

GREAT LENT

Service as Almsgiving



INTERNATIONAL
ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
CHARITIES

Weekly
Spiritual Reflections

Service as Almsgiving *The Work of Love*

“The one who loves God cannot help but love also every man as himself ... The one who loves God surely loves his neighbor as well.” –St. Maximus the Confessor, Four Hundred Texts on Love

His Eminence Metropolitan Nicolae
Romanian Orthodox Metropolia
of the Americas & Liaison Bishop
to IOCC from the Assembly
of Canonical Orthodox Bishops
of the United States of America

St. Maximus the Confessor teaches that we find God as we comprehend His love for us and learn to love each other. Because God loves us, we can—indeed, we must—love others. And “the work of love,” the saint writes, “is the deliberate doing of good to one’s neighbor.”

IOCC’s mission to serve persons in great need, without discrimination, reflects

this idea. This service is an expression of Christ’s love for all humankind; here, the work of love is caring for the physical and emotional needs of people who have survived disaster or who face adversity, offering hope for renewed life amid hardship.

During Great Lent, we trace the path of Christ to the Cross and, ultimately, Resurrection. At the same time, as we journey through this holy season, we do the work of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. If service is a form of almsgiving, then this, too, is the work of love.

In these pages, staff members of IOCC consider the service that they offer daily as they live their vocation. I invite you to consider ways that their service is also yours, as well as ways that you might do the work of love in relation to your neighbors, near and far.

Let us keep always before us the example of Christ, who washed His disciples’ feet and completed the ultimate work of love, trampling down death by death and bestowing life.





Sunday of Orthodoxy

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

*We venerate Your most pure image,
O Good One, and ask forgiveness
of our transgressions, O Christ God.
—Troparion of the Feast*

Susanna Amend

Donor Services Coordinator

Service to me means working for the Kingdom of God whenever and wherever I am needed. My role as a servant is ever changing, always challenging, and forever rewarding. Service at its best always points to God. So many times I have seen faith restored by simple acts of service for those who feel they've been forgotten, tossed away, or who've lost all hope.

Service can range from directing a group of volunteers preparing dinners for a homeless shelter, to visiting a prisoner in jail in order to encourage them in their new discovery of Christ, to bending down and helping an elderly person tie their shoes. Service comes in all shapes and sizes. One of my favorite modes of service is finding a neighbor or fellow parishioner in need and secretly leaving gifts for them of groceries, children's clothing, or gift cards.

Having the opportunity to serve the Orthodox Church, its people, and those in crisis around the world by working at IOCC epitomizes one of the greatest blessings I could ever receive. My position with IOCC allows me to do my heart's calling in my own small way.

Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

*“O Gregory the Miracle Worker, ...
preacher of grace, intercede forever
that our souls may be saved.”
—Apolytikion of St. Gregory Palamas*

