



THE HELLENIC Link, Inc.
ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΟΣ ΣΥΝΔΕΣΜΟΣ

Member Update- Bulletin
Ενημέρωση Μελών, Φίλων, και Συνεργατών του Συνδέσμου

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CHRISTMAS 2020



Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania, healed from a serious encounter with Covid-19, exiting from hospital.

We could have had the highly respected Hierarch interpret for us the significance and imperatives of the Lord's Nativity under any circumstance. But this Christmas, with the humanity suffering worldwide and his personal experience with the most virulent pathogen, the voicing of his message becomes even more befitting and valuable. We are, therefore, grateful to Mr. Alexis Papachelas and to KATHIMERINI for conveying the Archbishop's statements to the public, as they radiate a healing grace for our body and soul. CJE

Archbishop of Albania: 'We have to re-examine humanity's priorities'

By [ALEXIS PAPACHELAS](#)

The archbishop of Albania is a special man. I wanted very much to get him to speak after his ordeal with the coronavirus, because I knew his thoughts and words would be anything but trivial.

He describes his feelings as he was placed in the “capsule” to be transported from Albania to Athens. He addresses himself to those who, even today, dispute the existence of the virus. He talks about the immense changes it will bring, starting by observing that “the pandemic made a mockery of all the defenses of the powerful of the Earth.”

He does evade the question of the rift between Church and science – quite the contrary – and he notes that “polarization is a form of conceit and decadence.”

A small confession: When I was going through the same ordeal, at the same hospital, Anastasios was one of the very few people I got a chance to talk to. Maybe because I was instinctively aware that even a very brief chat with him would give me unexpected strength. He, in his interview, describes his feeling, which was exactly what I felt, too: “In this terrible isolation, which is the main feature of this disease, the antidote was a voice [telling you], ‘You are not alone, never have been and for sure you are not now.’”

Your Beatitude, you went through an ordeal with your disease. Were you afraid?

Not exactly fear, but an unprecedented concern. I have been through many diseases in my life, but this was an adventure in uncharted waters. It was preceded by a strange fatigue. At first, tests were negative. On November 11, I was informed I had tested positive for the virus. The most difficult phase was the transport. I was told about a certain “capsule” and a special flight by C-130 [military transport aircraft]. I had never imagined what this meant. When they put me in the capsule, I had the impression I was entering a coffin. A dark moment. I prayed and added, “Follow whatever protocol dictates in such cases.” And I again found refuge in the verities that have always sustained me in life.

When I left the Archbishopric, I responded to questions they put to me: “There are many difficult treks in Albania and I have been going down ravines for 29 years now. Every time we discover a trail that brings us back to the clearing. To share, even thus, in the common affliction is an important experience. The symptoms are mild. I have a certain sensitivity in the lungs, I have been suffering from asthma for a long time. I believe we will surmount this. In the afternoon, I will be at Evangelismos [hospital] in Athens. We have been through certain ordeals before. We overcame them. And to not be sad! It will pass! ‘For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord.’”

What gave you hope during those difficult days in the hospital?

During difficult passages of my life, I go back to the basic tenets of the faith. Verses from the Psalms spontaneously pour out: “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why do you groan within me? Have hope in God, for I will yet have cause to acknowledge Him.” “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.” In this terrible isolation, which is the main feature of this disease, the antidote was a voice [telling you], “You are not alone, never have been and

for sure you are not now.” “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers.”

Many of our fellow citizens still question the very existence of the coronavirus. What would you tell them if you had the chance to talk to them?

The distinguished expert scientists and the leaders of so many countries who have mobilized to confront it are neither naive nor dishonest. Also, the 3,400 fellow humans in Greece and the 1,690,000 globally who have died up until now are not unimportant. Those who contest these shocking facts have obviously been afflicted by another serious illness, defined by the ancient saying: “You will not convince me, even if you convince me.”

It is often said and written that the pandemic will change the way we live forever. Do you believe this? What lessons should we draw from this frightening experience?

