

*Θεοφιλέστατε, ευλογείτε.*

Dear distinguished attendees, dear guests colleagues,

*Χριστός ανέστη, Χρόνια Πολλά!*

This is a special day for Ionian University, and we are happy and honoured for your presence, which encourages us in our continuous efforts to make steps towards closer collaborations with Institutions of the United States in research and education level, as an integral part of our overall strategy.

As Rector Professor Floros mentioned earlier, the official operation of Ionian University's office in New York in the premises of the Orthodox Church of Saint Spyridon is of great symbolism. I would totally agree, in terms of the importance of the blessing, but also in terms of the long history of Hellenism. This great miraculous saint lived in 4th-century Cyprus, while his *σώμα* stayed for centuries in Byzantine Constantinople before coming to Corfu, his new home. We are grateful for the protection and the blessing he offers today, and for the shelter which the Orthodox Church of Saint Spyridon here provides.

In Ionian University we seek innovation and pioneering research while treasuring our rich tradition. We believe that this is an important choice for nowadays and the future academic challenges and prospectives. As our Rector already mentioned, in 2024 our Institution will celebrate the bicentennial of the establishment of the Ionian Academy in Corfu by Lord Guildford. In this framework we will give a broad image of the political, social and cultural conditions on the Ionian Islands in the 19th century.

The celebration of the bicentennial of Ionian Academy will include an online series of presentations and lectures, and exhibitions of archive material throughout the coming year. It will also include a festival of contemporary art which is inspired by the atmosphere, the personalities and the events of the era. Last but not least, at the end of 2024 an International Colloquium on the Education in the Ionian Islands in the 19th century will take place both in situ and online. You are all welcome, and we would be really happy to see you in one of these initiatives. They are of high value to us and they give the clear message that innovation and pioneering research go hand-by-hand with treasuring tradition.

Thank you so much for your presence here on this important, hopeful and promising day. Ευχαριστώ από καρδιάς, εις έτη πολλά.