

09/09/2024

Archbishop Elpidophoros Visits the Theological School of Halki with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew



Following his attendance at the Holy Synaxis of the Hierarchy of the Ecumenical Throne, His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America accompanied His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to Halki, the second-largest of the Princes' Islands in the Sea of Marmara near Istanbul, Türkiye, on Wednesday, September 4, 2024.



As the former Abbot of Halki's Monastery of the Holy Trinity, His Eminence was overjoyed to return to the monastery, greeting monastics, staff, and visitors alike with warmth and familiarity. Visiting the property's gardens, he expressed a particularly paternal delight at the growth of the plants and animals he welcomed and nurtured during his tenure at Halki, including its roses, olive trees, and donkeys.



After attending the monastery's morning Divine Liturgy, His Eminence joined His All-Holiness at the adjoining Theological School of Halki, where His All-Holiness offered an address at a conference celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Metropolis of Philippi, Neapolis, and Thasos's founding. The Theological School of Halki is among the most significant sites in Eastern Orthodoxy, making it an apt host to this historic event: beyond the grounds' gardens, a cemetery is home to the graves of Ecumenical Patriarchs, bishops, clergy, and faculty of the school, and in its operation the school produced 330 bishops, one exarch, five archbishops, and seventeen patriarchs.



Two sketes welcomed His Eminence during his time on Halki as well: the Skete of St. Spyridon and the Skete of Metamorphosis Chapel. The former skete was recently restored thanks to the sponsorship of His Grace Bishop Spyridon of Amastris, while the latter, vandalized in 2007, was recently restored for a second time thanks to the assistance of Fr. Alexander Karloutsos and the generous funding of Archon Dr. Steve Yallourakis and his wife Dr. Anna Yallourakis. His Eminence was responsible for both then-damaged sketes during his time at Halki, making yesterday's visit to see them in their newly-restored beauty particularly meaningful.



Recalling the Skete of Metamorphosis Chapel prior to its restoration, His Eminence remarked at how many liturgies he celebrated on the Feast of the Transfiguration “outside, outdoors” because the skete had been destroyed. Moved by the restorations of his two beloved sketes, His Eminence expressed gratitude that “the faithful of our Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America not only take care of their own churches...but we also take care of our Mother Church in Constantinople.”



As His Eminence rejoined His All-Holiness at the Theological School of Halki, a lunch marking the Metropolis of Philippi, Neapolis, and Thasos's anniversary exemplified this global connection of the Orthodox Christian faith. Faithful from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Greece, and the Americas gathered for community and connection, evoking the legacy of the Theological School of Halki – during its 127 years of education, the school was known for its particularly international character, given that its student body consisted not only of native-born Greeks but Orthodox Christians from Arabic and Slavic-speaking regions, among others.



Graduates, including His All-Holiness, gained a richer, intercultural perspective on Orthodox Christianity as a result of this diversity, making the 1971 loss of this space uniquely painful. Still, yesterday's visit and the enduring efforts of His All-Holiness and His Eminence demonstrate that the Theological School of Halki remains a site of inspiration and mutual understanding, and the school's location on the "hill of hope" reminds Orthodox faithful worldwide not only of our hope for the school's eventual reopening, but of the hope we receive in the Resurrection of our Lord.

Photos: GOARCH/Corinna Robinson.

goarch.org