



INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES NEWS & NEEDS

FOCUS ON COMMUNITY BUILDING

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Photo: Dusko Yucic-IOCC

Drago, a Bosnian woodworker and farmer, displays a work-in-progress at his wood workshop. Drago and his family were able to return to their pre-war home in 2001 with the help of IOCC. They are among more than 2,100 families that IOCC has helped return to Bosnia after the 1992-1995 war.

Home, utility repair programs sustain lives

By Chrysanthé Loizos, IOCC Intern

Banja Luka, Bosnia-Herzegovina

(IOCC) — We turn onto a narrow, stony path, overgrown with shoulder-high brush and wild flowers. Eventually, we round a bend, and a small wooden gate appears ahead of us. This is how we know we have reached the house of Drago, a Bosnian woodworker and farmer.

We go on foot around the gate and down the path that leads to the hub of the property — the family home and stone barns, with roosters and sheep wandering about in the yard. We haven't told Drago we are coming, and the welcome is greater for it. After greetings and his admonishments for our not visiting more often, we tour

his property.

In 1995, Drago was living here in this remote village of Skakavac in northwest Bosnia, on the same land that his family has lived on for six generations. He lists the livestock he had at that time: 117 sheep, 10 cows, two bulls, five calves, four horses, 15 pigs, and poultry. He had a tractor, a combine, tractor attachments and three hay mowers. On his ample land he grew corn and potatoes.

And the farm wasn't even his only job. For 36 years he worked full time for a wood processing company, tending to his animals and land in the evenings and on weekends.

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Rural areas of West Bank transformed

By Nora Kort, IOCC-Jerusalem

Jerusalem (IOCC) — The children of Beit Sira mimic the violence they see around them every day. Their toys are sling-shots and wooden guns.

Life in a rural West Bank town is filled with fear and uncertainty. But slowly, one village at a time, that is changing. In places like Beit Sira, IOCC is bringing new hope and opportunity through the construction and/or repair of schools, roads, kindergartens, clinics and women's centers.

The village leaders of Beit Sira grew tired of seeing their children with no safe places to learn and play. "Our village kindergarten was in two damp rooms at the local mosque," said Mohammad Abdul-Aziz, a member of the Beit Sira Village Council. "We did not have the means to change, but our children were changing as a result of what they see and watch. The only thing they experience and live is violence. Children need proper places to learn, play and grow."

Through a partnership with the village, IOCC provided Beit Sira with a new kindergarten — one of six that IOCC has built in the West Bank over the past two years. The building's dedication was "like a wedding. The entire village showed up," said Ma'zouzeh, a teacher at the school. "With the new kindergarten, the children will have space to play, and sand and toys to play with."

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From the Executive Director

The dictionary defines infrastructure as “the basic facilities, services and installations needed for a community or society” to function properly.

In a society whose infrastructure is fairly sophisticated, most people in the West don't give the topic a second thought: Our roads are fairly well maintained; public utilities are generally reliable; our homes provide security and shelter. Are our lives worry-free? Certainly not. But the “basic facilities and services” are there, and fear of losing any of them is not a constant preoccupation for most of us. But go to a place like the Republic of Georgia or the West Bank or Bosnia-Herzegovina, and it's a different story. It's that story that we want to tell you in this issue of News & Needs.

In Bosnia, where the 1992-1995 war destroyed homes, public utilities and other infrastructure, refugees returning home have found that there is not much to return to. What good is it to rebuild one's home, they ask, when there is no running water or electricity? IOCC has been addressing this challenge over the past few years with projects restoring village water supply lines and electricity supply networks. To date, 373 households have been reconnected to repaired water lines, and 468 households have been reconnected to repaired power lines.

In the West Bank, where an almost constant state of turmoil has wreaked havoc on roads, public buildings and homes, people despair of an infrastructure that will last. This in a part of the world with buildings that are centuries old! IOCC has been active these past two years opening new agricultural roads, building retaining walls and hedging, constructing community centers, health clinics and libraries, and repairing school classrooms. As each village has partnered with IOCC in this endeavor, the renewed pride in their community has been palpable.

