

HISTORY OF ST. GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

St. George Greek Orthodox Church of Rock Island, Illinois, is one of the oldest Greek Orthodox parishes in the United States. It has enjoyed a rich history since its founding in 1910, over a hundred years ago.

The Decade of the 1910s

History tells us that in the early 1900s Greek immigrants came to the Quad Cities area primarily as the demand for labor increased. They worked in farm equipment factories, on railroad gangs, some became peddlers or restaurant owners, and many started their own businesses.

On February 24, 1910, about 50 of these Greek immigrants met and formulated the first church bylaws. They established the "Syndesmos Ellenon O Agios Georgios Orthodox Greek Church" (Union of Greeks The St. George Orthodox Greek Church). During this period, the congregation met at Turner Hall in Moline, Illinois, located on the Southwest corner of 6th Avenue and 14th Street.

Fr. Sofronios Karapiperis is employed as the first, full-time, resident priest and serves from 1911 until 1916.

In 1912, as a result of a growing congregation, four lots were purchased in Moline, Illinois, on 19th Street to build a new church. The St. George Church was built and completed in Moline with an address of 800 - 19th Street. On April 20, 1913, the official dedication of the new St. George church was held.

Fr. Bartholomew Karahalios becomes the second priest and serves from 1916 until 1920.

In 1918, a fire almost destroys the Saint George Greek Orthodox Church. Rebuilding and remodeling takes place with the addition of the church hall and classrooms that are completed in 1919.

The rebuilt church in Moline had all of the attributes of a traditional Orthodox church. It was done in a Byzantine style that is characterized by the dome, the cruciform shape, and round arches. The same Byzantine style that dominates the facade of St. George's present home in Rock Island could be seen in the Moline edifice.

The Decades of the 1920s & 1930s

Around the start of the decade of the 1920s, bitter disputes about politics in Greece threatened to split the congregation. One faction favored the Greek Royalists, led by the Greek King; others sided with the anti-monarchy Federalist faction. In the end, St. Mary's Greek Orthodox Church, later named Assumption, was founded in East Moline, and the division between the two sides intensified.

During this period, the full force of the Great Depression was being felt in the Quad Cities area. As the Depression deepened, the two local Orthodox congregations, in Moline and East Moline, found themselves hard-pressed financially. The Archdiocese encouraged them to share a priest to reduce each parish's clergy expense. Both parish councils agreed with the recommendation and one priest served both parishes alternating services in each community every other Sunday.

On December 13, 1931, the St. George parish in Moline, IL and the St. Mary's (Koimisis) parish in East Moline, IL formally join together and become known as "United Greek Orthodox Churches of Moline and East Moline, Illinois".

The Decades of the 1940s & 1950s

Greeks began to arrive in large numbers, fleeing the economic devastation caused by World War II and the Greek Civil War. In the United States, the Great Depression was over and companies began to hire workers.

With the influx of new people, the congregation of St. George was getting larger than the church could hold, so as early as the late 1940s it was evident the church needed a newer, larger home. Examination of several churches for sale brought the inevitable decision that a brand new church was needed.

Discussions begin with the St. Mary's parish in East Moline, IL to combine congregations and build a new church. The issue is heavily debated, but the discussions break down and the goal is never achieved.

April 15, 1950 – The United Greek Orthodox Churches ceases to exist and separates into two individual parishes of St. George in Moline, IL and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in East Moline, IL. Thereafter, St. George makes plans to remodel the Moline church and both parishes go on to prosper.

During the early 1950s, St. George was still wrestling with its need for a bigger facility. Discussions began on remodeling the old church or designing and building a completely new church.

In November of 1952, Fr. Theo Dymek, a Roman Catholic Christian who had become Orthodox, became the spiritual leader of St. George and was actively involved in the congregation's plans to build a new church.

October 11, 1953 – a vote by the General Assembly indicates a desire to remodel the old church building rather than build a new church. Thus, a large remodeling project begins on May 10, 1954 and work finishes in October.

Newspaper accounts from this time period indicate that even as the remodeling work was undertaken, there was the sense that St. George was only buying time, and that sooner or later the parish's needs would one day force what would become the inevitable – a move to a new church.

The Decade of the 1960s

The decade of the 1960s established the foundation for moving the church from Moline to Rock Island.

Although the decision to build a new church was still being considered, another church renovation project began in April 1960 and finished in September 1960. Air conditioning was installed, the church grounds were beautified, and a new parking lot was constructed.

After many discussions, the parish decides to buy land in a neighboring city - Rock Island, Illinois. This established the foundation for the design and construction of the beautiful, modern facility that is the home of St. George Greek Orthodox Church today.

As the congregation was getting ready to celebrate its 50th Anniversary, the Parish Council announced to the public in local newspapers on October 15, 1963, that a new church would be built in Rock Island, Illinois.

Even though the Parish Council made the announcement of plans to construct a new church in 1963, the project was delayed until 1970 as various federal and state governmental agencies took an inordinate amount of time in purchasing the church property that was needed for the new Interstate 74 highway project.

