



# GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF SAN FRANCISCO

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## ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΦΡΑΓΚΙΣΚΟΥ

### Message from Metropolitan Gerasimos for the new Ecclesiastical Year 2019

Dearly Beloved,

A New Ecclesiastical Year is always a time of optimism in our parishes. The many ministries of our communities resume after their summer hiatus and they begin with fresh energy, filled with possibilities to see our parishes grow and our faithful grow in their faith in Christ and devotion to His Holy Orthodox Church.

The optimism and hope of the New Ecclesiastical Year are sorely needed at this time. Our summer has been difficult and painful in many places. We have seen the stories about mass shootings in Gilroy, California; El Paso and Dallas, Texas; and Dayton, Ohio. We have seen the stories of the rise of violent acts of hatred, racism, and bigotry directed towards our fellow man, simply because of their race, ethnicity, or religion. This kind of behavior and attitude goes by many names because hatred always looks for new opportunities and ways to express itself.

We as Orthodox Christians must talk about this sin. We as a Church condemn the sins of racism, bigotry and hatred. We must be especially strong in our condemnation when acts of racism, bigotry and hatred are expressed in the name of religion, including Orthodox Christianity. Nearly twenty years ago, His All-Holiness our Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew stated, ***“All human beings-regardless of religion, race, national origin, color, creed, or gender-are living icons of God, innately worthy of...respect and dignity. Whenever human beings fail to treat others with this respect, they insult God, the Creator.”***

The evidence and history of our Church is very clear. In His ***“Great Commission”*** (Matthew 28:19), our Lord and Savior commanded us to go to ***“all nations”***. There is no discrimination in the statement.

The Orthodox Church over the centuries has spread to all corners of the globe. There are Orthodox Churches literally on all the continents of our planet. Our global Church is comprised of men and women of all races, colors, languages, and cultures. As Saint Paul wrote, ***“There is neither Jew or Greek...for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*** (Galatians 3:28). As a Church through various forums and dialogues, we are actively engaged in seeking dialogue that will produce peaceful relations with all people of all religions, even as we strive especially for the reconciliation of Christians.

We too – as Orthodox Christians and Greek Americans – have experienced discrimination and bigotry because we were “different” from our neighbors. Even today, countless of our fellow Orthodox Christians experience oppression in many parts of the world. Archbishop Iakovos, of blessed memory, marched with Martin Luther King for that reason in the 1960’s. And now, just because we in the USA are not direct targets of discrimination, we cannot allow ourselves to become oppressors ourselves. We must always remember the words of Scripture, ***“You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt”*** (Exodus 22:21). Saint John the Evangelist wrote, ***“He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still.”*** (1 John 2:9).

Beloved brothers and sisters, as we begin a New Ecclesiastical Year, even in this time of unsettling news and events, let us remember the command of our Lord and Savior: ***“Love one another.”*** ( John 13:34)

With Love in Christ,

  
✠Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco