

The Testament

SAINT SOPHIA GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH | ALBANY, NY

Volume 34 | October 2022



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA
ARCHDIOCESAN DISTRICT



Celebrating 100 Years



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Fr. Pat's Insights

We dedicate this month and this Testament issue to our 100 years as a Greek Orthodox Community in the Capital District of New York State. In the planning for over two years, we finally get to celebrate.



Paraphrasing the Davidic Psalms, It is with timbrel and harp, song and dance, praise and joy, we join together as one body to celebrate, remember, to give thanks to our God Most High, and to gather, in concord of soul and body to commemorate this joyous event. We remember our founders, our families and friends, parish and philanthropic leaders, those who are here today, and those who have passed into the world of everlasting life yesterday. We celebrate 100 years of memories, growth and the awesome experience of being all connected to Saint Sophia established in 1922.

It is always easier to remember what transpired recently in our lives, but we should never exclude our past from our memory banks. St. Sophia and the establishment of our Community started with a simple goal of our first families to perpetuate their culture, language, and religion in the United States of America. This concept probably sounds out of touch with the world we live in today but, for those intrepid founding families, there was much to overcome. The language they spoke, the customs they adhered to, the religion which they worshipped were not native to the U.S. in 1922. The alphabet our founders were familiar with was also foreign to America. Americans truly did understand the glory of Greece, but only in terms of ancient history, and that was found in a book, and studied in school.

Our progenitors were "foreigners". Some did have a sense of the king's English, but most spoke Greek exclusively.

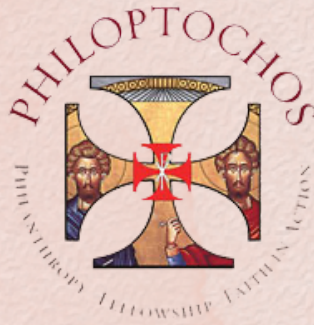
Something needed to be done, and the result can be clearly defined today. We are a body of Orthodox Christians who have assimilated into the fabric of American society, and without having to sacrifice our roots, nor our heritage.

Today, we are a shining star and productive members of what has become our American adventure. We are doctors, lawyers, and teachers, factory workers, business entrepreneurs, culinary experts, and corporate leaders. We are scientists, historians, and politicians. We are homemakers, care providers, and students. We are young, we are old and we are one. We are a people living in the greatest country of the world, and we are free to live, work, sing, write and worship as we choose.

We are a family of Orthodox Christians from around the world, and we have come a long way from the European shores, Middle East, Africa, and the Mediterranean basin. Today, we are multifaceted, multicultural, and joined together by a strong bond and common thread. We are an Orthodox Christian Community worshipping our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Church. May God continue to bless us and to continue our growth. I have been so blessed and am most thankful to be a small part of our history.

To those who will celebrate with us, and to those who are unable to be with us, I dedicate this month to you, our parishioners, supporters, and members. God bless you always.

Happy Anniversary and to our next 100 years!



Established in 1931, our Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society has been the right hand to our church. Over the years our ladies have happily supported Saint Sophia's with numerous events.

Happy 100th Anniversary

to our beloved church
Hagia Sophia

We look forward to serving you for
another 100 years and beyond!

God Bless You and Our Community

Parish Council: Centennial Corner

Autumn. The leaves begin their transformation and begin to fall. We have already celebrated our 100th Anniversary on Columbus weekend, before this article was written. But if you receive it before October 8th, join us for a super weekend.

October is the beginning of the month of change in in our Church activities.. It is a very important time. We will hold our General Assembly Meeting on October 23rd. This meeting sets the stage for the following year (2023) which comes much quicker than it looks on the calendar. This is because Halloween, Thanksgiving, and the Christmas season seem to fly by every year before we know it.

The October GA reviews where we have been financially, what our next year's budget will be, and, who will makeup your new Parish Council.

Each year, 6 Parish Council members' terms will end, and new candidates, plus remaining members, will set the agenda for the next year.

So, is having talented, committed, hard working Parish Council members important to our church? If these sprawling facilities along with the Apartments (\$4Million+) next door, were yours, would you be "missing" from an important meeting like this? By not attending will we still elect qualified, enthusiastic, caring, & committed individuals to care for your Assets?

I say this not to imply that anyone on our current PC is not qualified or lacking commitment, but because at every General Assembly in October, we barely nominate 2-3 candidates, leaving the remainder to be nominated by mail-in nominations. Substantial investments, and, at times difficult decisions must be made, yet there is low interest in serving.

Please help your Church by coming to the General Assembly with nominations to the Parish Council of members who do want to serve and can contribute their time making crucial decisions in all areas of church operations.

