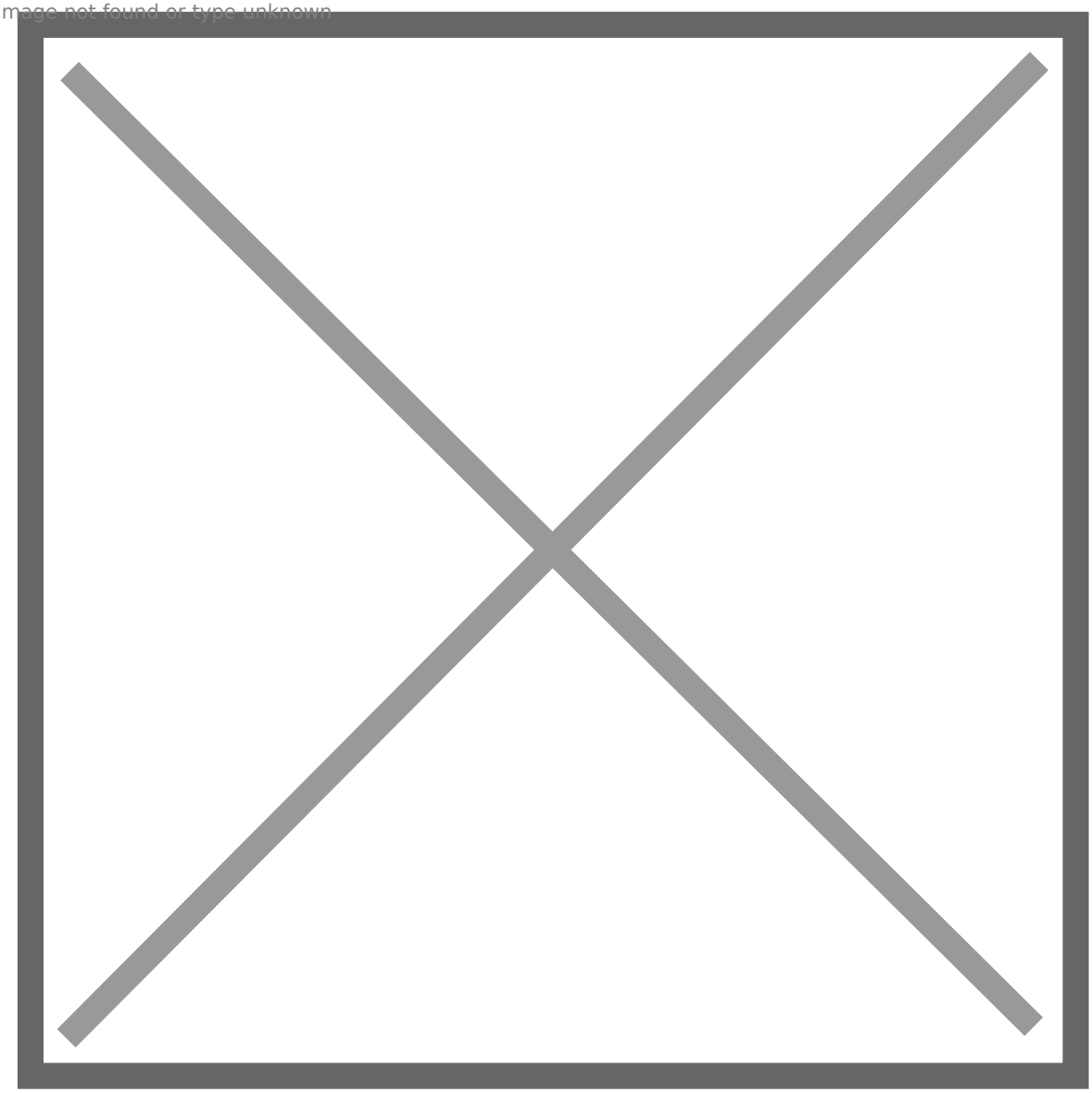
21/06/2024

Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine Hosts Juneteenth Ecumenical Prayer Service



