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St. John Chrysostom Archdiocese Oratorical Virtual Festival Finals A Success



The St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival held the Archdiocese Festival, June 11-12, 2021. It was a virtual Festival hosted from the Archdiocese Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in New York City. Nine Junior Division Speakers and nine Senior Division Speakers, representing their Metropolises delivered their speeches on-line to Archbishop Elpidophoros, the panel of judges, the National Chairperson, Mrs. Katherine Orfanakos Demacopolous, Archimandrite Anton Vrame, Director of the Department of Religious Education of the Archdiocese of America, which creates and sponsors the annual festival. In addition, because of the live-streaming of the Festival, the program was broadcast to all who follow the Festival.

The Senior Division Awards were presented to John Vranas (Metropolis of Chicago), St. Nicholas Church, Oak Lawn, IL, First Place; Elizabeth Karides (Metropolis of New Jersey), Sts. Constantine and Helen Church, Annapolis, MD, Second Place; and Ana Dobrot (Metropolis of Detroit), Holy Spirit Church, Rochester, New York, Second Placae. The Junior Division Awards were presented to Maria Daniels (Metropolis of San Francisco) St. John the Baptist, Beaverton, OR, First Place; Calista Leroux (Metropolis of Boston), Annunciation Church, Cranston, RI, Second Place; and Demetra Chudley (Direct Archdiocese District), Kimisis Tis Theotokou Church,

Southampton, NY, Third Place.

On Friday, June 11, the finalists participated in an evening of virtual fun and games, breaking the ice among them. Under the guidance of Hellenic College-Holy Cross Ambassadors, they played trivia games and began to get to know one another.

On Saturday morning, His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros presided over the opening of the Festival offering his remarks and a prayer from the Cathedral. Greetings were also offered by Fr. Nikolas Karloutsos, Pastor of the Holy Trinity Cathedral, Archimandrite Anton Vrame, Director of the Department of Religious Education, and Kathy Orfanakos Demacopoulos, National Chair of the Festival. Then the program shifted to a Conference Room at the Cathedral offices with a set-up of computers, internet connection, and screens to create the live-stream and allow the finalists to deliver their speeches to the Archbishop, judges, and the viewing audience. On Saturday evening, the finalists had a private meeting with the Archbishop where they could interact with him, asking him questions about his life and ministry. The Awards Ceremony was presented in a webinar format, announcing the results from the judges. Finalists at the Archdiocese Festival receive awards from the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival Scholarship Fund, the Faith Endowment for Orthodoxy and Hellenism, and the Chrysostom Scholarship Program of Hellenic College-Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology.

In addition to the finalists who received first, second, or third place awards, Honorable Mention speakers in the Senior Division were: Stephanie Vagelos (Metropolis of Atlanta), St. Mark Church, Boca Raton, FL; Stavros Spanakis (Metropolis of Pittsburgh), Holy Trinity Church, Canton, OH; Andreas Lolis (Direct Archdiocese District), St. Barbara Church, Orange, CT; Lecau Macesanu (Metropolis of Denver), St. Basil Church, Katy, TX; Kathleen Virsik (Metropolis of San Francisco), Holy Cross Church, Belmont, CA; Eleni Carris Livingston (Metropolis of Boston) St. Demetrios Church, Weston, MA.

In addition to those who received first, second, or third place, Honorable Mention awards in the Junior Division were given to Anna Chacona (Metropolis of New Jersey) Sts. Constantine and Helen Church, Annapolis, MD; Stephanie Haviaris (Metropolis of Detroit), St. John the Baptist Church, Sterling Height, MI; Kyriaki Lagoutaris (Metropolis of Atlanta), St. John the Divine Church, Jacksonville, FL; Michael Tarpley (Metropolis of Denver) St. John the Baptist Church, Euless, TX; Alexandra Rupp (Metropolis of Chicago), Holy Apostles Church, Westchester, IL; Evan Jordanides (Metropolis of Pittsburgh), Holy Trinity Church, Canton, OH.

The St. John Chrsysotom Oratorical Festival was established in 1984 by the Department of Religious Education to provide young people an opportunity to research a theological topic from a pre-approved list and then prepare and deliver a short speech on the topic. The Festival begins at the Parish level, and top speakers move on to District and Metropolis level Festivals. In 2020, the Festival was abruptly halted in the early days of the pandemic. In 2021, the Festival restarted and to everyone's joy, 185 parishes offered the program with about 600 speakers Archdiocese-wide, practically pre-pandemic levels of participation, which is a testament to the resilience and popularity of the program and dedication of parish and Metropolis coordinators, as well as the families that encourage their sons and daughters to participate in the Festival program.

Preparations for the 2022 Festival program are already underway. The Archdiocese Festival will be an in-person event, hosted by the Metropolis of Denver, June 3-5, at the Holy Trinity Church in Dallas, Texas.

Welcome Address From Rev. Tony Vrame, Director of the Department of Religious Education
Your Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros, Dear Friends of the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival, Parents and Families of our Speakers, and especially you, the Archdiocese Finalists.

To call the last twelve months unusual is an understatement. When in the early months of the pandemic in 2020, the decision to stop the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival at all levels was difficult. And we sensed that the program in 2021 would be filled with uncertainties.

But, as a testament to the strength of the program that has been established over its thirty-plus year history, the Oratorical Festival sprang back to life, practically to pre-pandemic levels. As of the other day, 185 parishes and about 600 young people from across our Archdiocese registered their participation.

Your Eminence, as the Chief Teacher of our Archdiocese, the Oratorical Festival provides a glimpse into the dedication of clergy, teachers, and parents to hand forward to the Orthodox Faith to the young people in their care and what is being achieved in our educational ministries. And these 18 finalists have reached this level because of their hard work. I submit to you that you will be more than impressed by their level of thinking, their knowledge of Orthodox Christianity, and the deliveries of their speeches. You will be grateful that you don't have to be one of the judges but can merely enjoy the presentations today. Thank you for being

with us today and the concern you continually express for the young people of our Archdiocese and the educational ministries in our parishes.

To the families of the speakers, thank you for encouraging your sons and daughters to participate in the Oratorical Festival. Behind every Oratorical Festival participant there stands parents who have nurtured their children in the Faith and encouraged them to excel in their lives. To you the speakers, congratulations on this accomplishment. You have worked very hard to reach this level. We look forward to hearing your speeches.



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