



2023 Clergy Laity Assembly

“Let Your Light Shine” Matthew 5:14-16

April 24-25, 2023

Minutes

Monday, April 24, 2023

Welcome

His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos

His Eminence welcomes everyone to the Assembly and expresses his appreciation to everyone for taking the time to participate. He then offered an opening prayer.

Appointment of Presiding Officer

His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos

His Eminence appoints Deacon Justin Bosl to be the Presiding Officer of the Assembly and Hon. Connie Contes (ret.) as Secretary of the Assembly.

Archpastoral Greeting

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros

Metropolitan Gerasimos introduces a video message from the Archbishop. The Archbishop greets all of us with the triumphant celebration of this season of Paschal joy and extended his heartfelt greeting and best wishes for a spiritually rewarding Clergy-Laity Assembly. He notes the particularly poignant theme of the assembly, selected from Christ’s Sermon on the Mount. The Lord reminds us that the Light is already within each of us, which is the same Light that dawned at the beginning of Creation, and is the same Light shone forth at the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and is the same Light we behold in the stars of the heavens so very far away. This Light of love and compassion, mercy and goodness, and enormous power is always available to us. God does not force us to be brilliant. We must choose to be brilliant and, when we make that choice and allow our Light to so shine, God provides the Grace and means to achieve brilliance.

Now that we have concluded the centennial celebration of our sacred Archdiocese, the Archbishop presented the challenge for the next century of our Church. What lampstands to light? And how to project this Light from the lampstands of our Church communities. We must light the lamps from our own generation first by preserving and educating our young people with every aspect of Christian life and Faith. In the Metropolis of San Francisco, the FDF is a marvelous event for bringing young people together in a setting of cultural excellence and spiritual protection, and it offers a wonderful model of finding ways and means of promoting youth engagement so that our

young people will carry forward the Light of Christ in their own lives.

The theme of the assembly also calls upon us to shine our Light before all people. The question remains how are we to engage the world around us with the Light of Christ within our hearts? What lampstands are we going to build throughout our communities to manifest the love of God for all people? What is our vision for the next century of our ministry in America? He hopes the assembly challenges us to develop a whole range of ideas and to improve a footprint of philanthropy in social programming outside of our Church communities. Shouldn't we be sharing our liturgical and spiritual life with those Christians who know little of our Faith?

The Archbishop prays that our time together would be blessed to search and find the lampstands that God has designed for us to magnify His Holy name.

Keynote Address

His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos

Metropolitan Gerasimos expresses his joy at having so many clergy and laity together since our Covid hiatus, which has truly made us appreciate our time together. He looks forward to our time together at the assembly in prayer, reflection, celebration, deliberation and fellowship. He welcomes our guest speakers Archon George Cantonis, President of Hellenic College Holy Cross; Katrina Bitar, YES (Youth Equipped to Serve) Program Director; and Rhea Ballas, Assistant Director of Youth Safety at the Archdiocese. He expressed his profound gratefulness for his many partners in his ministry including each of us, especially Archon Isidoros Garifalakis, President of our Metropolis Council. He also thanked Archon Fanis Economidis, who served for many years as Vice President of the Metropolis Council, for his more than three decades of service and his vision and commitment to growing the Metropolis, which are still evident in the ongoing work of the Metropolis ministries.

The theme of this year's Assembly "Let Your Light Shine" connects so many aspects of our work as a Metropolis. This light helps us understand where we come from, where we are, and where we are going. As our Metropolis celebrates 100 years of the brightly shining light of Christ in the western United States, we give thanks to our forebearers, those clergy and laity who had the vision to establish our first parishes. We now cover seven states with 67 parishes and three monasteries over 1.2 million square miles of land and water, serving tens of thousands of people united by our faith and connected with our local communities. We have been blessed with the opportunity to build upon this foundation to grow our ministries by offering substantive support for those in need, so that our focus is always on doing the work of the Lord and following the lighted path of Christ. Our Liturgical life is paramount to everything we do. Yet we have both the opportunity and the obligation to bring the church to life within our society through our actions, outreach, philanthropy and ministries. In this way, we set an example for others, especially our youth to emulate. And we have a host of examples surrounding us to guide us. Let us be sensitive to the daily miracles taking place because of the Holy Spirit through the ancient and new saints throughout the centuries. So that we may cultivate, improve and positively impact this legacy for the next generation and beyond.