In addition to business, we are in need of Sunday School teachers and students, choir members, Greek School students. It seems COVID-19 created convenient opportunities for many who used to come to Church regularly, to stay home. It also has disrupted what I call "the rhythm" in our community. Full church attendance, lots of kids in Greek School, and Sunday School, etc. That rhythm started and grew yearly since 1922 by Greeks who wanted their families to grow up in our Orthodox Faith and a strong Greek Culture.

Let's not let our next 100 years wane due to lack of interest, for whatever reason.

Harry J. Ermides
Parish Council President



St. Sophia Choir -- 1956 -



PICNIC-1926-

Photo No.:
126-A



Saint Demetrios and Nestor

Source: Poulos, G. (1995). Saint Demetrios and Nestor
In Orthodox Saints Vol. 4 (pp. 67-68) Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Pr.



Demetrios was a native of the city of Thessaloniki, the city founded by Alexander the Great, who named it for a sister very dear to him. In the tradition of the great thinkers of ancient Greece, Demetrios honed his keen oratorical power in the public forum, where the debates of the great minds of the day drew the spirited Christians as much as the gladiatorial games attracted the pagans.

As the second leading city of the empire, Thessaloniki had a reputation for providing the brightest intellectuals on the public platform and the most fearsome gladiators in the arena, strange bedfellows, indeed, and oddly enough, in both of which the power of Demetrios was to find expression.

Demetrios was in the military service as well as a devout Christian, a study in contrast that was countenanced in Thessaloniki, but when it came to the attention of the Emperor Maximianus, who had come for an annual exhibition of gladiatorial prowess in the arena, the dual nature met with royal displeasure. For his part in the Christian cause, Demetrios was stripped of his military rank and cast into prison to await an uncertain fate. It was at this point that the friendship of Nestor came to light. At great personal risk Nestor visited his friend in prison regularly and sought to intercede in his behalf, a move which availed him little but the aroused suspicions of those who surrounded the emperor. This provided the setting for one of the finest displays of the power of God through the friendship of two gallant Christians.

It seems that one of the favorites of the arena, admired particularly by the emperor, was a giant man named Lyaïos, a seven foot brute who destroyed every hapless gladiator he ever faced, and for whom the pagans sought an opponent who at least had the courage to walk up to Lyaïos and give a good account of himself before succumbing to the inevitable.

It was during one of his visits that Nestor heard from Demetrios that the power of the Lord could be transmitted through him to any man and make him invincible against any foe in the arena. The youthful Nestor, with the spirit of the true believer welling within him, agreed to hurl a challenge to the best of the gladiators with a declaration that the power of God would, thanks to his friend, Demetrios, prevail against all comers. Buoyed by the assurance of Demetrios, he stepped into the arena and shouted his defiance in the name of the Lord.

The pagan crowd, thinking this some practical joke, roared with laughter, but when Nestor strode to the royal box where Maximinus had looked on with amusement and heard the young man invoke the name of Demetrios and the awesome power of God, his smile turned to a snarl and the audience joined him in derision, whereupon the scowling Lyaïos was brought into the pit. The crowd settled back to witness the anticipated cat and mouse match, which the giant would conclude when it pleased him. But they were brought to their feet in disbelief when the supposed victim withstood the withering attack of the gladiator who had never tasted defeat, and, in due course, turned the tables and soundly defeated the greatest of the gladiators. Nestor scorned the thumbs down signal of the mob who now screamed for death, and the young Christian walked away from his prostrated foe.

The frustrated emperor now ordered the deaths of both Christian companions, and they were executed without delay by the Roman soldiers. Not all who left the arena that day remained pagans.



The First St. Sophia

October 13, 2014 written by 98 Acres in Albany

In 1923, the Greek Orthodox Community of Albany purchased and began holding services in a former Unitarian (before that, Presbyterian) church on 8 Lancaster Street. St. Sophia served congregants from across the city and as far away as Hudson, Catskill, and Little Falls. The new building doubled as a Greek language school for the members' US-born children, the first pastor, Rev. John K. Chrysogelos, serving as their teacher. The following year, the Community purchased 10 Lancaster as a rectory.

By 1960, the Community had begun a major expansion campaign—raising funds to purchase and demolish neighboring structures in order to build a new school and community center on Lancaster. These plans were disrupted in 1962 by the State's appropriation of 98.5 acres in Albany, including Lancaster between Eagle and High Streets.

A new plan was needed: St. Sophia would continue to hold services in 8 Lancaster while building a new church elsewhere in the city. This plan held until February 1965. The *Knickerbocker News* reported that the old church would be one of eight structures left standing in the take-area after the March 26 clearance deadline. Roughly two weeks later, the church was evacuated. State engineers discovered a floor-to-ceiling fissure (presumably caused or worsened by nearby demolition and construction) and declared the 109-year-old building unsafe.

