

I'm a College Student: How Could I Possibly Find Time to Pray?

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while in college.

For the Orthodox, the traditional personal prayer is the Jesus Prayer. The classic form of the Jesus Prayer is, "**Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.**" The first half is often said as we breathe in and the second half is said as we breathe out. The actual words of our short prayers can vary. We might say the classic version of the Jesus Prayer, or we might say, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." We may say, "Lord Jesus, have mercy." Or, we might say a Psalm verse, or a Bible quote, or some other prayer. Monks of old said, "Lord, make haste to help me. Lord, make speed to save me," all day long.

The first half of the Jesus Prayer stresses the Name of Jesus. Jesus is always present, but we are not naturally aware of his presence. We say his Name so that we become aware of his presence and share in his power. He said, "Hitherto you have asked nothing in my Name. Ask and you shall receive that your joy may be full" (John 16:24).

The second half of the Jesus Prayer stresses mercy. Mercy, *hesed* in Hebrew, means "loving kindness" or "everlasting love." When we ask for mercy, we ask to be loved. A basic human need is the need to be loved. Often college students look for love in fruitless ways like unrequited romances or virtual connections such as internet pornography or soap operas. When we indulge in these things, we eventually hurt ourselves. This is a joyless, loveless suffering. When we put Christ first, we will suffer, but we will know the joy of being loved. When we ask the Lord for mercy we appropriate the love that is always there for the asking.

Why don't we avail ourselves of what we need most? Is time the basic problem?

Hidden Martyrdom

We are called to pray "ceaselessly" (1 Thess 5:17). Throughout the college day, a quiet moment in the library, a hectic moment between classes, or while eating lunch we can pause mentally and quietly say the Jesus Prayer. Trying to pray without ceasing is a "hidden martyrdom." Martyrdom of any sort requires courage, and college students know the satisfaction of trying to live a life of valor.

We can expect invisible, subtle snares, sent from Satan, precisely because we have up scaled our efforts, and are turning to God. In a sense, we rouse the enemy to action. St John Chrysostom says that when we begin to pray we stir the snake (living within us) to action, but that if we persist in prayer we can lay the snake low.

Prayer requires super-human courage, given the atmosphere of the world today. The whole ensemble of natural energies is in opposition.

Trying to pray is the hardest of all human tasks precisely because we are reaching for God, trying to connect with him and become like him. Abba Agathon tells us that if we do not find prayer difficult, perhaps it is because we have not really started to pray.

Lions may not eat us for the sake of the Gospel. Rather, our call to martyrdom takes the form of being attentive to the present moment, relying upon God's power always, and doing His will. Our call to martyrdom may not be any easier than death by violence.

Out Loud

The voice of God is infinitely delicate, always resistible. How can I ever be quiet enough to hear the voice of God in my daily life? The Fathers tell us that one effective way to concentrate is to speak our prayer in a soft, barely audible voice.

When alone, we might find that praying the Jesus Prayer out loud lowers the distraction level, a perennial enemy of college life. Hearing one's voice makes it easier to concentrate. Praying in a soft, barely audible voice is a way of engaging the body in the prayer of the spirit.

Transforming the College Years

College years are provided to find our identity. Personal prayer is the door which opens to our true identity, where we find our deepest and most stable self. Prayer keeps us sane. Through prayer we discover deep peace and unshakable joy.

By standing in Christ's presence for no more than a few moments each day, invoking his Name, we deepen and transform all the remaining moments of the day, render ourselves available to others, effective and creative, in a way that we could not otherwise be.

The Jesus Prayer is recommended in the morning, following our prayer rule, for some period of time, perhaps 10 or 15 minutes. If that is impossible, then try saying the prayer sometime before noon, or in the evening. This might be called "formal" use of the prayer. The second form of the Jesus Prayer is the "free" use of the prayer. This means at any and all other times of the day, or night. This is especially true for the semi-automatic tasks such as driving, doing dishes, exercising, being unable to sleep, or walking to your next class. The Jesus Prayer is notably useful in times of extreme concern or upset.

In prayer, we discover that Jesus stands within us at the door of our hearts. He is always knocking until we open the door of our heart to him. College is a time of renewed valor to find our identity through prayer.

