



# INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES

# NEWS & NEEDS

HELPING OTHERS HELP THEMSELVES

VOLUME 9, NO. 3 WINTER 2006

## Return to Kosovo: IOCC Programs Continue as Province's Status Remains Undecided

**KOSOVO (IOCC)** — Having driven for hours by the scenic and lush farmlands of Serbia, a busload of IOCC staff and supporters arrived at the United Nations checkpoint where passports were inspected before permission was granted to enter Kosovo. Crossing into Serbia's troubled southern province may have had some risk, but the eleven IOCC supporters and staff visited beneficiaries last September to demonstrate IOCC's continuing commitment and solidarity with the people of Kosovo, even as the province's final status was being discussed by diplomats in Vienna.

IOCC has been active in Kosovo since 1993. During the NATO bombing campaign of 1999, IOCC was one of only three international relief organizations to maintain an operational presence in the region, providing continuous humanitarian assistance to refugees and displaced persons in both Serbia and Montenegro.

After crossing the checkpoint, the Study Group made their way to the village of Velika Hoca. Local leaders explained that the situation remains very tense, with most villagers restricted to their homes, making access to health and education facilities difficult. More and more young people are leaving Kosovo because of the isolation and the lack of jobs.

IOCC has been implementing



A. Morcos/IOCC

**Left:** Today, the village of Velika Hoca has about 200 families, less than half the number that lived there before the 1999 conflict in Kosovo. **Right, above:** The 14th century Visoki Decani Monastery, today under guard by UN peace-keeping troops, is a spiritual and humanitarian oasis in Kosovo. **Right, below:** Father Marko of Decani Monastery shows IOCC Study Tour participants the winery that provides economic opportunity to isolated communities in Kosovo.

community development programs in Kosovo designed to give people in such isolated communities hope and opportunity. In cooperation with Hellenic Aid of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, IOCC is building a community center in Velika Hoca with a special meeting place for youth clubs, a gym facility, an internet center, and computer-equipped classrooms.

Participants also toured a winery run by the brothers of the Visoki Decani Monastery, who have been making wine in the region for 600 years. The Decani brothers are looking forward to

an innovative project with IOCC that will not only increase their production capacity, but will also provide more jobs to villagers and promote peaceful cooperation through the purchase of grapes from local farmers of all ethnicities. "We should be here as long as the people are here," said Father Marko, who runs the winery. "We can give them a tool so that their future will be secure," he said.

*continued on back cover*

IOCC's Study Tour to Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina continues on pg 4.

# From the Executive Director

On a recent visit to Ethiopia I was asked how IOCC has been able to affect such dramatic change in that country since we launched our USAID-funded HIV/AIDs program in 2004. Nearly 7 million Ethiopians have received training in HIV/AIDs prevention. The answer lies not only in the unique experience and resources that IOCC brings to the table, but also in the strength of our local partner, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) and its humanitarian arm, DICAC (Development and Inter Church Aid Commission). Their ability to harness the power of a 35 million person constituency, combined with IOCC's programmatic resources, has produced a powerful partnership for real change in the fight against HIV/AIDs in Ethiopia.

The potential for effective partnership is one of the major factors that IOCC considers in choosing where and how we will intervene in any humanitarian need. Is there an indigenous partner who shares IOCC's vision and values and can help us empower the local community to unlock its own solutions?

IOCC's partnerships are the key to success in all of the 16 countries where we currently operate, including those featured in this issue of *News & Needs*. In Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, where we recently visited for our annual Study Tour, the millions of dollars that IOCC has invested since 1992 in humanitarian and development programs is today reaping a harvest of economic and infrastructure development. Our partnerships with the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as numerous civil society organizations, has assisted people of all ethnicities and all faiths, and has left a true legacy of community empowerment in places that were ravaged by ethnic strife not many years ago. You will also learn about our visit to Kosovo, where our partnership with the courageous brothers of the Visoki Decani Monastery is helping to build an economic future for isolated and endangered communities.

Of course, all of this is only possible through our partnership with our supporters and those who benefit from our aid. Your response to last summer's crisis



Nicole Minor

Constantine M. Triantafilou is welcomed by the Ethiopian Patriarch, Abune Paolus. Sitting to the left is the president of Ethiopia, Girma Wolde-Giorgis. IOCC's partnership with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and its humanitarian arm, DICAC, has resulted in nearly 7 million Ethiopians receiving training in HIV/AIDs prevention.

in Lebanon and the Holy Land enabled IOCC to bring emergency aid to thousands affected by war and political turmoil. IOCC Regional Director George Antoun and Jerusalem/West Bank Head of Office Nora Kort answer questions in this issue about the state of each crisis and how IOCC is responding. It was our experience in building partnerships since 2001 in Lebanon that helped IOCC respond at a moment's notice when the crisis broke out last summer. I found no story more poignant than that of a mother who had been displaced from her home by the bombing of southern Beirut. When she learned that it was IOCC that was giving her family aid, she remembered that it was the same organization that had provided lunches and nutritional lessons to her children during the school year. "During the peace you were with us," she said, "and now you are with us in time of war."

