



Archbishop Demetrios: We must affirm that education in the parish and in the home involve a collaborative and committed effort on the part of clergy, teachers and parents

Encyclical of Archbishop Demetrios for the Ecclesiastical New Year and the Day for the Protection of our Natural Environment

Beginning of the Ecclesiastical New Year

Day for the Protection of our Natural Environment

To the Most Reverend Hierarchs, the Reverend Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, the Presidents and Members of the Parish Councils of the Greek Orthodox Communities, the Distinguished Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Day, Afternoon, and Church Schools, the Philoptochos Sisterhoods, the Youth, the Hellenic Organizations, and the entire Greek Orthodox Family in America

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we commemorate this Feast of the Indiction, the beginning of the new ecclesiastical year, we ask our great and merciful God to “bless the crown of this year which His goodness has allowed us to begin” (Hymn of Orthros). It is His goodness and grace that has brought us to the beginning of one more ecclesiastical year and to another blessed cycle of the feasts and observances of our Holy Orthodox Faith. In anticipation of the marvelous and wonderful things our Lord will accomplish in our lives, parishes, and families, we look forward to the blessings that will come through our worship, prayer, and service.

This time of year is also the beginning of the academic year when our children, youth, and young adults return to school. In addition, it is the time in association with the new Church year and the academic year that our religious, Greek education, and day school programs begin in parishes throughout our Holy Archdiocese. These ministries are vital in teaching and nurturing our spiritual and cultural heritage among our youth, but they are also essential to the well-being of the Orthodox Christian family.

With our continued emphasis on the theme of our recent Clergy-Laity Congress, “The Orthodox Christian Family: A Dwelling of Christ and a Witness of His Gospel,” we begin this ecclesiastical year reflecting on the priority of strengthening families through the educational ministries of our parishes. It is also a time to focus on the important role of Christian education in the home.

In our sacred work of teaching, we must affirm that education in the parish and in the home involve a collaborative and committed effort on the part of clergy, teachers and parents. In addition to offering knowledge about our faith and Hellenic culture or teaching basic academic disciplines, programs in the parish should emphasize the identity of the Orthodox Christian family and offer resources that guide families in staying connected to God and the Church. Through worship, prayer, reflection, and teaching in the home, families should reinforce the guidance received through the educational ministries of the parish, nurturing family members in the faith and becoming a *kat'oikon ekklesia* – the Church in the home (Romans 16:5, Colossians 4:15).



The Orthodox Christian family that is strengthened and guided by the educational ministry of the parish becomes a dwelling of Christ and a witness of the Gospel. The members of the family are connected to God and to the primary mission of the Church. Children and youth are nurtured in the faith. They connect the values, ideals, and treasures of their cultural heritage to life today as an Orthodox family. And the family receives the wisdom and spiritual guidance needed to seek the potential of each member, to mature in Christ, to serve others, and to bring honor and glory to God.

As we reflect on the beginning of the ecclesiastical year and our ministry to families, we also recognize that this day has been designated by the Ecumenical Patriarchate as the Day for the Protection of our Natural Environment. With grateful hearts and as faithful stewards, we must also renew our commitment to protect all that God has created. We do this when we identify abuse, waste, and destructive practices and affirm the priority of sustaining and respecting life. We are also witnesses of our Creator and His grace when we seek to conserve, to renew, and to transform the world around us so that it is productive and beneficial for all people and for generations to come.

As we begin this new ecclesiastical year, I ask each of you to consider your efforts and concern for the natural environment and to make every effort to protect the created order. Regarding the family, I also ask all of our parishes to plan, evaluate, and offer the resources to ensure that our educational programs are helping families become Orthodox Christian families. May we make every effort to equip and edify families in unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God (Ephesians 4:13) so that each family member has the spiritual foundation to mature in the fullness of Christ, and the family becomes a dwelling of Him and a witness of His Gospel. Also, as we ask for our Lord's generous blessings through the cycle of this year, may we also pray that He will keep our families and the natural environment in peace, safe and secure from all harm.

With paternal love in Christ,

†DEMETRIOS

Archbishop of America