

ANNUNCIATION GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH



*PARISH PROFILE
JULY 2015 -
JANUARY 2021*

January 15, 2021

Dearly Beloved in the Lord,

It has been my practice to offer a Parish Profile every five years in order to look back at what we have accomplished together, by God's grace, and also to look ahead, and present some sort of vision for where we might go over the course of the next five years.

I arrived in Memphis on July 15, 2015 in the middle of the pouring rain (as the song says). Thus, I was preparing this profile early in 2020 to be published in July. Then Covid-19 happened. As we were still in the midst of adjusting to the pandemic, I did not feel it was the appropriate time for this profile. With the development of vaccines and treatments, I feel it is time to share this with you. So, please accept this 5 (and a half) year Parish Profile.

This is not intended to be a comprehensive study of the Parish, but rather a snapshot of a few of the things that have taken place during our time together. I am sure many more things could be added, so if I leave out something important, please forgive the omission.

From a personal standpoint, these five and a half years have been remarkable. Presvytera Stephanie and I arrived and made our home in a new town with our two children. We were pleasantly surprised when God granted us a third child, who is a native Memphian, and baptized here at the Annunciation. We have made many friends here, which is one of the challenges that a priest may face – as well as the parishioners – because my role is first and foremost a Spiritual Father. Nonetheless, we are thankful for the friendships that have been created, and we look forward to many more being formed over the years.

As will happen within any family, there are times that I may have said or done something to upset or offend you. At this time I ask your forgiveness for any and all of these instances. I am grateful for all the love and support you have shown to me, and to my family, over the course of the past five and a half years. For this reason, I dedicate this Parish Profile to you, the Stewards of the Annunciation. Further, we must always give thanks to our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ for the blessings we enjoy, and continue to pray for the development and growth of our precious Orthodox Christian Faith.

PARISH DEVELOPMENT

The Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church of Memphis, Tennessee was established circa 1907. The first church building was located at the corner of 3rd and Poplar. In 1955, the doors were opened at our current location on Highland.

The economic condition for the last 10 years in Tennessee, and in particular the Memphis area, has been relatively favorable. The cost of living is low compared to the rest of the country, and the job market rose during the last 9 years.

It is difficult to fully understand the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on our Parish, and on the Greek Orthodox Church in America. The shutdowns and restrictions have severely impacted attendance at services, social gatherings, and ministries. Although the financial impact has been mitigated so far, more than a dozen families have moved due to the effects on employment in the area and the economy. Although we did lose a beloved member of our Parish Family to Covid-19, we have mercifully been spared greater losses. Memory Eternal to all those who have been lost due to this pandemic.

The ethnicity of our Parish continues to change as the percentage of parishioners of Greek descent decreases. In order for our Parish to grow, we will need to share our precious Orthodox Faith with our fellow residents of Memphis and seek to bring more people to the Faith.

There are approximately 250 families that are active Stewards of our Parish, who to the best of their abilities support the ministries of the Annunciation with their time, talents, and treasure, and who actively participate in the Sacramental life of the Church. There are another 150 or so families that are connected to the Annunciation, but rarely participate in worship or the ministries of the Parish, although many of them contribute in some way financially to the Parish. Many of these families live a great distance from the Parish, as we serve areas of Mississippi, Arkansas, and Missouri, as well as rural areas of Tennessee.

Our Christian Orthodox Church was established on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (see Acts 2). The Church is the Body of Christ and in Herself is without fault. On the other hand, those of us who make up the Church do have our faults and weaknesses. It has been said: “The Church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum of saints!” We are all guilty of some mistakes and we all sin. In the Church we can be forgiven and reunited with our real family, the family of Christ.

St. John Chrysostom wrote: *“Never separate yourself from the Church. For nothing is stronger than the Church. Your hope is the Church alone; your salvation is inside the Church only, your refuge is the Church. She is higher than the heavens, and wider than the whole earth. She never grows old, but is always full of vigor and vitality. Holy Scripture (which would not even exist were it not for the Church), when pointing to Her strength and stability, calls Her an unshakable mountain.”*

STATISTICS: JULY 2015 – JANUARY 2021

Baptisms – There have been 57 baptisms in this five and a half year period, 29 male and 28 female. Included in this number are 8 adults. The previous five and a half year period (January 2010 – July 2015) had 48 baptisms total.

Chrismations – There have been 23 chrismations in this five and a half year period, 9 male and 14 female. The previous five and a half year period had 34 chrismations.

