

What inspires Miss America's service?



Holly Meyer, hmeyer@tennessean.com 7:03 p.m. CDT July 1, 2016



(Photo: Courtesy of Matt Boyd Photography.)

A hectic travel schedule came with [Betty Cantrell's Miss America](http://missamerica.org/miss-america/) crown, making it a challenge for her to attend church regularly. But she packs devotional readings and draws on her upbringing in the Greek Orthodox Church as she fulfills her year of service.

"I think the reason why I feel so strongly about doing philanthropic work is because of my faith. The religion teaches us to give back and to always be thankful for what we've been given," Cantrell said. "I'm definitely very passionate about giving back and being a part of this charity organization that is the Miss America Organization. We're always giving back."

The 21-year-old former Miss Georgia, who promotes the Children's Miracle Network Hospitals and Healthy Children, Strong America platform issues, will join other charitable Greek Orthodox leaders for a national event in Nashville. The [Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society](http://www.philoptochos.org/)'s biennial convention runs Sunday through Thursday at the Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center.



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[Miss America plans Nashville move for country music career](http://www.tennessean.com/story/entertainment/2016/06/29/miss-america-plans-nashville-move-country-music-career/86527554/)

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The 26,000-member organization is the philanthropic arm of the [Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America](http://www.goarch.org/) and has existed for 85 years. The national group gave out \$1.74 million in aid in 2015, and its convention runs concurrently with the archdiocese's [Clergy-Laity Congress](https://www.clergylaity.org/home) (<https://www.clergylaity.org/home>).

The Tennessean interviewed Miss America in advance of her Nashville appearance.

As an increasing number of millennials no longer identify with a particular religion, what's it like to be a religious millennial with a national platform?

I think it's important for me to be outspoken about my faith and to show millennials that I'm proud of my faith and for them to be proud as well. People are definitely outspoken about their own personal lives and not being religious so I think you should definitely be able to be outspoken about your faith. I think that's one of the great things about our country, that we are able to speak openly about our faith, especially as women. In my position as Miss America, I take that on as responsibility to make sure people know who I am as a person. I am a Christian and I'm proud of it.

While most Americans are exposed to Christianity, they may be less familiar with Greek Orthodoxy. Are you faced with misconceptions about your faith, and how do you handle those situations?

People are not as familiar with the Greek Orthodox faith, and I think a lot of people they hear the Greek part and they just say, 'Oh, you're Greek.' They don't understand that I am Greek, but I'm not just Greek. I'm Greek Orthodox. That's the actual faith. People usually say, 'Oh, well that's like Catholicism.' We are very similar to Catholicism, but it is very different at the same time. I do try to educate people on my faith any chance that I get because I think it is important that people know the difference. The difference is important to me. It's such a traditional old faith and I don't ever want it to ever be lost.

What do you hope to share and learn during your time at the Philoptochos convention?

I travel the country this year spreading the message about my platform as well as our national platform, Children's Miracle Network Hospitals. I do a lot with them as a national goodwill ambassador in my year as Miss America. I'll definitely be talking to the Philoptochos about that and I'm sure that I'll take away so much from them because I know that in my own home church I see everything that the women of my church are doing to give back and to help their community. So I'm looking forward to seeing what they're doing on the national level for sure.

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