



# INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES NEWS & NEEDS

SPECIAL ANTIOCHIAN CONVENTION EDITION • SUMMER 2014

## SYRIA'S REFUGEE CHILDREN FACE RISING RISK OF MALNUTRITION



photos by Ryan Erickson/IOCC

Shrouq is 8 months old, but no bigger than a newborn – only 7oz more than her birth weight of 6lbs, 10oz. The Syrian baby has struggled to thrive since her family fled Aleppo to find refuge in Lebanon. Her fragile condition at such an early age puts her health at grave risk, as the first 1,000 days of a child's life are the most critical period of development.

IOCC health workers found

Shrouq to be suffering from severe acute malnutrition and began treating her immediately with highly-enriched therapeutic food. With support from UNICEF, IOCC is working to screen 60,000 at-risk Syrian refugee children under the age of five, the most vulnerable age group. IOCC community health workers evaluate the health of refugee children by measuring the upper arm

**"These young children have so many odds against them living as refugees in the worst of conditions, and not being properly nourished only magnifies their suffering."**

*Linda Shaker-Barbari, IOCC Country Representative – Lebanon*

circumference using a small tape measure with green, yellow and red ranges. A child whose arm measures in the red range suffers from severe malnutrition.

The screenings and treatment are part of a larger effort by IOCC, a member of the ACT Alliance, to ensure the health and well-being of Syria's youngest refugees. Community educators are working in Syrian refugee settlements to teach mothers about the importance of nutrition and encourage breastfeeding practices in times of emergency.



**IOCC has already identified more than 400 malnourished children in the nearly 23,000 they have screened, and is providing a treatment of specially formulated foods to improve their condition.**



## A COMMUNITY OASIS IN TROUBLED WEST BANK

Three days a week, a small group of elderly village women in loose fitting garb shuffle into the stretching class for seniors at Taybeh Community Center. The rest of the week the space is used for everything from daycare to dance classes. Lifelong Taybeh resident and center director, Abeer, 43, calls the multi-purpose facility built and equipped by IOCC an “oasis” in the West Bank village of Taybeh, about 20 miles outside of Jerusalem.

Taybeh is the last all-Christian community in a Muslim-dominated region. About 1,300 Christians still reside in this sacred place where Christ spent his final days, but the numbers continue to dwindle. A lack of employment and unrelenting political tension has driven many of the Orthodox Christian youth to emigrate in search of peace and prosperity.



Or-Ben Shabat/IOCC

Abeer calls the Taybeh community center a lifeline for those who struggle to survive in isolation amid security roadblocks and restricted access to water. “IOCC helped us to reach this point to

succeed,” she says. “Every person has benefited from IOCC’s project in some way.” Through your support of IOCC, the center has helped provide a welcome respite in a hostile environment.

## HEALING THE HIDDEN SCARS OF DISPLACED SYRIANS



Jennifer Romanos/IOCC

Recognizing the importance of addressing not only the physical but also the psychological needs of young and old during the Syrian conflict, IOCC and its church partner in Syria, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East (GOPA), are providing trauma counseling to more than 2,500 displaced and vulnerable Syrian people.

Families take part in a four-day retreat where children and the parents engage in separate activities in a safe environment. Children’s activities such as puppet making, drawing and drama are designed to help the youngsters rebuild their communication and interaction skills along with confidence and trust. The children are also encouraged to strengthen their connections with people, and to develop a stronger sense of self and community. Adult participants are taken through activities that provide them with the necessary tools to cope with their own stress as well as the emotional needs of their children, and to help rebuild self-confidence.

International Orthodox Christian Charities, Inc. (IOCC) is the official humanitarian aid agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America.

*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.*



This special edition of *News & Needs* is edited by Mark Hodde and Rada Tierney.