What I Learned In School

By Vicki Cassis

I couldn't sleep. I was nervous. School was starting, and it was going to be my very first day. I awoke early and took my son with me in the car. It was my first day returning to college, and it was also his first day. He didn't mind going with me. In fact he liked the idea that I was to finish my education. I also liked the idea that he was going to get his education, but I didn't know what that education was going to be.

The decision to continue my education was a difficult one to make. Going back to school included a financial burden for me when both of my sons were attending college at the same time. I also knew it would be difficult academically. I just didn't know how difficult.

The first semester was very full. I was taking 13 credits, plus I had a child in middle school. I didn't want to miss anything so I made it to every class. That's when I started to learn what I had not expected. I had no idea there were so many students on drugs; many use drugs as if it is expected of them. Some didn't have a church life, a religion, or even a family life. In one class, a student told me that Christmas is not a religious holiday.

Wow!

In a speech class, we were given various assignments and speech styles to learn. The instructor encouraged us to speak in front of the class every day. By talking with students, I learned that many live in places without their parents. They weren't just living in apartments with friends, but they were living with strangers.

One evening, while having dinner with my husband, son, and daughter, we were talking about the day. When it was my turn, I said, "Well, I learned about ecstasy today." My son

coughed, pushed his chair back, and cleared his throat some more. Then he said, "Now you know how good we are."

That was a very interesting comment to me. Being cradle Orthodox, my husband and I raised our children in the Eastern Orthodox Faith, and it was good to know that they were listening. I can't imagine what it's like for those kids to grow up without caring parents, or any parents at all. Today, many parents believe in the "eighteen and out" theory; they believe their parenting is done when their child turns eighteen. There aren't very many eighteen-year-olds, if any, that are ready to be out in the world without the emotional, financial, and moral support that good parents provide. Just because college students move away from home doesn't mean that they don't need their parents. Sometimes they're needed even more.

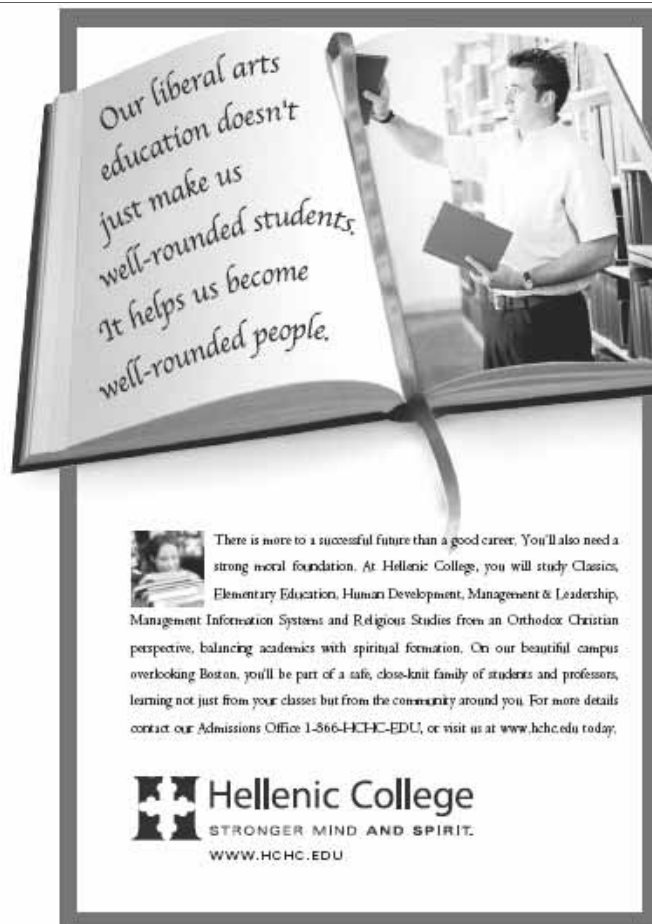
I went on to take some religion courses. In hoping to clear up some of the messages I was getting, I took a women's spirituality class at our local Roman Catholic college. I was excited to learn about women saints and their lives. I didn't learn that. My instructor, a Catholic nun, was about 70 years old. She talked about herself and other nuns who wanted to be priests and their disappointment with men. I never realized there were so much anger, disappointment, and power used in the classroom. So

many instructors have their own agenda. I felt she was one of them.

