

# NEWS & NEEDS

SPECIAL ANTIOCHIAN CONVENTION EDITION

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## *Historic Primary School in Homs is Restored*

After suffering massive damages due to ongoing fighting, a primary school re-opened its doors with the support of IOCC and its partner, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, Department of Ecumenical Relations and Development (GOPA-DERD.)

His Eminence Metropolitan Georges of Homs said: “This school is considered an old and historic institution dating back 125 years, and it’s considered as one of the most important church facilities in Homs. As such, the church has a role in rebuilding the community and educating future generations.

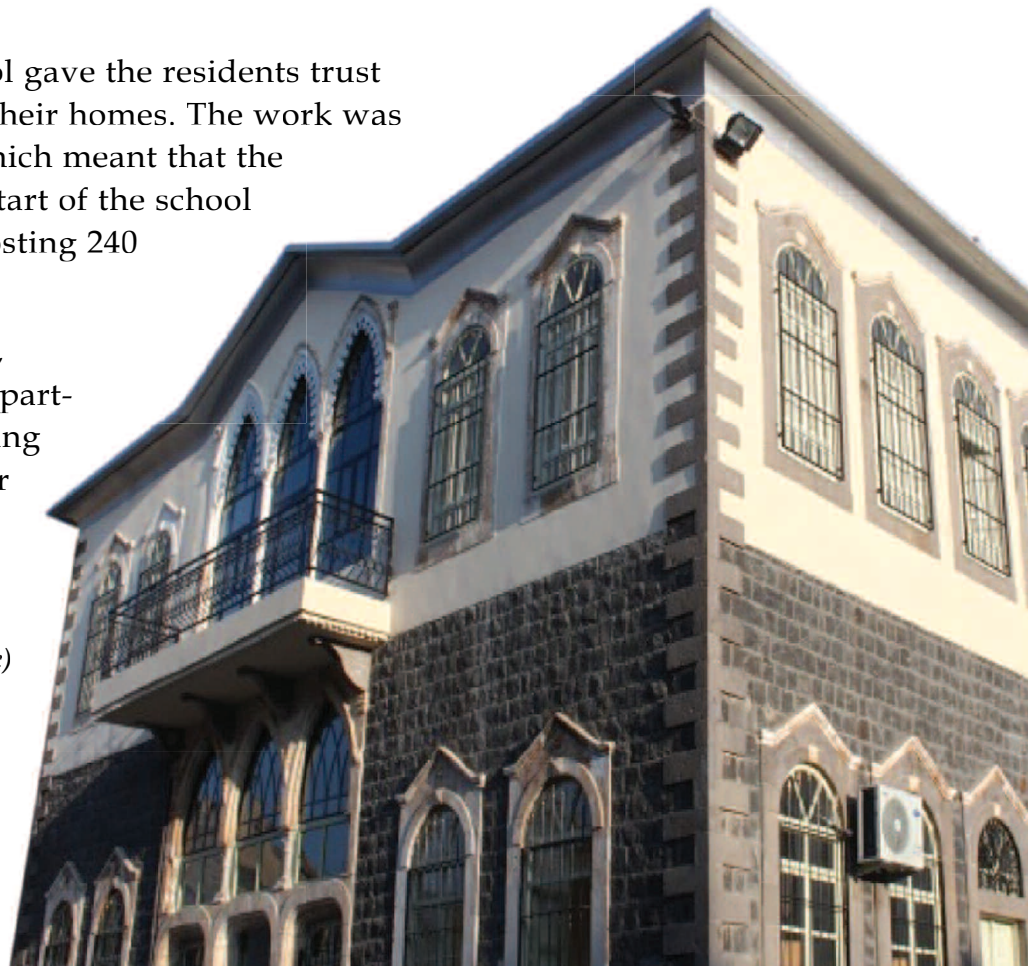
“The school has severely suffered from the ongoing conflict. The roof and school building were damaged from the shelling, preventing students from attending classes. Rehabilitation work was necessary.”

He continued, “Restoring the school gave the residents trust and encouraged them to return to their homes. The work was completed within three months, which meant that the building was complete before the start of the school year. The primary school is now hosting 240 students in primary grades.”

Alongside the school rehabilitation, IOCC/GOPA-DERD restored 160 apartments in the surrounding area, giving families the ability to return to their homes. “I thank everyone who participated in this important work,” said Metropolitan Georges.

