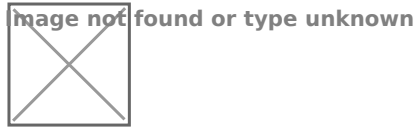


Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Makes First Official Visit to Ionian Village for 50th Anniversary Celebration



(July 27, 2023) — His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America made his inaugural visit to Ionian Village (IV), the international summer camping ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese. The highly anticipated visit commemorated the camp's 50th anniversary, the celebration of which— delayed in 2020 due to the pandemic— proved to be a joyous and memorable experience for His Eminence, campers and alumni, and neighbors in the broader community.

The visit began on Thursday, July 20 with a warm welcome from IV Director Ms. Marina Floratos upon His Eminence's arrival in Glyfa, just outside Bartholomio, Ilias. An intimate gathering later that evening brought together members of the Nastoulis and Zafiropoulos families, generations-long servants of the IV ministry, who shared fond memories of the camp and learned more about His Eminence's vision for its future.

A full day on Friday, July 21 began with a morning visit of His Eminence to the Ionian Village campgrounds, where he was greeted by applause from campers, staff, and clergy as he entered the camp. After addressing campers— this year's 250 participants are among the 20,000 since IV began in 1970— His Eminence enjoyed breakfast with the campus's administrative team. The remainder of the day likewise reflected the rich history and lively ongoing relationship between Ionian Village and the broader community in Ilias. Mayor of Gastouni Mr. Andreas Marinos, accompanied by local civic and community leaders, received the Archbishop in the morning. Affirming a shared commitment to foster deeper understanding and collaboration, His Eminence and Mr. Marinos discussed the importance of the logistical and spiritual partnership between the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese and the local municipality. In addition, Mr. Marinos bestowed honorary citizenship of the local area upon His Eminence.

In the afternoon, the Archbishop was formally welcomed by His Eminence Metropolitan Athanasios at the Holy Metropolis of Ilia and Oleni in Pyrgos. During a

celebratory lunch, they spoke about IV's legacy, including its impact on generations of campers and the Greek Orthodox communities in both Greece and the United States. Metropolitan Athanasios also noted His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew's upcoming visit to the region in September 2023.

The highlight of the visit was the evening program, which commenced with an Agiasmo, a "blessing of the waters" service, led by His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros with assistance from former IV Director Rev. Protopresbyter of the Ecumenical Throne Evagoras Constantinides. Following the service, Archbishop Elpidophoros, Metropolitan Athanasios, US Ambassador to Greece George Tsunis—himself a camper in 1982 and 1985— and other invited guests joined campers and staff in the amphitheater to participate in the regularly scheduled evening activity "Greek Invasion," playfully named and designed to immerse campers who have recently arrived from the United States with an experience of Greek culture and life. Friday evening's included a performance of traditional Greek dancing by a local troupe.

