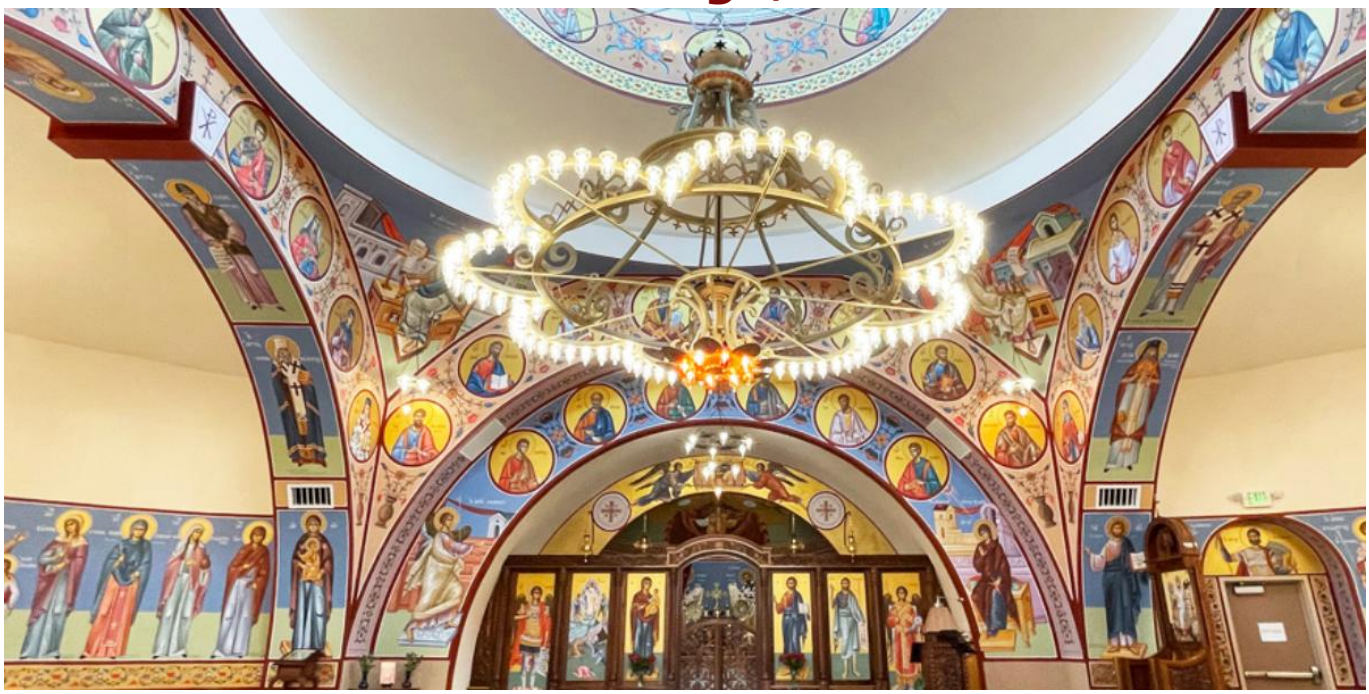
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Parish Highlight: Holy Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church Anchorage, Alaska



Holy Transfiguration holds the distinction of being the northernmost parish of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, and of being the only Greek Orthodox parish in the State of Alaska.

Holy Transfiguration is Pan-Orthodox in character, with a very diverse congregation. Services are primarily in English with some Greek. During the Divine Liturgy, the Lord's Prayer is recited in Greek, Arabic, Armenian, Romanian, Ukrainian, French, English and sometimes other languages. The parish has an active Philoptochos, Sunday School, Greek School, and youth dance groups. The parish also puts on the Alaska Greek Festival each August, which has become a popular event for the Anchorage area.

Reverend Vasili Hillhouse has been serving Holy Transfiguration since August 1, 2011. Previous priests have included Rev. Chris Margaritis, Rev. Philip Armstrong, Rev. Luke Kontgas, Rev. Michael Courey, Rev. John Roll, Rev. Michael Diavatis and Rev. Leo Schefe.

History

The Greek Orthodox presence in Alaska dates to the early eighteenth century when Greeks accompanied the first Russian Orthodox missionaries. However, it was not

until the early 1900s that large numbers of Greeks first arrived to work on construction of the Alaska Railroad. After its completion, a small number remained in the railroad camp at the head of Cook Inlet, which became Anchorage. For many years, the nearest Orthodox parish was St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church in Eklutna, a village 35 miles north of Anchorage.

