

The voice he gave: Archons honor Dr. Nicholas Loutsion



NEW YORK — Dr. Nicholas G. Loutsion had spoken only a few sentences of his acceptance speech when he had to stop.

“This has been pretty rough,” he told the guests. “Hold on one minute.” Loutsion, an equine veterinarian and the “protopsaltis” (first chanter) of All Saints Greek Orthodox Church in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, had just received the 2026 Nicholas J. Bouras Award for Extraordinary Archon Stewardship. The Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate presented it Oct. 16 at the New York Hilton Midtown, during their annual weekend. He would dedicate it to the memory of his father.

The award honors the late National Vice Commander Nicholas J. Bouras, a World War II veteran and steel industrialist. National Commander Dr. Anthony J. Limberakis recalled that Bouras had quietly and anonymously supplied the steel for churches across the country. “Not just one or two, but many, many churches,” he said. The honor is meant to inspire Archons to give as Bouras did.

National Vice Commander B. Theodore Bozonelis opened his toast with the Gospel of Matthew: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Loutsion, he said, “has offered to us extraordinary time, talent and treasure that has inspired all of us.” After reciting decades of that service, Bozonelis asked, “Dr. Nick, are you exhausted?”

The most personal tributes came from his daughters. Alyssa Loutsion Kyritsis, who directs youth and young adult ministries for the Metropolis of Pittsburgh, jokingly introduced the pair as “the one who works for the church and the opera singer.” Alexandra, a dramatic soprano who has sung leading roles with companies across North America and has been on the roster of the Metropolitan Opera, had earlier sung his favorite aria, “O mio babbino caro,” from Puccini’s “Gianni Schicchi,” and “Ti Ypermachos,” the kontakion to the Theotokos.



Soprano Alexandra Loutsion sings for her father at the Bouras Award dinner. (Orthodox Observer/Dimitrios Panagos)

Their father, Alyssa said, is devoted to his home parish, “or as he likes to say, the center of the universe.” He has been married to Susan for 50 years and is now grandfather to Nicholas and Gregory. “Alexandra and I have been replaced,” she added.

Alexandra Loutsion described a home full of music: cassettes of Kazantzidis and

Byzantine chant in the truck on the way to veterinary calls, Greek folk songs at the dinner table and the κάλαντα, or carols, sung house to house at Christmas. She traced his choice of profession to her grandfather's meatpacking business, where her father worked as a boy. "Perhaps it's no surprise then that a man with such a generous spirit decided he'd rather devote his life to caring for animals than preparing them for the dinner table." Closing the tribute, Alyssa wondered aloud: "Isn't it fitting," she asked, "that your two biggest passions, your faith and music, are now the paths myself and Alexandra have followed in our own careers?"

Nicholas Loutsion began his remarks with a memory. "Fourteen years ago, I stood at this very spot," he said, recalling the 2012 dinner at which he paid tribute to that year's honorees, among them his friend and mentor John Halecky Jr., a proud Carpatho-Russian who used to greet him in Slavonic: "Slava Isusu Christu." Glory be to Jesus Christ.

He spoke of the years when "we did not have the luxury of Zoom" and council members traveled to New York every month. "What might have seemed like a burden really became a blessing," he said. Such service, he added, requires sacrifice, and much of it is made by "the family members who quietly support us behind the scenes." To Susan, he said: "Whatever I have been able to accomplish in service to the Lord and his church, I have not accomplished alone."

Then he came to his father, and his voice broke again. He started over.

"Growing up, he was my best friend, my mentor, my confidant, and my anchor," he said. "I loved him deeply. And through his words, and more importantly, through his actions, he taught me how a man should live."

His father, Archon George T. Loutsion Sr., had come from Rhodes, chanted at All Saints and become the parish's first Archon. "My father was a proud Hellene, but really, he was a Byzantine at heart," his son said. Addressing the congregation, the elder Loutsion would begin: "Αγαπητοί μου πάροικοι, εμείς οι Ρωμιοί." My beloved parishioners, we Romioi, the name the Orthodox Christians of Byzantium gave themselves.

"He understood that our faith and our spiritual inheritance transcended national identity and connected us to a tradition that has endured for centuries," Loutsion said.



Archbishop Elpidophoros, setting aside his prepared remarks, speaks as Dr. Nicholas G. Loutsion listens. (Orthodox Observer/Dimitrios Panagos)

When Archbishop Elpidophoros of America rose, he was too moved to read his prepared remarks. Setting them aside, he spoke of how deeply the church's worship, services and hymns reach children, "even though they don't realize it at that time." As they mature in faith, he said, they come to understand. He thanked Loutsion for recalling his father's words about the "Romioi," which he called "the widest, the most ecumenical expression of the Hellenic culture and faith." For that reason, he said, the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its children "can never be nationalistic, can never be extreme." The church embraces everyone, he added, and that is why the Ecumenical Patriarchate has a future in the United States, a country that "doesn't ask you to change whatever you are, but to embrace the same ideals."

His Eminence said he was touched by Alexandra's remarks about the voice. Describing herself as her father's "shadow at the chant stand," she had told the guests: "I was among those most profoundly moved by his voice. It was through listening to him that I first discovered the power of music, a discovery that would eventually lead me to a life on the operatic stage. But perhaps the greatest lesson he taught me was that a voice is not simply something we possess, it is something that we give."

His Eminence built on her words: "We all have a talent in our pocket. And this is not

ours. It is given to us.” In his telling, the talent is returned by giving it to the Church, “because the Church is His body.” “And when I say the Church,” he told the Archons and their families, “I don’t mean the Archbishop or the priests. You are the Church.” Then he turned back to Loutsion, a chanter’s son who became a chanter himself, and to his father’s ecumenical inheritance. “And you represent that,” His Eminence told him, “as a faithful child of your late father.”

orthodoxobserver.org