



INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES NEWS & NEEDS

HELPING OTHERS HELP THEMSELVES

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OUTREACH IN THE U.S.

IOCC Helps Single Working Moms Realize Dream of Homeownership

Covington, Louisiana — At 43, tan, and muscular, a woman named Michelle bounds up a ladder and uses her shoulder to hoist a “truss,” a large wooden structure that will secure the roof of a new home. When she ducks as the team below her slides the truss into place, Michelle, a New Orleans native, reminds you of a pioneer woman. In fact, she is one. For the first time in her life, she will own a home, something that this landscape gardener and single mother never thought was possible.

Michelle is working at a Habitat for Humanity work site, putting in the 300 hours of sweat equity

IOCC Baltimore



IOCC Baltimore



(above) IOCC volunteers, Katherine Baine and James Kostaras flank future Habitat homeowner Michelle at a work site in Covington, Louisiana. Since 2006, IOCC has mobilized hundreds of volunteers to help build new homes for Hurricane Katrina survivors on the Gulf Coast. (left) IOCC volunteers help secure the roof of a new Habitat home in Covington, Louisiana.

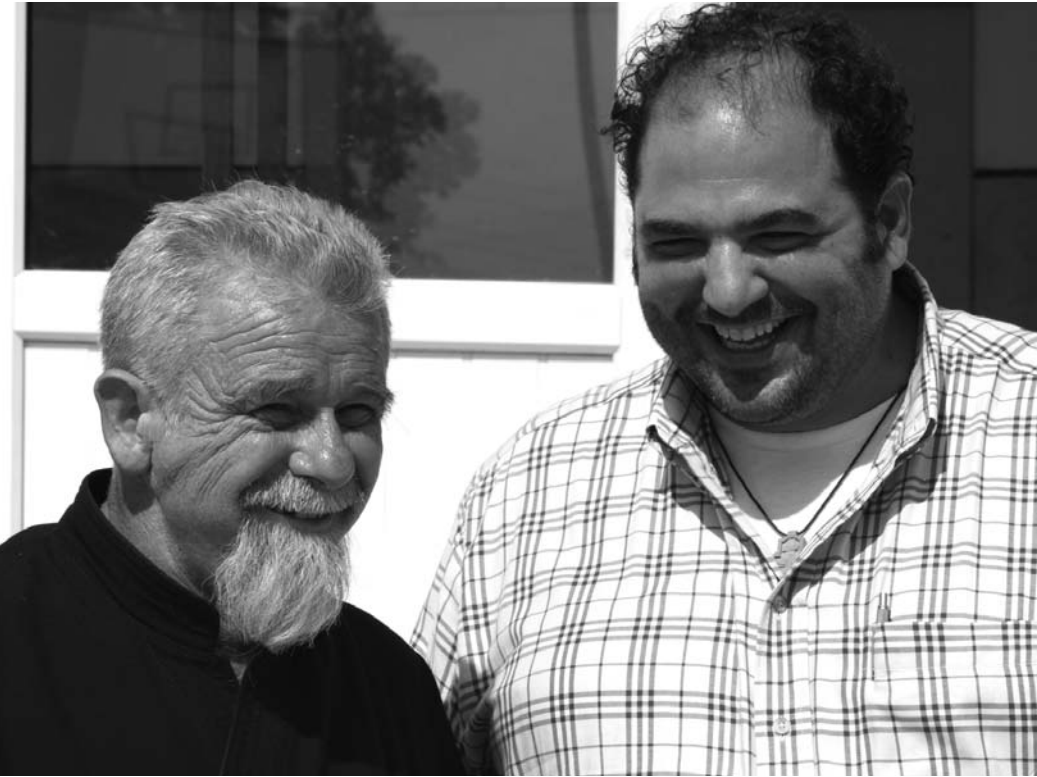
required towards the acquisition of her own house. Her American dream is about to come true thanks in part to the hundreds of IOCC volunteers who have toiled in the Louisiana sun since 2006 to build new Habitat homes for the survivors of Hurricane Katrina. “The idea of owning my own home for personal security, for personal investment, for my two

growing sons – plus one that is affordable and that can withstand a Category 5 hurricane is something I never thought possible,” she said.

In this year’s deepening recession and subprime mortgage meltdown, Michelle’s story is a refreshing change. She’s not alone. Of the 127 families in the St. Tammany

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



IOCC collaborates with national Orthodox churches to serve their communities. Above, Father Milenko Dragicevic meets with IOCC's Constantine Triantafilou in Kosovo.

On the streets of the hurricane-devastated Upper Ninth Ward of New Orleans, you'll find new, brightly painted churches sitting side-by-side with rotting, deserted houses. That community knows something: the church can be in the lead of any effort to rebuild and renew a community.

