14/02/2022

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Centennial Address 31st Annual Leadership 100 Conference



My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

This surely is the Day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

As I look around this ballroom today, I see three moments in the life of our Church.

I see the past – the past encompassing the One Hundred Years since the founding or our Sacred Archdiocese as an Eparchy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. And I hear the voices of our great leaders:

the visionary Patriarch Athenagoras,

the pious Archbishop Michael,

and the inimitable Archbishop Iakovos.

All of whom are remembered by you, the inheritors of their incredible legacies. By which I mean Holy Cross Seminary and Hellenic College, Saint Basil Academy and

Saint Michael's Home; Philoptochos, GOYA, and of course, this very organization, Leadership One Hundred.

And these past achievements are made even more tangible by the sense of loss that this Thirty-First Annual Conference possesses. For as you know, with the passing of the incomparable Peter Dion last September, this is the first time we are without a living Founder of this wonderful organization of our Church. They have all now passed into history, and we keep their memories alive by telling and re-telling the stories of their generosity, their nobility, and their vision. Allow me to recall all the Founders by name, for together, they were the right hand of Leadership's eponymous architect and creator, Archbishop Iakovos himself:

Arthur A. Anton,

Andrew A. Athens,

Thomas A. Athens,

George K. Chimples,

Peter M. Dion,

Michael Jaharis, and

George P. Kokalis.

Their legacy lives on in you! Be proud of it.

And may their noble memory be eternal.

At this centennial Καιρός of our Church, they are, in truth, our past. But as Shakespeare said: "What's past is prologue."1 All of us in this room – all of us who are alive and working for the ministry of our Archdiocese – we are the present moment of the Church, and the prologue of the future.

The decisions and actions we take in this present moment are built upon the foundation of those who came before us – whether Hierarchs, Clergy, national lay leaders, or local parish helping hands.

But the choices we make today – however small they may seem – will have lasting impact on the future. When we decided last year – the Bicentennial of 1821, to highlight this foundational event in the life not only of Greek Americans, but of all freedom-loving peoples, it was Leadership One Hundred that inaugurated our celebration. You led the way in the Archdiocese events and commemorations from

coast to coast. The result was a revival in the interest of our history, and in the contributions of the Philhellenes to the Revolution.

I know that there is tremendous pride in Greek ancestry and inheritance, but this is something that is shared by all who claim Western Civilization as their intellectual and spiritual home. Therefore, without the cultivation of a new generation of Philhellenes, the grand legacies of the past will find it harder and harder to be passed on.

Today, as we strive to make Greek, Classical, and Orthodox education relevant to our children and supported in our communities, we need the Philhellenes of our country who love Greece – both ancient and modern. For through the love of culture will also come the love of our faith. Or it may happen the other way around. But the truth is, that for our Church to grow and thrive in the next century of its life, we need those good people who will adopt our faith and traditions – and perhaps even our language.

And Leadership One Hundred did not stop with the Bicentennial of Greece. You are leading the way with the Centennial of our Archdiocese!

I am so very happy that your outgoing Chairman – now in full emeritus status, Argyris Vassiliou, agreed to be the Chairman of the National Centennial Committee, which commenced its work in December of last year. This Hundredth Anniversary year is a vital moment of reflection – on the past – in the present – and for the future.

As part of our journeys throughout this year of the Centennial, I have designed a special program of five pilgrimages, which will afford many the experience how the legacy of our first Orthodox world, is a living legacy that we are entrusted with, here in the new Orthodox world.

Connecting to the points of origin of our Faith, and the living tradition of the Church, is vital for our self-understanding as an Archdiocese, in the words of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, as “the newly planted branch of the ancient vine of Christ’s first called disciple Saint Andrew.” 2

This program of pilgrimages will commence at the end of this month with visits to Thessaloniki, Mt. Athos, Komotini, and Constantinople.

The second pilgrimage will take place during Holy Week to attend the Special Service of consecrating Holy Chrism, the fourth time His-All Holiness has done so in the thirty-year Patriarchy.

The third pilgrimage will be a special visit to Cappadocia, the homeland of Saints Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa. This pilgrimage will include the sites of Churches of the Book of Revelation: Smyrna, Ephesus, and Pergamum.

The fourth pilgrimage returns to Constantinople and to the Panagia Soumela Monastery and Trabezon for the Feast of the Kimisis in August with His All Holiness.

The fifth and final pilgrimage commences at the Phanar for the Thronal Feast of Saint Andrew, and then moves on to the Holy Land, and the Holy Sites of Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Jerusalem in the weeks before Christmas.

As you can see from the ambitious schedule, we are making every opportunity possible to our faithful to experience the sacred προσκυνήματα of our Faith, and the points of origin of our salvation. I hope that Leadership One Hundred will not only participate as individuals, but take up one of these pilgrimages as a special Centennial event.

Your Leadership One Hundred team, now to be chaired by our dear friend, Jim Logothetis, who will be joined by the new Vice-Chair, Jim Pantelides, and the new Executive Committee member, Michael Bapis, are taking the reins in this exciting time for our Church.

As we observe our Centennial, we must apply ourselves to the vision for the future, for the next Hundred Years.

This is why I speak of:

Legacy – the foundation upon which we are built;

Renewal – our activities and energies in the present moment; and

Unity – the ever-expanding embrace of the Church, as an inclusive environment in which all are welcome – to the degree they embrace the truth of God’s love for all of creation.

We are now a thriving institution nationwide, very much due to the generosity and foresight of Leadership One Hundred. The over five hundred parishes have done

their part through the decades – building and adorning Houses of God in every State of the Union.

Add to these the cultural centers, gymnasia, and community facilities that have been created at the local parish level, and then you understand that the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America is truly a National Institution with a strong history and a bright future.

