

Rev. Protopresbyter John D. Protopapas, B.D., S.T.M Falls Asleep in the Lord



Rev. Protopresbyter John D. Protopapas was born in Pano Zodhia, Cyprus on December 12, 1926 to Demetrios Protopapas and Panagiota Katsaris, and was dedicated to the church on January 23, 1927, which then became his official birth date. His father was the Protopsaltis of the village and taught him Byzantine music at an early age.

After completing high school at Paphos College, his uncle, Rev. Christopher Argyrides, sponsored his immigration to the United States in February of 1949, and he enrolled as a student at Holy Cross Theological Seminary in Brookline, Mass. After graduating in 1952, he continued his studies at Andover Newton Theological School in Newton, Mass., earning a Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1954 and a Master of Sacred Theology degree majoring in Pastoral Clinical Psychology in 1955.

On June 5, 1955, he married Catherine Lianides of Worcester, Mass. Fr. John was ordained to the Diaconate on June 26, 1955 and to the Priesthood by Bishop Athenagoras Kokkinakis on July 9, 1955. His first assignment as a priest was at the Parish of St. George in Bangor, Maine, which he served for over ten years. He organized the Jr. GOYA, enriched the Sunday School program, taught Greek School

twice a week, and directed a weekly religious discussion group. From 1958-1965, he oversaw all Greek Schools of Maine. At the parish house, he cultivated land into a vegetable garden for the entire community to enjoy. Fr. John and Presbytera Catherine were blessed with three children, Christopher, Paula, and Mira.

In 1965, Fr. John was transferred to the Diocese of Pittsburgh, where he served for two years as the secretary to His Grace Bishop Theodosios, assisted in the formation of the Dormition of the Theotokos Church, Oakmont, Pa., and then served the Kimisis Tis Theotokou Church, Aliquippa, Pa. for eleven months.

The most dynamic period of Fr. John's career began on July 15, 1967 when the Archdiocese assigned him to the Annunciation Church of Cleveland, Ohio. After assessing the needs of the parish, he embarked on an aggressive program that led to the renovation of the church's basement into a functioning hall, adornment of the church with iconography by Constantine Youssis, and the construction of the Annunciation Center, which became a first-class entertainment venue.

However, Fr. John's most important accomplishments at Annunciation were spiritual and intellectual growth of the faithful: the Greek School became recognized by the Greek Ministry of Education of Greece, church membership doubled, the choir flourished, and the church sponsored patients from Greece to receive open heart surgeries at local hospitals. Fr. John always extended the hand of spiritual guidance to all he could reach. The parish honored him with three testimonial banquets on the 10th, 25th, and 30th anniversaries of his service to the parish; the latter also marked his retirement in 1997.

Upon retiring, Fr. John and Presbytera Catherine moved to Clearwater, Fla. where he accepted temporary assignments throughout Florida and also Montgomery, Ala. Afterwards, the then Bishop Alexios of Atlanta requested that he come out of retirement to start a mission church in Palm Harbor, Fla. On February 6, 2000, Fr. John celebrated the first Divine Liturgy in honor of Saints Raphael, Nicholas, and Irene in the Palm Harbor Public Library. One year later, the church purchased a house near the library and remodeled it to accommodate a sanctuary, fellowship area, office, and three classrooms. In 2003, the church received Holy Relics of its patron saints from His Eminence Metropolitan Iakovos of Mytilene. During thirteen years of ministry with the church, Fr. John established a Parish Council, Philoptochos, a choir, a year round Sunday School, Greek School, Acolytes, GOYA, JOY, and Hope. His desire to cultivate vegetable gardens and fruit trees and to share their bountiful harvests with his communities began in Maine and continued well into his retirement years in Florida.

On Sunday, February 3, 2013, Fr. John celebrated his last Divine Liturgy with about 250 worshipers in attendance. Fr. John and Presbytera Catherine began their second retirement season with God leading the way. Glory be to God who leads our footsteps.

The funeral is Thursday December 3, 2020 at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, Clearwater, Fla.

List of honors:

November 21, 1970 - the Offikion of Economos by His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos.

May 12, 1977 - the Offikion of Protopresbyter of the Ecumenical Patriarchate by Archbishop Iakovos and keynote speaker at the 25th anniversary celebration of the 1952 Holy Cross graduating class.

October 16, 1982 - Vested a Small Cross of the Holy Sepulcher by Patriarch Diodoros of Jerusalem.

December 31, 1989 - Mayor George V. Voinovich appointed and commissioned Fr. John Protopapas as Honorary Mayor of the City of Cleveland.

September 3, 1994 - the Chios Societies of America, Inc presented Fr. John with a plaque in recognition of his support and secretarial work to achieve their goal in the establishment of the Eye Clinic at the Skylitsion Hospital in Chios and with the addition of new Hi-tech medical equipment.

1996 - the Hellenic Preservation Society of Northeastern Ohio gratefully presented Fr. John a glass plaque for his exemplary Hellenic achievements.

May 23, 2002 - Keynote speaker at the 50th anniversary celebration of the 1952 Holy Cross graduating class.

On the National level, Fr. John served as a member of the Archdiocesan Presbyters Council, as president of the St. Chrysostom Clergy Synthesmos of the Pittsburgh Diocese, a member of the Diocesan Council, Chairman of the Diocesan Greek Education Committee, and Chairman and Secretary of the Diocesan Ecclesiastical Court in Ohio.

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