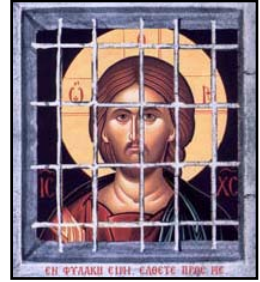


❖ METROPOLIS OF OROPOS AND PHYLE

The St. Philaret the Merciful
Orthodox Women's Guild

- Headquarters: Patron 12, Kolonos, Athens



- For the furtherance of concerted Orthodox volunteerism

“Love and Offering”

A dynamic message with salutary ramifications

A.

BY THE GRACE of Christ our Savior, Who loves mankind, and with the protection of the *Panagia Evangelistria*, with the blessing of our Father and Archpastor, His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle, and the guidance of His Grace, Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi, Acting President of the Holy Synod, on Sunday, March 2, 2008 (New Style), our Guild held a **lecture** by a member of the Onesimos Guild for the Support of Prisoners, **Ms. Panagiota Eikosipentarchou** (sociologist, psychologist, and educator) on the topic, “**Love and Offering.**”

This topic touched the heart of everyone in the audience, which filled the hall of the “Annunciation of the *Theotokos*” Spiritual Center. At the exhortation of His Grace, Bishop Cyprian, our Guild has recently been endeavoring to put “love and offering” into practice in various ways, including visits to prisons such as those of Amphissa and Korydallos.

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Following an introduction by His Grace (see section [C.](#)), Ms. Eikosipentarchou stressed, in her presentation, the importance of **offering** and **love** in people's lives—especially to those forced by cir-

cumstances to live on the fringes of society.

She likened the needs of man to a pyramid, at the base of which are our *biological needs*. Ascending the pyramid, there is need for *attention* and *acceptance* from one's environment and *self-esteem*, which lead to the pinnacle of the pyramid, *self-realization* (fulfillment of personal potential).



The majority of our imprisoned brothers and sisters in “frozen” prisons are people who have experienced rejection and abandonment from childhood and who never loved in a healthy way or esteemed themselves as people with a social *raison d'être*, since they were never loved.

These are people who lived in an environment of violence and used violence on others, lived in an environment of hatred and turned this hatred on others, lived in an environment of pain and inflicted pain on others. But were they to receive love—pure, true love—, they would give love!

If by our love we help them to love themselves, by our esteem help them to esteem themselves, and by our acceptance help them to accept the value of the Divine gift of life, we will primarily help them to free themselves, above all, from the bonds of their souls, which bonds hold love imprisoned therein like a pure white dove in a cage.

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At the end of Ms. Eikosipentarchou's presentation, Bishop Cyprian asked her some thoughtful questions, which led the discussion towards a theological approach of the topic of “*love and offering*,” as we are taught by Christ our Savior.

Also of note were the comments by Mr. Basilieos Gaïtanes, a theologian and professor at the School of Theology at the Univer-



sity of Athens, who emphasized that love in Christ is what will lead us to the “pinnacle of the pyramid,” that is, the deification of man.

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Our gathering was honored by the presence of Ms.

Nitsa (Helen) Koukoutse—a social worker at the Women’s Prison of Korydallos—and Ms. Kotoula, a representative from the Society of Friends of Large Families.

Thus, with God’s help, our Guild’s activity attracts a variety of philanthropic organizations in an effort to promote mutual acquaintanceship, help, and support, for a substantial and dynamic contribution within the philanthropic domain.



In conclusion, Bishop Cyprian offered Ms. Eikosipentarchou a work by the Icon Studio of the Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina: an Icon of Christ our Savior behind the bars of a prison cell, calling out to all:

“I am in prison; come to Me!”

All present, visibly moved, made a secret promise in their hearts to our Lord Christ:

“Yea, O Lord, Thou art in prison and we are coming to Thee!”

B.

In the context of this promise, which we gave to Christ Himself, on Monday, March 3 (New Style), Bishop Cyprian, together with two nuns from the Convent of the Holy Angels, Aphidnai, Attica, and three laypeople (one man and two members of our Women’s Guild) once again visited the Women’s Prison of Korydallos, where some of our imprisoned sisters in the unit for minors and teenage mothers had asked to have a private meeting with His Grace.

It was a very moving visit. Our imprisoned sisters, who already knew us and were waiting for us, welcomed us with great love, spontaneously embracing us.

The nuns from the Convent of the Holy Angels, Mothers Seraphima and Basileia, offered the young women flowers, edible treats [pizza and pastries], and words of consolation. Our Guild offered clothing, shoes, and phone cards.

One by one, the young women met personally with Bishop Cyprian. After speaking with him, their faces were bright and their eyes, brimming with tears of repentance, shone with the Light of Christ!

Night had already fallen when we left the prison, but our hearts were full of light—light which our imprisoned sisters transmitted to us from the Light granted to them by Christ our Savior when they fell with contrition to their knees under the *Epitrachelion* and *Omophorion* of His Grace, Bishop Cyprian. And our Lord, touching their bowed heads, said to them consolingly:

“I am together with you in prison!”

