



A Recipe for Success

Microloans Grow a Restaurant Business in Greece

Manolis is a young business owner from Greece and father to a 10-year-old boy. While he holds degrees in both financial sciences and psychology, his true passion is cooking. Manolis trained at several culinary schools in Europe, where he then found work as a chef in fine hotels and restaurants.

Manolis, however, missed his native Greece. He returned to his hometown in the Thessaly region, along with his son, where he rented a tiny kitchen to develop minimally processed, nutritious food. Along with two employees, he crafted a menu specifically tailored to dietary needs, including organic, vegan, gluten-free, dairy-free, and sugar-free foods.

Over the next two years, Manolis ran headfirst into the difficulties of starting and running a small business—especially in a troubled Greek economy. He didn't even take a salary at the time. "Sometimes," Manolis said, "I thought about quitting. Although the products are healthy... they were difficult to promote, and expenses kept rising."

Then he heard about a community program that supports small businesses and microenterprises through IOCC and local partner, Apostoli. Through this program, Manolis was able to receive specialized equipment to help boost production, including an industrial blender and commercial oven capable of baking, steaming, and dehydrating several kinds of food.



Manolis's business is one of more than 175 in Greece that have participated in IOCC's microloan program.

Using his new equipment, Manolis increased his productivity and even created a new product line. His reputation grew. Then one day a customer visited town and tasted Manolis's delicious food. "He was so impressed," Manolis recalled, "that he proposed investing in my business. I worked harder and harder, and with his investment we created a fully equipped laboratory ... [even] extending our sales abroad."

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Friends,

At the start of each new year, I reflect on the blessings of the previous one – and I count you among them. In 2024, both in the US and abroad, our world faced tragic events, and by God’s grace and your support, IOCC was able to bring relief and hope to many of the affected people and communities.

When extraordinary circumstances arose, you responded with extraordinary faith and generosity – including helping us to reach our \$1 million fundraising goal to help those affected by Hurricanes Helene and Milton – and for that the team at IOCC is extremely grateful. In this issue of *News & Needs*, you’ll read about the impact of your gifts in Greece, Gaza, and here in the US.

These are just a few of the stories of people whose lives you have helped to change. Looking ahead to 2025, we have the opportunity to provide hope and support to more people like Jana and Manolis. Together, we will continue bringing the love of Christ to wherever it is needed most.

Thank you for your support and faith.

Yours in Christ,

Constantine M. Triantafilou
Executive Director & CEO

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Manolis expressed his gratitude, saying, “IOCC’s assistance during a difficult time helped me continue my work creating nutritious products for individuals with special dietary requirements and needs.”

His success story is just one of many. Working closely with the Apostoli since 2015, IOCC has helped more than 175 microbusinesses and agricultural associations throughout Greece with over \$2 million invested in new production equipment, technical services, and business mentoring – improving productivity and profitability, and helping them become sustainable employers in their communities.



New, specialized equipment allowed Manolis to increase production and create a new product line.

Hope and Health for a Displaced Family

Bringing Critical Aid to Gaza

Jana (not her real name), a young girl living in Gaza, had her life take a dramatic turn when conflict forced her family to flee their home. They suddenly found themselves living in a tent, struggling to make ends meet.

“We had no source of income, limited access to proper nutrition, and no clothing other than what we wore,” Jana’s mother Salam recalled.

But hope emerged through IOCC and its partner, Al Amal Rehabilitation Society, who were able to reach displaced families with critical food supplies in Rafah. As a result, IOCC was able to provide Jana’s family with hot meals for 28 days.

This nourishment and assistance reinvigorated Jana’s family. Her father reflected, “Our children, especially Jana, are healthier and more active now.”

With Jana’s health and strength recovered, the family envisions a brighter future. Her father added, “We hope for increased access to nutritious food and the continuity of these projects. Above all, we wish for a secure and dignified livelihood, where we can provide for our children’s needs and give them the opportunities they deserve.”

IOCC has worked in the Holy Land since 1997, collaborating with the local Orthodox church and other partners. Since the conflict escalated



IOCC is helping to provide displaced families, like Jana’s, with critical food supplies.

in October 2023, IOCC has stayed in close communication with local partners, delivering emergency food, medical support, and critical supplies to families like Jana’s.

Share your Lenten recipes!

Email outreach@iocc.org to have your recipe considered for our Lenten series.

 **IOCC**[®]

International Orthodox Christian Charities, Inc. (IOCC), is the official humanitarian relief and development 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.



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IOCC staff and volunteers spent over 1,100 hours cleaning up homes for over 25 households.

Donors Provide Momentum for IOCC Hurricane Response



With \$1 Million in Support Raised So Far, Rebuilding Will Continue Through 2026.

On September 27, Hurricane Helene struck the southeastern US with devastating force causing catastrophic damage to homes, businesses, and communities. Immediately after the storm, IOCC field staff were on the ground conducting assessments to determine the most effective means of response.

As initial recovery work was underway in Tennessee, North Carolina, and Florida, tragically, less than two weeks later, Milton, a category 3 hurricane, made landfall in Florida causing storm surges, flooding, and tornados.

IOCC was able to quickly expand its response to the areas affected by Milton. To date, staff and volunteers have spent over 1,100 hours cleaning up and mucking out homes, as IOCC Frontliners provided emotional and spiritual care emotional and spiritual care to survivors, including to the Orthodox parish communities. IOCC also sent over 100 clean-up buckets to partners in Florida for additional help.

Cleanup and muck-out work will continue through March, at which point efforts shift to long-term recovery activities including home repairs, rebuilding, and continuing emotional care. As with most crises, emergency response is critical, but recovery requires extended commitment – and thanks to generous donor support, IOCC will be able to provide that assistance.

IOCC recently announced that it had met its initial \$1 million fundraising goal. US Country Representative Archdeacon Paul Zaharas shared, “The funds provided by IOCC’s donors make our recovery work possible, and give momentum to the ongoing hurricane relief efforts, which we’ve projected into 2026.”

Though an impressive benchmark has been reached, IOCC’s fundraising efforts continue so that more individuals and families may receive the help they truly need. Those wishing to aid in this effort, either through donation or volunteering, are welcome to visit iocc.org/hurricanes24 for more information.

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