



— Office of the Secretariat —

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

— 1 John 4:11

To the Most Reverend Clergy, Venerable Monastics, and
Devout Faithful of the Holy Orthodox Churches in the United States:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Each Sunday before Thanksgiving, Orthodox faithful in the United States give thanks to God for His many blessings and for the privilege of serving Christ by serving others. The Assembly of Bishops has designated this Sunday to mark the ministry of International Orthodox Christian Charities, or IOCC, whose mission is to serve people in need worldwide.

In a year when we have been unable to gather as we normally do in our parishes, when so many have been touched by heartache, anxiety, isolation, and a deep disruption of our lives, the challenges we face are perhaps a reminder of how firmly we must hold to our faith. In the midst of uncertainty, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We remain His Church, and He calls us to love and service.

This is IOCC’s work. As the humanitarian and development agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States, IOCC is a way for Orthodox Christians to extend to others the great mercy that Christ shows each of us. Since it began in 1992, IOCC has served people facing war, famine, natural disasters, and economic hardship so that they may have the means to live with dignity, respect, and hope. And the work continues, even amid a global pandemic.

In fact, here in the United States, IOCC has created its Care Calls program as a response to the pandemic: a way for each one of us to reach out to and connect with others, who may be struggling, offering the love of Christ in a trying, stressful time. At a moment when many of us are isolated, IOCC reminds us that we must care for each other, in great and small ways.

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With the generous gifts of people like you, IOCC works tirelessly amid crisis, offering practical assistance as communities near and far build resilience. Cleanup after US disasters; nutritious meals for preschoolers in Gaza; counseling for Syrian families who have survived unspeakable trauma; training to help small businesses in Greece flourish; a new science lab at a rural Church-run school in Uganda; hot meals after the devastating explosion in Lebanon's capital; training so farmers in Georgia can sell more at market and feed their families – these are only a few examples of the service IOCC offers in the spirit of Christ's love.

As an agency of the Assembly, IOCC belongs to all Orthodox Christians, reflecting our shared calling to serve Christ by serving others. St. John asks us to love one another because we know God's love for us: with IOCC, we can do precisely that, remembering the incarnate Lord's request that we feed, clothe, and serve one another for His sake. As we thank God for His blessings, seen and unseen, let us also give as we are able to serve our brethren in need.

May the Lord shine His mercy upon you and your families this blessed Nativity season, and may His peace fill your homes and your hearts!

With paternal blessings and love in Christ,

+Metropolitan NICOLAE of the
Romanian Orthodox Metropolia of the Americas
*Liaison for IOCC from the Assembly of Canonical
Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America*