



# INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES NEWS & NEEDS

SHARING GOOD

WINTER 2013

## GAZA FARM REHAB PROJECT REAPS FOOD AND OPTIMISM

The 20-year-old greenhouse on Yusef's modest plot of land in Gaza once provided his large family of ten children with an abundance of fresh vegetables and a steady source of income from the sale of surplus produce. But seasons of wear and tear took their toll on the structure. For three years it sat barren because he had no access to the repair materials needed to make it productive again.

For thousands of farmers like Yusef, the isolation of living in the Gaza Strip and lack of agricultural resources leave them struggling to cultivate their land and feed their families. With significant funding from USAID through the Palestinian Community Assistance program (PCAP), IOCC is helping more than 16,000 impoverished people living in Gaza improve their access to food and an income with agricultural assistance, farming supplies and short-term jobs. IOCC is one of only a very few humanitarian organizations



Rada Tierney / IOCC

Yusef and his grandson proudly tend the tomato crop daily in his newly rehabilitated greenhouse. The proceeds from the sale of the tomatoes will provide seed money to grow more produce and help his family break free of the cycle of poverty that engulfs so many in Gaza.

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with an established presence in Gaza, providing assistance to destitute Palestinian families living in this underserved and overcrowded slice of land.

IOCC provided Yusef with building supplies, new protective netting and 1,500 tomato seedlings. Now the 66-year-old farmer and his grandsons proudly tend their tomato plants daily in the newly rehabilitated green-

house. Yusef estimates that their efforts will yield more than 22,000 pounds of tomatoes over the next 6 months. The proceeds from his cash crop will provide seed money to grow more produce, and help his family break free of the cycle of poverty that engulfs so many in Gaza. "My joy," said Yusef, "is that IOCC and its supporters in America have helped me be able to provide for the family."



## From The Executive Director



Dear Friends,

For many of us, ushering in the New Year often brings with it plans for fresh starts and new beginnings. For people facing adversity, a fresh start may seem like an out-of-reach dream. Your resolve to support the work of IOCC is helping create fresh starts for so many people in need around the world. Subsistence dairy farmers in Georgia and farming families living in isolation in Gaza are learning new skills to make their farms more productive and more profitable. Hundreds of the poorest families and elderly people living in Montenegro now receive a hot meal daily from two newly rehabilitated soup kitchens.

Each day, your desire to help those in need brings new beginnings and new joy to the lives of people who have lost everything but their faith in God and their hope for better days ahead. Their stories in this issue of *News & Needs* are a tribute to you for helping turn adversity into opportunity, and for joining us in serving Christ through compassionate living.

In Christ,

Constantine M. Triantafilou  
Executive Director & CEO

# MONTENEGRO SOUP KITCHENS NOURISH BODY AND SOUL



Nenad Prelevic / IOCC

Not much bigger than a toolshed, Kosovo refugee Dragica's tiny shack in Podgorica has just enough room for a makeshift bed. She has nowhere to cook and little money to buy food. IOCC and the Orthodox Church in Montenegro are reaching out to the area's poorest with hot meals prepared and distributed at two soup kitchens recently rehabilitated by IOCC.

Dragica, 70, was uprooted from her lifelong home in Kosovo a decade ago and fled to the nearby country of Montenegro. All alone with no family to assist her, the elderly woman had to scavenge building scraps from a nearby railway yard to cobble together the one-room shanty she now calls home. Donated blankets and clothing provide some warmth, but Dragica lived in constant hunger from a lack of food or a place to cook it.

The influx of more than 20,000 war refugees into this small former republic of Yugoslavia, along with a severe economic downturn in recent years has increased the number of people in need of emergency assistance. Many of the newly needy in Montenegro were self-sufficient in the past, but most are now unemployed for the first time in their lives and depend on food donations and public soup kitchens to survive.

Through a generous gift given in memory of Ms. Mela Vujicic, IOCC in cooperation with the Orthodox

Metropolitanate of Montenegro and Littoral, rebuilt and equipped two soup kitchens to feed 300 of the area's poorest residents. The existing soup kitchen in Podgorica received minor repairs along with new industrial quality kitchen equipment and cooking tools. In Cetinje, a donated home was reconstructed to accommodate large-scale prepping and cooking areas, as well as a special service window for handing out hot meals.

Every day at noon, mothers with young children and the elderly arrive at the church soup kitchens with empty take away containers, and leave with fresh bread and a hearty helping of soup or stew prepared by members of the ladies' church auxiliary. Soup kitchen supervisor, Deacon Miomir Vulevic, says the daily contact with Dragica and the others does more than just nourish their bodies. "We are her closest family. She comes often to visit us, to talk and to be listened by someone. It is not just having a hot meal, it is having someone who cares about you."

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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ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL  
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actalliance

## ETHIOPIA'S DISABLED MOBILIZED FOR THE FUTURE

They live in the shadows of their communities, the 1.9 million children, women and men in Ethiopia whose physical disabilities make them immobile. The inability to walk severely limits their access to school, work and the outside world, and creates tremendous hardship for them and their families. Access to a wheelchair is out of reach for many, with people who can afford one waiting for months as one small workshop in Ethiopia struggles to meet the demand. IOCC, in cooperation with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter Church Aid Commission (EOC-DICAC) is helping to bring mobility and a better quality of life to a vast number of physically challenged people and their families by improving access to wheelchairs.