That it will change, I’m certain about this. I’m not sure about “forever” and I’m not sure how. After the two World Wars there were changes in world history: alliances, global initiatives and organizations, collaborations encompassing all humanity. A great lesson comes in a way no one anticipated. It wasn’t a single nation, a single ideology, a single system [that failed]. The pandemic made a mockery of all the defenses of the powerful of the Earth. The enemy is an invisible, faceless protein, with a variety of mutations and a strange aggressiveness against everybody, indiscriminately. The great lesson was that to face [the enemy] a global alliance and mobilization of scientific and other forces, and a global solidarity, was required. It is imperative to re-examine humanity’s priorities and the values that determine its fate, on the basis of justice and respect for every human being and not the law of the most powerful.

The pandemic appears to have created a rift between the Church and science.

It would be the greatest mistake for both Church and science to allow rifts to develop because of the pandemic. Already the Old Testament notes: “Give doctors the honor they deserve, for the Lord gave them their work to do... He gave medical knowledge to human beings, so that we would praise him for the miracles he performs” (Book of Sirach 38:1, 38:6). On several occasions I have noted: Orthodox Christianity views the development of natural sciences and technology by celebrating and thanking God for bestowing upon humanity the gift of seeking truth and discovering unknown aspects of Creation. It is worth noting that the Orthodox Church has avoided guiding scientific research and does not take a position on every scientific achievement when it happens. The scientific quest to explore the mysteries of the creation and the Church’s spiritual quest for an approach to, and communion with, God are two different ways to seek truth. Both are expressions of glorification toward Him who is the Truth.

There are also rifts within the Church arising from the severity of the measures taken by the state to curb public gatherings. Even Holy Communion has become the subject of public dispute between prelates and scientists and among prelates. What are your thoughts? How does a theologian balance dogma and public health?

Dear Mr Papachelas, you will allow me to note that I serve as leader of a certain Orthodox Autocephalous Church and I’m not allowed to enter into a current debate inside a sister Church. The

Church of Greece has its own hierarchical structure and I remind you that the Church does not consist solely of clerics but also lay members, some belonging to various scientific specialties. Church-state relations in Greece have their own specificity. In Albania, we face different conditions and can neither copy solutions proposed in Greece nor promote as a model the solutions we in the Albanian Synod are called upon to provide. In Albania, specifically, we communicated with the prime minister and the country's authorities from the start of the pandemic. We informed the Orthodox faithful (they are estimated at about 20 percent of the population) officially, through encyclicals, insisting that they follow the necessary measures with exactitude. Churches did not shut: They remained open for the celebration of Mass and as places of spiritual aid and individual prayer. The authorities of every metropolis are responsible for the strict application of hygiene measures. A few extreme voices (finally) obeyed the Synod's instructions.

For a general treatment of the pandemic from the Orthodox standpoint, we noted, in a response letter (May 25, 2020) to His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Vartholomaios: "The Hierarchy of each Autocephalous Church could make decisions, taking into consideration the worries of its faithful members, to set up, for example, a special commission by distinguished theologians and specialist scientists to examine the facts and submit specific proposals. The Hierarchy, understanding in love and sagacity the needs of its flock, would then have the latitude to set out practical guidelines. Scientific forecasts and warnings by competent world organizations warn that the unprecedented pandemic is expected to come back in new waves and mutations. It would be desirable, therefore, for the Orthodox Church to undertake in timely fashion the necessary initiatives: setting up a pan-Orthodox special commission to assess the new global conditions and, subsequently, convening a pan-Orthodox Assembly to determine practical directives. I strongly believe that the Synodic system is an invaluable and irreplaceable Orthodox tradition which must be activated in critical circumstances such as the present one, which has shaken all humanity."

Polarization rules in our times. Politicians, pundits and church officials take extreme positions in their public statements. Does this phenomenon worry you?

I don't think there is polarization between religious dogma and public health. It is more a question of interpreting the dogma and the specific conditions relevant to the matter at hand. Different voices and assessments are legitimate and often fertile in a free, democratic society. However, spite, contempt and demagoguery are indefensible. In order to be productive, public debate demands serious knowledge, responsibility and sobriety. Polarization is a form of conceit and decadence.