November 3, 1963 – St. George celebrates its 50th Anniversary. Church services are held with Bishop Meletios of the Chicago Diocese officiating followed by a banquet in the Gold Room of the Blackhawk Hotel in Davenport, Iowa.

The Decade of the 1970s

The decade of the 1970s saw the dreams of building a new church become a reality. The consecration of St. George Greek Orthodox Church of Rock Island also occurred. In addition, the community saw the transition of parish priests from Fr. Theo Dymek to Fr. Basil Papanikolaou

November 2, 1970 – a ground-breaking ceremony for the Rock Island church occurs. Construction of the new St. George church takes place during the years of 1970 – 1971.

May 30, 1971 – the last church service is held at the St. George church in Moline, IL. The highlight of the service was the removal of the church relics. The relics, once taken out of the altar, were displayed for the congregation to see. Then they were turned over to the Archbishop until the new church is consecrated and ready to receive them.

During the summer of 1971, services are held at the St. Joseph Catholic Church in Rock Island awaiting completion of the new church.

September 5, 1971 – the first liturgy is held in the Gold Room of the new church. Later on November 21, 1971, a Cornerstone service is conducted and a time capsule is inserted in the brick cavity of the new church.

January 30, 1972 – the first liturgy is held in the new Church building. On April 23, 1971, Bishop Timotheos of the Chicago Diocese officially opens the doors of the St. George church building (Anixitheria) on the Feast Day of St. George.

August 6, 1972 – Fr. Basil Papanikolaou begins his priesthood at St. George and serves for nearly 30 years.

November 19, 1972 – an Open House of the new church is held for the public. More than 2,000 visitors turn out to see the new church.

Jun. 14-15, 1975 – the consecration of St. George Greek Orthodox Church and Celebration Banquet occurs. Archbishop Iakovos and Bishop Timotheos conduct the Consecration Liturgical Ceremony. Others participating are: Chancellor Athenagoras Aneste, Archdeacon Methodios Tournas, the Very Rev. Eusebius Stephanou, Fr. Basil Papanikolaou (Rock Island, IL), Fr. Nikiforos Tzerdimos (East Moline, IL), Fr. Thomas Tsevas (Dubuque, IA), Fr. Theodore Filandrinos (Peoria, IL), Fr. Constantine Masood (Spring Valley, IL), and Fr. George Philippas (Waterloo, IA).

May 26, 1978 – the Panagia Platytera mosaic icon is commissioned and installed to further beautify the church interior.

In 1979, St. George hosts the annual GOYA Basketball Tournament and also files with the State of Illinois to incorporate as “St. George Greek Orthodox Church, Inc.”.

The Decades of the 1980s & 1990s

The decades of the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a steady growth in church membership primarily due to an outreach effort to non-Greeks. In addition, “mixed” interfaith marriages allowed the introduction of more English into the Sunday Divine Liturgy. The congregation was becoming more diverse. There were more members who were Orthodox, but not Greek, and there were many more converts. During this period, major interior decorating projects were completed that further enhanced the beauty of the church.

October 13-23, 1980 – stained glass window icons are installed by Rohlf’s Stained & Leaded Glass Studios.

November 9, 1980 – the community celebrates the burning of the building mortgage. Through the hard work of parishioners, the 20-year mortgage is paid off in eight years.

March 5-8, 1982 – The Christ Pantokrator stained glass icon is installed.

November 2-3, 1985 – St. George celebrates its 75th Anniversary. His Grace Bishop Iakovos conducts the Divine Liturgy the following day.

In 1988, St. George hosts the annual GOYA Basketball Tournament and hosts the 36th Annual Choir Federation Conference in 1993.

October 1, 1995 – St. George celebrates its 85th Anniversary. His Grace Bishop Iakovos conducts the Divine Liturgy. A banquet is held later that evening.

The Decade of the 2000s

The first decade of the new century was a decade of change. St. George saw a transition of clergy who were assigned by the Diocese to provide the spiritual guidance to push our Orthodox faith forward. After nearly thirty years as the priest of St. George, Father Basil Papanikolaou retires in 2001. Also in 2001, Father Dean Photos is assigned to St. George and begins his ministry. In 2004, Father Leo Gavrilos is assigned to St. George and serves until 2010.

The decade of the 2000s witnessed a celebration of the 90th Anniversary of St. George on June 11, 2000. Fr. Demetrios Kantzavelos, Chancellor, Chicago Diocese, conducts the Divine Liturgy. A banquet is held that evening.

August 5, 2001 – Fr. Dean Photos begins his priesthood at St. George and serves until August 2004.

August 11, 2002 – a major remodeling project of the church interior takes place. The church receives a new marble floor and carpeting in addition to a fresh coat of paint. While the church is being remodeled, church services are held in the Gold Room and in good weather on the patio.

September 1, 2004 – Fr. Leo Gavrilos begins his priesthood at St. George and serves until November 2010.

September 17-18, 2005 – St. George introduces the 1st Annual two-day “Our Big Fat Greek Festival” event that is open to the public. St. George continues the tradition of the Annual “Our Big Fat Greek Festival” in the years following.

