

THE WORLD'S ORTHODOX YOUTH COME TOGETHER  
at the  
ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE



Pictured are the Metropolis of Pittsburgh Participants  
with Metropolitan Maximos & Fr. John Chakos on the island of Halki



Article by: Jimmy Schooley, Participant from Annunciation Cathedral, Columbus, OH. He is standing near Agia Sophia. Jimmy is a first year student at the Ohio State University.

Last month, from July 11-16, 2007, I had a special opportunity as one of fifteen representatives from the Metropolis of Pittsburgh to attend the 2<sup>nd</sup> Orthodox Youth Conference in Istanbul, Turkey, historically Byzantium, later Constantinople and the present-day home of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This was only the second conference of its kind; the first such conference took place over seven years ago in June 2000. Under the auspices and blessing of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the conference was centered on the theme: Members of the Church – Citizens of the World. Approximately 900 young men and women participated in this conference from all of the Eparchies of the Ecumenical Patriarchate around the world, sister Orthodox Churches, the Monastic Communities, other Christian Churches and Confessions, Orthodox Theological Schools, Academies, Institutes and Seminars, International Church Organizations, International Youth Associations, Cultural Foundations, as well as from the local Christian Churches. The conference constituted a forum for getting to know others, for communication and dialogue, and a unique opportunity to meet the Mother Church and personally His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch.

During the week, I was able to tour the city and visit many of its landmarks. The city holds over eleven million people and was extremely busy. While I heard of people protesting our group's arrival, I myself did not experience any difficulties stemming from my American citizenship, Greek ethnicity, or Orthodox faith. Early in the week, our very large group had dinner at the Gulistan Restaurant on the Bosphorus, the strait that forms the boundary between the European and Asian parts of Turkey, as Istanbul is the only metropolis in the world which is situated on two continents. The next day we visited the Island of Halki and the Holy Monastery

of Holy Trinity. Many of today's Orthodox leaders attended The Theological School of Halki including Patriarch Bartholomew. Our own Metropolitan Maximos, another graduate of the school, taught and led us in song in one of the classrooms.

The last day of the trip was a memorable one. We began by celebrating the Divine Liturgy at the Patriarchal Cathedral of St. George in the Phanar. This was an amazing experience as the Patriarch himself sat but a few feet away from me. The cathedral was magnificent, and I was in awe of the golden iconostasis and its beautiful icons, the relics of St. John Chrysostome, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Solomone, St. Euphemia, and St. Theophano, and the column of Christ's flagellation, a portion of which our Lord was bound and whipped upon by Roman soldiers during His Passion and before His Crucifixion. In contrast, visiting St. Sophia was a very different experience. It was sad to see how such a beautiful cathedral which had been the religious focal point of the Orthodox Byzantine Empire for nearly a thousand years had been desecrated and turned into a mosque and was now a Muslim museum. Only one mosaic of the Virgin and Child remains. Finally we visited the Monastery of Chora, which houses a dome very similar to the dome of my parish, Annunciation Cathedral in Columbus, Ohio. Also during the week we visited the Grand Bazaar and the Blue Mosque, toured the Topkapi Palace which contained a piece of the skull and arm of John the Baptist, and dined, sang, and danced at the Hilton Hotel most nights.

Much of our time was spent listening to various presentations and participating in discussions about different aspects of our faith. Since participants gathered from around the world, each person received a headset so that he or she could listen to the speeches in English, Greek, or French, the three languages of the conference. While we realized the ecumenical dimension of Orthodoxy and its unifying power, we also learned to appreciate the richness of each of our traditions. Among the many theological topics addressed, the most discussion involved Orthodox witness and contemporary Christian life, sexuality and relations, and communication and technology. According to the conclusions of the conference, we learned that "it is significant not only to understand the liturgical life of the Church, but also to live the liturgical ethos of the Church as the core our life." The conference stressed the meaning of a Christian marriage as "the place where the relationship between man and woman is fully consummated and as a mystery of love for which we must prepare, the authenticity and preservation of which we must struggle for." Also, it was stated that "in the age of communications and the society of information, we Christians are called to use with prudence and trust the capabilities which new technologies offer for the spreading of the Word of the Gospel."

His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew reminded us, the youth, "of our personal place and role into the god-human body of the Church, according to the gift that each has been given or will be entrusted with in the future by God." His All Holiness invited us to recognize as soon as possible "our special talent and our role in the Church and to willingly respond responsibly to the calling of God." We agreed that "the youth does not want to be thought of simply as the future of the Church, remaining in the margin of contemporary developments, but desire to presently contribute to what is going on today, to participate energetically in the pastoral, communal and liturgical life of the Church."

My participation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Orthodox Youth Conference in Istanbul this past July was a life-changing experience. It was gratifying not only to spend the week getting to know other proactive youth of our Metropolis, but also to experience fellowship with youth, seminarians, and priests from around the country and the world. I even got to know many of the Carpatho-Russian Camp Nazareth staff members I see each year, who also participated in the conference. It also was good to see Bishop Savvas of New York who my family had known years ago in Cincinnati and Dr. Timothy Patitsas of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in

Boston. I was fortunate to spend the week with Metropolitan Maximos and Father John Chakos from Pittsburgh, who shared many stories and experiences with us. Patriarch Bartholomew was also ever-present at the conference, and I was able to speak with him personally. I thank Metropolitan Maximos for inviting me to participate in this unique opportunity; it truly was an experience of a lifetime.

As Patriarch Bartholomew said, “As citizens of the Kingdom who are simultaneously citizens of the world, we should neither identify with the world, nor reject the world without cause, but take a critical stance in the world according to the standard that our polity exists in the heavens.”



Pictured left & above: The Cathedral of St. George at the Phanar.



Dome at the Monastery of Chora (now a museum).



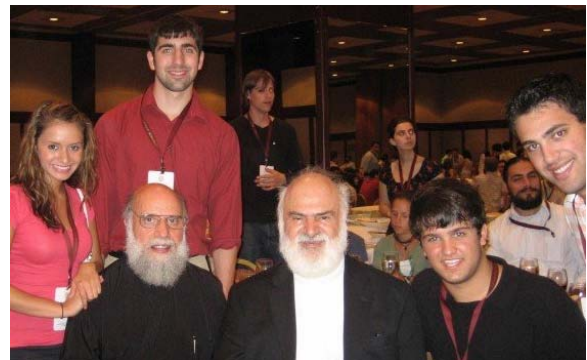
Participants on a boat to Halki.

Pictured left to right:

Eleni Elderkin (Group Leader);

Jimmy Schooley; Peter Dickos (Group Leader);

Eleni Valliant



Left to Right: Jennifer Chakos, Fr. John Chakos, Emmanuel Makris  
Metropolitan Maximos, Jimmy Schooley, Michael Gregory