

GREEK ORTHODOX LADIES PHILOPTOCHOS SOCIETY, INC.
METROPOLIS PRESIDENT’S REPORT
2022 – 2024



Metropolis of Pittsburgh Philoptochos

Joyce Spanakis, President

July 2024

Your Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America,
Your Grace Bishop Athenagoras of Nazianzos,
National President Arlene Siavelis Kehl,
Members of the National Board and fellow Philoptochos Sisters,

Greetings from the Metropolis of Pittsburgh.

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” – Mark 5:16

The above verse from Mark 5:16, speaks to the sub-theme for the 2024 National Philoptochos Convention, **“Inspiring Women, Impacting the World.”** To inspire other women and make a difference in the world, we must not be afraid to let our light shine, be willing to share our good works and most importantly, give glory to God the Father. The women of the Metropolis of Pittsburgh Ladies Philoptochos Society strive to do just that to inspire others and make an impact locally and globally.

Since the last National Philoptochos Convention in New York City, much has happened within the Metropolis of Pittsburgh Philoptochos. In September of 2022, we held our ***Clergy-Laity and Philoptochos Assembly*** at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Pittsburgh, PA. It was there that the current Metropolis Executive Board officers and Board members were elected to a three-year term. The following women were elected to the **Executive Board**: Joyce Spanakis, *President*; Anna Vedouras, *Vice President*; Despina Denne, *Recording Secretary*; Sharon Whitman, *Corresponding Secretary*; Paula Makris Larance, *Treasurer*; Eleni Gugliotta, *Assistant Treasurer*, and Barbara Pasalis, *Advisor*.

In February 2023, the first annual *Metropolis Philoptochos Retreat* was held at the DoubleTree Hotel in Canonsburg, PA. About 30 board members and chapter presidents were in attendance. This past February 2024, the second annual retreat was held at the Hilton Garden Inn in Washington, PA. This time approximately 50 women attended and were present for the Metropolis Board meeting, luncheon, and fellowship. This retreat has become a much loved and anticipated event.

It was in February of 2023 that the **earthquakes occurred in Turkey and Syria**. The Metropolis Philoptochos immediately responded to the National Philoptochos appeal and sent **\$5,000 from our Emergency Fund** to aid in the relief efforts. During this same month in Ohio, there was a train crash where toxic chemicals were spilled into the water and soil leaving residents of East Palestine, Ohio unable to leave their homes or drink the water. The Metropolis Philoptochos donated **\$1,000 from the Emergency Fund** to help residents who were suffering during the initial toxic spill.

In April of 2023, the Metropolis Philoptochos held the annual *Daffodil Luncheon* in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, which was hosted by the seven Philoptochos chapters of Northeast Ohio. Due to Covid, this was the first in-person Daffodil Luncheon since 2019. Approximately 250 guests attended the luncheon which is the largest fundraiser for the Metropolis Philoptochos. National Philoptochos President Arlene Siavelis Kehl served as our guest speaker along with Ron Carleton from the Greater Cleveland Food Bank. **Monies raised from the luncheon totaled close to \$34,000**. Two-thirds of this money went into the Metropolis Philoptochos Social Service Fund and one third went to the Seminarians Our Future Fund. The favors given out at the luncheon were ceramic tea bag holders designed and made by Dorie Papademetriou and the women of Mud Girls Studios in New York. It was our desire to support a business which gave back and supported women in need.

The month of May 2023 focused on **chapter elections and ratifications**. Our Metropolis Philoptochos saw a turnover in over 1/3 of our chapter presidents. There were chapters who had not previously submitted forms for ratification that were doing so this year. There were lots of emails and texts with questions and instructions from the Metropolis to the chapters, which resulted in one of the highest percentages of ratified chapters in the Metropolis in years.

There was excitement throughout the Metropolis of Pittsburgh in July of 2023 as ground was broken for our **new Metropolis Center in Washington, PA**. Metropolis President Joyce Spanakis represented the Philoptochos at the event and donned a hard hat and shovel along with His Eminence Metropolitan Savas and other Metropolis Philoptochos Board members who were present.

In August of 2023, all chapter presidents or chapter representatives were invited to join a *National Social Service Zoom* call to hear information regarding Social Services from **National Director Paulette Geanacopoulos and National Chairpersons Eleni Constantinides and Lisa Xanthos**. Approximately 70% of the chapters from across the Metropolis were represented on the call to learn more about Social Services and ask questions of the three guest speakers. The meeting was beneficial in ensuring that the chapters understand how to access available services for their communities. During this month, **devastating fires occurred on the island of Maui**. The Metropolis Philoptochos disbursed **\$5,000 from the Emergency Fund** in support of the National Philoptochos' relief efforts.