There is a lot of anger and desperation among a large segment of society which is experiencing the isolation and economic catastrophe resulting from the pandemic. What would you tell these people?

I understand anger, but we must avoid desperation. We must face the disruption brought by the pandemic seriously, in a critical spirit and with faith and hope. We must all collaborate, emphasizing the need for social justice, respect for every individual and care for the suffering and the vulnerable.

Will you be vaccinated, when the vaccine becomes available?

Of course. Always according to the instructions of my distinguished doctors

The pandemic of Covid-19 plaguing all nations in 2020 had at least one salubrious effect in Greece: it mended the long-deteriorating Celebration of Christmas by the typical Greek family. The creation of a global zone of economy, and the transformation of the world into a unitary dominion culturally and otherwise, progressively detached family members (usually the younger ones) from the traditional Christmas-time reunion to novel forms of recreation, removed from the spirit of the Holy Days and their enjoyment by the entire family as a social unit. The restrictive measures of social mobility, imposed by authorities concerned with public health, seem to have brought back family unity during Christmas. This was highlighted in the *Greetings* Edition of the **Greek Reporter**, along with several examples and cited hyperlinks. We sincerely thank the **Reporter** for their warm and meaningful good wishes, which we reciprocate in the same spirit of friendship. We deem the message we received quite appropriate and useful for our readers to become aware of it. The Editor



May this special day be filled with love, health and happiness, for you and your family!

**Merry Christmas - Καλά Χριστούγεννα,
Your friends at Greek Reporter**

And some stories to make your Christmas a bit more Greek!



Stray Puppies Seek Refuge in an Outdoor Nativity Scene in

Every appropriate Christmas scene, a group of stray puppies sought refuge in an outdoor creche in the village of Neochori on Mount Pelion.

Christmas and New Year's Eve.

[Read the full story!](#)

New York

Serving up classic Greek dishes ranging from gyros to authentic pitas, Greek food trucks and their resourceful owners have long been a staple at the corners of the busiest streets in NYC.

[Read the full story!](#)



Archbishop Elpidophoros Issues Encyclical for Christmas 2020

Elpidophoros, the Archbishop of the Americas, has released an encyclical for Christmas 2020, during this most unusual of any holiday season most of us have ever experienced.

[Watch the video!](#)

Christmas

Greek treats are the perfect welcome to the holiday season, and once you try them, you'll crave them every year.

[the full story! Read](#)

Five Traditional Greek Treats to Sweeten Up Your

News from and about our Association

We bring to the attention of our readers three major areas to which the Hellenic Link, Inc. (HL) focuses its activities during this festive season.

As is known, HL is conducting at this moment the election of a new Board of Directors in accordance with its ByLaws . In this election all members, in the USA and abroad, cast votes for the nominated candidates. What is new in the 2020 election is that the candidates include, for the first time, members residing in Greece and Cyprus. It is anticipated that the presence of representatives of the overseas membership and their contribution to the operation of the Board will enhance the systematic and effective support of learning and use of the Greek language, the projection of the Hellenic Culture, and the promotion of the national and ethnic concerns of Hellenism in the USA and Canada. Conversely, the knowledge, interest and ability of the HL membership in North America to offer positive assistance in educational, cultural, scientific, technical and economic matters of interest to Greece and Cyprus will be also strengthened.

In the sector of Secondary Hellenic Education, endeavors are under way to establish direct collaboration between schools of the US *Omogeneia* and schools in Greece for the purpose of raising the oral and written proficiency of US pupils in the Greek language, and understanding better their common Cultural Heritage. For this educational objectives, initiatives were taken with the appropriate school administrations to develop specific programs which are mutually acceptable.

In the area of tertiary education, analogous efforts undertaken for the first time aim at collaboratively showcasing the Hellenic humanistic values to the US community by Modern Greek Studies Programs of US universities. The *Bulletin* will keep its readers abreast of specific programs and public events that will emerge from the ongoing deliberations and be organized by the faculties of universities participating in joint outreach activities.

