



LIFE IS A **MAR**



ATHON

These young Latter-day Saints live today where the Apostle Paul lived during New Testament times. And they live by his words.

By Sally Johnson Odekirk
Church Magazines

A few months ago, a seminary class met at Mars Hill, near Athens, Greece, where the Apostle Paul once delivered a powerful sermon (see Acts 17:22–34). The students talked about the influence of seminary in their lives, including the teachings of Paul.

“Living in Greece makes the New Testament come alive,” says Alexis H., age 18. “My father likes to go to different ruins where Paul taught and will share a scripture or tell us a story about where the event happened.”

Just as Paul faced challenges in his time, youth in Greece also deal with social, political, and economic issues. Youth conferences and Young Women camp are rare events in Greece, and even attending seminary can be difficult. Despite these and other challenges, youth in Greece put into practice Paul’s encouragement to “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27).

Living in Greece means these young members get to enjoy warm weather, beaches, food, and dancing. They also really enjoy getting together with each other. As they meet in seminary and branch activities, they have become stronger in faith and friendship.

Seminary on Mars Hill

When seminary began in Greece a few years ago, there were only five students. They meet three mornings a week, with some joining via online video



"I have learned that the gospel is the same everywhere. Living overseas, I have learned to focus on the gospel truths and to feel the Spirit instead of getting distracted by culture."

—Bryana W., 15



"I wrote the word remember on my mirror to remember all that's happened this year: FSY, Young Women camp, seminary. It helps me remember where I came from."

—Marie H., 17



"I know that when I go to seminary I can feel satisfaction knowing that I'm doing what I need to do, and I know that everything will be OK."

—Lizzie T., 17



Loukia C., 15, bore her testimony for the first time at Young Women camp and was later baptized.



The seminary group in front of the Athens meetinghouse.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF LEEANN HEDER

conferencing. They also meet on Wednesday afternoons for seminary, followed by an activity. They have drawn close to each other and become a light to their friends, who notice their example. When their friends ask questions, the youth bring them to seminary and Mutual activities.

One young man, Pavlos K., 15, says, "Going to seminary is a good way to start the day and helps me to stay strong. It puts me in the mind-set of being an example to others. It helps to begin the day thinking about Jesus Christ."

As the youth grow in strength and unity, blessings and opportunities come. For example, in 2017 they were blessed to attend For the Strength of Youth (FSY), a large regional youth conference. The young women also participated in the first-ever Young Women camp in Greece. As a result, they have grown even closer as a group, and two young women joined the Church.

International FSY Conference

The conference, held in Germany, brought together young Latter-day Saints from across

Europe. Youth from Greece and Cyprus came from hundreds of miles away, and the conference experience had a profound impact on them. For Maximos A., 14, "the most memorable thing at FSY was when we shared our testimonies. Everybody felt the Spirit, and it inspired me to develop my own testimony."

"At first only four youth were going to go," adds Loukia C., 15, "but in the end, we had 15 attend—a record for Greece—including 3 non-member friends." "It was so nice to be together somewhere where you share the same gospel and you're not the different one. We were all together, and we were feeling the same Spirit. These things help me."

"My father isn't a member and wouldn't let me go to FSY or be baptized," says Jesiana, 16. "But then branch members fasted for me, and my grandmother talked with my father. After that he said I could go!"

At FSY, she experienced many firsts, such as, "participating in the lessons and activities and bearing my testimony helped me understand

what it is really like to feel the Holy Ghost. I had never felt the Spirit like that before, and I was so happy and excited. I bore my testimony for the first time."

In addition to being spiritually fed, the youth were able to relax and have fun together at the conference. Haig T., 14, came to the conference from Cyprus. "I learned to be more social, to have real friendships, and to have fun, even in the hard times."

Young Women Camp

The Young Women camp had a similar effect. Twelve young women met with their leaders near the ancient battle site of Marathon. They spent three days together, learning to rely on each other for strength and encouragement.

"When I was 12," says Loukia, "I went to church for the first time and was so happy, but then I realized that I was the only one my age. Now, two years later, we have so many young women that for the first time we were able to have Young Women camp." As they met together, she says, "I realized what it means to be a Latter-day Saint. When we live the gospel, a light surrounds us."

For Bryana W., 15, FSJ and Young Women camp helped her open up and talk to others. "My family moves often, and I had a hard time



"My favorite part of FSJ were sports, dance, and the group meetings, which were morning devotionals and review. It helped me be more helpful and patient and to appreciate the scriptures more."
—Haig T., 14



On the way to FSJ in Stuttgart, Germany.



