



# INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES NEWS & NEEDS

SHARING GOOD

FALL 2016

## GLASSES BRING WORLD BACK INTO FOCUS FOR SYRIA'S REFUGEE CHILDREN

Wearing ponytails and a pink coordinating outfit, Enas, 11, seems more like the girl next door than a survivor of civil war. She loves playing with her brothers and sisters, watching cartoons and going to school. Three years ago, the life Enas knew in Homs, Syria, ended abruptly when the family fled to Jordan to escape heavy fighting in her hometown. "We left due to horrible shooting in our city," Enas said. "I was so afraid at night." Adjusting to life as a refugee in Jordan hasn't been easy, especially when Enas began struggling in her new school. A vision test revealed the need for glasses, but her parents, who are without jobs, could not afford to pay for the glasses she needed.



Enas and her family are not alone in their struggles. More than 657,000 Syrian refugees are registered in Jordan, and those with injuries or hearing, vision and mobility impairments face particular challenges. IOCC is working to improve the quality of life for nearly 1,000 refugee and vulnerable Jordanian children with these disabilities by providing them with glasses, hearing aids, low vision devices, blind communication devices and wheelchairs. IOCC is also covering the cost of medical treatment for children at risk of further health problems caused by their disability.

Enas' father took her to a community center where IOCC provided glasses made specifically for Enas, with frames in her favorite color – pink. "I'm so happy and thankful for IOCC," her father said. "Now she can get higher marks at school, and her vision won't affect her performance."

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## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



This summer I met with participants in the Serv-X-Treme! Youth Leadership Conference. As the name implies, the forum focused on Christ-centered service and the youth had the chance to interact with families facing challenges, many of which were beyond their control. No matter where we live, conflict or natural disaster can make years of building a life filled with family and the comforts of home vanish instantly.

What is in our control, yours and mine, is lending a hand to help impoverished families as part of a Christ-centered life. In Jordan, for example, where you are helping Syrian refugee parents provide basic but vital health needs like glasses and wheelchairs for their children. In drought-stricken Ethiopia, where you are supplying the seeds needed to help restore crops in the field and food on the table for hundreds of rural families.

These examples along with others in this issue of *News & Needs* shine a light on how your support of IOCC is giving families the fresh hope and sustainable tools they need to become self-sufficient again and to put poverty behind them.

In Christ,

Constantine M. Triantafyllou  
Executive Director & CEO



## SEEDS OF HOPE FOR ETHIOPIA'S DROUGHT-STRICKEN FARMERS

Living off the land means that Zenebech, 50, relies heavily on farming to feed her four children. Along with cultivating teff, a nutritious staple grain grown in Ethiopia for millennia, the widow also spends her days collecting firewood and selling it at the village market to supplement the family's modest income. Her only livestock are a donkey for hauling firewood and a few chickens.

Last winter's severe drought across southern and eastern regions of Ethiopia drastically changed the quality of life for Zenebech and 9.7 million other Ethiopian people who rely on seasonal spring and summer rainfall to grow their crops. The lack of rain led to widespread crop failures and hunger among Ethiopia's predominantly rural communities. "I used to collect up to 4,000 pounds of teff from the farm but this year I got nothing," said Zenebech. While the rains have returned, the threat of hunger remains. Seeds normally used for planting were eaten by families faced with starvation, leaving nothing to plant for future crops. IOCC, working with church partner, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission, is responding to the urgent needs of Ethiopia's rural families with the distribution of more than 16,000 pounds of teff seed to 500 farmers in the Amhara Region. The high-yield seed will help replace crops lost to the drought and replenish seed stores depleted by families desperate for something to eat.

International Orthodox Christian Charities, Inc. (IOCC) is the official humanitarian relief agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America and a member of the ACT Alliance, a global coalition of churches and agencies engaged in development, humanitarian assistance and advocacy.

*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.*



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# GIVING LEBANON'S BABIES A HEALTHY START

Hamadiya, 38, was already an experienced mother when she gave birth to twin girls, and planned to nurse them just like she did her three older children. The hospital staff discouraged her, insisting that breastfeeding was insufficient nourishment for the babies. "They told me to buy baby bottles and formula and that there wasn't any option to breast-feed," Hamadiya recalled. Baby formula is expensive, especially for Lebanon's financially vulnerable families and Syrian refugee women. It also carries health risks where access to safe water needed to prepare the formula is unreliable. Breast milk, on the other hand, provides the nutrients an infant needs and costs nothing. IOCC is working to give newborns in Lebanon a healthier start in life through better infant nutrition. IOCC lactation specialists visit Lebanon's public hospitals regularly to provide new mothers with technical and emotional support needed to breastfeed their babies. The IOCC team also makes home visits to ensure the baby continues to thrive. The support Hamadiya received from IOCC helped her transition away from bottle feeding. "I can now breastfeed my daughters as many times as they need, and will keep nursing them as long as I can," said Hamadiya. This support is part of a larger effort by IOCC to work with the Ministry of Public Health and local institutions in strengthening the country's ability to protect the health and nutritional well-being of all Lebanese children.



# ORTHODOX YOUTH GAIN LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE SKILLS AT CONFERENCE



More than two dozen high school seniors from eight Orthodox Christian jurisdictions across the US participated in IOCC's third annual Serv-X-Treme! Youth Leadership Conference in Minneapolis this summer. The conference was made possible the past two years by a generous grant from The Archbishop Iakovos Leadership 100 Foundation. The 26 participants came together for eight days to gain a deeper understanding of Orthodox philanthropy, engage in meaningful service opportunities and forge new friendships with their Orthodox peers.

Hands-on service opportunities with a variety of organizations ranged from providing basic needs—meals and housing—to after-school programs and disaster response. During play time with children at the Twin Cities Boys and Girls Club, Serv-X-Treme! participants gained a new understanding of how important giving their time could be, even if it was just helping a child draw a picture or play a game of Duck, Duck, Goose. The participants also took on more physically demanding volunteer work and helped hang sheet rock at a Habitat for Humanity build project which provides affordable housing for families who can't typically qualify for a conventional loan. The parent of one Serv-X-Treme! participant reflected on how the experience had such a profound impact on her daughter. "In her words, 'it was life-changing.' We hear this phrase thrown around quite often," said the mother, "but in this case the week altered her future plans. She is seeking more ways to stay connected to the Church and Orthodox organizations while in college."

# THE JESUS PRAYER

*“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”*



While faith education is important it can't supplant the powerful cultural forces that have swayed our society. We are losing the battle because we aren't capturing the human heart. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote in *The Gulag Archipelago*, "If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But, the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

While we don't want to destroy the human heart, that is the battlefield. Education in the

faith will not help us win this battle unless it is accompanied and nourished by prayer, specifically, the prayer of the heart or the Jesus Prayer. Elder Sophrony once noted, "People in the West live with their brain: their lives are centered on reason. So, if scientists were to invent a machine, they would be able to read people's thoughts and direct them. All those, however, who live with their heart, within which God's grace acts, and who pray in their heart, have the sign of the Cross in their heart and no one is able to control them spiritually. They have freedom of spirit." The Jesus Prayer is our weapon against all forces antithetical to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

When we speak of Orthodox Christian witness, there is no better witness than the one who keeps the mind constantly in the remembrance of God. This is precisely why the Jesus Prayer is so vital and should be encouraged. Undoubtedly, the greatest Christian witness we can offer the world is our own relationship with Christ. If He dwells in our hearts through the practice of the Jesus Prayer, countless others will be attracted to us and the message of the Gospel.

Bishop Thomas

*Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America  
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