Ενημέρωση για δραστηριότητες του Συνδέσμου που είναι σε εξέλιξη

Στο παρόν σημείωμα το πληροφοριακό μας Δελτίο αναφέρεται σε τρεις σημαντικούς στόχους στους οποίους εστιάζονται οι δραστηριότητες του Ελληνικού Συνδέσμου κατά την διάρκεια της εορταστικής περιόδου που διερχόμαστε.

Όπως είναι γνωστό, ο Σύνδεσμός μας την στιγμή αυτή διεξάγει την εκλογή νέου Διοικητικού Συμβουλίου που θα έχει τριετή θητεία, σύμφωνα με τον Κανονισμό λειτουργίας του. Για την εκλογή ψηφίζουν όλα τα μέλη του Συνδέσμου, τόσο εντός των ΗΠΑ όσο και αυτά που κατοικούν μόνιμως στην Ελλάδα/Κύπρο. Καινοτομία της εκλογής 2020 είναι το ότι ο κατάλογος

των προς ψήφιση υποψηφίων στο ψηφοδέλτιο που προτάθηκε περιλαμβάνει σημαντικό ποσοστό μελών που δεν είναι μόνιμοι κάτοικοι Αμερικής (4 από 14). Η σύνθεση του ψηφοδελτίου αναμένεται να επαυξήσει σημαντικά την παρουσία και συμβολή των εκπροσώπων του Συνδέσμου Ελλάδας στη λειτουργία του Συμβουλίου, ώστε να βελτιωθεί η συστηματική και αποτελεσματική καλλιέργεια της μάθησης και χρήσης της Ελληνικής Γλώσσας, καθώς και η προβολή και στήριξη της Ελληνικής Πολιτισμικής Κληρονομιάς στις ΗΠΑ και Καναδά. Η διεθνής σύνθεση του Συμβουλίου ευνοεί επίσης τον καλλίτερο συντονισμό του συνόλου των δραστηριοτήτων του και θα επηρεάσει ευνοϊκά την επίγνωση, το πρακτικό ενδιαφέρον, και την δυνατότητα θετικής συμβολής των μελών του που δεν έχουν ακριβή γνώση των Ελλαδικών θεμάτων, όπως, π.χ., το εκπαιδευτικό σύστημα, ο πολιτισμικός πλούτος, και οι αναπτυξιακές ανάγκες της χώρας.

Στον τομέα της Μέσης Ελληνικής Παιδείας, προσπάθειες καταβάλλονται να συναφθούν συμφωνίες συνεργασίας μεταξύ Ελλαδικών και Ομογενειακών σχολείων με σκοπό τη βελτίωση της επίδοσης των μαθητών στην έκφραση προφορικού και γραπτού λόγου στα Ελληνικά και της αφομοίωσης της Ελληνικής Πολιτισμικής Κληρονομιάς. Για τον σκοπό αυτό διεξάγονται ήδη συνεννοήσεις με τις αρμόδιες σχολικές διευθύνσεις προκειμένου να εφαρμοσθούν συγκεκριμένα, αμοιβαίως αποδεκτά προγράμματα.

Στον χώρο της τριτοβάθμιας εκπαίδευσης, ανάλογες ενέργειες του Ελληνικού Συνδέσμου οδήγησαν στην σύγκλιση Προγραμμάτων Νεοελληνικών Σπουδών Αμερικανικών Πανεπιστημίων σε κοινή εκ μέρους των ανάληψη πρωτοβουλιών για θεματική προβολή των ανθρωπιστικών αξιών του Ελληνικού Πολιτισμού σε χώρους δημόσιας συζήτησης, καθώς και για άλλες παρεμφερείς εκδηλώσεις. Το πληροφοριακό Δελτίο μας θα τηρήσει τους αναγνώστες μας ενήμερους της εξέλιξης τέτοιων προγραμμάτων που θα προκύψουν από τις διαβουλεύσεις των αρμοδίων καθηγητών ενδιαφερομένων Αμερικανικών πανεπιστημίων. **Editor**

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