



# Church Lands, IOCC Hands Advance Agriculture Projects



Photo: IOCC - Podgorica

Sheep graze peacefully at "Djurdjevi Stupovi" Monastery in Berane, Montenegro. The monastery is an example of how IOCC collaborates with the Orthodox Church worldwide in carrying out its agriculture programs.

"He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth ...."

— *Psalms 104:14*

**Baltimore (IOCC)** — After the 1917 Russian revolution, Orthodox Church lands were nationalized and the churches themselves were turned into granaries and storehouses. Collective farms became the rule. Now, in an ironic twist of history, many of those lands have been returned to the churches, and the churches are becoming a source of food once again. Through International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), church lands are being cultivated and farmed to meet the food needs of local populations.

Making land available to landless people, in cooperation with Orthodox churches in Russia, Georgia, Ethiopia

and elsewhere, is one way IOCC has been on the cutting edge of food relief — both short-term and long-term. IOCC has learned from 10 years of responding to crises that the challenge with agricultural and food programs is to effectively meet the immediate needs of people while developing ways to help them become self-sufficient once the crisis is over.

"One of the things that is readily identifiable in all the countries we work in is agriculture," said IOCC Executive Director Constantine M. Triantafilou. "Agriculture is a way of providing stability. If people can provide for themselves, that gives them their dignity back."

Agricultural programs help people achieve not only food security but also economic security, Triantafilou said. In some cases, food programs can create jobs and extra sources of income, he said. When people have enough food, lives

that have been disrupted by war, famine or natural disaster can return to normal.

Nowhere has that approach been more successful for IOCC than in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a land rocked by war from 1992 to 1995. At first, IOCC responded to the situation by providing emergency food relief to people displaced by the war. Now, IOCC is working to get people back in their former homes and make them "food secure" once more. Many of the displaced people were farmers, so it is natural to assist them by getting their fields back into production, supplying them with tools and tractor attachments and repairing buildings.

"We're going full circle," Triantafilou said. "We're helping people who were evacuated from their homes, and now we're helping them go home. With agricultural programs, we're giving them the means to help themselves." In Bosnia and elsewhere, IOCC has offered a full continuum of relief — from emergency food aid, to rehabilitation, to long-term sustainability.

Food insecurity, a problem commonly associated with Africa and parts of Asia, is not unknown in Eastern Europe. According to the United Nations' World Food Program (WFP), based in Rome, "Many countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe undergoing the transition from centrally-planned to market-based economies have experienced economic hardship and rising levels of under-nutrition during the last

*Continued on page 5*

# From the Executive Director

Food is such a basic necessity of life that, from our very beginning in 1992, IOCC has been involved in emergency food distribution to people — in times of war, famine or natural disaster. But very early on, it also became apparent that meeting the food needs of people would also involve agricultural programs that enable people to feed themselves. The difference between giving a man a fish and teaching him how to fish may sound clichéd, but I was reminded again of the truth of that proverb recently by Patriarch-Catholicos Ilia II of the Georgian Orthodox Church. The best way to help people is to lead them to self-sufficiency, once the immediate emergency passes.



In this issue of News & Needs, you'll read about the different ways IOCC has tried to promote this ethic through its agriculture programs. The benefits of such programs go beyond simply alleviating hunger: Because they are labor intensive, they can provide jobs and economic stimulus to an area; they provide an important source of nutrition, which is so crucial for the healthy upbringing of children; they provide a possible source of income through the sale of surplus commodities; and they make good use of once unproductive land.

On that last subject, IOCC also has taken care to cultivate relationships with Orthodox churches and monasteries that may have lands available for farming. This has been the case most recently in Ethiopia and the Republic of Georgia. At a time when Orthodox institutions are having expropriated land returned to them, this is a partnership that deserves further exploration.

Perhaps the agricultural program that best embodies the goals of IOCC is the one in Bosnia and Herzegovina. What started as the distribution of food parcels to refugees displaced by war has now become a comprehensive program to resettle those refugees. To get their feet back on the ground, returnees, many of them farmers by trade, have received agricultural assistance through the distribution of greenhouses, seeds, fertilizer, nursery plants, tools and tractor attachments. Thus, our program there has gone full circle — from emergency aid to long-term sustainability.

May this example be a source of inspiration to all our supporters, as it has been to us in our ongoing work to meet the needs — short-term and long-term — of people.

