

Metropolis of San Francisco 2023 YAL Conference Another Resounding Success



By Joseph Dumont, 2023 YAL Conference Co-Chair

The Young Adult League Conference does it again! As another resounding success, over 450 young adults came from 32 states to FULFILL their faith, vocations, and lives through Christ. FULFILL was the theme for the 2023 Young Adult League (YAL) Conference hosted by the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco over Labor Day 2023 weekend in Orange County, California. Led by Conference Co-Chairs Eva-Marie Kailas and Joseph Dumont, the young adult planning committee was committed to providing an unparalleled and balanced weekend for their fellow peers. The four cornerstones of the YAL ministry – Witness, Worship, Service, and Fellowship – were fully demonstrated throughout the Conference, and the young adults embraced every opportunity to be immersed in growing in their faith and finding their spiritual home in the Church.

His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos shared with the conference delegates a profound message of reflection and inspiration, encouraging participants to consider the direction of their life's journey towards eternity and fulfilling their purpose. He stated, "Your theme FULFILL comes with a sense of discovery. The word itself can be defined as bringing something to completion or reality, and I

think this is very applicable when we look at the future of our church and what can be accomplished if we work together and if we keep our focus on Christ. I find it quite significant that the first day of this conference also marks our new Ecclesiastical Year in the church. There is no better time to implement the conference theme FULFILL in your lives than today! You cannot just be Orthodox Christians on Sundays. You have to LIVE your faith."

The Conference keynotes were headlined by two prominent women in their respective fields with very distinct backgrounds and unique experiences. Michelle Moujaes, the Founder and Executive Director of Faithree Resources, and Matina Kolokotronis the COO of the NBA Sacramento Kings.

On Friday morning, Michelle Moujaes shared these thoughts, "How do we reach our highest levels of fulfillment? It can only happen when we unite to God and others and live intentionally into HIS design. Not our design. Not the world's. But His design for our lives. Everything else comes up short. My hope today is that you leave knowing deep in your gut that God has a plan and a purpose for your life. And that you feel inspired to take the next step to figure out what it is and to live into it with a hundred percent of your being. Whole-heartedly. With sacred effort as unto the Lord. Because when you do that, fulfillment is a natural by-product."

Matina Kolokotronis was Saturday morning's Keynote Speaker and offered valuable insight into how she has found fulfillment through all aspects of her life. "Faith and the teachings of the Greek Orthodox Church grounded me and provided me with a spiritual foundation upon which my life – and my success – was built," stated Matina. "I realized that the Church will give you a foundation and a community. Even if you stray from it, it will always be there for you. In moments of crisis you go back to your faith and your principles. Your faith will anchor you as it anchored me. As you make your way into the world, I hope that you remain true to your Greek Orthodox faith and your values. Every step of the way, my faith and the Greek Orthodox community have served as a grounding force for me. If you serve your community, if you are empathetic and kind, you will always find fulfillment."

After each keynote the participants engaged with clergy from across the metropolis in six workshops to have discussions on distinct topics pertaining to the overall theme. Those topics were "Dating for Marriage" with Fr. Christopher and Presvytera Kalli Retelas (St. John the Baptist – Anaheim, CA), "Finding your Purpose" with Fr. Nicholas Metrakos (Holy Trinity – San Francisco, CA), "Finding your Potential: How Discipline Leads to Freedom" with Fr. Michael Prevas (St. Nicholas – Northridge, CA), "Finding your Focus through Prayer and Stillness" with Fr. Photios Dumont (St. Demetrios – Seattle, WA), "How Christ Heals and Calls Us Back after Falling Away"

with Fr. Gary Kyriacou (St. Sophia Cathedral – Los Angeles, CA), and “Boundaries: When to Say Yes and when to Say No” with Fr. Tom and Presvytera Pat Tsagalakis (Holy Apostles – Shoreline, WA).

In their remarks to the attendees, YAL Conference Co-Chairs Eva-Marie Kailas and Joseph Dumont shared their insights on the theme and what the conference has meant to them personally after years of both being involved and now chairing this conference for the first time. In his reflective and inspiring address, Joseph emphasized how critical the time was in the life of every young adult in attendance. They are now on their own to make their own life choices. This process will determine the type of fulfillment their lives will bring. May it be found through a life that is invested in the Church and true to God. In her heartwarming speech, Eva-Marie pointed out how after years of various stages in her life it was the YAL ministry itself which has given her personal fulfillment and purpose. Eva-Marie, along with her involvement on the planning committee for the annual Conference, has also spearheaded the YAL In Your Backyard (YALIYB) movement in her region of Southern California for the past two years which enables young adults from throughout the nation to stay connected throughout the calendar year with various engagements in their local communities and areas.