Weddings – There have been 21 weddings during this five and a half year period. Of these 7 were marriages between two Orthodox Christians; the remaining 14 were inter-Christian marriages (an Orthodox Christian with a non-Orthodox Christian). The previous five and a half year period had 21 weddings.

Funerals – There have been 40 funerals in our parish during this time. May their memory be eternal! The previous five and a half years had 44 funerals.

STEWARDSHIP

When understanding the concept of Christian Stewardship, we must realize that as Baptized and Chrismated Orthodox Christians, we have a daily obligation to the ministry of the Church. Stewardship calls each of us, the individual and every family member, to manage his/her Time, Talents, and Treasure to the glory of God.

For some, the Stewardship Program is only a financial system of supporting the Parish. This belief, unfortunately, shows a misunderstanding of the word itself, as well as, our obligation to live the Christian Orthodox Faith. The Stewardship Program is our total ministry. All that we say, feel, and do is a part of the Stewardship ministry. When we worship together, this is Stewardship! When we visit the sick, this is Stewardship! When we participate and support the Elpis Philoptochos, this is Stewardship! When we assist the various programs of our youth and senior citizens, this is Stewardship! When we work together for the Greek Festival, this is Stewardship! When we support the ministry of the Metropolis and the Archdiocese, this is Stewardship! We could go on and on to define Christian Stewardship that teaches, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1).

Stewardship by year:

Year	Amount Received	Total Stewards
2020	\$318,939	205
2019	\$331,854	211
2018	\$323,268	219
2017	\$315,997	219
2016	\$301,904	217
2015	\$280,135	208
2014	\$277,322	203
2013	\$299,562	216
2012	\$329,237	216
2011	\$324,447	N/A

It is incumbent in each Parish that the stewards of the Parish support and maintain the operations and ministries of that Parish. It will be an emphasis over the next 5 years that stewardship of our beautiful Annunciation Parish be understood as a spiritual responsibility of time and talent, even more than treasure. Those who have already embraced this have

reaped of the benefits and blessings of God. Their concept of our Faith has become a necessary and integral part of who they are as Orthodox Christians. We continue the process of developing an active and dynamic Stewardship Program for our Parish. The Stewardship Committee is actively working to grow this program, and to provide opportunities to learn and grow in our Faith.

BUILDING MAINTENANCE
CAPITAL PROJECTS
RENOVATION PROJECTS

Our campus is now over 65 years old. Much has been done to maintain the integrity and beauty of the buildings. A major renovation was completed at the end of 2012 with most of the expenses paid by July of 2015. A loan balance of \$71,254 remained, which was expired in January of 2016.

The Parish also owns a property of about 40 acres on Highway 64 which was purchased in 1998. A mortgage of \$226,103 remained in July of 2015, which was expired in March of 2018. Almost \$300,000 in loans were paid off in 32 months, and the Parish continues to be debt free!

When the Parish moved to the current location on Highland in 1955, we retained the original property at 3rd and Poplar. This was converted to a parking lot that has been leased to an independent contractor over the years, producing revenue for the Parish. Currently, we are in the first year of a seven year lease (with the option to renegotiate after 5 years). As part of the terms of this lease, the parking lot was repaved in 2020. Our only obligations are to pay the property taxes.

Since 2015, several projects have been undertaken to maintain our buildings. These projects are above and beyond the regular maintenance for our landscaping, kitchen, classrooms, Cotros Hall, and other parts of the building. These projects include: 1. Painting and patching the interior of the classroom buildings, offices, hallways, and the Narthex; 2. Repairs to the roof; 3. Waterproofing the roof and all sides of our buildings; 4. Lightbulbs were replaced in all the chandeliers in the Sanctuary; 5. Concrete walks in front of the Sanctuary and along Highland were replaced; and 6. Fire Suppression Unit in the kitchen was upgraded to meet code requirements. In all, these repairs and upgrades to our facility alone cost over \$86,000.

In addition to the maintenance that has been taking place we have also been improving our campus through various capital projects and improvements. These capital improvements include: 1. Repaving the parking lot (the parking lot at 3rd & Poplar has also been repaved at no cost to us); 2. Replacing the canvas awnings with metal awnings (the last canvas awning at the entrance will be replaced in 2021); 3. Replacing 4 of our A/C units, and 2 gas furnaces; 4. Replacing and upgrading our security system, including cameras and locks; and 5. Installing a motorized gate at our entrance. In all, over \$98,500 was spent on these capital projects.