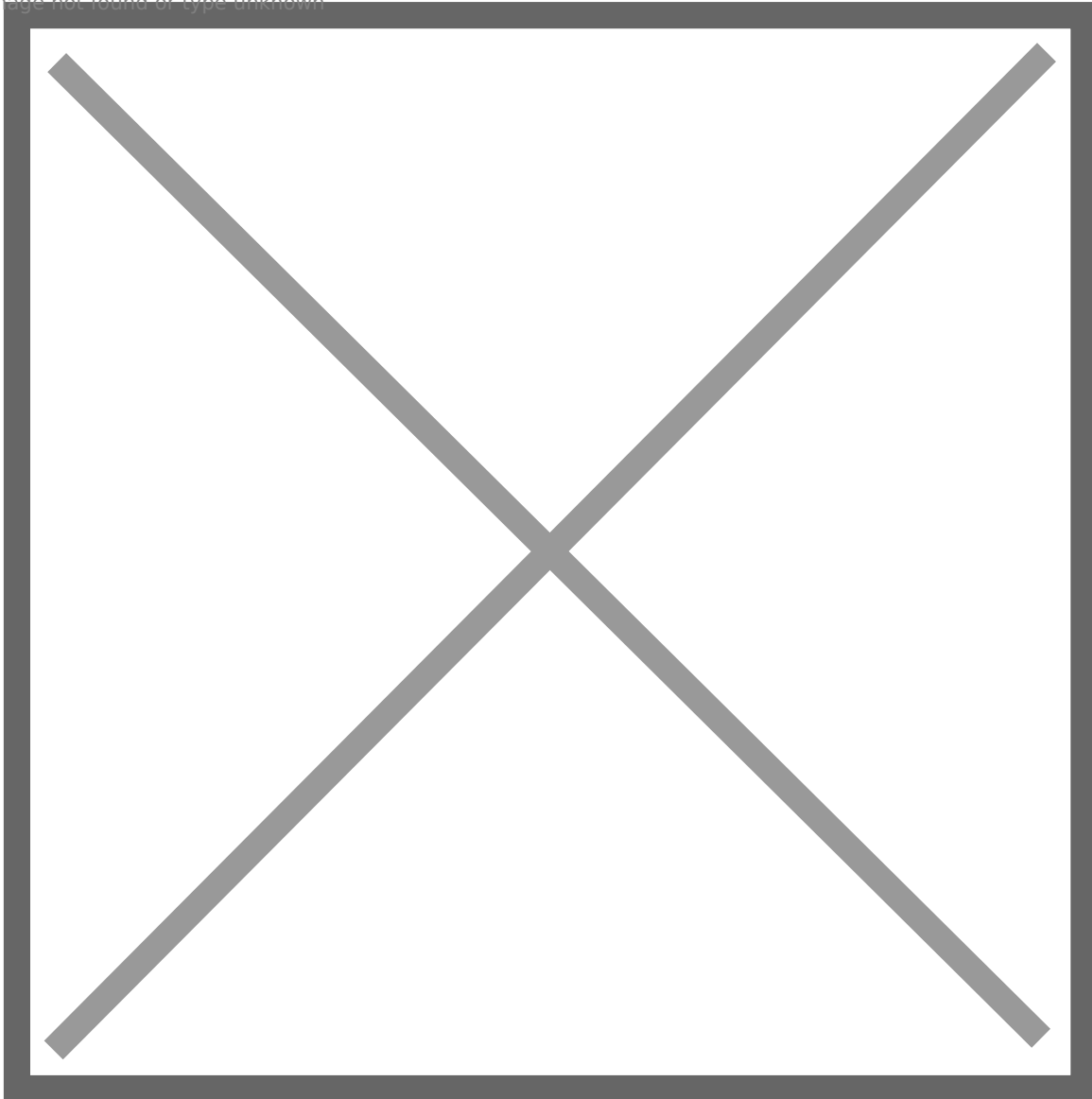
A celebratory dinner afterward honored Ionian Village's historic milestone. During the dinner, Ambassador Tsunis spoke about his love for IV, noting that some of his closest friends to this day are people that he met during his summers at the camp.

His Eminence reflected on the generations of Greek Orthodox campers who have travelled from the United States and passed through the gates of Ionian Village transformed. "These young people have come not just for a summer camp, but to travel and witness the real beauty and treasures of Greece," His Eminence said. "They came to savor the food, to learn the language, to experience the Greek lifestyle, to swim in the Greek sea. Most importantly, they came here to learn about the Orthodox faith, which they have done not only by being here but also by traveling and visiting the monasteries and churches of the region— venerating the relics of so many important Saints of our Church.

"These saints, such as Dionysios, Mammas, Gerasimos, Nektarios, Andrew, Loukas, and many more, are no longer mere stories of people who lived long ago; they are now true realities in the lives of these young people. These memories and experiences are cherished and kept for the rest of their lives," said His Eminence. He expressed his deep honor in undertaking this inaugural visit to Ionian Village and reaffirmed his support for its continued success in nurturing the next generation of Greek Orthodox leaders.

His Eminence's visit concluded on Saturday, July 22 as he continues on to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

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