The church in Anchorage began in 1953 in the basement of the Chiamis Apartments located on Third Avenue between B and C Streets, where Orthodox families would gather in an effort to preserve their traditions, and Russian priests would come occasionally to give sermons. Several years later Soterios Chiamis, Chris Papademetrios, George Poggas and Goldie Grames began talking about building a small church.

Finally, in 1958, a small group of Greeks built the first Orthodox Church in Anchorage. Chris and Marika Papademetrios donated the land, Goldie Grames supplied the building materials, Soterios Chiamis served as the general contractor, and the church was built entirely by volunteer labor. The church was originally named “Saint Sotirios Greek Orthodox Church”. It was a 1,900 square foot cinder block structure with a metal roof, divided into two sections containing the church and hall, on one-half acre at Arctic Boulevard and Campbell Station Road (now Tudor Road). The little church became the center of religious and social activities for Greek, Russian, Serbian, Ukrainian, and Alaskan Native Orthodox. Reverend Michael Oskolkoff, was among the visiting Russian Orthodox clergy who conducted liturgy on a regular basis, and Father Norman Elliott of All Saints Episcopal Church, assisted when needed with baptisms, weddings and funerals.

On January 12, 1959 Soterios Chiamis, Chris Papademetrios and Goldie Grames filed with the State of Alaska the Articles of Incorporation for the Greek Orthodox Church of Anchorage, Alaska. This was 9 days after Alaska officially became the 49th state on January 3, 1959. In August of 1959 the “Greek Orthodox Church of Our Savior” applied for and was granted an Ecclesiastical Charter from the Greek Archdiocese of North and South America. Later that year the name of the church was changed to “Holy Transfiguration” and the Archdiocese assigned the parish’s first Greek Orthodox priest, Reverend James Adams. The church was served by Reverend Spyridon Diavatis (1963-1964), and Reverend Nikolas Augustinakis (1965-1967).

After 1967, the mission parish had a series of part-time or visiting priests, and for a period the church was closed. In 1971, Reverend John Karastamatis was ordained into the priesthood at Holy Transfiguration and served the parish for two years. In October of 1977 a momentous occasion occurred in the life of Holy Transfiguration

when His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos traveled to Alaska to meet with President Nick Pefanis and the Board of Trustees, and to bestow his blessings on the small parish.

The oil boom of the late 1970s and early 1980s brought a new influx of Greeks who decided it was time to reorganize. The driving force behind this movement was Dr. Alexander Baskous and Tanya Clark. Through word of mouth and the telephone book approximately 300 Eastern Orthodox families were identified and invited to a reorganization meeting, which led to the church once again becoming a full time parish in 1983 with the assignment of Reverend Gregory Constantinos.

Growth continued until the late 1980s, when a sharp decline in the oil market caused thousands of Alaskans to lose their jobs and leave the state. The parish lost half of its active membership. Despite this setback, determination and perseverance prevailed, and in 1987 the parish moved from its old location to what is still considered a “gift from God.” The parish swapped its small property for an 8,000 square foot“mansion” on five acres. The three-story wooden structure houses the offices, kitchen, Sunday school and meeting rooms, and an apartment. The sanctuary occupied the 36-by-18-foot former living room.

By 1995 it was the strong desire of the community to build a traditional, Byzantine style church on the current site. A building committee was formed, under the leadership of Paul Lotakis, and with the help of Ikona Architects of San Francisco and Krochina Architects of Anchorage, a master plan was developed. After much consideration it was later determined that this plan was too large for such a small community.

Ten years later, the building committee redefined the plans to suit the needs of the present community, and moved boldly forward with the goal of constructing a new church. On October 23, 2005 the Parish General Assembly overwhelmingly approved the project, including the general building plans and allocation of the funds necessary to begin final design of the new church. The capital campaign continued and on August 30, 2009 the Greek Orthodox community of Holy Transfiguration welcomed its hierarch, Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco, for groundbreaking ceremonies at which time the community received the Metropolitan’s blessing for the parish to officially begin construction of its new church. On May 6, 2010 the construction contract was signed with Alcan General.

On Wednesday, June 4, 2014 we held our first service, the Paraklesis to the Mother of God, in the new church building. Our first Divine Liturgy was held the following Sunday on the feast of Pentecost.

From transfiguration.ak.goarch.org/our-parish/

Learn more about Holy Transfiguration here.

Photos: Courtesy of Holy Transfiguration

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