In February 1965, construction on the new church had not yet begun. Indeed, the St Sophia community still had \$200,000 to raise on top of the \$455,000 reimbursement from the State. For more than two years, until the new parish center was completed in November 1967, the congregation held services at the Episcopal Cathedral of All Saints on the corner of Elk and S. Swan Streets. The new church on 440 Whitehall Road was finally completed and consecrated in April 1969.

source: (98 Acres in Albany. 2014. The First St. Sophia. [online] Available at: <<https://98acresinalbany.wordpress.com/2014/10/13/the-first-st-sophia/>>



St. Sophia Greek Language and Culture Academy Corner

Γωνία της Ακαδημίας Ελληνικής Γλώσσας και Πολιτισμού Αγίας Σοφίας



Upcoming Events

OXI Day Celebration on October 23rd in church following the Liturgy. All students are expected to participate!

October 2022 Class Schedule

October 8th, 15th and 22nd

Classes are in session

October 29th -Halloween Party Greek style at 9:00 am for all students!

Costumes, games, prizes, music, food and dancing



A quick Greek lesson for students as they begin their year! Greeks have special wishes for many occasions:

Καλή Χρονιά! Kali Hronia' or Kali sholiki hronia' (καλή σχολική χρονιά) so that it doesn't sound like you are wishing for the New Year, is probably the most common expression you hear when schools are about to open after the summer.

Καλή Αρχή! One more expression starting with the adjective kali=good. Kali arhi is a wish that can be used for any new beginning since it basically states the need for a new time that will hopefully start well and bring good things to people.

Καλή Πρόοδο (kali proodo)! This is a wish to new graduates but it is also used for the first day of school. "Proodos" means progress and is wished for their children when it comes to their studies, to evolve and learn as much as possible

Reminders

Θα θέλαμε να ευχηθούμε σε ένα συνεχές σχολικό έτος 2022-2023 σε όλα τα παιδιά, στους γονείς και στους δασκάλους μας!

Κυρία Ελένη Δαμάσκου-Χρίστου, Διευθύντρια

We want to wish a continued happy school year 2021-2022 to all our children, parents and teachers!

Lainie Damaskos-Christou - Director

email: greeklanguageacademy@stsophiabany.org

www.stsophiagrekschool.org



OXI DAY COMMEMORATION AT USS SLATER



FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28TH 10:00 AM

"OXI" IS THE GREEK WORD FOR "NO". IT
SYMBOLIZES GREECE'S INVOLVMENT IN WWII.
JOIN THE CAPITAL REGION'S HELLENIC
COMMUNITY IN MARKING THIS IMPORTANT
DAY OF FREEDOM.

**SPONSORED BY
USS SLATER & AHEPA 140**



OCTOBER 2022 CALENDAR

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
2 2ND SUNDAY LUKE Ἰ ΛΟΥΚᾶ DIVINE LITURGY 9:30 AM	3	4	5	6	7	8 100TH ANNIVERSARY GALA 6:00 PM ALBANY CAPITAL CENTER
9 3RD SUNDAY LUKE Ἰ ΛΟΥΚᾶ HIERARCHICAL DIVINE LITURGY 9:30 AM 100TH ANNIVERSARY LUNCHEON	10	11	12	13	14	15
16 7TH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL Δ' ΛΟΥΚᾶ DIVINE LITURGY 9:30 AM	17	18	19	20 ST. GERASIMOS ΓΕΡΑΣΙΜΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΚΕΦΑΛΛΗΝΙΑΣ DIVINE LITURGY 9:30 AM	21	22
23 6TH SUNDAY LUKE ΣΤ' ΛΟΥΚᾶ DIVINE LITURGY 9:30 AM	24	25	26 ST. DEMETRIOS THE MYRRH- STREAMER & GREAT MARTYR OF THESSALONIKI ΜΕΓΑΛΟΜΑΡΤΥΡΟΣ ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΜΥΡΟΒΛΥΤΟΥ DIVINE LITURGY 9:30 AM	27	28	29
30 5TH SUNDAY LUKE Ε' ΛΟΥΚᾶ DIVINE LITURGY 9:30 AM	31					

A modern building will begin

By MEL GONICK

A perfect blending of the traditional and the contemporary can be found in the new Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Church now being completed at 440 Whitehall Road.

The new church and parish center, connected by a breezeway are being erected at a cost of between \$850,000 and \$1,000,000 and replaces the former facilities at 8 Lancaster Street which were razed for the South Mall project.