NEW YORK, NY – On the occasion of Juneteenth, a national holiday commemorating the end of slavery in the USA, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America held an Ecumenical Prayer Service at Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine at Ground Zero in New York. Resurrected after the original St. Nicholas Church was destroyed on September 11, 2001, the Church stands as a reminder of the resilience of people of faith and welcomes visitors of all faiths. The beautiful and distinctive icon above the altar, “Platytera ton Ouranon” icon of the Virgin Mary arms with her arms widespread over New York City, embraces all people of all ethnicities, race, and religious backgrounds. Today, on June 19, 2024, this icon welcomed all who attended the Ecumenical Prayer Service, entitled, “Healing the Wounds of Slavery.”

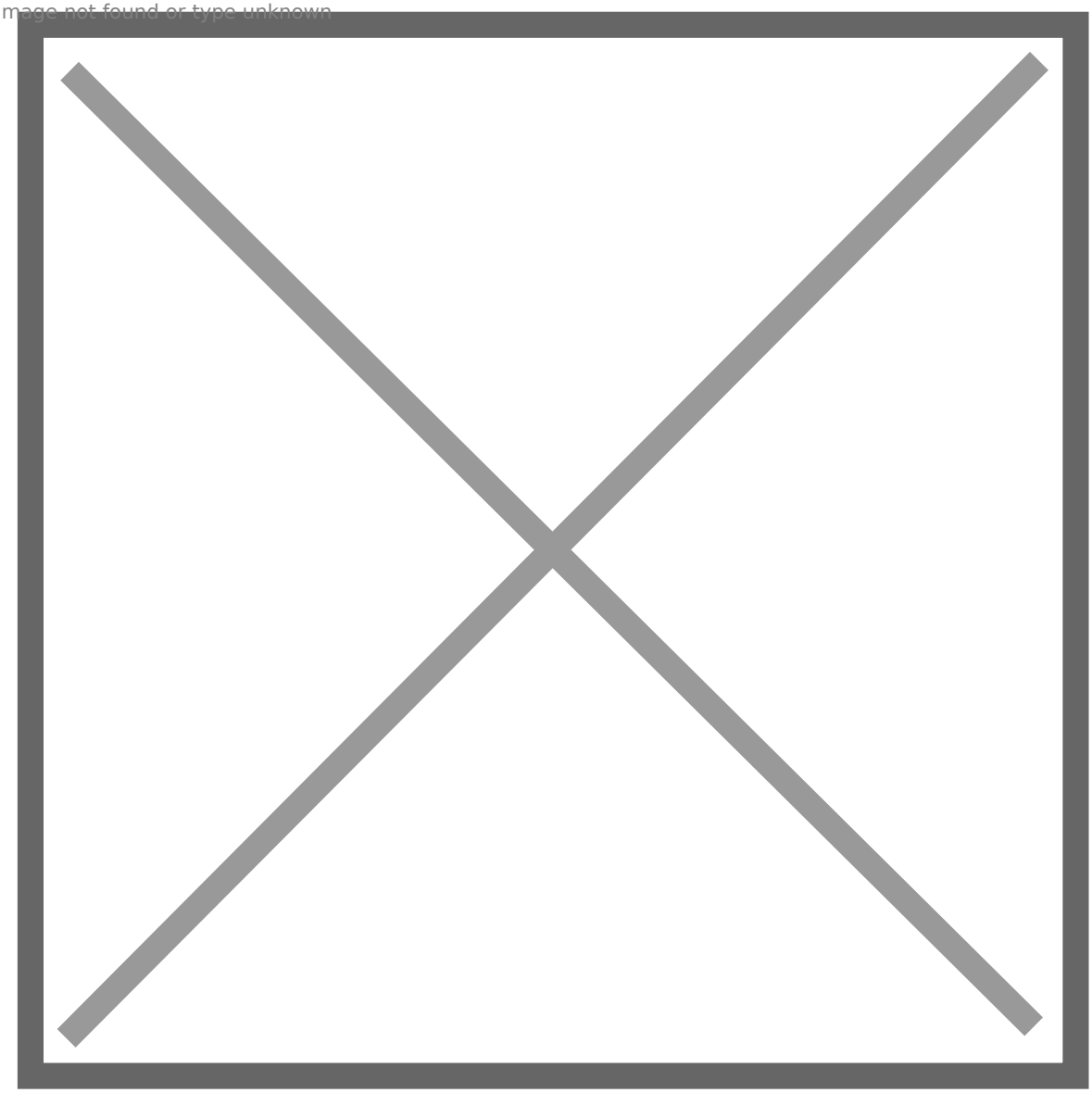
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The Ecumenical Prayer Service was convened with the blessing of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America with the participation of Christian leaders from various Church denominations.

