



# INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES NEWS & NEEDS

FOCUS ON WORLD HUNGER

VOLUME 6, NO. 2 FALL 2003

## IOCC mobilizing to stave off looming disaster in Ethiopia



Photos: Dirk Van Gorp-IOCC

Two Ethiopian workers tend an urban gardening plot at the Blue Nile Training & Outreach Center, IOCC's partner in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia. With the center, IOCC plans to develop a comprehensive agricultural and vocational training program that will help Ethiopian young people improve food production for their people.

On the shores of scenic Lake Tana, in northern Ethiopia, young people are learning how to improve food production through urban garden plots. The training they receive may one day hold the key for the food security of Ethiopia, a land known for its natural beauty, its monasteries and its droughts.

Memories of the famine that claimed nearly 1 million lives in the mid-1980s are still fresh in this country with an ancient Orthodox Christian heritage. And, once again, Ethiopia is faced with serious food shortages in the wake of

two consecutive years of drought. An estimated 12.5 million people are said to be in immediate need of food aid, provoking a growing humanitarian response on the part of governments and relief agencies.

"Food insecurity remains the country's most deep-rooted problem," according to a recent report by former Ohio congressman Tony Hall, U.S. ambassador to the U.N. food agencies. "Of the country's 67.2 million inhabitants, almost half live in deep and long-term poverty and are vulnerable to drought, acute malnutrition and even, at extreme moments, to starvation."

So far, outright famine has been averted, but concerns over a shortfall in food grain donations — about 1.3 million tons are required through December — and the cyclical nature of Ethiopia's problems have forced humanitarian organizations to rethink the best ways to respond. Exacerbating Ethiopia's food shortage is the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic.

According to the 2003 Hunger Report by Bread for the World, Africa accounts for 70 percent of the world's AIDS cases and 80 percent of new infections. Ambassador Hall's report notes that Ethiopia has the third-largest number of HIV-positive people in the world — 2.2 million, including 250,000 children under age 5. As a result, the spread of AIDS in Ethiopia has led to a loss of labor for agriculture activities and a consequent loss in agricultural productivity. People with AIDS also require greater caloric and nutritional intake — a need that is difficult to meet with today's food shortages.

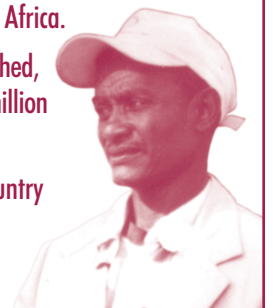
Other factors in Ethiopia's food crisis include its war with neighboring Eritrea, the failure of the two rainy seasons in 2002, the lack of top soil, and poor land management. IOCC consultant Xenia Wilkinson, who traveled to Ethiopia with an IOCC team in 2001, said Ethiopians cultivate farmland that in many cases is not owned by them.

*Continued on page 5*

### A quick look at hunger in Africa:

- Of the 82 countries in the world classified as "low-income food-deficit countries," 42 are in Africa.
- One in three Africans is malnourished, and about half of its nearly 700 million people live on less than \$1 a day.
- One in five Africans lives in a country torn apart by war and conflict.

Source: Bread for the World Institute, 2003 Hunger Report, "Agriculture in the Global Economy."



# From the Executive Director



This issue of News & Needs arrives at a time of alarming need in the suffering countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Since late 2002, there have been ominous warnings about potential famine in the Horn of Africa and southern Africa, exacerbated by a growing HIV/AIDS epidemic. Those warnings are being borne out in places such as Ethiopia, where an estimated 12.5 million people are at risk of starvation if nations and relief agencies do not move urgently to curtail serious food shortages.

Such numbers are hard to fathom. Equally unfathomable to those of us who live in the West is the very notion of hunger. Most of us know where our next meal is coming from, and our only real brush with hunger is perhaps during Great Lent. Even then, we are hungry because we choose to abstain from certain foods. We have the luxury of fasting for spiritual reasons, but in our world, there

are millions of people who go without food simply because there is no food.

