

## National Oratorical Festival culminates in final competition



The National Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America Oratorical Festival Finals were held June 13-14, 2026, at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church in Northridge, California, bringing together young students from across the country for a weekend centered on faith, education, and fellowship.

The annual festival, a cornerstone program of the Archdiocese's Department of Religious Education, welcomed 18 finalists—nine in the senior division and nine in the junior division—each representing their respective Metropolises and Districts. These finalists, selected through regional competitions, gathered to deliver prepared speeches rooted in Orthodox theology, scripture, and contemporary Christian life.

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America attended the event, joined by

His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco; His Grace Bishop Athenagoras of Nazianzos, Director of Religious Education; His Grace Bishop Ioannis of Phocaea, Chancellor of the Metropolis of San Francisco; Fr. Michael Prevas, presiding priest of St. Nicholas Church; and National Chairperson, Katherine Orfanakos Demacopoulos. Their presence underscored the significance of the Oratorical Festival as a vital ministry fostering youth engagement and spiritual formation.

The weekend began on Friday with arrivals and registration, followed by a Paraklesis service, setting a prayerful tone for the days ahead. A welcome dinner hosted by the parish provided an opportunity for participants, families, clergy, and organizers to gather in fellowship before the competition commenced.

On Saturday, June 13, the 42nd Annual St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival officially began. In the morning, finalists presented speeches reflecting on various topics which were identified by the Department of Religious Education and chosen by each speaker.



**Archbishop Elpidophoros addresses the finalists. Photo courtesy of Allen Altchech Photography**

“This National Oratorical Festival, a gathering of the best and brightest from around the country, is like a golden bell which resounds with the glorious story of our Holy

Orthodox Faith,” Archbishop Elpidophoros said. “All of the offerings which we will hear come from sincerity of faith, and bring praise to the Father of Fathers for whom the Festival is named, Saint John Chrysostom—which means ‘the one of golden voice’ ... Each of the participants is sharing a message from your own ‘golden mouth’ today, and therefore you stand in the same tradition as the Holy Chrysostom, who stood in the tradition of the Lord Himself.”

After the speeches, judges evaluated participants on content, delivery, and theological understanding and during the awards luncheon announced the following winners:

Junior Division: 1st place - Stephen Mueller - Metropolis of Denver, St. Spyridon Church, Loveland, CO: 2nd place - Aspasia Panos - Metropolis of Atlanta, St John the Baptist, Tampa, FL: 3rd place - Eleni Passaris - Metropolis of San Francisco, Nativity of Christ, Novato, CA

Senior Division: 1st place - Andrew Taxiarchos - Metropolis of Boston, Annunciation, Cranston, RI: 2nd Place - Jack Choukalas, Metropolis of San Francisco, Holy Trinity, Phoenix, AZ: 3rd Place - Sophia Zmed, Metropolis of Atlanta, St. Mark, Boca Raton, FL.

All participants received scholarships, with the winners receiving additional awards.

Later in the evening, the participants enjoyed evening of fellowship with dinner and dancing at the Santa Monica Beach Club. The celebratory atmosphere highlighted the strong bonds formed among participants and their shared commitment to the Church.

On Sunday, June 14, the community will gather again at St. Nicholas for Orthros and the Divine Liturgy officiated by Archbishop Elpidophoros and con-celebrated by Metropolitan Gerasimos. During the service, the first-place junior and senior speakers will deliver their winning speeches, offering a powerful witness to the depth of faith and eloquence cultivated through the festival.

For those unable to attend in person, the festival was live-streamed, extending its reach to a broader audience and allowing communities across the country to witness the inspiring presentations. You can watch it [here](#).

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