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## **Archbishop Elpidophoros Celebrates Door Opening and Blessing of Slavic Vicariate Church, Spring and Exhibition in Hot Springs**



Photos Courtesy: Slavonic.org

On July 10, 2025, in the city of Hot Springs, Arkansas, a new church of the Slavic Vicariate, dedicated to the Icon of the Mother of God “Life-Giving Spring” held its Door Opening which was celebrated by His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America. During his visit to Arkansas, the Archbishop also blessed the thermal spring and the exhibition space “Eastern Christianity”.



Concelebrating with His Eminence were:

- the Vicar of the Slavic Vicariate, Archimandrite Alexander (Belya), Bishop-elect of Nikopol;
- Protopresbyter of the Ecumenical Throne Alexander Belya, Rector of St. John the Baptist Cathedral in Brooklyn (New York);
- Archpriest Ioann Voloshchuk, Rector of St. John of Shanghai Church in Jacksonville (Florida);
- Archpriest Gennady Kravchuk, cleric of the Vicariate;
- Archpriest Vasyl Babych, Rector of the Church of the Icon "Life-Giving Spring" in Hot Springs (Arkansas);
- Archpriest Maksim Pliskov, cleric of St. Matrona Cathedral in Miami (Florida);
- Archpriest Olexander Stepanenko, Rector of Holy Trinity Parish in Charlotte (North Carolina);
- Priest Ioann Kovach, Rector of the Nativity of the Theotokos Parish in Dallas (Texas);
- Archdeacon Dionysios Papiris, Archdeacon of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

Among the honored guests was Eldar Urgebadze from Georgia and nephew of Saint Gabriel (Urgebadze).

The resort city of Hot Springs is world-renowned for its thermal waters, long praised for their healing properties. In older American literature, these waters were often called “life-giving” — bringing life and healing. Fittingly, the new church is named after the Icon of the Mother of God “Life-Giving Spring,” whose history dates back to the 5th century and the city of Constantinople. Holy water from Constantinople was specially brought for the consecration of the church and the spring.

The uniqueness of the new church lies in the fact that one of the natural springs is located directly inside the church building — the first such occurrence in the history of Orthodoxy in America – which was blessed during the opening ceremony.

After the service, Archbishop Elpidophoros awarded the highest honor of the Archdiocese — the Medal of the Apostle Paul — to Ivan Belya, founder and builder of the church, museum, and spring. Certificates of Appreciation were also presented to all who contributed to the creation of this sacred place.

As a gift to the “Eastern Christianity” exhibition, Archbishop Elpidophoros presented an epitrachelion, an omophorion, and a silver censer from Constantinople.

A long and challenging path preceded the opening: clearing the site, restoring the building, and preparing the spring. Much work still lies ahead, as a large part of the building is being developed into a permanent exhibition titled “Eastern Christianity.” The exhibit will feature icons, crosses, vestments, liturgical items, photographs, and historical documents. In this way, the church and museum will serve as a missionary center, through which visitors and residents of Hot Springs — deep in the heart of America — can encounter the ancient and living heritage of the Orthodox Church.

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