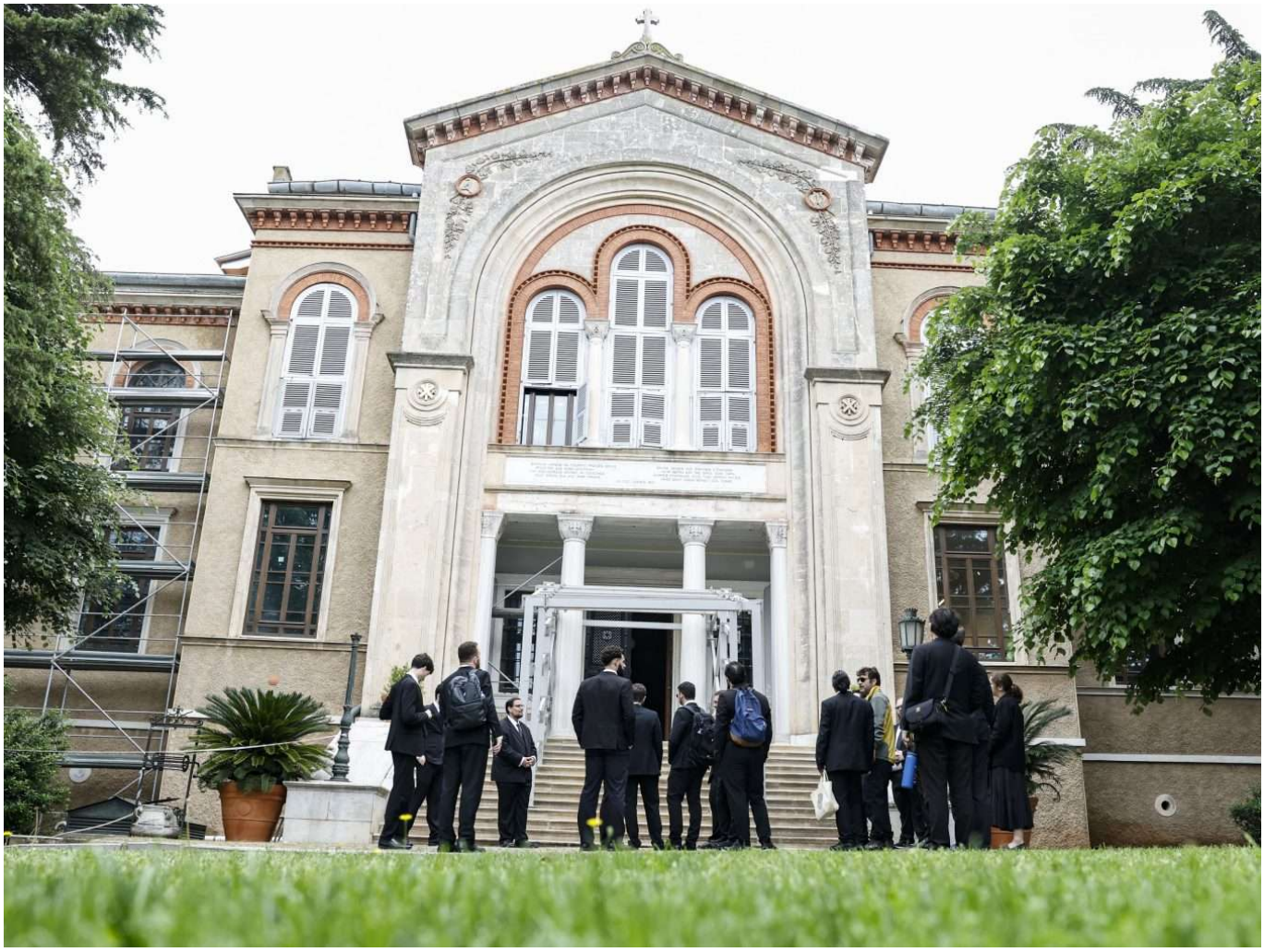
02/11/2026

# Theological School of Halki renovation to be completed in 2027



CONSTANTINOPLE—Renovation work at the Halki Theological School is expected to be completed in January 2027, according to the Abbot of the Holy Trinity Monastery on Halki, which has housed the School since its founding in 1844.

Speaking to the Orthodox Observer on Oct. 23, 2026, His Grace Bishop Kassianos of Arabissos highlighted the pivotal role of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America in the initial planning of the renovation, as well as the substantial financial support provided by shipowner Athanasios Martinos to bring the project to fruition.