Yours 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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# A New Life In A New Home

by Nenad Prelevic — IOCC - Podgorica

**Podgorica, Montenegro (IOCC)** — Mirko's life has been uprooted by war, and now he's trying to put it back together with the help of International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC).

Mirko and his family were among the thousands of refugees and displaced people who found they faced an uncertain future as ethnic, religious and political factions battled for superiority in war-torn Kosovo in 1999.

Driven from their home village of Zamlje in Kosovo-Metohija in May 1999, Mirko's family fled to Berane in Yugoslavia's Montenegro republic. With only a cow and a few sheep, Mirko said he couldn't imagine how he could provide safe shelter and adequate food for his wife, Natasa, and their children, Mirjana and Stefan.

Mirko said he found people who were willing to help. A local Orthodox charity group, the Circle of Serbian Sisters in Berane, began working with IOCC on a pilot project designed to revitalize the region's agriculture.

The project, which has since expanded to all of Montenegro, involves assisting small farming families with establishing and maintaining a productive farm. An estimated 3,000 people have been served so far.

In late spring 2000, Mirko was selected to be involved in the project. As a participant, he was furnished with six ewes and their lambs, seed potatoes, fertilizer and irrigation equipment, as well as technical assistance and the education needed to develop and maintain a small farm. Only in helping the project partici-



Photo: IOCC - Podgorica

Milutin stands with the ewe sheep and lambs that his son Mirko received from IOCC. Uprooted by the 1999 crisis in Kosovo, the refugee family is now trying to make a better life for themselves in Berane, Montenegro, where IOCC has a well-established agriculture program.

pants move from reliance to self-sufficiency would IOCC consider the project a success.

In much of the world, sheep are treasured not only for their wool and their meat, but also for their milk. Mirko took up the opportunity and challenge presented by the project and began working with the small flock of sheep.

If Mirko were to meet the rigorous demands of this project, it would be under circumstances as difficult as his exile from home. He and his family — now increased by one since the birth last summer of daughter Marija — live in an old, dilapidated village house barely larger than 540 square feet, with Mirko's parents and his brother's family.

Harder still to face was the reality of living in exile far from home. In words

that ring true for many in the region, Mirko honestly comments, "I don't know how long I will stay here."

Still, grateful for the opportunity given him, Mirko prepared for an upcoming agricultural competition. This past summer, farmers from throughout northern Montenegro gathered for the event. Mirko won first prize in sheep milk production, second prize in cheese production, and a special prize for the quality of his dairy products.

Mirko said he is thankful to everyone who has contributed to his most recent success. Perhaps more than making it possible to start a farm, or win a prize, both aid organizations and their benefactors have aided Mirko in his struggle to come to terms with his life and to accept his new home.



# Sowing Seeds Of Hope In The West Bank

by Lee Papouras — IOCC-Jerusalem

**Jerusalem (IOCC)** — The rugged Palestinian countryside has, for countless ages, produced an abundance of food. Citing a common occurrence in Palestinian life, Jesus Christ told the parable of the sower who went out to sow his seed (Luke 8:5).

Given the region's harsh climate and political turmoil, the fact that any food is harvested here is a strong testament to the endurance and traditional work ethic of the people. But the instinct to plant and to farm is challenged now in such a way that the future of the Palestinian people is truly in question.

As a result, International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) is laying the foundation for a comprehensive agricultural aid program in the Palestinian territories.

It began in Deir Ballout, a village of about 2,500 people where IOCC is opening a women's agricultural cooperative center, and ultimately will expand to 24 villages in the West Bank. The Deir Ballout center will, among other things, provide training in more efficient farming techniques, ecological preservation and product marketing for women.

Historically agrarian, the countryside of Palestine has suffered the loss of many of its men, who have, during the past several decades, followed the luring call of construction work in Israel. The responsibility for tending the orchards, vineyards and fields has fallen to the women, whose merchandise often is purchased at exploitatively low prices, then resold at exorbitantly high prices in urban markets.

To make matters worse, the ongoing *intifada* (uprising) has resulted in Israel closing its borders to migrant labor, destroying agricultural land and roads, and maintaining a heavy military presence in the West Bank.

Unemployment has risen to 37 percent in the region, and women constitute only 12 percent of the work force. Poverty, abuse and violence are increasingly becoming a way of life.

Seeing their world crumbling, village leaders from through-

out the rural West Bank region have come together and assessed the needs of their people. They, with the help of IOCC, have identified several primary goals.

