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More Than 1,200 Delegates and Observers Participate in Virtual 45th Biennial Clergy-Laity Congress



New York – More than 1,200 delegates and observers participated in the 45th Biennial Clergy Laity Congress of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. The theme of the Congress, "…the greatest of these is love" exemplified the words and the spirit of the presenters as the Covid-19 pandemic forced the Congress to be held "virtually."

The virtual meetings began on Wednesday, September 9, 2020 at 12:00 p.m. Eastern Time with a prayer service led by His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America. Introductory remarks by Judge Theodore Bozonelis, Secretary of the Archdiocesan Council and Presiding Officer of the virtual Congress, greetings from the Chairman of the Congress His Grace Bishop Apostolos of Medeia, and remarks from Vice President of the Archdiocesan Council John Catsimatidis followed.

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew sent virtual greetings to the delegates urging them to be active participants in the world, "Our objective should be a Christian witness and action in the world, which implies engagement and not disengagement, praxis and not just theoria, acceptance and not just rejection,

dialogue and not just barren disputation" (watch the full address at https://youtu.be/SyOECc-1lLI).

Following the message from the Ecumenical Patriarch, Archbishop Elpidophoros offered his keynote address, focusing on the theme, "… the greatest of these is love" (I Corinthians 13:13). "Imagine a world where instead of objectifying and opposing others, we simply loved them, and allowed the transformative love of God to fill their hearts. This, my beloved friends, is faith in action, because we continue to believe that we can become better people, even our best selves in Christ. … In the Light of Christ, the future is always bright. Even in the midst of a global pandemic that has changed our world and our societies, we have found ways to live our life as Ἐκκλησία. We have been called out, called out to lives of service and mission to one another and to the world," Archbishop Elpidophoros stated (watch the full keynote address at https://youtu.be/6VpUCTY8pb8).

The Opening Session of the Congress was adjourned in order for delegates to virtually attend the Finance and Administrative Committee Meetings or one of the virtual Ministry Sessions offered by the Departments of Internet Ministries, Religious Education, Youth and Young Adult Ministries, Greek Education, Stewardship, Outreach & Evangelism, Inter-Orthodox, Ecumenical & Interfaith Relations, National Forum of Greek Orthodox Church Musicians, Youth Safety, and the Center for Family Care. It was recorded that more than 900 people logged on to the Ministry Workshops, while the Committee Meetings each had record attendances.

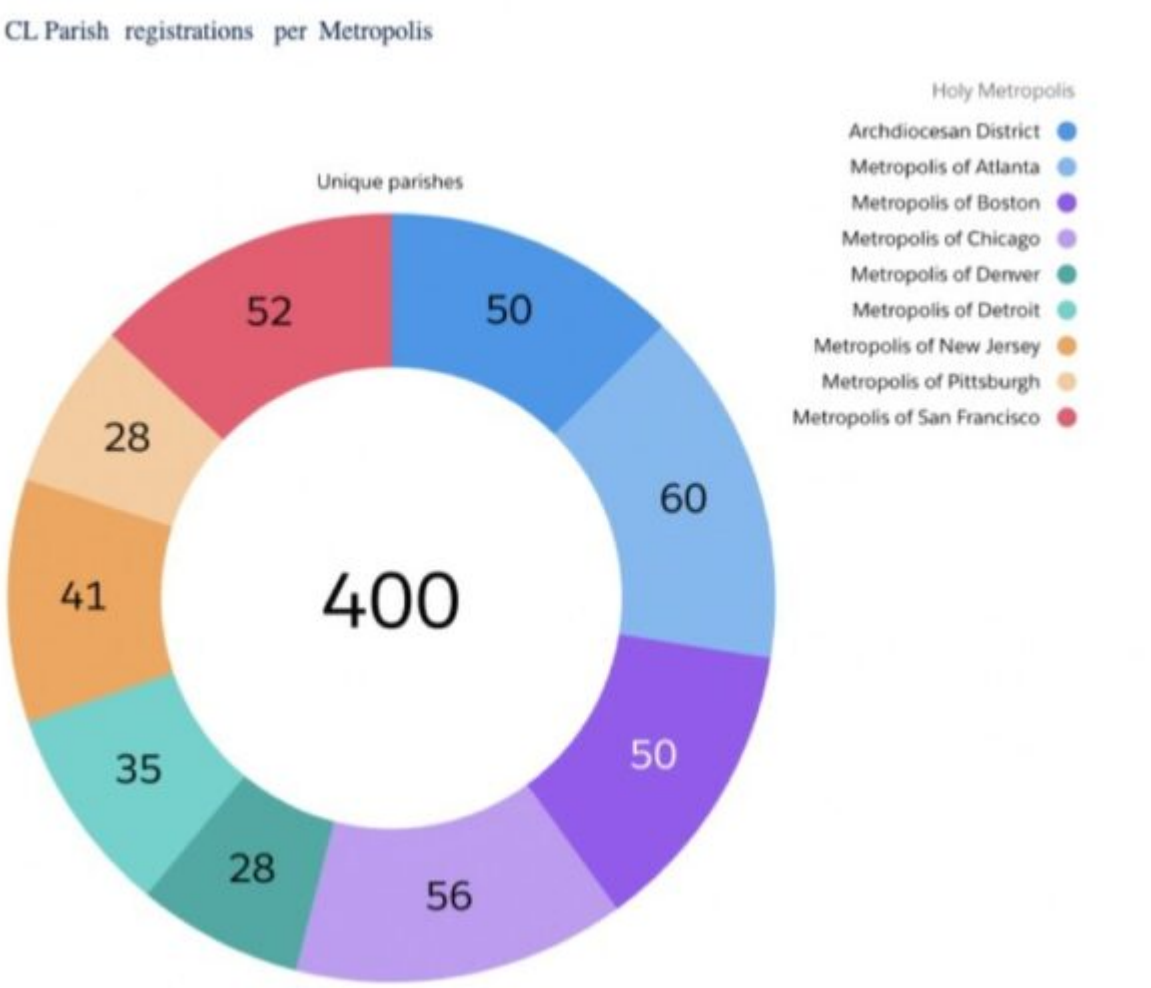
On Wednesday evening, the Archdiocesan Benefits Committee presented a detailed informative session on the Clergy & Lay Employees Pension Plan. The presentation included goals for the future sustainability of the Clergy and Lay Staff retirement program.

