

Metropolis of San Francisco - Message from Metropolitan Gerasimos on the California Fires



Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord,

We are all painfully aware of the devastation brought on by the fires in California that are literally burning from one end of the state to the other. Currently there are over 600 fires which have consumed hundreds of thousands of acres, destroyed countless structures, and have also sadly led to loss of life.

This is a time when we must be keenly alert and aware of these signs from God – the Coronavirus pandemic, the fires, and other natural disasters – all are sobering reminders that our focus should not be on worldly, fleeting matters. Rather, we should be reliant on God’s unconditional love and care for us as His children and creation.

Some parishioners from Saint John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Carmel by the Sea have been evacuated, and one family with two small children have lost everything in the fire. The wife is a nurse at a local hospital and she continues to go to work to help those who are sick and suffering. This is a beautiful example of courage and faith that she exemplifies.

There are presently 27 families from the Prophet Elias Greek Orthodox Church in

Santa Cruz who have also been evacuated. They are all accounted for and are safe. The parish has opened their doors to the clergy and faithful of Saints Peter and Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church, keeping safe their Liturgical vessels and icons, as the church structure is in harms' way. The faithful will worship together on Sunday, August 23 at Prophet Elias, and then they will process through the town carrying icons of Christ and the Theotokos, chanting Paraklesis and seeking the intercessions of the Panagia for her protection and comfort. Saint Lawrence Orthodox Church in Felton, California has also been evacuated and we also offer to them our support and prayers during this tenuous and dangers and challenging time.

This is an unprecedented occurrence, and because of adverse weather conditions, fire authorities are gravely concerned that this weekend could bring forth even more fires. Many of the current fires were caused by over 12,000 strikes of lightning that ignited the drought-stricken land and forests in our state.

For nearly 30 years, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has been alerting us to the dangers of environmental degradation and that we must be responsible for the world around us. This is our clarion call, my beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, for greater stewardship and askesis – a more disciplined relationship – with the world around us.

On the afternoon of Saturday, August 22 I had the opportunity to participate virtually in the National Philoptochos Convention. Upon joining their meeting, I was truly overwhelmed to learn that over 500 delegates to the Philoptochos convention unanimously approved a \$25,000 donation to assist the Metropolis of San Francisco in helping those whose homes and livelihoods have been affected by these fires. This, my beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, is how we put our faith into action. This is how we, as Orthodox Christians, can unite and help people during these times of great need.

In closing, I would like to share with you a powerful message from His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew where he declared, "As Orthodox Christians, we use the Greek word *kairos* to describe a moment in time, often a brief moment in time, which has eternal significance. For the human race as a whole, there is now a *kairos*, a decisive time in our relationship with God's creation. We will either act in time to protect life on earth from the worst consequences of human folly, or we will fail to act. May God grant us the wisdom to act in time. Amen."

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