

06/11/2023

Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Keynote Address for the Archdiocese Council Meeting November 4, 2023



Your Eminences and Graces,

John Catsimatidis, Vice Chair of this Archdiocese Council,

Distinguished Members of the Executive Committee and

Members of the Archdiocese Council, Senators for Orthodoxy and Hellenism,

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I rejoice at the opportunity to offer my greetings and paternal blessings to you all, as we gather for our regular Fall meeting of the Archdiocese Council. Before we proceed though, I ask that we take a moment to bow our heads and pray for those whose lives have been lost over this past month in the Middle East. As we watch daily the horrors from afar, we must repeat the words of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew who said "Enough is enough, enough blood has been shed! War is not a solution" We stand firm with His All-Holiness in calling for a peaceful solution, and for an end to the tragedies that are occurring. Please join me, my dear friends, in a moment of silence for all those who have passed during

this struggle, and pray together with me for peace, in the Middle East and throughout the world.

Thank you. This council, as stated in Article Five of the Regulations of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, “is concerned with matters and issues that affect the life, growth and unity of the Archdiocese.”

Life - Growth - Unity.

These are our mandates. These are our responsibilities and duties before God, and to the faithful of our Parishes from coast to coast.

As far as “Life” is concerned, then - we are gathered here today to seek those life-giving ministries and experiences that will nourish our faithful and give them the sense of belonging to the Family of God.

As far as “Growth” is concerned, we are to undertake every and all possibilities that will lead to increase in the ability of the Church to fulfill Her mission, and set us on a trajectory not only of increased resources, but of increased spiritual life. And no Archdiocesan Institution contributes to that increase of our Church more than the place where the seeds of future clergy are planted - our Seminary at Hellenic College and Holy Cross. Our dear friend, George Cantonis is finishing his extraordinary presidency, which pulled our precious Σχολή back from the brink. But with all of our thankfulness to him, we must find the right person to succeed him and take the School to its next higher and more sustainable level. Let us all pray for that choice to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that we may continue the progress that George fought so very hard for, and give to our Church the new generation of leaders that it will require. The resurgence of enrollment is certainly a good sign for a hope-filled future.

We also see growth everyday at our beloved Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine. As we approach its one year anniversary of being open to the public, it is a point of personal pride to note that visitors this year will eclipse 140,000! Saint Nicholas is now one of our most visited sanctuaries, and serves as a witness of Orthodoxy to all who visit. In regard to the financial situation of the Shrine, it is crucial for us to continue to nurture its financial condition to create prosperous growth. To continue to support the mission of Saint Nicholas, the Archdiocese has provided financial operating advances since the consecration of Saint Nicholas that will continue into 2024. This financial support will supplement that of Saint Nicholas’ newly appointed Board of Trustees. The appointment of a Director of Development later this year is part of the plan to generate revenue for

the National Shrine in 2024. The goal is that in 2025 Saint Nicholas will generate financial surpluses from which the Archdiocese will benefit. I would like to personally thank the Board of Trustees of St. Nicholas and especially the Chairman of the Board, Mr. Michael Psaros, for their faith, wisdom and dedication to the mission of St. Nicholas.

As far as “Unity” is concerned, I want to pause for a moment to acknowledge the status of the Mixed Commission and the Charter revision process for our Holy Archdiocese. The Mixed Commission, formed by the Holy and Sacred Synod of our Mother Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, will wait for our Holy Eparchial Synod to continue its deliberations and come to a consensus on the general direction for the revision of the Charter before reconvening. In the meantime, your very presence here from across the country bears witness to our unity, and the desire of us all to be a solid and synergistic structure, as a united Eparchy of the Ecumenical Throne.

Life - Growth - Unity.

These are our chief concerns and I am happy to report that our continued focus on our youth and young adults is fulfilling all of these mandates. Tomorrow evening, the reinstatement of the Archbishop’s Annual Nameday Banquet will highlight and contribute scholarships for our camping ministries in the Metropolises and Ionian Village. I have heard that the Annual event for Saint Iakovos for the Seminary, in honor of the then Archbishop of North and South America, was a tremendous success, both in terms of consciousness-raising and fund-raising. I am hopeful that the occasion of my own Nameday will have the same effect for the camping programs. I want to thank all of you who are contributing to the event and who are able to stay and participate.

Our ministry update today with the Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries - Eva Konstantakos - will give you all an impressive overview.

In addition to these reports, the resurgence of YAL across the Archdiocese throughout our Metropolises is an extremely positive sign for the future. We look forward to these re-initialized initiatives culminating at the National YAL Conference, which is scheduled to be in conjunction with the Clergy-Laity Congress in San Diego in July 2024. Planning for the Clergy-Laity Congress has already commenced, and I want to thank Metropolitan Gerasimos for hosting the Congress and Gerry and Jeannie Ranglas, and Isidoros and Maria Garafilakis for being co-chairs.

Finally, I want to reflect for a moment on our pained and suffering world, and what our response must be as Orthodox Christians. We have seen how our Ecumenical Patriarch has stood up for the Ukrainian Nation, at the expense of attacks and reprisals from the Moscow Church of Patriarch Kirill, which is a ready accomplice of the Russian State. We must remain vigilant that the Moscow Church does not invade Anatolia as they have Africa, using false pretenses to set up parallel jurisdictions – something we call παρασυναγωγή – in the canonical tradition of the Church.

Our Church stands against violence, and even in the case of self-defense, we see it as the wrong answer to a wrong problem. Those who live by the sword eventually die by the sword. We pray for the peace of the world at every Service, but we see peace giving way to aggression and war at seemingly every turn, especially in the land where our Savior walked.

Such a state of world affairs causes our faithful – even those safe and sound here in the United States – anxiety and worries. As the Church leaders, Priestly and Lay, let us commit to voicing such messages that are not only irenic, but can help our faithful cope with a world that appears more dangerous and threatening.

We are people of Faith. Of Hope. And above all else, of Love. Let us magnify these things in the life of our churches, and we will witness Life, Growth, and Unity throughout our Archdiocese – to the glory of God and His Holy Name. Amen. Thank you.

goarch.org