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Remarks of Metropolitan Methodios for the 2020 Virtual Ministry Awards Recognition



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This is the 34th year that we gather at a Metropolis Awards Dinner to take pride in our Parishes and to express our gratitude to all those brethren – priests and laymen who (as we pray during the Divine Liturgy) "with one voice and one heart glorify and praise the most honorable and majestic name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit." We come to thank those who labor harmoniously to manifest God's name – to witness our faith in our communities and in the world in which we live.

We gather to strengthen one and other and be inspired by one another. We believe that everyone is the image and likeness of Almighty God who created us.

Every year, it is a joy and a source of pride to look out and see Lombardo's filled with 800 or so attendees from throughout New England. I enjoy recognizing the faces of the honorees sharing fellowship not only with their families and fellow parishioners, but with stewards from neighboring communities and from those from afar.

I'm saddened that this year, this is not possible, because the tables and chairs here at Lombardo's are empty because of the pandemic.

I hope this is the last time we will be forced to hold this dinner virtually.

Our banquet coincides this evening with All Saints Sunday, i.e. the Feast Day of all the Saints of our Church. The Church celebrates all her known saints today, even though they each have their own special Feast Day. We celebrate as well the feasts of the saints who are not known, those who glory in anonymity, many of whom shed their blood to nourish the tree of Christian Faith. All Saints Sunday is always celebrated on the Sunday after Pentecost to remind us that sainthood is the normal flowering of every Christian. We honor tonight the flowers which the earth brings forth in every age from the soil (which is) continuously refreshed by the streams of the Holy Spirit.

Tonight's festive celebration coincides with the celebration of the Feast of my Patron Saint, Methodios, Archbishop and Patriarch of Constantinople. As we reflect on his life, we are reminded of the goals of Christian Ministry which clergy and laity share.

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As you know, Patriarch Methodios restored the Holy Icons to churches following over a century of iconoclasm. In much the same way, our shared responsibility as clergy and laity is to labor to restore the icon of God in our towns, in our cities, in our country and in the whole world. Living as we do in a world mired in narcissism and nihilism, of cynicism and relativism, in an age of spiritual iconoclasm, we are called to restore the icon of God on the iconostasion of the hearts, minds and souls of our fellow Americans.

For several months, we have been battling the dangerous pandemic of the Covid-19 virus, and are now confronted with an even more dangerous pandemic, that of lawlessness.

Many in America have long felt dehumanized, humiliated, frustrated and angry. Many have resorted to lawlessness.

It was indeed tragic to witness in Boston, in Brockton, in Manchester, NH, in Rhode Island - in cities and states throughout New England - the consequences of injustice, inequality, hopelessness and lawlessness.

We have watched crowds expressing their outrage through peaceful protests which they hope will bring attention and meaningful change to a broken and unjust society. Exacerbated by the horrific killing of George Floyd, they filled the streets of our cities to express their pain in a manner consistent with our nation's history of peaceful protest urged by, among others, Martin Luther King Jr. He believed that we should never return hate with hate or repay violence with violence. The peaceful protesters surely recalled his words, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies in a descending spiral of destruction."

Sadly, however, we witnessed on the part of other demonstrators criminal acts of arson, vandalism and violence, horrific acts of rage against innocent citizens. We were appalled by the senseless ransacking and destruction of national monuments and churches, and the destruction of private properties and businesses.

As Americans of Greek Orthodox faith, we must be instruments of peace during these challenging times. We must work harmoniously with our fellow citizens to bring about justice in the face of inequality and discrimination. Jesus taught, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." (Matthew 5:9). As Orthodox

Christians, we believe that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God. We love our neighbors regardless of their color, their creed or their race.

I believe our parishes can play a critical role in the future of America. In a world that is radically changing and seems to be rapidly running away from God, our Metropolis is committed to helping renew the spiritual fabric of New England by instilling in our parishes a transformative vision of spiritual health and vitality.

New England has long been plagued by a spirit of irreligiosity. Our Metropolis and its parishes must labor to revitalize the religious fabric of New England.

I believe that the challenge of our Church is to assume a responsibility, a challenge and a mission – and that is to rediscover its identity. And that identity is to offer diakonia- service to a community, we must confess, growing more and more estranged from Christianity. To a society which wants to impose its own image, its own criteria, its own agenda. To a people that still consider the truths of the Christian message as irrelevant.

It is the responsibility and calling of the Church to bring unity where people are divided, to bring peace where violence prevails, to bring justice where injustice and oppression exist. To bring love where there is hatred and, above all, to unite all people in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. More so than at any other time in America's history, the Church must be able to speak a language which will reach the souls of brethren who await to hear its message.

I end my remarks by announcing that our Metropolis has applied for a grant to help us develop programs geared toward equipping, enabling and empowering our parishes to take the responsibility of enhancing the level of their vitality to engage the society at large. Due to the pandemic, our parishes have had to reevaluate and rethink the way they offer ministry, and the ways they respond to the needs of their stewards. We hope that as a result of these programs our parishes will see

1. Growth in membership and stewardship
2. Rise in the number of parishioners engaged in ministries of all ages groups, especially young adults
3. The realization of strong leadership driven by clergy and parish council members