This past July, George S. Raptis came full circle. Mr. Raptis established his reputation as a Greek Orthodox choir director and composer of Church music at the St. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church in the Greater Detroit area. Since he retired from that parish several years ago, he has traveled around the Detroit area and the rest of the country as a conductor, clinician, and general advocate for American Greek Orthodox Church music. He is a respected archon of the Church and beloved by many who have worked with him and under his leadership. In July, his musical setting of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostomos, English Version, was performed at the Mid-Eastern Federation of Greek Orthodox Church Musicians 62nd Annual Convention, held at Westland, Michigan in the St. Constantine and Helen Church. It was lovingly directed by the host church’s choir director, Maritsa Kalasz. Mr. Raptis also assisted by conducting a part of the service in the parish that he called home for so long.

For the first time, Convention participants were given the opportunity to chant the entire Sunday morning Orthros service. Seventeen members of the Convention choir, who had participated in an Church Music Institute Orthros workshop during the first three days of the Convention, chanted the service under the direction of Nancy Takis. Many Convention participants also chanted the Resurrectional Vespers service on Friday evening (by permission of His Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas of Detroit), making this the first time Federation choir members chanted all three services at one convention. There were four other successful workshops held as part of the Church Music Institute. Two were given by the noted director Mark Bailey of Yale University and formerly a longtime faculty member of St. Vladimir’s Seminary. He lectured and demonstrated on the “whys and wherefores” of Orthodox hymnology and on singing during Communion. A workshop and demonstration on youth music was given by Mrs. Kalasz and fellow Detroit area choir director, Evey Simon. William Christoff, choir director at Holy Trinity Church in Carmel (Indianapolis), Indiana presented a workshop called “It’s Music – Not Rocket Science.” All of the Church Music Institute workshops were very well-received and pronounced useful and worthwhile by those who attended them.

(Continued on page three.)
Dear MEFGOX Friends,

It is hard to believe that we are already into September and that two months have passed since our convention in Westland. Those of you who did not attend missed a beautiful convention. We were graciously hosted by the Sts. Constantine and Helen community. Our thanks again go to Alex Skylakos and Connie Bogdanos, Convention Co-chairs, their committee, and Father Teodor Petrutiu for all their hard work and careful planning. We were blessed to have Father and our two Metropolitans with us much of the time. Next year, we will be hosted by the Pittsburgh Metropolis at All Saints Church in Canonsburg, PA. They are very excited about hosting us and it promises to be another memorable convention.

This year, we did have less rehearsal time than usual so we could devote more time to educational workshops. We offered separate tracks on: our church history and theology; chant; youth; and basic music training. At our Executive Board meeting in August, the officers did a review of the convention, particularly our workshops and scheduling. As a matter of fact, we are also preparing an online survey to solicit the input of all our members. An organization can only be useful as long as it meets the needs of its people. Overall, I can safely say that our people were pleased with the learning opportunities, but we should always strive for improvement. We were blessed to have some young people who seemed to enjoy meeting each other and enjoyed the convention. Certainly, we hope to build on that.

Your officers are making an effort to carry out our mission as best we can and to prioritize our achievable goals. This coming year, we will be focusing on attracting more youth; creating more learning opportunities for directors; including more workshops about our faith and music; and using technologies to improve communication. We are going through a transition as a Church and in our music. We have a rich tradition of Byzantine chant and also, a rich choral music tradition created in this country. As an organization, we embrace them both and celebrate the opportunity to learn about these musical traditions that have enriched our religious lives.

As we have already begun our religious year on September 1st, I wish you all a blessed New Year. I, along with your officers, look forward to seeing you at our next meeting in Canonsburg on Saturday, November 7. We always invite your participation at every meeting, even though it may be an Executive Board Meeting. We will begin preparations for the learning of Nancy Takis’ liturgical arrangement and other CMI’s which you will learn about shortly. I remind you that October 1st is the feast day of St. Romanos, our Federation’s patron saint, and the first Sunday in October is Church Music Sunday – October 4th. And don’t forget to check out our website: www.MEFGOX.org!

With Love in Christ,

Irene Georgantas
President of MEFGOX

EDITOR’S NOTE...

Earlier this month Nancy and I were returning from a wedding in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and we stopped in Canonsburg, the site of next year’s convention, and visited for a few hours with Stephanie Zeremenko, choir director at All Saints Greek Orthodox Church, and one of the members of the hosting committee. Stephanie is a great lady, and she gave us a brief tour of the convention site, including the church and the hotel. We came away very impressed with the physical beauty of the area and the church. The ideas for the convention that the hosts are considering are very exciting. This truly has the potential of being a great and memorable event in a great location. I think you will not want to miss it.

