

2026 NATIONAL PHILOPTOCHOS BIENNIAL CONVENTION



**Hotel Cleveland
Cleveland, Ohio**

MINUTES Tuesday, June 30th, 2026

The 2026 National Philoptochos Biennial Convention was called to order by National Philoptochos President Debbie George at 1:32 EDT on Tuesday, June 30, 2026 at the Hotel Cleveland in Cleveland, Ohio.

Entrance of Hierarchs led by National Philoptochos President Debbie George.

Invocation - His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America

President's Video Presentation - A recorded message from National Philoptochos President Debbie George was highlighting the last two years of Philoptochos.

National President Report - National Philoptochos President Debbie George

- Two years of works giving a feeling of pride and gratitude
- We have a strong foundation due to the women who build upon it
- We will be inspired, challenged, and make new friends, ready to take on work in our chapters and beyond
- Let us rise, let us build, let us begin

His All- Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew Video Presentation - A recorded message from His All- Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew was played, expressing his love for Philoptochos and giving us his blessing.

Welcome Remarks - His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America

- Thanked His All- Holiness for sending delegation to witness our amazing ministry
- We are the mothers and nurturers of our communities from coast to coast
- Love for the church, love for one another and for the poor, including not only those lacking materials, but those who are poor in spirit

- You who are Philoptochos love the poor and spread the good news every time we come together and especially during this Biennial Convention
- The stronger the Philoptochos is, the stronger the Church is
- We are the largest Greek Orthodox Church association in the United States and possibly the world
- We are truly the mothers of our church and share a special relationship with the Theotokos, the Mother of Excellence
- His Eminence presented a gift given to Debbie George in appreciation of her good works

Lunch break was called by Convention Chair Anna Vedouras at 1:58 pm.

The meeting was reconvened at 3:00 pm by Debbie George.

Adoption of Standing Rules And Agenda - The Standing Rules and Agenda were presented by Anita Kartalopoulos, 1st Vice-President and Convention Tri-Chair. A motion was made by Anna Vedouras, Convention Chair, to accept the standing rules and agenda as presented. It was seconded by Vasiliki Tsigas-Fotinis, Metropolis of New Jersey. Motion passed.

Hunger and Homelessness Panel

- **Elish Counts, Hitchcock Center for Women**
 - Video presentation of Hitchcock Services: Rebecca's Story
 - Primary Mission: Support women and families with substance use issues
 - Allow women to bring their children to treatment until age 12, maintain access their cell phone and to build relationships within the community
 - Another primary barrier for substance use issues is housing
 - It's important to treat the whole family when dealing with substance use issues
 - New residential treatment center opened in December 2025
 - Partnered with Cleveland Clinic to be able to provide daycare so women can focus on treatment programs when needed
 - Residential Treatment is 30 - 45 days and Recovery Housing is 9 - 12 months
- **Kirk Reis, St. Herman's House of Spirituality**
 - Founded as an Orthodox Monastery with a primary focus on support for men
 - Currently emergency shelter and transitional housing, community meals, clothing and other primary needs

- FOCUS North America has 13 centers across the country with 3 more in the process of being under the FOCUS umbrella by end of 2026
- Poverty rate is 28.3% in Cleveland, one of the highest in large US Cities
- St. Herman's House has 28-bed emergency shelter, 12-bed transitional house and 10-bed low income housing with more space in progress to increase low income bed count with a 2-year limit
- Serving three (3) meals a day to the community, approximately 60,000 meals per year with financial support from local parishes and food banks make it so 60,000 meals cost approximately \$5,000 per year
- Clothing & Hygiene kits are distributed, as needed
- How you can help:
 - Prayer
 - Give time and resources
 - Serving at a FOCUS center
- Video presentation of FOCUS: St. Herman's House
- **Beth Spanos, Chapter Project on Hunger, Holy Trinity, Camp Hill, PA**
 - Rise Against Hunger
 - 18M people in the US are food insecure: inconsistent access to healthy food
 - Partner with local leaders to implement sustainable agriculture and long term solutions to food insecurity
 - Impact Report:
 - 7.4M Lives were impacted by supporting schools, feeding students daily and distributed meals to 41 countries across the globe
 - A meal packet that can feed a family of 6; contains rice, soy, dehydrated vegetables and have vitamins and minerals packet included
 - Video presentation of RISE
 - RiseAgainstHunger.org
 - Philoptochos raised over \$9,000 and packed 23,000 meals in 1.5 hours with close to 120 volunteers
 - RISE has online registration and donation options
 - Participants range from ages 5 to 85

Coffee Break was called by Anna Vedouras, Convention Chair at 3:50 pm and reconvened at 4 pm.

