Ecumenical Patriarchate

Chair: Anita Kartalopoulos
Members: Josephine Avaneas, Helen Demos, Dora Hart, Marina Kookootsedes, Faye Peponis, Vicki Scaljon, Maria Stavropoulos, Lila Prounis (Honorary)

The Mission of the Committee is to support the work of the philanthropic programs and institutions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate including, but not limited to, Balukli Nursing Home, orphanages, schools and shrines by the Philoptochos Chapters, through the annual commitment, and to increase awareness of the Ecumenical Patriarchate with distribution of information to the and Chapters of the Archdiocese.

The goals of the Ecumenical Patriarchate Committee continue to be advanced by the National Philoptochos with great love for our Patriarchate. As we all know, the Mother Church continues to face difficult circumstances in Turkey. The Philoptochos remains committed to fully supporting and assisting our Mother Church as effectively as possible, through the Annual Commitment, and through the “Ministry of Presence:” travel to the Patriarchate to personally bear witness to our faith, our support for our Patriarch and our belief and that this Church and its Patriarchate are truly ecumenical.

• The Annual Commitment
   Annually, on the first Sunday in November, monies are collected for the benefit of patriarchal philanthropic ministries. The annual collection enjoys wide support throughout the United States and results in a collection of approximately $100,000 each year. It was decided at the March 2012 National Board meeting in Atlanta, Georgia that those monies be transmitted to the Patriarchate annually in conjunction with the Name Day of His All Holiness, which is celebrated on June 11th. National President Aphrodite Skeadas, personally presented His All Holiness with those funds on June 11, 2013 in conjunction with the Philoptochos Pilgrimage to Constantinople. The 2014 name day gift to His All Holiness was delivered on our behalf by Archbishop Demetrios of America in conjunction with his travel to the Phanar as a member of the Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

• Philoptochos Pilgrimage to the Ecumenical Patriarchate: June 2013
   In October 2007, the National Philoptochos made its first pilgrimage to the Patriarchate, led by Bishop Andonios of Phasianie. All who participated were thankful for a beautiful spiritual experience that included not only an audience with His All Holiness at the Phanar but also visits to our important religious sites.

   At the March 2012 National Board Meeting, the members expressed an overwhelming desire to make another pilgrimage to Constantinople, to be led by our new spiritual advisor, Bishop Sevastianos of Zela.

   Thus, our 2013 Pilgrimage to Constantinople took form and on June 7, 2013, 30 Pilgrims departed from JFK airport for a pilgrimage to Constantinople, our spiritual home.
Our journey took us to Hagia Sophia, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Vlaherna, Balukli, the incredibly beautiful monastery at Chora adorned by its world-famous mosaics, the magnificent theological school and monastery at Halki, the historic school of the Zographeion, which has been in continuous session for over 120 years, the Grand Bazaar, the Spice Bazaar and even to the Palace of Topkapi where the relic of St. John the Baptist is found. Every step taken was guided by love and faith, as can readily be seen in the photos below.

National President Aphrodite Skeadas receives an icon of St. Bartholomew from our Patriarch. The icon today adorns the Philoptochos Center of Philanthropy.
At the Zographeion School:
Pilgrimage Participants:

Bishop Sevastianos
Anita & Stamati Kartalopoulos
Efthalia Katos
Angelike Gialourakis
Eleftheris Karapas Parafink
Maria Skiadas
Nelie Loogothetides
Kiriakoula and Mark Poneros
Lois Papademos
Stella Wacker
Carol Stamas
Sophia Vendelis

Aphrodite and Peter Skeadas
Marian and Spyros Cathechis
Hon. Marina Corodemus
Frances Hadjigeorge
Martha Stefanidakis
Alexis Limberakis
Aspasia Mellis
Maria Antonakos
Katherine Siavellis
Dora Hart
Sophie and Anthony Mastor
Cally Pappas

The grave of Patriarch Athenagoras where we offered prayers.
Preparing to sail to Halki on our chartered yacht.

National President Aphrodite Skeadas, Spiritual Advisor Bishop Sevastainos and Pilgrimage Chair Anita Kartalopoulos at Halki.
On the Front steps at Halki.

The Vision of Halki of the Future presented by Metropolitan Elpidophoros.
The Philoptochos Pilgrimage to Constantinople was a joy to all who participated and an expression of our love, respect and honor to His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew.

