## News Release

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## MEMPHIS EXTENDS SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY TO FINALISTS

The Thirtieth St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival was held at the Church of the Annunciation in Memphis, TN from June 7-9, 2013. The Rev. Fr. James Berends and Dr. Stephanie Storgion Poplos, host co-chairpersons, and their entire committee worked tirelessly to ensure a successful weekend, filling the days with southern hospitality!

Upon their arrival at the Double Tree Hotel, the eighteen finalists and their families were greeted by the registration and hospitality committee members, and were given a back pack filled with welcome gifts and memorabilia from Memphis. The weekend officially began with Vespers at the Annunciation Church and an welcome by His Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas of Detroit. Dinner was a Southern specialty fried catfish, followed by a father and son duo who performed soul music on the harmonica and guitar and an ice breaker, run by Eva Kokinos, Director of Youth and Young Adults for the Metropolis of Detroit.

Saturday morning began with breakfast at the newly renovated Cotros Hall and the opening of the Oratorical Festival Program by His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios. Also in attendance were: Metropolitan Nicholas of Detroit, Dr. Anton C. Vrame, Director of the Department of Religious Education, the Rev. Fr. John and Presvytera Margaret Orfanakos, Oratorical Festival Archdiocese Co-Chairpersons and many others. The congregation listened attentively as each speaker delivered his/her speech and agreed that the judges were faced with the very difficult responsibility of selecting first, second and third place recipients.

Receiving First Place in the Junior Division was: Nicholas Tassopoulos-Holy Transfiguration Church, Marietta, GA; Second Place was awarded to: Christina Hanos-Sts. Constantine & Helen Church-West Nyack, NY; Third Place was awarded to Timothy Kaelin-St. George Church-Eugene, OR. Those receiving a Rank of Honorable Mention were: Costas Vergados-Sts. Constantine & Helen Church-Andover, MA; Katerina Paganis-St. Demetrios Church. Libertyville, IL; Alexander Shah-St. John the Baptist Church, Euless, TX; Jordan George-St. Nicholas Church, Troy, MI; Alexandra Birbilis-St. Thomas Church, Cherry Hill, NJ; Artemis D'Amico-Kimisis Tis Theotokou Church, Aliquippa. PA.

The Senior Division First Place Speaker was: Anastasia Zavitsanos-Annunciation Cathedral, Houston, TX; Second Place was awarded to Sarah Hunt-Sts. Markella & Demetrios Church, Ft. Walton Beach, FL; receiving Third Place was Louis D'Amico-Kimisis Tis Theotokou Church, Alquippa, PA. The Honorable Mention recipients were: Christopher Augustinos-St. George Cathedral, Hartford, CT; Basil Vergados-Sts. Constantine & Helen Church, Andover, MA; John Stavropoulos-St. John the Baptist Church, Des Plains, IL; Theodore Monk-Annunciation Church, Chattanooga, TN; Mario Sokolic-St. George Church, Clifton, NJ; Susanna Silva-St. Basil Church, San Jose, CA.

Along with a certificate and plaque for all participants, those receiving First Place will receive a \$2000 college scholarship; Second Place a \$1500 college scholarship and Third Place a \$1000 college scholarship. Those who received a Rank of Honorable Mention were given an iPad Mini. Finally, each finalist will receive an additional scholarship from FAITH: An Endowment for Orthodoxy and Hellenism.

After a quick stop at the hotel, the finalists and their families joined Archbishop Demetrios and Metropolitan Nicholas at the well known and popular Rendezvous Restaurant for a delicious meal of barbeque ribs and other specialties of the Vergos Family, proprietors for many generations. From there everyone enjoyed a River Boat ride on the historic and scenic Mississippi River.

A Hierarchical Liturgy was celebrated on Sunday morning and after a farewell luncheon, it was time to say goodbye. There weren't enough words to adequately express the feelings of gratitude to the Memphis host committee and to Metropolitan Nicholas. His encouragement of the Oratorical Festival led to high levels of financial support to the hosts from the parishes, organizations, and individuals from throughout the Metropolis.

Even though only eighteen finalists advance to the National Oratorical Festival, each and every participant at the 219 parishes that had an Oratorical Festival is to be congratulated. The parish is where the Oratorical Festival thought process begins and the ideas are developed into a speech which is delivered before the congregation who is inspired by what they hear.