In being selected as the conductor for the Divine Liturgy at next year’s MEFGOX Convention in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, I feel both honored and awed at the responsibility which I now bear. I will work diligently to see to it that next year’s convention is a success from the musical standpoint. I would like to emphasize to all participants the importance of coming to the convention prepared by acquiring and rehearsing the convention music several times over the next nine months. We have made the Divine Liturgy music available on the Internet at www.newbyz.org, which anyone may download for free, and we will shortly be adding the proper hymns for July 18, 2010, which is the Sunday of the Convention. We also plan to make available the music for the Vespers and Orthros services for that day in staff notation, so that Convention participants will be able to either sing with the chanters or silently follow along. Please visit the site often for the updates and visit www.mefgox.org for the latest information on Convention preparations.

Finally, I would like to join Irene and many others in thanking the St. Constantine and Helen parish for the wonderful job they did in hosting this year’s conference. The 62nd Convention will be remembered as a very good one.

THE BYZANTINE ECHO is published by the Mid-Eastern Federation of Greek Orthodox Church Musicians. Please send all correspondence to the editor: Stan Takis, 1900 Burkley Rd., Williamston, MI 48895 — takistan@yahoo.com
Congratulations to the 2009 MEFGOX Memorial Scholarship Recipients!

This year, scholarships were awarded to four deserving young adults of the Mid-Eastern Federation. (See photo on page 8.) Funding for the scholarships comes from donations by Federation members, parishes of the Metropolises of Detroit and Pittsburgh, earnings from the Scholarship Foundation, and other sources. If you wish to contribute, please send a check to Dan Packis at 4651 Greenview Court, Avon, Ohio 44011.

Thespina Christulides, from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania has been involved with the Holy Cross church choir since about the age of seven. She has not only been involved with church and school productions, but interned with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and apprenticed with the Pittsburgh Opera. Thespina is attending Otterbien College in Westerville, Ohio studying music. Thespina is the recipient of the MEFGOX Memorial Scholarship award. Congratulations and best wishes Thespina!

Andrew Wardner, from Ann Arbor, Michigan is a member of St. Nicholas Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan choir. He not only sings at St. Nicholas, but he plays the piano, French horn, guitar, and ukulele. Andrew is a student athlete, has been an altar boy, and is a tonsured reader by Metropolitan Nicholas. Andrew will be attending Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, South Carolina. Andrew is the recipient of the Mike Hadgis Memorial Scholarship award. Congratulations and best wishes, Andrew!

Marina Monoyios, from Grand Rapids, Michigan has been a member of Holy Trinity choir in Grand Rapids, Michigan since about the age of fifteen. She is not only a member of the choir, but is a member of Jr. Goya and school choral group. Marina will be studying Nursing at University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Marina is the recipient of the MEFGOX Memorial Scholarship award. Congratulations and best wishes, Marina!

Mary Matzorkis, from Westlake, Ohio is a member of St. Demetrios choir in Rocky River, Ohio. She is not only a member of the choir, but also a member of Jr. Goya and parish dance group. Mary also sings solos during the Lenten, Paschal and Christmas services. Mary is studying Special Ed at Cleveland State University in Cleveland, Ohio. Mary is the recipient of the George Georgantas Memorial Scholarship award. Congratulations and best wishes Mary!

Westland Conference is a Success (cont.)

Dan Packis was awarded the 2009 Patriarch Athenagoras Award for Distinguished Metropolis Service in Church Music for contributions to a local parish and to the Metropolis through the Federation. Dan has been a long-time participant in the parish life of St. Demetrios in Rocky River, Ohio, not only as a dedicated choir member, but also as a diligent contributor to other parish activities, including service on the Parish Council, holding the offices of President and Treasurer, and chairing their parish’s Greek Festivals, among other activities. He has served as a Trustee and Chairman of the Federation’s Memorial Scholarship Program for several years, guiding the program’s recruitment and selection process and as a result, has enabled quite a number of young church musicians to further their studies through the awarding of generous scholarships. He has also managed the Endowment of the Scholarship Fund, investing monies prudently and wisely, encouraging donations, and also making substantial financial donations himself. He has also helped enable the Federation to establish a strong communication network. He developed, and up until this past year maintained, the Federation Database, which includes more than 1300 individuals. Dan has been an integral and loyal member of the Mid-Eastern Federation’s Executive Board, always present at its meetings, despite travel distance and family demands. He served as Treasurer some time ago and currently remains a member because of his role as Chair of the Scholarship Trustees. His contributions are always thoughtful, perceptive, and helpful.

