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275 Youth Receive Camping Scholarships as Archdiocese Continues Financial Aid Efforts

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Last year, at the direction of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America established the Archbishop Elpidophoros Camping Scholarship Fund in the fall of 2024 to provide need-based financial assistance for the youth summer camps offered by the Archdiocese, including both Ionian Village and Metropolis camps.

To launch the Fund, in November 2023, the Archbishop Elpidophoros Name Day Gala was held in New York City, where $430,000 was raised. 275 young campers were able to participate in the camping ministries as a result of the generosity of attendees, parishes, organizations, and faithful. The funds were distributed as follows: $100,000 toward Ionian Village scholarships, $160,000 toward Metropolis camp scholarships ($20,000 for each Metropolis), and $150,000 toward the launching of an endowment scholarship fund for future campers.

Participants were grateful for the opportunity to immerse themselves in these unique camping ministries. One participant, Jonah, wrote that he was particularly grateful that his scholarship allowed him to attend the Metropolis of Boston Camp in his last year of eligibility, expressing that “sense of community” he experienced at MBC inspired him to be a camp counselor next year. Several campers, Nikiforos, Eleni, Theodosia, Markella, Stephen, Macrina, Avery, and Daniella, wrote that the opportunity to attend St. Nicholas Ranch and Retreat Center “expanded their knowledge of the faith.”

In one particularly-touching thank-you note, a recipient’s mother expressed gratitude that her daughter was able to attend Ionian Village, the camping ministry of the Archdiocese. She wrote that her daughter Juliana “not only…[grew] in her faith, but…made such special friends who also love their Orthodox faith,” thanking the donors, grant distribution committee, and His Eminence “with all [her] heart.”

Expressing his gratitude for the funds raised in 2023, His Eminence emphasized the importance of camping ministries for our Archdiocese youth, remarking that “Our camps offer a unique opportunity for young people to grow in their faith by taking

them out of the techno-world that they continuously inhabit and bringing them into nature – the “desert place,” of which the Lord spoke. Through camping, we connect our youth with nature, with creation, itself, and in the case of Ionian Village, with Greece and many sacred places of the Motherland. Our camps are refuges for our young people, where they learn to understand our Holy Orthodox Faith, and they are understood themselves by the wonderful counselors and camp workers who are cultivated for this purpose throughout the Archdiocese.”

The Archdiocese will continue with the tradition of the Nameday Gala, honoring Archbishop Elpidophoros, on November 17, 2024 at Terrace on the Park in Queens, New York, once again raising critical funds for camping ministry financial aid and enabling youth across the Archdiocese to attend Greek Orthodox summer camps regardless of their financial circumstances. Proceeds from the gala will directly support the scholarship fund, ensuring that even more children can benefit from the spiritual growth and lifelong friendships fostered in the camp environment.

Last year’s success helped children from every corner of the Archdiocese experience the transformative power of faith, fellowship, and nature at camp. This year, Archbishop Elpidophoros calls on the faithful to help expand this effort: “There are people in need, and families who can’t afford the transformative impact of a Greek Orthodox summer camp. We must make these lasting and life-changing experiences at our camps financially-accessible to every child who wishes to attend.” Distribution of funds will again be overseen by a Grants Committee.

To make a donation to the fund, please click here.

Photo: Ionian Village.

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