In September 2023, our Metropolis held its annual *Clergy-Laity and Philoptochos Assembly* at Sts Constantine and Helen Church in Reading, PA. We were blessed to have His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America join us for the three-day assembly. At our Philoptochos Assembly, we heard a presentation from Kate Alley of the **LightHouse Center** in Reading, PA. This center helps homeless women and children by providing them with a place to stay until they can get back on their feet. Our St. Xenia chapter from Sts. Constantine and Helen Church in Reading funded the construction of one of the rooms at the center as part of their National Philoptochos Chapter Challenge project. The Metropolis Philoptochos also donated to the LightHouse Center.

The Metropolis of Pittsburgh Philoptochos made the following donations/disbursements during the 2023 Assembly: \$3,000 to the **Metropolis Y2AM**; \$500 to the YAL Service Project, **Global Links**; \$3,300 to His Eminence Metropolitan Savas' **Good Samaritan Fund**; \$3,300 to the **Nativity of the Theotokos Monastery**; and \$3,000 to each of our **four Seminarians** for a total of \$12,000. A \$5,000 donation was made to the Archons on the Ecumenical Patriarchate for their **Pilgrimage of Discovery** program earmarked for a Metropolis of Pittsburgh participant, and \$1,000 was presented to His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros for his **Summer Youth Camp Scholarship**.

In October 2023, the inaugural edition of the **monthly Metropolis of Pittsburgh Philoptochos Newsletter** was sent to each Metropolis president for distribution to the membership, the Metropolis Council, and the Metropolis clergy. The newsletter features National and Metropolis Philoptochos news, as well as a chapter spotlight.

The Children's Medical Fund Luncheon was held in November of 2023 in Houston, Texas. Metropolis President Joyce Spanakis, as well as National Board members Anna Vedouras, Despina Denne, Sharon Whitman, Helen Primbas, Barbara Pasalis and chapter president, Marian Cheri were excited to attend. A wonderful weekend was had by all.

The new year 2024 brought with it a spike in Social Service cases within the Metropolis of Pittsburgh. The work of the Metropolis of Pittsburgh Philoptochos centered around our ***Social Services Committee***. We were approached by individuals in three separate cases within weeks of each other.

- Electricity and heat were restored to a family home in Pittsburgh by paying off the balance of the electric bill. The father has medical issues and has been unable to work. The family had been staying with relatives due to the lack of heat in the home. We also purchased \$1,500 worth of Walmart gift cards for the family to use for their various needs.
- Two months of mortgage were paid for a man with shared custody of two young children who is recovering from surgery to remove a brain tumor. Due to his illness, he is unable to work and is using FMLA. We also provided the young father with \$600 in grocery gift cards.
- Three months of mortgage bills are being paid for a young stay-at-home mother of an 18-month-old who suddenly lost her husband. The husband had been unjustly terminated from his job two months prior to his death, so the family had no income or benefits. The National Philoptochos Social Service committee also helped the young mother by paying for the cost of the husband's funeral and providing grocery gift cards.

In April of 2024, the Metropolis ***Daffodil Luncheon*** was held at the Marriott Pittsburgh Airport. The luncheon was hosted by the chapter of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Ambridge, PA. Our guest speaker was **Lacie Spagnolo**, author of the book, ***You Were Born to Do This...Now Push!*** This true-life story unveiled the heart-wrenching, yet inspirational tale of a mother's strength as she confronted the relentless challenges helping her son survive a brain tumor. Proceeds from the luncheon supported the ***Metropolis Emergency Fund (Humanitarian Aid)*** and the ***Seminarians Our Future Fund***.

Throughout the past two years, the committees within the Metropolis for ***Operation Classroom, Feed the Hungry, Social Services, and Membership*** have been holding meetings either by Zoom or in person to implement the necessary action items for each committee. President Spanakis has been visiting chapters and members throughout the Metropolis of Pittsburgh. Connections are being made and relationships are being strengthened.

As a Metropolis we continue to work on shifting our focus outward, to spread God's love and be the light of Christ for others. The Philoptochos members throughout the Metropolis of Pittsburgh give of their hard work, stewardship, time, and talent to make our philanthropic endeavors possible and to inspire women and impact the world. May God continue to bless each of them so that they may continue to be a blessing to others.

In His Service,

Joyce M. Spanakis
Metropolis of Pittsburgh
Philoptochos President