After Friday’s Keynote presentation and the first set of convo workshops, the Conference participants embraced the Southern California atmosphere as they went to the beach and continued the theme into the dazzling evening event, ‘YALifornia Dreamin’.

On Saturday morning after Orthros, Archon Regional Commanders Hon. Steven G. Counelis (Metropolis of San Francisco, Southern California) and Dr. Gregory G. Papadeas (Metropolis of Denver) introduced the conference attendees to the exciting new Archon pilot program, the Pilgrimage of Discovery journey to Constantinople. This life changing experience was recently completed for the first time this past summer when it enabled a group of young adults, led by Archons, to explore the rich heritage of Constantinople, their ancient faith and experience a once in a lifetime opportunity for young adults to engage and connect with the roots of our Mother Church. Additionally, the program attendees engaged in a private audience with His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. This successful Pilot Program is expected to become a National Archon Program in 2024 and subsequent years, opening up the application process to young adults from all Metropolises in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, as administered by the Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in America.

As a central pillar of YAL, service was again a key component of the weekend. This

year's Diakonia project was once again sponsored by the Metropolis of San Francisco Philoptochos Board, continuing the multi-year partnership between YAL and Philoptochos. This year the ladies of Philoptochos and young adults assembled 700 care packages through a local charity called the "Illumination Foundation" whose mission is to disrupt the cycle of homelessness in Southern California by providing a comprehensive safety net of client-centered services for the most vulnerable individuals, families, and children. Metropolis Philoptochos President Jeannie Ranglas and several members of the Metropolis Philoptochos Board worked hand in hand with the young adults and built bonds of friendship and collaboration.

Throughout the Conference weekend, participants also engaged with various ministries throughout the country in the Ministry Pavilion which included Hellenic College Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology (HCHC), Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America Youth and Young Adult Ministries (GOARCH Y2AM), the Metropolis of San Francisco Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, the Metropolis Family Wellness Ministry and the PanHellenic Foundation. Their presence provided great opportunities to participants to get insight to the work they do and how young adults can get involved. On Saturday after the Diakonia project, all participants gathered for a reception hosted by Hellenic College

Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, which included presentations by President George Cantonis and the Dean of Students Reverend Fr. Patrick O'Rourke. Following the words from HCHC leadership, the young adults connected and networked before transitioning into the next evening event.

After the engaging reception and giving back to the Southern California community, it was time for "Rock N YAL", the headline event of the weekend. Located at the iconic House of Blues in Anaheim, participants were ready to rock the night away, wearing their rock band themed outfits. After dinner and dessert, attendees gathered in the double-decked, stand up auditorium where a local rock band captured the night with nostalgic rock classics, along with DJ Greek music.

The YAL family worshiped together on Sunday morning with the congregation of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Anaheim. The Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was celebrated by His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco, along with His Grace Bishop Ioannis of Phocaea, and the clergy present throughout the Conference weekend. That afternoon YAL participants enjoyed a wonderful reception at the host parish, along with food truck lunches featuring Greek and American cuisines.

The final event of the weekend was the "Endless Summer" Gala and Glendi.

Attendees wore their colorful suits and gowns as they took part in the formal gala dinner and program followed by a Live Young Adult Greek Musicians led Glendi. As the program concluded, it was also announced that the Metropolis of San Francisco will host the 2024 National YAL Conference in San Diego, CA from July 3 - 7, 2024, coinciding with the Archdiocesan Biennial Clergy-Laity Congress. Once the dancing festivities began, young adult musicians played music from Crete, Thraki, Peloponnesos and Pontos. Hundreds of young adults holding hands together demonstrated the unity and love this group developed through the weekend as they danced under the lights into the Endless Summer, making the perfect end cap for an incredible Conference weekend.

This Conference was truly a remarkable experience and would not have been possible without the leadership of esteemed advisors, Hon. Steven and Stacia Counelis, along with newly appointed young adult advisor and previous Conference Chairman, George T. Anagnostopoulos, all of whom were instrumental in the creation of this year's Conference, and gave great direction and guidance for the new Co-Chairs and committee.

Special thanks to Eva-Marie Kailas and Joseph Dumont who served as the 2023 YAL Conference Co-Chairs, the planning committee and volunteers. The Executive Committee members for 2023 were: Caroline Basdakis, Jimmy Cardaras, Demetri Dogias, Elena Guillen, Cassiani Kateyiannis, Jack Koulos, Nia Matty, Aaron Papagalos, Julia Pappas, Grace Paris, Stephania Veziris, and Christine Scolinos.

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For more information on the YAL Conference and the ongoing YAL In Your Backyard regional events that are happening throughout the year, please email: [\[email protected\]](#) and follow their respective social media channels.

See YAL soon!

Photos: Allen Altchech Photography

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