



Father Alex Karloutsos

Archon Spiritual Advisor

Protopresbyter of the Ecumenical Patriarchate



Archons
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**Ecumenical
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80TH

Birthday Celebration

of

Father Alex Karloutsos

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Ecumenical Patriarchate



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The Muses
Southampton, New York

Saturday, April 5, 2025

Invocation

Welcome

Anthony J. Limberakis, MD
Archon Megas Aktouarios
National Commander

Toast

The Honorable B. Theodore Bozonelis
Archon Ekdikos
National Vice Commander

Personal Reflections

Michael G. Psaros
Archon Ostiarios

Remarks

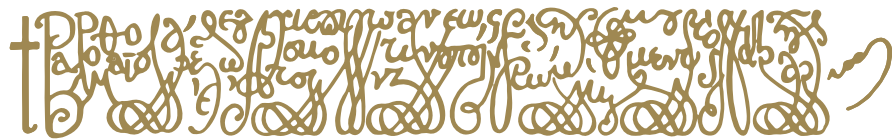
Michael, Anastasia and Olga

Special Message From
HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

Response

Father Alexander Karloutsos
Protopresbyter of the Ecumenical Throne
Archon Spiritual Advisor

Benediction



BARTHOLOMEW

By the Mercy of God,

Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

To the Reverend Father Alexander Karloutsos, Protopresbyter of the Ecumenical Throne, our beloved in the Lord: Grace be unto you and peace from God.

With profound joy, we extend our warmest and most heartfelt wishes to you on your 80th birthday. This milestone not only recognizes your faithful dedication to nurturing and utilizing your God-given talents but also celebrates your steadfast service to the Holy Great Church of Christ.

Your journey is deeply rooted in the enduring spirit of Hellenism and Orthodoxy, shaped by the heritage of your ancestors from the martyric lands of Asia Minor. Raised in Greece within a family that safeguarded the cherished traditions of our people, you immigrated to the United States at an early age, embracing your divine calling with zeal. After completing your theological studies at Hellenic College and Holy Cross School of Theology, you were ordained to the Holy Priesthood in 1970, embarking on a vocation that has profoundly impacted countless souls, particularly within our beloved Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

For decades, you have distinguished yourself as a devoted and tireless servant of the Mother Church of Constantinople, offering your wisdom, energy, and boundless dedication to its sacred *diaconia*. Your ability to cultivate relationships with governmental and civic leaders has amplified the Ecumenical Patriarchate's voice on the international stage, ensuring that its concerns are acknowledged and respected.

In your capacity as spiritual adviser to the Order of St. Andrew, Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in America, you have been pivotal in advancing their advocacy for religious liberty and human dignity, principles that have reinforced the Church's standing in key global discussions, fostering greater understanding among faith communities and world leaders. Likewise, in close cooperation with the Archons, you have contributed to safeguarding the historical prerogatives, solemn responsibilities, and canonical rights of the First-Throned See of Orthodoxy.

Accordingly, we acknowledge your invaluable assistance in the realization of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete (2016), as well as in numerous Apostolic Pilgrimages and Patriarchal Visits across the world. Through these historic events, you have played an essential role in mobilizing resources, coordinating logistics, and facilitating broad international participation. Your meticulous oversight has further enriched the Church's engagement with Orthodox communities, religious institutions, and distinguished dignitaries worldwide while advancing the Ecumenical Patriarchate's mission on the global stage.

At the same time, your steadfast dedication has been crucial in upholding the Ecumenical Patriarchate's presence and function in its historic and Venerable Center. Through diligence and diplomatic acumen, you have helped safeguard the Church's ability to navigate complex realities while continuing its witness in the land from which it has radiated for centuries.

Beyond these endeavors, your stewardship in the administration of Leadership 100 has been instrumental in fortifying Orthodoxy and Hellenism in America. Under your guidance, this endowment has become a pillar of philanthropy, providing indispensable support to clergy, parishes, and ministries while ensuring that future generations inherit a flourishing ecclesiastical and cultural legacy.

In recognition of your extraordinary achievements, you were awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2022, the highest civilian honor in the United States. This distinction is a testament not only to your lifelong devotion to ecclesiastical service but also to the immense pride it brings to your family and the entire Orthodox Christian and Hellenic community.

On this joyous occasion, we acknowledge the indispensable presence of your beloved Presbyteria Xanthi, whose love, steadfast support, and shared devotion have been a pillar of strength in your life and ministry. Together, you have raised a family that exemplifies the highest ideals of faith, dedication, and commitment to the Church—a legacy that continues through your three children and nine grandchildren, who uphold these hallowed values with honor.

With deep gratitude to Almighty God for the gift of your life and calling, we fervently pray that He grants you many more years in health and strength, filled with the same zeal and love that have defined your extraordinary journey. May you continue to be a beacon of wisdom and inspiration for all who labor for the well-being of the Church and the fulfillment of its divine mission.

At the Ecumenical Patriarchate, March 16th, 2025
Your fervent supplicant before God,

✠ BARTHOLOMEW

Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome
and Ecumenical Patriarch



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

April 4, 2025

The Reverend Father Alexander Karloutsos
Protopresbyter of the Ecumenical Patriarchate
Dormition of the Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox Church
Southampton, New York

Dear Father Alex,

On this day before your Eightieth Birthday (as hard as that is to believe!), I want to extend to you, to Presvytera Xanthi, and to your entire family my very best wishes and heartfelt prayers for this milestone in your remarkable life, a life which has been one of exemplary service to our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Orthodox Church. The celebration planned for this day at the Muses is a worthy testament to your singular βίος και πολιτεία, as we say in Greek.

The Order of Saint Andrew, which you have served as a spiritual steward for these many years, is sharing this celebration of your life and ministry with the Dormition Parish of the Hamptons, for it is “meet and right” that such a gala take place there, at the Church community which has received so many blessings from your pastoral care.

Although it is literally not possible to enumerate the accomplishments of such a life so well lived, allow me to highlight what I perceive to be your most compelling testimony of faith. And that is this: that you have always held firm to the Priesthood to which our Lord called you, with fidelity, with determination, and with integrity. You have set an example for all clergy to emulate and admire. And although your countless achievements have elevated our Church both in America and globally, for your faithfulness to the Ecumenical Throne and the person of His All-Holiness is legendary, you have always set the Priesthood above any other consideration. For this, God has richly blessed you, even as He set challenges before you, and you have met and exceeded them all.

May He grant you many more years of happiness and good health, and through the prayers of His Holy Mother, continue to shower upon you and your family His abundant blessings, that you may always bring glory to His Holy Name and to His Church.

With blessings in our Lord Jesus Christ,

†ELPIDOPHOROS
Archbishop of America



Archons
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Dear Brother Archons and Friends of the Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate,

It is an immense joy for me to share in this celebration in honor of our beloved Spiritual Advisor, Fr. Alex Karloutsos, on the momentous occasion of his 80th birthday.

For many years now, I have had the privilege of knowing Father Alex and working closely with him in all manner of capacities, most importantly in diakonia to serve the needs of our beloved Ecumenical Patriarchate and His All-Holiness BARTHOLOMEW. Fr. Alex is a unique individual who intersects the lives of countless individuals on this great planet. To me, he is a brother PK (priest's kid), inspiring mentor, passionate Φαναριώτης and Spiritual Father *par excellence*, both personally and for the Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. He is an American patriot and recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He is a favorite son of our Πατρίδα, known throughout the land of Homer simply as “Father Alex (Φαθέρ Αλεξ). A devoted husband to his beloved Presvytera Xanthi, a loving father to his three children and grandfather to his ten grandchildren, all of whom he offers his unconditional love, guidance and an abundance of the extraordinary Father-Alex-experiences that will remain with them throughout their lives. Although he serves in many roles in our Holy Orthodox Church and has raised half a billion dollars for the Glory of God, he is first and above all, a priest... “Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” (St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 7:7-17.)

Father Alex's extraordinary achievements are too numerous to count. He has been an essential and irreplaceable partner for virtually every Archon achievement of the last three decades: our establishment of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew Foundation; our four International Conferences on Religious Freedom; our numerous religious freedom missions to the European Union, Ankara and on the home front in the United States from the White House, Congress and the State Department to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom.

Of course, no celebration of Father Alex would be complete without recognition of our dearest Presvytera Xanthi, who has likewise dedicated her life to the service of God and His Church. These faithful servants of our Lord and Savior, hand in hand, of like mind and purpose, have devoted herculean efforts to promoting the wellbeing and vitality of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Church at large, with prodigious impact and substantive accomplishment.

Happy birthday, Father Alex! Χρόνια Πολλά! Να τα εκατοστήσεις!

Yours in the service of our Holy Mother Church,

Anthony J. Limberakis, MD
Archon Megas Aktouarios
National Commander



80

A Pictorial Tribute to Father Alex

Father Alexander Karloutsos has dedicated his life to serving the Church, offering spiritual guidance and leadership for decades. Currently, he serves as the Spiritual Advisor to the Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, continuing his mission of strengthening and supporting the Orthodox faith worldwide.

He has been an assistant to three Archbishops, playing a crucial role in the growth and development of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. His service has extended beyond administrative duties, as he has been a trusted counselor, visionary, and advocate for the Church and its faithful.

This pictorial directory provides a glimpse into the many accomplishments of Father Alex's ministry, reflecting his unwavering dedication, deep faith, and commitment to the Church. Through images and memories, it highlights his pastoral work, leadership, and the countless lives he has touched. As he celebrates his 80th birthday, this collection serves as a tribute to his lifelong devotion and the profound impact he has made on the Greek Orthodox community. His legacy of service and faith continues to inspire generations, and this directory stands as a testament to his extraordinary contributions to the Church and beyond.



Scan to view more moments



The 4th Archon International Conference on Religious Freedom, Athens
Official Opening, Stoa of Attalos, May 27, 2024



The 4th Archon International Conference on Religious Freedom, Athens
Hon. Michael R. and Susan Pompeo, May 28, 2024



The 4th Archon International Conference on Religious Freedom, Athens
Hon. Michael R. and Susan Pompeo, May 28, 2024



Archons honoring Father Alex with a gift during the Farewell Dinner at the Zappeion
May 29, 2024



Father Alex and Presbyter Xanthi Karloutsos honored with the Athenagoras Human Rights Award, October 27, 2018



Vice President Joe Biden with Father Alex and Presbyter Xanthi Karloutsos at the Athenagoras Human Rights Award Banquet, October 27, 2018



Father Alex and Presbyter Xanthi Karloutsos offer remarks at the Athenagoras Human Rights Award Banquet, October 27, 2018



The Karloutsos Family
Athenagoras Human Rights Award Banquet, October 27, 2018



Fathe Alex, Aphrodite Skeadas and National Commander Dr. Anthony J. Limberakis
October 17, 2024



National Council Meeting in Southampton
March 31, 2023



Archons Hon. B. Theodore Bozonelis, Andy Manatos, National Commander Dr. Limberakis,
John Metaxas with Father Alex in Washington, D.C., July 12, 2016



National Council Meeting at the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
May 5, 2018



Archon Leadership with His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel, Geron of Chalcedon, Konstantinos Bakoyannis, Mayor of Athens, Archon Boris Gurov, January 18, 2023



Archon delegation with Archon Nawaf Salameh, Romania June 9, 2022



Archon delegation, led by His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel, Geron of Chalcedon, with the Prime Minister of Greece, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, January 16, 2023



Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton visit to the Ecumenical Patriarchate July 16, 2011



Greeting His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Washington, D.C.
October, 2021



Holy Church of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker of Myra,
the Metropolitan Church in Pyrgos, Greece, September 3, 2023



Door Opening service for St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine
at the World Trade Center, November 2, 2021



Archons meet with His All-Holiness
September 3, 2023



President Donald J. Trump
March 22, 2018



Vice President Joe Biden
October 27, 2016



President George W. Bush
March 24, 2006



President George H.W. and First Lady Barbara Bush
July 5, 1988



Pope Benedict
June 30, 2006



Pope Francis
May 26, 2014



Archbishop Iakovos and John Brademas
July 4, 1986



Fidel Castro
January 22, 2004



Mark Arey, Father Alex and Archon Michael Psaros walk the grounds of St. Nicholas at the World Trade Center, June 3, 2022



Ceremony and Lighting of St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine at the World Trade Center, September 10, 2021



Greeting President Mikhail Gorbachev, recipient of the Athenagoras Human Rights Award October 22, 2005



Under the bell atop Saint Sophia Church, Bulgaria June 15, 2022



Feastday of Dormition of the Theotokos
August 15, 2019



Paschal Vespers
April 16, 2017



Andrea Bocelli performance at Dormition of the Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox Church
September 8, 2024



20 years of ministry to Dormition of the Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox Church
November 11, 2018



Archons accompany Fr Alex to his home village in Pyrgos, Greece where he was born.
September 4, 2023



Fr Alex greeting his family in his home village in Pyrgos, Greece where he was born.
September 4, 2023

The Father Alex Karloutsos Origin Story



Michael and Olga Karloutsos with their children

The following articles appeared on the website of *Orthodox History* and were reproduced with the permission of writer and editor, Matthew Namee, Esq. *Orthodox History* exists to study the history of Orthodox Christianity in the modern world. It was launched in 2009. www.orthodoxhistory.org

Matthew Namee, Esq. has been the editor of *Orthodox History* since its inception in 2009. He is a lawyer by training and serves as General Counsel and Chief Operating Officer for a nonprofit called Orthodox Ministry Services. He holds a B.A. in History from Wichita State University and a J.D. from the University of Kansas.