*(story continued on back page)*

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## EMERGENCY RESPONSE FOR DISPLACED PEOPLE IN MHARDEH VILLAGE, SYRIA

The village of Mhardeh, Syria has the highest concentration of Orthodox Christians in the modern-day Middle East region.

After an increase in violence in March 2017, approximately 10,000 residents – mostly women, children and elderly – left the village. An additional 40,000 in the surrounding villages were abruptly displaced. They now live in community shelters or with host families, but lack resources to purchase basic items such as food and other essentials.

To help these communities, IOCC, through its partner, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, Department of Ecumenical Relations and Development (GOPA-DERD), directed resources to meet the immediate humanitarian needs in Mhardeh. Significant gaps remained, especially in food and other essential supplies. But through the generosity of IOCC co-founder and former Chairman of the Board Mr. Charles Ajalat and his wife, Marilee, IOCC and GOPA-DERD received additional funds for hygiene kits, mattresses, and food items such as rice, beans, bulgur, lentils and cheese. In order to help support the local economy while also helping the displaced to live with greater comfort, all items will be purchased from local vendors and then distributed to those in need.

The needs of the people of Mhardeh are indicative of the plight of millions of Syrians who have been displaced internally within the country. Since 2012, IOCC and GOPA-DERD maintain one of the largest networks inside of Syria to assist those who have been displaced across the country.



### SEEDS *of* HOPE

With a planned gift to IOCC, your legacy can ensure that those in need learn how to grow food for their families and communities in a sustainable manner.

For more information, please contact IOCC's Director of Development at (877) 803-4622.

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[iocc.org/plannedgiving](http://iocc.org/plannedgiving)

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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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## ORTHODOX ACTION TEAMS JOIN IN HELPING NEIGHBORS

The first IOCC Action Team of 2017 gathered in Mandeville, Louisiana for the Fourth Annual Seminarian Home Build. Ten seminarians representing Holy Cross, St. Vladimir's, St. Tikhon's, and Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminaries participated. The team was led by IOCC Frontliner Dn. Dan Gray, with Fr. Mark Vair from St. Ephraim Antiochian Orthodox Church in San Antonio acting as the Spiritual Advisor. Action Teams, one component of IOCC's US program, promote Orthodox volunteerism to help people rebuild and recover after natural disaster. Since the IOCC Action Team Program was formed in 2005, over 235 homes have been built by Orthodox seminarians and lay volunteers.

*Please visit [iocc.org/US](http://iocc.org/US) for more information on volunteer opportunities in your area.*

## IOCC AND GOPA-DERD REBUILD COMMUNAL SHELTERS FOR DISPLACED PEOPLE

IOCC and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, Department of Ecumenical Relations and Development (GOPA-DERD) continue to rebuild communal shelters and apartments for displaced people in Homs, Latakia, Dara'a, and al Hassakeh. Since 2016, over 35 shelters and over 200 apartments have been rehabilitated, including repairs to destroyed buildings, improved electrical wiring, and dividing open spaces into smaller rooms to accommodate more people.

*Here is an example of a before-and-after:*



*Before*



*After*



# HISTORIC PRIMARY SCHOOL IN HOMS IS RESTORED *(Cont'd from page 1)*



One school teacher, Rania, said: “I’ve taught in the school for 20 years; however, three years ago, we were forced to leave the neighborhood and move to the surrounding villages. Today, the school is back and [IOCC/GOPA-DERD] also helped us to repair our house.

“I’m so happy to see the school

now completed; no one believed that the school could be repaired in three months, as the damage was severe. The rehabilitation work played a big role in encouraging the families to return to the neighborhood. This school is over 100 years old and has a great history. Everybody trusts the education level that is provided here.”

She added: “I couldn’t manage to find any work opportunity after we fled from Homs. Now I’m back to my work, which was a big relief.”

A parent, Tariq, who recently returned to the neighborhood, said: “We had to flee from our neighborhood due to the conflict three years ago. When I heard that the school was restored, I decided



to return so my children could continue their studies. We used to live in a rented house and suffered from the high living costs because of the children’s school, but today with this primary school in the neighborhood, we were able to go back and save the money that we used to pay on rent towards more important things for our children.”

He added: “We didn’t believe that it would be possible to rehab in such a short time due to the severe damage in it. The rehabilitation team did great work.”

“My daughter used to study in the school before we had to flee the neighborhood and now she is happy to be back.”

*\*names have been changed to protect beneficiaries’ privacy*