The full Congress reconvened on Thursday, September 10, 2020 for the Plenary Session. The Chairman of the Administration Committee Constantine Caras presented a resolution from the Committee which allows for the postponement of 2020 Parish Council elections, at the discretion of any Metropolitan for any parish within his jurisdiction. Current parish council members would maintain their positions. This resolution was presented due to the limitation resulting from the Covid-19 virus. The resolution passed.

Treasurer of the Archdiocese Elaine Allen and Chairman of the Finance Committee Lou Kircos reviewed the financial history of the past years and presented budgets that were approved by the previous day's Finance Committee meeting and referred

to the Plenary Session for approval. Highlights of the budgets include no increase in Total Commitment for 2021 from the 2020 level and a 2% increase in 2022. Grants to Hellenic College Holy Cross increased in 2021 by $1 million consistent with the Archdiocese's commitment to provide the funding that is needed to stabilize the School's finances and the additional funding for the Clergy & Lay Employees Pension Plan was maintained at the $1 million level for 2021 and 2022. After lengthy discussions the 2021 and 2022 Budgets were voted on and passed.

Additional resolutions were approved regarding: New Retirement and Ancillary Benefit Funding Methodology as presented at the Congress: that any of the budgeted amount of $3.5 million granted to Hellenic College Holy Cross that is not used for Hellenic College/Holy Cross shall be redirected to the pension fund: and to refer to the administration committee for immediate review, analysis and conclusion , the following proposal: That the Archdiocese Finance Committee: 1) adopt a zero based budgeting process in the future, so that the Archdiocese Budget is more closely aligned with the mission, strategic plan, and goals of the Archdiocese, 2) engage in an annual evaluation of the effectiveness of its programs and ministries relative to the success of accomplishing the Archdiocese mission, and 3) re-allocate capital more systematically, intentionally, and accordingly in future budgets. The resolution that was approved on the New Retirement and Ancillary Benefit Funding Methodology will provide for an additional $900,000 to be funded into the Pension Plan over current funding levels while also providing for a more equitable distribution of the costs of the Pension Plan to the parishes.



Resolutions were also presented regarding: recognizing the loss of life and the effect that the worldwide pandemic has had on the world, as well as saluting the health care and essential workers who risked their lives during this time. The resolution also recognized Archbishop Elpidophoros who created the Archdiocesan Covid-19 Relief Fund which gave in excess of $600,000 to more than 350 needy families who were impacted by Covid-19: a resolution presented by the Order of St. Andrew Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate supporting the plight of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and supporting religious freedom around the world; and a resolution of thanks to Archbishop Elpidophoros, the Holy Eparchial Synod, Bishop Apostolos of Medeia and the staff for their work in putting together the first ever virtual Congress.

Archbishop Elpidophoros offered closing remarks to the delegates thanking them for their diligent attention in the unique situation of a “virtual” Congress and also thanking all of those who worked with dedication on making the Congress a success in terms of attendance and in the quality of work completed.

For more information or to F information or to watch the Ministry Sessions click

here: https://gateway.on24.com/wcc/eh/2397736/clergy-laity-2020

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