In the Republic of Georgia, where decades of decay and



Photo: IOCC-Ethiopia

Ethiopian Orthodox Church officials demonstrate a new water pump and well for IOCC Executive Director Constantine M. Triantafilou. Infrastructure projects such as water system improvements are one way that IOCC seeks to improve the quality of life for impoverished communities around the world.

neglect left the education system in shambles, IOCC is repairing schools one-by-one and restoring a sense of optimism among Georgia's educators and school children.

These infrastructure projects are not just about buildings or roads or power poles. They are about the people whose lives are restored to some semblance of normalcy through access to these services. IOCC has found that if you build it, they will come — come home to a village with running water and electricity, come to class in a school where water doesn't drip through the ceiling, come to a clinic where health services are available to all.

Thank you for helping us make these vital projects a reality.

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.

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recycled paper

To learn more about the communities helped by IOCC, please visit www.iocc.org

Georgian schools getting passing grade with help of IOCC, partners

By Darejan Dzotsenidze, IOCC Georgia



Left:
"Before"



Right:
"After"

Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia

(IOCC) — In the past, you wouldn't find students at Borjomi School No. 1 looking for ways to get a bathroom break in the middle of class. The restrooms in their school were barely useable.

"Before IOCC fixed our lavatories, the toilet was very dirty," said Tsothe, 14, an eighth-grader at Borjomi. "The windows were broken, the walls were covered with graffiti; we did not have running water to wash our hands. We would all use our feet to open the toilet doors. We were afraid even to touch the doors."

The 30-year-old school in southern Georgia is one of many that IOCC has helped over the past three years. With an enrollment of 600 students ages 6-17, Borjomi participated in IOCC's school lunch program and serves children displaced by the early 1990s civil war.

"The kids really enjoyed coming to school during the time the program was running — they were so happy to receive their meals," Principal

— a sewage system that did not work and no running water.

Marina Dadiani, a teacher at Borjomi, said the conditions were so bad that the teachers and parents recommended the students not use the bathrooms at all. There was even a threat of hepatitis spreading at the school.

"But, this was in the past," Ms. Dadiani said. "Now our lavatories are brand new and clean. Even the janitor keeps joking that she enjoys cleaning the new bathrooms because they are so clean. Hygiene and sanitary conditions at school are one of the basic requirements for our children's health, and healthy children are the future of our country."

Nugzar Chaduneli said, noting that Georgian schools in general suffer from a lack of funds, resources and textbooks.

Then school leaders appealed to IOCC to help fix the intolerable conditions of the restrooms. Parents, the school administration and the local government had no funds to address the prob-

lem — a sewage system that did not work and no running water. With IOCC's assistance, the school was able to repair the restrooms and sewage system as part of a larger program funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The physical improvements also have meant improvements to the school's sanitary conditions and to the overall health of the students, school officials said.

Elsewhere in Georgia, IOCC has been active making repairs to other dilapidated school buildings, including fixing leaky roofs. A lack of money and resources, as well as years of neglect, has left many Georgian schools in a state of disrepair.

Monika and Nika, fifth-graders from southern Georgia, are glad that IOCC recently repaired their school, Likani Abkhazian Ministry School. "Last year, IOCC painted the walls, fixed the toilets and arranged new classrooms in our school. Before that, several classes shared each classroom. Now each class has its own room," Nika said.



Right:
"Before"



Left:
"After"



Bosnian citizens taking action through local organizations

By Chrysantho Loizos, IOCC Intern

Drvar, Bosnia-Herzegovina (IOCC)

— From a Tito museum to a headquarters for community groups, the NGO Resource Center in Drvar has had a long and storied history. But today, the building is more about creating a better future for Bosnia than about preserving the past.

The Drvar Resource Center houses six non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide resources and services to Bosnians of all religious and ethnic backgrounds. The Center opened its doors in March of this year in a three-story house with a noteworthy past.

Originally a private residence in the 1930s, the home was abandoned before the start of World War II. It served briefly as the command center of a Partisan brigade and later as a school for communist leaders. After WWII, it was converted into a museum about Tito's WWII hideout in the hills surrounding Drvar and his crafty 1944 escape from a major German paratroop assault there, aimed at his capture.

After the war, Tito rose to power and ruled socialist Yugoslavia with a strong hand until his death in 1980.

The museum remained intact until 1995, when Croatian forces overtook the city. Late that year the museum was looted. A fire ravaged the building in the summer of 2001, leaving only the exterior walls standing.

