

Cypriot Federation honors three as its President says those who ‘tried to divide us’ failed



NEW YORK — “Cyprus is one of the most glorious civilizational emergences in the history of the world,” His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America told the Federation of Cypriot American Organizations at its annual Testimonial Dinner on Friday evening, September 25. “We must persevere in prayer, in hope, and in effective action to bring about a future of Cyprus that does justice to its past.”

The dinner, at Terrace on the Park in Queens, also marked the Federation’s 75th anniversary. The Archbishop shared its honorary chairmanship with President Nikos Christodoulides of Cyprus, who was in New York for the United Nations General Assembly. Archbishop Elpidophoros opened the program with the invocation and closed it with the benediction.

John Josephakis, NVIDIA’s global vice president of sales and business development

for supercomputing, received the Lifetime Achievement Award. Community Service Awards went to Stavros A. Kamilaris, president of the Lampousa Cypriot American Association, and Despina Axiotakis, a past general secretary of the Federation. Both have roots in associations that helped found the Federation in 1951: Mr. Kamilaris leads Lampousa, and Mrs. Axiotakis once led the women's division of the Asgata Association "Cyprus."



From left, Kyriacos Papastyliaou, Philip Christopher, Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides, Archbishop Elpidophoros and Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos. Photo by Orthodox Observer/Dimitrios Panagos

Philip Christopher, president of PSEKA, also spoke. Guests included Konstantinos Letymbiotis, the Cypriot government spokesman; Menelaos Menelaou, Cyprus's negotiator; former U.S. Ambassador to Greece George Tsunis; and the Cypriot and Greek diplomats Evangelos Savva, Maria Michael, Kyriakos Pogiatzis, Aglaia Balta and Ifigeneia Kanara.

Before the dinner, Archbishop Elpidophoros met with President Christodoulides and Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos. He briefed the President on the success of the 48th Clergy-Laity Congress, held in Cleveland this summer, and invited him to the next one, in Dallas in 2028.

Mr. Christodoulides spoke first in Greek, then in English, and made one argument across both: the stronger Cyprus becomes, the more it needs its diaspora. He

called the Federation and its member organizations the strongest and most credible voice Cyprus has in the United States, and said Cypriot Americans had for decades “opened doors that diplomacy alone couldn’t.”

Fifty-two years after the Turkish invasion, he said, Cyprus has not made its peace with the occupation and never will. The Turkish side, by his account, had refused even a joint meeting to discuss new proposals he gave U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres the day before. Business leaders he met on a trip to New York, Texas and California, he said, had one message for him: “Cyprus is no longer being discovered. It is being chosen.” “We need you to continue defending our national cause,” he told the room, “but we also need you to tell the story of Cyprus as it is today, a modern, outward-looking and Western-oriented country.”

Mr. Christodoulides first came to New York in 1993, as a student at Queens College. He has known two of the evening’s honorees ever since. One is Mr. Kamilaris, who grew up in Agios Georgios, in the Kyrenia district, and fought the Turkish invasion in 1974 as a young commando. “When I landed at JFK in September of 1977, not in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that one day I would be standing here in front of the President of the Republic of Cyprus and the Archbishop of America receiving this award,” he said.



Stavros A. Kamilaris, third from left, receives his Community Service Award. Photo by Orthodox Observer/Dimitrios Panagos

He was 7, he told the audience, when he declared that he wanted to be a civil engineer. He left for America at 22, a refugee with \$300 from his father, and promised him he would become one. He kept his word, earning a civil engineering degree from the New Jersey Institute of Technology in 1985. For more than 35 years he has worshiped at the Metropolitan Cathedral of St. John the Theologian in Tenafly, N.J., where he serves on the parish council.

Mr. Josephakis's family fled Famagusta on August 15, 1974, and never went back. "When I received the word that I would be honored tonight, my first thought was of a young boy in Famagusta, Cyprus," he said. What stays with him from those days is "the determination in my parents' eyes and faces, not despair, but resolve." President Christodoulides, who first met him in Houston in 2025, said the collaboration that followed has NVIDIA investing in Cyprus, which he called a huge vote of confidence in the country. "Do not wait. Do not wait. Be proactive. Push forward," Mr. Josephakis said. He had a flight to Dallas to catch that night, for his grandson's baptism the next day at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church. He ended in Greek: "Ζήτω η Κύπρος!" Long live Cyprus.



Despina Axiotakis, third from left, receives her Community Service Award. Photo by Orthodox Observer/Dimitrios Panagos

Ms. Axiotakis came to the United States with her family in 1956 from Asgata, in the Limassol district. She has been active in the Federation for more than 40 years and serves as executive director of the Cyprus-U.S. Chamber of Commerce. “Who doesn’t know Despina?” Mr. Christodoulides asked, recalling her as one of the first people he met in New York.

She remembered, too. “I remember you very well from 1993, when you were a student at Queens College,” she told him. “Look at us, where we are. I stand on this microphone, and you are the President of Cyprus.”

Kyriacos Papastylianou is serving his final term as the Federation’s president. He thanked Archbishop Elpidophoros for his support through both terms, and for his work. He added: “Our Church in America stands at the center of our community,” he said. “This can never change. Some people chose to attack our Church and tried to divide us. They failed in their effort.”

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