Most immediately, the people must have work. Secondly, in a land where differences of religion and politics have produced an intensely individualistic mentality, a cohesive, community-building infrastructure must be established. With the women, youth and children being at greatest risk, these groups must be pivotally involved in any proposed aid program.

The village councils have called upon IOCC to help establish projects to meet this urgent need. Funding for the \$2.6 million project is coming from the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

It is hoped that sufficient funding and dedication to the task at hand — building and setting the sorely needed cornerstones of unified, functional communities in this rural region — will provide lasting economic and social stability. Rural Palestine needs roads, irrigation, clinics and schools. Sanitation, public health, vocational training and even water distribution require much improvement.

IOCC will work with the local village councils to recruit workers from the rural populace to build what they lack and to improve what they have. Brimming with hope and enthusiasm, the villagers seek not only to survive, but also to provide a brighter future for the next generation of those who sow the seeds in the Holy Land.



Photo: Dr. Simon Araj

Newly-expanded agriculture programs in the West Bank will paint a better picture for future generations of Palestinians.



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(Continued from page 1)

decade. The number of people suffering under-nourishment has consequently been rising."

These "countries in transition" include the Russian Federation, Romania, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), Albania, and the Republic of Georgia. In the latter, considered by the WFP to be a "low-income, food-deficit" country, a large proportion of the population of 5.1 million remains poor. Expenditures on food absorb 60 to 70 percent of the average family budget. "The elderly, disabled, unemployed and geographically isolated remain highly vulnerable to food insecurity," according to the 2000 "State of Food Insecurity in the World" report of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization. "A slow but clear increase of malnutrition among children is being observed."

The same report said emergency food aid programs have been terminated in most former Soviet countries that are now part of the Commonwealth of Independent States. This, despite the fact that in nine of the 12 CIS countries, at least 5 percent of the population is under-nourished; and in four countries, including Georgia, at least 20 percent is undernourished. Seven CIS states are classified by the UN as low-income, food-deficit countries.

Triantafyllou said that while IOCC always will be involved in emergency food relief, "we constantly remember the need to help people to help themselves." Being there in a crisis has won IOCC the right to get involved for the

long haul, he said.

"When you're in an emergency situation, that's how you get to know the country and the players. You establish relationships with the beneficiaries."

And IOCC is uniquely positioned to do more with long-term, sustainable programs through its partnership with the Orthodox Church, he said. In places such as

Georgia, Montenegro and Ethiopia, for example, IOCC has been cultivating relationships with Orthodox monasteries that have land available for farming.

In Ethiopia, the need is great because of drought, war and famine. According to the WFP, Ethiopia has the world's highest incidence of malnutrition. More than 2 million Ethiopians are chronically "food insecure," while up to 10 million are vulnerable to temporary food insecurity. (The UN defines food insecurity as the state of living with hunger or in fear of starvation.)

IOCC and the development arm of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church have started a project to address some of those needs and capitalize on the long-standing role of monasteries in their communities.

The project will establish diverse agricultural programs at the Belbeit and Gashola monasteries, including a gravity-flow irrigation system, an



IOCC agronomist Tihomir Predic (left) with a Bosnian woman pleased with a good corn yield made possible with an IOCC-donated corn picker. The tractor attachments were distributed to farming families in five provinces in Bosnia-Herzegovina through a project funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Photo: Milan Djuric - IOCC

apiary/beekeeping business, a fruit orchard and vegetable garden, and a weaving and tailoring business.

Because monasteries in the Ethiopian tradition are part and parcel of the communities where they are located, the agricultural programs will have an impact not only on the monasteries and but also on their surrounding areas.

Such an approach is consistent with the Orthodox Church's teaching on the stewardship of creation. In its 1999 document "The Orthodox Church and Society," the Holy Synod of Russian Orthodox Bishops said, "Nature is not a repository of resources intended for egoistic and irresponsible consumption, but a house in which man is ... the housekeeper, and a temple in which he is the priest serving ... the one Creator." Acknowledging the beneficial aspects of monastery landholding, the bishops said, "The property of religious organizations is a special form of property."





# Refugee Family Reaps Harvest from Greenhouse Project

by Dragan Terzic, IOCC Agronomist

**Belgrade (IOCC)** — A plastic greenhouse and a great deal of courage have given Damir, and many others like him, the ability to survive in post-war Yugoslavia.

