



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

June 10, 2009

**HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN ALEXIOS` WELCOME TO
THE 2009 CLERGY-LAITY ASSEMBLY**

Reverend Clergy & Presbyteres, Retired/Widowed Clergy & Presbyteres, Delegates of Parish Communities of the Metropolis of Atlanta, Members of the Metropolitan Council, Members of the Metropolis of Atlanta Philoptochos Board, Ladies of Philoptochos, Archons, Members of Diakonia Deca, Visitors & Faithful.

My dearly beloved in the Lord,

"There is hope in your future, says the LORD, that your children will return to their own land." Jeremiah 31:17

Greetings in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is with profound spiritual joy that I welcome you to the biennial Clergy-Laity Assembly & Philoptochos Conference of our Holy Metropolis of Atlanta that takes place in the beautiful city of Clearwater, Florida, hosted by our beloved Parish community of Holy Trinity. I have been looking forward to seeing all of you at this magnificent event, and I am eagerly anticipating sharing our ideas, dreams and aspirations for the future of our God-Protected Metropolitan Family in a spirit of brotherly love and unity, enlightened and guided by the Holy Spirit.

I give thanks and praise to our Almighty God, with the Chancellor, V. Rev. Fr. George Tsahakis and our Metropolis staff, for this opportunity to gather together as Orthodox Christians of one family of faith, and to offer honor and glory to His Holy Name. I extend my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to Father James Rousakis, Father Peter Andronache, the Parish Council

president, and Parish Council members, the Philoptochos President and the Philoptochos sisters, and all the Holy Trinity family for all their hard work and especially for their warm Philoxenia that welcome us. I also congratulate Dr. Theodore Vlahos, the chairman and his team, Mrs. Jeannie Demas, the Ladies of Philoptochos and all the organizers of this blessed event for the generous and unselfish offering of their time, energy and resources in the service of our Lord and His Holy Church to plan and organize this wonderful assembly. I know how much hard work and commitment are required to coordinate and plan an event like this, and I commend you for your tireless efforts and dedication.

It is particularly appropriate at this challenging and difficult time in today's society to turn our thoughts to our plans for the future of our Church: our youth. That is why we have chosen the theme and focus for this assembly "THE DAY AFTER TODAY: OUR YOUTH." By choosing this Bible verse and theme, I wanted to convey the message that I am deeply and personally concerned and involved with our precious children. Nothing could be more important than planting the seeds and laying the foundations for a young generation of leaders of our Holy Orthodox Church and servants of our Lord. In today's society, we can no longer take for granted that our children are living in a Christian environment or even one that upholds our Orthodox Christian values and beliefs.

Our Orthodox faith is lived in the midst of a society which operates on totally different principles - we are constantly exposed to and live within a society that is not only un-Orthodox but actually hostile to Orthodox Christian beliefs. Especially in the United States, our pluralistic society makes many demands upon us as Christians, yet we are all expected to be followers of Christ, regardless of our individual circumstances. Most importantly, in a society and environment that is antagonistic to our beliefs, how will we pass on that faith to our children?

One way is by various programs and activities that we call "Youth Diakonia," or Youth Ministry. The goal of Youth Diakonia is to

provide Christ-centered programs and activities which contribute to the spiritual, mental, social, and physical development of every young person. That means that Jesus Christ is the center of every youth program or activity, and that prayer and worship, participation in the ecclesiastical and sacramental life of our Church, is vital. No matter what the activity or event, whether school, study, spiritual retreats, sports events or Hellenic Dance Festivals, as Orthodox Christians, our young people are an essential part of the body of Jesus Christ, our Orthodox Church. In addition to fun and fellowship and other activities, they learn about what is really important — the love of Christ and one another that we carry in our hearts.

As we begin our meetings and workshops, activities and events, I offer to you my Hierarchical Blessings and best wishes for a successful and productive 2009 Clergy-Laity Assembly & Philoptochos Conference. May God bless us and bestow upon us His unfathomable Mercy. I remain prayerfully yours,

With paternal love in Christ,

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta