06/06/2024

Archbishop Elpidophoros Archpastoral Address at the Archdiocesan District Servant Leadership Awards Banquet



Your Grace, Bishop Athenagoras of Nazianzen,

Your Grace Bishop Nektarios of Diokleia, Chancellor of our National Archdiocese,

Protopresbyter Elias Villis, Chancellor of the Archdiocesan District,

Larry Hatzoglou, Archdiocesan District Council Vice President,

Protopresbyter Nicholas Anctil and Christine Balidis,

Irene Hatzoglou – Archdiocesan District Philoptochos President

Protopresbyter Peter Orfanakos – President of the Archdiocesan District Clergy Syndesmos

Presvytera Diana Kazakis – Outgoing President of the Archdiocesan District Sisterhood of Presvyteres President,

Members of the Archdiocesan District Council,

Beloved Sisters of the Philoptochos,

Distinguished Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate,

Honored Members of Leadership 100,

Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers,

Tonight's Honorees,

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Lord,

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! Christ is Risen!

I am so delighted to be gathered with you again for the now annual Servant-Leader Banquet for the Archdiocesan District. Last year was such a success, a testimony to the involvement and the commitment of our laity and clergy to the spiritual prosperity of the District.

I want to thank the Co-Chairs of the evening, and especially thank the District Chancellor, Protopresbyter Elias, for the all the hard work that has gone into making the Servant-Leader model for our communities such an exemplary program. For it is only as we learn to serve, that we are fit to lead.

The Archdiocesan District has come a long way since I arrived on these shores five years ago. I remember having such positive first impressions of the parishes of the District, but the sense of cohesive and shared ministry was somewhat lacking.

Since that time, all of you have demonstrated leadership and devotion to others in ways that are truly admirable, and many of which we honor tonight. This is not an exercise in self-congratulation, but a lifting up of servants of the Lord, whose selfless offerings inspire others to be of service as well. This is true leadership.

Those we recognize this evening are being commended for their intentions and their examples. We note that there are members from all walks of Parish life: Stewards, Philoptochos and Parish Council Officers and Members, Community workers, Greek Education Teachers and Administrators, Choir Members and Chanters, and our Youth Workers and Youth Honorees.

Each of you brings a range of talents and dedication to the work of the Church, and the sheer variety of your contributions tells all of us something wonderful about our parishes – namely, that we are one family in Christ. Every member of any family brings their unique gifts to the work of the family, which is primarily to create a

space where love characterizes all the activities around which the family functions.

Well, we are a very large family! One that has all kinds of relationships, but one that is under the loving eye of our Heavenly Father. When we say the Lord's Prayer together, we all begin: Πάτερ ἡμῶν, Our Father. We are all in the same family – regardless of our origin, ethnicity, language, race, or any of the other qualities of human exigency by which we normally distinguish ourselves from one another.

I think this is a fundamental vocation for the Church – to teach and to preach the truly equal status that we all have before God. There may be distinctions in service and ministry, but there is never a division of one member of the Church from another. All of us are vitally important. Saint Paul highlights this reality – that we all belong – in his First Letter to the Corinthians, where he says;

The members may be many, but the body is one. How can the eye say to the hand, "I don't need you!" Or again, how can the head say to the feet, "I don't need you!" Rather, those members of the body that seem to be weaker are much more necessary.

Likewise, those members of the body which we deem less worthy of honor, we bestow upon them all the more honor.*

I have always loved how these verses orient the Church – not toward the powerful and the rich, but to those who might appear less important, but who are in fact the very backbone of each and every parish, and thereby of the Church of Christ.

Therefore, beloved Sisters and Brothers in our Risen Lord:

Let us celebrate this evening by acknowledging the contributions of everyone, and especially those we honor tonight. We all possess by grace the same Heavenly Father, and the same Holy Mother – our precious Orthodox Church. May we always cultivate the very best in our families – personal and parish – and recognize in each our profound connections to God.

Thank you, and may the Good Lord bless you all!

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη!

Photos: GOARCH/Dimitrios Panagos.

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