Father Alex Karloutsos may be the most influential Orthodox priest in modern history. He has spent time in every Oval Office going back to Jimmy Carter, culminating in a Presidential Medal of

Freedom from Joe Biden. His connections are extraordinary – the presidents, of course, and every patriarch you can imagine, but also a range of twentieth century giants like Henry Kissinger, Elijah Muhammad, Pope John Paul II,

and Blackstone founder Pete Peterson, to name four at random. Karloutsos is also incredibly polarizing, with critics viewing him as a nefarious “Grey Eminence” pulling strings behind the scenes of Orthodoxy.

Earlier this year, I conducted a series of interviews with Fr Karloutsos to record his life story. Today, I’m going to recount his origin story – how the son of a widowed Greek Old Calendarist priest gained access to the highest echelons of power in America.

Childhood

Karloutsos was born in Greece, but his story begins in Springfield, Massachusetts, where his father, Michael, was born. Michael’s parents – Fr Alex’s biological grandparents – were Constantinopolitan Greeks who had moved to America. Michael’s mother died in childbirth, and while his father was out of town, the grandmother – Fr Alex’s great-grandmother – traded the infant Michael to another Greek family for \$500. Michael’s father tried to get him back, so the adoptive parents left America for Latzio, Greece, where the boy was raised, completely unaware of his American origins.

Michael married a woman named Olga Douros, and they went on to have seven children, six of whom survived to adulthood. Alexander – the future Fr Alex – was born in 1945. A few years later, when Michael learned that he was an American citizen, he decided to move his family to the United States. The family attended a parish that belonged to a non-canonical Old Calendarist sect.

Fr Alex remembers, “The Old Calendar church was more flexible in regards to ordination – if you could chant a little bit and read a little bit, there’s a good priest.” So Michael was ordained, and Fr Alex spent a good part of his childhood in the Old Calendarist movement.

When Fr Alex was nine years old, his mother Olga died of tuberculosis. She was thirty-five. The widowed Fr Michael spent the rest of his life as a celibate priest, raising six children as a single father. Not long after Olga’s death, Fr Michael left the Old Calendarists and joined the canonical Greek Archdiocese. “Somebody came to him and said, you should join the New Calendar; it would be a better life for you and your family,” Fr Alex recalled. “So my dad made the switch.” It was a difficult transition. “There was an in crowd and an out crowd, but my dad was always on the outside looking in. And I guess maybe that’s one of the reasons why I’m on the inside looking out. But when I’m inside looking out, I’m always looking in, because I see it through my dad’s eyes. That’s what makes me such a restless priest within the Archdiocese.”

The family moved from Detroit to tiny Bayard, Nebraska, which had a population of 1,519. “It was a nightmare,” Fr Alex says. When the children asked their father how many TV channels Bayard had, Fr Michael said “Ten.” But he was stretching the truth; the town actually had just one channel – Channel 10. “So we went out there, and all we did was watch Channel 10.” Fr Michael was paid \$300 a month, “plus all the corn, tomatoes, and bologna we could eat. A lot of

bologna.” They were in Bayard for three years. The Karloutsos kids were difficult. “The parish council had enough of us. They wrote a letter to the Archdiocese: we love the priest, but if we could move the kids, we’d be grateful.”

After Bayard the family moved constantly: Charleston, West Virginia; Middletown, Ohio; Concord, New Hampshire; Jamestown, New York. Then Iowa, then New York, next Wilmington, North Carolina; Orlando, Florida; and back to New York.

Boston (1962-69)

In 1962, the future Fr Alex enrolled as an undergraduate at Holy Cross in Boston. Initially, he was still very much the son of an Old Calendarist priest – he was even familiar with the now-infamous Father Panteleimon of Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Boston, which at the time was still part of the Greek Archdiocese, but would soon jump to ROCOR (and, years later, left canonical Orthodoxy in the wake of sexual abuse allegations). But at Holy Cross, for Karloutsos, “all of a sudden, our minds were expanding,” Professors introduced him to existentialism, to “a world outside of Orthodoxy,” as he says, and he was particularly drawn to the work of Carl Jung.

Karloutsos was already beginning to stand out from the crowd. Once, the upperclassmen were engaged in a battle with Archbishop Iakovos over whether to kneel during the Anaphora prayers at liturgy on Sundays. Iakovos favored kneeling, but the students insisted on strictly following the Orthodox

tradition that prohibits kneeling on the Lord’s Day. Karloutsos and his undergraduate classmates staged a walkout in support of the upperclassmen. They did another walkout in protest of the Vietnam War.

Karloutsos was his undergraduate class valedictorian, but the school refused to let him give a speech at graduation for fear of what he might say. He then moved up to the seminary graduate program, on track to become a priest. And once again, he became valedictorian. This time, they let him speak – but instead of writing an address, Karloutsos recited a poem:

Much has been written,
much has been said.
Those who have written or spoken
are dying or dead.
Jesus said “Love one another.”
I have nothing significant to add.

And then, dramatically, he walked off the stage. The mighty Archbishop Iakovos jumped up in applause, and the room followed with a standing ovation.

Chicago (1970-74)

After seminary, Karloutsos studied at the Bossey Institute in Switzerland, an ecumenical institute run by the World Council of Churches. By this point he had gotten married to Xanthi Karavellas, and when he returned to the United States he was ordained a priest and assigned to Saints Constantine and Helen in Chicago as the assistant to Fr Byron Papanikolaou (father of Dr Aristotle Papanikolaou of Fordham University). Fr Karloutsos has



The former Saints Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church, now "Mosque Maryam," the headquarters of the Nation of Islam.

fond memories of Fr Byron, whom he calls "a priest's priest." Whereas Karloutsos's own father taught him what not to do – the mistakes to avoid – Karloutsos saw Fr Byron as a model of what kind of priest he wanted to be.

The Saints Constantine and Helen church building was the largest in all of American Orthodoxy, but the parish faced a difficult situation. The neighborhood, once full of Greeks, was now dominated by Chicago's black community. Teenagers would break the windows of the church gymnasium, and Fr Karloutsos would chase them down the street. The church was struggling financially, unable even to afford to replace the broken windows. It was clear that the status quo wasn't sustainable, and so they sold the building for \$4 million in cash to the Nation of Islam, led by Elijah Muhammad, with funding from Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi. (The parish relocated to Palos Hills, where many of its parishioners had moved.)

In Chicago, Fr Karloutsos quickly became known as an outstanding youth

director. He was young – mid-twenties – and played basketball and pool with his parish youth. "I could actually not only shoot baskets, but I could shoot my mouth off pretty well." Soon he was appointed to be the diocesan youth director. He organized a youth camp and youth rallies. It was clear that he was destined for something bigger. As his apprenticeship under Fr Papanikolaou neared its end, he was due to be given his own parish – but Papanikolaou wrote to Archbishop Iakovos saying, essentially, "This young priest has certain gifts that I've never seen before. One of them is opening doors. I don't want him ever to leave my parish, but if he has to leave, it would be a big mistake if you did not take him into the Archdiocese."

And so Iakovos called Fr Karloutsos to New York, where he put him in charge of youth ministry throughout the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America.

New York and Washington (beginning in 1974)

"I didn't know Archbishop Iakovos well," Karloutsos told me. "I got to know him, and we became very, very close. Archbishop Iakovos was my ideal archbishop and priest, in many ways. He was an extraordinary, gifted man, and as Mayor Ed Koch would say, when Iakovos went into the room, even if he was in the corner, he was the center of the room. His presence was amazing." For a few years, he was even Iakovos's driver.

At this point, the relationship between the U.S. government and

Ecumenical Patriarchate (and its American archdiocese) was at a low ebb. In the early Cold War era, the U.S. and EP were pretty tight – the United States played an important role in putting Archbishop Athenagoras on the throne in Istanbul, and Athenagoras saw himself as America's agent in the Orthodox world. All that changed as the 1950s wore on – when anti-Greek riots devastated the Greek community in Istanbul in 1955, the United States did nothing. The emerging crisis over Cyprus led to the mass deportation of tens of thousands of Greeks from Turkey in the 1960s. In his later years, Athenagoras tried to appeal to the Nixon Administration to secure EP succession, but the White House had no interest. After Athenagoras died in 1972, his worst fears were realized: the Turkish government vetoed several candidates for Patriarch (including Archbishop Iakovos), and when (Greek-American) Vice President Spiro Agnew tried to prevent this, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger declared, "I don't give a damn about the Turkish bishops. I give a damn about the Turkish government."

In July of 1974, Turkey invaded Cyprus, occupying the northern part of the island – an occupation that continues to this day. The Greek-American community was outraged, and some of the community's leaders began to organize themselves. The modern-day Greek-American lobby really has its origins here, in 1974. Fr Karloutsos took charge of organizing the youth of the Archdiocese to lobby the U.S. government, and he was working side-

by-side with other key Greek-American political figures.

Another big moment happened in January 1977, when Jimmy Carter became President of the United States. Archbishop Iakovos felt snubbed when he wasn't invited to offer a prayer at the inauguration. In response, over the summer, he created a new archdiocesan department – the Department of Church and Society – and he made Fr Karloutsos the director. "Many people love you," Iakovos told Karloutsos, "but I'm going to give you a position now that they'll not only love you, they'll fear you and respect you." Karloutsos responded that he didn't want to be feared. "Well," said Iakovos, "they'll respect you. And once they do that, they'll also talk about you. But if you don't want anybody to talk about you don't say anything worthwhile, don't do anything worthwhile, don't be anything worthwhile."

Fr Karloutsos's first assignment in his new position was to establish a relationship between the Archdiocese and the White House. But how would a complete outsider gain access and influence at the center of global power?

It began with a big gathering of religious leaders at the White House – a pretty ordinary thing, with hundreds of religious leaders crowded together in the East Room to hear some talks and, if they were lucky, shake hands with the President. Fr Karloutsos felt like he was a fish out of water. "I'm scared to death and saying, 'What am I doing here?' I don't know anything. I went to Holy Cross seminary. I mean, I'm not



President Jimmy Carter and Fr Alex Karloutsos

Harvard, I'm not Columbia. And these guys are all smart. They all know what they're doing."

But Fr Karloutsos's outsider status turned out to be an advantage. "As everybody was trying to get the President's attention, I went in and spoke to the secretary. I went in and I talked with the gardener. I talked to all the people on the periphery, not at the heart of everything, and I treated them with love and respect. So in my mind, I said, these are all the people around the President, which means that they'll have time to speak to the President about everybody that was there. It's human nature, you know?" He attended more of these events,

met more people on the periphery of the Oval Office. "And they'd say, when I walked in, 'Father Alex, how are you doing?' The gardener, the secretaries. So finally, the time comes when I'm meeting Jimmy Carter and he says, 'So you're Father Alex! I've heard so much about you.'"

