

## **Address of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America at the 2019 AHEPA Supreme Convention**



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Greetings to all of you in the grace of God and in His boundless love that has been revealed to us by our Risen Lord. It is in this love that you and faithful across our Holy Archdiocese have welcomed me as Archbishop of America, a sacred calling and responsibility to God and to the Church. Filled with His love and strength, and inspired by His divine presence and guidance for the work that is before us, I have entered this blessed pastorate of the Archdiocese of America so that together we may offer a compassionate and powerful witness of our faith throughout this great land and support the witness of Orthodoxy around the world.

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It is also in the love of God that I convey to you the greetings and blessings of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. You are dearly loved by him as your support for the Church and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, your longstanding witness of philanthropy, your commitment to Hellenic ideals, and your service to those in need exemplify the exhortation of the Apostle Paul: ...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Philippians 4:8). Your witness as the AHEPA family affirms that you not only think about these things, but you do these things!

My heart is filled with joy to address you on this wonderful event of the Grand Banquet of the AHEPA Supreme Convention. This is a blessed opportunity for fellowship in the bonds that we share through our faith, our legacy, and our service. It is also an opportunity to affirm the great potential we have before us.

The witness that you offer as the AHEPA family is a witness of love: love for your fellow human beings, love for one another, and love for God. It is a love that comes from the unlimited love that God has shown us. The Holy Apostle John writes, We love, because He first loved us (I John 4:19). It is the love that surpasses all knowledge (Ephesians 3:19). It is the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (I Corinthians 13:7). And as people of faith whose lives have been transformed by the power of love, we know that we can never be separated from the Source of this love: For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor power, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39).

In your service as members of AHEPA and in our service to God as His Church, we know that this love is not limited by distance. This is why I can convey and you can receive the love and blessings of our spiritual father, His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. We share this love with our brothers and sisters throughout this nation and around the world. It is the love that unites us in Christ. It is the love that guides and inspires us to address the needs of our youth, the elderly, the orphan and widow, and all who need physical and spiritual healing. It is the love that leads us in gratitude to offer all that we are and have as a witness of our faith and for the glory of God.

In addition, we know that this love cannot be limited by any power that is contrary to the will of God. We gather for this banquet during the annual commemoration of the independence of this great nation of the United States of America. This holiday is a celebration of freedom, and it honors the value of this ideal in providing a social and political environment where people can flourish and explore the potential of their God-created, human ability. As heirs of a noble Hellenic heritage that has cherished freedom and as the children of our Greek forbearers who sacrificed for independence, we know the value of freedom. We know that freedom is inseparably connected to the love of our fellow human beings and our love of God. We affirm that we have been called to freedom so that through love we can be servants of one another (Galatians 5:13); and because for freedom Christ has set us free (Galatians 5:1), we are called to use this freedom, as you the AHEPA family do so admirably, so that others may experience this love.

Within a few years both our Holy Archdiocese and the AHEPA family will celebrate centennial anniversaries in this nation of freedom and hope. These anniversary events are certainly times of remembrance. We will reflect on a century of faith and service. We will mark great accomplishments, honor the memory of so many who offered so much, and give thanks to God for His many blessings. But we will also affirm that all that has been achieved has been through His love and the love we share. We will recognize that we are the benefactors of a legacy of love that has impacted innumerable lives.

As we prepare for these commemorations, we share great joy in knowing that the Holy Archdiocese of America and the AHEPA family have worked together and shared this legacy. Over the past century, the members of AHEPA have supported the sacred ministry of the Church through the establishment and growth of our parishes, through the support and leadership offered in our national programs and initiatives, and through the unwavering support for our beloved Mother Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The Church has continued to recognize in love and

gratitude the vital work of AHEPA in education, philanthropy, civic responsibility and in so many other areas of service, as well as in advancing Hellenic ideals which inspire and enliven our common humanity and enhance our witness of our Orthodox faith. My hope and prayer is that this relationship will not only continue in the love that we share and that it will bear much fruit, but that it will also become even stronger as we prepare and commit for the work that is before us. Together, we can and will accomplish tremendous things that will reveal our love for God and our love for each other. Through our shared efforts in ministry and service, many more will experience God's transforming love. Together, we will honor the legacy of love that has been given to us by our forbearers, and we will bring honor and glory to God for the great and marvelous works that we will see.



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