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Parish Highlight: St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral Bethlehem, PA



The first Orthodox Christians to arrive from Greece in hopes of a new life in the Lehigh Valley came to Bethlehem in 1911, opening restaurants or working at Bethlehem Steel. By 1916 these immigrants, realizing the need and importance of maintaining their faith and culture, purchased the former St. Joseph's Episcopal Church at 1224 East Fourth Street, on the South Side of Bethlehem. From its founding in 1916 until 1955, this church served the Greek Orthodox population.

In 1955, realizing that the church on East Fourth Street could no longer meet the needs of the community, the present site at 1607 West Union Boulevard was purchased. In December 1958 it was unanimously voted that a new church, school and social auditorium be built, and ground breaking ceremonies were held in March 1959. Construction of the new St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral was begun in 1960, lasting for two years, with the opening of the doors service (thyranoixia) observed in April 1962.

The new location, the new church, the abundance of space, and the extra facilities were a dream come true. The new church was a symbol of the faith, as well as the courage and the endurance of the Greek Orthodox people. Rev. Fr. Steven Sarigiannis was the proistamenos for most of the 1960's. He was the beneficiary of

this new beginning and his task was to take advantage of the great progress and to begin actualizing the religious dreams and aspirations of the Greek Orthodox people of the Lehigh Valley.

In the next two decades under the spiritual leadership of Rev. Fr. Theodore Sideris, the community continued its sacred mission. The Sunday School and Greek School programs along with a special emphasis on the religious services of the Church brought the community to a deeper realization of its significant purpose and character.

The beginning of the 1990's marked the arrival of Rev. Fr. Michael Varvarelis. Various new programs were added in the life of the community which necessitated the decision of the General Assembly in 1990 to have a second full time priest to deal with the overwhelming needs of the parish as it grew to over 700 families.

He was succeeded by Rev. Fr. Nicholas Palis in 2005, and a new era of spiritual focus began. Bringing a deep love of worship, the 2000's are marked by an increase in the focus of spirituality at St. Nicholas. This χάρισμα was complimented by the hard work of his predecessor who started the iconography project in the sanctuary. The church's iconography was finally completed in 2016, in time to celebrate the parish's centennial.

In January 2024, the Rev. Fr. Alexandros Petrides was named proistamenos, tasked with caring for the 500 families St. Nicholas Cathedral currently serves. He inherited a flourishing parish, one with an abundance of youth, educational programs, community life, and worship, all products of the last decade of Fr. Nicholas Palis' retirement.

St. Nicholas Cathedral is one of the 15 largest parishes in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, and has an active parish life year round. During the school year more than 80 preschoolers attend St. Nicholas Academy, over 120 attend Sunday School and at least 60 come on Monday evenings for Greek School. Fr. Alexandros and the parish council are supported in their work by youth director and lay assistant Isaac Lampart, parish secretary Despina Kotsatos, and custodian Abe Sabbagh. Fr. Alexandros benefits from the council and camaraderie of his two retired clergymen, Fr. Nicholas Palis and his father-in-law, Fr. Michael Kon.



His Eminence Metropolitan Savas of Pittsburgh with the acolytes of St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral.



The Sunday School children of St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral honored Father Nicholas Palis with hymns and poems and a thank you card. Sunday School

teachers also presented Fr. Nicholas with an icon of Extreme Humility in gratefulness to his work over the past 18 years as proistamenos of St. Nicholas Cathedral.



Agiasmos for the 2023-2024 Greek School Year

Visit St. Nicholas | Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral- Bethlehem PA (stnicholas.org) for more information.

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