IOCC is providing parts needed to assemble new wheelchairs for more than 2,900 children, women and disabled war veterans, as well as replacement parts for repairing broken wheelchairs. Vocational training for additional workers will generate the labor force required to assemble a steady output of wheelchairs and provide these men and women with jobs to support their families. Many of the wheelchair recipients will also receive vocational training to improve their income-generating skills and their prospects of being a part of mainstream society.

With ready access to wheelchair assembly parts and job training for production workers and wheelchair recipients, the lives of more than 18,000 people will be uplifted by the positive impact of this effort to restore movement and hope to the lives of Ethiopia's disabled.



Jake Lyell / IOCC

Sparks fly as a worker at Cheshire Services orthopedic workshop welds together steel tubes to form a new wheelchair. IOCC is working with relief partners in Ethiopia to help increase the number of wheelchairs available to the country's disabled children, women and disabled veterans.



Tammy Segall / IOCC

Local farmers visit the new demonstration dairy barn constructed by IOCC in the Akhaltsikhe region of Georgia. IOCC and the Georgian Orthodox Church are working together to expose dairy farmers to improved farming practices that will help lift them out of poverty.

## GEORGIAN DAIRY DELIVERS PROMISE OF NEW PROSPERITY

The southern region of Georgia is a patchwork of tiny verdant farms owned by thousands of families trying to survive off the land. The former Soviet collective farms were broken up into some one million small, privately owned parcels rarely exceeding two acres. The lush grazing pastures have the potential to produce five times their current output of milk, but many of the farmers lack the knowledge, equipment and guidance needed to produce more than subsistence levels of milk and homemade dairy products.

IOCC, working in partnership with the Patriarchate of the Georgian Orthodox Church and in cooperation with agricultural expert, Dr. James Hanson of the University of Maryland, has brought hope for new prosperity to the region with the construction of a modern demonstration dairy barn. The structure includes milking stalls for 50 cows, a maternity area for calf delivery, and storage space for new, modern milking equipment. The airy, hoop-style design delivers improved lighting and ventilation, both important in keeping cows healthy and boosting milk production.

The site was chosen for its close proximity to the Patriarchate cheese plant, which will be supplied with milk from the farm, and its central location for farmers and agricultural students who will visit the model dairy to learn about breeding, feeding, housing, and modern practices in the production of milk. The IOCC project will equip the farmers with the technical know-how and the tools needed to help them produce a steady flow of milk and income for their families.



# EMBRACING A LIFE OF COMPASSION

Scan here to take part in the IOCC Chairman's Challenge!



IOCC

A young girl living in the West Bank receives a school kit from an Orthodox cleric.

As we think of the people in our lives whom we love with all our hearts ... a spouse, children, parents, a lifelong friend, just thinking about them can bring joy to your soul and a smile to your lips. You would do anything for them to ensure that they are safe, healthy and happy. To St. Isaac of Syria, our love and compassion should extend to everyone in our lives, from family and friends to

and compassionate hand to a total stranger should come to us naturally; as children of God, we were created in His likeness and become Christ-like when our actions put the welfare of all others before our own. *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)* A rich man is not one who has much but gives much.

When we see a person in distress

complete strangers. *"Let our compassion be a mirror where we may see in ourselves that likeness and that true image which belong to the Divine nature and Divine essence. A heart hard and unmerciful will never be pure."* The capacity to extend a loving

or suffering from some affliction, we shouldn't turn away and say the usual "There but for the grace of God go I" but "There go I" as we are all part of the body of Christ. As we dwell within Him and He dwells within us, we are all life-creating. Not one of us is immune to the possibility that circumstances could one day place us in the same shoes of one who is suffering or struggling to survive. We can, however, be mindful of how we treat one another, and live by the example of St. Silouan, a fervent follower of compassionate living: *"The Spirit of God teaches us to love all that exists, and the soul feels compassion for each being, and also loves enemies and pities demons, because in their fall they were detached from the good."* Compassion makes no exceptions, nor should our love.

Rev. Nicholas Triantafilou,  
President, Hellenic College/  
Holy Cross Greek Orthodox  
School of Theology



Send birthday, anniversary, Valentine's Day or get well wishes with an IOCC e-card gift ... a meaningful way to touch a loved one's heart and touch the lives of people in need. Your e-card gift will help us serve some of the most vulnerable around the world through programs devoted to helping people impacted by disasters, disease and conflict. For easy-to-follow directions, go to [www.iocc.org/ecards](http://www.iocc.org/ecards)

## IOCC AND YOU

Here are some "hands-on" ways that Orthodox Christians can join IOCC in extending a loving hand to neighbors in need:

- **JOIN an IOCC Action Team**
- **ASSEMBLE Emergency Kits**
- **VOLUNTEER as a Parish Rep**

For more information about "hands-on" humanitarian activities, contact IOCC Outreach Coordinator Christina Meares at [cmeares@iocc.org](mailto:cmeares@iocc.org).



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