“I would like to thank Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, whom I have known for 30 years,” he said. “He was also one of my professors during my postgraduate studies in Thessaloniki.”

Bishop Kassianos was born in Istanbul in 1978. He studied theology at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, where he completed his postgraduate studies in 2010. He was ordained to the episcopacy in 2017, serving as an auxiliary bishop of the Metropolis of Chalcedon. In March 2020, he became Abbot of the Holy Trinity Monastery on Halki.

“Archbishop Elpidophoros had already drawn up plans for the renovation of the Halki Theological School when he was still Metropolitan of Bursa,” Bishop Kassianos explained.



***His Grace Bishop Kassianos of Arabissos addresses HCHC seminarians during their visit to the Theological School of Halki in May 2026. (Orthodox Observer/Huseyin Aldemir)***

During Archbishop Elpidophoros’s tenure as abbot, from 2011 to 2019, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki prepared a study for the renovation and restoration of the School’s buildings. The study was subsequently published in a dedicated volume.

Archbishop Elpidophoros was succeeded as abbot by then-Bishop Cyril of Erythres,

now Metropolitan of Imbros and Tenedos. He served until Bishop Kassianos of Arabissos succeeded him in March 2020.

In 2019, during his tenure as abbot, Bishop Cyril drew on the existing study and approached Athanasios Martinos, asking him to fund the project.

“When I took over as abbot, we began the renovation work,” Bishop Kassianos said, noting that the project got underway during his tenure.

Bishop Kassianos also emphasized the importance of this support: “By the grace of God, and thanks to the generosity and support of Mr. Athanasios Martinos, we expect the work to be completed around January.”

Athanasios Martinos, Archon Exarch of the Holy and Great Church of Christ, is funding the project through the Athanasios and Marina Martinos Foundation, with technical oversight provided from Thessaloniki.

The renovation plans include the construction of an underground auditorium and the conversion of the old barn into a modern conference hall. The previously unused attic is also being converted into accommodation for students and visiting professors.

Extensive work is also underway in the historic 1896 building to upgrade fire safety, accessibility, air conditioning, and digital infrastructure.

The renovated spaces, including the School’s theater and dining hall, already reveal the scale of the transformation taking place across the historic complex.



***HCHC seminarians visit the Theological School of Halki in May 2026. (Orthodox Observer/Huseyin Aldemir)***

Completing the renovation, however, will not automatically mean that the Theological School can reopen. That still depends on a decision by the Turkish authorities.

The Halki Theological School has remained closed since 1971, when a ruling by Turkey's Constitutional Court brought private institutions of higher education under state control.

Its reopening has been a longstanding priority for the Ecumenical Patriarchate and a personal goal of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who called for it in his enthronement address in 1991.

For decades, the United States and the European Union have also urged Ankara to allow the School to reopen.

The issue has gained fresh momentum over the past two years. In 2024, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan instructed Minister of National Education Yusuf Tekin to examine the possibility of reopening the School.

The Halki Theological School was founded in 1844 by Ecumenical Patriarch Germanos IV at the Holy Trinity Monastery, which, according to tradition, was

founded by Saint Photios the Great in the ninth century.

The School stands on the Hill of Hope on Halki, the second-largest of the Princes' Islands. The present building, designed by architect Periklis Fotiadis, was inaugurated in 1896, following the devastating earthquake of 1894, which had severely damaged the original building.

Generations of clergy, theologians, and hierarchs of the Ecumenical Throne studied at the School, among them the current Ecumenical Patriarch, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

For Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, Halki holds deep personal and spiritual significance. In a November 2025 interview with the Associated Press, he described the School's continued closure after more than 50 years as "a political and diplomatic anachronism."

On October 23, 2026, Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate visited the Halki Theological School while in Constantinople for celebrations marking the 35th anniversary of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew's enthronement. They were welcomed by Bishop Kassianos of Arabissos.

The abbot led them on a tour of the School's facilities, now in the final stages of renovation, including the impressive theater, the dining hall, and the library, which will house 85,000 books of great historical value.

The visit gave the Archons an opportunity to see the progress of the work firsthand and the transformation of the historic complex.

As his interview with the Orthodox Observer drew to a close, the abbot expressed his heartfelt hope that Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew would live to see the School reopen.

"My fervent prayer for Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who has just marked 35 years as Patriarch, is that God grant him many more years of life and the blessing of one day seeing this School open its doors again."

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