Another instructor with a personal agenda was my communications teacher who furthered his political opinions by knocking down a certain political party. I was getting upset and spoke up . . . a few times. Finally, he realized what I was doing and became fairer. He talked in the same way about religion, and about how he chose his religion. I knew it was a communications class, but I didn't think it was supposed to be just the instructor talking.

I went on to take another religion class. This one was taught at a liberal arts college. This particular course was to include three religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. We spent the most time

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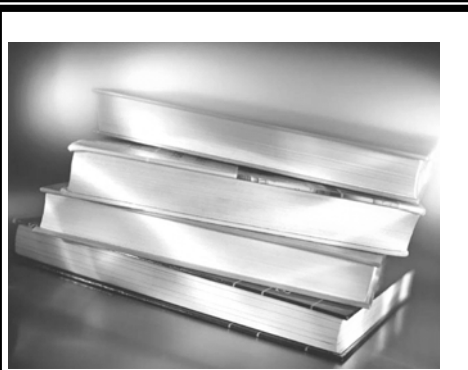
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on Buddhism because the instructor liked Buddhism the best. To be fair, he did not push his beliefs on us. However, when we got the chance to study Christianity, there were only two weeks left. Two weeks!

On the first day discussing Christianity, the instructor asked the Protestants in the class of fifty students to raise their hands. Two students raised their hands. The instructor stopped, and said, "Wait a minute." He asked again. "Protestants are Baptists, Christian Reformed, Methodists," he said. A bunch of hands went up. I was amazed to know that most of them didn't know that they were Protestants. After that lesson, I heard a student quietly say to the instructor, "I've never been in a church." "Oh my," I thought. No baptisms, weddings, funerals, nothing? I was upset with my peers; the parents of these students didn't do their job. It became clearer to me why Christianity is so greatly misunderstood, and especially by our youth.

I was surprised by the extra credit offered in the class; we were to watch

a Monty Python film mocking Christianity and Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*. The instructor didn't understand Christianity and couldn't possibly teach it well. That's what I paid money for? What an education! I knew it was going to be difficult, but I



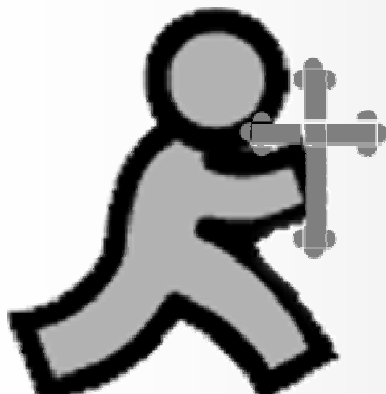
'I heard a student quietly say to the instructor, "I've never been in a church." "Oh my," I thought. No baptisms, weddings, funerals, nothing?'

didn't know I would see and hear such sadness, neglect, and disregard for Christianity.

As parents, we need to teach our children about our own Orthodoxy, not just as a religion, but as a way of life. As students, we need to have a good foundation so that we won't be deterred and manipulated away from our roots and faith. I say this because it was evident that the power was used in many classrooms to diminish Christian and family values.

What I learned in school was truly an education. Now I know what's out there and what young people face.

Vicki Cassis is a mother of three and a recent college graduate. She wishes to share her experiences with college students and their parents.



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Fall 2004 Schedule (EST)

Monday	8-9 pm, 9:30-10:30 pm, 11-12am
Tuesday	10:00pm-12:00am
Wednesday	8:00pm-10:00pm
Thursday	8:30pm-10:30pm

New OCF House Opens at Purdue

by David Purpura

Through the blessings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Purdue OCF chapter now has a campus house. With a great deal of hard work, and even more prayer, Fr. Gregory Allard and the OCF members of Purdue were able to secure a beautiful house two blocks from the academic campus which is closer than all the residence halls!. Our lease was signed on July 15th, and the house was prepared and furnished by the generous parishioners at St. Alexis Orthodox Church (OCA) in Lafayette, Indiana. Currently, the OCF campus house is home to three male students, but is open all day and night for any members of our community to enjoy. The house is also home to St. Herman's Chapel. This small, but holy place is located on the first floor and is frequently used for services by our members. Along with the chapel are a full size living room, dining



room, breakfast nook, and kitchen. Upstairs has three bedrooms, furnished by the residents, and a guest room. The house is the perfect size for our OCF.