In 2002, IOCC recognized the need of local NGOs in Drvar for a Resource Center similar to those IOCC had already established in other towns in northwest Bosnia.

IOCC arranged the reconstruction of the former museum's roof and interior, the installation of a completely new electrical system and telephone lines, and provided office furniture and equipment.

In exchange, the local municipal government agreed to provide the use of the building to the local organizations free of charge for five years, and for a nominal rent for the following five years.

As part of its wide-ranging efforts to strengthen these groups, which form

the core of an emerging democratic society, IOCC has created Resource Centers in three communities in north-western Bosnia, renovating buildings with funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

“The building is helping the NGOs, and the NGOs are helping the community.”

— Nikola Materic of the NGO Forum

“The Resource Centers that IOCC has established represent the transition taking place in Bosnia today,” said Tina Wolfe, IOCC Civil Society project manager. “Whereas in the old socialist system, individuals relied on the authoritarian state which controlled everything, today in Bosnia citizens are taking action; they are taking responsibility for making positive

changes in their communities. These Resource Centers are a stepping stone in that process.”

The Centers provide a range of opportunities and services for community organizations, including the free use of office and meeting space, access to equipment such as computers, fax machines, copiers and scanners, and the opportunity for groups to work side by side, promoting collaboration and cooperation.

Currently, six community organizations are housed in the Drvar Center, as well as the NGO Forum, a representative body for like-minded agencies in the region.

With IOCC's assistance, the NGO Forum established and now manages an Internet club on the ground floor, offering much-needed computer access to the town's young people. At the same time, the Internet club provides the Center with revenue to offset operating costs. The Center has plans to offer computer and English classes to youth and adults as an additional source of income.

The largest of the agencies located in the Center, Refugee Return Services (RRS), promotes human rights and democracy, and assists refugees and other people displaced by the fighting of the 1990s who wish to return to their pre-war homes. It does so by rebuilding their houses and repairing infrastructure such as electricity transmission systems.

Social service agencies such as RRS are still relatively new in Bosnia, first emerging at the outset of the fighting in 1993. Local groups have grown since then and work in areas such as emergency relief, infrastructure repair, health, education, job creation and the environment.

Despite providing crucial support to citizens, community organizations in Bosnia continue to face obstacles, including scarce resources, suspicion from the government and a lack of understanding of their missions and activities.

Four of the organizations in the Drvar Center serve young people. One of these is the Drvar Youth Council, which seeks to empower young people ages 15-32. The Council currently has 20 members, “but everyday someone wants to sign up,” said General Secretary Andjelko Rokvic.

For one of its recent projects, the Youth Council mobilized the students of a multi-ethnic primary school to clean nationalist graffiti off the school's walls, and then to repaint the walls with a mural. “People passing by would join in,” Andjelko said.

Although the grants they have received to date have been relatively small, Andjelko hopes the Youth Council will send the message that even with small funds, they can work to make changes in their community and promote coexistence.

As for the other benefits of the Resource Center, NGOs often cite the ability to meet with one another daily to share their experiences and the lessons they've learned through their widely varied activities. The newer agencies appreciate the opportunity to learn from the experience of RRS, for example.

“Without this, they would cease to exist,” says Nikola Materic, secretary of the NGO Forum. “The building is helping the NGOs, and the NGOs are helping the community by addressing unmet needs and voicing peoples' concerns.”



Gutted by fire in 2001, the former Tito museum of Drvar, Bosnia-Herzegovina, was only a shell when its reconstruction was begun by IOCC in 2002. Here are “before” pictures of the building prior to reconstruction and during installation of the roof. Set in the hills surrounding Drvar, the building is now a resource center for IOCC-supported community organizations.



A Bosnian child (left) works on a computer at the newly-completed NGO Resource Center of Drvar, Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Center, one of three developed by IOCC, houses six community organizations that provide resources and assistance to Bosnians in need.

To learn more about the communities helped by IOCC, please visit www.iocc.org

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‘There’s no greater feeling’ than coming home again

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On September 14, 1995, Drago’s family, like others in this region, met a stream of refugees coming from the west. The family knew this meant that Croatian forces were approaching and that they too would be expelled. Leaving behind nearly everything they had ever built or owned, the family left immediately. With Drago driving their horse cart and his son driving their tractor, the family of seven traveled 120 miles in eight days, to the town of Derventa. “It was raining as though heaven was crying for us,” Drago said.

