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Finding Faith in Iconography: Documentary PISTEVO "I believe" Chronicles a Sacred Journey



Michael Psaros, center, being presented with the Archbishop Iakovos Leadership 100 Award for Excellence by Archbishop Demetrios and Leadership 100 Chairman, George S. Tsandikos.

The following excerpts are from an article written by Eleni Kostopoulos for the July issue of NEO Magazine. Michael Psaros and his wife, Robin are members of Leadership 100.

When Mike Psaros, co-founder and managing partner of KPS Capital Partners in New York City, was named Executive of the Year by The Hellenic American Bankers Association (HABA) last May, he was asked to provide a biopic to be presented at the award ceremony. As a shrewd businessman with a keen eye for talent, Psaros selected a seasoned professional to undertake this task; MiB Mediaworks founder Mark I. Brodie, an Emmy-winning editor and documentary filmmaker with more than 30 years of experience working for national and international broadcasts, was an obvious choice.

Following several interviews with Psaros's business partners and associates, Brodie was asked to interview a somewhat surprising subject: Father Elias Villis of the Greek Orthodox Church of Our Saviour in Rye, NY, a parish that Psaros and his family belong to. On the morning of the scheduled interview, Father Elias called Brodie to warn him about scaffolding that would obstruct the view of the church, where the interview was to take place. Brodie was untroubled by

the potential distraction, and he and his crew proceeded to the church. When they arrived, they observed the scaffolding, which partially cloaked bold, colorful iconography that was being installed in the temple.

"I walked into this church- and I have not been to many Greek Orthodox churches in my life- and I was blown away," said Brodie. Later that day, Brodie's colleague Taryn Grimes-Herbert interviewed Father Elias in the temple after the construction team had left. Grimes-Herbert, who has spent 20 years writing, producing and directing scripted and documentary projects for television (and was previously a Broadway, film and television actress), intently observed Father Elias as he showed the crew each image and shared inspirational stories of martyrs and saints who overcame colossal atrocities.

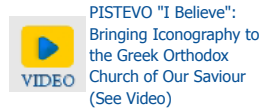
"Iconography is a theological confession of our faith," said Father Elias. "It is a practice, or a veneration, that was approved by a whole ecumenical council in the eighth century. When we venerate an icon, we venerate an image, person or scene depicted in the icon- we're not actually venerating the canvas, or the painting or the wood itself- we're venerating the image through the icon, which is ultimately what we do through Christ."

Brodie and his crew decided to make a three-minute clip and send it to Psaros, who, after he saw it, eagerly commissioned Brodie to expand on the short clip. Nearly a year later, this effort culminated into a 17-minute film packed with vivid imagery depicting the life of Jesus Christ and His saints called *PISTEVO* "I believe."

The film chronicles the journey of a congregation through a multi-phased campaign to complete the tradition of iconography that began generations earlier at the Greek Orthodox Church of Our Saviour. The temple of the Church of Our Saviour was built in the 1960s. In the 1980s, the congregation installed two icons, one of the Holy Mother (the Platytera), and the image of Jesus Christ (the Pantocrator). In 2012, the community came together to complete the mission that was initiated 55 years earlier.

"The only objective of everyone involved is to have 300 million Orthodox Christians take 17 minutes of their lives, along with their children, to watch this film," said Psaros. "This is not about a church in Rye. This is about why a Greek Orthodox community took on this challenge of installing the iconography and how the process of completing this challenge deeply affected the community. Dimitrios Mourlas, the iconographer, didn't paint pictures, he didn't paint portraits, he didn't paint icons; rather, the Holy Spirit worked through his right hand in what was a three-year act of prayer. As he did his work, he would stop, he would reflect, he would pray."

Psaros credits His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America for igniting the flame that propelled this journey forward. "His Eminence came to have liturgy with us, and in the



PISTEVO "I Believe":
Bringing Iconography to
the Greek Orthodox
Church of Our Saviour
(See Video)

most polite way, he observed that we had white walls,” said Psaros. “This film is dedicated to the Archbishop because it was his vision that launched an entire community to undertake this challenge.”

Archbishop Demetrios officiated at the Divine Liturgy followed by the blessing of the new iconography with Holy Chrism from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople on June 21 at the Church of Our Saviour. Following the blessing, the film premiered at the parish.

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