Rev. Presbyter Samuel Davis served as Master of Ceremonies. Offering a Reflection was President and General Secretary of the National Council of Churches USA Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie while the Keynote Address was presented by Founding Board Chair of Keystone Restituere Justice Center and CEO of Phronema Justice Strategies John Wetzel.

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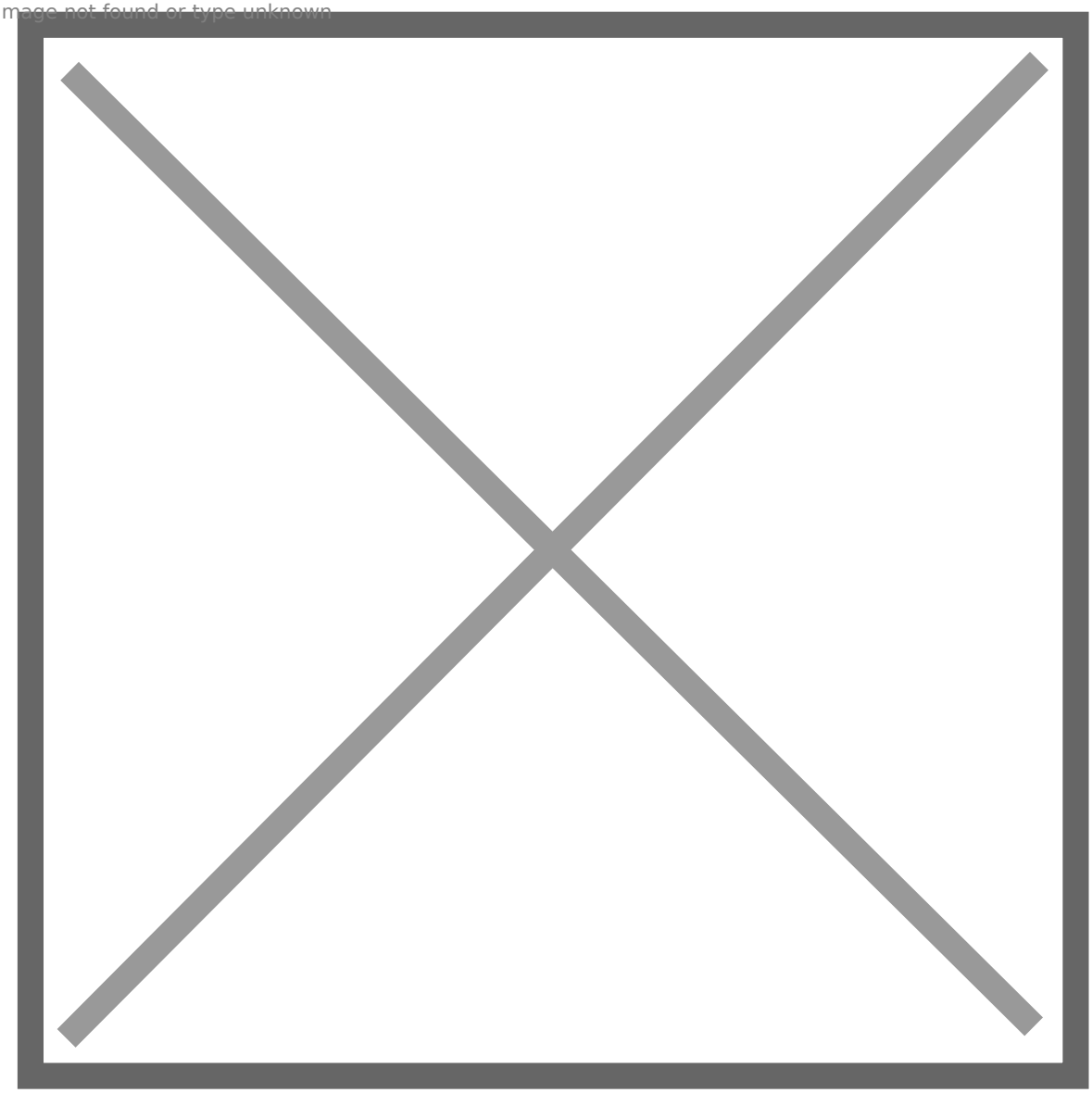
His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America has remained committed to racial reconciliation since his participation in June 2020 in the Black Lives Matter March with Mayor Adams in Brooklyn, honoring the memory of Breonna Taylor. The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America has created a Racial Reconciliation resource page to help engage conversations to bridge racial gaps and provide resources for those seeking to learn more. In this same spirit, Rev. Samuel Davis and Rev Chrysostom Onyekakeyah host the Black American Orthodox Experience, now well into its second season, in partnership with OCN, which can be found here.

