

## Parish History

To appreciate the debt that we owe to our Founding Fathers, we must go back in time to the early history of our parish. The great wave of immigration at the turn of the 20th Century brought many Greek immigrants to cities and towns in America. The historical archives of San Joaquin County show Greek immigrants arrived in this county as early as 1870.

By the 1920's there were a number of families established in Stockton. These were young families, and as children were born and grew, there was a deep concern to preserve a spiritual, ethnic, and linguistic identity and heritage for this young first-born generation. This concern gave rise to an organization called the ADELFOFOTIS or the Hellenic Mutual Society or Brotherhood. This organization served the families of Stockton, Tracy, Lodi, and Manteca.

Through the efforts of this group, even before the first church was built, priests were brought to Stockton from Sacramento or San Francisco for Easter and Christmas services, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. These services were held at homes or at downtown St. John's Episcopal Church. The two priests who served the Orthodox faithful of Stockton and vicinity were Father Constantine Chapralis from San Francisco and Father George Sardounis of Sacramento. The earliest baptism recorded in the records of Holy Trinity Church, San Francisco, was Maria Zizonatos on May 18, 1908, and the earliest recorded wedding was that of Nicholas Skaftouris and Parasekve Kardapatis, who were married on August 25, 1910.

The newly organized AHEPA replaced ADELFOFOTIS on March 3, 1929 continuing to work on behalf of the existing families and their needs as well as helping them to assimilate to their newly adopted country, America. The ladies' auxiliary of this fraternal organization, the Daughters of Penelope, was organized on Sept. 28, 1934. Throughout the years, both organizations have supported and financially contributed to many church projects.

A strong concern, especially among the wives and mothers of our parish, was for the establishment of a permanent church. The parish of St. Basil, according to official legal documents contained the cornerstones of our two previous houses of worship, was established at a General Assembly meeting of parishioners in November, 1929, and was recognized as a religious organization by the State of California on December 20, 1929.

The first parish council consisted of twelve men, who along with many others, labored on behalf of the parish with a great deal of concern and zeal. The first elected council of our parish were the following: Peter Bobotas, Pres., Anthony Caramiho, Vice-Pres., Nick Spiropoulos (Sperry), Sec., Peter Fotinos, Treas., Steve Chiarchianis, Constantine Delegiannis, George Eliopoulos, Constantine Mallos, George Sarris, Alexios Symvoulos, George Valsamakis, and Emmanuel Xenakis (Xenos). At the first council meeting, held at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Nicholas Sperry in November, 1929, plans were made to create a church where all Greek Orthodox people of Stockton and vicinity could gather together to worship.

The first site of our Church on 248 S. Stanislaus was purchased on March 20, 1930. Six thousand, five hundred dollars was borrowed from the Bank of America. On October 28, the contractor agreed to build within 60 working days a two-story brick building for \$10,400. A lottery was held for the naming of the church, and the winner was Stamatina Xenakis (Xenos), who together with her husband Emmanuel, chose the name of Agios Vasilios, St. Basil. A dream fulfilled, parishioners celebrated Christmas service, 1930, in the new church. The first church site became the focal point for the community, and the lower floor served as a social center. This is where Sunday School classes were conducted. It also served as a meeting place for various organizations, as well as a place to hold social functions.

There were difficult years, and there were problems that had to be worked through. The struggling parish suffered its ups and downs internally, but by the Grace of God, the hard work of its presidents and

councils, and the moral and financial assistance of parishioners, the parish worked through these early problems.

There can be no more eloquent testimony to the enduring vitality of Orthodoxy than the lives of our pioneer forefathers, our Founding Fathers, and the work of the first Parish Council, who in faith, devotion and vision established our church. We will always owe them a debt of gratitude. Two commemorative plaques for future posterity to remember, honoring our Founding Fathers and the first Parish Council, can be found in the narthex of our present church.

**248 S. Stanislaus St.**

Bishop Athenagoras, in the 40's at the marriage of Nick and Georgia Johnson, Sister of Dr. Nick Demas.



Understand the contributions they made, we need to look at the changes that occurred in our parish life from 1931 to the present and how these challenges were met. As early as the end of World War II, a new era began with the children of our Founding Fathers coming to the fore to assume their role of responsibility and leadership within the parish. And so the torch was passed on to this new generation.

Our original site had served our needs adequately, but as our parish grew and subsequent needs arose, our early leaders with the approval of the parishioners, made the decision in 1945 to build a new and larger church with more facilities to adequately serve our community. Spearheading the fund raising efforts were the following: Emanuel Trachiotis, Nick Seperas, James Ladas, Theodore Lourentzos and Chris Farakos. With the cooperation of the parish council, they successfully collected \$65,000.

Our second church at 250 S. Stanislaus was constructed next to the then existing church and opened in December, 1948. The need for a community center was paramount. Instrumental in the efforts to renovate the former church and create a community center were the following: Steve Xantopoulos, Edmond Stevens, George Dremalas, Chris Farakos, and Frank Vellis. For many years it was in this center that Sunday School and Greek School classes were conducted and where meetings and social functions of the parish were held.

St Basil's Philoptochos Ladies Society had been founded in 1937, and the philanthropic work of the organization flourished during this time. This organization became an integral part in meeting the many needs of the St. Basil parish. A Mother's Club was established by parents who had children attending Sunday School, and this group did much to support the religious education of our parish children.

Recognizing the growing needs of the community, the first food festival was organized in 1960 and was held



Thiranexia, Door Opening, In December 1948.  
The previous church at 248 S. Stanislaus can be  
seen on the edge of the photo.

at the Stockton Civic Auditorium. Through the years it has become the parish's major fundraiser and attracts people from all over. Much of the burden was carried by the many festival chairpersons with the help of many of our parishioners.