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## COMMUNITY KITCHEN NOURISHES SYRIAN REFUGEE FAMILIES



Ryan Erickson/IOCC

Six mornings a week, three Lebanese women and two Syrian refugee women work side by side in the Akkar community kitchen to prepare hot meals for 240 Syrian refugee families scattered across northern Lebanon. The cooks ladle the hot soups or stews into more than 100 covered metal pots which will be delivered by van to Syrian refugee families in Miniara.

Most of the refugee families who

receive the hot meals don't have kitchens or the means to buy ingredients needed to make nutritious meals. To help stave off the threat of malnutrition among the refugees, IOCC equipped the community kitchen and trained the women hired as cooks to prepare meals in large quantities. IOCC nutrition experts oversee the daily menu to ensure a balanced diet for the refugees.

Amid the bustle, Samar, 40, a

Syrian refugee who fled Homs eight months ago with her husband and six children, reflects on her life now. "We had a decent life in Homs, but then war came and took everything." The community kitchen not only helps nourish Samar's children, the wages she receives for working there also help sustain the family with desperately needed income. Samar's Lebanese coworker, Zeina, 40, understands her pain all too well.

**"We endured war for 30 years here in Lebanon. I know what they are going through, and I want to help. I want them to have hope and not lose faith in humanity."**

*Zeina, Lebanese cook*

Zeina's hospitality and empathy are vital to the well-being of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The kitchen helps reduce the burden shouldered by thousands of Lebanese families whose communities have been hosting Syrian refugees since the civil conflict began three years ago.

## A PLACE TO CALL HOME AGAIN

Barbara, 70, spent more than 40 years creating a comfortable home in the coastal town of Brick, New Jersey, for her family. It took only a few minutes in October 2012 for surging waters from Superstorm Sandy to flood her modest bungalow and obliterate a lifetime of hard work and treasured belongings.

Her neighbor John, 80, a retired naval seaman, barely escaped his home. Volunteers working as part of IOCC "Orthodox Action Teams" assisted Sandy survivors like Barbara and John in rebuilding their storm-damaged homes. "I am so thankful for the help of good people like IOCC," said Barbara. "They helped put a roof back over my head," added John. For information on how you can join an Orthodox Action Team this summer, visit: [iocc.org/actionteams](http://iocc.org/actionteams).



**• SINCE 2005 •  
800 IOCC VOLUNTEERS  
30,000 MAN HOURS  
169 FAMILY HOMES  
REBUILT OR REPAIRED**

Christina Meares/IOCC

# IOCC ASSISTS DISPLACED SYRIANS FLEEING EMBATTLED KASSAB

Intense fighting in Kassab, a predominantly Armenian Christian town in northwestern Syria, forced hundreds of families to flee for their lives to Lattakia 36 miles away. Working from their office in Lattakia, IOCC and church partner, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East (GOPA) responded to the most urgent needs of the families, many of whom have been displaced multiple times.

An IOCC/GOPA rapid response team provided 720 displaced families with emergency shelter at a local school and basic necessities such as hygiene kits, bedding, clothing, diapers and kitchen sets. The shelter continues as a school by day,



Rasha Kabaj/IOCC

and IOCC/GOPA is helping displaced school children stay on track with school supplies, tutoring and remedial classes

taught by teachers displaced from Kassab.

"I don't have anything to depend on to survive," said Santic, a woman who fled Kassab and is now living at the school shelter. "Without your help I could be sleeping in the street." IOCC, an ACT Alliance member, is also providing 100 displaced Syrians like Santic with trauma counseling to help them cope with the stress and uncertainty of being uprooted repeatedly.

More than six million people have been displaced by the civil war in Syria over the past three years. IOCC/GOPA is among a very few humanitarian organizations working inside Syria to aid families living in some of the most volatile regions.

**Since 2012, nearly 1.5 million displaced Syrian people and those living as refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Armenia have received humanitarian assistance from IOCC. The generous annual support of the Order of St. Ignatius makes it possible for IOCC to reach the world's most vulnerable with critical, lifesaving assistance in their time of greatest need.**



**Scan here  
for more about  
IOCC's response  
in Syria.**