The broadest stroke that emerged from IOCC's recent strategic planning process was our commitment to build the capacity of the Orthodox Church to help communities respond to emergencies and to achieve economic sustainability. You may not have known this but in order for IOCC to provide an Iraqi refugee in Syria with a job skill, or a Ugandan teenager with a school, IOCC collaborates with and trains national Orthodox churches to implement programs, create good governance practices, and maintain transparent financial systems.

That commitment to building the Orthodox Church's capacity is reflected in the stories of this

issue of *News & Needs*. Our cover story features IOCC's "Volunteer on the Gulf Coast" program that builds new Habitat for Humanity homes for hurricane survivors in Louisiana. We're very proud of that program, now in its third year, for the excitement it has generated among hundreds of Orthodox volunteers to find service opportunities in the U.S. Two more stories highlight IOCC's US Program: Desire Street Ministries provides an education and crucial mentoring for at-risk boys in New Orleans, and in Alabama, Penelope House provides shelter and transitional services for women and their children who want to build new lives apart from domestic abuse.

Our story on Park Town Clinic in Zimbabwe shows the dedication of Orthodox Christians to build a clinic in the midst of a country that has completely lost

its social service structures. In Georgia, our war relief work is expanding to provide trauma therapy and continued food assistance to the thousands of Georgians who were displaced by the August 2008 conflict. As always, our work there is in coordination with the Georgian Orthodox Church.

Ultimately, our collaboration with the Church underlines everything IOCC does. Of course, we could not accomplish anything without the grace of our Lord and the blessing of our Church fathers. As long as I have worked with the Church, I have felt that blessing and seen its power. May that blessing touch you and your family for your support of IOCC.

Yours In Christ,

Constantine M. Triantafilou
Executive Director & CEO

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 Orthodox Churches worldwide.

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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ODDS STACKED AGAINST THEM, BOYS IN NEW ORLEANS GET FIGHTING CHANCE

New Orleans —

Kirk Stevens uses everything he has — even the homemade tattoos on his arms — to gain credibility with his kindergarten to 12th grade students. Stevens is the Academic Director of the afterschool program at Desire Street Ministries, a school and community outreach program founded in 1995 to help boys who typically fall through the cracks of the public school system in New Orleans' Upper Ninth Ward. "They're so street-wise, they have this attitude of 'if you haven't been there, then I don't want to hear about it,'" said Stevens.

Stevens has been there. The 59-year-old former accounting assistant who left his career to answer the call of "black men helping black men," was raised by a single mother in the notorious Desire housing project during the 1950s and 60s. The project housed 14,000 individuals and was so infested with drugs, gangs, and crime that "you thought twice about venturing across the street to the supermarket," recalled Stevens.

Hurricane Katrina devastated Desire Street in 2005 along with the rest of the Upper Ninth Ward, which was sandwiched in between the two major levees that collapsed. The neighborhood is slowly coming back with small convenience stores, some new brightly painted churches, and the occasional repaired home



IOCC Baltimore



Kirk Stevens (above, left) left a career in accounting to answer the call of "black men helping young boys." Today, he is the Academic Director at Desire Street Ministries helping young boys who typically fall through the cracks in New Orleans' public school system.

interrupting rows and rows of rotting, deserted houses.

Desire Street Ministries sits at the end of Luisa Street in a nondescript building with a large gymnasium. The mission is to transform the community by training young black males to be leaders. IOCC recently provided \$1 million worth of books and audio/visual equipment for their new library, the only one in the

neighborhood. While funding for the storm-battered Gulf Coast has tended to focus on emergency relief, IOCC is also supporting key local partners like Desire Street who focus on education and community development.

A typical Desire student is being raised by a single mother who is looking for a safe place for her sons while she is at work.

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ORTHODOX CLINIC MEETS ZIMBABWEANS' HEALTH NEEDS



Park Town, Zimbabwe — On the outskirts of this beleaguered country's capital, Harare, is a free medical clinic run by a nurse midwife who provides what most people can't find in Zimbabwe today: a proper medical diagnosis. "Most people haven't been diagnosed yet and so they are just treating the symptoms," said Sister Nomhle Mtupha, who, with one aide's assistance, sees about 700 patients per month at Park Town Clinic. Her patients suffer from malnutrition, diarrhea, the flu, sores, hypertension, HIV/AIDS, and other ailments.

Zimbabwe's spiraling economic crisis has exacerbated the health crisis. Salaries have been rendered useless by the nation's hyperinflation. Doctors and nurses have stopped going to work in Harare's two leading hospitals. In addition, the country's complete breakdown in water and sanitation systems created last

December's cholera epidemic.

