

Archbishop Elpidophoros blesses new firefighting vehicle donated by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America



ATHENS, Greece — The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and the Greek-American community reaffirmed their enduring commitment to Greece through the donation of a new state-of-the-art firefighting vehicle to the Penteli Volunteer Fire Unit, strengthening the region's ability to respond to wildfires and other emergencies.

The blessing ceremony for the new vehicle took place on Friday, July 17, officiated by His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America and attended by representatives of the Greek government, the Hellenic Fire Service, local government officials, and dozens of volunteer firefighters. The event marked the culmination of an initiative launched two years ago and resulted in the delivery of a modern firefighting vehicle that will now serve the protection of Penteli and the greater Athens area.



The donation of the vehicle fulfills commitments previously made by Archbishop Elpidophoros, following wildfires that struck Penteli in 2024. Photo by Orthodox Observer/Yorgos Karahalidis

The donation significantly enhances the operational capabilities of the Penteli Volunteer Fire Unit, which has been called upon repeatedly in recent years to assist in combating the devastating wildfires that have affected Attica. The vehicle addresses a critical operational need by strengthening wildfire prevention efforts and enabling a more rapid emergency response to protect lives, property, and the natural environment.

The donation also fulfills a commitment made by Archbishop Elpidophoros following the major wildfire that struck Penteli in 2024. During a visit to the region after the disaster, the Archbishop, accompanied by representatives of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, assessed firsthand the extensive damage and the needs of local emergency responders. He met with volunteer firefighters, witnessed the challenging conditions under which they operated, and learned of significant shortages in equipment and resources. That visit ultimately led to the decision to donate the new firefighting vehicle.

In his remarks, Archbishop Elpidophoros shared a personal reflection that underscored his deep concern for communities threatened by wildfires. He recalled an experience from his youth in Florina, where as a high school student he encountered a fire at a summer camp and joined others in trying to extinguish the

flames using tree branches and whatever means were available.

“I have felt firsthand what fire means and the devastation it can cause,” Archbishop Elpidophoros said. “Since that experience, I have remained especially sensitive to the dangers posed by wildfires, which is why I am here today to bless this vehicle and support those who stand on the front lines protecting our communities.”

Speakers throughout the ceremony praised the initiative of Archbishop Elpidophoros, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, and the Greek-American community. Representatives of the government, fire service, and volunteer brigade emphasized that the donation addresses a genuine operational need and will significantly strengthen the preparedness and response capabilities of the Penteli Volunteer Fire Unit.

Among those in attendance were His Eminence Metropolitan Ioannis of Thermopylae, Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Penteli and Director of the Inter-Orthodox Center of the Church of Greece; Nikos Papaefstathiou, Secretary General for Civil Protection and representative of the Greek government; Attica Regional Governor Nikos Hardalias; Mayor of Penteli Natassa Kosmopoulou; and Mayor of Vrilissia Giannis Pisimisis. Also present were Lieutenant General Anastasios Pappas, Deputy Chief of the Hellenic Fire Corps; Fire Colonel Nikolaos Vlachogiannis, Commander of the 12th Fire Station of Athens; a delegation of Hellenic Fire Corps officers; and the leadership and volunteers of the Penteli Volunteer Fire Unit.

This donation continues the Archdiocese’s longstanding commitment to supporting Greece during times of crisis and natural disaster. Following the catastrophic wildfires in Northern Evia in 2021, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, with the support of the Greek-American community, provided assistance to hundreds of affected families, livestock farmers, and small businesses, while also donating two modern ambulances to serve the region.



His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America with the Penteli Volunteer Fire Unit. Photo by Orthodox Observer/Yorgos Karahalas.

Concluding his address, Archbishop Elpidophoros emphasized that the relationship between the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, the Greek-American community, and the homeland is demonstrated not only through words but through meaningful action whenever Greece faces challenges.

“The Archdiocese of America and the Greek-American community will always be here,” Archbishop Elpidophoros said. “Whatever our homeland needs, we will remain by its side, ready to help Greece in every way we can.”

The inauguration highlighted once again the strong bonds between the Greek diaspora and Greece, as well as the continuing commitment of Greek Americans to support and strengthen the communities and institutions of their ancestral homeland.

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