In Derventa, they found shelter of sorts in an abandoned house — one with no windows or doors, and without even a roof until Drago was able to collect enough tiles from the garbage to make one. To earn money, he cleaned toilets. “We did

hard jobs, but we were used to it, so we could adapt,” he said.

He recalls how happy he was with the signing of the Dayton Agreement and particularly the provision that gave all people the right to return to their pre-war homes. He called it “a glimmer of light that shined through a huge piece of darkness.”

Drago visited his home and property in July 1996, though he knew that it was still too soon to return for good — the war was still too fresh in people’s minds and enmities were too strong.

Nonetheless, he wanted to see his home. He traveled first by bus and then walked the last 15 miles through the mountains at night so that he wouldn’t be seen. When he finally arrived home, he found his house and barns in ruins. All that remained of his home were the exterior walls.

Over the next few years, Drago

visited his property a number of times and finally returned to stay in early 2000, doing what he could to make repairs with what little he could find or afford to buy. The following year, IOCC rebuilt his home, as well as the homes of the five other returnee families in the hamlet.

In 2002, IOCC repaired the local electrical transformer station in Skakavac and the electricity transmission lines, bringing electricity to Drago’s home and to the five others.

Drago also received from IOCC a flock of laying hens and a supply of chicken feed, a hay mower and tools for planting crops and gardening. Slowly, he has acquired livestock again; he’s set up beehives and is also farming corn, wheat and potatoes. He’s able to earn cash by selling livestock and honey.

“When I returned, I was very happy. It was awful to be in exile. Now I am on my own land again. There’s no greater feeling,” he said. “I know who I’m working for on my property — me, my sons and my grandchildren.”

As part of its larger return and reconstruction program, IOCC rebuilt more than 300 homes in the Bosanski Petrovac region, where Drago and his family live, through a grant from the U.S. State Department’s Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration. And through funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development, IOCC reconnected more than 270 homes to electricity.

IOCC Intern Chrysanthe Loizos served at IOCC’s office in Banja Luka this summer. IOCC offers internships to college-age students in the areas of program management, communications, and administration.



Bosnian farmer and woodworker Drago (front row, far right) and his family pose proudly outside their newly-rebuilt house with IOCC intern Chrysanthe Loizos (back row, far right). Drago’s family was able to move back into their pre-war home with IOCC’s help after spending five years as refugees.

Photo: Dusko Vucic-IOCC

To learn more about the communities helped by IOCC, please visit www.iocc.org

Rural West Bank transformed

Photo: Dr. George Malki-IOCC



Children from the West Bank village of Beit Sira celebrate the opening of a new kindergarten built by IOCC. The children are holding Arabic signs that read "Beit Sira Kindergarten," "Welcome," and "Education lifts and builds; ignorance destroys even the home of the generous and giving." Since 2002, IOCC has built six kindergartens in rural areas of the West Bank.

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Throughout the West Bank, IOCC has undertaken dozens of similar infrastructure projects that have brought basic services to isolated, underserved villages. (See box.) Funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, these services come at a time of increasing hardship for the people of the Holy Land, said Nora Kort, head of IOCC's Jerusalem office.

Elsewhere, IOCC-built schools have helped villages cope with the high Palestinian birthrate on one hand, and cash-strapped local governments on the other. "We need more classrooms every year," said Fouzi Radi, head of the Saffa Village Council. "IOCC helped us realize our dream of having an adequate school building. The school's inauguration was like a festival for the whole village."

In Az-Zawiya, village leaders asked IOCC to assist in the develop-

ment of a hospital after several women gave birth at Israeli army checkpoints. The women were waiting for an ambulance, but bureaucratic delays kept them from crossing the checkpoint in time to get to a hospital, Ms. Kort said.

"It is humiliating and unsafe for any woman to deliver at a checkpoint," said Reem, coordinator of the village Women's Committee. "We have been begging the village council to build a small hospital here in the village. Now we have the building, and the council is in the process of furnishing it to become a maternity hospital."

