thanksgiving turkey. This man, now homeless, once had a home full of memories just like me. Liturgy on the Streets during CrossRoad turned my world upsidedown. I unceasingly asked myself, “What does it mean to serve our fellow human beings as icons of Christ?”

March 2016. It’s my first semester of college. I’m set on doing an OCF Real Break at the FOCUS Center in Cleveland. St. Herman House completely changed my worldview of poverty in America. I vividly remember bringing Subway sandwiches to a couple living under the bridge in a tent, with 20 other tents nearby. The woman was only a little older than me with sores all over her legs.

August 2017. I start my junior year of college and move into West Harlem, New York City. Every day as I walk the streets and ride the subway, there’s a constant nagging in my heart; how people can have extravagant wealth while others sleep on the street? How is this possible in a global city of opportunity?

June 2019. I begin full-time as the Coordinator of Programs for the Department of Inter-Orthodox, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations at the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. My work is informed by our mandate of “Church & Society,” to represent the Church at the United Nations and bridge our work on social issues at the UN and in the Church. I immediately joined the NGO Working Group to End Homelessness. Then the question was, “How do we as Orthodox understand homelessness and what are we doing about it?”

September 2019. I’m beside myself with excitement and disbelief. I spent countless days turning to the icon of Christ in my office, asking how this project was going to work. I walk into the room with close to twenty-five people representing ten different Pan-Orthodox ministries in the United States, called by our department to specifically discuss the Orthodox Christian response to homelessness.

The energy and commitment of the group was incredible. We brainstormed an Orthodox Christian common language, understanding, and approach to homelessness. A network now exists to connect Orthodox organizations, parishes, and individuals working on this issue. And the Assembly of Canonical Bishops of the United States endorsed a working group to explore the crafting of an Orthodox Volunteer Corps, essentially a gap year of service for Orthodox young adults after college.

It’s amazing to see God’s hand in all of this. From being a grumpy CrossRoadie having to wake up early for Liturgy on the Streets to now being able to engage with Orthodox organizations and NGOs working on homelessness daily is incredible. It makes me think of the last day of CrossRoad, crying and singing about our vocation, not knowing where God was going to lead each of us next.
It is a miraculous gift from God to be able to bring a child into this world, one that I thank Him for every single day. I never thought I was capable of this type of overwhelming love until I met my little Samuel James on the day he was born. I would move mountains for that kid… but make no mistake, having a child is freaking hard.

Before we had kids, our life was our own. We could do what we wanted, when we wanted, without thinking too much about it. Now, our son rules our life: when he needs to eat, when he needs to sleep, etc… and we just have one!

For a mother who is home every day with her child, life can somehow feel monotonous, joyous, exhausting, and exciting all at the same time. When Samuel smiles up at me with his sweet little face, buries his head in my chest for a drive-by hug, or triumphantly says a new word, my heart bursts with pure love and adoration for him. When Samuel is purposefully not listening, or sneakily heading to turn on the dishwasher for the thousandth time, or slyly opening a drawer and running away with the can opener, I want to run screaming from the house! Motherhood is a wild ride and it is easy to feel some days that my identity and vocation (and my mind) have been ‘lost’ to the throes of motherhood.

But of course, our Church is wise and sees and acknowledges the struggle of motherhood. St. John Chrysostom states, “I mean, the children being born, provided they receive proper care and are brought up to virtue by your attention, prove a basis and occasion of complete salvation for you; and in addition to your own virtuous acts you will receive a great reward for your care of them” (Homily on Hannah, trans. Robert Hill). How encouraging this is to hear, especially on those harder days!

Motherhood (and parenthood) is a continual act of denying oneself. Yet through this act, we are somehow rejuvenated. Every time I’m feeling torn between cleaning, folding the laundry, or working, but instead sit down on the floor to play with Sam, it is a form of prayer for me in that moment. I usually find that when I surrender to motherhood, my new vocation, I feel much more peaceful. Just as we surrender our lives to the Lord, the most important part of motherhood is to be present and ‘lean in’, even when it feels hard or overwhelming.

