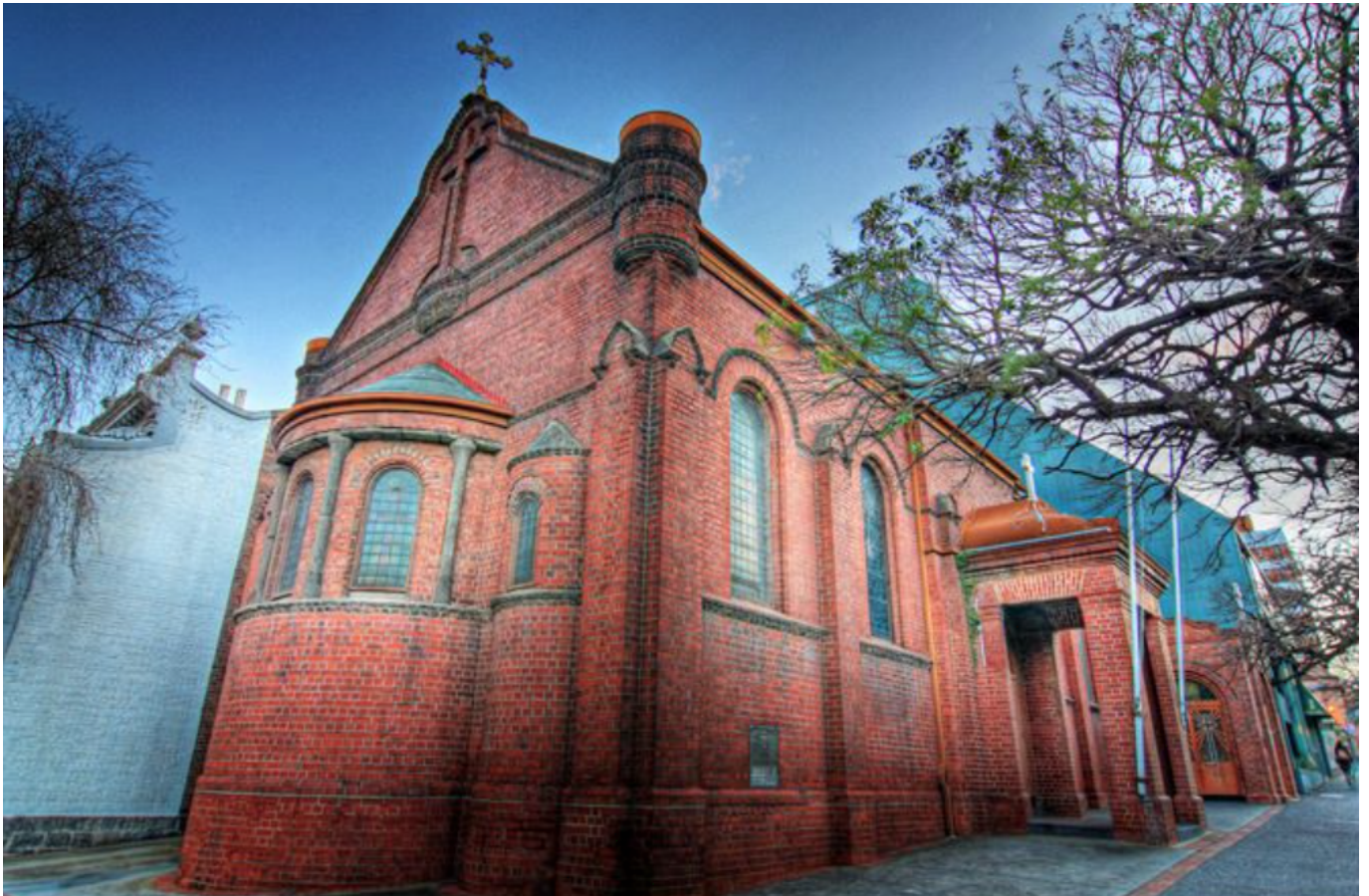


Melbourne's Oldest Greek Orthodox Church to Reopen Before Christmas



The renovated Holy Church of the Annunciation of Our Lady, or Evangelismos tis Theotokou, is preparing to open its doors to the faithful before Christmas for the first time after a disastrous fire in 2016.

The fire blazed through much of the Church's interior on the day after Easter in 2016, and restoration work has been in progress ever since.

In a letter to parishioners, the Church's pastor, Father Antonios Vanikiotis, announced the end of the building's restoration works, stating that "the church will be ready to open for the faithful just before Christmas."

The historic Church, built in 1901, was the very first Greek Orthodox church built in Melbourne, and one of the oldest in Australia, second only to the Church of the Holy Trinity in Sydney.

At the turn of the last century, there already was a large community of Orthodox

Christians in Victoria, as there still is to this day, but there was no place in which they could worship.

The Orthodox community, made up of not only Greeks, but also Syrian and Lebanese Australians, organized to both acquire land for the church and also fund its construction.

The Church served as the epicenter of Melbourne's vibrant Greek community for years, offering a place for the support of recent arrivals as well as social gatherings. For much of its history, it was the only Greek Orthodox Church in Melbourne, cementing its status as an integral location in the Greek community.

Since the start of Melbourne's strict anti-virus and lock down measures, the church has been live-streaming church services on its [Facebook](#) page for the faithful. Currently, as Melbourne begins to open again, churches there are functioning at a limited capacity.

Up to ten parishioners only are allowed to pray in churches at one time, and they must first call to book an appointment in order to avoid overcrowding.

In reference to the Covid restrictions, Father Vanikiotis expressed his "wish and hope for the churches to open soon and gradually to be filled with congregation in order to strengthen our faith in God and our connection to Christ as Greek Orthodox citizens of (Australia)."

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