The opening of the OCF house has had and will continue to have a major impact on the Orthodox Christian presence at Purdue. The location and the visibility of the house have already led to an increase in our membership. It is also a place that we

can call our own, and grow in the faith with fellow Orthodox students. The house provides us with a place to hold our weekly meetings, as well as other fellowship gatherings. The positive effect has already been felt by our members. All the changes that have occurred for us over the past year have truly been a blessing by God. If you would like to see pictures of the house please visit the Purdue OCF website at www.purdue.edu/ocf.

David Purpura is a senior at Purdue University majoring in psychology. He is a member of the Purdue OCF and a member of the OCF Student Advisory Board. David roots for the Boston Red Sox, New England Patriots, and of course the Boilermakers of Purdue.

National Day of Prayer

by Helene Krenitsky

Last spring (March, 2004), students from around the nation started the season of Great Lent with the first **National OCF Day of Prayer**. Over 30 OCF chapters participated in the event, which began immediately following Forgiveness Vespers. Chapters began their prayer services in succession, so that for a 24-hour period, there was a constant flow of prayer from OCF chapters across America. The National OCF Day of Prayer was established to spiritually unite all of the OCF chapters in prayer for one day. Petitions were offered for each member of the local OCF as well as for all the chapters across the nation. My chapter at Penn

State University in State College, PA, came together at 1:00am for its hour of prayer. It was a moving experience to gather in the middle of the night and offer our prayers to the Lord along with the prayers to all the saints. Knowing that praises were constantly being lifted to our Lord for all Orthodox college students was very powerful.

Prayer is such an important part of our lives and an important part of OCF. As St. Nilus of Sinai says, "As bread is food for the body and virtue is food for the soul, so spiritual prayer is food for the mind." It was the needed food to begin our Lenten journey and to bring our members of OCF closer together. Mother Gavrilia

says, "There exists no energy greater than that of prayer...because prayer is power."

The Day of Prayer has the power to bring all of us together in Christ. Please watch for information on the OCF website to sign up for this year's National OCF Day of Prayer. May the Lord bring all of us together again on the first day of Lent in 2005 to support each other with our prayers.

Helene is a senior at Penn State University, majoring in mechanical engineering. She also enjoys playing soccer and rooting for the U.S. Women's National Team.



2004 Orthodox Christian Fellowship College Conference December 27-31, 2004

Cost: All-inclusive \$200 registration fee (Scholarships are available.)



Under the jurisdiction of the SCOBA Campus Commission, these National Conferences of Orthodox Christian Fellowship are open to college students, high school graduates and college-age young adults. Both conferences will include a variety of enlightening workshops, daily services and many different social events. They aim to promote unity among Orthodox young people and to renew them in their journeys toward salvation. Check out the details for each coast below!

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Workshop speakers will include:

Fr. Moses Berry
Dn. Paul Zaharas
Fr. John Manuel & more

Workshop speakers will include:

Fr. Michael Nasser
Fr. Christopher Salamy
Fr. Michael Courey & more

Events

- Snow-tubing
- Pre-New Year's Eve Dance

Events

- Dancing
- Trip to Sequoia National Forest

Questions?

Helene Krenitsky (east_cc@ocf.net)

Questions?

Lydia Najim (west_cc@ocf.net)

To register or for more information, please go to **www.ocf.net**

Special thanks to The Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch and to our anonymous generous donor of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, proud sponsors of our College Conference!

Warren Farha: Owner of Eighth Day Books

The following narrative Warren Farha shared with the Wichita State Orthodox Christian Fellowship as part of their Vocation Retreat. It is the story of how he discerned his life's vocation and runs an Orthodox Christian Bookstore.

I've been asked to give personal testimony about finding and living a vocation, so I will oblige, even though I believe that my vocation is still—yes, even after sixteen years—being tested. Will I endure the parts of the vocation that are distasteful to me in order to continue the thing as a whole? Will I continue to submit to the risks necessary to extend the life of this vocation? Will I live in a manner worthy of the gift of knowing my vocation, even a vocation that is also my occupation, a gift that many struggle their whole lives to determine? Will I distort my vocation through negligence, laziness, distraction? Through taking it for granted? Will I continue to be willing to subject my loved ones to the sacrifices they have to make, so that I might be able to pursue this vocation, which I hope is God's intended one? These are some of the questions that occur to me as people tell me that I have a vocation, and often even praise it.