“Chrysostom saw motherhood as a salvific opportunity, as a vocation that can lead to the heavenly reward” (The Power of a Mother’s Prayer, Carrie Frederick Frost). I haven’t lost myself because I am no longer ‘in charge’ of my everyday life; I have received an unbelievable opportunity to draw closer to Christ in surrendering to motherhood every single day.
I know I was born to fly; that intangible, inner drive and passion I've had for airplanes goes back as far back as I can remember. I ask constantly, “Where did this passion come from?” No one in my family flies, as is the case with a lot of pilots in my industry. I couldn’t care less about the destination before every trip I took with my family as a kid. All I cared about was the upcoming flight: what type of aircraft would greet me at the gate, which route would we take, which altitude would we cruise at, and at what speed? I even brought along my set of airplane models to make sure I had the right one when I arrived at the gate and could pull out the correct one for the type of airplane I would be flying on. I remember my first flight in a small airplane when I was nine years old, and I then knew I was going to be a pilot, no matter what. I was fortunate to first solo fly when I was 15, earned my private pilot’s license at 16 (with my mom driving me out to the airport for lessons because I didn’t have a driver’s license yet). It was that same summer I attended the first ever CrossRoad session in 2004.

I’m now 32 and have been flying all various kinds of business jet aircraft all over the globe for the past 12 years of my life. I’m incredibly fortunate to be able to cultivate my career-vocation as a pilot. When at CrossRoad I learned the broader illustrations of what vocation is and how discernment of vocation plays into my life. Fast forward some 15 years later and I’m now really starting to understand what that means. There are two insights I’ve gained that I’d like to share.

First, vocation is never static—answering the call is a dynamic or “ongoing” process that requires constant discernment. It’s lifelong. Even today, I feel I am just scratching the surface of how vocation and discernment have impacted my life since CrossRoad.

Second, while I consider flying to be a career-vocation, it certainly isn’t my only vocation. Along the way I discerned the call to enter into holy matrimony with my wife, Dasha, and now my vocation as a husband is another lifelong and dynamic call that requires—and will always require—discernment. Furthermore, I’m starting to realize the interdependence of various vocations in my life and how discerning one vocation can lead to discerning others as well. For example, God willing, someday raising a family will certainly be another lifelong discernment process that will require me to understand my vocation not only as a father, but more specifically to also reexamine and deepen the understanding of my vocation(s) as a pilot and as a husband.

Vocational discernment is an enduring, active, and multifaceted process. CrossRoad gave me the tools “back in the day” and I’m grateful these tools have given me a much deeper understanding of where my life has taken me and where, perhaps, it may lead.
I first became a team-building facilitator during my time at camp. Each counselor was required to have a program assignment and, considering I liked climbing and was a game enthusiast, working on the ropes course seemed like the natural choice! I didn’t expect team-building to feel like coming home. While I had never considered myself good in front of groups, when I finally led one through a team-building cycle, it was electrifying. Observing groups as they worked to become aware of their strengths and shortcomings felt incredibly fulfilling. I loved the adrenaline of being able to shift the experience of the entire day based on which activity I presented next.

As much as I loved team-building, I had a hard time understanding how it connected to my vocation. I’d always thought of vocation as a ‘what,’ and felt envious of those who had always been confident of their future career. That changed when I took a class about the psychology of leadership. I learned that what drives people is very often a ‘why’ rather than a ‘what.’ Suddenly, the idea of vocation as it applied to team-building in my life seemed clear. It was the process I felt so passionate about and that was completely valid. Once I understood that, I could let go of the anxiety of feeling like I needed to be matched to a certain role or job title. The places where I had always felt useful, valued, and like I was using my God-given talents were situations in which I was able to aid others in their process of development. That was my vocation. That was my ‘why.’ In a team-building setting, that meant facilitating activities in a way that allowed individual members to see the gifts of their peers.

That recognition of what made people special was, in many ways, a direct expression of love, and I got to see firsthand how that changed how individuals carried themselves. After graduating from college, I was able to accept a job where I helped build and facilitate creative problem-solving activities for teams within businesses. It was a different setting, but because I no longer saw vocation as a destination, that simply meant an abundance of new opportunities.