We are called to be Orthodox Christians each day of our lives, and we have the duty to carry the light of Christ into society to bring hope. This is why our commitment to ministry development is so important and empowering so that we can effectively provide for the spiritual, emotional, educational, social and cultural edification of all those we serve. Our focus should not be on how we are spending money but rather on the investment we are making by prioritizing ministry work

as a Metropolis, as parishes, and through our own involvement in our communities. As we work together during the Assembly, let us strive to expand on our theme of “Let Your Light Shine” to be that light, to share that light, and to protect that light which always leads to salvation and glorifies the Risen Christ.

Expressions of Gratitude

Deacon Justin Bosl

Deacon Justin Bosl expresses thanks on behalf of all people in attendance for the generosity of Jeannie and Gerry Ranglas and the work of Dio Stefanopoulos over the last year in renovating and expanding the conference room where the clergy and laity are gathered for this Assembly.

Featured Presentation

Deacon Justin Bosl introduces Katrina Bitar, Program Director for YES (Youth Equipped to Serve).

First Question: Does the typical ethos of our Church make our young people feel that they belong? Do we create spaces where young people can develop a sense of belonging, or do we create spaces that possibly make an insider feel like an outsider. Maybe the things we preach publicly make young people feel shame and shy away from the Church. If we are truly leading others to Christ, isn't it of paramount importance that anyone who wants to be there is welcomed?

This lack of belonging and sense of identity is pervasive among young people, especially with the influence of devices. The search for identity in Christ will anchor young people to the Church.

Imagine a place where you have peace in your heart and your being. Imagine further that the only way you can come into this perfect place is by leaving all your given and created roles. Imagine how our children feel when they have not yet found and are not yet immersed in their created roles. Developing that identity in Christ will allow our young people to embrace their God-given gifts and created roles.

God's ideal is happening when we are named by God, called to witness to the edges of the earth, and treat each other as God-given.

She offers three points of how to make young people feel a sense of belonging:

1. Always go to them. There is more hesitancy nowadays for young people to come to us in the Church. When we just plan everything, they will be more likely to come once they already know us and have established relationships with us. Important for young people to feel that they have been seen, they have been heard, they are accepted, loved and welcomed. Build relationships.
2. Listen to them. Offer hospitality. Be a healer. Active listening does not try to fix problems but is simply being present. Let go of your agenda and opinions.
3. Believe in them. Give encouragement and expect beautiful things from them. Guide young people to choose a way of life rather than rules to foster their acceptance and cooperation. Young people will rise to our expectations.

Katrina explains about YES internships to allow young people to explore their self-identity by developing various programs. One young woman developed a program called Bridges where inter-generational communities began developing relationships.

Example of Fix, Help and Serve Approach: Fixing is different from Helping which is different from Serving. The Fixer is only there when something/someone is already broken. The Helper is not on the same level as the person helped. Serving is the work of the soul. Our service serves us as well as others. An approach of service keeps the door open, makes no judgment, provides a lifeline, and makes a person feel that he/she belongs.

Youth Safety Update

Deacon Justin Bosl/Rhea Ballas

Deacon Justin emphasizes the importance of our parishes becoming compliant as soon as possible. From a legal perspective, it is possible that if there is a claim in a parish and the parish is not 100 percent compliant, the parish may not be protected by the insurance company. In this case, if found liable, a parish would need to pay out of pocket. Thus, a serious financial and legal risk exists in not being compliant. Claims will be filed with the Metropolis and if one parish is not compliant, the Metropolis will not be compliant. California Statute AB506 now requires Livescan background checks by 1/1/2024, but the US Department of Justice continues to have a lengthy delay. Deacon Justin and Johanna Duterte Carter will be following up with parishes to help them become compliant.

