

Unexpected Ministry continued from front cover

or water in an emergency, repairs to a storm-damaged home, training that helps farmers or small-business owners grow their incomes: the services that IOCC offers are horizontally focused. Yet these simple offerings change our relationship to God as much as they serve others, as we allow His love to be manifested through us.

Whether we are mindful of it or not, we bring “the fragrance of life” (2 Cor 2:16) with us wherever we walk. These moments of unexpected ministry buoy me when spirits flag, reminding me who is the tool and Who is the Craftsman.

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If you wish to contribute a reflection to the next issue of *Priest to Priest*, please email rloumiotis@iocc.org



PRIEST *to* PRIEST

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Unexpected Ministry

Remembering the Essence of Service

Fr. Apostolos Hill

My dear brothers,

I am ever humbled when asked to share a reflection with you, understanding myself to be the very least among you. I beg your indulgence for what follows.

Often in our spiritual lives the focus is vertical – on our relationship with Almighty God – but Scripture teaches that we must demonstrate our love for Christ through our love for each other: a horizontal orientation grounded in daily life. “He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (1 Jn 4:20). We can say that we love God only to the extent that we love others: that is the Gospel. We are to be reconciled with and serve those around us.

As priests, we dedicate our lives to service; it is our vocation. Yet in the years of my ministry, I have often found that it is in unexpected moments that I most feel like an Orthodox priest. At times, I have been forced to reexamine the shape of my ministry and admit to myself that much of what consumed my time was simply not salvific. It has taken me far too long to realize that ministry occurs in unexpected quarters.

The waitress at JFK stopping to ask for prayer, the young couple in the hospital chapel whose baby girl lay dying in the NICU unit, grieving families at mortuaries I hadn’t intended to see, a homeless person requesting an anointing with *lathi* – these were pure ministry encounters which God provided me despite my many “priestly” distractions.

These unexpected moments are not unlike IOCC’s ministry, which meets people where they are, in ordinary, everyday moments, seeking to ease their human needs in the spirit of Christ’s love. Food

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Participants gather at weeklong conferences to cultivate a deeper understanding of Orthodox philanthropy and *diakonia* (service) through leadership-building activities, workshops, and hands-on service.

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IMPORTANT NOTE: IOCC is committed to following local and federal safety regulations related to COVID-19 in the US, and we are prepared to adjust activities as needed – including offering a virtual format if required. Our goal is to offer the Serv-X-Treme conference in the safest and most effective format possible.