Report of Credentials Committee - Sharon Whitman, Metropolis of Pittsburgh, presented the Credentials Committee Report as follows:
380 Registered Delegates

357 Delegates in Attendance

348 Voting Members

7 Observers Registered

2 Honorary Members

Prison Ministries Panel

- **Archdiocesan Commitment, His Eminence Metropolitan Constantine of Denver**
 - Ministry that beautifully respects the heart of the Gospel
 - More than 113M adults have immediate family members impacted by incarceration
 - Lord teaches us that “I was in prison and you visited me”
 - The Ministry visits correctional facilities and reinforces that even in places of darkness the Light of God can continue to shine
 - Lives transformed through Love of Christ and the Gospel
 - Orthodox Prison Ministries - pastoral care, personal correspondence, Orthodox literature, and first authentic encounter they have with an Orthodox church
 - OCPM - ensuring access to Orthodox pastoral care - the Philoptochos annual commitment funding is currently supporting OCPM Learning Center
- **Orthodox Prison Ministry, Nicholas Petrogeorge**
 - Work in prisons is intense, a lot of bureaucracy, people are not that easy to work with within the prison system
 - 1.7M people are in prison in this country. We can't just leave them. The Lord is asking us to go to them
 - What are we doing?
 - Have hired Case Managers/Spiritual Support Managers who cover parts of the country and coordinate regionalized visits to the various correctional facilities
 - Our spiritual support managers walk with a prisoner for years through their incarceration journey
 - Currently 840 open case files for Orthodox Christians
 - OCPM worked in 357 prisons
 - There are states in the US that do not explicitly recognize Orthodox Christianity within their prison system, we are taking on the active work of adjusting this as a recognized religion
 - How can we get involved?
 - Philoptochos funds are supporting training platforms on how to get involved in OCPM

- The Storybook Connections program records parents who are incarcerated reading a book to their children with the recording sent to their children
 - Video featuring Hallmark Program of voices of inmates reading “Goodnight Moon” theocpm.org/storybook
 - They would like to partner with us to put this in every jail in America
 - OCPM - standalone 501(c)(3) organization, donor funded
 - Contact them if you know someone that works within the county, or sheriff's department to provide an “in” within your local system
 - Website: theocpm.org/philoptochos
- **Chaplain’s Perspective, Reverend Deacon Keric Shiepis**
 - Spoke from the perspective of uniformed officers
 - Desire to minister to those “wearing the uniform”
 - Job is difficult, spotlight is on these public servants
 - Stressful situations
 - Odd-shifts, long hours, marital strain (60-70% divorce rate)
 - Media Scrutiny
 - Behavioral Health Issues: PTSD, Anxiety, depression,
 - First responder experiences 200-300 violent/dramatic episodes within a 20 year career
 - Loss of faith, strained relationships, suicide (1.5 times higher than national average)
 - Call to protect and serve becomes a heavy burden. The first responder crisis is growing. Suicide rates/stress induced post-retirement deaths.
 - Even with resources available, many first responders fail to seek help
 - What are we doing for uniformed first responders?
 - Prayer
 - When ministering to incarcerated inmates, please don't forget the uniformed officers
 - Visit with local police and fire stations
 - Invite chief of police and fire chief to NAMEDAY banquet
 - Hosting a First Responders Appreciation Event
 - Sharing our Faith/Inviting them to coffee hour/ social events
 - Approaching them and saying “THANK YOU for everything you do for our community”
- **Chapter Prison Ministry Project, Despina Kartson**
 - “The safest place I’ve ever felt in my life is in prison”
 - 95% of incarcerated individuals have experienced abuse or trauma before entering the prison system

- Spoke about Saturday Morning Reflections
 - Took 18 months to implement within the existing prison
 - Monthly 2-hour Session
 - Themed discussion, prayer, sharing of scripture: hope, healing, self-worth, value, redemption
- Who are the women we meet?
 - Most are mothers and grandmothers, some are accomplished business women who got involved with drugs, domestic violence survivors
 - Most have said that incarceration has given them an opportunity to grow spiritually, and educationally
- Local Chapter Support of Prison Ministry
 - Release bag - tote bags filled with essential items for women once they are released from prison
 - Yarn Drives - color appropriate yarns for knitting clubs
 - Feminine Hygiene Products
 - Dove Soap Drive

Housekeeping/ Wrap Up- Anna Vedouras, Convention Chair

Katherine Clark, National Philoptochos Marketing and Communications Associate, gave a tutorial on the 2026 Philoptochos Convention app and Slido for voting tomorrow

Closing Prayer- National Philoptochos President Debbie George led the delegates in a closing prayer.

Meeting Recessed- The meeting was recessed at 5:23 PM by National President Debbie George.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dara Phillips, Secretary

Mia Lipsanopoulos-McMahon, Secretary

Chrissy Orginos-Zografos, Secretary

June 30, 2026