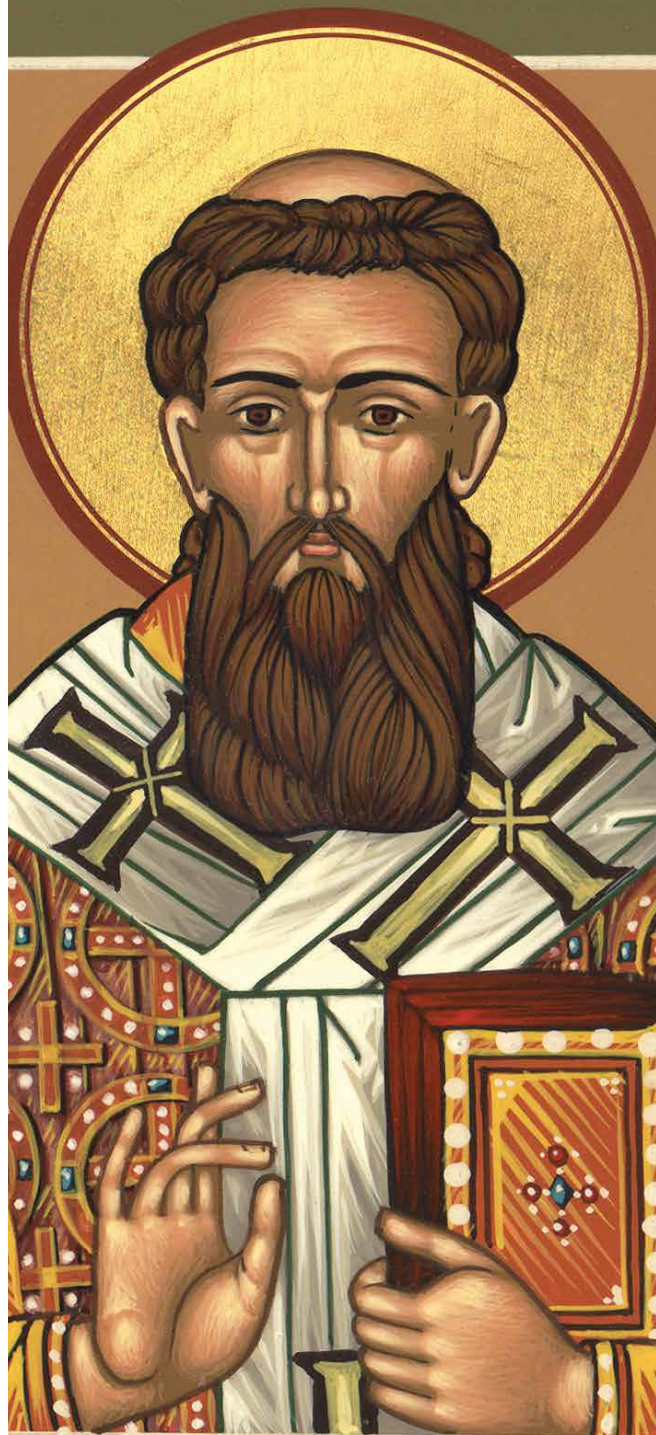
Nenad Prelević

Regional Representative
for the Western Balkans

A young man once came to work for IOCC from a simple peasant family. He knew what it was to be poor and was determined to help others. He thought, “I’ll visit isolated areas, delivering assistance. I’ll be the one to bring strength and hope to those we’re helping.” Together with his brothers and sisters at IOCC, he worked hard to respond to the call of our Lord Jesus Christ and to support the work of our Church.

That man was me. Now, 20 years later, many good things have been accomplished; we’ve helped so many. I look back and see how blessed I’ve been to be a part of a team of honorable people dedicated to sharing God’s gifts with those in need.

The journey still goes on. Only, I was wrong to think that I would be bringing strength to others. The fact is, the people we help give me strength to do this work. Every time I visit a new place, a new family, I find more motivation from the people we serve. Even in 100 years, I could never thank them enough for such a gift. None of us can.



ST GREGORY PALAMAS



Sunday of the Holy Cross

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

*The sting of death and the victory
of hell have been vanquished; for You,
O my Savior, ... cried to those in hell:
"Enter again into paradise."
—Kontakion of the Feast*

Haregewoin Mamo Desta

Ethiopia Country Representative

I was living abroad in the mid-1980s, when there was a terrible famine in my home country, Ethiopia. My dad worked for the UN's World Food Program, and we lived in Haiti and Jamaica while I was in high school. During that time, I saw two things.

First, we would watch television and see thousands of people suffering in Ethiopia—I remember feeling like I wanted to be part of a solution, one of the people doing something about it. It's part of why I studied agriculture at university.

Second, sometimes we'd drive around neighborhoods in Haiti, and my dad would explain that people in this or that area really needed food assistance. Part of his work in Jamaica was a school-feeding project, and he told us how providing breakfast for kids helped to keep them in school because they knew they could get a meal there.

So as a teenager, I dreamed of a career that would help people. I don't know where I'd be without this kind of work. I feel that I'm blessed to serve other people and see the changes in their lives. I see it on their faces every day.



Sunday of St. John of the Ladder

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

*You offer the teachings of your
God-given book, O wise John,
most blessed, ... for it is a ladder
from the earth unto Heaven that confers
glory on the souls that ascend it.
—Kontakion of the Feast*

Christina Meares

Manager of Outreach, Special Events,
and Donor Engagement

Growing up, I was involved in every aspect of Church life – youth groups, choir, oratorical contests – but it wasn't until I was 16 and attended an Orthodox summer camp in Greece that I felt a true connection to my faith. It was the first time I'd experienced Orthodoxy in a broader context, outside of my home parish. We venerated saints, visited magnificent cathedrals, and walked in the footsteps of the Apostles throughout Greece. I met faithful young adults from across the country who'd chosen to dedicate their life to the Church, living the faith as their profession, and it inspired me to explore that path for my future.

When I think about service, I think about making a deliberate choice to live out a vocation that not only serves the Church but also helps others in a world that seems overwhelmed by wars, famines, and natural disasters. IOCC's mission gives me the opportunity to serve Christ and others in a practical and concrete way: even if it sometimes feels like a drop in the bucket, I know I'm making a difference.



Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

In you the image was preserved with exactness, O Mother, for taking up your cross, you did follow Christ, and by your deeds you did teach us ... to attend to the soul.

—Apolytikion of the Saint

Gregory Manzuk

Safety and Security Manager

In my years at IOCC, I've personally met scores of people whose world has fallen apart—through natural disasters and through disasters made by man. Family, home, job, savings, pension—all just gone. Sometimes, it hit them literally overnight. Others saw it coming but were unable to prevent it. They've survived losses

and worries that only a very few of us in United States have ever experienced. Some are gentle and kind. Some are completely disconnected. Some are looking for someone to blame. Some are searching for hope.

"I will show you my faith by my works," wrote the Apostle James. Being a Christian requires that we do something. This brings challenges, whether you're working to keep family and friends and parish together or working with IOCC on behalf of people you don't know and who may never have personally encountered a Christian, ever.

What we do as Christians—our actions that reflect our faith—can offer real help and hope to people in places where needs are great. That may be in our home or parish, or it may be around the world. Our actions in service to others reveal our hope in Christ and His Resurrection.

Palm Sunday

SIXTH SUNDAY OF LENT

*Hosanna! Blessed is He who
comes in the name of the Lord!*
— John 12:13

Mary Catherine Huneycutt
Grants Coordinator for Syria

For me, service is set apart by the connotation that both those serving and those being served benefit.

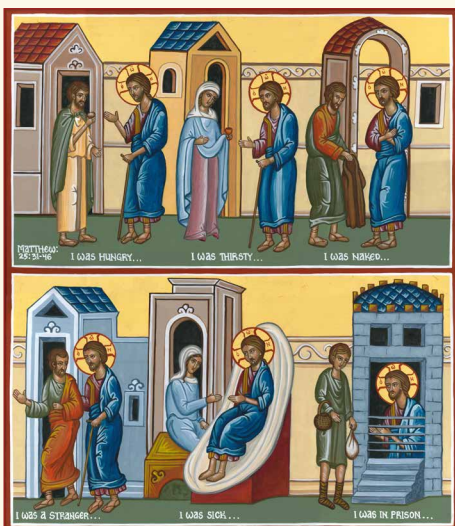
Service can be a smile, a favor, a hygiene kit, a hot meal, advice—I feel inclined to serve others because the word itself cannot

be defined by one single thing. A simple thank you in another language, or a child showing you their school books and telling you their story—this is their service to you.

Service is sharing Christ's love through actions. Service is not only visiting the sick or clothing the poor, but also giving them your time.

Working with IOCC affirms my calling to service daily, as our work is rooted in making sure those hot meals are provided and people are cared for and clothed. Through service, we can each find a way to share Christ's love, peace, and compassion, daily.





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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