

## Remarks of Father Nikiphoros Fakinos at the Great Vespers of Saint Demetrios the Myrrh-Bearer, Merrick, NY



The conditions in the world are not ordinary. That calls for us to become extraordinary. Last week, Your Eminence completed visits to all the Parishes, Monasteries and Chapels in the Direct Archdiocesan District. Despite the delays caused by the pandemic and all pertinent restrictions, Your Eminence travelled from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople, all the way to the White House in Washington DC and from the rejuvenated Seminary in Boston all the way to the West Coast and even the missionary Parishes in Hawaii. And to crown this accomplishment, we are celebrating here, this eve, at the Great Hierarchal Vespers of Saint Demetrios, Your Eminence's second visit to the Greek Orthodox Community of Merrick. Because this accomplishment is extraordinary.

Your Eminence, we have witnessed Your hard work ethic, and this beautiful Parish implements Your example to respond to the challenges presented to us. We were faced with fear, the fear of an unknown virus. To this, we responded with faith, because faith takes away all fear and distress. We responded; more people than

ever attended our services through the live stream, more people than ever lit candles, even from afar, and more services, sermons, lessons, electronic messages, telephone and email communications, personal assistance and pastoral support than ever in the history of the Parish were disseminated to our Parishioners. Times are not ordinary, we are called to become extraordinary.

When the doors of the Church opened again, we approached the chalice, we prayed, we reunited in person, safely, and whole-heartedly. By July, we had the best Church attendance than ever before in any July in the history of the Church. The same happened for the daily August Paraklesis services. And for Panaghia's!

We were challenged to reinvent and reorganize our Church and Greek School programs and methodology. Our teachers attended more than 35 seminars. We are fully equipped with all the necessary protective hardware, educational formats and electronic infrastructure to face the needs of 21st century Hellenic and Religious education. We saw 95% registration compared to last year as early as September, with more students still coming in. We commissioned two teachers per class in Greek School, teaching in person and remotely, according to the needs and wishes of each family. We are not giving up our faith, our values nor our heritage. Times are not ordinary, we are called to become extraordinary.

One of our College Students is in the sanctuary, currently studying at the seminary. Next year, more students will join Hellenic College as well. From our Parish programs and religious education we have seen 4 priests get ordained, 3 Archdiocesan employees, 2 work in the Youth Office and one retired from the Orthodox Observer, and one more currently studying for the priesthood, all from this Parish. At the same time, many young professionals, academics, researchers, and first responders have emerged from this beautiful Community. We are called to be extraordinary. And all this talent and potential is placed at the service of the Church, in a harmonious collaboration for the glory of God.

We are blessed to work under Your omoforion, Your Eminence. In the coming weeks, we will be following your leadership participating in the 2nd Annual Educational Conference for Greek language and hosting Parish Council candidates' seminars, and I humbly express my gratitude for allowing me to be a presenter for both of the above.

I also thank you Your Eminence for trusting me with serving as the Undersecretary of the Holy Eparchial Synod, a member of the Spiritual Court and as the President of the local District Clergy Fellowship. In those capacities, I have been motivated to serve You, and in serving You, commit my efforts to our beloved Great Church of

Christ, with gratitude for your generous trust, loving support, and dedicated Hierarchal bequests. You have taught us not to fear, not to back down, not to give up. Times are not ordinary, we are called to become extraordinary! Εις πολλά έτη Δέσποτα!

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