Damir credits the greenhouse project of International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) with giving him a sense of hope about the future.

Damir lives in the Citluk refugee shelter in Krusevac, southern Serbia. He and his family — along with thousands of others — were forced to flee their homes in Croatia in the aftermath of the 1991 war there. Having lost his father in the war, a 10-year-old Damir and his family made their 500-mile escape atop a relative's tractor.

Damir, now 20, recalls those days with sorrow, but smiles and says, "We have learned to live with it, but not to surrender." Those are brave words given the family's circumstances: Home is currently a classroom in an old school which they share with five

other families. Despite living in Serbia for several years now, the family continues to struggle to be accepted by the local populace and to make a decent living.

Damir has studied and received a technical degree in plumbing, yet work is hard to find. What assistance he and his family have been able to find has been irregular and insufficient.

In 1999, IOCC, with funding from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, initiated a plastic greenhouse project in Citluk. Damir was one of the first candidates to enroll and is one of many refugees and displaced persons who benefit from the greenhouse program, designed to guarantee a fresh source of vegetables throughout the year. The project serves 1,901 individuals, 479 of which are direct beneficiaries who share their produce with other vulnerable families.

With IOCC's assistance, including that of expert agronomists, Damir and

others are able to acquire life-long skills that will provide them with work and a modest income no matter where they call home. Damir believes his days of reliance on others for aid and of taking jobs no one else wanted have ended.

And he has done well with his hard-earned knowledge. In celebration of World Food Day, aimed at heightening global awareness of hunger and malnutrition, a display of agricultural products was organized in the vicinity of Citluk. Damir was chosen as one of three representatives from the refugee shelter to present samples of their harvests.

The small group of refugees took first place in the competition and received an honorary diploma for their cucumbers. Damir said the experience raised his self-esteem and, for the first time since coming to Serbia, he felt on equal footing with the local population.

Both the founders and participants of the project see in it even more potential. While the project is meeting its goal of supplying food to the growers, it has the possibility of producing enough food for a marketplace, thereby earning a good profit for the growers. The small size of the greenhouses and the achievement of a one-crop harvest instead of two demonstrate that further work on, and aid for, this project is needed.

Damir does not foresee being able to leave Serbia. To survive, he and his family must prosper and integrate in their new home. All this, he says, is possible if the greenhouse project itself succeeds.



Photo: IOCC - Belgrade

Refugees in southern Serbia earn extra income and learn to become less dependent on humanitarian food aid by growing fresh vegetables in plastic greenhouses distributed by IOCC. Hundreds of plastic greenhouses have been distributed in the former Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina as part of IOCC's agriculture program.



# Cyclists Cultivate Awareness About Needs Of Neighbors Around The World

**Baltimore (IOCC)** — Riding his bicycle past the fertile plains of the American Midwest this summer, Jim Angelus won't have a hard time imagining the plowed fields of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the rocky, irrigated land of Palestine and the monastery farms of Ethiopia.

That's because Angelus is riding his bicycle cross-country to benefit the humanitarian programs - agricultural and otherwise — of International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC).

Angelus, 45, of Hopewell, N.J., will lead a team of five amateur cyclists across the United States in August 2002 in the "Race to Respond," a long-distance bicycle tour that will celebrate IOCC's 10th anniversary and raise awareness about the people it serves worldwide.

Angelus, an Orthodox Christian layman and New Jersey advertising professional, has been riding bicycles since he was a youngster growing up in Manhattan. He and four other cyclists will start their cross-country tour from New York City on Aug. 3, 2002, with a goal of raising \$250,000 for IOCC.

"For ultra-cyclists like myself, the challenge to race cross country in just 25 days at a pace modeled after the Tour de France provides the ultimate test of physical and mental endurance," Angelus said. "It's a matter of riding so you can cover the distance. It's a matter of riding smartly."

The IOCC benefit is not a race in the traditional sense but a long-distance test of endurance. What's more, it is intended to highlight IOCC's daily "race" to respond to the needs of people suffering from war, poverty and natural disaster.

The cycling team expects to cover

12 states in 25 days, for a total of 3,500 miles. The planned race route, which Angelus continues to refine, winds through northern and central portions of the United States. At strategic stops in Philadelphia, Cleveland, Chicago, Denver and other cities, a team of IOCC volunteers will make presentations about the mission of IOCC. The closing celebration will take place in San Francisco.

