



HELPING SYRIAN REFUGEE FAMILIES FIND A FRESH START

When violence erupted in the Syrian neighborhood where Boutros, 37, and his pregnant wife, Haneen, lived with their two young children, the family fled their third floor apartment and hid under the stairway. Once it calmed down outside, Haneen insisted on going upstairs to grab some food, water and blankets for the children. She was gone before Boutros could object. Minutes later, an explosion destroyed their apartment, killing both Haneen and their unborn child. Boutros scooped up Youssef, 3, and Rafah, 2, and left on the spot without any belongings or documents.

They found their way to Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, where IOCC, an ACT Alliance member, responded to their immediate needs, providing a winterization kit containing blankets and a heating stove for the small tent they now call home. Boutros and his children are among the 600



Jennifer Romanos / IOCC

vulnerable refugee families that have received these kits as part of IOCC's emergency response to the growing refugee population seeking safety in Lebanon. Since 2012, IOCC has assisted more than 425,000 Syrian people displaced in their own country or living as refugees in Jordan and Lebanon with emergency relief items such as food, clothing, blankets, bedding and housing assistance.

Knowing that they have found safety and shelter comforts Boutros somewhat, but the loss

of his wife weighs heavy on his heart. "I am so worried about the children. They have seen and heard horrible things," said the former garage owner, his voice cracking. "They ask about their mother and I don't know what to say. I loved my darling wife and now she's gone. These two are all I have now. I live for them."

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From The Executive Director



In my 20 years of travels for IOCC, I have always been most humbled by the families I met that were struggling to survive but eager to share what little food they had with me. Their generosity and desire to make me feel included brings to mind the example of the Last Supper, where Jesus offered bread to His Disciples as a symbol of including them in His Life. This offering or "prospora" is carried on today in the Orthodox Church, following Divine Liturgy as an offering to nourish the souls of the Orthodox faithful.

Your generosity in support of IOCC's humanitarian work allows us to share what we have with the world's families in need. Like the prospora which is shared at the end of Divine Liturgy, your gift of sharing has helped relieve hunger with emergency food packages for displaced Syrian families, brought the comfort of warm winter blankets to impoverished children of Armenian inmates, and helped ease the suffering of families living in isolation in the West Bank.

This Lenten season as we reflect on the love that Christ shared with us in His ultimate sacrifice, I hope that you will also experience the rewarding feeling of sharing with others in need around the world so that they too feel included in God's family.

In Christ,

Constantine M. Triantafilou
Executive Director & CEO

CREATING A COMMUNITY OASIS IN TROUBLED WEST BANK



Ori-Ben Shabat/IOCC

This group of elderly friends share tea and conversation following an exercise class at the Taybeh Community Center. Many of them are widows who rely on the center as their only source of interaction in this isolated Christian community in the West Bank.

Three days a week, a small group of elderly village women in loose fitting garb shuffle into the stretching class for seniors at Taybeh Community Center. The rest of the week the space is used for everything from daycare to dance classes. In the computer lab the next room over, a steady stream of teens drop in to connect with the rest of the world via free internet access. Lifelong Taybeh resident and center director, Abeer, 43, calls the multi-purpose facility built and equipped by IOCC an "oasis" in the West Bank village of Taybeh, about 20 miles outside of Jerusalem.

Taybeh is the last all-Christian community in a Muslim-dominated region. About 1,300 Christians still

reside in this sacred place where Christ spent his final days, but the numbers continue to dwindle. A lack of employment and unremitting political tension has driven many of the Orthodox Christian youth to emigrate in search of peace and prosperity.

Abeer calls the Taybeh community center a lifeline for those who struggle to survive in isolation amid security roadblocks and restricted access to water. "IOCC helped us to reach this point to succeed," she says. "Every person has benefited from IOCC's project in some way." Through your support of IOCC, the center has helped provide a welcome respite in a hostile environment.

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

IOCC, in the spirit of Christ's love, offers emergency relief and development programs to those in need worldwide, without discrimination, and strengthens the capacity of the Orthodox Church to so respond.



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GIVING COMFORT TO ARMENIA'S INMATE FAMILIES

With their father in an Armenian prison and their mother gravely ill, twins Ani and Azniv, 8, rely on the care and protection of their aging grandmother. Her pension barely covers living expenses for the four of them, leaving the girls to often go without personal care items needed to stay healthy, and school supplies needed to progress their education.