Participant Marina Corodemus offered these eloquent words about our journey to Constantinople:

**The Road to Constantinople**

The road to Constantinople is lined with the souls of those who venerated Christ, preserving and protecting the faith through their devotion. Their sacrifices are a living presence palpable for all Orthodox pilgrims to experience in today’s Constantinople. Jesus’ presence is not confined to ancient testaments of devotion, as evidenced in the magnificent mosaic in Ayia Sophia church and the breathtaking frescoes in Chora. Christ lives today in the Patriarchate, the Theological School at Halki and primary/secondary schools of modern Greek children living in Poli—reminders of a once flourishing Greek population. Christ is the living being for pilgrims to experience and is ever-present.

Istanbul is a city of contrasts. It is a modern democratic secular society wrapped in the enigma of the Muslim faith. Its youth rebels for true separation of religion and state and beckons for individual liberty in the face of governmental retaliation. It is social chaos in an evolving, societal stream. The cacophony of Taksim Square echoes to those who seek freedom. Yet Orthodoxy, a repressed religious minority, survives on the fringes. Battered but not beaten, censored but not suppressed. Liturgy continues to be celebrated, vespers are still chanted, and recitation of prayers continues to rise with requests to a living God.

In contrast to the transitory politics of modern day Turkey, Christ’s presence is constant and sustaining. Orthodoxy in Constantinople and its endurance among the faithful has been challenged by centuries of oppression, holocaust of the Hellenic Society, desecration of church, monasteries and, and humiliation of the clergy. Despite all this, our faith persists. Amidst the time-worn churches, transformed into mosques, transformed yet again into Turkish museums, the power of the biblical depictions of Christ, Panagia and the saints and their messages endure.

Entry to the modern Patriarchate reveals a modest series of edifices, adequate but far from opulent. Here, His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew leads the worldwide Greek Orthodox Church within Muslim Turkey even as the blaring sounds from neighboring minarets announce a call to prayer. Absent are the vaulting ceilings of Ayia Sophia but silently, reverently one venerates the sacred relics of two renowned Archbishops of Constantinople who were solemnly restored to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, St. Gregory the Theologian (329–390) and St. John Chrysostom (c. 347–407).

Being in the presence of His All Holiness, whether in liturgy or private audience, one is struck by calm solemnity of his voice, reaching into your heart for the peace and love of Christ. His prayer is devotional, his words inspirational and his living example as the Head of the Church of Christ in Muslim Turkey is exemplary. Prayer with His All Holiness is a true blessing.

Certainly, “must sees” while in Constantinople are the two “churches” of Chora and Ayia Sophia, the Patriarchate, and a day-trip—a 90 minute ferry ride—to Halki, the still-closed Theological School and alma mater of His All Holiness. It is the emblem of religious repression of the Orthodox minority. The goal of His All Holiness is to see the door of Halki open once more for the preparation of priests and to ensure future clergy and hierarchs for the great church of Christ. The 90-minute ferry ride to Halki transports you past a skyline of Aghia Sophia and the Blue mosque onto the island where Halki stands at the top of the mountain. Halki today is under the care and leadership of the charismatic, progressive, Metropolitan Elpidophoros.

One of the several places to visit is the monastery of Ayia Triada. The chapel and its surrounding garden is a beautiful oasis of spiritual tranquility in the midst of cosmopolitan Istanbul. The neighborhood of Baloukli, which leads up to Ayia Triada, is a living crypt of abandoned houses and stores from the once thriving community. The emptiness of this once thriving Greek society reminds you of how much so many have sacrificed.

Again, the face of Christ appears before us. This time we see Him in the faces of the young children attending the three schools of the Zographion, Zappeion and Megali Tou Genous Scholi. Here, children, descendants of Greeks, who thrived in Constantinople, are educated with the watchful guidance and love of His All Holiness.

What lesson do I take from this ancient land? It is the lesson of sacrifice and endurance as put so succinctly by His All Holiness, “This [Constantinople] is the continuation of Jerusalem and for us an equally holy and sacred land. We prefer to stay here, even crucified sometimes; we await the joy of the resurrection.”

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......Judge Marina Corodemus,
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We are thankful that we, as the members of the National Philoptochos, are able to assist in the great ministry that His All Holiness has undertaken in the Queen of Cities and for all of Orthodoxy worldwide.