Fr Karloutsos's department had no real budget and no archdiocesan credit card, but his job involved expenses. To cultivate his political connections, he needed to travel, to take people out to dinner. And so he learned how to fund-raise on the fly, getting wealthy Greek-Americans to back his efforts. He became close to two Greek-American congressmen, Representative (later

Senator) Paul Sarbanes and House Majority Whip John Brademas (later president of New York University). He was building his network.

In 1979, Archbishop Iakovos celebrated his twentieth anniversary as Greek archbishop. He wanted something big to celebrate, so he called in Fr Karloutsos, who'd never organized an event like that before. Years before, during his honeymoon in Pyrgos, Greece, Karloutsos happened to meet a Greek-American restaurateur from Kearney, Nebraska, named George Peterson. The restaurateur's son, Pete, had gone on to become Nixon's Secretary of Commerce – the first Greek-American to serve in a presidential cabinet – but although he was Greek, "he was a Brahmin of our community; he had nothing to do with the Greeks, not involved in the Church at all. In fact, everybody thought he was Swedish." By 1979, Peterson was chairman of the Lehman Brothers financial firm. Later, he created the investment giant Blackstone and chaired the Council on Foreign Relations for twenty-two years.

Fr Karloutsos decided to try to get Pete Peterson to be the chairman of Iakovos's year-long anniversary celebration. His one big advantage was the Nebraska connection – Karloutsos, like Peterson, had spent a big part of his childhood in small-town Nebraska. He wrote to Peterson, mentioning their shared Nebraska origins, his chance meeting with Peterson's restaurateur dad, the pitch to be the chair of the Iakovos anniversary celebrations. "His

secretary, Melba Duncan, called me up out of the blue one day and said, 'Father Alex, Mr. Peterson is going to call you in five minutes. If you answer his five questions correctly, he'll do it. If you don't answer him, he's not going to do it. So be ready.' I said to myself, what the heck am I going to say to this guy? So he called me in five minutes. I answered his questions, and he agreed to serve as chairman."

As the 1980 presidential election approached, Fr Karloutsos and his allies decided to try to get President Carter to award Archbishop Iakovos the Presidential Medal of Freedom. The rationale was based on Iakovos's support of Martin Luther King Jr. and his participation in King's march at Selma. Nowadays, this has achieved a kind of mythical status among Greek-Americans, and images of Iakovos and King circulate every year around MLK Day. But back then, Iakovos was actually subjected to a lot of criticism within the Greek-American community for his actions. It was here, with Karloutsos and friends in 1980, that the legend of Iakovos and King really came into being.

The congressmen, Sarbanes and Brademas, weren't too keen on the idea of Carter giving Iakovos the medal, because they were bitter at Carter for his friendly relations with Turkey – they felt that Carter had sold out the Greek community by lifting a U.S. arms embargo on Turkey in the wake of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. But Fr Karloutsos argued the other side. "At the end of the day, if the President decides to give him the



Fr Alex Karloutsos, President Ronald Reagan, and Archbishop Iakovos

Presidential Medal of Freedom, they'll only know that he was the Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient. They won't remember that he got it under Carter." Karloutsos's argument won the day, and Iakovos got his medal.

Of course, Carter lost the 1980 election to Ronald Reagan – a man to whom Fr Karloutsos had no connections at all. "I'm watching TV and I'm going, what do we do now? Now we have a relationship with Carter. Nobody knows Reagan." Karloutsos happened to notice that, when Reagan visited the Senate, he was accompanied by a Greek-American lobbyist, Tom Korologos (who passed away on July 26 of this year). Fr Karloutsos cold-called Korologos, who helped connect him with the Public Liaison Office of the Reagan White House. First, Karloutsos went to the Religious Affairs people, but the man he spoke with assumed that Greek Orthodox people weren't Christians. So he tried Ethnic Affairs, where he devel-

oped a relationship with Reagan advisor Jack Burgess. It was thanks to Burgess and Korologos that Fr Karloutsos got access to key players in the Republican Party, including Reagan's vice president, George H.W. Bush.

Here is how Fr Karloutsos remembers his first meeting with Reagan, not long after Reagan survived an assassination attempt. "Ronald Reagan walked into his office, and I remember Tom Korologos saying, 'Mister President, this is Father Karloutsos.' And Reagan said, 'Father Karloutsos? I was looking forward to meeting Father Alex.' I said, 'Well, Mister President, I am Father Alex.' He says, 'You know, I'm a Dodgers fan, and we beat you in the World Series, because I know you're a Yankee fan.'"

At this point – 1982 – Fr Karloutsos was thirty-seven years old. And while he was not a politician, bureaucrat, lobbyist, or donor, he had, indeed, gained access to the highest echelons of power in America.

Karloutsos and the Rise of Bartholomew



Fr Alex Karloutsos with Metropolitans Joachim and Bartholomew

"Growing up under Archbishop Iakovos, nobody really knew or cared about the Ecumenical Patriarch," Fr Alex Karloutsos told me. "The center of our universe was America. They would talk about the patriarchate, but it was like a grandmother. You know, we love our yiayia, but it was old fashioned; no vision was coming from there."

Following the death of Patriarch Athenagoras in 1972, the Turkish government blocked a swath of top candidates in the patriarchal election, resulting in the surprise election of the obscure, kindly, but untested Patriarch Dimitrios. Behind the scenes, one of the vetoed candidates, the powerful Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon, did what he could to run things in Istanbul. But the power of the Phanar was at a low point.

Over in America, thanks to Fr Karloutsos, Archbishop Iakovos and the Greek Archdiocese were on the rise, with newfound access to the centers of political power in Washington. Karloutsos had built relationships with both political parties as well as Greek philanthropists, and it was Iakovos, not anyone in Istanbul, who laid claim to the most prominence in the Greek Orthodox world.

It was right at this point – around the time that Fr Karloutsos met Ronald Reagan – that Meliton of Chalcedon made a personal visit to the United States.

Metropolitan Meliton and Archbishop Iakovos were old seminary classmates and rivals. A few years earlier, when Pope John Paul I died, Archbishop Iakovos was asked by President Jimmy Carter to be a member of the U.S. Presidential delegation at the pope's funeral. He asked the patriarchate for permission to attend, but his request was denied. Meanwhile, Metropolitan Meliton was present, representing the Ecumenical Patriarch. Some newspapers even reported that Meliton was the "head of the Greek Orthodox Church." Iakovos was furious and threatened to resign as archbishop, although he didn't follow through on it.

On his visit to America, Metropolitan Meliton – who was a very shrewd man – immediately took notice of Fr Karloutsos, who was obviously (at least to Meliton) Iakovos's secret weapon.

Meliton had two up-and-coming disciples: the young hierarchs Bartholomew and Joachim, who were best friends. Bartholomew was a rising

star, installed at Meliton's recommendation as the first head of the private office of the Ecumenical Patriarch. By the early 1980s, he was metropolitan of the ancient see of Philadelphia (in Asia Minor). And Bartholomew was from the island of Imbros, which was also the home of Iakovos – in fact, Iakovos's sister, Chrysanthé, was Bartholomew's godmother. Undoubtedly, upon returning to Turkey, Meliton told Bartholomew and Joachim about Fr Karloutsos.

The following year, 1983, Metropolitan Bartholomew came to North America to attend the World Council of Churches meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia. While he was on this side of the Atlantic, he made a point of meeting Fr Karloutsos. "When I met Bartholomew in 1983, he was forty-three years old, and I was thirty-eight," Karloutsos said. "Both of us felt a big commitment to the Church: him to the Mother Church of Constantinople and me to the Archdiocese of America."

Shortly after this, Metropolitan Meliton had a stroke, and, at Archbishop Iakovos's invitation, Bartholomew brought his spiritual father back to the United States for therapy in White Plains, New York. Every day, for forty days – at the direction of Archbishop Iakovos – Fr Karloutsos drove Bartholomew to the rehab center to care for Meliton during his therapy. "That's when Bartholomew and I became very, very close," Karloutsos said. "We were together every day. We could talk about different things, our vision, the church. I introduced him to lay people. He started seeing America differently."



Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon, pictured with Pope Paul VI in 1975

Bonding

In April 1985, Fr Karloutsos and his wife Xanthi were invited by Tim Maniatis and Cleo Zampetis, who at the time were the leaders of AHEPA (a Greek-American organization), to visit Turkey. Up to that point, says Karloutsos, "I had never been to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. I had to get permission from Iakovos, and he gave me permission, and he asked me to bring back relics from the Armenian Catholicos. I think later, he probably cursed the day he approved it."

Fr Karloutsos had a general understanding that the condition of the Greek Orthodox in Turkey was bad, but he didn't understand the magnitude of the situation until he paid his first visit to the Phanar. "I remember going up to the patriarchate. The roads had hundreds of potholes in them right in front of the patriarchate. It looked like crap. And we see a gate closed. And they describe, 'Well, this is where they hung Gregory the Fifth.' I said, 'What?' 'This is where

they hung Gregory the Fifth, 1821, April 10.' I never knew it. And I looked up and there was a burnt down building. And I said, 'Why is this building burnt down?' They said, 'We don't have any influence. The Turks won't let us rebuild it. Burnt down in 1941.' I said, 'Wait a minute – 1941? It's 1985 and you guys can't get this thing done?'"

Then he went into the makeshift headquarters of the patriarchate, where he met Patriarch Dimitrios ("he was a saintly figure"). Bartholomew was there, too. "And I just started crying like a baby. We were all crying because we had heard about the Holy Mother Church, but we never really were touched by it before." Patriarch Dimitrios asked Metropolitan Bartholomew to take the group on a tour of the patriarchal compound, and later, Bartholomew broke protocol to have Fr Karloutsos celebrate the Divine Liturgy as the first, despite lacking seniority. Their friendship was growing.

The AHEPA delegation was ready to leave for the next stop on their trip, but Bartholomew had other plans. He pulled Fr Karloutsos aside. "I don't want you to go on the trip immediately. I have a surprise for you and your presbytera. I can't tell you what it is, but make sure you have your passports." Karloutsos, a bit confused, agreed and got together his luggage. They drove to the airport.

"I said, 'Where are we going?'" Fr Karloutsos recalls. "He says, 'We're going to Smyrna. Didn't you tell me your family is from Smyrna?' So we get on the plane and we're talking, we're getting to know each other. He spent

more time talking with my wife than with me. We got to the hotel, we're eating, and then in the evening we sat on a balcony overlooking the port. It's beautiful. I mean, you wouldn't believe it, it was so beautiful. And Bartholomew said to me, 'Look at the waters? Isn't it beautiful to see how beautiful the blue waters are, the green waters? Did you ever see anything like that?' I said, 'Oh my God, no. It's really peaceful here.' Then he goes, 'Well, do you know what the colors were in 1922?' I go, 'What do you mean?' He says, 'The Asia Minor Catastrophe! Your family! Your legacy! People butchered here!' And he brought me back. That's what Bartholomew could do. And I had tears in my eyes as he was describing the slaughter of the innocents, the genocide, and I said, 'How do we honor their memory?'

"Then we got in a bus and drove to Ephesus. We visited the house of Mary, which was an imagined shrine that the Turks put up there, and that angered me. They're restricting us, restricting the practice of our faith! And whenever they can, they make money off of our faith! So we went to Saint John's tomb, and we walk up to this simple grave. It was a beautiful grave, but it was simple. And Bartholomew says, 'This is Saint John's grave.' I said, 'Saint John the Theologian? St John the Theologian was here!' I said, 'My God, Saint John, the Apostle of Love!' I started getting emotional. Again, I cried. We were with a crowd of tourists, and we all walked away, and I thought Bartholomew was with us. Then all of a sudden, there was an energy field that made every-

body turn around to look at what was calling us back. And there you saw Bartholomew on his knees crying and praying at the tomb of Saint John.