More often than not, hunger is a matter of people not having access to food or not being able to afford the food that is available, rather than a lack of resources. There are times, such as in cases of drought or natural disaster, when food is unavailable and must be distributed to prevent starvation. But experts tell us that our world currently produces enough food for everyone. Tragically, hunger and food insecurity are usually the result of controllable factors — inept governance, trade inequities, civil strife, poor infrastructure, lack of resources, unemployment or underemployment, among other things.

IOCC seeks to meet people's immediate food needs, while ensuring that they have access — by production or purchase — to nutritious food for the long term.

I'm reminded of an elderly woman who fled the fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1995 — one of nearly 2 million people displaced by that war. She was riding in the back of a horse-drawn trailer, hiding from the rain under a plastic cover. All I could do was offer her a smile and a parcel of food — flour, canned meat, beans. Today, IOCC is helping those displaced people secure a better future for themselves, their families and their communities — through small-scale farming projects, agriculture training, food-for-work programs, animal husbandry projects and school lunch programs.

Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, let's remember that "our daily bread" is nothing to be taken for granted — and let's recommit ourselves to working so that this prayer is answered for everyone.

In Christ,

Constantine M. Triantafilou  
Executive Director



International Orthodox Christian Charities, Inc. (IOCC) was established in 1992 by the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA) as the official humanitarian aid agency of Orthodox Christians to work in cooperation with the Orthodox Churches worldwide.

*The mission of IOCC is to respond to the call of our Lord Jesus Christ, to minister to those who are suffering and are in need throughout the world, sharing with them God's gifts of food, shelter, economic self-sufficiency and hope.*

Published three times a year by IOCC, News & Needs is edited by Stephen Huba and Mark Hodde.



recycled paper



# 'Loaves & Fishes' multiplying in Atlanta

**Atlanta (IOCC)** — Orthodox Christians are known for their food festivals, not so much for their food programs. But in places like Atlanta, that's changing.

In January, the 13 Orthodox parishes of Greater Atlanta, representing eight jurisdictions, began a cooperative effort to support the "Loaves & Fishes" food ministry of St. John the Wonderworker Orthodox Church (OCA) near downtown Atlanta. Since then, Orthodox Christians have been giving their volunteer labor, as well as donations of perishable and non-perishable food items, to assist the poor and homeless of inner-city Atlanta.

"It's been very helpful to us," said Fr. Jacob Myers, pastor of St. John's. "I haven't gone to the Atlanta Community Food Bank at all in the past six months because I've been able to rely on the Orthodox donations."

The pan-Orthodox effort was launched with the support of IOCC's U.S. Program and under the auspices of the IOCC Atlanta Metropolitan Committee. It soon received the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Atlanta and the



A volunteer at "Loaves & Fishes" prepares to make sandwiches from lunchmeat donated by Atlanta's Orthodox churches. IOCC's U.S. Program helped coordinate the pan-Orthodox initiative, which could serve as a model for other cities.

Orthodox clergy association of Atlanta.

"People are excited when they see something that's organized and unified," said Costa Panos, chairman of the Atlanta Metropolitan Committee. "It makes us more visible as Orthodox Christians and shows that we're working together to help alleviate poverty in Atlanta."

Panos said the current economic downturn has aggravated the problems of homelessness, poverty and hunger in Atlanta.

The "Loaves & Fishes" program feeds up to 100 people every weekday at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. What kind of food the people receive depends on donations, Fr. Jacob said. Individuals and families are served a hot meal or a sandwich, and families receive canned goods that they can take with them.

Through collection barrels that have been set up at all participating churches, parishioners are able to donate canned goods, which are delivered to St. John's once a week. Lately, hot meals have been donated from parish festivals and other parish events in the city. Metropolitan committee members have started soliciting donations of food from grocery stores and Orthodox-owned restaurants. Through monetary donations, Fr. Jacob is able to keep the program well-stocked with lunchmeats and other necessities.

"I was getting a little worn out after 10 years of doing it," he said. "This makes our job easier, and the people seem to enjoy having a unified service program in the city."

IOCC's U.S. Program Director Robert Pianka said the Atlanta initiative demonstrates how regional pan-Orthodox cooperation can have an immediate positive impact. "If we



Photo: Fr. Jacob Myers

A homeless family in inner-city Atlanta enjoys a hot meal provided by the "Loaves & Fishes" food program of St. John the Wonderworker Orthodox Church. IOCC's U.S. Program helped coordinate the pan-Orthodox initiative.

focus our resources, we can help more people, better and better, in more ways," Pianka said. "This combination of stewardship and the sharing of God's gifts in projects like 'Loaves & Fishes' is the essence of Orthodox philanthropy."

