



THE
SAINT NICHOLAS NATIONAL SHRINE
AT THE WORLD TRADE CENTER

ABOUT ST. NICHOLAS – A SHRINE FOR EVERYONE

On September 11, 2001, the thousands who senselessly perished in the terrorist attacks of that day were only the first and most grievous losses to our Nation. In the confused and stormy dark days that followed, even as we all gained some small measure of comfort from the extraordinary courage of our Fire and Police heroes, our national sense of security, safety, and even our some sense of identity in the wider world was deeply and perhaps forever shattered. In those days when our Archbishop, His Eminence Demetrios of America, ventured to Ground Zero offering prayer and solace to the survivors and rescue workers, the vanished Saint Nicholas Church was already beginning to speak up. There began in the hearts and minds of those sifting through the debris an utterance crying from that sacred ground unto the Lord on behalf of the blood of many brothers and sisters (cf. Genesis 4:10). And that cry became a story and a history – a story of those who were slain that fateful day, and a history yet to be written of the immigrant communities of lower Manhattan and their dream of America.

That is why the Encyclical of the Holy Eparchial Synod of our Church in America is so compelling. As the Hierarchs state:

The new Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church at Ground Zero will be much more than a rebuilt parish. It will be a National Shrine of our Holy Archdiocese and a place of pilgrimage for our Nation and the whole world.

This recognition, this raising of the consciousness of every member of our Greek Orthodox Archdiocese to the value and significance of the Saint Nicholas National Shrine at the World Trade Center is just the beginning. Saint Nicholas will be the only House of Worship in the entire sixteen-acre rebuilt World Trade Center site.

Hence the Holy Eparchial Synod, under the presidency of Archbishop Demetrios of America, is calling for the entire national Church to become stakeholders in the new Saint Nicholas at the World Trade Center. In order for this edifice to truly be the National Shrine it is called to be, it must be a National Shrine for everyone, Orthodox and non-Orthodox, Christian and non-Christian, believer and non-believer.

This does not mean that as an Orthodox House of Worship, it will look or feel any different from any other Naos. In fact, the inspirations of the architect are Hagia Sophia, the Church of the Savior in Chora, and the very Walls of Constantinople! The interior of the finished Naos will be instantly identifiable as an Orthodox Church with all the accouterments, furnishing and, of course, plentiful iconography. Saint Nicholas will function as any other parish with a rich liturgical life centered on the transfiguring cycles of feasts and fast that define every year of the grace of the Lord.



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But as transfiguring as the liturgy is for the community that worships and understands what it is saying (cf. Acts 8:30,31), there is a transformative role for Saint Nicholas to play for the Nation and indeed the world, as the Hierarchs have said.

In a place where the ashes of mourning still fall into the landscape of memory, we are called to bring glory, in fulfillment of the words of the Prophet (Isaiah 61:3). And this is no self-glorification, but a real sense of the transforming, glorious love of God. This a profound responsibility to be shared by every member of our Holy Archdiocese: to uphold the re-building and ministry of the Saint Nicholas National Shrine at the World Trade Center by prayer, by fasting, by feasting, by material support, by sharing resources, by donations, by telling the story from every housetop (cf. Luke 12:3), and writing a new history of human interaction and Divine love. This is precisely why housed within the Saint Nicholas National Shrine will be a room of special purpose, a place of quiet non-sectarian reflection and meditation. And this is no concession to diversity – by no means! It is the exact opposite. It is the acceptance and even celebration of diversity. It is the witness to the triumph of our Nation's values of freedom of conscience and mutual respect for all religious expression that does not violate the freedom of others. And is this not precisely what the terrorists of 9/11 did their worst against? Did they not rob our fellow citizens and fellow human beings of their most basic freedom – the freedom to live, by their horrific and madness-fueled murders? Our answer to such negative, hate-filled nihilism must be the affirmation of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

That is why the Saint Nicholas National Shrine will rise in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty. That is why we will welcome all visitors who come in peace and with the mutuality of respect that every human being deserves. That is why the Golden Rule will be emblazoned for all to see:

So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12)

Truly, such a National Shrine is worthy of a nation-wide effort and campaign. The Holy Eparchial Synod, under the leadership of Archbishop Demetrios of America, is calling on the entirety of our Archdiocese to take up this noble and indeed glorious cause.

There is no other group of citizens who have this opportunity. No other religious body that has such an obligation, such a duty to all other members of its society. The challenge is ours, and ours alone. The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America has been given this solemn charge and this sacred task. We are all called to give our finest and our best to this holy work of the Church. If all free human beings are citizens of Messolonghi, how much more are we all members of Saint Nicholas National Shrine at the World Trade Center! Let us all – each and every one – heed the call of our spiritual fathers, and join this journey of faith.