The preface to the Catalogue of Eighth Day Books gives you an idea of the principles that determine how we put our book collection together.

Eighth Day Books is not a super chain, pitching any books that might sell.

Instead, we're selective, offering an eccentric community of books based on this organizing principle: if a book—be it literary, scientific, historical, or theological—sheds light on ultimate questions in an excellent way, then it's a worthy candidate for inclusion in our catalog.

Reality doesn't divide itself into

"religious" and "literary" and "secular" spheres, so we don't either. We're convinced that all truths are related and every truth, if we pay attention rightly, directs our gaze toward God. One of our customers found us "eclectic but orthodox." We l i k e t h a t .
(www.eighthdaybooks.com)

Though many things change, these organizing principles will never change. It's all about the unbreakable connections between all things that are true and good and beautiful. We'll live and die for Fr. Schmemmann's insistence that you can't compartmentalize reality—separating things into “religious” and “secular, not religious.” We believe that doing so is a denial of God's “very good” creation. Do we believe that God created all things, and called them “very good”? Do we really believe, as St. Paul tells us, that “Jesus is Lord”? If we believe that, doesn't it follow that a good book that tells a human story truly, that tells history truly, that says beautiful poetry—doesn't it follow that these belong to the Holy Trinity? If we are honest Orthodox Christians, we have to claim all of creation, all that we know and all that exists, for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Whether it looks “religious” in the conventional sense doesn't really matter at all. God doesn't really care about us being “religious.” He cares about us being honest and true and loving, human beings fully alive.

Another way we describe the store is that “we specialize in Classics in religion, literature, and history.” We try to stock the best of all Christian traditions. We believe that if you “lay all the cards on the table,”—the best cards—the truth of Orthodoxy will silently make itself known. We don't try to push Orthodoxy on anyone. Freedom is a key word here. Our God, and His Church, respect freedom. Our God and His Church abhor force and manipulation. Love is incompatible with both. If Orthodoxy

is the true Faith, it will be known simply by being available, not by being pushed or forced on anyone. Its beauty and truth will be self-evident. We are both very quiet and very open about our faith. That is how it has always been, and that is how it will always be.

We honestly recognize that other Christian traditions contain elements of the Truth within them. We try our best to lay these truths out in the best of the works of other Christian (and sometimes, even non-Christian) traditions before the public. It's all about trusting our God Who is the source of truth, and who makes Himself known to some degree to EVERY human being. It's also all about trusting the truth and beauty of the Church to speak for itself by way of comparison and contrast with other traditions. The Church can take care of itself, when placed side by side with other traditions.

How did I come to this sense of vocation? I have always loved to read. I have always loved the sense of entering a completely new world, yet finding points of contact with my own. I have often lived through my imagination. I have always been somewhat shy and introverted, so reading offered a safe haven where in my times of solitariness I found an endlessly varied occupation. I “read” even before I could really read, imaginatively narrating the illustrations that accompanied the as-yet indecipherable text. Academics, not sports, were my strong suit all through school.

In the early '70's, when I was in my teens, the so-called “Jesus Movement” was sort of sweeping the country, and through its influence here in Wichita I became part of a large group of young people who made open commitments to Christ, in a sort of evangelical context. The subgroup that I was part of was of course, the readers: only now the “Jesus

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freak” readers. We didn’t stop with the Bible. We read books about the Bible, we read defenses of Christian faith (apologetics), we read books on theology and church history and spirituality. Books were the common coin of this particular sub-group. When I entered college, I chose Religion as my major, because no profession really held any attraction for me compared with the issues of faith my friends and I had been probing for the last several years. The Religion major was as close as it got.

College years were for me, as for many, decisive. My “Jesus freak faith” matured, and sort of joined itself to the Orthodox faith into which I had been born and baptized and nurtured, and which I had never left even in my most enthusiastic evangelical days. This occurred through encountering Church History and the world and writings of the Church Fathers. As years went by, I discovered that the Church I had always been in, but never fully appreciated, was the same Church the Church Fathers knew and spoke of and lived in. There was no reason to look elsewhere for a fuller expression of Christian faith—even though my experience within evangelical Christianity was overwhelmingly positive and valuable, throwing light on neglected aspects of Orthodoxy. I began to hear the words of our services with new ears, to see the deep wisdom of the Church in its structure and habits with new eyes. An awesome time.