Rhea Ballas with the Archdiocese emphasizes that the Youth Safety Ministry is a lifesaving endeavor for our youth ministries. The Orthodox Church of America (OCA) began these measures even before our Archdiocese, also utilizing insurance through Sterling Volunteers. Our Metropolis was the first of the Metropolises to have all the churches sign contracts. There are roughly 1,000 youth workers in our Metropolis, and at least 70% are compliant with screening and training. One of the goals of FDF was to ensure compliance of dance instructors and chaperones before FDF. Philoptochos within each parish through its mothers, yiayias and theas can assist to ensure the protection of our children. The president of each parish council is responsible for designating the person with responsibility for ensuring youth safety protection.

Deacon Justin and Rhea Ballas field pertinent questions.

Metropolis Ministries Circuit

Paul Gikas and Ministry Leaders

Paul Gikas introduces the Leaders of the 14 Ministries of the Metropolis.

Philoptochos - Jeannie Ranglas: How do you spell Philoptochos? Philanthropy, Hope, Initiative, Love, Opportunities, Prayers, Time, Open Hearts, Charitable contributions, Hands-on work, Ordination of seminarians, and Sisterhood.

Orthodox Parish Leadership - Steve Tibbs: 40 Parishes that he has worked with; four offerings of OPL – leadership development, parish revitalization, capital campaign and strategic planning; two asks: Parish Health Assessment as well as team for parish leadership network.

Missions & Evangelism – Fr. Gerasimos Markopoulos and Kenny Scott: our focus on Missions to America and the Great Commission. Spread the Word of the Evangelism Conference on June 6-8, 2023 at St. Nicholas Ranch.

Clergy Continuing Education – Fr. Gerasimos Markopoulos: recent help from Chrissie Zeppos and Fr. Nicholas Metrakos. Exploring areas of affordable, relevant, easily accessible resources to

our priests.

Stewardship - Danilo Simich: Stewardship program of the Metropolis offers three items – education, resources and programs, and virtual forums. Important that each parish develops a written stewardship plan.

Youth & Young Adult Ministry – Johanna Duterte Carter demonstrated the many hats that she wears: the goal of the Ministry is to allow youth and young adults to draw closer to Christ through programs including summer camp, confession, establishment of lifelong friends, young adult retreats at Lake Tahoe and the Ranch, GOYA winter retreat, Oratorical Festival, Family Wellness Ministry, and Youth Safety Ministry.

Folk Dance & Choral Festival – Spiro Beckas: over 3,000 FDF participants this year, young and old. Many young adults serve on the FDF Management Team.

Church Music Ministry – Fr. Aris Metrakos: the goal is to help choirs and chanters improve to engage parishioners; scholarships are available.

Young Adult League – George Anagnostopoulos: annual four-day conference over Labor Day weekend; over 2,200 young adults have attended the last four conferences since its reintroduction in 2019. Four pillars: faith, fellowship, worship, service.

Saint Nicholas Ranch – Michael Pappas: He suggests that we consider the various ways of making the Ranch a destination venue.

Christian Education – Dr. Eve Tibbs: this Ministry involves writing, teaching, organizing, recommending curriculums, providing online resources, the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival, connecting resource providers with one another, and upcoming online class.

Family Wellness – George Papageorge/Fr. Tom and Presv. Pat Tsagalakis/Fr. Jim and Presv. Donna Pappas/Fr. Vasili Hillhouse: musical ensemble number to Grease’s Tell Me More

Greek Village Immersion Camp – no current representative

Greek Language and Culture – no current representative

Closing Remarks and Benediction

His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos

His Eminence expressed his pleasant surprise and delight at the depth of talent demonstrated by the Ministry presenters with their inspirational messages this evening. His Eminence offered a closing prayer.

