

White House Correspondent a Dedicated Orthodox Christian

by Andrew Manatos

WASHINGTON – From the perspective of Orthodox Christianity, his family and his career, Mike Emanuel, the White House correspondent of the Fox News Channel since 2007, is a very special person.

Mike has made time to be fully immersed in his Church and faith amid the time and pressures involved in interviewing presidents and vice presidents, being embedded with American troops in harm's way in Iraq, traveling with Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama around the country and abroad, traveling to Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates with Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and all the other demands of such a nationally known position.

He attributes his reaching this pinnacle of American journalism in his statement: "My only wish is that I could see the faces of my grandparents as I broadcast from the White House lawn and be able to thank them for their struggle and sacrifice that made this possible for me."

As the White House correspondent for Fox, Emanuel has distinguished himself with such notable accomplishments as being the only broadcast journalist in Rome selected to attend President Bush's first meeting with Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican and securing the final cable news interview with former Vice President Dick Cheney before he left office.

Prior to his White House assignment with Fox, Emanuel earned a reputation for solid reporting through his coverage of the execution of former dictator Saddam Hussein, the legal troubles of former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, the Iraqi elections, a rare interview with then-Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge and his month of reporting in 2005 from Kuwait City and from Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Before joining Fox 13 years ago, Emanuel worked for a local independent station in Los Angeles and for the ABC, NBC and FOX affiliates in Midland, Waco and Austin, Texas. He got his start in journalism as a student at Rutgers University in New Jersey where he was a play-by-play announcer for football, basketball, soccer, and even lacrosse. He also served a brief internship with GOTELECOM.

Mike Emanuel had an extraordinary honor bestowed on him during a visit to the Holy Land with President Obama.

Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem was so moved by Mike's faith that he presented him with a mother-of-pearl nativity scene that he had originally planned to give to the President of the United States.

Today, Mike finds time amid his high pressure news position to serve on the parish council of his church, St. George in Bethesda, Md. As well, he responds without hesitation when asked to do anything for the Archdiocese or the Church. He has been the master of ceremonies at numerous Church events including dinners that included Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. Mike was also selected in 2009 as an Archon of the Ecumenical Patriarchate—Order of St. Andrew.

Most recently, he was the emcee at the St. John Chrysostom National Oratorical Festival luncheon in New York, passing up an invitation from President Obama to fly to the Gulf of Mexico for a first-hand view of the BP oil spill.



Mike Emanuel reports from the north lawn of the White House (above). On a recent trip to the Middle East, he rides in a helicopter with Defense Secretary Robert Gates to some hot spots in southern Afghanistan, including Kandahar.



Mike's life has been thoroughly Orthodox since his childhood.

As a boy, he faithfully attended Sunday school, where he later taught, and also attended Greek School. Mike participated in the Church's summer camp at the Ionian Village in Greece where he later became a counselor. He was also elected president of GOYA at Holy Trinity, and after college, he sang in the church choir.

According to the priest in his home church, Fr. Alexander Leondis, Mike was an extraordinarily devout Orthodox Christian. Fr. Leondis said that like many, Mike participated in retreats, athletic and cultural activities but, unlike most, he also attended church all summer long. Mike has maintained a close relationship with his priest through e-mails and other communications.

When Mike met his wife, Evangeline (Lynne) Lailas, in July at the 2000 YAL convention, he had no idea that about six months later the presidential election, fate and his work would take him to from Texas to her home – the Washington, area.

A little over a year later, he proposed marriage to her. They were married at St. George Church, where they and their children Savas and Tess attend today.

Mike married into an Orthodox family that also mirrored his devotion to the Church. Lynne Lailas grew up close to the St. George Church in Bethesda where her mother, Elaine, served as parish council president. Mike's current head priest at St. George, Fr. Dimitrios Antokas, by coincidence also served at Mike's Holy Trinity parish in Westfield, N.J., before becoming the executive director of Leadership 100 for the Archdiocese and before his service at St. George.

Fr. Antokas said, "Mike embodies all the traits of a good Orthodox Christian. He demonstrates this as a wonderful husband, father, parishioner and parish council member." One could say that Mike's extraordinary success in television journalism is exceeded only by his devotion to his family and his church.