Fr. Jacob started the "Loaves & Fishes" program soon after St. John's was founded in 1989, a mile away from one of Atlanta's poorest neighborhoods. "There's an Orthodox principle that you never turn anybody away when they ask you for help," he said. "We could not ignore the fact that there were poor and homeless people all around us, and that they were hungry."

Panos said the energy behind the pan-Orthodox initiative has not waned. If anything, it's gotten stronger. "It's certainly awakened a lot of people to see the problems we're having in the city," Panos said.

"People are starting to realize that making a little sacrifice once or twice a week goes a long way, especially if every Orthodox family does it. We want to get all Orthodox Christians into the habit of buying a little extra food and bringing it to church."

Pianka said the "Loaves & Fishes" program could serve as a model for other U.S. cities.



# Orthodox can help hungry by supporting legislation

Orthodox Christians who are concerned about world hunger can do something about it by making their voices more heard in Washington, D.C., said IOCC consultant Xenia Wilkinson.

"As communities with strong immigrant backgrounds, Orthodox Christians in America understand the crucial linkage between democratic governance and opportunities for the poor to make a better future," Ms. Wilkinson said.

One way Orthodox can make a difference is by promoting a new proposal to help low-income countries which are committed to democracy, economic reform and basic social services, she said.

Called the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), the initiative, if passed into law, would double the amount of development assistance the United States gives to poor countries

over the next three years. President Bush is asking Congress to fund the MCA at \$1.3 billion for fiscal year 2004.

Humanitarian aid agencies such as IOCC are calling for Congress to keep the MCA focused on development assistance that is over and above the current foreign aid budget.

Money from the MCA is meant for programs that lift people out of poverty in the world's poorest countries. The MCA will provide grants to improve agriculture, health, child welfare, education, and small business, helping people to help themselves.

"The MCA can be successful only if it is linked to sound policies in developing countries," explained Ms. Wilkinson, who serves on the MCA Working Group, a committee active in educating members of Congress about the Millennium Challenge Account.

Orthodox advocacy on behalf of the MCA could take the form of letters or

phone calls to Congress, Ms. Wilkinson said. (Please see box.)

Letters are considered important for the appropriations process this fall because there's no guarantee that Congress will fully fund the President's budget request for the MCA, she said.

"One message that is not heard in Washington is that there are many people in need among Orthodox Christian communities overseas. They don't get as much attention because they're not as well known among Washington policymakers and Congress," she said. "We could advocate for a good geographic distribution of countries that qualify for MCA funding, so that poor countries in all regions of the world are represented."

That includes the lowest-income countries in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, the Caucasus and the Middle East, she said.



## You can help by sending a letter to your Representative or Senator:

Dear [Rep. or Senator]:

Please support S. 1160 [for Senators] / H.R. 2441 [for Congressmen] to help establish a poverty-focused Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). The MCA would assist countries who use their resources well, and it could help reduce hunger, fight disease and educate children in the world's poorest countries.

Congress must also make sure this new program receives the funding it needs without cutting other good development and emergency aid programs. Please see that the MCA receives at least \$1.3 billion this year, which reflects the president's budget request.

Please do everything in your power to support this legislation. Thank you.

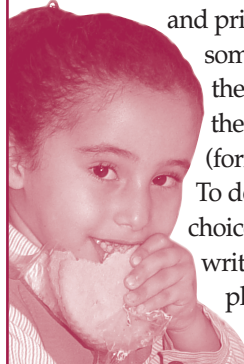
Sincerely,  
[Your Name]

A letter to a representative should be addressed to: Rep. [Name], U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515. A letter to a senator should be addressed to: Sen. [Name], U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510.

