



Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church of St Augustine

"Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God"

[Romans 15:7]

Saint Augustine, Florida is home to three distinct Orthodox institutions, whose ministries witness on a local, national and international level. These include the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, Saint Photios Greek Orthodox National Shrine, and Orthodox Christian Mission Center.

For many years, the Greek Orthodox faithful of the nation's oldest city, St. Augustine, Florida, were under the spiritual jurisdiction of St. John the Divine Greek Orthodox Church of Jacksonville. Today, Holy Trinity Church, along with the other institutions in St. Augustine assist in the formation of a community dedicated to serving the needs of all peoples towards growth in Jesus Christ.

The 1700s

The first colony of Greeks to arrive in the New World landed in St. Augustine on June 26, 1768. They were among the 1,402 persons of Mediterranean descent to depart from Mahon, Menorca, of whom almost 250 died en route. This group of Corsicans, Minorcans, Italians, and Greeks were contracted by Dr. Andrew Turnbull, under the British Indentured Servitude Act, to establish the New Smyrna Colony, 75 miles south of St. Augustine.

In nine years, all but 400 perished due to the harsh weather, disease and the torturous conditions. Upon hearing that Great Britain was losing its hold in the northern colonies, three people escaped and walked the Kings Road to St. Augustine to plead for freedom from Governor Patrick Tonyn.

Within three months, the survivors of the New Smyrna Colony were released from their contracts and given sanctuary at the Avero House on 41 St. George Street.

The 1900s

In the 1890s, Greeks began arriving again in North Florida. Like those immigrants before them, they did not have a church for worship in St. Augustine. The Trinity Episcopal Church on St. George Street received many of these early settlers. When St. John the Divine Greek Orthodox Church was established in Jacksonville during the early part of the 1900s, many of the Greek Orthodox in St. Augustine traveled there to worship.

In the late 1950s, Fr. John G. Berris, from St. John the Divine Church, began serving Divine Liturgy at the St. Peter's Chapel of Trinity Episcopal Church one Saturday each month, an arrangement that continued on and off for almost 20 years.

The 1960s

For years, Olga Fotiou and Tom Xynidis wrote to Archbishop Iakovos, primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, about the historical presence of Greeks in St. Augustine, FL. During a holiday visit to St. Augustine and meeting Olga Fotiou, Professor E.P. Panagopoulos spent a sabbatical from University of California at San Jose researching the 18th century arrival of Greeks in America.

In 1964, St. Augustine residents Mr. and Mrs. George Fotiou, Mr. and Mrs. James Kalivas, Mr. and Mrs. Steve Sarris, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Xynidis, and Mr. and Mrs. Spiro Zepatos brought to the attention of the Greek Orthodox

Archdiocese of North and South America the significance of the Avero House.

After two full years of paying the mortgage payments through the generosity of the local Greek families including the Fotiou, Gaetanos, Pappas, Sarris, Xynidis, and Zepatos families, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in 1966, took possession of the Avero House on 41 St. George Street. It would take 17 years of raising funds and historical due diligence before the St. Photios Greek Orthodox National Shrine opened its doors.

The 1970s

To promote greater religious and cultural togetherness, on November 22, 1970, a group of Greek-American families from St. Augustine and Palatka formed a social organization emphasizing the heritage of Greece and the perpetuation of the Greek Orthodox faith. One of their early dreams was to have a church for worship in accordance with their Orthodox Christian faith and to spread the Gospel of Christ.

In early 1973, the Hellenic Society was incorporated as a religious and philanthropic organization and hosted the first "Greek Nite" on May 12, 1973. This event, and all following "Greek Nites", along with numerous bake sales, dinner-dances and collections, allowed the Society to secure a building for worship and meetings.

In 1976, they materialized their dream, and the Hellenic Society purchased an existing church at 7 Waldo Street. Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church and the St. Augustine Hellenic Center were established. On March 6, 1976, Fr. John Hondras from St. John the Divine Church celebrated the first Divine Liturgy at the church.

