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Greek Orthodox Women Set to Meet Challenge of Serving One Million Meals to Homeless



World Hunger Day is a prominent event on the calendar of the Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society. As the philanthropic arm of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, the organization will mark the May 28 national day of awareness by offering meals to the homeless and hungry.

Serving hearty meals to those in need is a regular practice for the Philoptochos Society. Many of the organization's more than 400 chapters have had such programs for decades. In 2015, newly appointed National Philoptochos President Maria Logus established the Feed the Hungry Committee with an initiative to promote those long-term efforts and to create a new national outreach program.

A challenge was established to provide 250,000 meals by the National Philoptochos Biennial Convention in July 2016. When chapters across the country exceeded the goal by 300%, Logus raised the bar.

She said, "Our new goal, challenging but certainly achievable, is to offer one million meals before our next convention in July 2018, and to experience both the joy and the rewards of this service, over and over again."

In church halls, in soup kitchens and on city streets, Philoptochos stewards across the nation are ministering to the less fortunate. Salt Lake City, UT; Elkins Park, PA; Chicago, IL; Hartford, CT and Euless, TX, represent just a small fraction of the cities and towns with Philoptochos chapters that participate in an effort to feed those in need. Some initiatives are parish-wide and include families and friends.

A rotating group of chapters from New York, New Jersey and Connecticut host a monthly program outside Manhattan's Penn Station. They provide home cooked meals to guests who enthusiastically line up at the site. Guests also receive snacks, toiletries and clothing in stuffed knapsacks marked "Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos."

Georgia Vlitas, Chair of the Feed the Hungry Committee said, "We have been blessed with many volunteers and donations supporting this program, as well as the guidance and support of Philoptochos Spiritual Advisor, Bishop Sevastianos of Zela. Volunteers participate regularly, no matter the weather, with smiles on their faces and their sleeves rolled up to do whatever is needed."

Since its inception, the New York metropolitan area program has seen a 25% increase in guests (from about 100 to 125) in their monthly service outside Penn Station. A similar increase in guests has been noted throughout the country, as well. The Feed the Hungry initiative directly encapsulates the mission of Philoptochos— of helping those in need—and the time is right to increase efforts.

With 26,000 members nationwide, the Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society responds immediately to needs and crises, and its philanthropic outreach extends to each area of the country and throughout the world. Major initiatives include Feed the Hungry, Children's Medical Fund and Aid to Greece & Cyprus. In 2016, National Philoptochos distributed \$2.06 million in philanthropic aid.