With 4,000 residents who rely mainly on agriculture for their sustenance, the village of Tell has suffered from military closure and inaccessibility for almost a year. The multi-purpose Village Council building built with IOCC's help has become a favorite destination for many local women, who go there

seeking health care, skills training and workshops.

"Having a place of our own helped us leave our isolation and see the light. We are more confident about our role and better respected in our society now," said Faizeh, the local Women's Committee coordinator. "The construction of the center and the initiation of the Women's Committee made us feel united. It also strengthened our sense of belonging to the community and Tell particularly. We are proud of this center."



Infrastructure projects completed* by IOCC in the West Bank since 2002:

- Twelve community centers
- Eight health clinics
- Six kindergartens
- 20 classrooms
- Two school multi-purpose halls
- One school library
- One school lab
- 22 bathroom units
- 33 classrooms
- Two school playgrounds
- 27 miles of agricultural access roads
- 143,286 square yards of retaining walls/hedging

**constructed or renovated*

To learn more about the communities helped by IOCC, please visit www.iocc.org

Honor gifts keep giving

Kathy Abraham believes that the best gift for someone who has "everything" is a gift in their name to IOCC.

"Sometimes you just don't know what to give a person," said Ms. Abraham, an IOCC supporter from Grand Rapids, Mich. "What do you do? Instead of giving them a gift they don't need, you can make a donation that could change someone else's life."

Giving an honorary gift is the perfect way to recognize a friend or family member's birthday, anniversary, graduation or other momentous celebration. For each donation received, IOCC will send your designated recipient an honorary greeting card in your name.

Your honorary gift will show how much you care for family and friends, while giving hope to people served by IOCC throughout the world.

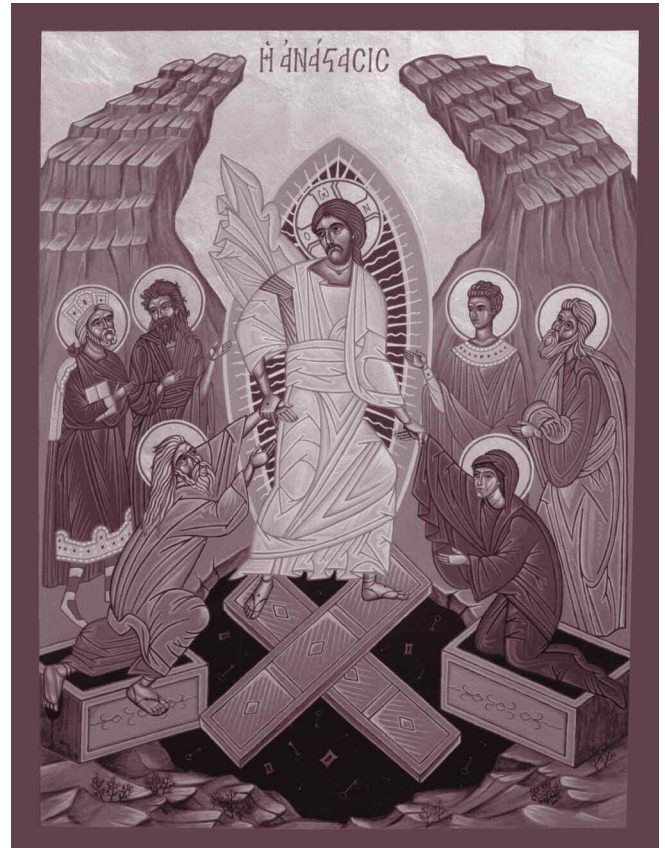
Memorial gifts are an established tradition in the Orthodox faith. For each donation received, IOCC will send a beautiful memorial card in your name to your designated recipient.

These gifts honor the memory of a loved one and comfort family and friends during their time of loss. You will also be giving help and hope to victims of poverty, natural disasters and war.

Through an agreement with IOCC, the monks of St. Gregory Palamas Monastery in Ohio remember the departed in their prayers during the first 40 days. They will also enter the name of the departed in the Monastery Diptychs, to be commemorated every Memorial "Saturday of Souls" throughout the year.

"What better way to honor someone who has lived a full life and been such a blessing to others," Ms. Abraham said.

To learn more, please visit www.iocc.org/giving.



Cover of the IOCC Memorial card. Icon by the hand of Diamantis Cassis

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