"That hit me right here. We went back to the Phanar and I said, 'This is ridiculous. We have to do something. How can you allow this building to be burned and not rebuilt?' Bartholomew said, 'We can't get permission. We've tried to, we've tried everything, but no one is helping us. It's like the paralytic before the pool of Bethesda.' So I said to him, 'I have an idea. Jimmy Carter is going to Greece in July. Maybe I can convince him to come to Constantinople, to raise his voice and support the rebuilding of the patriarchate.' And Bartholomew said, 'If you could do that, Alex, we would be very grateful.'"



The Ecumenical Patriarchate, Istanbul

Jimmy Carter's Trip to Istanbul

Fr Karloutsos returned to America a changed man. It was as if scales had fallen from his eyes; the motherless son found in the Ecumenical Patriarchate a mother that he wanted to serve and defend. But he was still a servant of Archbishop Iakovos.

"He asked me about my trip. I thought it was a matter of interest, but it was

more for gathering intelligence." But Fr Karloutsos demonstrated a vital discretion: "I didn't tell him that I offered to bring Jimmy Carter to Constantinople."

Jimmy Carter had been out of office for a few years by then, and he was fundraising for the Carter Center at Emory University. Fr Karloutsos had arranged for the Greek Archdiocese to host a fundraiser for the Carter Center, and through that, he'd developed relationships with two of Carter's top advisors – Carter's childhood friend Arthur Cheokas and his chief development officer George Schira. Karloutsos called Schira and proposed that the ex-president's planned trip to Greece and Cyprus should include a stop in Istanbul to visit the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Carter himself was open to the idea but wanted to know what Iakovos thought. Fr Karloutsos had to handle the archbishop delicately. He arranged for a meeting between the archbishop and Cheokas, Schira, and Bishop Silas of New Jersey, who were going to accompany Carter on his trip. They propose the idea of Carter visiting the patriarchate, but the archbishop was completely opposed, says Karloutsos, responding, "I'm against the trip. It's not the right time, So please tell President Carter that I'm against it. I appreciate his sentiments, but he should not go and please tell him that I'm against the trip unequivocally."

The group came out of their meeting with Iakovos and broke the news to Fr Karloutsos. They were frustrated, and Cheokas exclaimed, "I

don't know what the hell we're going to do!" But Karloutsos shifted gears. "I said, 'Do me a favor – let's go for lunch to Le Pleiades.' I ordered some great, great chicken and two bottles of wine. I love the French style chicken. And I told them, 'Just go back and tell the President that the archbishop endorses it.'" The three of them were in shock, but Karloutsos said, "Look, the Ecumenical Patriarch wants Carter there. What are we worried about?" So Schira and Cheokas went back to Carter and told him that Iakovos favored the trip. Carter then instructed Schira to go on ahead to make arrangements.

Fr Karloutsos couldn't keep Carter's visit to Istanbul a secret from Iakovos for long. Once Schira was officially visiting the patriarchate on behalf of Carter, Iakovos would know that something was up. Karloutsos informed the archbishop during a car ride. "I said, 'Your Eminence, President Carter has decided to go. He feels, since he's in the region, he'd like to go to Constantinople.' I did it in a nice way, but Iakovos was angry – he was seething – but he couldn't express his anger. Iakovos said, 'But I told him not to go. I think it's the wrong thing.' I said, 'What can I tell you? That's what they're doing. And if President Carter is going, we've got to inform the patriarch, and you're the one who has to do it. You're the Exarch of North and South America.' I'm driving along, and he's ready to explode on me, but I'm driving."

But Archbishop Iakovos didn't immediately call the patriarch. The next day, Fr Karloutsos called Metropolitan

Bartholomew and told him about the Carter visit. The timeframe was pretty tight, and Carter's people had to work with the Phanar to make the necessary arrangements. Karloutsos planned a trip with his family to Greece to coincide with Carter's visit, and he intended to be with Carter in Corfu. Iakovos had other ideas. Karloutsos told me, "Two days before I was supposed to go to Greece with my wife and children, I received a phone call from Paulette Poulos, the archbishop's secretary, saying, 'Father Alex, you are forbidden from going to Greece when Jimmy Carter is there.' Oh my gosh. In the meantime, my wife had broken her hand. So she said to me, 'If you're not going to go, I'm not going to go.' And I said to her, 'Honey, you've got to go, because if Carter senses that Iakovos is against this, he will cancel the trip.' I needed my wife to be there to make sure that everything's fine. So then I sent a message to President Carter saying that there's an emergency at the archdiocese and Father Alex has

to stay. And my wife went to Corfu and put our children with her aunt and uncle, and every day she would take care of Jimmy Carter and Rosalyn – she was actually their tour guide on Corfu and his interpreter on occasion. And she was my eyes and ears. And she had a broken hand."

And so President Carter visited the Phanar, and Metropolitan Bartholomew showed him the burnt-out structure. Carter and Bartholomew walked on the burnt rubble and Carter promised to intercede with Turkish prime minister Turgut Özal on behalf of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Carter assigned Schira the responsibility to work with the Turks until permission was granted. The Turks responded by giving the patriarchate its long-sought building permit, and Panagiotis Angelopoulos, a major philanthropist from Greece, funded the whole project.

Archbishop Iakovos may not have known the details of Fr Karloutsos's role, but he understood well enough. "He



Metropolitans Bartholomew and Joachim with Jimmy Carter at the patriarchal ruins

tried to separate me from Bartholomew. He would speak suspiciously of Bartholomew to Patriarch Dimitrios, and to me he said, 'You can no longer have relations with Bartholomew.' But by that time, we had already become close friends."

Metropolitan Bartholomew and the Oval Office

Although Iakovos's trust in his priest was shaken, Fr Karloutsos's skills and connections were so unique that the archbishop had little choice but to rely on him. In 1986, Iakovos put Karloutsos in charge of a struggling, fledgling foundation called Leadership 100, which was intended to be a major funding vehicle for the archdiocese. Karloutsos was perfect for the job, leveraging his connections in the philanthropic world to build the fund. "But it didn't mean I had to give up the politics," Fr Karloutsos told me. "In fact, it played out very well. I could use the politics and the money, which I did, and then, because I did great, I became part of Iakovos's inner circle again – but he was always reminding me not to have a relationship with Bartholomew."

By the end of the decade, Patriarch Dimitrios was well into his seventies, and the question of patriarchal succession was in the air. Iakovos, who had long kept a distance between the patriarchate and the American archdiocese, decided to make a calculated gamble: he invited Patriarch Dimitrios to visit the United States. "He didn't think the patriarch would come," Fr Karloutsos said. "At that time, the Turkish govern-

ment prohibited travel, and Iakovos knew that. He invited him just to show that he is the great Iakovos – he never believed that he would come." It was a sort of power move at a key moment. But the Phanar called Iakovos's bluff, and Dimitrios accepted the invitation.

"So Iakovos had a meeting in his office," Fr Karloutsos recalled, "and he said, 'You won't believe it – the patriarch is coming next year. He can't speak English. We're going to look Old World.' And I'm sitting there listening, and I said to myself, 'Geez, I know what I would do,' but I didn't want to speak up, because I wanted to think about things. Then I went to see Iakovos privately, and I said, 'Your Eminence, there's only one thing to do. We've got to keep him distant from the people so they don't see any weaknesses, but they can look at him from a distance. Humility is holiness, and people want holiness. So we can keep him at a distance and raise him up above everybody else. But there's one big problem: you have to humble yourself, because you're the leader. If you humble yourself, everybody will follow your example.' Iakovos said, 'That's a great idea. I'll do it.'" Why would Iakovos, so careful to preserve his own position, do something like this? Fr Karloutsos explained, "Because down deep, he still has a love for the Church – plus, he's now going to host the Ecumenical Patriarch for the first time in the history of the United States."

It was up to Fr Karloutsos to organize the visit. Metropolitan Bartholomew was part of the patriarchal entourage. "I got the Secret Service [for patriar-

chal security],” said Karloutsos, “I got [Nightline anchor] Ted Koppel to be the toastmaster, I had President George Herbert Walker Bush there. We had everybody. Andrews Air Force Base, private jet. I got the Capitol Rotunda closed down for him. The President was meeting him in the Oval Office and at a dinner at the State Department. He was received as a head of state.”

Fr Karloutsos was in his element. Patriarch Dimitrios was all set to have an audience with President Bush in the Oval Office, but on the eve of the meeting, says Karloutsos, “Archbishop Iakovos calls me into his room and said to me, ‘I want you to tell the patriarch that only me, him, Mr Angelopoulos [the philanthropist who had financed the rebuilding of the patriarchate], the patriarch, and his interpreter will be there. Go tell the patriarch that Bartholomew can’t come.’ I said, ‘But he’s already scheduled to be in the meeting.’ Iakovos told me, ‘Then you tell him that the White House called you and said that he can’t come.’”

Karloutsos now faced a difficult decision, a choice between his loyalty to Iakovos and his friendship with Bartholomew. It was his Rubicon moment.

“So I went in to see the patriarch and Bartholomew, and I said, ‘Well, I’ve got news for you. Archbishop Iakovos told me that the White House called and said that the meeting with the President is only for the patriarch, Archbishop Iakovos, Mr Angelopoulos, and the translator. No one else can come.’ He said, ‘Is that true?’ I said, ‘No, it’s not

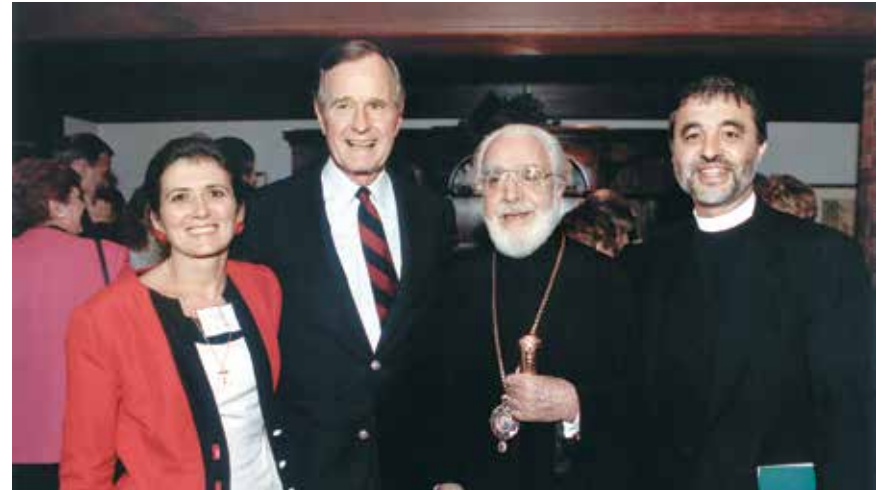
true. But he told me to tell you, so I’m telling you.’ So he asked, ‘What do we do?’ I said, ‘If I were you, I’d tell Iakovos to cancel the meeting.’”

Patriarch Dimitrios and Metropolitan Bartholomew were stunned – cancel a meeting with the President of the United States? But Fr Karloutsos knew what he was doing. “I said, ‘Yeah, because I know that at the end of the day, Iakovos won’t cancel. You’re calling his bluff.’ So the patriarch said, ‘Okay, go tell him.’ And I said, ‘Oh, no, you have to tell me to tell him to cancel.’ So he repeated, ‘Go tell Iakovos that we’re not going to go. If Bartholomew doesn’t come, I’m not coming.’ So I went back to Iakovos and he said, ‘What happened?’ I said, ‘He got really mad, and he said to cancel the meeting with the President.’ Iakovos said, ‘How can we cancel the meeting with the President?’ I said, ‘I don’t know what’s going on over there. Cancel the meeting.’ He said, ‘Okay, let Bartholomew come.’”

Karloutsos’s plan had worked. And his choice had been made.

The Patriarchal Election

Patriarch Dimitrios visited the United States in the summer of 1990. Meliton of Chalcedon died in December 1989, and Bartholomew succeeded his mentor as metropolitan of Chalcedon – a position that outranked Archbishop Iakovos’s see of North and South America. The close bond between Meliton and his disciples Bartholomew and Joachim was such that he actually gave his personal home to the two of them when he died.



