

Jerusalem/West Bank Study Tour

Journey with IOCC to the Holy Land

Meet IOCC's beneficiaries and see programs in the West Bank



IOCC JERUSALEM/WEST BANK STUDY TOUR

February 12 - 20, 2007

— TENTATIVE DATES —

Approximate Cost — \$2,500
all-inclusive from Baltimore

For more information, contact
Dan Christopoulos
email dchristopoulos@iocc.org
phone 410-243-9820
or go to www.iocc.org/studytrip



Upcoming Events

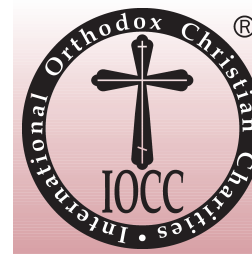
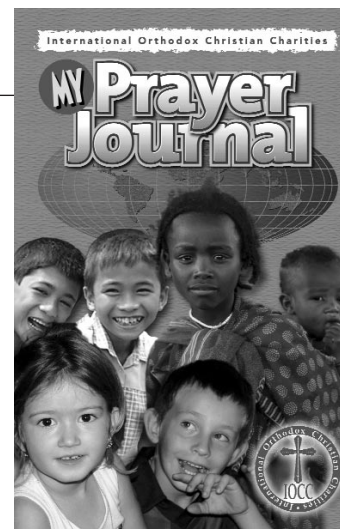
The following events are being sponsored by local Metropolitan Committees in support of IOCC's work. See more details at www.iocc.org/events.

- **ST. LOUIS, MO**
Annual Banquet, November 11
- **WASHINGTON, DC**
Annual Banquet, November 12
- **BALTIMORE, MD**
Orthodox Taste of Baltimore, November 13
- **CHARLOTTE, NC**
Annual Dinner, November 18
- **YORK, PA**
Annual IOCC/OCMC Banquet, November 19
- **IOCC SUNDAY** — November 19
- **WEIRTON, WV**
Epiphany Ball, January 13

IOCC Children's Prayer Journal Released!

A great tool to help your parish's young people pray and care for others in need. To order multiple copies, please contact the Department of Religious Education of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America at 1-800-566-1088. The prayer journal is free, but shipping charges may apply. To learn more, visit www.iocc.org/prayerjournal.

My Prayer Journal is made possible in part through the generous support of the Behrakis Family Foundation.



INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES

PRIEST to PRIEST

VOLUME 7, NO.3 FALL 2006

Journey to Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina With an Unforgettable Visit to Kosovo

"The news reached the ears of the church in Jerusalem; and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the divine grace at work, he rejoiced, and encouraged them all to hold fast to the Lord with resolute hearts..." (Acts 11:22-23)

How often do we get to experience the Book of Acts in our comfortably modern world? Two of our brother priests did recently through an unforgettable visit to Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina with IOCC. The organization's annual Study Tour 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 visit to the troubled province of Kosovo, now under United Nations mandate and home to some of the Serbian Orthodox Church's most historic churches and monasteries.

You will read their moving accounts of being escorted by United Nations troops into the medieval Visoki Decani Monastery, whose monks shared details on their present plight even as the future of Kosovo was being discussed by diplomats in Vienna. They also recount visits to churches in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, and how meetings with Serbian clergy and hierarchs brought special insight into the "resolute

heart" of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The tour, which was led by IOCC Executive Director and CEO Constantine M. Triantafilou, and included eight other supporters and staff, visited various IOCC projects including a children's orphanage in Belgrade, and micro-credit beneficiaries throughout Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. They met IOCC beneficiaries who had returned to their homes after the Bosnian war and are now working and thriving as farmers and small business owners thanks to IOCC. Above all, they saw that IOCC's work, a purely humanitarian concern, benefits the peoples of our suffering Orthodox lands.

As you read the accounts of Father Lou and Father Paul, my prayer is that you will be moved to consider accompanying IOCC on one of its next Study Tours. It would not be an exaggeration to say that it will change your life and your ministry.

Your Brother in Christ,
F. Michael Ellias
Father Michael Ellias



(above) The 14th century Visoki Decani Monastery in the UN-administered Serbian province of Kosovo.

(left) Decani Monastery's Father Marko explains the wine production process at the plant in Valika Hoca, Kosovo.

(right) Study Tour participants meet with His Grace IRINEJ (Dobrijevic), Serbian Bishop of Australia and New Zealand.



"Let us toil, carrying each other's burdens, as Christ carried our diseases in His body without flinching. If Christ is our master, then let us imitate Him and bear His injuries, lest in the age to come we be separated from our brothers who suffered afflictions."