Park Town Clinic was built by Ariadne Psillos, the granddaughter of Greek immigrants who came to Zimbabwe (then "Rhodesia") at the turn of the century. "We've always tried to see where we can serve the community and we thought that [the clinic] was one of the options as a family," said Psillos who runs a chocolate factory. Soon, people from the surrounding communities flocked to the clinic to receive free medical care. Her family also built St. Nektarios Orthodox Church that is attached to the clinic. The construction of both projects was blessed by His Beatitude Patriarch Petros VII of Alexandria and all Africa. Today, the church and clinic operate under the direction of the Orthodox Archdiocese of Zimbabwe.

IOCC recently delivered 200 boxes of medical supplies to Park Town. The shipment included antibiotics, intravenous fluids, over-the-counter drugs and

supplies such as bandages, needles, gloves and thermometers. In January, IOCC delivered medical kits that treated 6,000 patients suffering from cholera.

Since 2004, IOCC has been serving the health needs of Africans and strengthening the local Orthodox Churches to support their communities. IOCC is expanding its assistance to Zimbabwe and other sub-Saharan nations as part of its Africa Initiative.

As patients continue to pour into Park Town Clinic, Sister Nomhle tells an aide worker what is at the top of her wish list: antibiotics – across the board – for diabetics, hypertension, HIV – especially for children because people forget that children get this disease. She needs bandages, dressing, medication, etc. "Zimbabwe is a beautiful country, but we are in dire straits," she said simply. "We need help."



AFTER WAR IN GEORGIA, A RETIREE STRUGGLES TO REBUILD HIS LIFE

Brotsleti, Georgia — When Gaioz and his wife moved back to his childhood village of Brotsleti six years ago, they hoped to live out the rest of their lives in peace and quiet. With a proud smile on his worn face, Gaioz, 76, recalls life in the industrial city of Rustavi where he supported his wife and two children by working in one of the factories. But upon reaching retirement age, Gaioz longed for the green fields and fruit orchards of his childhood, and so he returned to Brotsleti in the Shida Kartli region of Georgia. To supplement his small pension, Gaioz raised cattle, and this was enough to give them a simple but comfortable life.



But Gaioz's dream of a peaceful retirement was shattered when war broke out last August between Russian and Georgian forces. Just five kilometers from the territory of South Ossetia, the village of Brotsleti was one of the first casualties of the war.

"We hid in the orchards for ten days," Gaioz recalls, "At 2 a.m. every night, the bombs and fighting stopped. That's when we would run home and grab food from the pantry."



When the fighting ended, Gaioz and his wife considered themselves lucky when they discovered that though their house had been looted, at least it had not been burned down. Unfortunately, however, all of Gaioz's cattle — his only source of livelihood — had been killed. To make matters worse, water that once flowed from South Ossetia and irrigated the fields was diverted in retaliation by Brotsleti's neighbors to the north. As a result, this farming village is struggling to survive.

In order to help people like Gaioz, IOCC, in partnership with the United Nations' World Food Program (WFP), has begun distributing essential food items (flour, beans, pasta, oil, sugar, and salt) to villagers throughout the Shida Kartli region.

Active in Georgia since 1994, IOCC was well prepared to respond to the humanitarian disaster following last August's

war. Through a \$200,000 grant from the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), IOCC provided emergency assistance in the weeks following the war. Since then, IOCC has worked with the WFP to distribute food to other war-torn regions of Georgia, and has also teamed up with the Georgian Patriarchate and ACT International to provide counselors to the traumatized.

Back in Brotsleti, Gaioz clutches his ration card and patiently waits in line under the hot sun. Zaza Macharashvili, IOCC's Field Project Manager, says that despite the hardships they face, Gaioz and his fellow villagers are "determined to remain in Brotsleti. Our hope is that the irrigation issue will be resolved in the near future, and that they can begin to farm again."

by Ryan Erickson
Intern, IOCC Georgia



IOCC HELPS SINGLE WORKING MOMS REALIZE DREAM OF HOMEOWNERSHIP

(continued from page 1)

Parish area who received Habitat homes since Katrina, 100 are single working mothers. Katrina devastated them, but it also gave them the impossible: first-time home ownership at an affordable price.

Habitat homes are 1,100 - 1,300 square feet with 3-4 bedrooms and are worth approximately \$135,000 in the St. Tammany market, although they cost only \$89,000 to build with volunteer labor and are sold to

homeowners for \$75,000.

The average Habitat owner has a 20-year, 0% mortgage that requires monthly payments of \$420. To qualify for a Habitat home in the St. Tammany area, a family of four can earn no more than \$35,800.

The program, however, aims to provide more than a house. As part of their 300 hours of sweat equity, homeowners are required to take classes in personal finance,

home repair, landscaping, career skills, and even parenting.

