



International Orthodox Christian Charities Volunteer Information for Houston, TX



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. About IOCC and Hurricane Harvey

- Who is International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC)?
- US Programs at IOCC
- Partnerships
- Hurricane Harvey

2. Volunteering with IOCC in Houston, TX

- What to expect when volunteering
- What does it cost
- Travel to Houston
- Are there age restrictions?
- What to bring when volunteering?
- Checklist: Items to bring
- Can I bring items to donate?

3. Volunteer Base

- Accommodations
- Lodging Address
- Sleeping Space
- Parking
- Dirty work clothes and shoes
- Laundry
- Bathroom and Showers
- Internet
- Free Time
- Daily Schedule
- Team Meetings
- Food
- Not comfortable with our housing option?
- Transportation

4. Safety and Security

- Weather
- Keeping safe while on the work site

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- Health precautions
- Physical and Mental Health
- Safety at St. George
- Drugs and Alcohol

5. After your trip

6. Questions

1. ABOUT IOCC and Hurricane Harvey

Who is International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC)?

IOCC, in the spirit of Christ's love, offers emergency relief and development programs to those in need worldwide, without discrimination, and strengthens the capacity of the Orthodox Church to so respond. We envision that, by God's grace, IOCC will enable those suffering and in need to continue to improve their own lives and communities and to have means to live with dignity, respect, and hope. Since its inception in 1992, IOCC and its partners have provided more than \$600 million in relief and self-help programs to people in more than 60 countries. Current programs focus on emergency relief, agriculture and food security, education, health, water and sanitation, and economic opportunity in places including Syria, Greece, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, the Balkans, and the United States.

IOCC staff identifies needs, develops plans, manages operations, tracks grants, guides programs, and assures reporting and transparency. IOCC is accountable to the Assembly of Bishops, governed by an elected Board of Directors, and managed by an Executive Director and Executive Team.

IOCC is committed to working with the most affected communities to identify the appropriate short and long-term responses to their needs.

US Programs at IOCC

Since 2001, IOCC's US Programs have given more than \$57 million in aid and gift-in-kind and over 40,000 volunteer hours to our brothers and sisters across the country.

Partnerships in Houston, TX

In Houston, TX in response to Hurricane Harvey IOCC is partnering with [NECHAMA Jewish Response to Disaster](#). During your deployment you will get to work alongside NECHAMA volunteers and occasionally NECHAMA team leaders.

Hurricane Harvey

Texas and Louisiana continue recovery after Hurricane Harvey made landfall on August 25, causing widespread flooding in the Houston area; rebuilding efforts will take months.

- IOCC has established a family-assistance program to help both Orthodox and non-Orthodox families through local Orthodox parishes. Applications have been received, and distributions of funds through area parishes.
- In the larger community, the IOCC Emergency Response Van, staff, Orthodox Action Team leaders, and volunteers remain on the ground, where over 40 homes have been cleared of damaged items and debris ("mucked out") since 9/4. In all, Over 100 IOCC

volunteers have already worked in Texas; IOCC volunteers continue to rotate in service. Assessments and muck outs are ongoing.

- IOCC has worked with ecumenical partners to deliver items worth over \$200,000 to the area, including clean-up buckets, hygiene kits, dental supplies, mattresses, and bedding. More commodities will be delivered in the coming weeks.
- IOCC Frontliners were the first group to offer emotional and spiritual care at the George R. Brown Convention Center shelter in downtown Houston. As the situation changed, efforts shifted to include response in Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Galveston. In all, 20 Frontliners have served in the Houston area.

2. Volunteering with IOCC in Houston, TX

What to expect when volunteering

We will be helping homeowners who are in need of prepping their home for re-building after Hurricane Harvey. We will be doing tasks such as tearing out dry wall, taking out personal possessions, and cleaning. Many of these homes were flooded with as much as three feet of water (more or less in some cases) and while the water has receded, all of the belongings and most of the drywall and appliances must be removed.

We understand that many volunteers have never done this type of work before and you may have a lot of questions, if you are unsure of how to complete a task, please ask your IOCC team leader for instruction. All training will be onsite and no skills are required to volunteer.

No experience is necessary and we provide all of the tools and safety gear. Please note that having access to a bathroom on site is always a gamble. We will come up with creative solutions on a site by site basis.

What does it cost?

IOCC does not charge a fee for volunteering on our Emergency Response teams. Volunteers, however, are responsible for funding their own travel to and from Houston. Once in Houston IOCC will provide accommodation and three meals a day for the duration of your stay.

Please make sure to budget accordingly for extras such as entertainment and drinks.

We encourage you to use your trip as a way to let your friends, family, parish, and community know what you're doing and help IOCC respond in the future. You can create a fundraising page through [DIY for IOCC](#).

Travel to Houston

Flying: The church is approximately 26 miles (30 minutes without traffic, 60 minutes with traffic) from IAH Airport (George Bush Intercontinental). The church is approximately 15 miles (20 minutes without traffic, 35 with traffic) from HOU Airport (William P. Hobby Airport). Either airport is a good option for you to fly into/out of.