— St. Pachomius the Great

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION FOR ORTHODOX CLERGY

from the Church Relations Committee of the IOCC Board of Directors: Very Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky, Chairman, Very Rev. Michael Ellias, Very Rev. Michael Rosco, Rev. Nicholas C. Triantafilou

A Foothold of Faith by Father Louis Christopoulos



The IOCC Study Tour to Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina exceeded my expectations, and was one of the best experiences of my life. I'll never forget our bus ride to Kosovo. You see for yourself that this was once a majority Christian country with a rich Christian heritage and then, suddenly, you come upon the 14th century Decani Monastery, a small foothold of Christianity that is trying to survive. As a Greek-American, I felt I could draw a parallel with our own Patriarchate trying to survive in Constantinople (Istanbul). Many say we should just move the Patriarchate, but being in Kosovo showed me that we have a responsibility to have a presence in a place that was once a stronghold of Christianity for centuries.

I have always had a vested interest in IOCC, but it was such an excellent experience to see firsthand the professionalism and dedication with which the staff members in Serbia and Bosnia accomplish their work. As a parish priest it is great for me to report to our people how IOCC has a thorough monitoring of how funds are distributed.

It was especially gratifying to see how IOCC is helping the whole person and the whole community. IOCC helped in emergency relief during and following the Bosnian war. After the war, they assisted refugees and displaced persons to relocate or return to their homes; they helped farmers get new equipment; and they helped business people to receive micro-loans so that they could reestablish themselves. It wasn't just an emergency effort but a complete reestablishment of infrastructure for municipalities and individual families. In this comprehensive way, IOCC is truly being faithful to our Orthodox ideals by helping the whole person and community. Through IOCC, our Orthodox Church in North America is helping our brothers and sisters in the Serbian Church as they strive to recover and to grow spiritually.

I'll never forget the Divine Liturgy that I had the privilege of participating in at the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Banja Luka. To see the dedication in the clergy and the youth was very inspiring. Also inspiring was the visit to the new Saint Sava Cathedral in Belgrade. Some might see such an impressive structure (not much smaller than Hagia Sophia) as extravagant, but I saw it as a great triumph of the church in a former communist country.

Overall, I felt the incredible dedication, courage and faith of the people, particularly of the brothers in Decani Monastery who are quite literally risking their lives for their faith. I was both personally humbled and greatly inspired. I would encourage all my brother priests to make one of these trips and to see firsthand IOCC's work. They will come back a transformed person with a renewed vigor knowing that the work of IOCC is being done in such a faithful and responsible manner.

Father Louis Christopoulos is pastor of St. Catherine Greek Orthodox Church in Greenwood Village, Colorado.

2006 IOCC STUDY TOUR



Serbia

Sabac
Belgrade



Montenegro

Decani Monastery
Kosovo

CLOCKWISE, above right: Upon completion, the St. Sava Cathedral in Belgrade will be one of the largest Orthodox cathedrals in the world; Bishop Lavrentije of Sabac, a special friend of IOCC, welcomed participants to Monastery Soko in western Serbia; Participants visited several IOCC micro-credit clients in Novi Grad, northwestern Bosnia-Herzegovina; Constantine Triantafilou with the Latinovic family, IOCC's first returnee family in Bosnia-Herzegovina; The Culcic family hosted participants at their greenhouse farm in the scenic Una River valley of Novi Grad, an area on the border with Croatia that is home to several IOCC micro-credit clients with businesses in agriculture, services and trade.

A Deeper Journey by Father Paul Wesche



The experience of participating in the Divine Liturgy with Bishop JEFREM in Banja Luka is indescribable. The two deacons made "let us attend" an event, singing it at the top of their voices. To worship with people who have been Orthodox for centuries and who have direct ties to Byzantium was very moving.

Going to Kosovo and having an armed escort to Decani Monastery was sobering, to say the least. Coming into the grounds of the monastery—the atmosphere was completely different—you would never know that you were surrounded by such hostility. There was tranquility and peace. You got indications just from looking and watching the UN soldiers as they came in to attend the Vespers service—most of them were not Orthodox—but you could tell that they had fallen in love with the authentic spirituality of the monks.

That was punctuated for me by the unexpected revelation that the relics of the martyred King St. Stefan of Serbia were in the monastery's church. When the monk removed the casket, there was an indescribable sense of awe that one felt. And then to receive his icon as a gift from the monastery was very moving. This was all new for an American boy raised in an evangelical church with no appreciation of relics.

I certainly knew about the existence of IOCC, that it was a charitable organization, but I had no sense of the professionalism, the competence of its staff. They have to know the people, geography, politics, history, bureaucracy. And you definitely know that they took great risks getting aid to people during the war.

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? Does it speak to foolhardiness or to tremendous courage? I cannot imagine living as a minority in a place where you do not feel safe.

It certainly made me much more appreciative of my situation in America, and that prayer where we ask God to preserve the authorities so that we may lead a godly life. Here in America we have the peace and security that Christians have been praying for, but do we use it to deepen our understanding of the faith, or to practice it more diligently?

The Study Tour has made Orthodoxy more concrete for me. You just won't get it from books the way you do when you are standing on that soil and you see east meeting west. I can feel and sense that this journey has deepened my vision and sense of Orthodoxy.

Father Paul Wesche is pastor of St. Herman Church (OCA) in Minneapolis, Minnesota.