

## **Death and Destruction! Fr. Irenaeus Cox of the Annunciation of Bahamas Speaks to TNH**



BOSTON – The presiding priest of the Annunciation Greek Orthodox parish in Bahamas Fr. Irenaeus Cox in an exclusive interview with The National Herald described the magnitude of the destruction caused by hurricane Dorian.

“Right now in the Bahamas things are very bad at Grand Bahamas and Abaco. Communications here is up and down as we have many people trying to call their relatives and there are not enough circuits to serve the demands of the callers here. There are also power outages, not from the hurricane but from on-going electrical issues at Nassau which interrupts communication and shuts down access to the internet.” He added that “the destruction is beyond description and the death toll is very high. The smell of death pervades many areas where the lifeless bodies have not even been counted yet. Homes are utterly demolished, torn from their foundations, and the remains of people’s lives are scattered about in a scene that evokes thoughts of Armageddon and the End of the World. Where we are, South of where the Hurricane was at its strongest, there is no sign of destruction. We had some flooding but that caused nothing worse than a mild nuisance when driving one’s car. People in Nassau, and other regions of the Bahamas are mobilizing constantly to transport food and necessities to those in need, and to rescue as many people as possible out of those tragic areas to places where they could be fed and cared for. The physical damage on those islands is one thing; the psychological damage in the survivors is perhaps even worse. Many people on the unaffected islands are opening their homes to strangers as well as friends and

relatives who survived. Most people were affected in one way or another as they have friends or relatives that suffered in Grand Bahamas and Abaco.”



Asked about himself, his family and his parishioners, he said “doxa to Theo, we are all well. Some of our people were in Abaco and others in Grand Bahamas, but we were able to communicate with them and they have reported that they survived, but many of their friends and employees were devastated, escaping with only the clothes they wore. They told me that everyone there was in shock, their minds in ‘outer space’, as they still could not comprehend the utter destruction that they survived.”

Asked if any of his parishioners was injured or lost his home or store, Fr. Irenaeus said, “although I have not contacted all my people in those regions, it seems that initially their homes, and even the business of one of the restaurateurs suffered no worse than mild damage, or water damage. I was told that Grand Bahamas, which

is one of the larger Islands of the Bahamas, was 75% flooded or under water. Even places miles inland that no one could imagine would ever be under water, were flooded. The Airport was at one time under 12 feet of water, and many survivors claimed that water rose 20 feet above the ground level in certain neighborhoods.”

Speaking about the nave of the Annunciation he said “the church is located in the city of Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas, on the Island of New Providence. Most of our community members live on this island, and as I said earlier, there really wasn’t much damage here, just a little flooding or high water on some of the roads. High winds and lightning did not seem to cause any inordinate destruction here. The church itself is under repairs and renovation at this time, but Dorian did not cause any damage.”



According to Fr. Irenaeus, “Annunciation has roughly 130 families, mostly from Kalymnos and Skopelos, but also there are some Greeks from Crete and a few from the mainland of Greece, but from outside of Greece we also have Russian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, and Serbian members from Europe, as well as Lebanon, Egypt, and India, and a few Bahamian convert families.”

Asked if they have Greek School, Sunday School, GOYA, he said “unfortunately the Greek School ceased before I was assigned here five years ago. I have attempted to restart Modern Greek classes but it was not maintainable. I do not consider it a



lost cause and would still like to pursue a humble elementary school with Greek as a language requirement for our youngsters and for any other non-Greeks who may wish to take Greek as an elective. I would also like to have a Biblical Greek class for adults, and between the elementary school and the adult classes perhaps grow that into a more formal Orthodox Institute, as was the dream of the second Priest of our community, Rev. Fr. Theophanis Kolyvas of blessed memory.”

To a question about what makes the parish unique, Fr. Cox said, “my first reaction to that question is, ‘It’s in the Bahamas.’ That is in and of itself unique. As an English speaking community, they found themselves in a predominantly Spanish speaking Archdiocese of Mexico and Central America when North and South America were divided into several Archdioceses. As their language made them like outsiders, they chose to petition the Archdiocese of America to return to being under the authority of the Archbishop of New York. That being granted, Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church is the only community outside the USA to be under New York, and is also directly under the authority of Archbishop Elpidophoros, rather than any of the Metropolitans.”



He also said “in the Divine Liturgy we use both Greek and English throughout all of the Service, except at the Lord’s Prayer we add any other language of the people present who recite the ‘Our Father’ in their own language.”

He also described the lives of the parishioners, saying, “our Parishioners have the same jobs as one might find in any other Greek community in the United States. They began as sponge divers, and then got into the sponge trade until the sponge blight and the invention of the artificial sponge. Only one Greek today remains in the business of cleaning and selling sponges from the sea. Others are involved in restaurants, tourist shops, the insurance business and clothing sales; they work as lawyers, doctors, and in construction and furniture making, among others. As business owners and founders of businesses, they have employed many generations of Bahamians over the years. They first came to the Bahamas in the late 1800’s and by 1917 were incorporated as a Greek Orthodox Community and

were served by Bishop Germanos Polyzoidis of blessed memory. In 1932 they established a Church building and received their first Priest, Fr. Theodoros Spirtos from Kalymnos, where he returned when he retired. Fr. Theophanis Kolyvas became our second Priest and he served here with his Presvytera Maria for over 50 years. When he retired, he continued to live here with his family until his repose. Since he was the longest serving priest in our community, he was also honored with being interred with his Presvytera next to the Chapel in which we continue to worship.”

Speaking about the imminent visit of Archbishop Elpidophoros to Bahamas, Fr. Irenaeus said, “we are excited and feel much honored to have the Archbishop visit us, but hope he is able to come after we complete our remodeling of the chapel, which should be soon. It has been many years since we were visited by Archbishop Demetrios. I would be guessing, but I believe it was about 10 or 11 years ago. The Commonwealth of the Bahamas is still a Nation following the protocols of the United Kingdom, to which it is attached historically and politically. If and when the Archbishop visits, as he is a person of high religious, social, and political position, it should be part of his agenda to meet with our Bahamian leaders as well.”

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