Driving: You are welcome to drive to Houston. Please be respectful of the limited parking at St. George during events held at the church. Please plan your route using a map or a GPS.

Are there age restrictions?

Due to the type of worksite you'll be working on there are age restrictions. Volunteers must be 14 or older. 14 year olds must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. Volunteers who are 15, 16 or 17 must have a parent or legal guardian either present or their care turned over to another leader. All volunteers, no matter the age, are required to sign an IOCC waiver form before starting work on the worksite.

What to bring when volunteering?

Please remember that this is a disaster response project, you will be working in mud, debris, with wet items and other dirty things. Be prepared for clothing you wear to potentially be destroyed. As a reminder, please check the weather forecast before departing. *Please try to pack lightly!*

Provided: An IOCC T-shirt will be provided to each volunteer to wear on site. If you are staying at our accommodations IOCC will provide an air mattress for you. We ask that you bring your own sheets/sleeping bag/towel; however, if you do not have them these items will be provided for you but we must know in advance.

Checklist: Items to bring

| If Staying at IOCC Accommodations: | For the worksite: | Recommended: |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal toiletries • Sleeping bag/sheets (optional) • Towel (optional) • Non-worksites footwear • Shower shoes/flip-flops • Book (s) • Travel alarm • Flashlight/Headlamp • Earplugs/sleep mask (optional) • Sense of humor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long pants • Work boots/tennis shoes (must be closed toe) • Boot socks • Re-usable water bottle • Extra work clothes • Sense of humor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sweatshirt (Our accommodations and most indoor places in TX keep the AC low) • Rain Gear • Cash/Credit Card • Nice clothes (at least one set) • Normal clothes (for after the work day) • Sunglasses • Hat/cap • Bug repellent/Sunscreen • Prescription medication/Ibuprofen • Camera • Tetanus shot (optional) |

Can I bring items to donate?

Your biggest impact is being made by your physical help in volunteering. IOCC works with corporate partners to receive and distribute donations in bulk. We are unable to accept in kind donations. Instead, please consider making a financial donation, which can be used to fund IOCC's response to Hurricane Harvey.

3. VOLUNTEER BASE

Accommodations

For all out of town volunteers wishing to utilize our housing, St. George Orthodox Church has been gracious enough to donate their space and allow us to stay with them. St. George has showers and laundry facilities. Bedding and towels are provided upon availability, but we request you bring your own if that is an option. If you make your own sleeping accommodations, please inform us before your arrival.

Please be respectful of St. George, this deployment would not be possible without their generous hospitality. Please pick up after yourself and be respectful of their programming throughout the week. You will be asked to pack up your belongings each Sunday so they can host Sunday School in our sleeping area. You are invited to attend Liturgy with them, if you would like.

Once registered, forms are given to those who are flying into Houston either through IAH or Hobby airport. IOCC volunteers will be making airport runs for those coming in, unless you have set up your own transportation.

Lodging Address:

St. George Orthodox Church
5111 Mercer St
Houston, TX 77005
713-665-5252

Sleeping Space

Volunteers will sleep on air mattresses (provided) in communal spaces. Depending on the size of the group it is possible to have a classroom to yourself, but this may not always be the case. Men and women will be in separate rooms.

Parking

St. George has limited parking, if you are driving please be respectful of their limited parking spaces during the days and times they have events.

Dirty work clothes and shoes

After the work day you will have dirty work boots and clothes. These dirty shoes must be taken off immediately upon entering the church. Please be cautious of your clothes by not hanging dirty clothes in clean, public places.

Laundry

St. George Orthodox Church has a washer and a dryer that IOCC volunteers are allowed to use. Please be respectful and wash your items with other volunteers to maximize the use of water and washer/dryer time.

Bathrooms and Showers

The restrooms are used throughout the week for church functions, so please keep your personal toiletry items with you instead of in a shared bathroom space.

There are two showers at St. George, one in the men's restroom and one in the women's. The shower facilities are nice and have hot water. Please try to conserve water. Your responsible water usage will help us allow everyone to have a hot shower in the evening.

Internet

St. George has a password protected guest wireless network. You are welcome to use the network, please ask the St. George Office Administrator or an IOCC staff member for the password.

Free Time

There are several restaurants and bars within walking distance of St. George Orthodox Church. It is also easy to grab an Uber or Lyft from St. George.

Daily Schedule: For those staying at St. George

The IOCC work week is Monday through Saturday. IOCC takes Sunday off for physical, mental, and spiritual rejuvenation. If you are interested in working on Sundays we will connect you with our partner NECHAMA Jewish Response to Disaster.

| | |
|----------|-------------------------------|
| 8:15 am | Morning meeting at St. George |
| 9:00 am | Start the workday |
| 12:00 pm | Lunch at worksite |
| 4:00 pm | Depart the worksite |
| 4:30 pm | Showers, free time |
| 5:00 pm | Nightly meeting at St. George |
| 5:30 pm | Dinner |
| 6:30 pm | Free time |
| 10:00 pm | Quiet Hours |

Team Meetings

The morning meeting will discuss the specific home the team will work on that day, what to expect at the worksite, and how many volunteers will be on site that day. The evening meeting will be for to debrief about the day, discuss any items that need to be addressed before the next workday, to introduce new volunteers, and to say goodbye to anyone who is leaving.