Fr Alex Karloutsos with his wife Xanthi, President George H.W. Bush, and Archbishop Iakovos

Archbishop Iakovos could see that Patriarch Dimitrios’s end was nearing, and according to Fr Karloutsos, Iakovos attempted, through an intermediary, to pressure the patriarch to retire and give him the throne. Dimitrios was heartbroken – according to Fr Karloutsos, this was done in a harsh manner, and when the patriarch emerged, Bartholomew and Joachim found him weeping. Not long after this, on October 2, 1991, Patriarch Dimitrios died. Karloutsos described Metropolitans Bartholomew and Joachim as being embittered toward Iakovos for putting so much strain on the aged patriarch.

“Bartholomew wanted to become patriarch and Iakovos wanted to become patriarch,” Fr Karloutsos said. Karloutsos was now five years into a wildly successful tenure as head of Leadership 100, and he planned to bring a big delegation of Greek-American philanthropists to Dimitrios’s

funeral in Istanbul. “So we filled up a plane, with Archbishop Iakovos leading the delegation. And we got a delegation from the White House – the first time in the history of the United States that a delegation representing the President attended the funeral of a patriarch. Now, Iakovos was setting himself up as the candidate, and I told him, ‘This would make you the leading candidate, Your Eminence. So this is the right thing for you to do. Show the strength of America, that you’re bringing these people over.’ He loved the idea. Then I got a phone call while he was in Switzerland, saying that Iakovos wants to become Ecumenical Patriarch, and they wanted me to handle the White House – they wanted Iakovos’s name imposed.”

Under Turkish law, all candidates for Ecumenical Patriarch must be pre-approved by the governor of Istanbul. In the last election, 1972, the Turks

had vetoed all the leading candidates, including Metropolitan Meliton and Archbishop Iakovos. This time, Iakovos wanted his name imposed, and he wanted Karloutsos to secure the American government's support for this plan.

"I arrived in Istanbul," Fr Karloutsos remembered, "and I got a phone call from Bartholomew. He says, 'I'd like to see you. The driver will be in front of the Hilton.' I had just left a meeting where the American power group, the money guys, were all pushing the idea that Iakovos was to become Ecumenical Patriarch. I'm in that meeting, I leave that meeting, I get in the car. It was a Mercedes, and he took me to this neighborhood. I didn't know where I was. I knocked on the door, and a priest opened it. I went into the room and Joachim was there. We were talking, and then Bartholomew came in. And Joachim said to me, 'Listen, we need help. The Turkish government will erase names. The number one candidate of ours is Bartholomew. Our geronda, Meliton, his name was erased, and three others, at the election after Athenagoras. We don't want you to ask for anybody's name to be imposed. What we want you to do is please help arrange for the Turks not to erase any names – for the Turkish government not to interfere in the election. If they erase Bartholomew's name, I'll be patriarch. But we don't want anybody's name erased and we don't want anybody's name imposed.' I said to Bartholomew, 'But people are saying, why don't you come to America and let Iakovos come

here, who's the leading personality in the world – that might be the best way of succession.' Joachim thought I was crazy when I said it, that I couldn't be trusted at that point, because why am I saying that? Bartholomew knew that I was not that kind of a person, and said, 'I love the patriarchate. Even if I'm going to be an assistant, I'm not going to America. I've got to stay where my heart is. So take that out of your mind. All that I want you to do is this. So I said, 'You have my word, I'll do that.' When I told my wife about all that, she said, 'You're stupid.' I said, 'What do you mean, I'm stupid?' She said, 'Do you think that Iakovos, if he became Ecumenical Patriarch, would allow Bartholomew to go to America?' I said, 'Well, that was stupid.' I told this to Bartholomew, and he said, 'Listen to your wife.'"

Fr Karloutsos now had two conflicting assignments. "My task was then to make sure that the President knew that Iakovos wanted to be Ecumenical Patriarch, but he had to know that the policy should be not to impose anybody's name or erase a name. So then, what did I do? I always keep my word." He called a couple of Bush's top advisors and told them that the policy should be not to erase or impose any names. National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft agreed. Then Karloutsos went to a big-time Greek philanthropist, Alec Courtelis, and told him to call Bush directly and advocate for Iakovos. "But the position had already come out of the White House, not to erase or impose any names. So Bush told the philanthropist, 'How can we impose

Archbishop Iakovos's name when we're telling the Turkish government that they can't erase anybody's name? That's our position. We're not going to change that position.'"

Technically, Fr Karloutsos had done what both Iakovos and Bartholomew wanted – but the order was crucial. "There were two positions – I just arranged the one before the other. Then on October 20, I got a phone call to my home in New York. I was playing basketball in the backyard with my son Michael. My wife says, 'Alex, Alex, the White House is on the phone! It's somebody named General something.' I took the phone. General Scowcroft said, 'Father Alex, I want you to know that it was just confirmed that the Turkish government will send back the list without any names being erased.' So I called up Bartholomew: 'Your Eminence, I was just informed that they're not erasing any names.' Hopefully it's true! Two days later, the Turkish government returned the list. No names erased."

At this pivotal moment, Fr Karloutsos was in, not Istanbul, but New York. The reason is that he was helping the Orthodox Church in America arrange a landmark visit of Patriarch Alexei II of Moscow – a task he undertook with Metropolitan Bartholomew's blessing. "I was in the car with [OCA chancellor] Bob Kondratich, on my way to LaGuardia airport, and my wife called me on my cell phone. She said, 'Bartholomew is elected! Bartholomew is the patriarch!' Oh, my God! So I went down to the State Department with Kondratich."

Archbishop Iakovos, too, was in America at the time of the election. Fr Karloutsos insisted that Iakovos had to attend Patriarch Bartholomew's enthronement: "He cannot look embittered, because they're all going to say there's going to be a division between them. I reached out to the White House, and they arranged, for the first time in the history of the United States, for a Presidential delegation to go to the enthronement of the Ecumenical Patriarch. And the President asked his brother, Bucky Bush, to represent him." Bartholomew refused to accept a phone call from Iakovos, still bitter over his treatment of the late Patriarch Dimitrios.

The new patriarch wanted to hold his enthronement right away, just a few days after the election, but Fr Karloutsos convinced him to wait ten days, to give him time to organize the American delegation. "And he agreed to it," Karloutsos said, "and that's how we chose November 2."

Karloutsos was responsible for picking up Bucky Bush from the Istanbul airport. "When I went to the airport to pick up Bucky Bush, the consul general told me, 'I'm very happy for you, Father Alex.' I said, 'Why is that?' He said, 'Your man won.' I said, 'He wasn't my man.' He said, 'We all know the same thing, the State Department, everybody knows. But you realize one thing?' I said, 'What's that?' He said, 'People from the Phanar went to Ankara to erase Bartholomew's name.'" This last statement showed the reach of Archbishop Iakovos and portended difficulties to come.

Exile

It is true that Fr Karloutsos's man – his friend – had become patriarch – but his master, Iakovos, had not. This was the final straw. Archbishop Iakovos, who viewed Karloutsos as a traitor, gave him the cold shoulder for a few months, and after Pascha, he offered him a choice: either quit his job at the archdiocese, or be fired. Karloutsos quit. He was given three months' pay and banned from serving anywhere in the archdiocese.

Unemployed and effectively suspended from the priesthood, Fr Karloutsos was in a dark place. He traveled to Istanbul and met in person with Patriarch Bartholomew. 'I said, 'Your All-Holiness, I did what I did because of my love for the Church. Now I'm in exile, and I know Iakovos will seek to destroy me. So what I'd like you to do is to ask for me to come to Constantinople and serve.' He said to me, 'You realize what you're asking?' I said, 'Did you realize what you asked me to do with the Turkish government? I put my life on the line, and I don't want to end up like other priests and go into business or become an executive or a multimillionaire. I want to live my life as a priest.' He said, 'Well, let me think about it.' He spoke to Joachim, who was his conscience. And Joachim said, 'You realize, having Father Alex here, what he could do for us? He opens up all these doors. Plus, we owe him.' So the patriarch called me the next day and said, 'I'm going to ask for you.' Which was a big deal, because the greater did not ask the lesser." Initially, Archbishop Iakovos refused to grant the release, but in the end he relented.



The enthronement of
Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

"For four years, I was in exile in Constantinople," Karloutsos said. "I was maligned, I was called Benedict Arnold, because Iakovos controlled the narrative. It made me Public Enemy Number One. I was condemned by fellow priests, by lay people whom I helped. For four years, I was struggling, with my ego, with 'who is Father Alex? Did I do the right thing? Did I serve the Church?'"

One day, in Istanbul, Fr Karloutsos was having lunch with Patriarch Bartholomew. "I don't want to see you again until you read *The Great Church in Captivity*," the patriarch said. Karloutsos had never encountered the famous Steven Runciman book on the Ecumenical Patriarchate under Ottoman rule. "Read the book," Bartholomew told him, "and then we can have a conversation about your role in the Mother Church."

Father Alex and the Mother Church



Fr Alex Karloutsos with Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope John Paul III

Kissinger

It was a dark and stormy night.

"In 1983, we were living in Pelham Manor, Westchester County," Fr Alex Karloutsos told me. "It's about 11:30 at night, it's raining cats and dogs, thunderbolts. It was unbelievable. I'm in bed late at night, and the doorbell rings. My wife says to me, 'You can't

go down there. It could be somebody crazy.' I said, 'I've got to go down there – something's wrong.' There's a knock on our door. Somebody might be in trouble. She finally relented, and I went down, and I opened the door. I recognized the guy immediately. He said, 'I've got to call my father, sir. I'm a student at Yale University. Our car broke down on Highway 95.' 'Sure,' I said, 'The phone's

in the back.' So he goes to make the phone call, and he comes back, and I said, 'You know something – have your friends come in. We'll make hot chocolate while you wait. But I want you to know – your dad is the most hated man in the Greek community.' 'What?' 'You're Henry Kissinger's son.' 'Yes, I am.'"

Henry Kissinger was the National Security Advisor to Richard Nixon when Patriarch Athenagoras died in 1972. With the patriarchal election looming, Kissinger told Vice President Spiro Agnew, "I don't give a damn about the Turkish bishops. I give a damn about the Turkish government." That Turkish government went on to veto the leading candidates in the election, including Archbishop Iakovos of North and South America and Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon, the mentor of the future Patriarch Bartholomew.

Two years later, Kissinger – by now serving as both Secretary of State and National Security Advisor – gave a tacit blessing for Turkey to invade Cyprus, beginning an occupation of the northern part of the island that continues to this day. Because of this, Kissinger became despised by many Greeks. But Fr Karloutsos took pity on his son David that stormy night in 1983.

The following year, Fr Karloutsos arranged for Archbishop Iakovos to give the closing prayers at both the Democratic and the Republican National Conventions. "On the night when Vice President Bush was to speak, I'm walking Archbishop Iakovos down the stairs to sit with Barbara Bush. I had arranged for Iakovos to sit

on the right and Billy Graham to her left. Right behind Barbara Bush was Henry Kissinger with his son. So I walked down. David sees me, jumps out of his seat, and says, 'Dad, this is Father Alex, the Greek Orthodox priest I was telling you about.' Kissinger goes, 'Father, I want to thank you for taking care of my son. I was so worried. And he told me what you did for him and how kind your wife and you were to him and his friends.'"

It happened that Kissinger was close friends with Ahmet Ertegun, the founder of Atlantic Records. Fr Karloutsos also became friends with Ertegun. One day in the 1990s, Ertegun was scheduled to host a dinner at the Chirigan Palace in Istanbul with Turkish prime minister Tansu Çiller, honoring Kissinger, who had been Çiller's professor. Ertegun called up Karloutsos and asked if Patriarch Bartholomew would like to attend. "It would be his honor," Fr Karloutsos recalled Ertegun saying, "for his wife Mica and him to host His All-Holiness along with the most powerful and influential people in Turkey."