The 1980s

For the next ten years, Fr. Paul Costopoulos from St. John the Divine, met the spiritual needs of the community.

In 1981, James George Couchell of Greenville, SC was appointed executive director of the new St. Photios Greek Orthodox National Shrine. The Shrine was dedicated February 22, 1982. James Couchell was ordained Fr. Dimitrios June 26, 1983, also marking the 215th anniversary of the landing of the first Greek colony on the North American continent. On February 10, 1985, Archbishop Iakovos consecrated the Shrine's Chapel of St. Photios.

In 1984, Fr. Dimitrios Couchell was called to organize an international missions program from the offices of St. Photios Shrine. In 1987, the Archdiocesan Mission Program outgrew the offices at the St. Photios Shrine and purchased its first Mission Center House (named "The Father Alexander Veronis Orthodox Christian Mission Center"), located in the heart of St. Augustine. This home served as the administrative headquarters of the Archdiocesan Mission Center, the foreign mission and evangelism agency of the Greek Archdiocese.

The 1990s

In November 1992, Fr. George Gallos became the first full-time priest of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church. His wife, Presvytera Anna Gallos, was the community's first choir director. Fr. George served this community until his death on October 18, 1995.

Shortly before Fr. George's passing, a parishioner of the parish, Jack Hill, was ordained to the priesthood and served the growing parish, while still the Associate Director of the Archdiocesan Mission Center. In February 1997, Fr. Nikitas and Presvytera Mary Theodosion arrived to serve the parish.

In 1994, the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (now the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the U.S.A.) extended its jurisdiction over the Archdiocesan Mission Center, and it became the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC). The OCMC is the official mission and evangelism agency of the Orthodox Churches in America offering assistance and support in over 30 countries throughout the world.

The parish has also nurtured workers for the Lord's vineyard: Fr. Vasile Mihai, who went on to serve at St. Paul in Savannah prior to retirement, iconographer Fr. Demetri Leussis, and missionary Fr. Stephanos Ritsi.

On May 31, 1998, Fr. Dimitrios Couchell was consecrated to the episcopacy as an auxiliary Bishop of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese with the title Bishop of Xanthos. Fr. Martin Ritsi became the new OCMC Executive Director in August 1998.

The 2000s

As the community grew, ministries involved including the Ladies Philoptochos Society, Sunday School, Altar boys, Bible Study, Choir, Stewardship, Mission Ministry, Dance Group, Greek Language School, and Greek Festival. In 2002, through the efforts of the Planning and Building Committee and Capital Campaign Committee, the community purchased a 20-acre property to build a new church. The property on CR 214 is located just west of historic downtown and provides a witness of Faith to the hundreds of thousands of visitors that travel through Florida. January 5, 2006, the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church of St. Augustine moved into its new church building, with a parish hall, offices, classrooms, and kitchen.

In May 2009, the new OCMC Missionary Training Center and Administration Building opened, a facility with offices, chapel, library, dormitories and conference rooms.

Fr. Nikitas served the growing community until February 2010. Fr. George and Presvytera Lisa Ioannou and family served the Holy Trinity parish from March 2010 until January 2016. The parish was served by an interim priest, Fr. John and Presvytera Ginny Hays, until September 2020.

Missionaries, along with short-term Mission Team members, from our parish continue to serve. Current long-term Missionaries include Fr. Stephanos & Alexandria Ritsi family (Albania) and Dr. Michael & Lisa Colburn family (specialists).

In October 2020, V. Rev. Fr. Maximos Politis became the priest of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church.

Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church not only serves Greek and English-speaking Orthodox Christians, but those of a number of different ethnic backgrounds. This has created goodwill and understanding through service to the local community cultural events. It is the home to Orthodox ministries witnessing on a local, national, and international level. The present congregation seeks to be of service in the Lord's work in the years and decades ahead.

Holy Trinity Church's past is a story of struggle, perseverance, and ultimate success. Its witness goes beyond historic St. Augustine, participating in a greater witness of Faith with all its Orthodox resources located in the nation's oldest city.

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