Ever since that class, my understanding of team-building has shifted. At its core, I now see the initial failure a group experiences together, along with their success, as a reflection of a group’s ability to recognize and utilize each team member’s gifts. My work in team-building feels as transformative now as it did when I was a camp counselor because I get the chance to observe individuals discover why each member of their group is essential and brings something unique to the table. Essentially, I’m getting to watch others learn how to love their neighbors! Ideally, the more you understand someone, the more you can love them. Recognizing someone’s unique skill set is an essential part of that, and the right activity can create an opportunity for that understanding. I’ll be candid: this only happens in such a condensed period through careful framing and support by the facilitator. It’s hard. But it’s something I never get tired of doing. It also directly informs my journey as an Orthodox Christian to always exhibit love, even in the most trying situations. That’s exactly the role I’d like my vocation to play in my life.
By God’s grace I have had the honor of speaking with CrossRoad youth every year for the past 16 years. According to my rough calculations, I have spoken with over 900 high school youth over those years. Whoa. What has been the impact of my words? Of course, I have no idea. Like Johnny Appleseed, I plant seeds and keep on walking and don’t look back. But I have a deep, revered afterglow in my heart for all of you and for our time together. Perhaps, when all is said and done, you graduates of CrossRoad are my most important and lasting contribution to leave this planet a better place. More than perhaps; yes, I think that you are my delight and joy, my very best fruit that I leave as a legacy. Yes, I think that. Truthfully, the only other group that means more to me is my two children and five grandchildren, and I am sure that you understand.

What have I learned that I can pass along for you and your work in the Lord’s vineyard? I think the most important, memorable way to communicate with youth, or anyone, is through narrative, narrative based on personal experience. When I meet a graduate of CrossRoad and I ask, “What do you remember from my three hours of talk with you?”, the answer is always the same. I hear, “Oh, Dr. R, I remember Cup of Tea.” And the CR graduate remembers the point that Cup of Tea made. Well, isn’t that something. That memory might be 16 years old, and still lingers as if it were heard yesterday. That’s the way the human mind and heart work.

You CrossRoad graduates live in my heart, alive and well, and are my treasure. Yep. You mean the world to me, simply because I know how you try to do the best you can with what you’ve got in this rather tumultuous world, which I dearly love but is still the “fallen world.” You will be, and are, the Orthodox Church, the living Body of Christ. That is as good as it gets.

What else to say? What do I think is the most important thing I said to you? By far, I think my request that you, and I, meditate at least ten minutes a day is of prime importance. Father Hopko, in his 55 Maxims, says that every Christian should meditate 20 to 30 minutes every day. Meditation is a simple activity. I sit comfortably, set a timer, become aware of my breath and, to the rhythm of my breathing, say a short prayer. I try to make myself available to God speaking to me as I internally speak to Him. How does that work? I don’t know. But all the saints I read say that it does work. Meditation transforms my deepest inner character. I would highly recommend a book on this topic, Into the Silent Land, by Martin Laird.

With much love,
Dr. R.
A star landed in my backyard last night, not with a whimper, but a bang!
It tore through atmosphere from other spheres afar, careening past jetliners full of confused passengers with jaws agape, to land here in this sleepy suburb, where no one could hear it but I.

I crept outside, my mother dreaming asleep in the house, while my feet pattered over an unmowed lawn, toward this whispering stone, this jewel of philosophers that had landed right outside my window.

I pressed my hand to its Promethean heat, every atom of every nerve cell aglow, my body alive with voltage, racing my soul upwards past worlds long gone and worlds to come, through darkness and light, the Void and Love, towards that final question mark at the end of life.

I awoke, curled up like that question mark on my battered sleep raft. Outside: no stone, no star, no mysteries unveiled... only the moon, winking like God’s eye in knowing benevolence.
Martha Saras, June 2013

This drawing depicts a girl closing her eyes, and is an expression of the "inner world" in all of us. It is a reminder for us to close our eyes against the cares and concerns of this world, and connect with our inner soul, and more importantly, connect with God. I remember one of the things that impacted me most about my time at CrossRoad was the "be still" time, or a few minutes of silence and meditation to connect with God, and be completely present in the moment. It is so important for us to set aside a little time each day for quiet reflection and prayer, especially if we lead crazy, busy lives. We live in a world where we are constantly focused on the next step, acquiring the next “thing”, the next promotion, the next vacation. Our mind is often in the future, which in turn, usually leads to a lot of anxiety. To simply take a moment, to close our eyes and pray, is truly a healing salve.
These inspiring words set the tone for what would be a remarkable forum that included activists, academics, and religious and lay leaders from all different sectors around the world who are seeking to eradicate the devastating plague of modern slavery and human trafficking. The forum was convened by a Task Force on Modern Slavery established by the Ecumenical Patriarch, and was the third of its kind in a series that began in 2017. The appointed Task Force includes the following members: His Eminence Metropolitan Nikitas of the Dardanelles, Dr. Elizabeth Prodromou, Presv. Maria Drossos, and the V. Rev. Nephon Tsimalis.