Source: Bread for the World; InterAction ([www.interaction.org/advocacy](http://www.interaction.org/advocacy))

## IOCC offers Orthodox choice for workplace giving

When Orthodox Christians are asked to give at the workplace, IOCC gives them an Orthodox choice. Each fall, Americans are invited to participate in a variety of workplace giving campaigns. These include the United Way, the Combined Federal Campaigns, as well as many state, local and private workplace giving campaigns. In some cases, the employer agrees to match the employee's gift. IOCC is registered for these campaigns through Global Impact (formerly International Service Agencies). To designate IOCC as your charity of choice, use Global Impact Code #0348 or write in IOCC's name and address on the pledge form. For more information, visit us at [www.iocc.org/atwork](http://www.iocc.org/atwork).



# Food needs require long-term solutions

(continued from page 1)

“There’s no guarantee that their heirs will get the same land, so they don’t have much incentive to take care of it or work to avoid land degradation,” Ms. Wilkinson said. “Even with massive amounts of food aid, you still have to reform the agriculture system and do more integrated rural development before they have sufficient food security.”

In December 2002, IOCC and the other members of the Coalition for Food Aid, an alliance of U.S.-based relief agencies, launched a campaign to raise awareness about the food crisis in Africa. Joining in the coalition’s “Baltimore Declaration” on Africa, IOCC renewed its commitment to Africa, to mobilizing on behalf of its people, and to partnering with Orthodox Christians to help stave off the looming disaster.

IOCC began supporting small-scale agriculture projects in the northern Amhara region in 2001, in partnership with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church’s Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission. The monastery-based projects seek to improve people’s ability to support themselves through agricultural pursuits such as beekeeping, gravity-flow irrigations systems, fruit orchards and vegetable gardens.

IOCC hopes to continue its relationship with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church through a series of community-based development projects, including grain grinding mills, improved water systems and a reforestation program. IOCC Executive Director Constantine M. Triantafilou met with His Beatitude Patriarch Paulos of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in July.

“Africa’s people face tremendous need because of food shortages that threaten millions,” Triantafilou said. “Over the long term, that’s where IOCC should be focused, while continuing to support traditional Orthodox countries and our local partners.” Prior to joining IOCC, Triantafilou worked on welfare and development projects in Kenya and Tanzania for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Mission Center and the Orthodox Church of East Africa.

Triantafilou said the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is a key partner for IOCC, along with the Orthodox Churches under the Patriarchate of Alexandria. Christianity in Ethiopia dates back to the fourth century. Today, as many as 30 million Ethiopians — about 45 percent of the population — are members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

IOCC also has proposed a vocational and agricultural training program in Barhir Dar, Ethiopia, on the shore of Lake Tana, the source of the Blue Nile River. IOCC’s partner, the Jerusalem Community Development Organization, was founded during the devastating 1984 famine in which large numbers of children were



Photo: Dirk Van Gorp-IOCC

A field worker irrigates a crop at the Blue Nile Training & Outreach Center in Barhir Dar, Ethiopia, where IOCC plans to train young people in techniques to improve food production for a country devastated by recurring droughts.

orphaned. Later, as the children grew older, the organization got involved in job training as a way to reintegrate the orphans into society.

The project proposed by IOCC, once funded, will train young people in new agricultural techniques, food production and animal husbandry, as well as woodworking and other trades. An agricultural extension service to surrounding rural areas also is planned.

“We’re trying to prevent future famines in Ethiopia by training young farmers in better production techniques, for both crops and livestock,” said Dirk Van Gorp, an IOCC consultant for international development programs and disaster response. “We’re working toward the future.”





# Farm offers way for poor schools to grow their own food



Photo: Bill Datch-IOCC

School children from an impoverished suburb of Buenos Aires, Argentina, gather at the site where IOCC and its partners are developing an organic farm. The land will be used to provide food and income to a kindergarten that lost its government funding in the wake of Argentina's economic collapse.

## Buenos Aires, Argentina (IOCC) -

“Are you here to bring us food?”

The question sticks in Helena Davonis' mind. It's stayed with her ever since the day she and some of her students at Athenagoras High School delivered food to a needy elementary school in a poor part of Buenos Aires.

Ms. Davonis, a Greek-Argentinean teacher, leads a group of young Orthodox Christian volunteers called Puerto Esperanza (“Port Hope”), an agency of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Buenos Aires and South America. Since May 2002, months after the collapse of the Argentine economy, Puerto Esperanza has been working hard to meet the food needs of an increasingly desperate population in Buenos Aires and beyond.