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 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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*To learn more about how IOCC helps others help themselves, please visit [www.iocc.org](http://www.iocc.org)*

# “You Were With Us in the Peace”

## A Lebanon Follow Up with IOCC’s George Antoun



*IOCC Regional Director George Antoun answers questions on IOCC's relief and reconstruction efforts following last summer's cross border conflict between Hezbollah and Israel. Since 2001, IOCC Lebanon has implemented a USDA-funded nutrition and infrastructure repair program for 250 public schools throughout the country. It was this development program that IOCC Lebanon staff used as a platform to deliver emergency aid to the thousands of displaced families that streamed into Beirut last July. IOCC Lebanon is currently implementing a \$2 million grant from the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) for the reconstruction of schools and water networks in 61 of the hardest-hit villages of Southern Lebanon. In addition, IOCC will be assisting about 3,000 of the most disadvantaged families that have returned to these villages.*

**N&N:** How did the destruction from this summer's crisis compare with Lebanon's civil war?

**ANTOUN:** During Lebanon's civil war, the damage was certainly great, but not to this extent. For example, an apartment would be hit by a shell, but it would still be standing. This summer, however, 4,000 apartment buildings in southern Beirut were completely leveled. The damage was beyond the imagination of many people.

**N&N:** What were the particular challenges for IOCC staff during the conflict?

**ANTOUN:** Israeli war planes were almost constantly in the air and ready to fire on anything they



Linda Shaker Berbari

IOCC Lebanon is implementing a \$2 million reconstruction program with the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) for the hardest-hit villages in Southern Lebanon.

thought was suspicious. They wanted to slow the movement of small vans because they suspected that they could be sending arms shipments to Hezbollah. But we know of small trucks transporting food that were fired upon and where people were injured and killed. So our staff had to go with the knowledge that their trucks could be fired on at anytime. They took IOCC banners and placed them on the roof of the trucks, but the threat was still there.

**N&N:** How will the IOCC-OFDA program benefit villages in Southern Lebanon?

**ANTOUN:** First, we are focusing on building and reconstructing schools as soon as possible because we felt that this is what would help people to go back to their villages and to a normal life. The second focus is to provide water and sani-

tation facilities. People can't live in a place that does not have running water. Finally, we are providing supplies including hygiene kits and blankets to the most disadvantaged people. We have identified about 3,000 families. These include elderly people living alone and people who have lost family members.

**N&N:** Tell us how you chose which villages to work in in Southern Lebanon.

**ANTOUN:** We focused on 61 villages where IOCC has had a presence since 2001. These are the villages that Israel had occupied for 20 years before it left in 2000 and had been out of the reach of the central Lebanese government. Back in 2001, there were only three NGOs working in Southern Lebanon and IOCC was one of them.

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# IOCC's 3rd Study Tour to Serbia

IOCC's annual Study Tour to Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina always affords supporters the opportunity to witness first hand how IOCC's development programs benefit farmers, small business people, returning displaced families, and civil society organizations. But last September's trip was made even more special by a rare opportunity to visit the troubled province of Kosovo, now under United Nations mandate and home to several IOCC projects (see cover story). The tour, which was led by IOCC Executive Director and CEO Constantine M. Triantafilou, and included ten other supporters and staff, also visited various IOCC projects including a children's orphanage in Belgrade, Serbia, and micro-credit beneficiaries throughout Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. It was especially rewarding to have the opportunity to meet beneficiaries of IOCC projects, many of whom had been made refugees during the war in Bosnia, and who have returned to their homes and are now thriving as farmers and small business owners.