Angelus said he is proud to be leading an effort that will benefit IOCC, noting that he especially appreciates its pan-Orthodox orientation. "I wanted this to benefit a group that wasn't connected with multimillion-dollar fund-raising already. I wanted this to go to a group more closely tied to a community that I came out of."

A second-generation Greek American, Angelus was reared in the Orthodox Church and grew up in New York City. "Having a bicycle in Manhattan was terrific (but) I never looked at it as cycling," he recalled. That interest was to come later.

Angelus went off to college and then graduate school. After earning a master's in fine arts at Indiana University, he returned to New York. There, at Holy Trinity Cathedral in Manhattan, he reconnected with his Greek Orthodox roots and met his future wife, Lynn. He also renewed his interest in cycling. "Out there, I got onto a road and just started riding, and kept riding. Before I knew it, I was 20 or 30 miles down the road in Nassau County."

Angelus left a pharmaceutical advertising agency to take a job with Merck Pharmaceuticals. He and his wife moved to New Jersey, where he became even more active in cycling. "I really wanted to go into the endurance

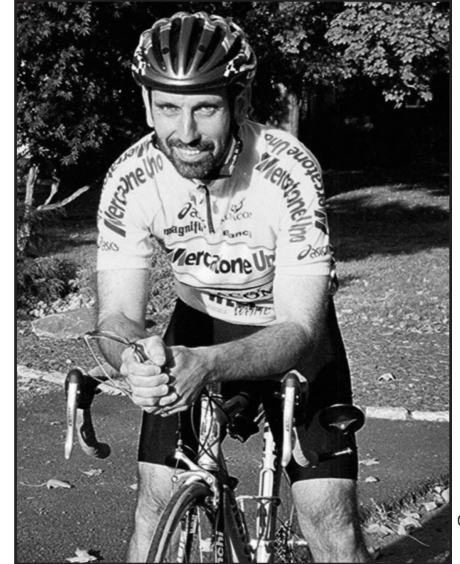


Photo: Jim Angelus

Jim Angelus, 45, of Hopewell, N.J., team leader and race organizer for the 2002 "Race to Respond," on his bicycle ready for a training run.

end of it. There, it's a matter of competing more against myself," he said.

Angelus, who now works for an ad agency in Princeton, N.J., got connected with IOCC through an Orthodox priest friend, the Rev. Mark Leondis. He has been helping plan the "Race to Respond" for about two years.

His wife, Lynn, and twin sons, Nicholas and Evan, 10, will accompany him on the trip. They will ride in the lead car, which will be responsible for scouting the route, securing hotel accommodations and making other arrangements as the race progresses.

While Angelus has been getting equipment sponsors for the race, IOCC is seeking corporate sponsors. For more information, visit the official Web site at [www.racetorespond.org](http://www.racetorespond.org).

"It's nice to know this is not just going to generate money but will hopefully put (IOCC) on a different course, where they'll have even more impact down the road," Angelus said.



# Loan Program Helps Drought-Stricken Farmers

**Tbilisi, Georgia (IOCC)** — An agricultural program just concluded by IOCC helped more than 200 farmers in southern Georgia recover from a recent drought.

One of those farmers was Teimuraz, 45. A building engineer by trade, Teimuraz had started a potato business with his sister. In May 1999, with a \$1,200 loan from IOCC, they planted about 2½ acres of land. After several years of success, the operation was hit hard by drought. That year, Teimuraz got only one-tenth of his normal yield.

Teimuraz applied for another low-interest loan from IOCC through a program funded by Save the Children and designed to help farmers affected by the drought. He expected to finish selling this year's harvest by the end of November.

Petre, 60, of Akhalsikhe, Georgia, said he is grateful to IOCC for two low-interest loans that have helped him maintain a cattle operation despite recent hardships.

The IOCC program was aimed at assisting experienced farmers in the southern region of Samtskhe-Javakheti to recover from severe crop damage and livestock loss. The loans were given to farmers who otherwise would not have qualified for a loan from a bank or traditional lending institution.

A total of \$250,000 in low-interest loans was disbursed through the program. The farmers, who, along with providing for their families, contribute to the food security of their communities, are in the process of paying back the loans.



Photo: Michael Tsakalos - IOCC

Georgian farmer Valerian holds a basket of kiwi fruits he harvested with the help of an IOCC loan. Many of his fellow farmers in southern and western Georgia were devastated by recent drought.



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