The "Volunteer in the Gulf Coast" program is IOCC's largest volunteer program. In 2008, IOCC mobilized 204 volunteers from 55 Orthodox parishes to work on Habitat homes in Louisiana. Participants put in over 8,000 volunteer hours, worth a total of \$160,000, towards the completion of 50 new homes.



ODDS STACKED AGAINST THEM, BOYS IN NEW ORLEANS GET FIGHTING CHANCE

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About 60% are living with a relative because one or both parents are incarcerated or struggling with a drug addiction. There are some extreme cases of boys raising themselves. For many, Desire Street is a refuge, a chance to get the positive affirmation they lack at home and to escape the temptations of the street.

Stevens says that getting to these boys early is the key, which is why the afterschool program is so vital. "We have kids in this area with the same abilities, capabilities, and dreams as any kid in the suburbs. It's just like a plant - if it doesn't get the proper sunlight and watering, it won't last very long," he says.

Desire Street's goal is to have 350 students in a full day school. Like other schools in New Orleans, whose public system is ranked among the lowest in the nation, Desire Street needs more support, more volunteers, more books, and more men like Mr. Stevens. The list is long, but so is the number of boys waiting to get in.



Josh is a graduate of Desire Street and is studying social work at Louisiana State University. He volunteers at Desire Street's summer program, helping young boys who use Desire Street to escape the temptations of the street.

IOCC ASSISTS ALABAMA'S BATTERED WOMEN



IOCC Baltimore

Penelope House in Alabama, one of the first shelters for battered women in the United States, provides a safe place for women in danger and a range of services to help them start new lives. IOCC provided a \$19,000 grant for the shelter's domestic violence prevention and training program for children.

Mobile, Alabama — Toni Ann Torrans takes pleasure in describing Penelope House, the shelter she runs for battered women, as "Fort Knox." She leads a visitor through an electronic fence lined with barbed wire. A second fence will not open until they are cleared through a call box. The shelter has lights, a security camera, a good relationship with the local police, and – if that were not enough – "a third line of defense with the moat," said Torrans, referring to the reservoir ditch in front of the compound that she hopes will make perpetrators think twice about trying to get to their wives or girlfriends.

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, nearly 1 in 3 adult women are assaulted by a husband or partner. Of the 6 million women who are beaten each year by an intimate partner, 4,000 are killed, and only one-fourth of domestic violence cases are reported.

Domestic abuse laws are relatively new and not every state has even declared domestic violence a crime. "In the past, if a man hit his wife and she called the police," said Torrans, "they might take him for a drive to cool him down, but he would not be arrested."

Penelope House was founded in 1979 in a two-room home by Torrans's mother, Kathryn Coumanis, a state social worker. Initial funding was provided by the Daughters of Penelope. This was Alabama's first shelter for battered women. In 1990, they moved to their current location, a compound large enough to accommodate 50 mothers and their children.

In 2008, about 1,000 women and their families received some form of assistance from Penelope House. The shelter has a

24-hour crisis hotline to provide counseling and referral. A woman is accepted into the shelter if she is in imminent danger.

The average stay is 35-40 days, but some women stay for as long as six months while they assess their situation with the help of a counselor and set life goals. The shelter also offers referrals for job training and transitional apartments.

Torrans is a firm believer in community outreach and education to help prevent domestic violence – particularly among children who grow up thinking that violence is normal in relationships. IOCC recently provided a \$19,000 grant to Penelope House's Prevention Education program for grades K-12. Children are taught to cope with stress, learn safety measures when there is violence in the home, and where they or their mothers can turn to for help.

Like most non-profits in this bleak economy, Penelope House is experiencing cutbacks in giving. It affects the women they help who may have to stay at the shelter longer because relatives or friends cannot take them in. Torrans, however, is staying focused on her ultimate goal: "Provide a safe place for women in danger and help them get back to themselves."





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IOCC VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT: NICK TEREZIS



When Nick Terezis moved to Pittsburgh and learned that the city did not have an IOCC Metropolitan Committee, he got one going right away, which he has chaired for the past six years. Now, the Pittsburgh Committee hosts a minimum of 4 events annually including the One-In-Spirit Dinner, the Theophany Ball, a wine tasting and a special themed event, raising thousands of dollars for IOCC. "It's an honor to help people do their best to do God's work," says Nick. "If I can help get the word about IOCC out a little faster, that is a good thing!"



The IOCC Foundation is a professionally managed, not-for-profit support organization which exists to further the work of IOCC and its charitable mission. Gifts to the IOCC Foundation generate annual distributions to support the mission of International Orthodox Christian Charities. For further information contact Dan Christopoulos, IOCC Director of Development, toll free at 1-877-803-4622 or dchristopoulos@iocc.org.

