



INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES NEWS & NEEDS

SPECIAL ANTIOCHIAN CONVENTION EDITION • SUMMER 2016

IOCC PROVIDING SYRIANS ACCESS TO CRITICAL HEALTH SERVICES

IOCC, together with the Department of Ecumenical Relations and Development (DERD), the humanitarian arm of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, is responding to the urgent need for medical aid in Syria due to ongoing violence from five years of civil war.

Alaa, a 25-year-old shopkeeper, credits IOCC/DERD for saving his life after he suffered the loss of an eye and serious internal injuries when his shop was hit during an attack. "My injuries were bad and life-threatening," said Alaa. "Though I lost one eye it could be worse if you didn't help me quickly with surgery."

With less than half of the country's hospitals still functioning and Syria's public health system severely crippled due to the conflict, the lack of access to immediate or proper treatment is emerging as a leading cause of life-altering disabilities. The situation is especially dire in cities such as Hasakeh and Homs where none of the public hospitals are operational. Those that remain open in other parts of the country are overburdened and often have to reject people in need of urgent care. IOCC/DERD is addressing the growing crisis with lifesaving and disability-preventing surgeries for thousands of Syrian war victims like Alaa.



Rasha Kaba/IOCC



Rasha Kaba/IOCC

In addition to providing critical surgeries, IOCC/DERD is also offering medical support for expectant mothers, medicine for cancer and chronic illnesses, and equipping local hospitals with specialized medical equipment needed to carry out critical lifesaving treatments. IOCC supports one of the largest established networks to deliver life-saving humanitarian aid inside Syria where more than 12.2 million people are in need of assistance, 7.6 million of which are internally displaced. Since 2012, IOCC has provided relief to four million people affected by the crisis.



Ramzi Haider/IOCC

ASSYRIAN CHILDREN BEAR SCARS OF WAR, FACE NEW CHALLENGES IN EXILE

Desperate to flee violence surrounding his village near Hasakeh, Charbel, 14, remembers how frightened he was when his family barely escaped their home before they saw it destroyed by their attackers. Cynthia, 9, lived through similar terror when she and her parents were forced to leave their home in the village of Tel Arbosh at dawn as the sounds of shooting could be heard in the distance. Cynthia says she feels safe in Lebanon, but misses her school and friends in Syria.

Assyrian Christians, an ethnic minority group who speak a modern form of the Aramaic language spoken by Jesus, are being forced out of lands they have occupied for millennia. More than 1,000 Assyrian families from Syria have found safety behind Lebanon's borders after being targeted in attacks on villages stretching along the Khabour River.

In Iraq, hundreds of Assyrian Christian families have faced similar suffering and sought refuge in Lebanon. Now the refugee parents struggle to provide for their children. IOCC is responding to their urgent humanitarian needs with food, housing assistance and education support.

More than 100 refugee children are able to continue their education at a local Assyrian school through IOCC tuition support, but they face new challenges in the classroom. The school's administrator says that teachers are voluntarily putting in longer hours to help the refugee students catch up to their Lebanese classmates. "We need to help them or they will be out in the streets," said Maroun Marokel, director of St. George Assyrian School. "They are all of our children, and we must care for them and their future. IOCC's support has made it possible for us to help our children learn."

International Orthodox Christian Charities, Inc. (IOCC) is the official humanitarian relief agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of 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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HOPE SPRINGS FROM SAFE WATER FOR FAMILIES IN LEBANON

Syrian refugee children living in makeshift camps across Lebanon face a daily risk of getting sick each time they take a drink of water. Unsafe water sources create an ideal breeding ground for waterborne diseases. IOCC is improving the access to safe water for more than 4,000 refugee children and their families at two informal settlements in Lebanon.

The project provides new water wells and pumps, storage tanks, and pipelines to channel clean water to communal kitchens, showers and latrines constructed by IOCC. In addition, newly installed sanitation systems serve the needs of both the camps and the neighboring communities of Lebanese residents.



Sam Tarding

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN VOLUNTEERS SERVE THEIR NEIGHBORS IN ST. LOUIS



Rebecca Turner/IOCC

With support from IOCC, Orthodox Christian parishes from greater St. Louis responded to the needs of their neighbors by helping clean out homes damaged from record-setting flooding last winter. Parishioners of all ages from three churches in Missouri and Illinois came together to help muck out and clear debris from some of the more than 4,000 homes affected by the flooding. “The damage in the neighborhood where we were working was catastrophic,” recounted Fr. Anastasios Theodoropoulos of Assumption Greek Orthodox Church, whose young adult group held an IOCC Saturday of Service in January. “The family we helped was grateful for our

assistance, as it took us, along with another dozen or so volunteers from another Christian group, an entire day to pull out their destroyed belongings, carpets, drywall and even the ceiling.”

Kara, a high school sophomore, was one of the parishioners who participated along with her parents. “I think that it’s really important to help our neighbor, especially in the wake of natural disasters. Being able to be here and meet those whose homes were destroyed makes me realize that real lives are affected, and we need to help.” Support for community-based outreach by Orthodox Christians like the Saturday of Service in St. Louis is part of IOCC’s national Orthodox Community Action Network (Orthodox CAN!), a movement to promote volunteerism across all age groups.

IOCC PROJECT OPENS DOORS TO JOBS AND HOPE IN GAZA

Growing up in Gaza, Sami, 24, was driven to ease the suffering of others. He pursued that dream by attending nursing school, and graduated with honors. Harsh reality set in as he was unable to find a nursing job or a way to support his wife and two young daughters. Sami even volunteered long hours at public hospitals hoping that doing so would lead to work, but the hospitals weren't hiring.

Nine years of living under a strict blockade has crippled Gaza's economy. The lack of jobs has created widespread poverty and overwhelmed community service agencies. More than 80 percent of Gazans rely on assistance to survive. IOCC is working to reduce the rising unemployment and ease the burden on understaffed service organizations in Gaza by creating short-term job opportunities for Gaza's college graduates. The program has paired 210 recent graduates with paid positions at 30 grassroots organizations that serve the educational, health, agricultural, and community rehabilitation needs of Gaza's people.

Sami now works as a community health nurse in his hometown of Khan Younis, treating children with malnutrition and teaching parents how to improve their children's health. "Having a job that matches my field of study and generates an income to support my family while I serve the community is a great feeling," stated Sami. IOCC has been providing humanitarian assistance in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza since 1997, working to help improve the lives of the region's most vulnerable people in times of conflict and increased isolation.



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Dimitrie Djurke/IOCC

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