08/12/2020

Greek Studies pioneer receives church medal for contribution to education and community

Dedicated retired educator Constantinos Papadopoulos (OAM) received the Silver Cross of St Andrew's for his work for the Greek community of Victoria and the church. The presentation was made by the Archbishop Makarios of Australia in a private ceremony at the Archdiocese offices on 27 November.

Mr Papadopoulos joined the Victorian Education Department in 1957 as a secondary-school teacher who held English evening classes for migrants.

He was to play a prominent role in establishing Modern Greek Studies at the Universities of Melbourne, Monash and La Trobe. He was also to help to establish classes for the teaching of Greek to Australian-born children in two Melbourne parishes that he helped to set up.

Mr Papadopoulos was born in 1930 in Monagroulli, a village near Limassol in Cyprus. He migrated alone to Melbourne in 1950. He went on to study at the University of Melbourne. In his final year there he was offered a post within the Immigration Department to help Greek arrivals to settle. He continued to provide

this help after he left the Department.

He established the Greek Orthodox Christian Youth Association of Australia (OHENA later to become known as GOYA), an organisation that sought to keep young Greek migrants close to the Greek Orthodox church and to also provide support as they settled in Australia.

READ MORE: La Trobe University's Greek studies program needs $80,000 to be out of the red

Mr Papadopoulos helped to establish St John's parish in North Carlton in 1958. This was the second Greek parish to be set up in Melbourne at that time. He served for a number of years as the General Secretary of the church committee.

In 1963 he was one of six people who helped to establish the Greek Orthodox Church of Saints Anargiri in Oakleigh. He played a key part in the fundraising effort to buy the land and to petition the Archbishop for the appointment of a priest at the parish on a permanent basis.

In 1970, Mr Papadopoulos proved instrumental in winning the approval of the Victorian Education Department to establish the teaching of Modern Greek with the Saturday School of Modern Languages (SSML).

He then applied to the Victorian Universities and Schools Examinations Board to

accept the teaching of Modern Greek to year 11 and 12 levels. This in turn, led in 1974 to the introduction of Modern Greek Studies at the University of Melbourne. Monash and La Trobe universities followed after.

The creation of the Greek Education Committee was another result of his efforts. The organisation looked at special needs and difficulties that Greek migrant children faced in the school system. It made recommendations to the government on how to overcome the problems.

In the late 1970s, Mr Papadopoulos served as Deputy Chairman of Prahran Migrant Resource Centre which was chaired by former Federal Treasurer Simon Crean. In 1978, Mr Papadopoulos served as the Deputy Principal of Prahran High School. He was to serve in this role until mid-1980s.
During this time, he helped establish bilingual Greek Orthodox colleges in St John and Sts Anargiri parishes. These colleges helped students to prepare for Year 12. He also served on the schools' councils dedicating much of his personal time in the belief that the colleges played a key role in the maintenance of the Orthodox religion and Greek religion for the next generation of Greek children.

Mr Papadopoulos, who by 1986 was Principal of Prahran High School, took early retirement from the Victorian Department of Education. He went on to serve as college principal of the Oakleigh Greek Orthodox College which is now Oakleigh Grammar.

He was to serve as the college for the next 10 years as the schools numbers doubled and the school facilities grew. Thanks to his efforts an Early Learning Centre was to be set up at the school.

In 2001, Mr Papadopoulos was awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in recognition of his contribution to education and service to the community. The following year he was awarded the Centenary of Federation of Australia Medal.

The Greek community of Melbourne awarded him the Hellenic Distinction for his work. Last year the Presidential Commissioner of Cyprus, Mr Photios Photiou, presented him with the Republic of Cyprus plaque in recognition of his significant contribution as a Cypriot abroad to the wider Greek and Cypriot Communities of Australia.