At the FSJ conference, spelling the word "Ask," from James 1:5.

**"Stand fast
in one
spirit, with
one mind."**

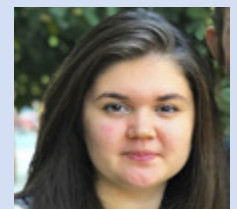
Philippians 1:27



Irimi S. performs at FSJ.



"At FSJ, we started becoming a group and it strengthened us. It helped shape and influence the youth program in Greece because now we know each other much better."
—Alexis H., 18



"Singing on the stage at FSJ was one of the most courageous things I've ever done and one of the most magical moments I've ever had. At the moment, I learned how important we are in this beautiful world."
—Irimi S., 17



“At Young Women camp I learned that life is like a marathon. It helped me grow my faith, knowing that we have to continue in the right path, just like we are running a marathon. That experience helps me grow my testimony and continue to have faith and stay on the right path.”

—Winifred K., 14

“Life is a marathon, not a sprint.”

Young Women camp theme



Young women at Marathon, Greece.



“We are all unique, just like the pebbles on the beach are each unique.” —Bryana W.



“Watching the sunrise brought a calming, beautiful spirit.” —Lizzie T.

bonding with others because I was shy,” she says. “But because I became close with our group at FSY, I made some really good friends. During testimony meeting, we shared our feelings, and I realized that others felt the same way that I did.”

Marie H., 17, remembers the camp theme, “Life is a marathon, not a sprint.” The young women and their leaders discussed the importance of enduring and finishing the race, she says. “It reminded me that I can endure, pace myself, and stay focused on the finish line. Then I can accomplish the things that Heavenly Father needs me to do.”

One of the highlights of the camp was a sunrise devotional at the beach on their last morning. Lizzie T., 17, says, “We took our scriptures, had our devotional, and watched the sun rise. We all felt the love of God. It was a wonderful ending to the time we spent with each other.”

Fearlessly Facing the Future

“From FSY and Young Women camp, I learned a lot about the gospel and how it can help me in my life,” says Irini S., 17. “I made a lot of friends and learned how important it is to express my thoughts and feelings. I felt the Holy Ghost deeply and the love of our Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Being around other Latter-day Saint youth, she says, strengthened her confidence. “Before FSY I couldn’t see the good and beautiful things that God made for us and the plans that He is still making for us.”



Young Women camp, 2017—the first ever in Greece.

“We shouldn’t be affected by anyone or anything else around us that would try to pull us away from living the gospel,” Manasseh A., 17, says. “The gospel is the same everywhere and we should always stay on the right path.”

And whether it’s in Greece or elsewhere in the world, sharing that path together allows us to be one in spirit. ■

The Church in Greece



In the early 1900s, Rigas Pofantis, a printer from Athens, sent a request to leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for information. The president of the Church’s mission in Turkey taught Pofantis, who was baptized in October 1905.



The Church experienced little growth in Greece until the 1950s, when Greek-American Church members in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, organized the Hellenic Latter-day Saint Society to retain their heritage and maintain ties with their homelands.



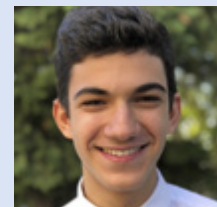
Church leaders organized a small congregation in Athens in 1965 and reorganized it in 1967. They established the Greece Athens Mission in July 1990 and completed construction of the first meetinghouse in Greece in May 1999.



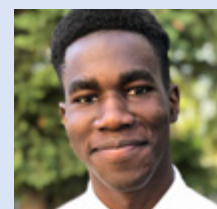
Athens, Greece, meetinghouse in Halandri



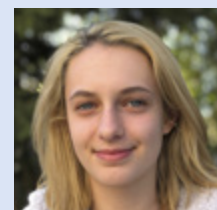
Church
Membership: 802
Congregations: 3



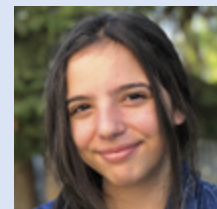
“I really liked to see what it is like to be around youth who have the same beliefs. I felt like we were all connected in some special way, more than just knowing each other’s names.” —Pavlos K., 15



“I’m glad that I had the opportunity to meet other youth that go through the same things that I do every day.” —Joshua K., 17



“FSY and Young Women camp have the same feeling no matter where you go in the world. I enjoyed the smaller Young Women camp because it was easier to connect with each other.” —Olivia H., 15



“I am not a member of the Church, but I come every week I can. I adore what the young women stand for.” —Irene C., 14