09/03/2026

Archbishop Elpidophoros returns to St. Sophia Cathedral in Albany, honors Fr. Patric Legato and parish leaders



His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America visited St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church in Albany on Sunday, March 8, for the Divine Liturgy on the Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas, returning to the parish six years after his previous visit during the COVID-19 pandemic. In remarks at the conclusion of the service, the Archbishop reflected on that earlier visit, recalling the uncertainty and pain of those months and expressing gratitude that the faithful are now once again able to gather safely in church.

“It took me six years to come back to this parish,” the Archbishop said, noting that when he first visited, the Church’s first concern was the health and safety of the faithful. He remembered the difficult early period of the pandemic, when clergy continued serving the Divine Liturgy even under severe restrictions so that the sacramental life of the Church would not be interrupted. He spoke movingly of the responsibility borne by bishops and priests during that time, and of the prayers offered for families watching from home while so many endured illness, fear, and loss.

Archbishop Elpidophoros also praised the beauty of St. Sophia and the devotion of

its community, saying he fully understood why the parish had been elevated to cathedral status. He commended the faithful for preserving the church with care and reverence, and he offered particular praise for the choir, the parish council, and the many parishioners whose work sustains the life of the community.

Marking the coincidence of the visit with International Women's Day, the Archbishop said that the Orthodox Church honors women in a profound way every Sunday through its devotion to the Panagia. Standing before the icon of the Mother of God, he said, the faithful are reminded that the Church honors not only the Theotokos, but also all mothers and all women who strengthen the life of the Church through faith, service, and sacrifice. It was a simple point, but a strong one: the Church does not need to borrow the dignity of women from the calendar; it is already written into its deepest spiritual grammar.



A highlight of the visit came when Archbishop Elpidophoros bestowed the offikion of Protopresbyter of the Holy Archdiocese of America upon Fr. Legato, recognizing his 40 years of priestly service. Referring to the priest's ecclesiastical name, Pashalios, the Archbishop noted its connection to Pascha and called it especially significant in the life of the Church. Presenting the silver cross of the office, he said it was crafted in Constantinople and urged Fr. Legato to remember always the Mother Church of Constantinople, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew whenever he bears it. The Archbishop also praised Fr. Legato's pastoral devotion, remarking with evident admiration that

during the preparation for Holy Communion he commemorates by name all the priests of the Archdiocese in prayer.

The Archbishop also presented awards to a representative of the parish Philoptochos and to the parish council. Together with the recognition of the parish council, the honors underscored the Archbishop’s emphasis on the shared witness of clergy and laity in building up the Church.

By the end of the morning, the message was unmistakable: memory, gratitude, and service. The Archbishop returned not simply to mark the passage of time since the pandemic, but to recognize a parish that remained faithful through it—and that continues to offer a living witness of worship, stewardship, and community in New York’s capital region.

Photo: Orthodox Observer/Chris Pappis

orthodoxobserver.org