Food

If you stay with IOCC, we will provide you with 3 meals a day during the length of your deployment. It will consist of a light breakfast, a sack lunch, and dinner made and consumed at

the church. On rare occasion the group may eat out. While alcohol may be consumed on the deployment, IOCC will not cover the expenses of any alcoholic beverages.

If you are not staying with the group at St. George, you must pack your own lunch to bring to the worksite. You are welcome to join the team for dinner, but that is not required. If you choose to join the team, please make sure the leader knows with at least a full day advance notice.

If you have dietary restrictions we will do our best to accommodate them. However, as some restrictions can be complicated we ask for your patience and guidance. We will be sure to accommodate for volunteers who are fasting during their stay.

You are welcome to purchase and bring any food that you would like to personally have. Please make sure to mark this food appropriately.

Not comfortable with our housing option?

We understand that not everyone is comfortable with our housing option. You are welcome to find your own accommodations in the local area. If you have friends or family nearby, you're welcome to stay with them. If you would rather utilize a hotel or Airbnb, you are welcome to do that as well. However, if you do not stay with IOCC at St. George you will be responsible to pay for your own housing and food as well as your own transportation to/from the worksite each day.

Transportation

IOCC does have a Utility Van to help with transportation to and from the work sites. IOCC also has rental vehicles to transport you to/from the worksite each day. If you are traveling from out of state and arriving at the either IAH or HOU airport, we will be in contact with you about transportation to St. George upon your arrival.

If you are making your own living accommodations while in Houston, when getting around, make sure to keep traffic in mind. Houston is a large city and with that comes a large amount of people who are transporting to work and from work at the same time. It's not an awful commute, but please keep the commute time in mind as you depart for the worksite each morning.

4. SAFETY AND SECURITY

Weather

Houston is known for its array of weather, but thankfully we're past the summer heat. Highs should stay in the 80's with lows in the 50's, so a light sweater for mornings and nights would be ideal. When on the worksite, because Houston is a humid city, you will still feel a bit of heat, so come prepared for that and make sure to always stay hydrated. Work at your own pace on the worksite and make sure to take breaks, please don't overdue yourself!

Keeping safe while on the worksite

IOCC or our partner organization does an assessment of each work site to ensure it is safe to run a volunteer team. Additionally, IOCC provides team leadership with experienced volunteer team leaders and staff. Make sure you have the correct gear on when going to the sites – close toed shoes, long pants, breathing masks, gloves, and eye protection. All necessary Personal Protection Equipment is provided by IOCC. You want to stay hydrated and make sure you are not overexerting yourself. As much as you'll want to help, make sure to take care of yourself while on site and ask for help when necessary. When dealing with heavy objects, make sure to not overexert yourself. Again, ask for assistance when needed. As a volunteer, you are under no obligation to do any work that you feel is potentially hazardous to your health or physical well-being. Your safety is extremely important to us.

All IOCC volunteers will sign a medical release and waiver form. All volunteers must also register before volunteering to ensure that IOCC has emergency contact information for each volunteer on site. IOCC also has a first aid kit on site, should any minor cuts or scrapes occur.

Health Precautions

As you know, with flooding comes many problems and just one of those can be dealing with mold inside a home. Be sure to have a mask ready when going on site, so you lessen the chances of harmful intake. Again, make sure to stay hydrated when working, especially in the Houston heat and humidity. These environments can be stressful and can be difficult work, be sure to take breaks when needed. We do recommend making sure your tetanus shot is up to date.

Physical and Mental Health

Volunteers should be in good physical health, as most of the work will involve manual labor. Working in a post-disaster environment is tiring and can be stressful. While the work is full of many rewards, please do not compromise your mental or physical health by ignoring your personal limits.

Safety at St. George

St. George is busy during the day with many people coming in and out. During the evenings, the building is locked. IOCC leadership has a key and will coordinate on access to the building. While there hasn't been any issue with theft, please be cautious of your personal possessions by leaving valuables at home and making sure to safely store your electronics and other valuables that you brought with you.

Drugs and Alcohol

Narcotics are strictly forbidden on the church property and on IOCC worksites. Any volunteer found with illegal substances will be asked to leave immediately, at their own expense. Additionally, reckless or illegal activity off site is also grounds for dismissal. Cigarette smoking or vaping are not allowed inside the church. Please use designated area outside for these activities and do not litter on the church property.

While St. George does allow alcohol on site all individuals must be 21+ to participate. Any on or off site alcoholic consumption must be within reason and if abused IOCC and St. George staff reserve the right to ask you to leave immediately, at your own expense.

5. AFTER YOUR TRIP

- Fill out an [online evaluation form](#)
- Share your photos with us! Please upload them to [this dropbox account](#)
- Find us on Social Media
 - [Facebook](#)
 - [Twitter](#)
 - [Instagram](#)
 - [YouTube](#)
- Sign up for our [mailing list](#)

6. QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Becca Tumm, Program Manager - US, at rtumm@iocc.com or call/text (612) 454-9452 and we will get back to you as quickly as possible!