"So we're there at Mica's table, and I see Ahmet, and I say to Patriarch Bartholomew, 'I have to get up now. I have to do something.' He said, 'What are you going to do?' So I get up and I move towards Tansu Çiller and Ahmet Ertegun and Henry Kissinger. Ahmet sees me and goes, 'Father Alex!' and I said, 'Ahmet, I just want to thank you. The patriarch wanted me to thank you for inviting him.' Then I turned to Dr Kissinger. And I said, 'Mister Secretary, how is David?' He

says, 'Father Alex, it's you! What are you doing here?' I said, 'Well, the Ecumenical Patriarch was invited by Ahmet, and I just wanted to say hello, and he wanted me to say hello to you.' He said, 'The Ecumenical Patriarch is here? Don't you think I should go over and say hello?' I said, 'I believe that is the right thing to do, Mister Secretary.' Now, remember that Henry Kissinger is like a god to the Turks. This is the guy who's protected Turkey. He's educated all those Turkish intellectuals, Turkish ambassadors, all these powerful businessmen. He's been their greatest advocate. So all of a sudden, Tansu Çiller now sees this god get up, he walks across the room, this Turkish king, and where's he walking to? So everybody's looking – where is he walking to with a Greek Orthodox priest in front of him? I take him to the Ecumenical Patriarch. The patriarch got up and they conversed for ten minutes in German. Oh my gosh. So everything at the banquet is paralyzed because they're seeing this. Now, when Tansu Çiller spoke, she did not recognize the Ecumenical Patriarch's presence – but when Henry Kissinger spoke, he did, with great respect."

"You realize, having Father Alex here, what he could do for us?" Metropolitan Joachim had said to his best friend Patriarch Bartholomew in 1992, when the patriarch broke normal protocol to request Fr Karloutsos's transfer from Archbishop Iakovos. This is one of a great many examples of the service that Karloutsos provided to the Phanar.

John Paul II

"The [figurative] walls around the patriarchate are put up by the Turks on the outside, because they're still invading from 1453," Fr Karloutsos said. "The patriarch wanted to tear down the walls because everybody else lived in fear. Bartholomew is trying to get into the Turkish community, but they're afraid of him and the Phanariotes, and he's trying to connect with them. So who could tear down these walls separating the Phanar from the rest of Istanbul? That was my key role back then. I helped knock down a few walls and created a connection between the patriarchate and the business people and intellectuals of Turkey."

But the walls weren't just between the Phanar and the Turkish people – another sort of wall still separated the patriarchate from its American archdiocese. Fr Karloutsos explains that this was because of Archbishop Iakovos, who intentionally kept the patriarchate at an arm's length from his people.

A pivotal moment came in June of 1995. Patriarch Bartholomew was scheduled to make an historic visit to Rome to meet with Pope John Paul II. Karloutsos seized the opportunity – if Patriarch Bartholomew wasn't yet a larger-than-life figure in the Greek-American community, John Paul II certainly was. "They grew up with the Pope of Rome. They did not grow up with the Ecumenical Patriarch." So Fr Karloutsos invited key Greek-American leaders and philanthropists to join the patriarchal entourage in Rome. The move had its intended effect. "They

saw the Ecumenical Patriarch as equal to the Pope of Rome. They started understanding the majesty of the Mother Church.

"Four years had gone by since Bartholomew's election, and Archbishop Iakovos had not gone to the patriarchate. There was tension between them. I'm the one bringing Greek-Americans to the patriarchate like John Kapioltas, the President of Sheraton, who got married in Constantinople. Iakovos can't stop Greek-Americans from traveling, and he can't stop me because I'm serving under the Mother Church. He can stop me from celebrating liturgy in America, but when I'm with the patriarch, I'm celebrating liturgy, and these people are seeing me serving the number one Orthodox hierarch in the world. They see that I haven't died, they're seeing that I can survive."

The Clintons

Soon after this, in August 1995, Archbishop Iakovos paid a visit to Istanbul – his first visit to the patriarchate since Bartholomew's election and enthronement. He was eighty-four years old. And he made a shocking move: he submitted his resignation as archbishop, effective a year later, on his eighty-fifth birthday. "It was right after Rome," Fr Karloutsos explained. "All the power was going towards Bartholomew, and it really hit Archbishop Iakovos's ego. He saw his influence waning, and I think in his mind, he thought Bartholomew would never have the nerve to accept his resignation. I know in his mind, he

said, 'I will see how much they love or hate me. I will create something.' I think it was a desperate move, because the patriarch never asked for his resignation – that's a lie. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew never forced him to resign; he would never do that. He loved and respected the archbishop a great deal. That idea is a total lie, a misconception – he would never have done that. But Iakovos felt that if he resigned, they would not have the temerity to accept it."

If that's what Archbishop Iakovos thought, he was wrong: Patriarch Bartholomew accepted his resignation. "Iakovos was blindsided," Fr Karloutsos said. "But he gave it a year, and by giving it a year, he could come back to America and create problems against the patriarch, claiming that the patriarch forced him to resign. He created a narrative during that period of time. And he also said that Father Alex was the one who created the distance between him and the patriarch. I was condemned for a year by priests and lay people and hierarchs. For an entire year, I had to go through hearing what a horrible person I was."

In the summer of 1996, Archbishop Iakovos was succeeded by Archbishop Spyridon. Fr Karloutsos arranged for First Lady Hillary Clinton to attend the enthronement. I was curious – how did Karloutsos develop his relationship with the Clintons? He explained that it went back to the 1992 presidential election. "I was close to [Clinton aide] George Stephanopoulos, so that was a natural bridge to the Clintons.



President Bill Clinton and Patriarch Bartholomew, with Chelsea Clinton, Hillary Clinton, and Fr Alex Karloutsos among those looking on.

[Billionaire Greek-American] John Catsimatidis told me, 'You got me to give \$100,000 to the Democrats for Dukakis. I've decided to put my political wager on Bill Clinton.' I said, 'You've got to be kidding me!' He says, 'No, I've just got a feeling about this guy.' And so John Catsimatidis was very close to Clinton. I went to the inauguration with John."

Because of Karloutsos's relationship with the Clintons, when Hillary and her daughter Chelsea traveled to Istanbul shortly after this, they made a point to visit the patriarchate, where they met privately with Patriarch Bartholomew. The First Lady gave the patriarch a copy of her new book, *It Takes a Village*. The sixteen-year-old Chelsea, says Karloutsos, "told my wife Xanthi, 'I want my father to come back here.'"

The next year, 1997, Patriarch Bartholomew came to the United States – his first visit to America as Ecumenical Patriarch. As with Patriarch Dimitrios's visit seven years earlier, Fr Karloutsos played a central role, securing the Gold Medal of Congress for the patriarch, with the help of Andy Manatos, among many other honors. Karloutsos points out that this award is actually higher than the Presidential Medal of Freedom. "Because it comes from the President, many people consider the Presidential Medal to be higher than the Gold Medal of Congress," Fr Karloutsos explains, "but in reality, the highest and oldest honor of the United States is the Gold Medal of Congress. It was first given to President George Washington, the father of our country."

Fr Karloutsos also arranged for Bartholomew to meet with President

Clinton, and afterward, Hillary Clinton hosted a reception in the White House in the patriarch's honor. Karloutsos also helped Al Gore host the patriarch at the vice presidential residence. There, Gore bestowed the moniker "the Green Patriarch" on Bartholomew for his environmental advocacy.

In 1999, President Clinton traveled to Turkey, along with his wife and daughter. The trip included a visit to Patriarch Bartholomew at the Phanar, where a remarkable moment occurred. The patriarchal cathedral of Saint George houses a portion of the Column of Flagellation, where, according to tradition, Christ was bound and scourged before his crucifixion. According to Fr Karloutsos, at Chelsea

Clinton's request, "the patriarch prayed over Bill Clinton before the column, and President Clinton asked the patriarch for forgiveness, and the patriarch blessed him."

Unimaginable a decade earlier, by the end of the 1990s, the Ecumenical Patriarch had been received as a head of state in America, prayed over the President of the United States at the Phanar, and begun to establish an image as the equal of the Pope of Rome. Metropolitan Joachim foretold to Patriarch Bartholomew that Fr Karloutsos could open doors for the Phanar, and Karloutsos proved that prophecy correct.

Karloutsos and 9/11



The first lighting of St Nicholas Shrine, September 11, 2021. Fr Alex Karloutsos stands to the right of Archbishop Elpidophoros. (Photo: Orthodox Observer / Brittainy Newman)

By 2001, the brief tenure of Archbishop Spyridon had come to an end, and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America was now led by Archbishop Demetrios. Fr Alex Karloutsos was, by this point, a parish priest in the Hamptons, on Long Island. No longer an exile, he had returned

to Archdiocesan work as Executive Director of Leadership 100, the major endowment fund of the Archdiocese and as the Archbishop's representative to the White House and Congress.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Fr Karloutsos and his wife Xanthi were in his car driving to the Archdiocesan headquarters in New

York City, when he got a call from his secretary who told him that a plane had just flown into one of the Twin Towers. Karloutsos immediately called Archbishop Demetrios and the Archdiocesan VP / billionaire Michael Jaharis, who were in Boston. "I said, 'Don't get on a plane.' And then all communications broke down. I tried to get into the city, but I couldn't, so we went to our son's apartment in Astoria and saw Tower Two fall." His next move was to organize a church service at his parish, to pray in the midst of the crisis. "I thought we'd get twenty people, but it was as if it was an Easter night. It was Pascha, but it felt more like Holy Friday than Holy Saturday."

Returning home after the service, Karloutsos got a phone call: it was the Port Authority, for whom Fr Karloutsos served as a chaplain. They needed him to come in to help with the relief efforts, to comfort victims. Karloutsos wondered how he'd possibly get to the relief site, since all the roads were closed. He was told, "Go on the left side of the road and show your badge at every checkpoint." So Karloutsos prepared to head out, and he let his wife Xanthi know he was leaving. "She said, 'I'm going with you.' I said, 'You can't come with me.'" But she insisted, and he agreed. "I had to listen to my wife," he told me. "I said to myself, 'I'm going to be the only guy with his wife near him!' But I married a Greek from Northern Epiros, you know?"

Every ten miles of their drive, they had to stop at a checkpoint, and Fr Karloutsos showed his badge and was allowed to continue. "I've been in mo-

torcades with Presidents of the United States, but this was different. This was sailing all the way through nothing – no one's on the road. They cleared it; they closed everything down. We went down to where St Nicholas [Greek Orthodox Church] was [at Ground Zero], and it looked like a Godzilla or King Kong movie. FBI, CIA, all these different police kind of jackets, uniforms, fire trucks, everything smoking. We went to the Holland Tunnel, and there were these two very, very large garbage trucks. They were bigger than tanks. You could not get through. So I went to the Holland Tunnel and showed them my badge, and they opened up so I could drive through."

They arrived at the makeshift relief site. "People were crying because we lost 37 policemen from the Port Authority. I said, 'What do you want us



George Tenet, CIA Director
and Greek Orthodox Christian

to do?' I was told, 'We don't want you to do too much. Just look holy. Just help us. Pray for us, talk to us, touch us. We just need to feel good, that there's hope.' So I went around, talked with people, did what I could, tried to comfort. I was shocked when I saw an Orthodox Jewish rabbi comforting the wife of the Superintendent of Police who had just died. She was Catholic, he was actually holding her. Love knew no bounds that night, and I witnessed humanity's finest hour in the midst of the worst inhumanity imaginable."

In the coming days, Fr Karloutsos helped Archbishop Demetrios and other Orthodox bishops visit the site – including the destroyed Greek Orthodox church of St Nicholas, which was the only house of worship destroyed on 9/11. Decades earlier, Fr Karloutsos's own father – himself a priest – had served at that parish.

On September 14, President George W. Bush stood on the rubble at Ground Zero and famously declared, "I can hear you, the rest of the world hears you, and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon." Fr Karloutsos was there, just a few yards away from the President. Then, Bush and other dignitaries bowed their heads as Cardinal Egan offered a hope-filled prayer. After this, everyone drove down to Washington, DC for a reception of religious leaders. ("You could only drive, not fly," Karloutsos explains.)

