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Greek Orthodox faithful repudiate religious hate at St. Nicholas Shrine

St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine joined houses of worship across the country on Sunday, Oct. 18, to speak out against antisemitism and all forms of faith-based hate.

The shrine, the only house of worship destroyed in the 9/11 terrorist attacks, was one of several prominent sites in “Stand Up Sunday,” a national day of action organized by the Blue Square Alliance Against Hate and the Appeal of Conscience Foundation. Organizers said this year’s observance, themed “United in Faith, United Against Hate,” reached more than two million Americans, up from 1.5 million congregants in more than 30 states last year.

“At Saint Nicholas, we know the pain that hatred can leave behind. Our responsibility is to bear witness to what love can rebuild,” Fr. Andreas said to the Orthodox Observer. (Photos by AP/Appeal of Conscience Foundation)

On the same day, separate Stand Up Sunday services were held at other prominent houses of worship, including St. Patrick’s Cathedral in Manhattan, BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville, N.J., and St. Luke’s Methodist Church in Oklahoma City, where the initiative began in 2024.

In an encyclical read on Oct. 18 in participating Greek Orthodox parishes, His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros noted that it was the Archdiocese’s second consecutive year in the observance and called antisemitism “one of the world’s gravest examples of how human dignity can be clouded by hatred and suspicion.”

“Any form of discrimination and hatred against any community, no matter their background, race, or creed, is a direct affront to all people, our shared dignity, and the image of God that we all bear,” Archbishop Elpidophoros wrote.

He cited Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who has urged the faithful to “look beyond the color of their skin, the creed or faith they adhere to” and to transform such crises into “an opportunity for building bridges, for practicing solidarity, for changing hearts.”

“Stand Up Sunday reminds us that love, not hatred, is our identity and our

mission," Archbishop Elpidophoros wrote, closing with a prayer that the faithful "work together as peacemakers and architects of a world free of hate."

"At Saint Nicholas, we know the pain that hatred can leave behind," said Fr. Andreas Vithoulkas, the shrine's proistamenos. "Our responsibility is to bear witness to what love can rebuild."

Fr. Andreas said the Orthodox belief that every person bears the image of God compels Orthodox Christians to come to the defense of people regardless of religion. "That dignity does not depend on whether someone shares our faith," Fr. Andreas said. "When our Jewish, Muslim, or other neighbors are threatened because of their beliefs, our Orthodox faith calls us to stand beside them."

"Here at Ground Zero, remembrance must move us to action," Fr. Andreas said. "Honoring those we lost means choosing, every day, to become people who bring peace."

The observance comes amid rising instances of religious hate crimes. Citing federal data, organizers said religious-based hate crimes in the United States increased 136 percent between 2015 and 2024, while antisemitic incidents rose nearly 900 percent over the same period. The FBI's 2025 statistics recorded a record number of hate crimes against Jewish people, accounting for 63 percent of all religious-based hate crimes.

The participating houses of worship joined the national, interreligious stand against that rise. Attendees received the Blue Square, the alliance's symbol of solidarity against antisemitism and hatred of all kinds.

Voices From Across Faiths

"Amid rising hate and division, Stand Up Sunday serves as a critical reminder: we are strongest when we stand united," said Adam Katz, president of the Blue Square Alliance Against Hate.

Karen Dresbach, executive vice president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation speaking with Fr. Andreas on Stand Up Sunday. (Photos by AP/Appeal of Conscience Foundation)

Karen Dresbach, executive vice president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, said, “We are all God’s children, together we can silence the voices of hate and the perpetrators of violence.”

The coalition also included parishes from the Catholic Archdioceses of New York, Newark, Washington and Boston and the Diocese of Brooklyn, as well as the Armenian Diocese of America, BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, and African Methodist Episcopal, Presbyterian, evangelical and nondenominational congregations.

“In a recent meeting with interreligious leaders, Pope Leo XIV reminded us, ‘To invoke God’s name in order to justify violence or oppression is to profane that name,’” said Bishop Edmund Whalen, vicar general of the Archdiocese of New York.

Stand Up Sunday is connected to the Appeal of Conscience Foundation’s “Respect the Other” campaign. The foundation was established in 1965 by Rabbi Arthur Schneier to promote religious freedom and protect houses of worship.

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