The aim of this particular forum was to energize the connections between awareness, on the one hand, and action and impact, on the other hand—how to take transform our awareness of this issue into a response of love in action? His All-Holiness advocated for action that can both offer healing to those suffering from human trafficking and other forms of modern enslavement and, even more importantly, action that seeks to prevent slavery from happening.

Key Takeaways from Patriarch Bartholomew’s Address:

- Silence and indifference are no longer acceptable.
- Social problems affect the core of human existence—we need to eradicate the causes of social problems.
- Words are not enough. Action is required.
- This forum is to rectify the direction society is heading and to address this oppressive evil.
- The heart of any Christian ministry is the call to serve those in need.
- For basic human rights and the protection of human dignity, we need to work towards peace, reconciliation and solidarity.

On Monday, January 7, 2019, ten speakers from around the world offered their wisdom, insight, and expertise on the particular ways they work to end modern human slavery. They were broken up into three different panels that addressed the following topics:

1. Human Rights and Legal Frameworks
2. Forced Migration and Human Trafficking
3. Practitioners and Grassroots Action

“Philanthropy is love for all humanity, not just those we know. Love for the nameless, the unknown, and those trapped in slavery.”

—His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
Kristina Arriaga de Bcholz, Vice Chairwoman of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, spoke in the first panel and shared that human trafficking is the second largest financial commodity in the world after drug dealing. An estimated 40.3 million people (majority women and children) are exploited as objects to be sold, used and disposed of rather than as human persons created in the image and likeness of God. Kristina expressed that human trafficking “defies the popular imagination of slavery”; it comes in all shapes and sizes and affects people in all corners of the world. In the United States alone, $150 billion is profited off the trafficking of human persons.

The presenters conveyed the urgency and importance of fighting for the protection, justice, dignity, and health of enslaved persons. There was a strong call to action for the Church in particular, to use her prophetic voice to raise awareness on this issue but even more so, to be a place that can provide compassion, love, and care for those who are trafficked. We were reminded by several of the presenters that as Christians, God has called us to work for justice, to alleviate the sufferings of other persons, and to “be a voice for the voiceless” (Proverbs 31:8).

On January 8th, invited ministries from around the world participated in an Inter-Orthodox Consultation that sought to connect ministries of the Church so that we might learn from each other on work that is currently being done to address this issue. It was also a platform to consider how we could work together as a Church to end various forms of human enslavement.

The Task Force is also seeking to engage youth of the Church in this conversation to raise their awareness and encourage them to take action. As a youth organization of the Church, CrossRoad was invited to attend this forum because we have begun talking about this issue. Each year we invite Dr. Elizabeth Prodromou, a member of the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s Task Force on Modern Slavery and as Visiting Assoc. Professor at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (Tufts Univ.), to speak on her work with religious freedom, human trafficking, and refugees. More broadly, our program encourages students to consider how the call to “clothe the naked, feed the hungry, and care for the sick” should become a real call to action here and now and not just words in they hear on Sunday.

**CrossRoad’s participation allowed us to:**

- Learn about the severity of this issue and how it affects young people in particular
- Discover what resources are available to victims (toolkits, nonprofit organizations) and what work is being done at the global level in all different spheres to respond to this crisis
- Connect with other represented Orthodox ministries on how as a Church, we can work to end slavery in our lifetime.

It was an incredible opportunity to consider how CrossRoad and young people of the Church can get take part in the fight against human trafficking and the many other, inter-connected forms of slavery in our time.
CrossRoad has created strong relationships, fostered by Christ. The impact of CrossRoad is made possible through generous donors and alumni who invest in the program’s sustainability and growth initiatives.

