

Remarks of Archbishop Elpidophoros at the Dinner with Parish Leadership of the Annunciation Church in The Bahamas (October 13, 2019)



My beloved spiritual children,

I learned a few days ago of the national motto of The Bahamas: “Forward, Upward, Onward Together.” It is a wonderful motto, one of the best. It could very well be a motto in the Church!

The Christian life is never a static life. It is not about sitting in the same place and doing the same thing day after day. The spiritual life is precisely a movement

Forward towards the future Kingdom of God. It is a movement Upward toward a higher and better way of life. It is a movement Onward that puts aside the things of the past and receives each new day as a gift from God.

But that last word of the motto is the key: the Christian life is a life Together. The spiritual life cannot be a life of isolation. There is no success or fulfillment unless we are connected with the entire body of the Church. It is crucial for us as Orthodox Christians to worship together, work together, and strive together for our salvation.

You know this from your family life. When every member of the family is off in a different direction, doing their own thing, the warmth and affection of the home suffers. For this reason, the family meal is so important—it is often the one chance for everyone to be together, face to face, talking, sharing, laughing, and planning for the future.

The Church is a family. And like a family, the Church does not thrive when one member or another is absent on a regular basis. We need everyone in this effort, every generation of every age and experience. Ideally, I would like to see every Parish Council with an even distribution of ages. This means that 20 percent of your Council should be age 35 or under! Let this be your goal for the coming year.

I ask you, as parish leaders, to reach out to those who have been away, especially among your own family members. Talk to your sons and daughters. Let them know they are wanted and needed. Give them tasks to do, even if that means the senior generation must step aside and make room. Give them space to try new things.

Above all, use this opportunity to begin conversations about the spiritual life and things of the Faith. You will find a greater openness than you might expect, and especially in the aftermath of this terrible hurricane.

The way of The Bahamas is the way of wisdom: “Forward, Upward, Onward Together.” God has given you an open door of opportunity today. Make the most of it, and God will richly bless you and your whole parish family.

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