Fr Karloutsos arranged for a meeting with CIA Director George Tenet, who is Greek Orthodox. "We went to the CIA and the Archbishop

prayed over George. He was shaken up, but we prayed with him, and then the Archbishop had a private meeting with the President in the Oval Office. There were about ten religious leaders there. The Mormons were left out. I remember sitting with the head of the Mormon church, and he was asking how my archbishop got in there. And then they went into the Roosevelt Room, and the President bowed his head and asked the Archbishop to pray over him. Oh wow! So at the time we needed help as a nation, it was an Orthodox prayer that strengthened the President of the United States."

Beyond the immediate response to the tragedy, Fr Karloutsos found himself running point on the effort to rebuild St Nicholas at Ground Zero. Archbishop Demetrios expected to rebuild at the exact location where



The original St Nicholas Church
at 155 Cedar Street, with the
Twin Towers in the background.



Fr Alex Karloutsos and Archbishop Elpidophoros meeting with Governor Andrew Cuomo at the Greek Archdiocese headquarters

the old church had stood – 155 Cedar Street. Fr Karloutsos disagreed. “It became apparent to me that they were making a park, Liberty Park, that would be a hub, like the Acropolis in Athens. 155 Cedar was on the wrong side of the street. I said, we should move it to a new site, 130 Liberty – that’s the best side of the street, the prime spot. I told the Archbishop, just trust me. And that’s what we did. Our old property was 1450 square feet. Our new prop-

erty is 4,500 square feet with 7,000 square feet of landscaping complementing our complex.

This began when George Pataki was Governor of New York. “But then the administrations changed,” Karloutsos told me. “There were different Port Authority Directors, and some didn’t want us at Ground Zero at all. Some of them were atheists. At one point, after a couple more Governors and Executive Directors, we were told by Executive

Director Chris Ward that they’re going to take the land using eminent domain.”

But then, an opportunity: “Andrew Cuomo was running for governor. I agreed with four guys – John Catsimatidis, Dennis Mehiel, Jim Chanos, and George Tsunis – who said, we’ve got to support Andrew, and we’ve got to go all-in for the Shrine at Ground Zero. So then I got a phone call, I think it was from George Tsunis or Dennis Mehiel one of them, and they said, ‘There’s going to be a breakfast for Andrew Cuomo in East Hampton, at Jim Chanos’s house – you have to come.’ I said, ‘When is it?’ ‘Sunday morning.’ I said, ‘Sunday morning, are you nuts? You think I’m going to miss liturgy?’ He says, ‘Father Alex, he’s going to be there from ten to twelve.’ I thought, ten to twelve, ten to twelve... I said, ‘You know what I can do? I’ll receive communion and then just take off. I’ll do the liturgy, then take off. Just keep Andrew there.’ So I got there and only the Greeks are left with him. He said, ‘I’ve been waiting for you, Father. They wouldn’t let me leave. They said that you’re the one who’s going to tell me what the Greek Orthodox would like.’ So I told him about our house of worship, and how we’d like it built at Ground Zero, and how the director is trying to throw us out on eminent domain. Cuomo said, ‘Let me think about it.’

“So then there are two or three more fundraisers, and every time I went to a fundraiser, Andrew would say, ‘Father Alex, what would you like?’ Everybody would turn to me, and I’d say, ‘Well, we’d like to build the church, and I’d

like you to fire Chris Ward, the Director of the Port Authority.’ So it goes on for the [campaign] season, and it looks like he’s definitely going to win. And we’re doing the last fundraiser at Dennis Mehiel’s house on 95th Street, and I got up and Andrew said, ‘Yes, Father Alex?’ – now, he knew what I was going to say – ‘What would you like?’ I said, ‘I would like to have St Nicholas Shrine built, and I’d like you to fire Chris Ward.’ After I finished, he said, ‘I’d like to talk with you privately.’ Then he said to me, ‘I want you to tell the Archbishop that we are going to rebuild St Nicholas Shrine. And you should know, my birthday December 6, the feast day of St Nicholas, and yes, I have the balls to fire Chris Ward.’” Cuomo won the gubernatorial election and kept his word, firing Ward within the year.

By this point, a decade had passed since 9/11. The St Nicholas building project dragged on slowly, with a lot of difficulties. Fr Karloutsos quickly raised \$25 million, giving the Archdiocese a total of \$40 million to spend on the project. He recalls, “We thought the thing would be about \$25-35 million, but as the bids went out and we saw Santiago Calatrava’s design, what he built was going to be a lot more, maybe about \$60 million. We’re building. I’m working with them. I got architects, I got to get it all done. Then I asked Dennis Miehle to handle the political process. I was basically coordinating different people, but the one who took

over monitoring the funds and spending the funds and working with the different elements was Jerry Dimitriou.”

What followed has been pretty well-documented in the Greek-American media: millions of dollars went missing from the St Nicholas Shrine fund, and the entire project was in jeopardy. Archbishop Demetrios was replaced by the new Archbishop Elpidophoros. And Fr Karloutsos needed to raise a lot more money, to account for massive cost increases due to the delays. In what is unquestionably the most impressive fundraising achievement in

Orthodox history, Karloutsos worked with Michael Psaros, under the guidance of the Archbishop, to raise \$55 million for the Shrine over a 55-day stretch in 2019. As they neared the end of that period, still running short of their target, Karloutsos came up with an idea: he convinced the Port Authority to let the Archdiocese put a donor wall outside of the church. “As soon as we announced that there would be a donor wall in Liberty Park forever, we raised \$12 million in 12 days.”

The Shrine was consecrated on the Fourth of July, 2022.

Karloutsos and Biden



The Biden and Karloutsos families at Fr Alex Karloutsos's parish in the Hamptons, 2016.

“I first met Joe Biden in 1987, when he ran for President of the United States,” Fr Alex Karloutsos told me. Then-Senator Biden was running in the Democratic primary, which was ultimately won by Greek-American Michael Dukakis. A lawyer-friend from Chicago, Theodore J. Theophilos, approached Karloutsos to ask for his support for Biden. Karloutsos was

hesitant: the Greeks certainly couldn't abandon Dukakis, and Karloutsos also had a strong relationship with George H.W. Bush, the presumptive Republican nominee. “But the truth is that Joe Biden had been a very strong friend of the Greek-American community, and it's important that if your friend is loyal, you don't give up on your friend because you're helping your relatives. So we did not abandon

Joe Biden, but we did help Michael Dukakis a great deal more.”

Biden dropped out before the year was over, but he and Karloutsos would see each other from time to time, and they developed a friendly relationship through Mark Angelson, one of Biden’s closest friends and a trusted colleague of Ted Theophilos. “In the Senate, with Cyprus issues and Greek issues and Greek-American issues, he was all-in. He became one of the champions.” But Biden and Karloutsos weren’t especially close ... yet.

The turning point came in 2008. “He was running for President against Obama and Hillary, and the Biden campaign was not getting money from the Jewish community and the black community, which they normally got. Hillary was taking the Jewish money, and the black community was supporting Obama. Dennis Toner, who was Biden’s chief of staff, went to Andy Manatos and said, ‘Listen, we don’t have the money to stay in this race, and we need it. Can you guys help us?’ Andy came to me – Andy’s the guy who gave him the nickname “Bidenopoulos” – and he asked if I’d help find some serious donors. So I brought in George Tsunis, and George did a great job in raising money, and that helped keep Biden in the race. And then I got my other friends to raise money, and he saw that I was loyal to the end. After he became Vice President of the United States, we were close.” Biden invited Karloutsos

to the Vice Presidential residence for various events – not just official but personal, such as for Christmas. “He introduced me to his son Beau when he was running for attorney general of Delaware again. He introduced me to his son Hunter, and we became friends with Hunter. Hunter and my son Michael, and Beau, and us, and his niece Carolyn Biden, we were all friends.” Hunter Biden would later tell Fr Karloutsos, “Father Alex, the Karloutsos family, the Biden family – it’s one family.”

In 2014, Biden’s son Beau was running for governor of Delaware, and Joe – who was Vice President at that point – had to step in for his son as speaker at a Greek-American campaign event hosted by Michael Karloutsos at his Water Works Restaurant in Philadelphia. Fr Karloutsos and his wife Xanthi were there. He sums up Biden’s comments: “He says, ‘You know, Beau could not be here, so I’m filling in. I hope you guys find it’s alright’ – you know, kidding around, here’s the Vice President. And he says, ‘I’m the Vice President of the United States, and I owe it all to you, to the Greek community. When I was running –’ and then he went through the story about the black and Jewish communities, ‘– but you guys stepped up. If you had not stepped up, I wouldn’t have stayed in the race. You kept me in the race, and I got to know Barack, and because of that, I became Vice President. So if it wasn’t for the Greeks, for you, Father Alex, and for others, I would not be Vice President of the United States.’ And Biden would not have become



Fr Alex Karloutsos and President Barack Obama

President of the United States if he hadn’t first been Vice President,” Fr Karloutsos added.

The next year, Beau Biden died of cancer. Fr Karloutsos attended the funeral, and afterward, the Biden family created the Beau Biden Foundation. “Hunter called up and said that they wanted to have a Karloutsos as part of Biden family team for the foundation. They wanted Presbytera Xanthi to be on the board.” The Biden and Karloutsos families became even closer. Fr Karloutsos arranged for the

Beau Biden Foundation to be the beneficiary at “Blue Dream,” an annual fundraiser held at Karloutsos’s parish in the Hamptons, raising \$200,000. The Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate gave Biden their highest honor, the Patriarch Athenagoras Human Rights Award. When Fr Karloutsos and his wife Xanthi were themselves given the Athenagoras award, Biden came for the ceremony as a surprise with his son Hunter. Biden and Karloutsos spent time together at innumerable events, even holding board meetings for the

Beau Biden Foundation at the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese headquarters in New York City.

(This article is mostly about the relationship between Biden and Karloutsos, but there's a story from the Obama years that has to be included.)

"Everybody in the world wanted to meet Obama when he was first elected, right?" Karloutsos began. "He was now President of the United States, and everybody wanted to meet him. So the heads of state of the world were thinking of the line that would make sense. What would you tell Obama that would immediately get his attention, and he would feel that you know him? So Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew was going to meet Obama with Archbishop Demetrios at the Conrad Istanbul Hotel, and the Patriarch said to me, 'What do you think I should say to Obama?' I said, 'I think you should tell him, Mister President, I know that you know a lot of different things, but you were one hundred percent right about North Carolina winning the NCAA March Madness basketball title.' The Archbishop immediately says, 'That's ridiculous, Father Alex.' I said, 'Your Eminence, I know Barack Obama, I know what will get his attention.' The Archbishop says to the Patriarch, 'Don't do it.' I said, 'Panagiotate [Your All-Holiness], trust me, please don't listen to the Archbishop on this. I know what I'm talking about.'

"So they go to the Conrad Hotel, and they're talking, and before the conversation ends, His All Holiness says, 'By the way, Mister President, I commend

you. You were one hundred percent right. North Carolina won.' So after this, Obama and his chief of staff Rahm Emanuel get on the Air Force One, they're leaving, and Rahm Emanuel calls George Stephanopoulos, and he goes, 'George, you won't believe this. Everywhere we've been going, meeting heads of state, all these great advisors, and they're all trying to get Obama's favor and attention. You know what got his attention? Your Patriarch over here, he congratulated him about North Carolina.' So George called me up and told me, Patriarch Bartholomew got the line that nobody else could get."

"Father Alex, the Karloutsos family, the Biden family – it's one family," Hunter Biden once told Fr Karloutsos.

