

LOOKING TOWARDS OUR CENTENNIAL

Looking Back, Yet Moving Forward

By Antonia D. Paras Chapralis

During the Divine Liturgy I love to look at the *pantokratora* (dome), the stained glass windows and the icons (which Father John Angelis referred to as the “windows to heaven”) in our lovely church. It’s transformative; I always feel a sense of reverence and awe. Yet I can’t help but recall happy memories of our beloved Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation.

It all began with our *protoporoi*, to whom we are forever grateful, who emigrated with little but brought much to America: a strong belief in our Greek Orthodox faith, strong ties to our Greek roots and traditions, and a strong work ethic. Our story begins when our father, Dimitri Paraskakis left *Palia Roumata*, Crete, and emigrated to America in 1910. Our mother, Katina Mosconisiotou, was born on the island of Skopelos and emigrated with her sister, Magdaline in 1922. Katina & Dimitri met in Hilmar, California, and were married at Annunciation on 620 N Street on January 24, 1926 with Father Georgakopoulos officiating. They honeymooned at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco. Our father had the Union Café at 1024 2nd Street, Old Sacramento, and farms in Natomas where the Sacramento International Airport now sits. Our mother worked at the Bercut Richards Cannery with other Greek women.

For our family, as for many, life revolved around the church. My father was on the Parish Council, ran the bar at the old picnics, and like some others, put up the family home as collateral for our current Annunciation site. Our mother always belonged to Philoptochos and she spoke of visiting people in outlying areas in order to collect money for various *erana* (church projects.) Years later she was in charge of making dolmades for the Food Festival, which meant visiting my aunt’s vineyard in Delhi to pick thousands of fresh grape leaves. My older siblings Mary, Sophie, Helen, George (+), Kiki, & Gus experienced life at both church sites. (Our oldest brother, Manoli, died at 8 months of age from pneumonia.)

When I was a child, a typical Sunday morning consisted of Sunday School, going into Church for communion, and then back to Sunday School in the Hellenic Center, affectionately known as “The Hall”. In those days we always fasted before communion, and really looked forward to the hot pancake breakfasts that followed. We can’t talk about Sunday School in the 50’s and 60’s without mentioning Lucille Vlahos and Teddy Yazigi, the Sunday school directors who made things run like clockwork. I fondly remember sitting in metal folding chairs while learning the hymns of our church from a flip chart. At Christmastime the myriads of white choir robes with big red collars would surface and the excitement would begin. One Sunday I was so tired from standing on the *soleas* during yet another Christmas pageant rehearsal that I simply walked over to the bishop’s throne and sat down.

There were more activities that most of us children were involved in. Greek School was always on weekdays after school, upstairs in The Hall. (My daughters knew this room as the dancers’ costume storage area.) We had a number of teachers through the years: our dear Father Kirmitsis, newly ordained Father Mark Vinas, Fr. Kirmitsis’ niece, Danae, Mr. Athanasiou and Miss George. They were as patient as they could be with a bunch of energetic yet tired children of mixed ages and ability levels, which could be a handful. Of course, we always tried hard to perfect our poems for the March 25th celebrations. We also had a thriving GOYA thanks to our advisors, Mr. and Mrs. Nick Kerhoulas and Mr. & Mrs. Athans, who kindly opened their homes to us for special occasions. We were all together and we had fun.

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Then there were *horosperides* (dances) galore sponsored by fraternal groups or the Parish Council. As one entered The Hall, the coat-check room was on the left and the church office was on the right. In addition to being with our friends and dancing and having a good time, the highlight for this writer was the *mezethakia*. Upon entering the large smoke-filled bar, we'd reach up, get pretzels and hot, fried chicken livers and then top it all off with a soda. Delicious!

In the early days, picnics sponsored by fraternal groups or the Parish council were held at New Helvetia Park with lots of people and lots of *kefi*! I fondly remember attending fun-filled picnics held in a shady spot at the old State Fair grounds on Stockton Blvd and Broadway. The ladies of the hosting groups always had tables laden with delicious desserts. And the highlight was BINGO, which we played as long as our parents allowed. One cannot talk about those picnics without remembering Mr. Ted Triphon, Sacramento's original DJ who so patiently spun 78's (vinyl records) all afternoon.

As I write this, more and more fond memories surface, but I'll end with the construction of our "new" Sunday School/Office building formerly located at 3022 F Street. What a sense of pride it produced when it opened in 1971. Working on the comprehensive curriculum with the many teachers in our parish was a grueling task, but what a job they did! Getting to teach Sunday School in the brand new building was a thrill for me.

Reminiscing about the good old days is fun and good as long as we stop to check where we are headed. As times change and life evolves, hopefully we are moving forward. As my godparents, Hrissoula and Tony Legatos, wrote in the Annunciation's 1956 Album commemorating our Church's consecration,

“Η προοδος μας βασιζεται εις την ενωσιν μας και την συνεργασιαν μας...”

“Our progress is based on our unity and cooperation...”

To that I would add, “and a strong belief in God and our Holy Orthodox faith and its rich traditions.”

We pray that our children, grandchildren and future generations may experience a loving, faith-based, community-centered life in our beloved Annunciation Greek Orthodox parish of Sacramento, California.

ΠΑΝΤΑ ΜΠΡΟΣΤΑ.

ALWAYS FORWARD.