And it has been the tremendous contribution of Leadership One Hundred that, on an institutional level – especially vis-à-vis our National Ministries, that has energized to be exceptional stewards of our Archdiocese by your visionary support.

My Friends:

When I arrived on these shores as your Archbishop, I made a commitment to fulfilling the promise of this Archdiocese, a promise that holds numberless blessings for our individual members.

With the extraordinary efforts of The Friends of Saint Nicholas, bolstered at the critical moment by the six million dollar contribution from Leadership One Hundred (nearly ten percent of your historical total) – and your fellow Leadership members who gifted another three million dollars – the Saint Nicholas National Shrine will be completed, adorned, and consecrated this year!

This achievement was nearly unimaginable two and a half years ago. Since the recommencement of work on the Shrine, we have joined the community of remembrance at the World Trade Center site. We participated in the official Twentieth Anniversary of September Eleventh Observances, by the lighting of the Shrine this past September Tenth.

It should be noted that this was the first time Saint Nicholas participated in the annual 9/11 commemorations.

Also, your support of the Apostolic Visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch, during which we received his special blessing and opened the Shrine on November Second of last year, the very day of the Thirtieth Anniversary of His All Holiness's Enthronement as the longest serving Ecumenical Patriarch in history, is just one of the many and most recent benefactions the Church has received from your generosity.

This reversal of fortunes for our National Shrine was made possible by the exceptional faith of you and others like you. Because it was not possible that we

were going to fail at this duty to the Nation and the world. You heard just a little while ago from Father Andreas, whom I have appointed to be the Proïstamenos of the Church and my personal Vicar. There are exciting prospects for Saint Nicholas. It is so much more than the rebuilt Parish, which we tragically lost on 9/11.

The Saint Nicholas National Shrine will be a beacon – a true Φάρος of Orthodoxy on the American public landscape. It will be our highest profile Institution in the Western Hemisphere. Like the Phanar in Constantinople, it will shine the Light of Christ for all the world to see.

The ministries that will emerge from the Shrine will expand the footprint of our Church in America, where we are the most ancient Christian faith, but also one of the smallest. Our Saint Nicholas will be the only presence of religious faith at the rebuilt World Trade Center.

Ground Zero, as it is still known, is arguably the epicenter of Twenty-First Century history. The ministries of healing and reconciliation, of the unalloyed teaching and preaching of the Orthodox Faith – these will form a basis for the next Hundred Years of our Church in America, and will radiate across the land and around the world.

Another commitment made in June of 2019 was to stabilize our beloved Σχολή. Need I remind any of you that over forty percent of the lifetime grants of Leadership One Hundred are in support of Hellenic College and Holy Cross, over twenty-seven million dollars! We have President Cantonis with us today, and I'm happy to report that under his leadership, the School has been making steady progress toward the secure foundation that it deserves, especially in its ninth decade.

I could raise other successes that have been accomplished in the past few years – and so very many of them have been made possible by the fidelity of Leadership One Hundred to the cause of the Archdiocese – but I think you all know that our future is bright. As bright as the sunlight sparkling on the water of Gulf of Mexico right outside our door.

What we have to lay hold of as an Archdiocese, is the hope for the future, that is our legacy of the past, and our effectual energy in the present moment. We have the firm foundation. And we have the dynamism to go forward. Therefore, allow me to say a few words on what I envision the next hundred years of our Archdiocese to look like.

There is one word that I believe holds the key to our impact in the coming

generations: Education.

And by “Education,” I mean the complete understanding of what it means to be an Orthodox Christian – who is also an inheritor of the very best of Hellenism – in the scientifically and technologically driven modern world. Or to say it another way, as Saint Paul might:

To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the edification of the Body of Christ, until all of us arrive at the unity of the Faith and the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God. Then shall we be a whole, complete, accomplished and perfected humanity, having attained to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. 3

There is no doubt that we live in a complex world, where attention spans are being shortened and demands on being lengthened. As a Church, we have an abiding responsibility to the generation who will succeed us. We are to “equip” them, not only with the “whole armor of God,”4 – which is the complete theological and moral teaching of the Church, but with the skills and wisdom to navigate the world around them. How is this going to happen unless we are serious about education?

It is one of the reasons that I have led the Assembly of all Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the United States to form a Youth Agency to bring together our best talent and resources. Together, we will build a coherent and attractive system to keep our youth engaged from their most formative years all the way through college. We cannot wait another day.

And it also why I am so committed to bringing about a renewal in our parochial schools and other educational systems that will enhance the learning experience of our young people. We want to teach our children our Orthodox Faith, but in order to do so effectively, we have to teach them to think as well. And not just learning by rote the formulas of mathematics and grammar. We need the same inspiration that filled the minds of Saints Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom. The Three Hierarchs are not merely a legacy from the past. They are the model for the future!

Critical thinking in an Orthodox Christian context;

Moral decision making that is supported by the Church community;

Feeling mentored by your Church;

This is the ministry of the future – the ministry that will give us a future!

Let us be realistic. Our Tradition of Christianity is a conservative one, especially

compared to the Christian communities around us in America. But we are not a coercive one. We are a creative tradition, a compassionate tradition, a Christ-like tradition.

If the next one hundred years of our Church in America are going to be as fruitful as the first one hundred, then the same energy which built the wondrous edifices and institutions we hold so dear, must be applied to building up the Body of Christ, beginning with our youth.

As the months go by and we approach our Clergy Laity Congress in July, I will have much more to say. But for now, allow me to close by saying that forming the spirit and intention of disciples in every corner of our Church is the ultimate goal. For be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is a life-long commitment to be a μαθητής – a pupil of the Lord, in His great and marvelous School of Creation.

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