

08/06/2023

Archpastoral Exhortation for the Archdiocesan District Servant Leadership Awards Banquet 2023



Your Grace Bishop Athenagoras of Nazianzos,

Archimandrite Nektarios Papazafiroopoulos, National Chancellor of our Archdiocese,

Protopresbyter Elias Villis, Chancellor of the Archdiocesan District,

Larry Hatzoglou, Archdiocesan District Council Vice President,

Protopresbyter Nicholas Anctil and Christine Balidis -

Co-chairs of this Banquet,

Jennifer Constantin - Archdiocesan District Philoptochos President,

Protopresbyter Peter Orfanakos - President of the Archdiocesan District Clergy Syndesmos,

Presvytera Diana Kazakis - President of the Archdiocesan District Sisterhood of Presvyteres President,

Esteemed Members of the Archdiocesan District Council,

Beloved Sisters of Philoptochos,

Distinguished Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate,

Honored Members of Leadership 100,

Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers,

Tonight's Honorees,

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

That was quite a list of salutations! But we are here this evening to recognize - to acknowledge - the gifts and talents of so many sisters and brothers, and I am very

proud to name you all!

As your Archbishop, I am delighted that the Archdiocesan District has decided to initiate this tradition. From the sea of people I see here today, this first Servant-Leader Banquet is a success. I am encouraged by today's strong showing and by the hard work of those who envisioned and executed this event, our Chancellor the Reverend Protopresbyter of the Ecumenical Throne Fr. Elias Villis, and the two co-chairs: Reverend Protopresbyter Nick Anctil, and Mrs. Christine Balidis, together with their team. It is by working together that we remain strong and united, finding purpose and faith from each other.

We are taking this moment to honor, with special mention, those among us who demonstrate the true servant-leadership exemplified by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who, after He had washed the feet of His Disciples, said to them:

"Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord' and you say rightly for so I am. Therefore if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, should you not also wash one another's feet? Truly, I have given you an example, that just as I have done for you, you should do for one another as well. Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master; nor are apostles, the ones sent, greater than the one who sends them. If you understand these things, happy and blessed are you if you act on them." *

Servant-Leadership can become a mere catchphrase, if we do not understand it in the light of the Gospel. We hear the expression used more and more, but we must never lose sight of its foundation in the principle above, enunciated by our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are called to serve and to lead as He did, and the most poignant example is that of the Good Shepherd, Who guides and protects His flock, and only enters into the sheepfold when all the sheep are safely in. This is leadership and service that is based in sacrificial love. No desire for glory or praise. Just loving concern and care for others.

Those we recognize this evening are being celebrated for the wonderful gifts of service and ministry they bring to our Church and communities. They are also consistent with this season of Pentecost, as they represent a true diversity of spiritual gifts, including:

Stewards, Philoptochos, and Parish Council Officers and Members,

Community workers, Greek Education Teachers and Administrators, Choir Members

and Chanters,

And our Youth Workers and Youth Honorees.

The sheer magnitude and range of activities call to mind the words of the Apostle:

For just as in our individual bodies we have many limbs – and all the limbs do not have the same function, so also are we, who are many persons, One Body in Christ, and each one members of each other. And our diverse spiritual gifts are owing to the grace that is bestowed on us.... †

Indeed, my beloved Christians, grace has been bestowed upon all of us, for the purpose of service.

We were not born into this world merely to live, acquire, and then expire. We were born to give to others, to enhance the lives of others, as the altruistic, compassionate, and loving People of God. That is why this evening is so important. We are taking time to recognize our own community, and to acknowledge that grace is given to each of us to make a difference. Whether you are being personally honored or not, we are all responsible to exercise God's grace in the world. Each of us has a special contribution to make, which will slowly, but surely, transform the world into a better place.

Therefore, beloved sisters and brothers in Christ,

Let us celebrate this evening's recognitions with more than just our applause and our encouraging words for our honorees. Let us each make a commitment to finding opportunities for grace-filled service and leadership every day. Thank you, and may the Good Lord bless you all!

* John 13:12-17.

† Romans 12:4-6.

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