The families of inmates often face a life of shame, discrimination and years of unbearable poverty as the father, the main breadwinner is unable to provide for them.

Working in cooperation with Armenian church partners, IOCC responded by providing 500 of these vulnerable family members with basic but necessary items such



Lena Margaryan/ Gyumri Social Center

as quilts, school kits, infant clothing, and hygiene kits filled with soap, towels and toothpaste. Local parish priests assisted IOCC in the distribution with home visits,

delivering relief items to help improve the families' physical comfort, and providing pastoral counseling to help ease the stigma that dominates their lives.

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CENTER A HAVEN FOR ROMANIA'S POOREST CHILDREN



Corina Maranu/IOCC

It's a big day for the youngsters at Joy Aid Foundation daycare center in Urlati, Romania. They are filled with questions for His Eminence Archbishop Nicolae of the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas, the Episcopal Liaison between IOCC

and the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America, who visited the center during his recent trip to Romania.

The center, which serves as a haven for 25 school children from underprivileged families in the

community, was founded by local priest, Father Manuel Radu. The fundraising skills he learned through an IOCC training program equipped Father Manuel to better serve the social needs of his community's children. Through support from local donations as well as produce sales from Father Manuel's 150 fruit trees, he and his volunteer team of high school teens, professors, a social worker and a doctor provide these children with everything from after school tutoring on ten donated computers to clothes, shoes and a hot meal each day. Since 2005, IOCC has worked in partnership with the Romanian Orthodox Church and trained more than 2,100 priests, religion teachers and social service providers on how to better respond to the social needs of vulnerable Romanian families and strengthen Romanian communities.

MEDITATION ON GREAT LENT

Before the Feast of the Lord's Resurrection, the Holy Church has established a period of seven weeks of fasting. What is the meaning of the Fast, and why does the Orthodox Church still preserve this special kind of preparation before our great feasts?

We must remember in the first place that fasting is related to one of God's provisions for mankind. The Holy Fathers say that in Paradise man received the commandment to fast, to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, otherwise he would die. The purpose of the commandment was to protect man from falling away from God, which brings death. St. Basil the Great says, *"Because we did not fast, we left Paradise and were driven out of it."* Beginning with the commandment in the Garden of Eden, continuing with the prophets Moses, Elijah, and Daniel, with St. John the Baptist, and then with the Savior Christ Himself, fasting has been a practice respected by all who wished

to put aside material things in order to gain spiritual things.


The Savior makes a statement which reveals the profound meaning of fasting: *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which comes out of the mouth of God."* This shows that fasting does not mean just starving ourselves by abstaining from food, but nourishing ourselves with another kind of food – spiritual food, which is the Word of God. The Savior tells us that man is not made of soul and body, the soul desiring spiritual things and the body desiring material things; but man is soul and body, and spiritual things can be nourishment even for the body.

In fasting we can experience the fact that our body can be nourished also by another kind of food, not only by bread. This is because, as a result of our efforts in fasting, the body begins to let go a little of its attachment to material things and to receive spiritual things more. The very matter with which we are in

solidarity through our body begins to be spiritualized through the work of grace, to which is added man's efforts to receive the Word of God. In fasting we begin to understand a certain communion which was established between God and man before the fall of Adam, a communion in which the entire being of man, soul and body, participated. We also begin to understand the communion which exists between us as people, related to our communion with God.

The closer we get to God, the closer we get to our brothers as well. So, we understand the needs of our brothers, those who are suffering, those who are in prison, and those who are alone. In fasting we realize the need of all humanitarian work. Our fasting receives a social and unthinkable dimension.

His Eminence
Archbishop Nicolae
Romanian Orthodox
Archdiocese in the Americas



MEMORY ETERNAL


Memorial gifts are an established tradition in the Orthodox faith. Make a gift to IOCC and we will send a beautiful memorial card in your name to the person(s) you designate. Visit iocc.org/memorial to send one today.

IOCC AND YOU

Join the over 700 volunteers who have already helped rebuild lives across the US.

Sign up to participate on an IOCC Orthodox Action Team. Become God's hands in service to your fellow man.

www.iocc.org/actionteam



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