In her remarks, Bishop McKenzie highlighted the importance of memory in bringing about justice. “Forgetting history, is to forget who you are…it is to put a different benediction on what happened…History gives us a chance to review lessons learned and lessons lost and this helps us to see the pits and the pitfalls so we don’t fall into the pit again.”

“The notion that the stain of slavery magically went away once Black people were emancipated is foolhardy…We can have the stain removed, but to do that we have to acknowledge it” stated John Wetzel in his keynote. Wetzel recounted a visit to Norfolk, Virginia, during which he feared a negative experience while attending a Greek Orthodox parish, but was pleasantly surprised when he sat beside an icon of St. Moses the Black. This experience was an example for Wetzel of the progress that has been made, but there is still much to be done. We remember the stains of the past and look forward to the future during celebrations such as this one on Juneteenth.

Recognizing Juneteenth as the most recently-established national holiday since the establishment of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Archbishop Elpidophoros acknowledged today as his first Juneteenth celebration and looked forward to future celebrations. The community of Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine gifted Bishop McKenzie and John Wetzel an icon of Saint Nicholas.

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In his remarks, His Eminence acknowledged the importance of remembering and actively working to heal the wounds of slavery. He stated “slavery cannot be erased by the whim of a few to forget the sins of America’s past…The Lord Himself, Who was scourged before His Ascent upon the Cross of our Salvation, and Who bore even in His Resurrected Form the wounds of the nails, knows that we have a duty to remember, and to be truth-tellers. For in Greek, the word for truth is alētheia (ἀλήθεια), which literally means, ‘non-forgetfulness.'” Archbishop Elpidophoros emphasized the importance of truth and justice and why we gathered in Saint Nicholas today.

“My friends, we are here today. In a Church. In a National Shrine that sits atop a place where a vicious and inhuman hatred sought to crush our spirit. But it did not! Juneteenth is our rallying cry of victory, that will continually and annually inform every American that our pursuit of a ‘more perfect Union’ is yet unfinished. Why it

remains for the injured to teach those that deny the injury is a mystery. Like the Lord's post-Resurrection wounds. Like the soul-scars of those who wielded the whips, for they defaced the image of God within themselves, even as they wounded the bodies of those they imprisoned in unspeakable bondage. As a Nation, we have come a long way. But we have a long way to go. The work is unfulfilled, and the hour often seems late. But I believe that with the fellowship and community we have formed this day, the spirit of Juneteenth and its message of liberty for all the captives, will resound for generations to come. May it bring healing and justice for those whose ancestors bore the scars of slavery, and spiritual restoration for our Country, so that we might truly be 'one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.'"

To watch the service, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=2S7xOSS30LU.

Photos: GOARCH/Dimitrios Panagos.

goarch.org