



REACHING FAMILIES ISOLATED BY TYPHOON HAIYAN

On November 8, the most powerful tropical storm ever to make landfall blasted across the Philippines with wind speeds up to 195 miles per hour, affecting more than 13 million people – including at least five million children – across 41 provinces in desperate need of food, water and shelter.

IOCC, an ACT Alliance member, is working with Orthodox churches and relief partners inside the Philippines to provide more than 8,000 storm survivors with assistance including food parcels, medicine, emergency medical care for the sick and wounded, and water purification tablets to improve access to safe water for drinking and cooking. Relief workers continue to slowly make their way through towns and villages, distributing urgently



An Orthodox priest looks on in disbelief as a survivor of Typhoon Haiyan leads them through the remains of his home in a remote area of Leyte Province in the Philippines.

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needed assistance to isolated Filipino families. For weeks, thousands of storm survivors cut off from the rest of the country endured hunger, thirst and exposure as they waited in desperation for aid they feared wouldn't come in time. No electricity or telephone service, and roads

blocked by piles of debris made it nearly impossible for government agencies and relief organizations to respond quickly. As roads have been cleared, IOCC and its church partners in the Philippines are directing relief efforts to reaching the country's most isolated survivors of the storm.

From The Executive Director



My family is never far from my thoughts. Their happiness and well-being are important to me. Christ teaches us that we should extend this depth of love and compassion to everyone in our lives, from family and friends to complete strangers. At IOCC, we strive every day to extend a loving hand, without discrimination, to those who are in greatest need – families, refugees and displaced persons, orphans, the elderly, school children, and people with disabilities.

The love and compassion you show through your support of IOCC is giving Ethiopian babies a fighting chance against contracting HIV/AIDS by teaching their mothers about prevention and treatment. You are helping farmers in Gaza feed their families because of improved methods to preserve precious water needed for crops. Because of you, Syrian men and women displaced in their own country are earning back lost wages and dignity through a program that employs displaced Syrians to improve the condition of public spaces and schools.

Wherever IOCC responds on behalf of the Orthodox Christian community, we respond as a family. We are all God's children, and we must heed His call to help our brothers and sisters wherever they may be, whoever they may be. Because the happiness and well-being of all families should be important to us.

In Christ,

Constantine M. Triantafilou
Executive Director & CEO

JOBS FOR SYRIA'S DISPLACED EASE HARDSHIP



Ahmed's masonry skills afforded him and his wife a home with a vegetable garden and a comfortable life for his family of eight. When civil war overran Syria's Dara'a region and threatened their safety, the family escaped to Damascus. Ahmed struggled to keep his family sheltered and fed, but felt useless with no job and fell into despair.

Sawsan, 21, shared those feelings of despair as her lifelong dream of becoming a chemist was dashed by rising bloodshed in her hometown of Zamalka, a Damascus suburb. Her final year at university was cut short when the family fled to Damascus. With no job skills and an incomplete education, she began to feel like an immense burden on her suddenly impoverished parents.

These two displaced Syrians from different walks of life share the same agonizing feelings of uncertainty and loss of self-worth as thousands of others uprooted from homes and livelihoods. For more than 28,000

displaced people, a cash-for-work program established by IOCC provides an essential source of income. IOCC and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East (GOPA), established the program in cooperation with local community leaders to provide employment for displaced Syrian families. The program harnesses manpower for projects like rehabilitating public spaces or sewing school uniforms for displaced children by identifying and hiring displaced Syrians with the skills and abilities needed to complete the work.

For families devastated by the civil strife, the work provides psychological as well as economic benefits. Ahmed's earnings helped improve his family's living conditions, and he's grateful to the project for restoring the purpose he was lacking from being idle. "Only work can help us forget our tragedy. We need work, and we prefer that to receiving charity."

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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actalliance

COFFEE TALKS HELP CURB HIV IN ETHIOPIA'S CHILDREN

The aroma of coffee brewing and corn popping welcomes expectant mother Mintimar, 28, and daughter, Kalkidan, 3, as they gather with others for an Ethiopian coffee ceremony hosted by an Orthodox priest in their town of Debre Markos. The ritual of preparing and serving coffee and snacks to guests is a symbol of hospitality and fellowship. Working in partnership with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter Church Aid Commission (EOC-DICAC), IOCC is delivering HIV/AIDS awareness messages over coffee as a way to help curb the spread of an epidemic that has orphaned 900,000 Ethiopian children, and infected more than 760,000 of the country's people. Whether HIV-infected or not, children born to women living with HIV face a higher risk of illness and death. Poverty, isolation and limited access to health care facilities often make life-saving care out of reach. IOCC's program aims to reverse this tragic outcome.

