

# History of Our Church

The history of St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, Youngstown, Ohio, is one full of remembrances. Because of liberal immigration laws in the early twentieth century, we find a massive influx of Greeks to all parts of the United States. The History of Greeks in Youngstown perhaps reflected or simulated the history of Greeks throughout the United States. Men and women left their poor homeland of Greece, desirous of the opportunity to come to America to improve their economic status, to educate their families, and to enrich their particular Grecian villages through their philanthropic gifts. Greeks in America initially offered considerable resistance however to assimilation into American habits and social structures. Thusly, the first generation Greek settlers banded together to work, to socialize, to promote Hellenism, and to worship according to the canons of the Greek Orthodox Church. America proved indeed a great light and hope, wherein mothers found a freedom not known in their native land of Greece - free from want, cooking meals with regularity, planning cultural development for their children, dressing in their Sunday finery, organizing the Church, etc.

The Hellenic community was organized in Youngstown in December 1915, in a meeting of Greek immigrants in a storeroom on West Federal Street. Church services were held regularly at the downtown YMCA until 1916, when the first Greek Orthodox Church, St. John, was erected on West Woodland Avenue. The turbulent years, 1915-1930, in Greece undoubtedly were responsible for the factionalism and division of the Hellenic community that was established in Mahoning County. Thusly, on May 2, 1919, Articles of incorporation were prepared to create the separate community of St. Nicholas, bearing the signatures of Messrs. Christ Antarakis, Demetrios Cassis, Pericles Chengelis, Spyros Chengelis, John Hondrogian, Stefanos Johnson, and Vasilios Zoyes. On May 5, 1919, the charter was issued by the State of Ohio, formally establishing the St. Nicholas Greek Eastern Orthodox Church of Youngstown, Ohio. A vacated Welsh Church was immediately purchased on the present site, 220 North Walnut Street, to become the original St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church.

During the 1950's, the original Church structure was in dire need of maintenance and repair. With a segment of the Church property condemned by the City Health Department, a coming together of membership occurred to dream for and to plan for a new structure. Under the strong leadership of Fr. George Hadjis, the parish priest, and of parish council presidents Theodore Baxevandes, Theodore Chengelis, Nicholas Deniakis, Gust Kolitsos, and Nicholas Masters, the Building Fund Chairman Harry Meshel, in excess of \$200,000

was raised, from contributions and pledges, in a relatively short period of time. Architects Boucherle, Hanahan and Stollo were consulted to plan the new (and presently existing) structures within a two-phase program - constructing the new social hall, followed by construction of the new Church. Daniel Terrari and Sons, building contractors, presented the acceptable bid to construct the new Church. Ground-breaking ceremonies were held in 1958, and the new Church complex was completed in 1960 - a dream fully realized. The new St. Nicholas Church and complex was consecrated on September 8, 1974, by His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos of blessed memory. The priest of the parish at the time was Fr. George Kostan.

On October 13, 1985, under the direction of Fr. John Karabatsos, the parish celebrated the 25th anniversary of the construction of the current Church complex with an elaborate dinner, marked by the production of a commemorative album, highlighting the celebration. The year 1994 marked the 75th year of parish life for the St. Nicholas community. The theme "75 Years of Life and Love in Orthodoxy" permeated throughout all of the relevant parish activities and functions that year. Formal celebrations were held on the weekend of May 21-22, 1994. Under the spiritual leadership of Fr. John Karabatsos and Parish Council President Thomas Mikulka, a 75th Anniversary Grand Banquet was held on Sunday, May 22nd.

The St. Nicholas community has witnessed the evolution of a parish, adapted to physical changes in the structural facilities within the complex, and undertaken guidance from a network of ordained priests. Preparations are now being made to celebrate 100 years of parish life in 2019, along with the functional operation of our beloved parish into the 21st century.