February 19, 2008 (Old Style)
† St. Philothei of Athens

Irene Archontoule
President of the Guild

C.

“I am in prison; come to Me!”

With feelings of joy and gratitude, we welcome, this evening, Ms. Panagiota Eikosipentarchou, sociologist, psychologist, educator, and member of the renowned **Onesimos** Guild for the Support of Prisoners.

By the Providence of our Lord, today’s gathering of our spiritual family and the lecture by Ms. Eikosipentarchou fall on **the Sunday of the Last Judgement**.

Our Lord, now as a Judge, is presented in the Gospel passage as saying: *“I was in prison, and ye came unto me.”* *“I was in prison,*



and ye visited me not” (St. Matthew 25:36 and 43).

That is, Christ identifies His Theandric Person with the imprisoned; thus, today and at all times, as **One Imprisoned**, he addresses us with the soul-stirring call: **“I am in prison; come to Me!”**

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In the person of Ms. **Eikosipentarchou**, I warmly thank the **Onesimos** Guild, which, for some twenty years now, has been working with unflagging zeal to bring relief to the imprisoned in many and various ways, under the protection of the Holy Apostle, Bishop, and Martyr of our Faith, St. Onesimos, disciple of the Holy Apostle Paul.

In particular, the **Onesimos** Guild:

- “Offers **assistance** and covers the needs of prisoners and their families.

- Works for the **release** of inmates from prison, according to strict criteria (e.g. the destitute, not recidivists, etc).

- Provides **accommodation in hotels** for a short period, following release from prison, for those who have no place to stay.

- Gives economic aid to charitable funds operated by prison social services.

- Provides free **legal coverage** for needy prisoners.

- Provides prison **libraries** with good literature and Christian books.

- Attends to the **professional rehabilitation** of ex-convicts and their **psychological support**.

- It also aspires to run a **hospice** for the accommodation of ex-convicts.”

We also thank the Onesimos Guild, because by its admirable work it constantly reminds us of the **Imprisoned Christ**, awakening us to His soul-stirring call: **“I am in prison; come to Me!”**

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The St. Philaret the Merciful Guild, founded in 2004 with the blessing and guidance of our Much-Revered Elder, Metropolitan Cyprian, wishes to support the work of the Onesimos Guild and to encourage its members to continue their sacred task, given that we minister unto Christ our Savior in the person of the imprisoned.

We have already approached the “world” of prisoners during our unforgettable visits to Amphissa (December 22, 2007) and Korydallos (January 23, 2008), and thus have firsthand knowledge of the drama of our imprisoned brothers and sisters.

We must place this endeavor of ours within the perspective of **concerted Orthodox volunteerism**, that we might unreservedly keep giving these people, created in the image of God, a heartfelt **embrace of love, hope, and life** on behalf of God.

The St. Philaret the Merciful Guild recently proclaimed (February 5/18, 2008) and reminded everyone that

**Christ our Savior identifies His Person
with the poor, the imprisoned, immigrants,
the ailing, strangers, and those in need**

- **We are not Christians** if their pain and needs do not become our pain and needs.
- **We are not Christians** if we simply write about or discuss them in the warmth of our homes.
- **We are not Christians** if we do not exert pressure wherever we can, legally and socially, so as to bring them some relief.
- **We are not Christians** if we do not make their needs (food, clothing, medicine, money) our concern.
- **We are not Christians** if we are afraid to put our hand in our pocket and give them, not just “something” (a pittance, a red cent) to avoid feeling embarrassed, but whatever we can for the sake of Christ and our conscience.
- **We are not Christians** if we do not see Christ Himself in the faces of these unfortunate people, since Christ identifies Himself with them.
- **We are not Christians** if we can eat and sleep when, literally next door to us, they are suffering and undergoing a slow death from exhausting and slavish work and from illnesses.

- **We are not Christians** if we can say with regard to them: “I don’t care!”
- And, of course, **we are not Christians** if we say: “Yes, poor things, but what is one to do?”

We can do a lot!
Come with us, that we might
systematize our efforts to offer love!
Strengthen concerted Orthodox volunteerism!
Let us become ministers of the Ministering God!

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Within this context of caring for all of our brothers and sisters in affliction and need, and in accordance with **Article 3** (§3f) of our *charter*, we formalize, this evening, yet another *fraternization* with a fellow Guild: the laudable and imitable Onesimos Guild for

the Support of Prisoners.

With the well-founded hope and the heartfelt wish that this *fraternization* might bear abundant fruit in Christ, by the protection of the *Theotokos*, I invite our beloved sister in Christ, Panagiota Eikosi-pentarchou, to come to the podium to deliver her address on the truly important topic, **“Love and Offering.”**

February 18/March 2, 2008

Thank you!

Sunday of the Last Judgement

†**Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi**