When a beloved member of our Parish reposes in Lord, memorial donations on behalf of that person are put in to the Agape account. This account has historically been used to purchase liturgical items to be used in the Sanctuary. Several items have been purchased since 2015, either donated by families or in general. These include: 1. A new chalice set; 2. Two 7-branched standing candelabras; 3. a new censer; 4. Altar coverings; 5. Acolyte robes; 6. Epitaphios (cloth icon of Christ entombed); 7. Two chairs for the Altar; 8. A wooden cross with an icon of Christ; 9. Child Icon Stand; and 10. A Sacramental Table. Further, a bookcase / display case has also been placed in the Vestry to store liturgical items when they are not in use. In all, more than \$43,000 has been used from the Agape Fund since 2015.

In 2018, we completed a major renovation of many of the liturgical structures in our Sanctuary. These items were created in Greece by a master woodworker in Crete, and a master iconographer in Athens. The items we installed include: 1. Icon Screen with icons; 2. Altar Table; 3. Bishop's Throne; 4. Pulpit; 5. Chanter's Stand; and 6. Tomb of Christ (Kouvouklion). As part of the renovation the tile in the Altar area was replaced, and new LED lighting was installed in the Altar and to light the Soleas. This project, costing more than \$324,000, was fully funded through donations.

The icons from the old Icon Screen were kept by the Parish, as they are historic and have sentimental value. They were restored and now hang in the classrooms for our Sunday School students to reverence.

Through all the maintenance, capital improvements, and renovations, our financial position has improved over the past 5 years:

July 2015-

Operating/Festival/Savings Accounts - \$310,570

Agape Account - \$19,594

Restricted Accounts - \$1,171

Total Accounts - \$331,335

December 2020-

Operating/Festival/Savings Accounts - \$429,126

Agape Account - \$43,351

Restricted Accounts - \$28,535

Investments - \$13,911

Total Accounts - \$514,923

PARISH MINISTRIES

The Parish Council is comprised of 12 stewards of our Parish who assist the Parish Priest in administering the sacred ministry of our Parish. These stewards are elected, 6 each year, to a two-year term of office. To be eligible to run for the Parish Council, stewards must attend a seminar organized by the Parish Priest. To serve on the Parish Council means that

a steward must attend divine services regularly and participate in the sacramental life of the Church. At least 32 stewards have served on the Parish Council during the past 5 and a half years.

The Elpis Philoptochos encourages the members of our Parish to join the philanthropic arm of the Greek Orthodox Church. Its purpose is to preserve the sacredness of the Orthodox family; to promote the charitable, benevolent, and philanthropic purposes of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America; to formulate plans and methods to voluntarily aid the poor, the destitute, the hungry, the aged, the sick, the unemployed, the orphaned, the imprisoned, the widowed, the handicapped, the victims of disaster; and to promote participation in the activities of the Greek Orthodox community with the cooperation of the Parish Priest and the Parish Council. Our chapter has generously contributed to those within and without our Parish, assisting those in need, and providing scholarships for our young people.

The Religious Education Program of our Parish includes Sunday Church School for young people ages 3 through high school. This program is held from September to June. The Christmas Program and the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival are supported by the Sunday School. The Religious Education Program enables us to concentrate on various topics that assist our young people in their Christian Orthodox development. We also have a Bible Study that meets regularly to discuss topics about our precious Orthodox Faith.

The Music Ministry is vitally important for the worship experience in our Parish. The Choir is comprised of parishioners sharing their gift of music as active stewards of our Parish. We have a beautiful Choir that sings the responses during the Sunday Divine Liturgy, and a few other services throughout the year, particularly during Holy Week. The Chanters chant the services of the Church in the traditional Byzantine style. These services include the Sunday Orthros, weekday Liturgies, and the various other services in the Parish.

The Acolytes are comprised of boys ages 7 and older that wish to assist the priest in the Holy Altar. Our Acolytes gain invaluable experience and grow in stature and maturity in their service to Christ. As we grow the number of youth in our Parish, it would be nice to see more boys serving in the Altar.

The Athenian Dance Troupe is a beautiful aspect of the Hellenic Culture that promotes fellowship within our Parish. The cultural tradition of Greece is extremely diverse in language, costume, dance, music style, and expression. This diversity, one should keep in mind, is united by our Orthodox Christian Faith. This ministry serves to teach and preserve the dances, the costumes, and the traditions of various regions of Greece. Instruction is offered to young people beginning in 2nd grade through young adults. Our instructors participate in this program as an expression of their Stewardship to the Church. There are no paid directors in our program. We have two dance groups, which meet seasonally.

The Youth Groups are programs that provide opportunities for young people to share fellowship and faith in social and religious environments. The GOYA is for youth in high school and middle school. They meet at least once a month on a Sunday after services, where social issues are discussed from our Orthodox perspective. The HOPE & JOY are for all youth younger than middle school. They usually meet once a month in a social environment.