My friendships—mostly friendships with non-Orthodox Christians—continued to revolve around books. We read books together, we discussed ideas, we joked about and argued and pondered things we read in books. Reading and discussing books were what we did for fun—they formed the center of our social life. We used to playfully muse over what the perfect bookstore would have in it—just for fun. This was ten years before I ever really considered opening one.

So that’s one half my life. The other half was that of family and work. I grew up in a family business, and pretty much from the time I was nine

years old or so, began to work in my father’s store (as did my older brother). There I learned hard dirty sweaty honest work, good work, neat work. My father was a stern taskmaster, and even though I can’t count the many times I resented him for his relentless demands, I now thank God for him and them. It taught me not just the inherent value and satisfaction of a job well done, but it taught me endurance, and he taught me not to feel sorry for myself because of having to work hard.

“A vocation is not a specific career; it is a whole way of being in the world.” —Learn more at www.ocf.net

Through high school and college and even into my early married life, I continued working for my father and with my family. I loved them, and was reasonably content with these two discrete halves of my life going on simultaneously. I worked hard because I was taught to, and I read and probed and discovered new and delightful things about my faith because I loved the pursuit and found deep fulfillment and a sense of mission in it. But somehow work and that deeper sense of delight were in entirely separate spheres. And I could live with that. As I said, I was reasonably happy.

On May 17, 1987, my wife Barbara was in an automobile accident, injuries from which took her life and the life of our unborn third child some two months later.

At this particular point, I felt that my life had ended in certain deep ways, and that I had to start over. What to do? For a number of months, I had no idea. When I began to recover from the numbness that goes with grief, I began to ask myself fairly obvious questions, including one that was preeminent: what kind of job could I look forward to going to every day? Well, answering that sort of question involves the tendencies, loves, talents,

and gifts that were part of my particular makeup. That thing that I could look forward to—with only a B.A. in Religion and Classical Studies and not much desire to teach—that is, to get up in front of people all day every day—with a family and a firm and wholesome attachment to a home and a thriving Orthodox community in Wichita—was to open a bookstore. The circle of friends and the tossing around of ideas about what that bookstore would contain came into play. I drew on those discussions, the advice of my friends both past and present, my experience in the evangelical world, by studies in college in the humanities and in literature, my exposure to church history and the Fathers, my deepening convictions about the fullness of the Orthodox faith, my growing sense that all things good and true and excellent and beautiful belonged together—and the essential elements of Eighth Day Books converged.

And my experience in the world of retail sales and all the grunt-work that went with it—these became the wheels for carrying this vision forward. The two discrete halves of my life seemed to coalesce with one another. Life began to make some sort of sense, on the most personal of levels. All the seemingly separate and distinct strands of my life were tied together. A lot of this I can only see in retrospect.

Of course, this is only my contribution to the story. I can’t begin to explain the essential part played by the support my present wife Chris, my extended family, my priest and now bishop Basil, the community of St George, and the wider Christian community of Wichita played in the formation and continued survival of this perhaps eccentric experiment of a bookstore.

There was a time when I knew that I could not not do this thing. Whether or not I sold a single book, I knew that this was the thing that I had to do. I hope and work every day that I might continue to have the honor of doing it.



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Life-Changing

Each year hundreds of thousands of college students take trips on their breaks from school, most often during spring break. Real Break provides alternatives to the "traditional" spring break which many times can be nothing but foggy memories and empty experiences. Real Break also provides opportunities for spiritual growth with one on one interaction with a priest accompanying each group. The experience also leaves the door open to many important personal realizations.

Over the past four years we have had over 350 Orthodox students from all over North America participate in Real Break during their spring break. In 2005, we are very excited to be planning to return to all our 2004 locations (Project Mexico, Guatemala, Greece, Alaska, & San Francisco) we are also exploring two new locations but in the US and in Central America. These both will add new chapters to the Real Break experience.

For more information about joining us and to register, go to: <http://realbreak.ocf.net>

