

01/08/2020

## **His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America issues message ahead of the resumption of construction event for St. Nicholas Shrine**



**His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America has issued a message ahead of the resumption of construction event for St. Nicholas Shrine, which will be taking place on Monday, August 3, 2020.**

### **The message reads:**

My Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I write to you in these heavy days, when our precious Hagia Sophia has been seized for re-conversion to a mosque. I want to remind all of you that the inspiration for the design of Saint Nicholas came from Hagia Sophia, as you can see by the wonderful series of watercolor sketches made by the architect, Santiago Calatrava.

Deeply moved by the magnificent icon over the south door in the Vestibule, which portrays the Emperors Constantine offering the City and Justinian offering Hagia Sophia to the Theotokos and Divine Child, the architect marvelously morphed the image of the Holy Mother into the design of the Church. And to solidify this connection with Hagia Sophia, the dome of Saint Nicholas will have forty ribs, as does the dome of the Hagia Sophia, a living reminder of the Great Church for all the world to see.

This artistic connection is also a spiritual one as well. Even as Hagia Sophia is manipulated to satisfy shortsighted exclusionary objectives of

'glory' and dominance, the Saint Nicholas National Shrine and Church will become an open and inclusive witness of what is best in all human aspirations for the Divine. For a thousand years, Hagia Sophia was the largest edifice - religious or otherwise - in the world. Saint Nicholas will be as large, but not physically. Our Church at Ground Zero will be that shining light set on the lampstand, the manifest city on the hill (Matthew 5:14,15), that welcomes dialogue, engagement, mutual respect, and above all the Faith of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is Himself the Holy Wisdom and Word of God.

Therefore, I implore you all to take whatever sadness and pain these recent tragic events have caused you and those you love, and let us pour our hearts into finishing Saint Nicholas National Shrine as a testament to our resilience, our steadfastness, and our faith. No matter what happens to Hagia Sophia, the Great Church will always be ours. Let us make Saint Nicholas a witness to that. Let us build our bright city on the hill of martyrdom where so many of our fellow citizens perished. And let Saint Nicholas and its glowing walls remind the world that the light of the Phanar, of the Great Church of Christ, will never be extinguished.

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