



CULTIVATING PROSPERITY IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

Baltimore, MD (IOCC) —

Farmers in rural areas of Kosovo, Montenegro and Albania are learning that making simple changes in their approach to crops and the care for their animals can make a significant difference in the productivity of their small farms.

For people whose livelihoods are dependent on the land, these changes and the information they are learning together can also make a dramatic difference in their lives.

IOCC, working in cooperation with Diakonia Agapes of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania and the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at the University of Maryland, is undertaking a regional effort to help rural farmers increase their income and improve sustainable access to food for families.

Farmer-to-farmer exchanges facilitated by IOCC over the past six months have aimed to help farmers gain knowledge through interactive learning and encourage local, collaborative decision-making in agricultural communities.

In the village of Shushicë, Albanian farmers received training on insects and diseases that affect late season vegetables and instruction on how to conduct tests to measure soil texture.

By protecting vegetables planted later in the season from insects, the farmers are able to bring higher



The Brotherhood of the Viski Decan Monastery

Children in Osojani, Kosovo watch as sheep graze in their village. IOCC and its partners are helping small farmers in Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro to better utilize available natural resources and support the sustainable production of locally grown foods.

quality products to market in greater quantities. Equipped with the knowledge about the soil texture, the farmers can better gauge the most productive type of crops to grow and the proper quantity of fertilizer to apply to their crops. The project not only helps the farmers to be more productive, but also provides a greater supply of fresh vegetables

for the local communities.

Field schools held in the region have given farmers the opportunity to discuss problems they face. By bringing farmers together, networks of learning have been developed to provide support for tackling problems they share in common. Topics identified by the farmers have included the proper

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.
And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth,
and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

— Luke 2: 6-7



December 2010

The image of a cradle – in the form of a humble manger in the middle of a stable – is a powerful symbol in the story of the Nativity of Christ. In many ways, as you will read in these pages, it also reminds me of people and places where your gifts of love are making a difference.

In Iraq – the cradle of civilization – Christians are increasingly in need of protection and basic necessities of life in ever more dangerous circumstances. IOCC has continued work with the Church to provide vital assistance to the beleaguered people in Iraq and planning is underway to find ways to provide more assistance – and to remain in solidarity with families in need.

Like the stable where the Christ child was born, farmers from rural areas of Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro are finding ways to work in common to improve agriculture techniques that will help to increase production and provide a better future.

The Christ child wrapped and placed in a manger also reminds us that the Theotokos was forced by circumstances beyond her control to be away from her home without adequate shelter – much like families still living in make-shift homes in Haiti nearly a year after the earthquake.

And like the angel who announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds, Orthodox priests in Ethiopia are proclaiming vital messages to encourage prevention of HIV/AIDS and care for those who have been infected.

As we reflect on God's love for us this Christmas, we give thanks for your gifts of love that are helping so many in need.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Constantine M. Triantafilou
Executive Director & CEO

International Orthodox Christian Charities, Inc. (IOCC) is the official humanitarian aid agency of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA) 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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CHRISTIAN FAMILIES ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE IN IRAQ

Baltimore, MD (IOCC) —

A massacre at one of Iraq's largest churches in October and continued attacks in predominantly Christian areas of central Baghdad highlight the continued danger for Iraq's Christian community. Many of Iraq's million and a half Christians wonder if they can continue to remain in their homeland.

Earlier this year, IOCC provided more than 1,500 Iraqi families in Baghdad with food and personal hygiene items and is currently seeking new ways to assist vulnerable families in the country.

An estimated 7,500 people received critical assistance in areas that have been the target of some of the greatest violence since 2003. Some of the families receiving assistance have been displaced by violence within Iraq and are unable to return back to their homes – some of which have since been destroyed.

Food assistance provided by IOCC has included high protein food supplies to combat increasing rates of malnutrition. The supplemental food was designed



Iraqi refugees and disadvantaged Syrian children receive health and school kits at a public school in Syria. Many of the kits were assembled by Orthodox Christians and delivered by IOCC through its kit program.

to provide for a more varied diet after needs assessments by international organizations in Iraq showed that access to food is one of the top priorities for people who have been displaced. Many of those displaced are not able to access government food rations – or fear for their safety if they venture out to receive them.

Isolated and vulnerable minorities, such as Christian communities, have been included in IOCC's humanitarian assistance program. The aid has been of particular importance given the recent resurgence of attacks by insurgents on churches in Baghdad and Christian families in other areas of the country.

An assessment of the most urgent needs is planned for 2011. In addition to providing direct

assistance to families living in Iraq, IOCC is also working to address the needs of Iraqi refugees living in neighboring countries. IOCC recently signed an agreement with the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration to provide food assistance, educational support and vocational training for Iraqi refugees and Syrians in Damascus, Aleppo, and Jazirat. It is estimated that the project will provide direct assistance to more than 56,000 people over the next two years. The project is being implemented with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East.



