



PHILOPTOCHOS COMMITTED TO REBUILDING OF SAINT NICHOLAS SHRINE



The Mission Statement of the Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society, in part, calls upon its members to aid the widowed and victims of disasters, to promote the philanthropic purposes of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, and to promote Greek Orthodox Faith and traditions. Thus, during a two-day meeting of the National Philoptochos Board in New York City, His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America offered moving remarks about the Philoptochos mission and the importance of keeping alive its history of philanthropy and strengthening its work in the Church. In his exhortation on May 6, 2015, His Eminence spoke directly to the hearts of the National Board when he recounted the importance of re-building Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and the National Shrine at *Ground Zero*. Emotions ran high as National Board Members remembered a fateful act of terror when thousands of innocent people lost their lives in a single day. What better way to promote our faith than through the resurrection of this sacred place of healing and worship which will stand for all the world to see as an expression of our Greek Orthodox faith and love for humankind?

Saint Nicholas National Philoptochos Initiative Chairs, Jennifer Constantin, Arlene Siavelis Kehl and Anne Michals offered remarks and reported on the progress of Philoptochos' efforts throughout the country to raise funds for the rebuilding of this Greek Orthodox House of Worship. After a moving introduction by National Philoptochos President Maria Logus, which included her personal journey through the initial days following the terrorist attack, Jennifer Constantin offered a brief review of funds collected to-date. Anne Michals delivered an overview of the many fundraising events happening in Metropolises and Chapters throughout the country, which reveal Philoptochos' passion for the building project. She offered inspiring and creative ideas for the continuation of Philoptochos fundraising efforts. Arlene Siavelis Kehl gave a summary of the well planned events of the day that would begin shortly after the close of the meeting's morning session. At the conclusion of the presentation, National Philoptochos President Maria Logus presented His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios with a check for \$200,000, the first of many donations as part of the Philoptochos fundraising initiative.

National Board Members then boarded buses for Ground Zero. They were escorted to the Trinity Building where they were met by Father Alex Karloutsos, Assistant to the Archbishop for Public Affairs at the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and a member of the Rebuilding Committee for Saint Nicholas, Steven Plate, Deputy Chief of

Capital Planning and Director of Construction at the World Trade Center and Nick Koutsomitis, the Architect of Record for the building of Saint Nicholas. The emotional and informational presentation began with commemorating September 11th and included an EarthCam time-lapse movie detailing the construction process for the World Trade Center and surrounding 16.5 acres of property at Ground Zero. National Board Members learned that the World Trade Center site will include six new skyscrapers, the memorial pools dedicated to the victims of 9/11, the museum, the transportation hub and the Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine. With construction of Saint Nicholas beginning in June 2015 and the process taking approximately 18 months, the opening of the church and shrine is prayerfully anticipated to be Sunday, April 16, 2017, at which time the first Eastern Orthodox Easter Service will be celebrated. The VIP walking tour, guided by representatives of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, included a trip to the 'Oculus' transportation hub and the other significant structures now in various building stages at the World Trade Center site.

After a tour of the 9/11 Memorial Museum, which commemorates the lives of those who perished through photographs, biographical information, artifacts and audio recordings was complete, National Board Members headed to Gallagher's for a dinner reception. There they were met by Paulette Poulos, Executive Director of Leadership 100, who spoke about a remarkable day soon after September 11, 2001, when she joined His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos, of Blessed Memory, to view the destruction of Saint Nicholas Church and the World Trade Center. It was the Archbishop's dream to see the Church rebuilt and to bring life back to Ground Zero. Joining the dinner was Anthoula Katsimatides, Actor, Producer, Writer and Board Member of the National September 11th Memorial and Museum, who lost her brother John on 9/11. John, a faithful man, who at times would light candles in Saint Nicholas Church, worked for Cantor Fitzgerald, the company who suffered the largest loss of life that fateful day. Anthoula spoke about the life of her brother, whose body was never found among the ashes at Ground Zero. This is truly hallowed ground, a cemetery, and Saint Nicholas National Shrine will commemorate the thousands of lives lost and serve as a beacon of hope and healing for the world.



National Board members pictured during their tour of the Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine construction site.