Ground was broken for the new buildings Oct. 2, 1966, and the parish center was opened Nov. 12 of this year. The center is being used for worship services until completion of the church building in January. Administrative and educational activities also are being carried on in the center.

On Sunday, Jan. 28, Bishop Silas (that's his only name) of the New York Diocese of the Greek Orthodox Church, will perform the traditional "Opening of the Doors" service in the new church building which has a seating capacity of approximately 500.

The Rev. Alexander G. Leondis, pastor of Saint Sophia's, said that according to church teachings, the church proper cannot be used for worship until this service is performed.

Saint Sophia's parish goes back to 1922 when it was formed by a total of 17 Albany area families who otherwise would have to travel to Schenectady for services in their own denomination.

The parish has grown steadily since that time and now serves approximately 400 families in the Capital District with about 350 families in regular membership.

When the church proper is put into full use next month, the parish center will become the social and cultural center for the

parish. This building includes administrative offices, five classrooms for the parish school, a meeting and dining hall, a kitchen and storage space.

The church has been designed in the traditional Byzantine style—in the shape of a cross—with a dome at the top. This symbolizes that the Cross is the way to Heaven which is represented by the dome.

Father Leondis said that while everything in the new structure is of the most modern construction, it all conforms to the liturgical traditions of the Orthodox Church. This includes the lighting with an ornate chandelier, mounted with a candle, showing God's love for man shown through his son, Jesus Christ, represented by the candle.

Another unique fixture of the church will be a marble Icon Screen, being imported from Italy at a cost of \$25,000. It was designed by Sculptor Sirio Ponelli of Chicago.

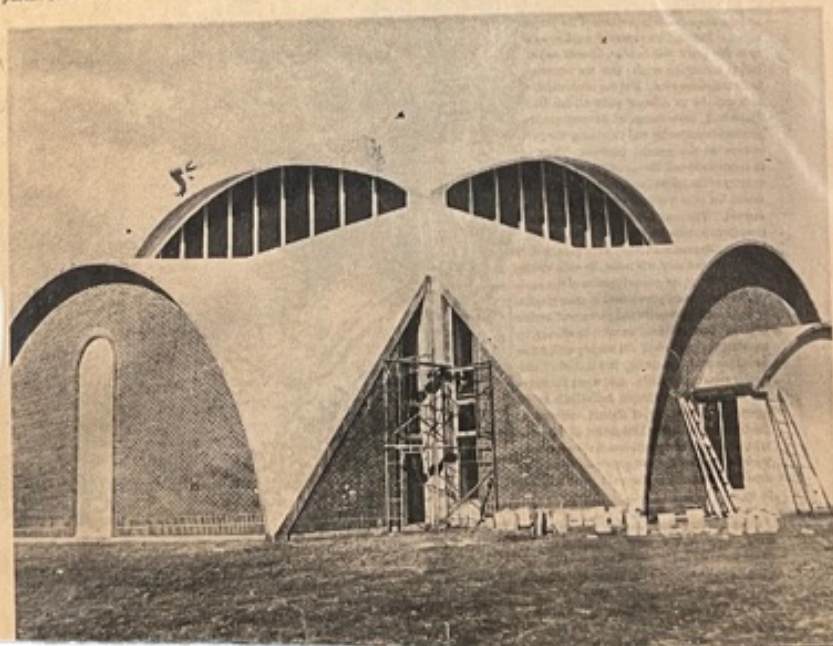
The "pantocrator," a large icon of Christ the Almighty, holding the Bible, is to be erected on the church dome, and an icon of the Virgin Mary will be mounted above the altar to show that She was the bridge by which Christ entered the world.

The church is divided into three parts—the sanctuary, the nave and solea. The sanctuary represents the Church Triumphant, the presence of God. Only acolytes and priests may enter the sanctuary and women are not allowed.

The Church Militant is represented by the nave, and the solea platform represents the meeting of the two and is the place where Holy Communion is administered, as well as the usual sacraments of the church.

Completion of the church has been delayed slightly by two suspicious fires which are under investigation, but plans are going ahead pretty much on schedule. Father Leondis said that

... continued on page three



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St. Sophia Mission Statement – St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church, Inc. is a not-for-profit religious community under the leadership of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, through the auspices of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople whose mission is to: (1) maintain, practice, and proclaim the Christian Orthodox faith, enhancing the spiritual growth of its communicants; (2) develop and operate programs, activities, and services for the Parishioners which serve and further the religious educational, cultural, philanthropic, and social ministries of the community as well as to protect and continuously develop the physical buildings and religious property as deemed necessary;
(3) dedicate the promotion of Christian Fellowship and values between the evolving diversity of cultures and its people.