

**SOUTHLAND GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY DEVASTATED IN WAKE OF MUDSLIDE
DISASTER AT SAINT SOPHIA CAMP AND RETREAT CENTER
VOWS TO HELP VICTIMS**

For Immediate Release
December 29, 2003

Contact: Father John Bakas
Phone: (323) 737-2424

[Los Angeles] Following a memorial service Sunday at Sophia Cathedral for the Christmas Day mudslide victims of Saint Sophia Camp in Old Waterman Canyon, San Bernardino; members of the community gathered to mourn the loss of their friend, Jorge Monzon, his wife Clara, daughters Wendy and Raquel, and baby son Jeremiah. The entire Monzon family perished in the Christmas Day mudslide. Father Bakas said, "We have lost a person and a family we loved and who loved our camp as much as we did." Father Bakas' feelings are echoed by the entire southland Greek Orthodox community.

"Jorge was a well-respected friend deeply loved and admired by us all," Father Bakas continued. "We've watched little Raquel grow up and so recently welcomed baby Jeremiah. Our devastation is indescribable, and life without the Monzon family leaves a void in our cathedral ministry. Their loss is heart wrenching to our entire community, and our grief goes out to all those suffering for their loved ones. The immediate goal is to raise funds to provide assistance for those families of the victims, which include nine (9) children and five (5) adults, and help mend the wounds left open by their untimely deaths." We are working with the staff of The Church of God of Prophecy in San Bernardino, where most of victims worshiped, to coordinate this effort."

County rescue officials finally allowed Father John Bakas and a group of Saint Sophia parishioners to visit the site of the devastation for the first time at 10:00 Monday morning, December 29, while bulldozers and chainsaws grumbled in the distance. Father Bakas, joined by the parishioners and rescue workers, performed a traditional Greek Orthodox memorial service there for the victims and prayed their families and the survivors.

A disaster relief fund has been established to assist those who have lost family members. The Mudslide Victims Fund will be administrated by Saint Sophia Cathedral which is the church in Los Angeles. All funds will be directed for the benefit of the families of the victims. Checks should be made payable to Saint Sophia Cathedral with the words, Mudslide Victims Fund, written on the memo line and sent to the Cathedral at 1324 South Normandie Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90006.

###