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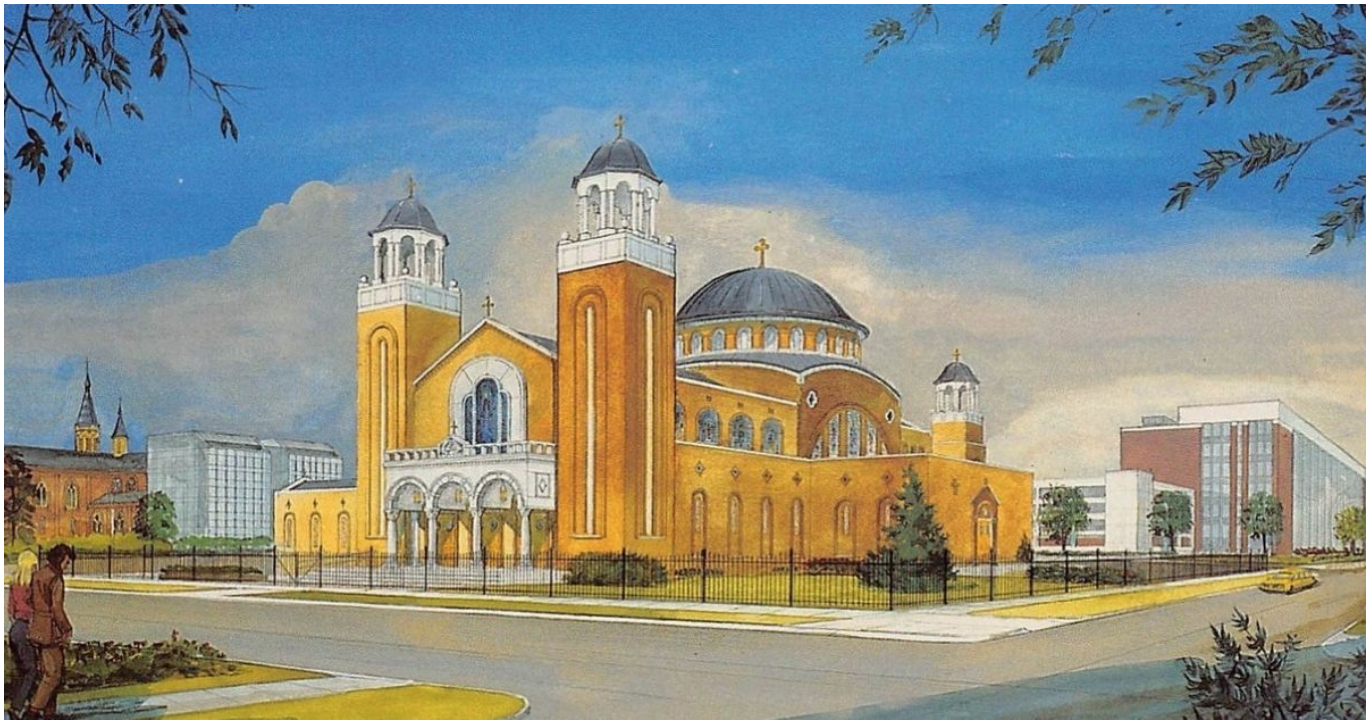
Parish Highlight: Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral Detroit, MI



In some ways, the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral is Detroit’s version of a mini Sagrada Familia, though instead of 140 years, the church was built over about 33 years—and even then, its original vision has not yet been realized.

The State of Michigan issued a charter for the Evangelismos Theotokou Greek Orthodox Church on March 25, 1910. This was the first Greek Orthodox Church in Michigan. At the time, the church was located in a rented hall on the second floor of the Peck Building, 42 Broadway St. (then Miami Avenue). The church was the center of Detroit’s Hellenic community, which dates back to the early 1880s. Many of these early Greek immigrants who settled in Detroit were from Sparta. The Detroit parish is the oldest Greek Orthodox parish in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky.

In 1913, Annunciation erected its own building at 660 Macomb St., and bought more land just the east, where it built a Greek Parochial school a year later. (The school operated until 1931.) In 1949, the church was renamed the Central Greek Orthodox Church Evangelismos (a Greek name derived from the “Annunciation of the Virgin Mary”). Meanwhile, part of the parish spun off and formed Assumption Greek Orthodox Church on the east side in 1930.

In 1962, the 7th Diocesan District of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Detroit was established, and Bishop Germanos Polizoidis designated the church on Macomb as the cathedral church, which led to it being renamed the Annunciation Cathedral. But just two years later, in 1964, the City of Detroit announced that it would buy all the parish’s properties in order to put in I-375. Two years later, the old church was razed along with the Black Bottom and parts of Paradise Valley neighborhoods, and the City gave the parish $50,000 – the equivalent of about $467,000 in 2022 inflation-adjusted dollars) and half a city block on East Lafayette and the Chrysler Freeway Service Drive—the freeway that cost the parish its historic cathedral.

That same year, 1966, ground was broken for the new Greek Orthodox church. It would open in the spring of 1968, but it was far from completed—and it was far from the full original vision of architect John W. Loizon. Loizon’s design was based on the Church of St. Andrew in Petras, Greece, and was to be decked in white marble and trimmed in black marble; instead, the church is clad in plain brick. It also was to feature twin towers and a more stately entrance, but those still haven’t been built yet.

Further, the church had to be built in three phases, and when the parish moved in in April 1968, it was only into the basement; the rest of the church as it stands today would not be ready for another nine years. After all, when the government takes your church for a freeway and you haven’t been saving up or raising money for years to build a new one, you have to build what you can when you can afford it. The church was to cost $1 million (about $9.6 million in 2022 dollars). The City’s payment for their old property got them less than halfway there.

Phase two of construction began in 1976, eight years after the parish moved into the basement. A “door opening ceremony,” which served as a dedication, was held March 20, 1977. In 1980, a state historical marker was installed at the church. Phase three began 10 years later, and would see the walls raised to their current height and the dome finally added, being completed in 1993. The cross atop the dome was hoisted into place March 26, 1996.

Following Byzantine tradition, the Cathedral exterior is almost devoid of decoration, but the interior is a different story.

The first iconography, known as the Platytera, was completed March 21, 1999—31 years after the parish began holding services in the building's basement. The Pantokrator Dome's iconography was finished in 2005, and two years later, an addition was completed consisting of the Exo-Narthex and office/conference rooms. In 2010, the banquet hall was renovated.

By Dan Austin/HistoricDetroit.org

Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral is still active today with flourishing ministries. For more information about this parish visit annunciationcathedral.org



1981—in the old kitchen. Two very active ladies of Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral, Mrs. Marika Toms and Mrs. Eva Branoff, always lending a hand.



Photos Courtesy of Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral

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