“I ALWAYS SEEM TO FIND A CONNECTION WITH SOMEONE I KNOW FROM CR NO MATTER WHERE I GO.”
~ EMILY (CR 2005)

“I WILL ALWAYS BE FOREVER GRATEFUL FOR THE FAMILY THAT CROSSROAD GAVE ME”
~ JOANNA (CR 2018)

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Where Are They Now?

Alumni Updates

George Anagnostopoulos
June 2014
Ever since George Anagnostopoulos attended CrossRoad back in 2014, he knew he wanted to inspire fellow young adults his age to come together in the name of the Lord. This past August, His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos appointed him to be the Chairman of the Metropolis of San Francisco 2019 Young Adult League (YAL) Conference held at the Hyatt Regency in Long Beach, CA. The Conference was a three-day all-inclusive weekend of faith, fellowship, worship and service. While held in CA, the Conference quickly became national in scope as 357 young adults gathered from 33 states from across the country. Similar to CrossRoad, the Conference featured workshops by local clergy and the Metropolis Family Wellness team about faith based and contemporary topics geared towards young adults. In addition, the special guest for the weekend was Emmy Award-winning actor, musician, and devout Orthodox Christian Jonathan Jackson, who shared his journey to Orthodoxy and how he has used his public platform to proclaim the faith. Conference attendees enjoyed a beach day, concert starring Jackson and young adults, formal Grand Banquet Glendi, Diakonia Rise Against Hunger service project and an evening aboard the Queen Mary. George led a steering committee of 55 young adults who gave their time and talents to make this event a success. His goal was for all attendees to leave the conference feeling spiritually fulfilled and socially connected and to always remember they have a place in the Church. Plans for the 2020 YAL Conference are underway: mark your calendars for Labor Day weekend 2020!

Bradley Delmar
July 2015
Started his own graphic design business, Bradmar Graphic Design. If you told him this is what he’d be doing five years ago, he’d be very surprised.

Anna Karos
Session 3 2018
Anna is currently a sophomore at the University of Minnesota studying biomedical engineering. During a stressful week filled with exams and projects, Anna was reminded by a peer that school is not just about exams and projects, Anna was reminded by a peer that school is not just about exams and projects, Anna was reminded by a peer that school is not just about exams and projects. If you told him this is what he’d be doing five years ago, he’d be very surprised.

Stellanie Kyros
June 2017
A story that needs to be heard...To anyone who has ever refrained from giving money to people on the street in fear it supports unhealthy habits (i.e., drugs or alcohol), hear this story:

A few moments ago, I saw a blind man take his weekly earnings to CVS to make a purchase. As I waited in line, I began to wonder what it may be that he wanted or needed to purchase. Being that he was blind, the cashier went to fetch the items he had requested. It was to my surprise when she arrived with two rolls of duct tape. As the man moved around his belongings, I noticed that the plastic chair he sits on outside was beginning to fall apart. He desperately needed this duct tape to piece together the chair in order to have somewhere to sit while he’s outside.

It’s easy to simply assume the worst of someone we don’t know based on their current situation. Just as I had wondered what his purchase may have been, we have moments of “what if” when we second-guess the impact of our actions. Instead of judging a situation or worrying where the money goes, we should instead assume the best and let God handle the rest—no matter the circumstances. Tonight a familiar lesson was re-taught to me in a beautiful way. Let this also stand as a reminder that we are not called to judge but rather to love. If you happen to see someone in the street, stop, ask them their name, and if you happen to have some spare change, share it. Feel confident that no matter what, you are sharing Christ’s love with them in that moment. THAT is what matters the most.—Food for thought.

Elena Shortes
June 2016
Elena is currently a Junior Secondary Education and English Major at Clemson University. In college, she has had a lot of opportunities to attend Orthodox conferences and events that remind her how important staying connected in the community of Orthodox young people is, and that make her think of the community and connection that CrossRoad gave her!

Christine Siapous
July 2015
Christine has graduated from Webster University with a bachelor’s degree in Media Communications and a minor in Professional Writing. Her toolkit leans heavily on writing, film, and a little photography. She recently attended Ancient Faith Con, a convention for Orthodox writers, and used her skills to continue writing historically accurate plays about saints for one of her parishes, the Assumption Greek Orthodox Church. After a few months of job searching, she is currently employed as a scriptwriter at VAT19, an online retail store with a well-known YouTube channel.

