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## **A Warm Welcome for Archbishop Elpidophoros and the YAL Conference in California**



LONG BEACH, CA – The Young Adult League (YAL) extended a very warm welcome to His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America at their 2019 conference which was organized by the Metropolis of San Francisco in Long Beach, CA.

Archbishop Elpidophoros was met at the airport by Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco, a group of clergy, and representatives of YAL holding a sign with the word 'AXIOS' – 'WORTHY'.

The theme of the Conference was Proclaim and it was taken from the First Epistle of St. John, Chapter 1:3 which reads: "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

More than 350 young adults between the ages of 18 and 35 journeyed from all over the U.S. to proclaim their faith and to enjoy fellowship with one another during a three-day gathering over the Labor Day weekend that was engaging and fulfilling.

Jonathan Jackson, the famous actor and singer, spoke and also sang at the Conference. Jackson and his entire family converted to Orthodoxy a few years ago. The Conference was organized under the guidance and supervision of Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco who told The National Herald "I am excited for this gathering with our young adults, and to engage with them in dialogue about our faith and how important it is to stay connected to the Church." He also said that "The YAL movement has tremendous potential to impact our parishes with a new generation of leaders whose talents can make a positive impact on the growth of our Orthodox faith."

Speaking about the presence of Archbishop Elpidophoros, he said that "it was a special blessing because he shared his vision about the future of our Church in America. The members of the YAL got to know him and received his blessings," and he added that "everybody young and old, clergy and laity were so pleased with his presence, his message, his friendliness, his smile, and his words of wisdom. He also brought the blessings of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the Mother Church of Constantinople."

Several workshops were offered throughout the weekend, coordinated by the Metropolis of San Francisco Family Wellness ministry.

In addition to workshops, daily worship services, and fellowship, YAL Conference participants joined hands in a Diakonia (service) project with the organization Rise Against Hunger, packaging 10,000 to 20,000 meals for those who hunger throughout the world.

In his speech Archbishop Elpidophoros among other things said, "I am very pleased to be here with all of you today. As I look out and see so many happy faces – faces of our Orthodox young adults from around the Archdiocese of America – I think of the words of the Apostle John: 'We write these things to you, so that our joy may be full.' (1 John 1:4) Just as Saint John's joy was made full in his spiritual children, so is my own joy made full and complete in you, my beloved young people!"

The Archbishop declared, "it is truly encouraging to see all of you, coming together here in California, out of your love for Christ and His Church. You have expended time and resources to be here. Some of you have given up vacation days; others must go directly from this weekend to the start of the new school year. You have all

made an effort and a sacrifice for the sake of your faith. May the Lord accept this offering in His Kingdom and reward you richly! And I personally express my gratitude for making your life in Christ a priority.”

In another instance the Archbishop said that “often when we think of proclaiming the Gospel, we think about talking to people outside of the Church about Jesus Christ. In this verse from the First Epistle of Saint John, however, the goal of the writer is to proclaim Christ to those who are in the Church, who are already believers in the Lord. He sent this epistle to his fellow Christians for a special purpose. That purpose is *κοινωνία*. This is translated with the English word ‘fellowship’; but ‘fellowship’ does not express the full meaning of *κοινωνία*.

It means more than friendship or spending time together. This word *κοινωνία* means a mutual sharing, a participation in the most important things in the world. It means ‘communion’: communion as a full and free exchange of all that is good in

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