



# GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF CHICAGO

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## ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΣΙΚΑΓΟΥ

March 24, 2019

**To the Reverend Fathers, Monastics and Laity of the Holy Metropolis of Chicago—to the beloved children of Christ: Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

A year ago today, I was enthroned as your spiritual father and Metropolitan of the Holy Metropolis of Chicago, and over that time you have welcomed me, counseled me and prayed for me. I will forever cherish my time visiting all corners of our Metropolis and hearing you share what is in your hearts and minds. After a year as your spiritual father, I'd like to share with you what is in mine.

To be here in the Metropolis of Chicago is more meaningful to me than you may realize. During my years at seminary, few days would pass where stories about the Metropolis of Chicago could not be heard. Schoolmates from the Midwest would share incredible memories of growing up in the Church. Often, they would tell stories of visionary clergy, including Fr. Bill Chiganos, Fr. Anthony Coniaris, Fr. George Nicosinis, Fr. Byron Papanikolaou, Fr. George Scoulas and Fr. Demetrios Treantafeles—who inspired them to serve Christ and His Church. Weeks before Holy Pascha, the students from the Holy Metropolis of Chicago eagerly prepared to visit their home parishes. At the center of their visit was time spent with their father, Metropolitan Iakovos of blessed memory. The students prepared to follow their shepherd from parish to parish, listening to his sermons and receiving his paternal counsel. As I listened to them, I longed for similar experiences and prayed that I may one day be part of such a dynamic Church family.

Two decades later, God has answered my prayers. What was once only imagined through stories heard in seminary, the Holy Metropolis of Chicago has now become my home. For this, I am grateful to God. With each passing day, I not only notice the current beauty of our house, but I await fullness that lies ahead of us with great anticipation. While some communities rest on laurels of past achievements, our Metropolis takes to heart the advice of Saint Gregory the Theologian, *always look forward*.

Over the last 12 months, I've pondered the awesome responsibility presented to me and regularly experienced the natural excitement and inevitable apprehension that accompanies such a responsibility. Time and time again, I have found that the words of John the Evangelist put my heart at ease: "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18).

This timeless truth—love drives away fear—has served as my spiritual compass when making life decisions. With every major challenge encountered this past year, I have sought counsel from lay and ordained advisors, and have chosen the path that, in my judgment, best manifested love. I continue to believe that this path will help us realize greater accountability, integrity, transparency and inclusivity, which the faithful of the Church have called for and deserve. I also believe that fulfilling such governing principles will help cultivate an ecclesial environment that promotes hard work, cooperation, and excellence, creating deeper bonds among ourselves and with Christ. In the end, I believe walking on a path toward perfect love will help us cultivate an ecclesial ethos that is as whole as the Body of Christ.

Much of my past year can be summed up by one word: listening. It was very important to me – and still is – to invest the time to engage our clergy and laypeople from throughout the Metropolis, listening to what they said, and what they did not say, before accepting opinions of others or forming my own prematurely. Having closed my first year as Metropolitan of Chicago, I intend to openly share with you the challenges and opportunities facing our Metropolis in short order, including the financial state of the Metropolis and the condition of our parishes and sacred institutions, so that you can have a better understanding of the

decisions that need to be made. Many will agree with some decisions, believing them long overdue; other decisions will be difficult and painful and will require continued discernment and prayer. Above all, I will speak the truth in love, hopeful that our open dialogue will help us establish our home on bedrock and not on sand (Matthew 7: 24-27).

At the time of my enthronement, I encouraged you to trust in God's will. I recounted the passage in the Gospel according to Matthew (14:22-33) wherein Jesus sees His disciples cowering in a boat that was being tossed about by the raging sea. Christ proclaims to them: *Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.* My beloved, I believe these words more passionately today than when I first uttered them.

Though our challenges are great, I see myself with you on that boat. I take courage and comfort in Christ's example, and, as your spiritual father, I ask you to do the same. In so many ways, the act of taking courage is not new or unknown to us. I've witnessed incredible faith throughout the Metropolis. Dedicated and selfless priests and presvyteres serve the needs of our parishes to the best of their abilities; lay leaders invest invaluable time, talent and treasure as they minister to their neighbor. Together, you do God's work with unconditional love through amazing ministries.

As I write this letter, it is altogether fitting that Great and Holy Lent is upon us, a blessed season that reminds us what it means to be Orthodox Christians. Lent is a time when God speaks to us with firmness and urgency; this period of repentance, reconciliation and reunification also represents the way forward for the Metropolis of Chicago. And while I intend to walk with you throughout this journey, the future of the Church depends on you—the men, women, young adults and youth of the Metropolis of Chicago who are called to serve the *least of God's brethren* (Matthew 25:40). I am truly grateful to those who have already stepped forward to help build and guide the future of our Metropolis. But, as members of the Body of Christ, we need to do more.

And so I invite you to become an active participant in the sacramental life of the Church; to join one of our Metropolis' many ministries; to become a steward of your parish; to join one of the [Strategic Planning task force teams](#); to attend our Metropolis' upcoming [Clergy-Laity Assembly](#) (September 25-29, 2019) in the Twin Cities; to offer your time, talent and treasure to help us fulfill our Metropolis' mission.

I have confidence that the possibilities for this great Metropolis are limitless and look forward to our shared future with great anticipation. I will continue to pray fervently for God's help to remain on the path toward perfect love. And on that path, I lovingly and humbly repeat the request I made one year ago at my enthronement: walk with me.

With paternal love in Christ,

† Metropolitan Nathanael of Chicago