Banja Luka



Bosnia -  
Herzegovina



# Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina



Sabac

Belgrade



Montenegro

**Clockwise from top:** The farmlands of western Bosnia-Herzegovina; Participants visit Monastery Soko in western Serbia; The Culic family hosted participants at their greenhouse farm in Novi Grad; Constantine M. Triantafilou with IOCC Banja Luka staffers Dusko Vucic and Zoran Micic; The Oljaca family of Novi Grad, IOCC recipients of agricultural machinery; Participants meet with His Grace IRINEJ (Dobrijevic), Serbian Bishop of Australia and New Zealand; Belgrade's new St. Sava Cathedral; The Una River Valley in Bosnia-Herzegovina, home of IOCC micro-credit clients working in agriculture, services, and trade; Danka Latinovic, one of IOCC's first returnees to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

*"The generous hospitality of the beneficiaries really stood out to me. They didn't have much to give, but they wanted to give what they could."*

Maria Loukaki  
Chicago, IL

*"You could see from their smiles how proud they were that they could be self-sustaining."*

Patrick Herbert  
Jacksonville, FL

*"The professionalism of IOCC's Bosnia staff was exceeded only by their love and dedication to their mission. Their relationship with the community is like the bridge between IOCC beneficiaries and donors."*

Andreas Hoeft  
Minneapolis, MN

*"It was especially gratifying to see how IOCC is helping the whole person and the whole community. IOCC helped during the Bosnian war, but it wasn't just an emergency effort but a complete reestablishment of communities."*

Father Louis Christopoulos  
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America  
Denver, CO

*"The tour gave me a greater perspective because I could actually speak and interact with people whose lives have been changed by IOCC. That was the gift of the trip."*

Nick Furris  
Jacksonville, FL

*"In the U.S. we talk about needing hundreds of thousands of dollars to start a business. But in Bosnia and Serbia, the loan amounts were not very much at all, but they had tremendous impact."*

Isidoros Zanikos  
Philadelphia, PA

*"The ingenuity that the beneficiaries showed and the creativity that they had in rebuilding their lives was inspiring. They took what they were given and they ran with it. What would it be like to lose your home and come back daring to start over again?"*

Father Paul Wesche  
Orthodox Church of America  
Minneapolis, MN

# From Bethlehem to Jerusalem: Children of the Holy Land Receive Improved Schools



**Jerusalem (IOCC) —** IOCC's plan to renovate and upgrade nine private schools in the West Bank was recently approved for funding by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This initiative follows the redirection of aid for IOCC's prior rehabilitation of public schools after elections brought new leadership to the Palestinian Authority. It is the first time that U.S. government funding will go towards faith-based schools in the Holy Land. Nora Kort, IOCC's Head of Office in Jerusalem, talks about how this new program will bring hope and opportunity to all children in the embattled West Bank.

**N&N: What is the situation in the West Bank today?**

**KORT:** I would say that the situation is extremely dire, particularly for tens of thousands of Palestinian Authority employees because their salaries have been frozen since March 2006. It is also a very difficult time for farmers because Israel's Defense Wall makes it very hard for them to reach their lands. Right now is olive picking season in the Holy Land and farmers cannot always reach their farms. Olives are the backbone of the Palestinian economy and we are afraid that an entire harvest will be wasted.

**N&N: What is the scope of the new IOCC school renovation program in the West Bank?**

**KORT:** IOCC Jerusalem has chosen nine private schools that are run by the Orthodox and Latin



The Orthodox Secondary School in the village of Taybeh is one of nine private West Bank schools that will receive new USAID funding through IOCC's infrastructure repair project. Enlarged classrooms, upgraded libraries, and other improvements are being planned for Orthodox and Latin Patriarchate schools in Beit Jala, Jerusalem, Beit Sahour and Ramallah.

Patriarchates in Jerusalem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, and Ramallah. We plan to enlarge classrooms and playgrounds, provide better equipment, and improve libraries and health and sanitation facilities. The whole purpose is to create a better and safer environment for children to learn.

**N&N: Are private schools in the West Bank in better shape than public schools?**

**KORT:** Like public schools, private schools are also affected by the economic situation, though they receive some support from churches and missions organizations. We're talking about sewage backing up, ceilings falling in, and doors that are not holding up against the wind. Even if the education is good, children should not have to learn in an environment that is rundown. Each school has a different need, but they all need

more equipment, larger classrooms and playgrounds, and more hygienic toilet facilities.

**N&N: We understand that children who had attended public schools in the West Bank are now trying to attend these private schools.**

**KORT:** Public schools are closed in the West Bank because the Palestinian Authority cannot pay the teachers' salaries and the teachers are on strike. Many Muslim parents go to these private Christian schools asking them to accept their children. They are accepted, but the schools do not have enough classroom space. This new program will upgrade classroom size. St. George's Orthodox School in Ramallah will be able to accept another 100 children because of the upgrade.

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**N&N:** *What were your criteria in picking the schools that will be assisted?*

KORT: We chose those in desperate need for immediate support and that have been waiting quite some time for donors. Also, we looked for schools in communities that were willing to help with labor. Finally, we chose those who don't charge tuition to low-income families and who don't discriminate or separate poor children from wealthier children.