Now the non-profit organization is partnering with International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) to expand the reach and range of its services. IOCC is in Argentina at the invitation of His Eminence Metropolitan Tarasios of Buenos Aires and South America, to assist in the startup of a church-based humanitarian agency and to provide relief to some of Argentina's most

needy citizens.

Until that agency is formed, Metropolitan Tarasios has given his blessing for Puerto Esperanza to act on his behalf, in partnership with the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, to assist the poor of Argentina who seek the Church's help.

The collaboration between IOCC and Puerto Esperanza began with a visit by Ms. Davonis and some of her students to a poor elementary school in the La Matanza district of Buenos Aires, where they took a minibus filled with food and delivered it to the school. As the group was leaving, a little girl from a nearby community kindergarten walked up and asked, “Are you here to bring us food?”

The girl took Ms. Davonis by the hand and led the group to Trencito de Papel (“Paper Toy Train”) kindergarten, which feeds and educates about 120 underprivileged children in a part of town blighted by trash dumps. The school, like many others in Argentina, lost its government funding in December 2002 and has been struggling to keep its doors open ever since. Left without the means to pay its teachers, maintain its facilities or care for its students, school officials appealed to Puerto Esperanza for help. “This kindergarten would have shut down, but some people in the community decided they weren't going to let that happen,” said Bill Datch, IOCC's Argentina liaison officer.

Puerto Esperanza and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese raised enough funds to continue the school's lunch program, donated furniture and equipment to the school, and acquired a nearby 48,000-square-foot plot of arable land for use as an organic farm, or “huerta.” The latter will serve multiple purposes — growing food for the

kindergarten students, generating income for the school and its staff, creating jobs — and could become a model for cash-strapped schools throughout Argentina, Datch said.

Such an approach, sustained over the long term, would address a number of the social ills that have resulted from Argentina's economic collapse, including malnutrition, school absenteeism, child labor/begging, juvenile delinquency, and substance abuse.

To date, the “huerta” has been cleared of debris, surrounded by a fence, and equipped with a guard-house, a water pump, a well and an irrigation system — all with volunteer labor. Winter crops have been planted, and a caretaker has moved into his partially-completed residence, Datch said. With the first harvest not expected until September, IOCC will ensure the children, their families and elderly pensioners in the community are fed while the “huerta” is being established. IOCC also is offering technical support and supervising the labor associated with the project, with funding from St. Paraskevi Greek Orthodox Church in Greenlawn, N.Y., through an effort led by parishioner Pam Praetorius.

Future plans call for the establishment of a henhouse and a bakery, and marketing of the farm's products to raise additional income. “We hope that by the end of the first year, the farm will be self-sufficient,” Datch said. “Selling a portion of the produce, the bread and the eggs in the neighborhood will allow the farm to sustain itself.”

IOCC also is cooperating with other Orthodox jurisdictions in Argentina, including the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese, the Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate, and the Serbian Orthodox Church.



# Gaza residents get food relief from IOCC, partners

**Al-Mawasi, Gaza (IOCC)** — The farmers of al-Mawasi used to fill the markets of the Gaza Strip, Israel and the West Bank with their fruits and vegetables, everything from dates and guavas to lemons and olives. Fishing and agriculture were the seaside community's main occupations.

But today's harsh political realities - a Palestinian *intifada* ("uprising") and Israel's military response — have changed all that. Al-Mawasi may still be among the best farmland in the Gaza Strip, but it isn't the source of food and income that it used to be.

Tight restrictions on movement have severely curtailed the activities of farmers and other workers who rely on outside markets for their livelihood. Where once 40 to 50 trucks filled with produce left al-Mawasi on a daily basis, now only four or five trickle across the border.

Unemployment in the Gaza community has increased dramatically because construction workers can no longer commute to their jobs in Israel. Travel restrictions also have prevented people from returning to their homes, from seeking medical care and from attending schools.

"The residents of al-Mawasi now live in intolerable conditions," concluded a report by the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, "and are engaged in a constant and prolonged struggle to survive."

