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SF Clergy-Laity Assembly Gathers Virtually, Looks to Future with Hope



“There is still time for endurance, time for patience, time for healing, time for change.” This quote from Saint Basil the Great was the theme for the 2021 Clergy-Laity Assembly for the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco. Held virtually on April 16 – 17, clergy and lay leaders from parishes in all seven states that comprise the Metropolis of San Francisco participated in enriching presentations.

It was a special blessing and honor for the Metropolis of San Francisco Clergy-Laity Assembly to convene with the Archpastoral blessing of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America. In his opening remarks to the Assembly, Archbishop Elpidophoros remarked, “I congratulate you for your persistence in these still extraordinary times of the pandemic which have been such a challenge to our churches and to our society.” When reflecting on the theme for the Assembly, Archbishop Elpidophoros remarked, “What a hopeful message for all of us is this in this time when the pandemic is still affecting our daily lives. In this time of Lent and the journey to Holy Pascha, we are encouraged by the great Basil. What I take away from this saying of Saint Basil is the optimism that even when we feel that we have run out of endurance, and that we have run out of patience, there is yet a reserve of both endurance and patience, a reserve that God has stored up for us.

Just when we think that healing will not come, and there will be no change in our dire circumstances, the light shines on in the darkness and the darkness never overcomes it. Truly, the light of the Resurrection that we will pass to one another on Holy Pascha triumphs in the end. As we move into a future that will still be clouded with doubts, Saint Basil reminds that there is still time. There is still time for us. There is time to renew. There is time to be made whole. There is time to be loved. And there is time to love."

The featured presentation for Friday afternoon was Rev. Father Barnabas Powell, from Saints Raphael, Nicholas and Irene Greek Orthodox Church in Cumming, GA, who spoke on the relevant topic, Moving Beyond the Pandemic and Returning to Worship. He spoke about how the pandemic and societal chaos has uncovered some deep wounds in our country. It has also caused us to broaden our horizons through the use of technology, as a means of outreach and an opportunity to grow our faith. Father Barnabas emphasized that now is the time for our people to re-engage in worship as a congregation, not as an audience. "We need to be that icon of the new community to a society gripped by chaos and division and tribalism and individualistic pride. We need to be that icon in our local cities where we are for the people who live across the street from our parishes to know so they can know that they can also become Orthodox," stated Father Barnabas. In closing his thought-provoking presentation, Father Barnabas presented the delegates with this challenge, "Our children and their children stand at the end of history, looking at us to see how we choose!"

Metropolis Missions and Evangelism Ministry director Thomaida Hudanish presented the results of an annual parish 12-question survey which included questions such as: the number of households supporting a parish, average number of Sunday livestream views, total parish income, parish outreach ministries, and the number of adults received into the parish through baptism or chrismation, among others all reflecting data for 2020.

In his Keynote Address to the Clergy-Laity Assembly on Saturday, His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos referenced the theme of the Assembly by offering, "As we go forward, we must find time for healing, to mourn those who have fallen asleep, to begin to recover emotionally and spiritually from the stress and disruptions of the pandemic, and to work to assist those who have lost so much over the past year." He continued on to reflect, "The pandemic forced us to change. Like anything, these changes have created opportunities and challenges. However, we have learned a great deal and we should take time to discuss as a Metropolis, indeed as an Archdiocese, about what we have learned so that we can move forward into a post-pandemic church, facing this new reality, but working in concert with one another across our Archdiocese and Metropolis to respond as one Church."

A new video highlighting the ministries of the Metropolis was presented to the delegates, which provided a comprehensive and engaging opportunity to learn more about the vast array of ministries offered that provide spiritual, emotional, educational and cultural enrichment for our faithful.

Metropolis Council Vice President Fanis Economidis presented a report which included comments on the budget which was being presented to the Assembly later, where he stated, “We take our fiduciary responsibilities very seriously, and we do not arrive at either the income or expense numbers arbitrarily. Rather, we look at past trends, explore opportunities for growth, areas for reduction, and other circumstances that we must take into consideration for every line item in the budget.” He continued on to offer that the Metropolis Council is “doing our very best to support you, and we will continue to provide opportunities for dialogue, as well as resources, programs and ministries that will help grow your parishes and continue to engage people in the Greek Orthodox Church.”

Finance Committee Chair George Psefteas presented the 2020 Year End financial reports. George stated that the Metropolis Finance Committee has been working very hard over this past year to convert the statements to a not-for-profit format. The Metropolis has also engaged the services of an independent CPA who are presently performing a Review Engagement on our financial statements, as required by the Archdiocese. The financial position of the Metropolis at the end of 2020 was strong, due in large part to the fulfillment of the Archdiocese Total Commitment by our parishes, as well as a strong fundraising effort through our Metropolis Faith Forward stewardship program.

Total Commitment and Benefits Committee Chairman Philippos Athanasiades conveyed his gratitude to the parishes for collectively achieving 102% of our Metropolis goal. Especially given the challenges of this past year, this was an exceptional achievement.

The 2021 proposed budget was presented by George Psefteas to the Clergy-Laity Assembly, which includes significant ongoing funding support for the ministries of the Metropolis, as well as covering payroll and associated expenses, property and liability insurance, and general operational expenses. The total 2021 budget for the Metropolis, approved by the Assembly, is nearly $2.5 million, of which approximately $1.1 million is for pass-through ministries that are self-funded or funded by targeted donations.

In accordance with the Uniform Metropolis Regulations, two members of the Assembly were elected to serve on the Metropolis Audit Committee, which is presently chaired by Rev. Father Thomas Zaferes (Ascension Cathedral – Oakland, CA). Elected to these positions were: Chris Kalabokes (Nativity of Christ – Novato, CA), and John Karas (Saint John the Baptist – Las Vegas, NV).

Reports from the Metropolis Ministries and Committees are posted online. You can also watch the presentations from His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos, and Rev. Father Barnabas Powell on YouTube.

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