**N&N:** *Why is education an important component to humanitarian work in the Holy Land?*

KORT: Education is a priority in order to overcome poverty and to have a better economy. It also strengthens civil society. I think that education is the way forward in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

**N&N:** *How will this program create economic opportunity in the West Bank?*

KORT: The upgrading of these schools will also provide construction work to many unem-

ployed laborers — a total of 7,550 work days for over 750 laborers. We chose those families who have been out of work for at least 6 months. Each family can have a maximum of 10 days of work for a breadwinner and then the workers are switched out so that another family can have a breadwinner work.

**N&N:** *What is your overall vision for the schools and the way that they will impact their communities?*

KORT: I think about how these schools will be able to offer more access to all children. One of the schools that we are going to help in Beit Jala has a really wonderful principal who accepts all children. I think that out of 50 children, only 15 are able to pay a nominal fee. Sometimes the parents take



A. Morcos/IOCC

the children out of the schools themselves if they can't pay. So this principal actually goes knocking on doors asking them to bring their children back. When I think of IOCC's impact, I think of that principal knocking on doors.



## Lebanon Follow Up with IOCC's George Antoun

*Continued from page 3*

We had chosen all of the 54 schools in that region for our nutrition and school infrastructure repair program.

**N&N:** *Talk about the problem of unexploded ordinance and how that is affecting IOCC's work in Southern Lebanon.*

ANTOUN: For the time being the Lebanese Army and some specialized NGOs have been able to clear the main roads of unexploded ordinance. But there is a lot of unex-

ploded ordinance in the farmlands and IOCC staff have to be aware of those places. Some have been found in trees, and now it is olive picking season in Lebanon, and we hear of incidents almost everyday.

**N&N:** *What would you say distinguishes the work of IOCC in Southern Lebanon?*

ANTOUN: As I said, IOCC was one of the few NGOs that had an infrastructure already in place in Southern Lebanon when the crisis

broke out. We know the people. We know the area. We know the best way of doing relief. When we were distributing supplies to displaced families in Beirut, a woman recognized the IOCC logo. It turns out that her children had attended one of the public schools where we have our nutrition program. Immediately she came over and started kissing the workers. "During the peace you were with us," she said, "and now you are with us in time of war."



## Jerusalem/West Bank STUDY TOUR

### Journey with IOCC to the Holy Land

Meet IOCC's beneficiaries  
and see programs in the  
**HOLY LAND**



**IOCC JERUSALEM/  
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**February 12 - 20, 2007**

— TENTATIVE DATES —

Approximate Cost — \$2,800  
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For more information, contact  
Dan Christopoulos  
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phone 410-243-9820  
or go to [www.iocc.org/studytrip](http://www.iocc.org/studytrip)

## Year-End Giving Opportunity

Thinking about year-end giving to IOCC? Consider a new tax law that allows older Americans to make charitable gifts directly from their individual retirement accounts. For the rest of 2006 and 2007, taxpayers 70 ½ and older can contribute up to \$100,000 a year directly to charities from their IRAs without triggering federal income tax on the IRA distributions. For more information, contact IOCC's Finance Department toll free at 1-877-803-IOCC (4622).

## Return to Kosovo

*Continued from page 1*

Participants finished their tour with a visit to Decani, considered the largest and best preserved medieval monastery in the Balkans. United Nations peace-keeping troops escorted Study Tour participants through the monastery's heavy metal doors. The brothers of the monastery welcomed their guests with a tour of their church's stunning 14th century frescoes. "Our role

is not a political or a national program, but to care for the soul and the body" said Father Sava, one of the monks who speaks often to visitors about Decani's role in Kosovo. "IOCC does this as well, and we hope that this economic interdependence that IOCC is helping us to establish with the Albanian community will help interethnic relations."



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**Return to Kosovo: IOCC Programs Continue as Province's Status Remains Undecided**

Kosovo 1999 — Having driven for hours by land and air, thousands of Serbian refugees arrived at the United Nations checkpoint where passage was granted to the former Yugoslav province. Crossing into Serbia, refugees took shelter in towns that may have had some risk. For the staff visiting hospitals and Septemvri to demonstrate IOCC's continuing commitment and solidarity with the people of Kosovo, even as the province's fate was being discussed by diplomats.

IOCC has been active in Kosovo since 1991. During the NATO bombing in 1999, IOCC was one of only three international relief organizations to maintain its presence to the province.

Left: In the village of Velje Pece, help about 200 families, less than half the number that had to leave their homes in 1999. Above: A UNHCR guard lets people sweep through the village of Velje Pece, Kosovo. To: Self-reliance. Right: Donations to help the people of Kosovo.



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