Tuesday, April 25, 2023

Feast of Saint Mark the Apostle and Evangelist

Divine Liturgy at the Monastery and Nineteen-Year Memorial

For Metropolitan Anthony

His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos

His Eminence was assisted by Rev. Fr. Jerry Markopoulos, Rev. Fr. Florin Ristache, and Rev. Deacon Justin Bosl.

Hellenic College Holy Cross Update

President George Cantonis

Metropolitan Gerasimos introduces Archon George Cantonis, President of Hellenic College Holy Cross.

President Cantonis reports on the many accomplishments made at the school during his tenure. HCHC is on a positive trajectory. Yet, much work remains to be done to ensure a sufficient number of qualified clergy in a climate where there is no truth and tradition is frowned upon. He recognized all clergy who are graduates of HCHC especially those who also received their M.Div.

The remaining challenges are not insignificant. Enrollment and continuing finances are struggling. The enrolment of 200 students is not sufficient. HCHC is seeking to enroll another 100 students in the online full-time program. While enrollment has doubled, the base numbers are still small.

He presents a video of the program and idea of Be Attentive which allows seminarians and students to partner with proistamenoι for outreach and support. Sight, sense, sound and substance represent the core elements of the seminarian program.

HCHC has reduced its debt of over \$20 million to under \$5 million over the last three years. This business venture is an undercapitalized turnaround situation. We must take one step at a time with this investment, first eliminating debt. Hopefully in two years when enrollment has increased, we can begin building the endowment. Fundraising is an investment and a critical effort. Our goal is to generate at least 50-55% of operating needs from tuition.

Excellence is what is required of HCHC. To be as successful as HCHC needs to be, everyone must be involved. The School is the future of our Faith at large, and time is not on our side. Aggressive action must be taken.

President Cantonis announces that he has submitted his resignation as President of HCHC in view of his age and health and the demands of the position.

Second Presentation

Katrina Bitar

Katrina Bitar opens the floor for clergy and laity to offer reflections of their experience at the Assembly. Many people offered moving statements.

Katrina begins this phase of her presentation by asking us to focus upon relationships first. We must develop trust and connection with people and see the growth and redirection that comes from this approach. Keep it simple. You cannot be gentle without being firm.

Being active as an intergenerational community, not just social, is essential. Service gives everyone within the church a purpose. The Table is the gathering place where we say the Lord's prayer and eat the Lord's Supper. We come to eat with the Lord because He called us there, He feeds us, and then He sends us out to bring the Lord to all people.

Katrina invites us to consider the concept of a life of service. It is the type of life that the Lord designed for us. True service will be a struggle not without hurt. Service and sacrificial love go together. Yet, what keeps us from coming together with a stranger? Fear of the unknown, rejection, judgment, and assumptions are just a few of the reasons.

The Lord gives resources unequally because he wants us to be together.

A Church without walls is the goal we are seeking where the Altar becomes the whole world.

Katrina recommends the book “How to Want What You Have” by Timothy Keller which emphasizes three attributes: attentiveness, compassion and gratitude.

Our communities can begin service efforts by offering consistency of efforts, ownership of actions. May be useful to conduct a needs assessment of our wider community. When and where we serve is everywhere and always.

Katrina expressed her gratitude for being a part of this community of people and feeling filled over the last two days. Metropolitan Gerasimos thanks her and presents her with an icon of the Directress.

Approval of Minutes from the 2022 Clergy-Laity Assembly

Deacon Justin Bosl

Motion passed to approve the minutes of 2022 CLA, made by Archon Paul Sogotis and seconded by Philippos Athanasiades.

