

Father Panagiotis Giannakopoulos to Retire After 29 Years of Service to St. George Greek Orthodox Church of Cape Cod



Father Peter and his wife Presbytera Paula Giannakopoulos and their two children, Simela and Constantine, arrived at St. George on July 1, 1991. He was appointed by the Metropolis of Boston to replace the late Reverend Spyros Mourikis who retired after 42 years at St. George.

Father Peter was a perfect fit for the Centerville parish. "I was born in 1949 and the parish officially started in 1949," he said. "The Cape is God's country. I always had a soft spot in my heart for this place. It reminded me of Piraeus where I was born. Just the whole aura and atmosphere is much more relaxed, more human. I've been blessed to have been in a nice spot where life is not easier, but more unique in many ways and the people here have been great."

Having come to the United States in 1967, Father Peter received his bachelor of arts from Hellenic College in Brookline; he was valedictorian of his graduating class

in 1972. He later went on to receive his master's degree from Holy Cross School of Theology in Brookline before attending the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey in Geneva, Switzerland.

He was ordained to the Holy Diaconate in 1979 by the late Archbishop Iakovos.

Prior to coming to St. George, Father Peter served at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Chicago, Illinois, from 1979 to 1981; St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church in Elgin, Illinois, from 1981 to 1985; and Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, from 1985 to 1991.

"It has given me everything," Father Peter said of the priesthood. "A beautiful wife, two beautiful children, and many beautiful parishioners. ... Every child I baptize is my spiritual son and my spiritual daughter. I love them and cherish them as my own. God has given me more than 1,000 in my 40-plus years of ministry. I cannot thank him enough. I have married couples and I have baptized their children. This is the joy of the priesthood and that fulfills what the Lord said, 'Go and preach and teach all nations in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.'"

For nearly three decades, Father Peter has led Sunday liturgies, Holy Week services, and the Holy sacraments of baptisms and weddings. He has done so in good times and in difficult ones, following Hurricane Bob in 1991, 9/11 and, most recently, COVID-19.

"For 29 years Father Peter has been a pillar of strength, ministering to our needs, teaching us our Orthodox faith, and he has been the voice of our parish," said Parish Council President Frances Haidas. "With one voice, we can say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'"

"I am struck by the fact that Father Peter is only the second priest to serve St. George. That speaks to the beauty of our location on Cape Cod, and the loyalty of parishioners to the Church and to the priest," said longtime parishioner Pat Davis of North Falmouth, who has served on the Parish Council and volunteered nearly every year for the annual Greek Festival. "I remember meeting Father Peter and his young family just as he was beginning his ministry at St. George. It was July, during our Greek Festival. Father Peter and his family came through the outdoor food line for lunch. He was warm and gracious, and over the years he joined us in the food line each July, serving parishioners and our guests. He always did it with good humor and spirit and it set a great example of service for the kids."

During his time at St. George, Father Peter has overseen upgrades to the church's heating system; the addition of a new narthex; and the recent repair of the church

floor.

He also helped to direct the replacement of 120 circular windows with 28 stained glass windows featuring Byzantine iconography. "They became the jewels of the church," he said. "Look at how beautiful they stand out during the day. At night, they are like rubies and jewels in the crowd."

On the 50th anniversary of St. George in 1999, the church was able to retire its mortgage thanks to the generosity of the parish.

"Whatever has been accomplished at St. George, we have accomplished together," said Father Peter. "The people assisted me and I cannot thank them enough because it is not my ministry. It is a collective ministry of people assisting the priest."

Father Peter has presided over every Greek Festival since 1991 as well as the church's annual Golf Tournament, which has raised over \$100,000 for the Cape Cod Times Needy Fund since its inception in 2010. Both events were cancelled this year due to COVID-19.

Chris Alex of Harwich, a member of the Golf Tournament Committee, said, "Father Peter opened my eyes to the beauty of Greek Orthodoxy and enhanced my knowledge of our religion. He's been devoted to our church and always there when we needed him."

Even in retirement, Father Peter will continue to give back to the church, lending his time and talents to a project that will bring new icons to St. George, including the burning bush; the ascension of Jesus Christ; the washing of the feet of the Apostles, and several other individual saints.

He will also spend time with his family, including his son who now lives in North Hollywood and is pursuing an acting career and his daughter who now lives in London, England, and is employed by Wellington Management.

He also hopes to write a book about his great grandmother's miraculous life. "She was my inspiration for becoming a priest," he said.

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