

FR. MICHAEL JOHNSON RECEIVES NATIONAL BOY SCOUT HONOR MEDAL FOR SAVING LIFE

SEATTLE – On March 8, 2018, Fr. Michael Johnson, assistant priest at the Greek Orthodox Church of the Assumption received the National Boy Scouts of America Honor Medal for “unusual heroism in saving...life at considerable risk to self.”

Mike Quirk, Scout executive of the BSA’s Chief Seattle Council presented the award during the council’s annual meeting at the Museum of Flight. As far as is known, Fr. Michael is the first Orthodox priest ever to receive the BSA Honor Medal. Attending the ceremony were Fr. Michael’s daughters Maria Johnson and Alexia Cortes-Johnson, and Fr. Dean Kouldukis, presiding priest of Assumption Church.

Last October on a sunny autumn day a young mother was pushing a stroller with her five-month old son through a residential neighborhood in West Seattle. Suddenly, without warning, she was attacked from behind with a large knife. As it turned out, the attacker was a homeless woman, completely unknown to the victim. The knife cut into the victim’s face and the top of her head, and she went down on her knees. When she put up her arms to protect herself, the knife cut deeply into the top of her left hand, damaging some of the tendons.

At that moment, Fr. Michael, 79, came walking by, heard the screams and saw what was happening. He realized some immediate action was needed to keep the assailant from attacking again.

"I'm not a brave person, but there was nobody else. I just had to do it," Fr. Michael told a reporter later at the scene.

Stepping into the street, Fr. Michael took a position between the assailant and the victim. The assailant twice threatened him with the knife, telling him to get out of the way, but he held his ground. The standoff continued for several minutes until the police, called by neighbors who also moved the child to safety, arrived and the assailant was apprehended and arrested. The mother was taken to the hospital, and fortunately, all her wounds eventually healed.

“I’m so grateful the Lord put you there,” the victim said to Fr. Michael during a joint television interview several days later.

In a letter read by Fr. Kouldukis at the award ceremony, Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco echoed those same thoughts in praising Fr. Michael’s heroism.

“You were exactly where God wanted you to be, as a faithful man and servant, coming to the aid of innocent victims.” His Eminence noted, adding “You remained calm in the face of danger, placing yourself in harm’s way, so as to defuse a serious and volatile situation.”

A 54-year veteran of the Boy Scout program, Fr. Michael earned the rank of Eagle Scout in his youth. As an adult, he has organized, led and promoted Orthodox Scout troops. He received the Silver Beaver award from the Chief Seattle Council in 2004, and in the same year, the Prophet Elias award from the Orthodox Church. For many years, he has also served as the Pacific Northwest Outreach Coordinator for the Eastern Orthodox Committee on Scouting.