Kendra Standish
Session 3 2018
“Help me to journey beyond the familiar and into the unknown. Give me the faith to leave old ways and break fresh ground with you. Christ of the mysteries, I trust you to be stronger than each storm within me. I will trust in the darkness and know that my times, even now, are in your hand. Tune my spirit to the music of heaven, and somehow, make my obedience count for you. Amen.”

- St. Brendan the Navigator
Charles Stewart  
*June 2017*

Charles has had the opportunity to meet many new and wonderful people in his time at college. These amazing individuals have helped him to realize that God puts people into your life for a reason. Perhaps you are there to help them, they’re there to help you, or some combination of the two. Regardless, God is always watching to aid you in your journey through life.

Mark Sultani  
*July 2013*

Mark spent his first year out of college working in Ann Arbor, MI as a software developer. In August 2019 he moved to Phoenix, AZ to be the Parish Intern at St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church. Mark works primarily with the youth of the parish in weekly Teen Bible Studies, High School Sunday School, Teen SOYO events, and programs for children ages 4-11. In both corporate and parish work, Mark has experienced firsthand that the vocation is the same no matter where we are or what work we are doing.

Alexa Vafiades  
*June 2014*

Alexa is beginning her studies in electrical engineering and is also spending much of her time in the ministries at her parish, St. Nicholas. She has enjoyed her increasing involvement in the church, especially being on the Metropolis board of the Philoptochos! She enjoys learning anything she can when working in the kitchen, with youth, decorating icons, or chanting. Alexa also loves continuing to interact with all things CrossRoad, working in the Office of Vocation & Ministry and as a member of the Alumni Advisory Board.

Pericles Vassos  
*Session 3 2019*

Pericles has been blessed to have a fifteen-month-old nephew born last year in May, and have a six-month-old niece born on Palm Sunday of this year! Pericles is also a certified Lifeguard and Water Safety Instructor and teaches a variety of classes throughout the year to help participants really understand the importance of these life skills so they can put them into effect! After attaining the rank of Eagle Scout from the Boy Scouts of America, Pericles is now an adult leader teaching older Scouts to effectively lead the younger Scouts by example and mentorship.

Jarod Wiederholtz  
*Session 2 2018*

After CrossRoad, Jarod spent the rest of the year wondering what Christ wanted him to do with his life. He honestly had no clue. Jarod originally wanted to go to college and do something cyber, but soon realized that without our military, none of us would be able to follow God’s call. So he enlisted in the Navy and found his true vocation. Defending the freedom of the seas and those back home. Jarod is currently going through the nuclear pipeline to become a nuclear machinist’s mate, operating a nuclear reactor on submarines and aircraft carriers.

Elyse Zappia  
*July 2011*

Elyse is working as an MRI technologist in New York City and going back to graduate school part-time to earn her MBA. However, Elyse is also reflecting on how 2019 has been a struggle. With an unexpected death in the family, there are never the right words to explain the emotions and pain of losing a loved one far too soon. Even Jesus Himself wept over the death of His friend Lazarus. During the moments we feel broken and helpless, we take comfort in knowing the Lord is always sitting besides us.

Anna Kallis  
*2005 Alum, 2011-2014 & 2018 Staff*

Anna has had a year full of many transitions. Last December, she and her husband, Fr. Kosmas (CR alum ’06), welcomed their first child into the world, and they have spent the year beginning to figure out their new role as parents. Anna also has taken on a new job for the OVM; she is now the Project Director for TelosGamma, an expansion of the Telos Project in the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago. Fr. Kosmas also started a new job as the Chicago Metropolis Youth and Young Adult Ministries Director. Anna and Fr. Kosmas are navigating their way through all this change and while this season of life is noticeably more overwhelming than the previous, they are focusing on soaking up every joyful moment of their son’s life and every joyful moment of the amazing work they get to do. As Anna struggles to figure out what it means to be both a mom and a working professional, the “ongoing” portion of the definition of vocation resonates with her more strongly than ever. She realizes it is ok for her vocation to keep taking different shapes - there is no end to the journey of discerning how God is calling her to life out His command to love Him and neighbor - and unexpected beauty continues to unfold in that sometimes messy journey.

