

Report to the 45th Biennial Clergy Laity Congress Saint Photios Greek Orthodox National Shrine

Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos, Hierarchal *Proistamenos*

Greetings in the name of the Lord from Saint Augustine, Florida and the Saint Photios Greek Orthodox National Shrine. Much has occurred since our previous Clergy-Laity Congress. First, in 2019, His Grace Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos was appointed the Hierarchal *Proistamenos* by His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America. Second, the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic was a serious challenge.

Despite the challenge, with precautionary measures we have been able to restore our normal operations after a very brief closure of our facilities. However, our store, museum and chapel are now fully functioning. Furthermore, many of the initiatives and changes implemented or planned prior to the pandemic permitted us to communicate with the public and present our Archdiocese's first national shrine and its activities even when we could not welcome guests in person. We have also found a means to alter some of our major activities to minimize any negative effect of the pandemic.

With the arrival of Bishop Demetrios, we have instituted regular chapel services though we do not and cannot function regularly on Sundays. However, we now have a regular monthly *Paraklesis* Service. We have celebrated and broadcast on social media occasional memorial services, including an annual commemoration of Archbishop Iakovos of blessed memory (15 years), and for my spiritual father, Metropolitan Iakovos of blessed memory (the third year of his repose).

Back in December, 2019, we inaugurated a most successful Christmas Open House attended by the public and numerous local dignitaries and civil officials, and in January we hosted a *Vasilopita* celebration that was very well received and attended. Also just prior to the shut-down instigated by the pandemic, we celebrated the Feast of Saint Photios the Great with His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros in attendance.

Following the onset of the pandemic, to maintain a presence within our community and our Holy Archdiocese, we released a number of video presentations during Holy Week and Pascha. This was made possible by the renewal and re-design of our social media presence through our website and Facebook page earlier in the year, both of which have received numerous compliments. This also prevented us from having to cancel some of our newest initiatives that, while they could not occur as planned, did occur "virtually" on the Internet.

The first of these was a video presentation held in lieu of what would have been our inaugural Commemoration of the Fall of Constantinople. For this initial program—which will continue in the future at the Shrine—our video presentation focused on *Haghia Sophia* in

Constantinople, the most sublime example of Byzantine and Orthodox Christian architecture. Due to the events in Turkey in July, 2020, we also featured this monument of our faith in a special presentation released through our social media for the Archdiocesan “Day of Mourning and Manifest Grief” as the Turkish government permitted *Haghia Sophia* to be converted from museum into a mosque.

The second initiative was a special program co-sponsored by the Saint Photios Shrine and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saint Augustine, an event honoring and remembering Saint Augustine of Hippo—a saint we commemorate in common, though on different days on our respective calendars. In addition to a celebration of the Divine Liturgy, a webinar was held featuring Dr. George Demacopoulos of the Orthodox Studies Center of Fordham University who has extensively studied the works of the saint. Our Roman Catholic partners will continue this program in an event to be announced shortly and held in August.

“Greek Landing Day” held each year is our largest program and main fundraising event. It could not be observed in 2020 as planned. Yet we produced another video presentation for the event, and it was live-streamed; we also presented a short program from the courtyard of the Shrine. This included a “Reverse Raffle” which raised over \$10,000.00 for the operations of the Shrine.

This followed shortly an outreaching program undertaken in support of our clergy throughout the Archdiocese. We were able to obtain and mail a cloth facemask for their use as a sign of our support for them during these difficult days. The thankful responses are still coming.

At the behest of Archbishop Elpidophoros, Bishop Demetrios is also overseeing our Archdiocesan Spanish Ministry Initiative, recently funded by a generous grant from Leadership 100, and Saint Photios Shrine will be the focal center of various activities related to this new supporting ministry.

Most of the initiatives and new programs at the Shrine were undertaken through the generous donations raised by Bishop Demetrios so as to not burden our Archdiocesan finances, or by the generous donation of services and material from supporters of our National Shrine. We are very grateful to His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios, President of the Board of Trustees of the Saint Photios Foundation, our numerous Board members, our staff including our Executive Director Polaxeni Maouris Hillier, and our many friends and supporters. Of course, all our thanks are extended to His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America for his interest, encouragement and support.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos
Hierarchal Proistamenos