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A Life Dedicated to Service: Paulette Poulos Recognized as Centennial Honoree



NEW YORK–The summer of ’65 signaled the arrival of a tempestuous period in American history, roused by the civil rights movement, then at its height, national division over the Vietnam War, and rapid social change. Archbishop Iakovos of North & South America had recently returned to New York from marching alongside Martin Luther King in Selma, Alabama—a moment that issued a spiritual challenge to America’s Orthodox Christians in the face of moral necessity, now widely regarded as one of the iconic moments of Orthodox Christianity in the United States, if not globally—and was preparing to travel to Vietnam where he would visit the Orthodox Christian troops and celebrate the Divine Liturgy.

It was around this time when Fr. Angelo Gavalas, priest of the Church of the Three Hierarchs in Brooklyn encouraged a younger parishioner to apply for a recently vacant position at the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

“I planned to work for the Church for only one year,” said Paulette Poulos, sitting in her office where a collection of Icons and awards attest to nearly sixty years of selfless commitment and distinguished service to the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. “I could never have imagined the wonderful life that serving the Church has given me. I have never regretted the choice I made.”

Charismatically humble and warm beyond compare, the inimitable Executive

Director of the Archbishop Iakovos Leadership 100 Fund is an institution in her own right in the Orthodox world. The former Archbishop of America, Demetrios placed her at the helm of the organization in 2011 after years as its Director of Development. Since that moment she has been indefatigably expanding the Fund's membership and directing its wide-reaching philanthropic undertakings. Paulette's authentic, human-centered approach, deep Christian conviction, and her ability to forge meaningful relationships have been profoundly effective. Her work creates a space for the faithful to express the evangelical commandment to love one another as it connects ministries with the resources and support they need to function. It can be said without exaggeration that there is no one in America's Orthodox community for whom the work of Paulette and her team has not had a meaningful impact.

Following in the footsteps of her mentor, the ever-memorable Archbishop Iakovos, she has dedicated her entire professional and personal life to serving the Church. Her career began in 1965 when she was assigned to work in the Archdiocesan Department of Laity, where she remained through 1970. Following a brief assignment as the Assistant Director of the National Youth Office, she was transferred to the Department of Development in 1972 where she was appointed Director of the LOGOS Fund, successfully raising over ten million dollars.

1984 was a turning point in her career. That was the year Archbishop Iakovos selected Paulette as Administrative Assistant of the Archbishop's Office. In this role she worked in close collaboration with His Eminence, traveling to parishes throughout the Archdiocese, and internationally. While Paulette listened attentively as Archbishop Iakovos imparted his invaluable knowledge to her, forming her spiritually and professionally. It was during this time that Paulette grew into one of the most visible, respected, and admired Orthodox women in the Church. Paulette believes the major criteria necessary for this work are that you must love the Church and you must love the faithful.

Archbishop Iakovos tendered his retirement in 1996, but that did not mean her work with him would be concluding. Paulette established a working office at his personal residence, where he had the opportunity to personally welcome the many visitors who remained close to him.

Like her mentor, Paulette is committed to vocational discernment and growing the next generation of American Church leaders. She is a fervent supporter of Hellenic College Holy Cross and its mission to train men and women for ministry. Since 1989, Leadership 100 has distributed $25 million dollars in scholarships to students at the Theological School who are preparing for ministry and the Priesthood. Ever

true to the personal touch she always brings, Paulette takes the opportunity to personally meet each of the women and men of Holy Cross' senior class when they make their annual visit to the Archdiocese for a week of orientation. "I am moved to tears when the young men come to hug me and say, 'Thank you and Leadership 100 for the support you offer.'" When the students ask Paulette what they can do to demonstrate their gratitude, her response is always the same, "Just be the best priests you can be." Paulette is unwavering in her advocacy for the clergy and lay leaders of the Archdiocese and strongly believes that they are the most vital investment of the Church.

While sharing in the joy of Hellenic College Holy Cross' annual graduation weekend is always a highpoint for Paulette, this year's 80th Commencement exercises were particularly special for her because the Board of Trustees conferred an honorary doctorate upon her. The official citation declares, "You embody the highest virtues espoused by our Faith, our Hellenic heritage, and the society in which we live." In her acceptance speech, she expressed thanks to many, among them her parents for their sacrifice and for teaching her by example, Archbishop Iakovos for his immeasurable impact of her life, Archbishop Demetrios for supporting her as Executive Director of Leadership 100 and Archbishop Elpidophoros for his dynamic leadership and vision in leading the Archdiocese into the future. Addressing the graduates, she urged them to seek to serve the Archdiocese of America, assuring each one that there is a place for their talents to be used to serve Christ by positively impacting the lives of others.

On the first day of this year's 46th Biennial Clergy-Laity Congress, presently underway in New York City, Archbishop Elpidophoros of America recognized Paulette, together with her longtime colleague Niki Calles, as a Centennial Honoree at the opening of the Archdiocesan historical exhibit for her life of devotion and dedication to the church. The Archbishop explained that Paulette "embodies what this Centennial Exhibition represents." Indeed, Paulette represents a great portion of the institutional memory of our Archdiocese. "I cannot thank [Paulette] enough for what [she] has offered to our Church throughout the decades. [Her] efforts have been heroic, and even our honoring [Her] today is far-exceeded by [her] contributions.

While countless people look to Paulette as a role model, she counts herself as a member of the team working for the Church – a team that she asserts has a place for everyone who desires to serve. Her hope for the future is for the younger generation to take a more active role on both the local and national levels.

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