Activities at the Convention also included a karaoke show on Thursday evening and the grand banquet on Saturday night. Participants lodged at the Marriott Inn of Livonia, Michigan. The organizers of the Convention were complimented by many attendees on the quality of their efforts. Convention co-chairpersons, Alex Skylakos and Connie Bogdanos were behind much of the work and were largely responsible for the success of the annual event. When asked who else should be acknowledged for their help in hosting such a wonderful conference, Mr. Skylakos replied, “His Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas, His Eminence Metropolitan Maximos, Father Theodor Petrutiu, Marissa Kalasz, George Raptis, Viola Peponis, the St. Helen's Philochoths Society of Saints Constantine and Helen, who underwrote an entire luncheon, and all of our committee members with special thanks to Dorthe Balaskas and Elaine Harlambopoulos.” Indeed, the entire Federation owes a debt of gratitude to these hard-working, gracious, and hospitable people, who gave the Convention participants a weekend to remember.

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OPPOSITE PAGE: The Orthros Workshop choir chants before the Liturgy. Maritsa Kalasz leads the choir while Viola Peponis, Fr. Teodor Petrutiu stands before the altar. Fr. Dean Hountalas proceeds followed by Fr. George Zervos, and Fr. Nick Kotsis. Sopranos sing in the Convention choir. THIS PAGE: Youth participants entertain on Karaoke night. Dan Packis receives the Athanagoras Award from Metropolitan Nicholas and Metropolitan Maximos. George Raptis conducts the choir during the Divine Liturgy. Clinician Mark Bailey shares a moment with MERGYX President Irene Georgantas. The Federation Youth initiate the candle lighting at the banquet. The St. Constantine and Helen Choir entertains at the banquet. Photos provided by Venetia Wurst and Irene Georgantas.

(Captions are from upper left to lower right)
A LETTER FROM A YOUNG MEMBER OF THE MID-EASTERN FEDERATION

President Irene Georgantas recently shared with us a letter she received from a young member of the choir at the Convention in Westland. The young lady kindly gave us permission to reprint the letter in the BYZANTINE ECHO. It beautifully expresses many of the things that draw us to participating in the music ministries of our parishes.

Dear Irene,

I just wanted to thank [the Federation] for organizing and running a fabulous convention this year. I can safely say for all of the youth that we had a lot of fun getting to know each other and know more of what we do in Church, particularly in the choir. We loved hanging out and singing together. From my end, I know that it was a privilege to be there in the first place, and an even bigger loving surprise that there were several more young people in attendance compared to last year.

We went bowling on the Thursday night. It was a fun time. We all got ridiculously low scores, but we earned them with laughs and smiles. We were genuinely surprised on Friday night when we actually had a reserved table for us near the dance floor. It was a wonderful gift and we loved having the opportunity to immerse ourselves in Greek culture through dancing.

Sunday's services were incredible. The time seemed to fly in the sanctuary, and I honestly have not heard a more beautiful sound anywhere other than the times that we sing together. Personally, I felt part of service. I felt that I was praying by singing, and that singing made the prayer all sweeter because of music's added plea in its emotion. The words, combined with the music, filled my cup with happiness. I could see the same happiness in my friends' faces.

We thoroughly enjoyed the privilege of being in each other's company, and in the company of such a wonderful choir. We truthfully could not have asked for better. We loved our experience, and hope that we can attend more conventions like this in the future, hopefully with some more recruits.

Truly, a big thank you for everything that you have done for us. On behalf of the MEFGOX Youth, I submit these comments.

In His Service,

Jennifer Dalton, 2008 & 2009 MEFGOX Convention Member

Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan
This hymn was written in the Nineteenth Century by St. Nektarios. It has become popular in recent years. This English arrangement is by Nancy Takis. She has chosen to retain the Greek words for the refrain after each line, because the words, which mean “Rejoice, O Unwedded Bride,” do not translate as poetically into English.

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2009 SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

FROM LEFT: Dan Packis, Scholarship Trustee; His Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas; Thespina Christulides, recipient of the MEGOX Memorial Scholarship; Andrew Wardner, recipient of the Michael Hadgis Memorial Scholarship; Marina Monoyios, recipient of the MEGOX Memorial Scholarship; Mary Matzorkis, recipient of the George Georgantas Memorial Scholarship; Mary S. Amerdes, Scholarship Trustee; His Eminence Metropolitan Maximos. Camera shy: Angie Angelos, Scholarship Trustee.

St. George Greek Orthodox Church
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