More than 720 IOCC trained Orthodox clergy and female community leaders use such gatherings around the country to educate pregnant mothers about getting tested and preventing the transmission of HIV to their unborn children. Men are also welcomed and encouraged to be tested along with their wives. On this day, Aba Tefera, an Orthodox priest, and his wife volunteer for the screening to help remove the stigma of being tested. Mintimar and three other expectant mothers also agree to HIV testing. IOCC has reached more than 370,000 women and 361,000 male partners with its HIV/AIDS prevention message since 2009, and screened nearly 22,000 pregnant mothers and 12,000 male partners for HIV.



Jake Lyell/IOCC

WATER-SAVING FARMS KEEP GAZA'S FAMILIES FED



Rada Tramey/IOCC

Farming has been a way of life in Omar's family for generations. When he inherited his family's land, Omar knew that survival depended on having a reliable source of water to grow the crops of olives, dates and citrus fruit needed to support his wife and four children. Over the past five years the local water supply began to dry up and his access trickled down to only two days a week. Omar watched helplessly as his livelihood began to wither away with his grove of 150 water-starved trees. The once fertile farmland that had been in his family for so many years was destined to become a wasteland.

Gaza's diminishing supply of fresh water brought on by a deteriorating water and sanitation system is threatening the ability to grow food and the well-being of the 1.7 million people who live there in isolation.

IOCC is helping to ease the hardships endured by more than 1,300 farming families like Omar's who are receiving practical training to learn how to improve their current farming practices and increase the amount of food they need to produce to sustain their families. IOCC provided Omar with assistance in digging and lining a water catchment that serves as a reservoir, fencing it and installing a pump and irrigation system. With daily access to water, Omar's grove produces enough cash crops to support the family and to fulfill a lifelong dream – to send his daughter to college and towards a more fruitful future.

THE OPPORTUNITY TO SAY, “YES” TO CHRIST

Though our pre-Christmas secular commercialized atmosphere often diverts our attention from the meaning of St. Philip’s Fast, growing and developing in Christ is the essence of this holy season. Even the external trappings of the pre-Christmas season, the lights and decorations, the carols, often seen as distracting from the real message conveyed by the Incarnation of Christ, can serve to remind us, the observant, that we celebrate, not a winter festival, but the renewal of all creation by the Nativity of the Only-Begotten Son of God, Who gave Himself freely and without reservation for the life of the world and for the salvation of all.

The holy days of St. Philip’s Fast challenged us to be spiritually mature, to prepare ourselves as a new spiritual Bethlehem, making room in the manger of our heart for the Savior, so that we might become the instruments through whom He works for the sanctification and salvation of all mankind.

It is during this sacred time, that Christ Himself calls upon us to put off the old, the corrupt and all else that defiles our nature. He lifts us up through the good gift of repentance crowning us with new life through the second laver of regeneration – the Holy Mystery of Penance – and bestowing upon us strength and unity in Holy Communion, the Eucharist.

This season, through prayer and good works, challenges us to change our lives by reflecting the sacred image according to which we were created and fashioned. The sacred season of St. Philip’s Fast, the spiritual springtime of the Winter Pascha, provides us with the opportunity to say, “yes” to Christ and to let the light of our good works shine so brightly that others, in beholding it, might be led to Christ as the Three Kings were led to Him by the star of Bethlehem.



+ His Beatitude Patriarch Teoctist of blessed memory of the Romanian Orthodox Church offering a Christmas blessing to Romanian children.

As we all come to a conclusion of this humble and sacred journey of faith and renewal, we must be guided and strengthened by the words of the penitential prayer of the Venerable Efraim the Syrian, a prayer which Orthodox tradition utilizes during this season as well as during Great Lent: “remove from me the spirit of laziness, lust, power and vain speech ... Grant unto me the spirit of prudence, the spirit of meekness, of patience and love ... that I may see my own sins and not judge my brethren ...”

I greet you all, the readers of this publication and supporters of IOCC, during this Holy, Sacred Season and pray that all the LOVE, Peace and Joy of the Christ-Child will fill your homes and lives throughout the New Year.

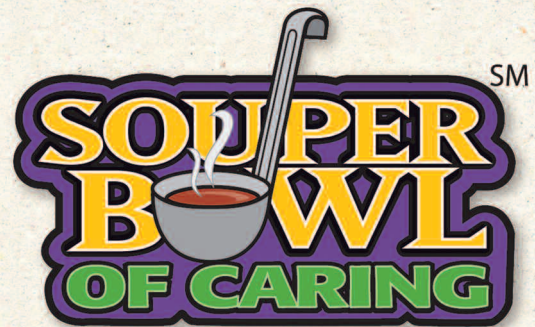
+Daniel

*Bishop of the Western Eparchy of the
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(Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople)*



Ryan Erickson/IOCC

During a trip to Lebanon last month with U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, Dr. Rajiv Shah, Administrator for US Agency for International Development (USAID), was welcomed by IOCC Construction Manager, Fady Haddad, to one of many schools in Lebanon rehabilitated by IOCC as part of a USAID-funded project aimed at improving the learning environment for Lebanon’s children.



iocc.org/souperbowl
Sunday, Feb. 2, 2014