A YEAR AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE, HAITIANS REMAIN VULNERABLE



Father Barnabas (center) and Father Pavlos (right), priests of the Greek Orthodox parish of St. Jean de Freres in the Bobin neighborhood of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, visit with people left homeless by the January 2010 earthquake who are living in a tent city in the neighborhood. More than a million Haitians living in temporary shelters like these remain vulnerable to threats such as tropical storms, water-borne disease and poor sanitation.

Paul_Jeffrey/IOCC

Baltimore, MD (IOCC) —

A hurricane that skirted the coast of Haiti in early November spared what authorities had feared would be yet another mass tragedy. But while the immediate threat passed, the storm was a powerful reminder of the real dangers still faced by more than a million people who remain housed in tent communities and make-shift shelters.

“We were fortunate that the strong winds did not materialize as had been expected,” said Fr. Gregoire Legouté, a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia in Haiti. “But, we welcome additional hygiene supplies and other kits to continue to serve the people of our community.”

He noted the continued efforts by the Orthodox Church to serve the needs of Haitians – many

who still have no access to permanent shelters.

The storm underscored the continuing hardships faced by the people of Haiti and the long-term need for permanent housing, clean water and sanitation, and other basic necessities.

“This is the third major disaster that has threatened Haitians this year,” said Mark Ohanian, IOCC director of programs. “The frequent disasters and threats to public health call attention to the vulnerability of the Haitian people, the magnitude of the work ahead and the continuing need for assistance.”

In the months following the January 12 earthquake, IOCC has been focusing its efforts on delivering immediate emergency assistance and mitigating the long-

term effects of natural disasters.

“We are working on rebuilding schools that not only serve as centers for education, but are built to withstand hurricanes and other natural disasters and will serve as disaster shelters,” explained Ohanian.

Other projects by IOCC include reforestation programs that will help to prevent mudslides. Construction of sustainable sanitation facilities that will contain waste and prevent the contamination of water supplies and prevent health threats like cholera are also underway.

In cooperation with ACT Alliance members, Orthodox Christian and other partners, IOCC has delivered nearly \$4 million in assistance to Haiti since the earthquake.

CULTIVATING PROSPERITY IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

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preparation and care of a seed bed, transplanting measures for saplings, tomato production in greenhouses, and technical information for mushrooms, herbs, onions, lettuce and garlic.

Throughout the region the program aims to help farmers better utilize available natural resources by sustaining and increasing the production of locally grown foods. Farmers and processors also learned new methods to increase farm income and expand market opportunities through things like handling, packaging, storage, and processing.

IOCC ... is undertaking a regional effort to help rural farmers increase their income and improve sustainable access to food for families.

In the village of Donja Rapëa in Kosovo, families established a centralized collection center for wild plants and herbs and have linked up with buyers to open up a market for locally grown products that will provide a sustainable source of income.

The collection center was equipped through a grant of \$11,500 and is managed by a local association for the benefit of the community. Through small fees paid by those who use the center, the rented facility will be sustained and families will be able to sell wild edible mushrooms and herbs. The center offers a

renewable and important source of income for the people of this remote village.

In November, representatives of the farming communities from Kosovo, Montenegro and Albania came together in Berane,

Montenegro for a meeting to discuss the project and share lessons learned. Based on the positive experience of the farmers, IOCC and its partners are currently seeking funding to expand the initiative in the region.



The Brotherhood of the Visoki Decani Monastery

In Berane, Montenegro, IOCC worked with the Circle of Serbian Sisters and a local association of fruit producers to establish a center for fruit processing and drying. The equipment will allow fruit to be processed and packaged in ways that add value on the market and provide stable income for the community long after the harvest season.

CHRISTMAS: WHAT CAN WE GIVE TO GOD AND OUR NEIGHBOR?

Archpriest George Morelli, Ph.D.



The Icon of the Theotokos by the hand of Debra Kortuka

It is no secret that God and religion are being marginalized in the United States, that is to say considered irrelevant in modern secular society. Many work hard to remove all reference to God in our culture and nation. Christmas, although a legal holiday by Act of Congress (signed 1870, June 28, by President Ulysses S. Grant) has had its religious significance systematically eradicated. For example, the secular “language police” have made sure a Christmas Tree is now a *Holiday Bush* and the proper greeting is no longer “Merry Christmas!” but “Happy Holidays!”

In the Orthodox Church, we go beyond saying “Merry Christmas!”

We exchange the Christmas greeting “Christ is Born!” with the response, “Glorify Him!” We have a profound sense of the birth of the “Prince of Peace; Emmanuel,” not the ‘prince of darkness or power.’ Along with Isaiah the Prophet we proclaim: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light ... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” And his peace shall have no end, for God is with us!” (Is 9: 2,6-7).

Secularism claims to be indiffer-

ent to religion. It claims to be inclusive of all. Secular values are disguised by politically correct jargon. What is so nefarious about this establishment of secularism is that its values are diametrically the opposite of the principles Christ taught us to follow: love God and our neighbor as ourselves.