By spring of this year, the situation had deteriorated to the point where emergency food assistance was needed, but humanitarian organizations had been denied entry into the area. Even so, five Christian relief agencies, including IOCC, organized a convoy to deliver much-needed food parcels, hygiene items

right: A Palestinian girl takes home food staples she received from IOCC.

below: Adel of Rameh, West Bank, is happy to receive rice, oil and beans for his family.



Photos: Nora Kort-IOCC.

With support from Action by Churches Together, IOCC recently completed a food distribution project among vulnerable families in the West Bank and Gaza.

and medicines to 1,200 suffering families in al-Mawasi.

It took weeks for IOCC and its partners to receive permission from the Israeli military to enter al-Mawasi. The convoy was finally successful in delivering the humanitarian supplies on March 31, but not without difficulties.

"We were not allowed to enter al-Mawasi even though we had the proper permits," said Nora Kort, head-of-office for IOCC-Jerusalem. "The trucks had to be unloaded at the checkpoint and reloaded on the other side in Gaza-plated trucks." This "back to back" method is the same one required of farmers shipping their produce out of al-Mawasi.

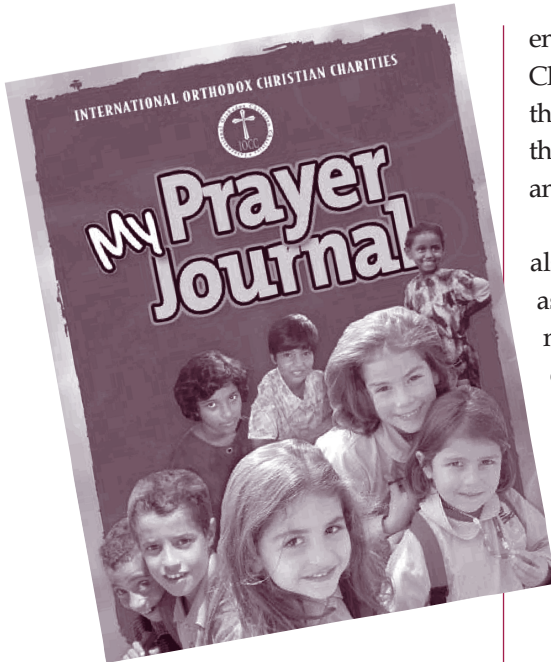
IOCC contributed \$5,000 to the initiative, which provided \$30,000 in

food staples — flour, beans, rice, sugar, tuna fish, tea, oil and cheese — to the needy families. Each parcel contained enough food to supplement a family's diet for about a month, Ms. Kort said.

IOCC's participation in the humanitarian convoy was part of a larger food-for-work project that it recently implemented in the West Bank and Gaza. Supported by the relief alliance Action by Churches Together, IOCC distributed more than 2,200 emergency food parcels to needy families living near the cities of Jenin and Nablus. The project also employed 88 men in the West Bank villages of Beita, Odala and Assira, providing them with food staples in return for work in the construction trades, Ms. Kort said.



# Prayer journal teaches about IOCC work in new way



Orthodox children across the United States will have a new resource this fall to teach them about prayer and their world: the IOCC children's prayer journal.

Titled "My Prayer Journal," the colorful book is designed to encourage children in their prayer life as they learn about the lives of children around the world. Each month features a different country where IOCC is implementing humanitarian and self-help programs.

Along with information about each country, there are Bible verses, quotes from the Church Fathers, excerpts from the Divine Liturgy, suggested prayers, and interesting facts. Space is provided for children to write their prayer requests and things that they are thankful for.

"This prayer book is a welcome liturgical and catechetical tool," said the Rev. Frank Marangos, director of religious education for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

"My Prayer Journal' successfully

encourages children to see the face of Christ in those who suffer and invites them to create a better global future through the intervention of personal and corporate prayer," he said.

The 12-month, interactive journal also offers children an opportunity to assemble school kits for children in need around the world. Each month, children will have the opportunity to visit the IOCC Web site for more information about that country.

"My Prayer Journal' is an excellent resource to help Orthodox children learn to pray and to care about their brothers and sisters throughout the world," said



**To order journals, please go online at [www.iocc.org/journal](http://www.iocc.org/journal).**

Frederica Mathewes-Green, author of "The Illumined Heart" and "Facing East." This free IOCC resource is available to parishes just in time for the new church year.



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