Metropolis Council Report

Archon Isidoros Garifalakis

Archon Garifalakis expresses his honor and gratitude in serving as the Vice Chair of Metropolis Council and supporting the dynamic leadership of Metropolitan Gerasimos. He reports on the success of the 2022 Faith Forward stewardship campaign (begun in 2007), raising more than \$484,000 and increasing the number of monthly donors. He announces plans for this year’s Metropolis Gala after a five-year hiatus. He expresses his optimism with the work of the Metropolis Council in developing a vision of purpose for the future of our Metropolis. He thanks everyone for their support and challenges each of us to convey to our parishes the vibrancy of our Metropolis ministries. Metropolitan Gerasimos thanks Archon Garifalakis for his presence and faithfulness in our community

Total Commitment and Pension Benefits Funding

Philippos Athanasiades

Philippos Athanasiades expresses his joy at being together with everyone after so many virtual meetings. He reports on the 100% participation of the Churches in our Metropolis with the Total Commitment Program. Letters for ongoing Total Commitment will be mailed soon. He introduces additional committee members: Christine Psfteas, Chris Kalabokes, Osama (Sam) Dawood, and Irene Melitas. He encourages people to reach out to any of the committee members for assistance

and questions. He notes that the Metropolis has contributed 108% of its allocation to the Clergy Pension Fund.

Review Engagement

George Psfteas

George Psfteas updates the Assembly on his work with the independent auditor over the last two years to complete the review of the 2019 and 2020 Metropolis financials, which will be posted on the Metropolis website once finalized. Then the process of reviewing the 2021 and 2022 Metropolis financials will begin.

2022 Metropolis Financial Report

George Psfteas

George Psfteas reports that the Metropolis financial reporting is moving to a not-for-profit format. The Metropolis has had a decrease in net assets in the amount of approximately \$225,000, primarily due to the outflow of cash from the restricted accounts. The operating budget shows an actual net decrease of approximately \$45,000 of which \$26,000 was due to market forces. The balance sheet of the cash accounts remains strong and continues to grow by controlling and managing expenses and increasing bank account dollars. From a statement of activity standpoint, the core income inputs are the Archdiocesan Allotment, the quarterly amounts of Total Commitment payments from the parishes, the Faith Forward donations and Gala fundraising.

2023 Budget Presentation and Approval

George Psfteas

George Psfteas refers to a poster/handout of the Journey of Your Dollar which is available today and on the Metropolis website. Approximately 30 cents of every dollar given by parishes to the Archdiocese comes back to the Metropolis, which funds the management of the Metropolis and the growth of its ministries. The Metropolis budget invests 63 cents of every dollar in its Ministries. Events such as Faith Forward and the Gala support the fundraising efforts for the ministries and programs of the Metropolis. Several of the Metropolis ministries and programs such as FDF and the Young Adult Conference are self-funding and self-sustaining.

George emphasizes that he is presenting the 2023 operational budget of the Metropolis. Projected operational revenue is \$1.348 million, down from \$1.35 million in 2022. Projected total revenue is \$3.8 million, up from \$3.3 million in 2022, driven by increases in restricted ministry accounts. Virtually every category of operating expenses for 2023 remains flat. Insurance costs are largely outside of the control of the Metropolis, being handled by overall coverage from the Archdiocese. The Metropolis budgets for a net zero balance.

Motion made by Fr. Peter Salmas, seconded by Andrew Primis, to approve the 2023 Budget as presented. Mr. Psfteas provides answers to questions from Assembly delegates. Motion passes.

New Business – none

Closing Remarks and Prayer and Adjournment His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos

Metropolitan Gerasimos offers his closing remarks, hopefulness, and gratitude on this Feast Day of Saint Mark the Apostle and Evangelist to all those people who have helped to make this Assembly a success. His Eminence recognizes the first-time attendees at this Assembly. He encourages us to share with our parishioners what we have learned during the last two days especially that we have five young men from our Metropolis attending HCHC this fall. He urges us to be watchful for the men around us who can become worthy, well-equipped and dedicated servants of God.

Motion passed made by Fr. Peter Salmas, seconded by Fr. Simeon Corona, to adjourn.

His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos closed the Assembly with prayer.