KEYNOTE ADDRESS
FROM METROPOLITAN ALEXIOS OF ATLANTA
FOR 2023 CLERGY-LAITY ASSEMBLY

Thursday, June 22, 2023
Innisbrook Resort, Palm Harbor, FL

My beloved ones, my dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, it is so good to see you all after such a long time. I greet you in a spirit of love and joy, conveying the prayers and blessings of both our loving spiritual father, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America.

When choosing the theme of this year’s Metropolis Clergy-Laity Assembly, it was important to remember that it has been four years since we have gathered together in person. As we come out of the COVID-19 pandemic, the theme of this Assembly reflects the importance of being together: "...for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

Though live streaming was a gift from God during the pandemic, we should not forget the words of our Lord: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20). For this reason, we must go out
of our way to encourage our brothers and sisters to return to the loving embrace of the Church, so that together, we may fulfill the work of our Lord.

Therefore, I would like to share with you some of the wonderful things that have been accomplished since our Virtual Plenary Session in 2021, as well as describing how this year’s Assembly will help us grow together as the Body of Christ.

I commend Mrs. Irene Politis, the Metropolis Philoptochos President, & the entire Board, because when I think of being “one in Christ”, this brings to mind the sad reality of the war between Russia & Ukraine, two majority Orthodox countries. Assisting our Ukrainian brothers and sisters in their difficult time, our Metropolis Philoptochos gave financial assistance to the National Philoptochos’s Ukraine Relief program.

During Clergy-Laity, Philoptochos will conduct its General Assembly, while also undertaking a charitable project, and a workshop about how to maintain a strong Philoptochos Chapter. Therefore, I extend my blessings to all our Philoptochos Board members, Philoptochos Chapter Presidents, & Philoptochos Delegates.

Our Youth, Education, and Hellenic Culture Office, led by Ms. Monica Gjerde continued to work closely with our Clergy to oversee vital ministries for our young people. The Hellenic Dance Festival, under the spiritual direction of Fr.
Sampson Kasapakis, saw 43 teams from our Metropolis, but also from Colorado, Virginia, Illinois, Kansas, as well as Arizona, & Maryland.

Thanks to the leadership of its 5 Directors—Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis, Fr. Sampson Kasapakis, Fr. Steven Klund, Fr. Robert Lawrence & Fr. Stephen Mathews, St. Stephen’s Summer Camp hosted over 400 campers during its 5 weeks.

Under the spiritual guidance of Fr. Steven Klund, The Winter Youth Rally had 500-plus GOYANs & 50 teams participating in our Bible Bowl Tournament.

Through the guidance of His Grace Bishop Sevastianos of Zela, we are blessed to build up our seven district conferences and offer breakout sessions that will address Religious Education, Youth, Adult & Family Ministry, and Greek Education.

A new offering for this year, I commend our Metropolis Chancellor, Fr. George Tsahakis & our local Clergy Laity Chair, Nicholas Manias for offering workshops on Friday and Saturday that showcase vital ministries throughout our Metropolis & Archdiocese.

Whether we think of the Liturgical Arts, Cybersecurity for our Parishes, Effective Christian Ministries, Young Adult Ministries, and Archdiocese Youth Safety all these will strengthen our work as members of Christ’s Body. New offerings also include spiritual workshops offered by Fr. Stephen Freeman.
And now, please allow me to thank the dedicated staff and coworkers of the Metropolis: His Grace Bishop Sevastianos, the Chancellor, Fr. George Tsahakis, Mrs. Ethel Gjerde, Ms. Joanne Mertzanis, Ms. Monica Gjerde, Mr. Nick Kostopoulos, Mr. Nick Moraitakis, Vice President of the Metropolis Council, Mr. Konstantinos Kazakos, Vice-Chair of the Diakonia Retreat Center & their coworkers & the Archimandrite, Fr. Konstantinos Carros, Director & Chaplain of the Diakonia Retreat Center.

I also offer my gratitude and blessings to those who are an important part of this Assembly: my dear Vicars, Priests and Con-celebrants; Presvytera Harriet Wilson, President of the Metropolis Sisterhood of Presvyteres & all the Esteemed members of the Sisterhood; distinguished Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate; our Parish Council Presidents & Parish Council Delegates; Mr. Philip Vavalides, President of the Southeastern Greek Orthodox Federation of Church Musicians & all our Choir members; and, of course, the organizers & parishioners of our 2023 Clergy-Laity Assembly at St. Nicholas Cathedral, including Fr. Athanasios Haros, the Dean, & the Committee Chair, Mr. Nicholas Manias, and all the delegates who are present for this weekend.

Last, but certainly not least, I extend my greetings to the Honorable Consul General Loukas Tsokos for making time to support this important endeavor of our common Hellenic-Christian faith.
We begin this beautiful Assembly, after we have celebrated the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit which inspired the Prophets, brought the world together, because, as St. Paul says to the Galatians, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

In today’s society, which is a world full of division, we are blessed to be part of a spiritual body which understands that our greatest strength is that we are all living icons of God.

Having lived through the difficulties of the pandemic, my prayer is that this Clergy-Laity shall inspire us & reflect our commitment to working together as one Body of our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ.

On a personal level, I knew this was my calling when I first arrived to serve you in 1997. I know that I am not a theologian, but I love the Lord with all my heart. And so, I seek to honor and serve Him by caring and inspiring the flock he has given me. In both a spiritual, and in a very real way, you have been my family for these many years. I look forward to continuing to serve you and living in fellowship with my family for many more years to come.

I pray that Almighty God will bless this endeavor, and all our endeavors, and that will He bless each and every one of us, now and always.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta