

## **Archbishop Elpidophoros and Governor Andrew Cuomo Preside at Ceremony to Resume Construction of the Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine at The World Trade Center**



New York, NY – August 3, 2020 — His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros and New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, with the leadership of the Friends of St. Nicholas and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, today visited the World Trade Center to witness the resumption of construction of the Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine, the only house of worship destroyed in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Once rebuilt, the Church and National Shrine will serve as a powerful symbol of resilience and a beacon of hope, welcoming people of all faiths to honor the lives lost on 9/11.

In his remarks, His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America stated, “Nearly twenty years ago, our Saint Nicholas fell with thousands of our fellow human beings lost in the ashes of 9/11, and countless others wounded in body, heart, and soul by a savage act of hatred and terror. We cannot, we must not, and we shall not let this

stand. We are going to open the Saint Nicholas Church and National Shrine as a sign of love, not hate; a sign of reconciliation, not of prejudice; and a sign of the ideals that exist in this great American Nation, where one's religious liberty and freedom of conscience never excludes, but only embraces."

The Archbishop blessed the construction workers, praying that God might "protect the workers who have returned to this holy place to rebuild in safety and peace. Guide their hands aright, shield their eyes from harm, grant unto them and all who contribute to this Holy Work every blessing of body and soul."

Governor Cuomo stated, "In the face of tragedy and destruction on 9/11, the St. Nicholas community literally held its ground against what was an inconceivable tragedy inspired by hate, instead relying on the power of love to restore what was lost and create a symbolism of faith and tolerance." Governor Cuomo continued, "In New York, we know from experience that rebuilding after a crisis means more than just restoring bricks and mortar or reviving an economy; it also requires healing a broken spirit. This church helps achieve that healing, and it will be a national shrine, rising on a place made sacred by the suffering that took place here and will send a powerful message to the world that New York is a state made stronger by tolerance and our respect for one another."

Rick Cotton, Executive Director of the Port Authority said, "Today marks a new chapter in the historic rebuild of Lower Manhattan. The new St. Nicholas Church and National Shrine will be a source of inspiration and peace, while also helping to share the historical contributions of the Greek-Orthodox community to all who visit and worship. The Port Authority is proud to have worked alongside Governor Cuomo to bring us to this important milestone and today, we are pleased to see construction resume. I commend the work of the Archdiocese and Friends of St. Nicholas as they have worked hard to ensure that this project honors the strength and resolve of our World Trade Center Campus."

Kevin J. O'Toole, Chairman of the Port Authority said, "In a world filled with so much uncertainty, this restart brings hope that we are closer to restoring St. Nicholas as a solemn place for parishioners and visitors to worship, reflect, and honor the innumerable sacrifices made after the September 11th attacks. The church is a symbol of the continued resilience that has helped bring a rebirth to the World Trade Center campus, and today is a day to recognize those hard-fought achievements."

The election of Archbishop Elpidophoros in May 2019 reset the stage for a new, transparent approach to complete the Saint Nicholas reconstruction, which had been abruptly halted in December 2017 due to a series of managerial and financial crises in the Archdiocese. With the encouragement of Governor Cuomo, the non-profit Friends of St. Nicholas was formed to oversee the project. This group of prominent Greek Orthodox Christians, under the guidance of Archbishop Elpidophoros and Fr. Alexander Karloutsos, and the leadership of Dennis Mehiel, Michael Psaros and John Catsimatidis, raised the funds required to complete the construction of the Church and National Shrine.

At the conclusion of the event, Archbishop Elpidophoros, Governor Cuomo and those in attendance at the event observed the placement of the first skylight in the dome of the Church. Dennis Mehiel, Chairman of the Friends of St. Nicholas, remarked, "We have just witnessed the placement of the first piece of glass that what will eventually become a beacon of light at Ground Zero, shining brightly as a symbol of good versus evil and providing a peaceful and prayerful place for people of all faiths who visit the 9/11 Memorial."

The Church is slated to be completed in the fall of 2021.

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