In April 2015, Karloutsos was visiting the White House. "We're at the White House, and Hunter says, 'If you're free, my dad's going to come by the Cafe Milano. I'd love for you to come by. We're having a small dinner.' So I said, 'Sure.' I went to my wife and said, 'Well, just change our plans. We'll go to Cafe Milano with our son Michael as well.' We went into Cafe Milano in Georgetown – very nice restaurant – and I went in, and the Vice President joined later. He was sitting right across from me. We sat around a table, and there were about 20 to 25 people, and we met different people around the room. At the end of the table, on the far side, were a couple of guys from the Ukraine. It turns out that



Joe Biden and Fr Alex Karloutsos (Photo by John Mindala)

those were the guys from Burisma [a Ukrainian corporation].

"So Joe Biden comes in. He greets everybody, but he hugs me and my wife, and then he leaves." Thus, according to Karloutsos, Biden had come to the dinner because he wanted to see them – but Hunter had told Karloutsos to come because Joe Biden would be there. "On occasion," Fr Karloutsos explains, "your own children can take advantage. Like, 'I know my father likes Father Alex, and so I'm going to tell him, Father Alex will be there, and that'll make him more comfortable.' So that's how I became

part of that investigation that's been reported on in the *New York Times*."

A few months later, in the summer of 2015, Karloutsos was on a plane flying into New York's JFK airport. An incident occurred on the plane – a drunk man apparently tried to touch a young woman inappropriately. Karloutsos's wife Xanthi realized what was happening and informed a flight attendant, and after the plane landed, law enforcement came to get the man.

As Fr Karloutsos was getting off of the plane, his phone rang. “The phone rings, and the lady on the phone says, ‘Father Alex, it’s the White House. The Vice President wants to talk to you.’ Then all of the a sudden, the police come up to me, and they said, ‘Father, we’ve got to speak to you.’ And the Vice President is talking to me – I’ve never told Joe this story, I’ve got to tell him this story! – the Vice President is talking, saying, ‘Father Alex, we’re very concerned about Greece leaving the European Union, and it’s not only about Greece, but it’s about the security of the United States that has consequences for Israel.’ And he started globalizing everything and saying how we’re all interconnected.

“In the meantime, the policeman says, ‘Sir, put down the phone.’ And Biden is saying to me, ‘Who can I talk to in the Greek community.’ I said, ‘Well, Mr. Vice President, [then-Prime Minister of Greece] Tsipras is so hated because he’s a communist, and there’s only one guy that I know that actually met with Tsipras and can do it, and his name is Angelo Tsakopoulos.’ The Vice President said, ‘You know, Father, actually we need *your* help to make sure this doesn’t happen. How do I get this thing done?’ In the meantime, the policeman is now threatening to put me in jail because I’m talking on the phone. ‘Put down the damn phone, sir!’ My daughter said, ‘Do you know my father is a Port Authority chaplain, and he’s talking to the Vice President of the United States. This is ridiculous.’ The policeman says, ‘He’s really talking to the Vice President??’”

Years earlier, Fr Karloutsos had become acquainted with the Turkish religious figure Fethullah Gulen, leader of the political Islamist Hizmet Movement, who had been in exile in the United States since 1999. Gulen was having trouble getting a green card to stay in the U.S., and at the request of the AK Party, Karloutsos helped him find a law firm and even wrote a letter in support. “Mr. Gulen is not only one of the world’s foremost spiritual leaders, he is also one of the world’s top religious scholars,” Karloutsos said in his letter. The United States ultimately granted Gulen’s application.

In July 2016, just a couple weeks after the end of the Orthodox council in Crete, a faction within the Turkish military attempted a coup d’etat, which was crushed by Turkish President Erdogan and his supporters. The Turkish government accused Gulen and his supporters of masterminding the coup, and his group was labeled a terrorist organization.

“Somebody in Russia tried to tie me to the coup,” Fr Karloutsos told me. “It was an article from Russia, saying that Father Alex is very close to Gulen. This spread around Turkey, that I was a Gulen supporter against Erdogan.” Not just Karloutsos; Patriarch Bartholomew himself was widely accused in the Turkish press, despite a lack of evidence for any involvement of the Patriarchate in the coup attempt.

Shortly after this, Fr Karloutsos was in New York City when he got a call



President Joe Biden presents the Medal of Freedom to Father Alex Karloutsos, Thursday, July 7, 2022, in the East Room of the White House. (Official White House Photo by Adam Schultz)

from the White House. He was told that Vice President Biden was going to be at a certain hotel in Times Square, and he wanted to meet with Fr Karloutsos and his wife Xanthi. “I thought we’d be there with eighty people,” Karloutsos said. “But we walked into this big room, and there’s a table set for three people: the Vice President, my wife, and myself. We were both looking at each other thinking, what’s going on here?” After chatting about their families, Biden got to the point: “He said to my wife, ‘Until things clear up, don’t let Father Alex go to Turkey, unless he comes with me.’”

“Now,” Fr Karloutsos says, “I’ve been told I can go back there. But you can be told one thing, and then you wake up the next morning and they say, ‘No,

I think you can enjoy a little bit more staying in a Turkish prison.’ It’s better safe than sorry. I don’t want to be another Andrew Brunson” (referring to an American Evangelical pastor in Turkey who was arrested and charged with supporting the coup attempt).

Biden didn’t run for President in 2016, but, of course, he did in 2020. Biden happened to be fundraising in the Hamptons when Fr Karloutsos’s parish was holding their annual Blue Dream fundraiser, and he invited Biden to make an appearance. At that point in the race, Biden was a longshot candidate. “Everyone was abandoning him,”

Karloutsos told me. "Greek-American friends of mine were pulling away – except for a guy named David Peterson. He is the son of Pete Peterson, chairman of the Blackstone Group, former Secretary of Commerce under Nixon. David said, 'Listen, I'm putting my money in again. I want you guys to stay in.' And it just so happened that Biden needed that money to go to South Carolina [for the primary], and that's where everything changed." It was Biden's first primary win and gave him strong momentum heading into the Super Tuesday primaries a few days later.

Just a week earlier, Fr Karloutsos's brother Nick had died. Biden was in the thick of the presidential campaign, but he called Karloutsos. "The phone rings, and Joe says, 'Father Alex, how are you?' I said, 'I'm fine.' He goes, 'I'm really concerned – I heard your brother died. I lost a wife, I lost a child, lost a parent, but I never lost a sibling, and I want to make sure you're alright.' I said, 'My God, you've got so many things to do. The country's resting on your shoulders. You've got to win South Carolina – don't waste your time with me!' He says, 'If I don't worry about my friends and people that support our country and love our family, then what am I doing? So I'm doing the right thing, but I want you to know that I'm praying for you and praying for the soul of your brother Nick.' He knew the name. He knew everything. I don't know how he found out. I didn't get a phone call from any of the bishops like that."

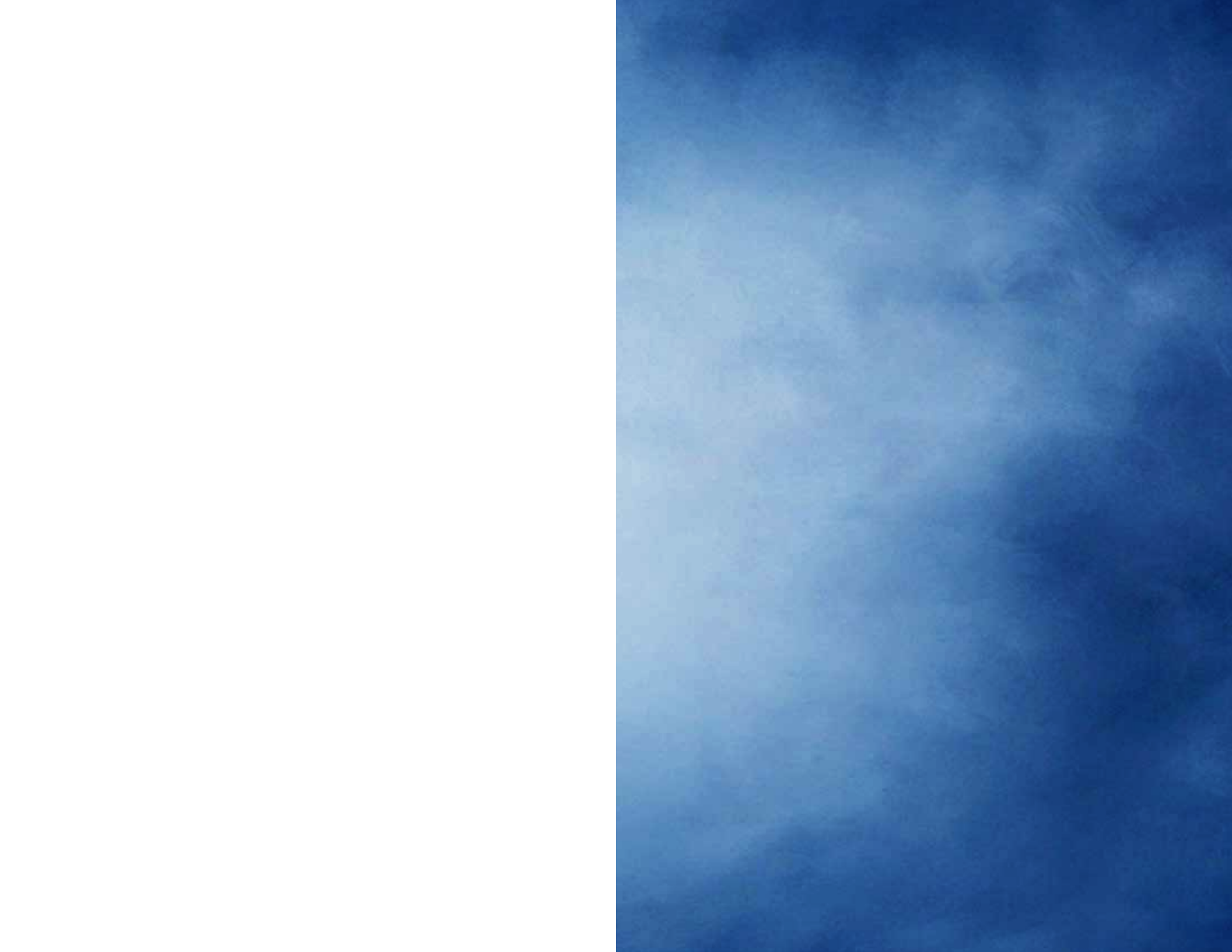
In June of 2022, Fr Karloutsos's granddaughter asked me, 'Papou, will you take me and my friends to our friend's house to go swimming?' I said, 'Sure, I'll take you over there.' So in the front seat was my granddaughter, and in the back seat were her friends. I'm driving along, and then all of a sudden the phone rings, and it shows up as 'restricted.' My granddaughter's been in the car before when the President called me, or the Vice President, so she tells her friends, 'Girls, be quiet. It's an important phone call.'

"I answered, and I hear, 'Father Alex, it's Joe Biden.' I said, 'Mr. President, how are you?' These girls are listening in the back of the car, going, 'That's the President of the United States!' And he goes, 'Father Alex, how is Xanthi now?' I said, 'She's doing really well, but how did you know she was sick?' He says, 'I follow you. You don't need to worry about it. I'm always there watching you.' I said, 'Well, I appreciate that. I'm really grateful you reached out to me, but my wife is fine.' He says, 'Well, I want her to be fine, because I want to invite you to the White House.' I said, 'That's very kind of you. What's going on?' He said, 'Did anybody tell you?' 'No.' 'I want to give you the Presidential Medal of Freedom. You've done so much for so many people. You're a good priest. You deserve the honor, and I want to give it to you. I'm going to give it to you on July 7, so make

sure your wife and your children will be able to come.'" Biden ended up going further, allowing Karloutsos to bring all of his grandchildren, too. "I had seventeen people – it was an entourage. Everybody gets seven. I got seventeen. Can you believe that?"

Through the gift of a friend, the Presidential Medal of Freedom is on display at his church in the Hamptons.

"So, that's the way it played out," Karloutsos said. Of Biden, he concluded, "We do have a meaningful, substantive relationship. I think it is about a certain amount of loss and pain, and also about the fact of being there when his family needed it, and he was there when my family needed it. And whenever he needed me politically, I was there, but I was also there when he needed me personally, and he was always there when our community needed him."





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