Nicholas and Amanda Lionas  
*2005 Alum, 2012 Staff*

Nick and Amanda Lionas are loving life with their two beautiful children, Scotty and Eleni. Nick serves at Assumption Greek Orthodox Church in St. Clair Shores, Michigan. Amanda is a Foster Care Supervisor in the Detroit area.

Sarah Livick-Moses  
*2016 & 2018 Staff*

Sarah recently completed her first semester of a PhD in Systematic Theology at Boston College. She’s been really interested in the theological poetry and mystical theology of the Middle Ages. She’s especially in how the body is understood and treated in those texts, thinking through the ways in which we might better receive those conversations in the Church today. Her program took her to England, Spain, and Belgium this year where she presented some of her current research at
various theological conferences. Sarah is really looking forward to the next 4 years of her theological research, writing, and teaching.

Dn. Nicholas Manuel
2017 Staff
In January, he married his beautiful bride, Demetria Manuel (a July 2011 CR alum). In May, he graduated from the Seminary! He was then placed at Annunciation GOA parish in Akron, OH where he serves as the Pastoral Assistant. This past November 4th, he and Demi welcomed their first child, John into this world. And by the grace of God and the hands of His Eminence Metropolitan Savas, he was ordained to the Holy Diaconate on December 5th. Glory to God for all things! He is supremely blessed and grateful for all of these immense blessings.

Fr. Jonathan (Resmini) Mettasophia
2004 Alum, 2009 & 2010 Staff
Fr. Jonathan has gone through a few changes over the past few years. He was married to his wife, Sarah, in May 2017. In the spring of 2019 he successfully defended his doctoral dissertation at Boston University School of Theology, earning his PhD in Practical Theology and Spirituality Studies. In March 2019 he was ordained to the diaconate and in April he was ordained to the priesthood at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Charlotte, NC, where he serves as the associate priest.

Presv. Olenka Ramos
2014 & 2016 Staff
My family and I are at the Greek Orthodox parish in Las Vegas, NV (Fr. Seraphim is my hubby). I can usually be found in the house picking things up off the ground and entertaining the little Ramoses. When it’s cool outside, we enjoy hikes with Jordan, our dog, or the park. Daily spiritual reading, working out in our garage gym, and laughter with my husband are the fuel to my vocation right now. My biggest new love is Gerondissa Makrina (who passed away in 1995) whom I encourage everyone to get to know! When things get hard I run to her and Panagia to help me with the ongoing call to love.

Sophia (Kon) Shadid
2016 Staff
This past year was filled with so many blessings! In November 2018 Sophia married a fellow HCHC grad, Chris Shadid, and they now live at Antiochian Village, where he serves as a priest and assistant camp director. Together they are growing in their roles as priest and priest wife. Sophia received her master’s in occupational therapy in 2018 and now works with the geriatric and pediatric population. Despite being the “therapist,” she feels that she has learned so much from her patients about hard work, sacrifice, and making time for what’s most important in life. She is excited to see where God places her and Fr. Chris to serve as they begin their second year of marriage.

Fr. Michael Tishel
2012-2018 Director
After passing on the baton of CR directorship to the illustrious Kyra Limberakis, Fr. Michael and family migrated south to… avoid New England winters… err… rather, for Fr. Michael to take up a new position as assistant priest at Holy Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church (Marietta, GA), while also working on his doctoral dissertation from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Life in the south has proved to be a good fit for the Tishel family. You can find them eating a leisurely, southern dinner on their back porch during the summer months, and meandering up a small mountain for a day-hike with Catherine, and the ever-growing Zoe (almost 4), and Isaac (2.5). They miss everyone at CR and the OVM, and believe so very much in the important work that is being accomplished, by God’s grace, through this wonderful office!

Dn. Niko Tzetzis
2012 Staff
It’s been a busy year for Deacon Niko (Staff ’12) and Diakonissa Ivey (CR ’09, Media ’12). Ivey has been making her way around the Speech-Language Pathology field after starting in spoken language school for deaf children and moving to a position in a skilled nursing facility. Dn. Niko was ordained to the diaconate on the feast of St. Andrew and 33rd birthday, November 30th. The two of them are currently living in Cincinnati, Ohio where Dn. Nick will continue to serve the Holy Trinity - St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox community.
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