

Archbishop Elpidophoros attends centennial celebration of St. Stephen Church in Nea Ionia



NEA IONIA, Greece — Celebrations marking 100 years since the laying of the foundation stone of the Church of St. Stephen the Protomartyr and Archdeacon of Saframboli in Nea Ionia culminated with particular splendor on Sunday, July 12, 2026.

To commemorate this historic milestone for the local parish, a Festal Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was celebrated, presided over by His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America. Concelebrating were the local hierarch, His Eminence Metropolitan Gabriel of Nea Ionia, Philadelphia, Iraklio and Chalcedon, and His Eminence Metropolitan Ieronymos of Kalavryta and Aigialeia.



His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America presides over the Divine Liturgy at the 100th anniversary of the Holy Church of Saint Stephen. (Orthodox Observer/Yorgos Karahalís)

In a particularly moving address, Metropolitan Gabriel warmly thanked Archbishop Elpidophoros for taking part in the celebrations, noting that he had traveled from the United States to honor this important anniversary. He also spoke of the Archbishop's character and wide-ranging ministry, praising his enduring service to Orthodoxy and Hellenism.

In his response, Archbishop Elpidophoros thanked the two Metropolitans, Metropolitan Gabriel of Nea Ionia and Metropolitan Ieronymos of Kalavryta, for their fraternal welcome and for the joy of celebrating the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy together.



At the Holy Church of Saint Stephen, Archbishop Elpidophoros spoke about his own family's resettlement in Greece. (Orthodox Observer/Yorgos Karahalís)

The Archbishop also reflected on the hardship, struggle and labor of the refugees from Asia Minor, who began with nothing and succeeded in creating in Nea Ionia a vibrant center of faith and culture, with the historic church at its heart.

Archbishop Elpidophoros also shared personal memories, observing that nearly every Greek family carries a story of displacement or uprooting. He spoke of his own origins in Constantinople and of his family's resettlement in free Greece, noting that, just as he himself arrived in Thessaloniki, thousands of refugees from Asia Minor and Constantinople built a new homeland in Nea Ionia.

There they rebuilt their lives and, through labor and faith, erected a church that remains a point of reference for the local community to this day. Concluding his remarks, the Archbishop thanked Metropolitan Gabriel for his warm hospitality.

The historic anniversary drew a large gathering of faithful who filled the church, as well as representatives of the national government and local authorities. Those in attendance included former Prime Minister Antonis Samaras; government ministers Adonis Georgiadis, Niki Kerameus and Kostis Hatzidakis; government spokesman Pavlos Marinakis; PASOK member of Parliament Milena Apostolaki; independent member of Parliament Athina Linou; Deputy Regional Governor for the Groves of

Attica Rita Pikrou-Moraitaki; and Athens Medical Association President Giorgos Patoulis.



The Holy Church of Saint Stephen is deeply linked to the history of Nea Ionia. (Orthodox Observer/Yorgos Karahalis)

Archbishop Elpidophoros, together with Metropolitans Gabriel and Ieronymos, administered Holy Communion to the faithful on this historic occasion. At the conclusion of the Liturgy, hundreds waited patiently to receive the antidoron from the Archbishop of America.

A Church Inseparably Linked to the History of Nea Ionia

The Church of St. Stephen the Protomartyr and Archdeacon stands at the intersection of Agiou Georgiou and Theodorou Konstantopoulou streets, a short distance from Nea Ionia City Hall and the Nea Ionia station of the Athens electric railway. It is the only parish church in Attica dedicated to St. Stephen the Protomartyr and Archdeacon.

The history of the parish began immediately after the Asia Minor Catastrophe, when refugees from Saframboli settled in Nea Ionia. In 1924, the first wooden church was built, the familiar makeshift structure known locally as the “paranga” ,serving the worship needs of the community until 1936.

The neighborhood of Nea Saframboli gradually developed around the original wooden church and, later, around the present-day sanctuary. The history of the church is therefore inseparably linked to the history of Nea Ionia and to the journey of the refugees from Asia Minor, who, through labor, faith and hope, succeeded in rebuilding their lives in a new land.

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