Our Orthodox Christian faith teaches us exactly the same thing: to give to God and our neighbor. The Godly Archbishop Tryphon tells us what our response to our blessings from God should be: “O all-good and life-giving Trinity, receive our gratefulness for all Thy goods and show us worthy of Thine eternal treasures, so that we may multiply the talent entrusted to us, reach Thy kingdom and enter into the joy of our Lord, singing to Him the victorious song: Alleluia!” (Akathist of Thanksgiving)

Yes, the operative phrase is “that we may multiply the talent entrusted to us.” Let’s let go of “money talks” and walk the path of selfless “giving.” This is the time to make room in our heart for God and our neighbor. This is the time to give back from the talents that have been multiplied to those in need. What greater way to “give thanks and celebrate the Nativity of the Savior!” Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

The Very Rev. Fr. George Morelli, Ph.D. is a licensed Clinical Psychologist and Marriage and Family Therapist, Coordinator of the Chaplaincy and Pastoral Counseling Ministry of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese and Assistant Pastor of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church in San Diego, California.

SUPPORT BRINGS HOPE FOR CHILDREN WHO BEAR BURDEN OF HIV IN ETHIOPIA

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (IOCC) — At eighteen years old, Tilahun is barely an adult, but he is already almost middle-aged.

Tilahun lost his brother and father to AIDS in a country where the disease has claimed the lives of millions of people and lowered the life expectancy to 48 years. Now he cares for his bedridden, HIV-positive mother and his three younger siblings as the head of the household.

More than one million children like Tilahun and his siblings have been orphaned or left to fend for themselves as a result of the AIDS epidemic in Ethiopia.

The epidemic is one of the key challenges for Ethiopia, one of the least developed countries in the world, where nearly half of the population lives below the poverty level. The poor and women are especially vulnerable due to the lack of access to health services and health education.

But disease, poverty and the responsibility of being the primary bread winner for his family have not dampened Tilahun's aspirations for the future.

Tilahun was given training on effective business management and start-up capital. The funds allowed him to open a small convenience shop which now helps support his family and pay for his siblings' school tuition.

"I would like to develop the shop even more," said Tilahun. "With my earnings, I have opened a savings account for my future education as well as for my siblings. I understand the importance of ensuring that my siblings complete their education. I also plan to open other shops to better support my family. Now, I feel independent."



IOCC Ethiopia

Orthodox clergy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church are trusted messengers for important information on HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia. IOCC works closely with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter Church Aid Commission to train Ethiopian clergy, Sunday School youth and lay persons to conduct education programs that promote abstinence before marriage, faithfulness and work to reduce stigma and discrimination towards those with HIV and AIDS.

The training and the capital for his new business came from International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) through funding from the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the U.S. Government initiative to help save the lives of those suffering from HIV/AIDS around the world.

Over the past two years alone, more than 1,000 orphans and vulnerable children have been given

the opportunity to begin entrepreneurial ventures in addition to 1,600 adults. The program is part of a comprehensive HIV/AIDS care and support program carried out in cooperation with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter Church Aid Commission. Since 2004, the two organizations have reached over 11.5 million Ethiopians with prevention and awareness messages.



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IOCC FOUNDATION GROWS TO MORE THAN \$1 MILLION



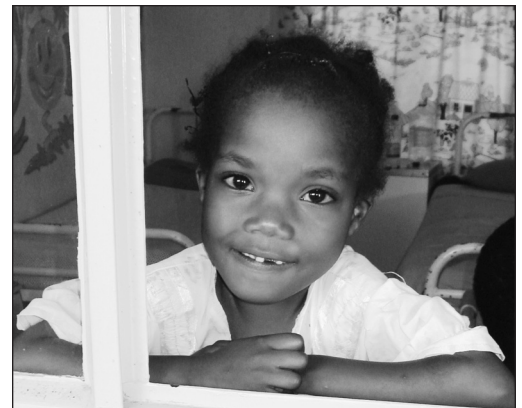
With the notification of a bequest from the estate of Colonel George Anthony, the IOCC Foundation, Inc. will surpass the \$1 million mark in donations it has received.

"We are grateful for this new gift and the opportunity it represents for IOCC to provide ongoing programs to assist the elderly and children," said Constantine M. Triantafilou, IOCC executive director. "The extraordinary support of donors like Col. Anthony – especially in difficult economic times – allows us to sustain vital programs for the

poor. We look forward to continued growth in the IOCC Foundation to support critical programs that will expand the capacity of the Church to serve the poor around the world."

The IOCC Foundation, a professionally-managed, not-for-profit support organization, is dedicated to supporting IOCC's relief and development programs. The IOCC Foundation was formed in 2004 to provide a vehicle whereby assets contributed toward IOCC's philanthropic work worldwide would receive focused stewardship.

For further information about the IOCC Foundation or to include IOCC in your estate planning, please contact IOCC Development Director Dan Christopoulos toll-free at (877) 803-4622.



YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

You can play a vital role in helping children and families in need in just about an hour a month.

Parish representatives help to communicate the work of IOCC in their local parish. For more information on how you can make a difference for people in need, please contact: Megan Carniewski (mcarniewski@iocc.org) or call 1-877-803-IOCC (4622).

Learn more at iocc.org/getinvolved