The Young Adult Group is comprised of young professionals in our Parish. We also reach out to Orthodox college students coming to Memphis to include them in our Parish Family.

The Young at Heart is designed to gather parishioners ages 55 plus in an atmosphere of faith, fun, and fellowship. They meet once a month for lunch and an activity.

The Greek Studies Program provides language classes for young people and adults. The purpose is to teach conversational Greek and the Hellenic Culture. This program has suspended due to the pandemic, but we are exploring options for later this year.

The Greek Festival was cancelled last year due to the pandemic. The excess proceeds from this event continue to be put in to savings. Unfortunately, a portion of the proceeds continues to be set aside to balance the budget for the operation of our Parish. It should be a goal that over the next five years our Parish operations become supported solely from Stewardship and other contributions from parishioners, and the Festival proceeds can be directed to important capital improvements. As Stewards of God's House, we should not rely upon the patrons of our Festival to ensure that the doors stay open. However, the success of the Festival is not to be measured by monetary gains, but in the spirit of cooperation, fellowship, and hospitality experienced. It is perhaps the best opportunity to share our precious Orthodox Faith with our friends and neighbors.

FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

The American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA) is a national organization for men, promoting the ideals of Hellenism. It serves to assist educational and cultural programs throughout the United States. The AHEPA meets regularly to promote fellowship and plan activities, and offers scholarships for our young people.

The Daughters of Penelope (DOP) is the national organization of women, which along with AHEPA, strives to preserve the Hellenic heritage. They also offer scholarships for our young people.

NOTEWORTHY EVENTS –

1. I began my ministry at the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church on July 16, 2015, and celebrated the Divine Liturgy for the first time that Sunday.
2. Rock-and-Roll Hall of Fame Member Chris Hillman headlined a concert that we hosted to benefit the St. Nicholas Shrine on September 4, 2016. More than \$10,000 was raised from this event.
3. In January of 2017, the Annunciation joined our sister parishes of St. John's and St. George's in a Blessing of the Mississippi River, the first time this service has been done in Memphis. This has become an annual event.
4. An Evening Celebrating the Theotokos took place on August 19, 2017, honoring the women in our lives. This fundraiser supported our Metropolis Philoptochos.
5. A new Parish Directory was distributed in 2018, including information on our Parish and the Orthodox Faith. A new Directory should be considered for 2021.
6. Screenings of the movie, "Becoming Truly Human" were sponsored by the Annunciation, along with the other Orthodox parishes in Memphis, in April of 2018, as an outreach to the greater Memphis community.
7. A major renovation of our Sanctuary took place in May of 2018, replacing the Icon Screen, Altar, Bishop's Throne, Pulpit, Chanter's Stand, and Tomb of Christ.
8. In the summer of 2018, a group of our young people travelled to Project Mexico to build a home for a family in need.
9. The Elpis Philoptochos sponsored an educational presentation in August of 2018 on the dangers of human trafficking, and how we can combat it.
10. His Eminence, Metropolitan Nicholas of Detroit made a pastoral visit to Memphis on Sunday, October 21, 2018. He also made a visit for a Lenten Lecture in 2017.
11. Father Vieron led his final Adult Greek Class in 2019. In total he taught Greek to thousands of Memphians for 47 years.
12. Eight of our young people travelled to Ionian Village in the summer of 2019 to participate in the summer camp program. Over the years, dozens of our youth have participated in this ministry.

13. Our Parish participated in the Dayton Basketball Tournament in February of 2020 for the first time in years. Everyone who went had the time of their life.
14. The Parish has awarded more than \$60,000 in scholarships to our young people over 5 years.
15. On September 29, 2020, Father Nicholas Vieron reposed in the Lord. He had served the Annunciation in one capacity or another for 65 years, and served the Church as a priest for over 70. His impact on the parish was felt by generations, and will continue for generations more. A portion of Highland Street in front of the church will be dedicated in his memory. His beloved wife, Presvytera Bess preceeded him in August of 2017.

I am grateful to you, the stewards of the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church for the many contributions you have made during these past 5 years. It is evident that our Parish is progressing thanks to the love and commitment of our parishioners. We must give thanks to our Heavenly Father Who is blessing our ministry. As we cooperate with one another in this sacred mission, we must continue to face the challenges ahead in order to build a strong Parish of Christian Orthodox Stewards.

Going forward in our ministry and praying for the health and well-being of our entire Parish, I remain,

Faithfully Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Simon Thomas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Father Simon Thomas
Parish Priest