Beginning in the 1950's and continuing today, our parish experienced a change in the composition and number of parishioners through family growth, converts, Orthodox Christians moving in the area, and Orthodox Christians of other ethnic backgrounds. Because of these changes, those who were presidents at this time recognized the need to plan for the future expansion of our church facilities.

In 1961 after much discussion and reluctance to leave our Stanislaus location for the move to the north part of town, the parish voted to purchase the present site on March Lane. Soon began the process of planning for a much need church and a separate complex to include Sunday School classrooms, an office, and a multi-purpose fellowship hall.

This arduous task fell on the shoulders of the council presidents and the various parishoiners who served on the councils and committees. The planning committee, headed by Gus Xanttopoulos and consisting of Robert Henning, Angelo Mitchell, George Marmas, George Besotes, Ernest Sopp, and Peter Spanos, with Dean Trachiotis and Frank Vellis as advisors, worked directly with the architext, Roger Ranuio, in the planning and designing of the church. The executive committee, headed by Dr. Arthur Chimiklis, Steve Xanttopoulos, Nick Chiarchiarnis, Emanuel Kokonas, Earl Blincoe, Peter Gaines, Ernest Marcopulos, and George Spanos, was formed to develop and direct the fundraising drive.

Modern Engineering & Contruction's bid of \$387,000 was accepted on January 11, 1970 and work began. On February 1, 1970, ground was broekn after an Agiasmos by Bishop Meletios. The last Divine Liturgy in our former church on Stanislaus was celebrated on January 1, 1971, and the official Door Opening (Thiranexia) of our present church took place the next day, January 2, 1971. The official burning of the mortgage took place on January 15. The Alex G. Spanos Family generously wiped out the debt by donating money equal to the difference between the money raised and the money owed.

### **920 W. March Lane**

Ground Breaking after an Agiasmos by Bishop Meletios, with Fr. Constantine Efstathiou, on February 1, 1970.



An Open House was held on April 27, 1980, to usher in the events leading to the Consecration of our church on May 4, 1980. On that day Bishop Anthony, with the assistance on many clergy, placed the Paten (diskarion) with the relics of the three saints, Theodore the Commander, Anastasia, and Theonas, on the altar table. The remained there overnight, together with the Vigil Light. A short prayer service, honoring the memory of the Martyrs, preceded the service of Great Vespers. At the conclusion of the Consecration Service, the church had now been Baptized, Chrismated, Sanctified, Consecrated, and Dedicated to God for eternal use as an Orthodox Christian House of Worship. it was a memorable event for our parish family!

From 1971 to the present our parish presidents dealt with many challenges. One area in particular was that of fundraising. From the first Festival to the present, our parish has depended on the profits to finance our parish expenses. This task has weighed heavily on the shoulders of our leaders and the various committees. An important decision was made to rent our hall, and this brought much needed additional income. Much effort was spent on the task of improving our stewardship program, introducing new ideas. With an eye to the future need of our parish, various funds were created such as the Memorial, Endowment, and Maintenance Funds.

In 1976 the late Theodore J. Laton bequethed to St. Basil his entire estate, whose income was to be used to financially assist, worthy and deserving Greek Orthodox students of our parish in the furtherance of their education. In the forthcoming years two other bequeths have been added: Chimiklis/Silva and the A. & S. Ligonis funds. As only interest earned on the principle can be used, a new concept has emerged, that of onations made by parishioners in honor of memory of family and friends. Because of this, more scholarship money has become available to assist worthy parish young people. From 1977 until now, close to \$200,000 has been given to about 150 of our parish young people.

Through the efforts of our parish priests and volunteer parishioners, youth activities such as GOYA, JOY, basketball teams, dance groups, Bible Studies, and a Junior Choir were started. Our parish leaders strongly supported these activities.

Implementing the Master Plan, which deals with the future development of our existing facilities and property, has been a continuing priority of our parish presidents and council members. With the assistance of the parish and generous benefactors, we witnessed the construction of a new wing for our Sunday School classes, new office space, the enlargement of our social hall, and the enhancement of the interior of our edifice and grounds.

Through the vision of our leaders we have added more land with the acquisition of the offices on Precissi & March Lane. Added to that has also been a property on Precissi Lane given to St. Basil by three parish families. One of the most recent and far reaching accomplishments for St. Basil has been the adoption and implementation of a sound and responsible parish fiscal program.

As a part of our Outreach program, the accredited Preschool program has brought recognition on a community level, as well as our involvement with St. Mary's Dining Hall and the Choir December Concerts, whose silver offering at the end of the program goes to charitable institutions here in Stockton.

Much time has been given in preparing for the visitations of Patriarch Demetrios in 1990, Archbishop Spiridon in 1997, and for the outstanding anniversary events, celebrating the 50th, 60th, as well as the one we are celebrating this year, our 75th.

Collectively working with our parishioners, Spiritual Fathers, benefactors, and with the Grace of God, our past presidents' helped to create what St. Basil is today. To these dedicated men and women leaders in appreciation, we say, "Thank you. Well done, good and faithful servants." It is our fervent hope that our younger generation will emulate their predecessors with the same fervor, zeal, and dedication to carry on the work of the church in future years.

*-Compiled and Edited by Bob & Dorothy Henning*

*Source Material: Past Presidents' Dinner 2001, St Basil Consecration & 50th Anniversary Album, and St. Basil 60th Year Anniversary Album*