November 5-6, 2005 – St. George celebrates its 95th Anniversary since the founding of the church in 1910. A banquet to commemorate this milestone event is held with church services conducted the following day.

During the period of the years of the 2000s, the parish of St. George continued to provide its parishioners opportunities to expand their Orthodox faith through Bible Study and Greek School programs. Opportunities for fellowship occurred during various Senior Trips, Mardi-Gras dinners, Men’s Group picnics, Philoptochos parties, and GOYA / JOY events. Also parishioners served the local community by donating items to the annual Philoptochos Rummage Sale and participation in various philanthropic activities such as the Evening Meal Program.

The Decade of the 2010s

The decade of the 2010s also saw a change in parish priests. Fr. Leo Gavrilos ended his service to St. George in November of 2010. While the Metropolis of Chicago decided whom to appoint, several priests were sent to conduct the Divine Liturgy until March of 2011 when Fr. Christos Margellos became the official priest assigned to the St. George community.

April 22-23, 2010 – a visit by His Grace Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos of the Greek Orthodox Chicago Metropolis occurs to celebrate the Feast Day of the church's patron saint, St. George. Participating with Fr. Leo Gavrilos of Rock Island are Fr. John Kalomas of St. Andrew Greek Orthodox Church, Chicago, IL; Fr. Jon Boukis of Assumption Greek Orthodox Church, East Moline, IL; and Fr. Ciprian Sas of St. John The Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, Cedar Rapids, IA.

October 16, 2010 – the celebration and commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of St. George begins with a Hierarchical Great Vesper service conducted by Archbishop Demetrios, Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in America, and Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos, of the Chicago Metropolis. Also assisting are priests Fr. Leo Gavrilos, Fr. Jon Boukis, Fr. Anastasios Bourantas, Fr. Basil Hickman, and Fr. Ciprian Sas. Following the Great Vesper Services, a banquet and program follows in the Gold Room of the church.

October 17, 2010 – the celebration and commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of St. George continues with the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy service conducted by Archbishop Demetrios, Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in America, and Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos, of the Chicago Metropolis. Also assisting in the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy are Fr. Leo Gavrilos, Fr. Jon Boukis, and Fr. Anastasios Bourantas. A luncheon is served in the Gold Room of the church after the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy service.

December 2010 through February 2011 – The Chicago Metropolis sends several priests to conduct the Divine Liturgy while a decision to assign a permanent priest to the St. George parish is finalized.

March 1, 2011 – Fr. Christos Margellos begins his ministry as the next parish priest of the St. George community.

Fr. Christos Margellos continues the St. George traditions of the past and incorporates new worship services and programs to enhance the celebration of the Orthodox faith.

The Decades of the Future

The visions of the original founders remain alive today. The parish has seen a continuation of the many programs implemented during the previous church periods, as well as the inclusion of many new ministries and programs.

In the years to come, the St. George parish will continue to offer many programs and ministries to further our Orthodox faith. Parishioners will continue to work hard and give their time in various activities such as: Choir, Altar Boys, Bible Study, Greek School, Sunday School, Ladies Philoptochos Society, JOY/GOYA.

In the Quad Cities, St. George Greek Orthodox Church stands tall today by keeping the faith with its heritage, remaining true to its traditions, carrying forward the simple, humble beginnings of the early immigrants to a fruition they could scarcely have dreamed possible.

ST. GEORGE PARISH PRIESTS

1911 – 1916	Fr. Sofranios Karapiperis
1916 – 1920	Fr. Bartholomew Karahalios
1920 - 1921	Fr. Emmanuel Simmeon
1921 - 1931	Fr. John Panos
Sep. 1931 – Sep. 1932	Fr. John Vassiliades
Oct. 1932 – Nov. 1932	Fr. Themostocles Vassiliades
Dec. 1932 – Nov. 1933	Fr. Arsenios Palikaris
Dec. 1933 – Sep. 1935	Fr. Harry Gavalas
Oct. 1935 – Oct. 1936	Fr. Timothy Hountras
Nov. 1936 – Feb. 1937	Fr. Kallistratos Glavas
Mar. 1937 – Jun. 1939	Fr. Spyridon Spyropoulos
Jul. 1939 – Jul. 1940	Fr. Demosthenes Prodromides
Aug. 1940 – Sep. 1940	Fr. John Mesoxhakis
Oct. 1940 – Jan. 1942	Fr. Spyridon Zoys
Nov. 1942 – Nov. 1945	Fr. Constantine Souliopoulos
Dec. 1945 – Oct. 1952	Fr. Constantine Papademetriou
Nov. 1952 – Jul. 1972	Fr. Theodoritos Dymek
Aug. 1972 – Jul. 2001	Fr. Basil Papanikolaou
Aug. 2001 – Aug. 2004	Fr. Dean Photos
Sep. 2004 – Nov. 2010	Fr. Leo Gavrilos
Mar. 2011 – Present	Fr. Christos Margellos