



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

My dear sisters in the Lord,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way--in all your speaking and in all your knowledge-- because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful. (1 Corinthians 1:3-9)

As we prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving, I thank the Lord for you and your service as I read the wonderful words of St. Paul from the above quotation. It has truly been an amazing year for us personally and for our Philoptochos. From acquiring the new Philoptochos Center and home, to the successful National Convention, to the domestic and foreign charities to which you dedicated yourselves, God has blessed us abundantly.

Many times in our ministry to those in need, we do not get to see the fruit of our labor, but in some exceptional cases God affords us the opportunity to witness the result of our efforts. Last month I had the opportunity to visit charities that the Society, through your generosity, has supported both in Greece and Cyprus and I wanted to share with you first hand the difference that you have made in the lives of those in need.

During my trip to Greece I was able to visit the central offices of Apostoli, the philanthropic agency of the Church of Greece, where I was briefed on the many ministries the agency is running. We visited the “Demetrio”, an afternoon school program in Moschato, Athens, named after our Archbishop. I wish you were there to witness the enthusiasm of the children as they were coming to the center, the love and affection between the children and their teachers, the smiles on their faces and the way they presented a small program with songs and poems. There, I recalled what Christ said: “Let the children come to me for theirs is the Kingdom of God”. The children come from underprivileged families. They have a meal after school and then are divided up into classrooms where they are tutored by teachers, rest or play a little until the parents arrive to pick them up. I have to admit that this facility is first class and decorated in a very colorful, artistic and child friendly fashion. The personal care and attention for the children was very much in evidence when I noticed the director of Apostoli calling the children by name, and the children running to him to receive a hug. What a joy! I felt proud that Philoptochos, the Archdiocese and His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios personally contributed to this wonderful ministry.

I also visited in Athens a facility for seniors that suffer from Alzheimer’s, in various stages. The cleanliness and condition of the facility were exceptional. This facility had been supported by public funds, by the government, but unfortunately due to budgetary cuts, they have not received any funding since the beginning of this year and have been appealing for private donations.

Additionally, I had the privilege to accompany His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios to Cyprus, for an official visit at the invitation of the President of Cyprus Mr. Nicos Anastasiades and His Beatitude Archbishop Chrysostomos. We have visited a number of facilities with children that suffer from autism or other disabilities. One of these institutions was in Limassol, and the Society has assisted them financially in the past. This facility is run by a group of parents and is under the auspices of the former First Lady Elsie Christofias. It is a small facility and due to limited space they have morning and

afternoon sessions in order to accommodate children and adults. The facility needs major renovations and to be expanded. Due to the economic crisis, the “tuition” that they receive from families is not enough to maintain the program and they depend on private donations.

We also visited a larger facility that serves adults that have various disabilities. It is a day facility with over a hundred individuals that receive training for basic skills, such as how to take care of themselves, learn a trade, if possible and facilitate their incorporation into society.

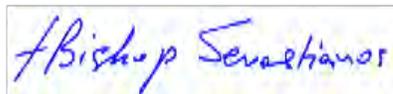
We visited a couple of schools, and one of them was located on the dividing line between the Turkish occupied and the Greek free area. There is an attempt to revitalize the neighborhood and the students are going back to school. The children had a small program for us with songs and poems. That program was very moving, since we knew that a few feet away there were the Turkish troops that occupied this Country since 1974.

A highlight of our visit to Cyprus was the inauguration of the new wing of a Rehab Center for children that have physical disabilities. The facility is state-of-the-art, run by the Red Cross, whose president is former First Lady, Fotini Papadopoulou. This new hospital wing became possible through major donations from our Omogenia in the United States and it was inaugurated by His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios and the First Lady of Cyprus Mrs. Andri Anastasiades.

Finally a pure delight was the Center of Volunteerism of Ayios Dometios for children and adults. There, the kindergarten children wearing traditional Cypriot costumes stole our hearts with their dances and singing. Among them, children of different ethnicities who immigrated to Cyprus sang in perfect unison and harmony with the Greek children and danced like everyone else. What a joy that was. The Cyprus Federation of America has been supporting this program and I have to confess every penny spent is worth a million in return.

My dear sisters in the Lord, as we prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving and the Nativity of our Lord this year, let us not forget the people in need in our neighborhood, the people in need in our country and especially our brothers and sisters in Greece and Cyprus. Put aside your offering for each cause and put a smile on their faces and most of all warm their hearts giving them the assurance that they are not forgotten but their Orthodox brothers and sisters in America love them as Christ loves us.

In Christ's love and service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bishop Sevastianos". The signature is written in a cursive style and is enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

+Bishop Sevastianos