



# **Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church**

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**Rev. Hector Firoglanis, Pastor**  
**Rev. Theodosios Palis, Assistant Pastor**  
**Rev. Alexander Veronis, Pastor Emeritus**

## **Parish annual Report: 2019-2020** **Submitted by: Fr. Hector Firoglanis**

This report for the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in Lancaster, PA, covers the period of September 1, 2019 to August 31, 2020.

### **Parish Staff**

- The administrative staff of the Annunciation parish contributes much to the life of our community. Their diligent and faithful service allows the clergy to focus on our ministries while also managing the administrative needs of the parish.
  - Fr. Hector Firoglanis – Proistamenos
  - Fr. Theodosios Palis – Assistant Priest and Youth Director
  - Eleni Mamas – Office Administrator
  - Elena Bartlett – Office Assistant
  - Mary Sakellaris – Office Assistant & Youth Safety Administrator
  - David Gammache – Building Supervisor – oversees Alex Mountis and Brano Boscovic as the parish sextons.
  - Daniel Blain, Aaron Blain, Nick Billis, and Jonathan Troop – Cantors
  - John Scanlon – Choir Director
  - Fr. Alexander Veronis – Pastor Emeritus
- Personnel Transitions during the past year:
  - Fr. Theodosios Palis was ordained to the Holy Priesthood on September 15, 2019, at Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church.
  - Mary Keares retired from her position as Office Assistant when the COVID crisis began, due to her advanced age and high risk of interacting with others in the office.
  - Elena Bartlett, who was being trained to replace Mary in 2020, was working 8 hours per week from January through the end of August. At the beginning of September (2020) her hours have increased to 24 hours per week. Elena assists Eleni Mamas with the office needs and has assumed some of the Greek School and Preschool administrative duties as well.
  - Mary Sakellaris works 8 hours per week as an Office Assistant to Eleni Mamas and serves as the Youth Safety Administrator of Annunciation Church – a new position mandated by the Archdiocese for each parish.

### **Liturgical/Worship Services and Sacraments**

- In addition to over 100 Divine Liturgies, our parish worship also includes many Vespers Services (including every Saturday evening), Paraklesis (Dekapentavgousto, Wednesday evenings, and Friday mornings throughout the year), Feast Day Liturgies, Akathist Services, Lenten and Holy Week services, and a vigil for St. Haralambos and St. Nikiforos at the beginning of the Coronavirus Pandemic.
- This year, during the pandemic, we offer two Paraklesis services each week: Wednesday evening to various saints whose services have been translated to English; and Friday morning Paraklesis to the Theotokos.

- Average Attendance:
  - Sunday Liturgies: 350 (before the red and yellow phases)
  - Weekday Liturgies: 20-50
  - Evening Vespers and Paraklesis services: 5-25
- With the help of Fr. Theodosios, we were able to do over 300 House blessings in January following Epiphany.
- Memorial Day services at the cemeteries were cancelled this year due to COVID concerns, but all our departed parishioners were commemorated in a Memorial Service we did after Liturgy on the Sunday before Memorial Day.
- Sacramental services (Sept. 2019 – August 2020):
  - 18 baptisms
  - 4 chrismations
  - 12 weddings
  - 13 funerals
  - Several weddings and a few baptisms have been rescheduled to later time due to COVID.
  - Fr. Hector offers services for pastoral counseling, the Sacrament of Confession, and pre-marital sessions in preparation for marriage. This year I completed my training in the Prepare and Enrich Program to offer more comprehensive premarital counseling sessions.
- In March of 2020, a new Audio-Visual system was installed in the sanctuary right before the outbreak of the pandemic. This was a providential gift to our parish, allowing us to provide a high-quality live stream to our church's YouTube channel throughout the duration of the pandemic.

### **Stewardship Monies and parish income**

- Total stewardship members remain stable at around 500.
- Total stewardship monies:
  - Sept. 1, 2019 to Aug. 31, 2020: \$657,341 (\$10,000 increase from last year)

### **Religious and Spiritual Education**

- Our Sunday School program enjoys an enrollment of 112 active students (185 in the books) taught by 35 teachers, under the supervision of three superintendents.
  - Sunday School classes were suspended during the COVID outbreak and have recently re-started only for the 9<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grade classes.
- Individual instruction and catechism was offered for those interested in learning about the Orthodox faith. Many of these dialogues lead to Adult Baptisms and Chrismations.
- The following weekly, monthly, and periodic Bible Study/Discussion Groups continued to nurture our community:
  - Family Night – This bi-monthly group meets on Sunday evenings for a dinner, followed by ministries for all members of the family: Bible study for parents, GOYA meeting and Bible study, and a program for the HOPE/JOY children. This ministry attracts 60-80 participants.
  - Evening Orthodox Study Group – A class led by Fr. Hector on Wednesday evenings to help inquirers and life-long Orthodox Christian learn more about their faith. This study group is now live streamed to allow for more participation.
  - OCF (College) and Young Professionals Study Group – Meets weekly during the semesters on campus, at the church, or at an outdoor venue, led by Fr. Theodosios Palis.
  - Orthodox Women's Study Group – Thursday morning study group led by lay leaders – now meets virtually or outdoors.
  - Women's Bible Study – Tuesday morning Bible Study led by Presvytera Pearl Veronis – no longer meets because of the COVID pandemic.

- AGAPE Bible Study – Monthly Greek language Bible Study led by Fr. Alexander Veronis – no longer meets because of the COVID pandemic.
- Plugged-In Study Group -- A weekly group led by a group of parishioners on an alternating basis (Dr. Tom Miller, Kathy Moshos, John Lampart, and others) to offer a small group theological discussion during coffee fellowship hour, geared towards visitors, catechumens, and recent converts – no longer meets because of the COVID pandemic.
- A Study of the Ancient Church Fathers – A study of the Apostolic Fathers of the Church led by Edward Blain during coffee fellowship on Sundays -- no longer meets because of the COVID pandemic.
- Greek School – Greek School is meets Wednesday evenings from 5:30-7pm, directed by Fr. Theodosios Palis with 5 teachers. 29 students are enrolled. An adult Greek School Class taught by Nitsa Kambouroglou was begun this year with 8 students. Classes suspended during COVID pandemic; now meets virtually using the Ellinopoula program.
- Our parish preschool, with two educated and faith-centered teachers, continues to educate and spiritually nurture our children, both parishioners and non-parishioners. 7 students are enrolled in the MWF Class and 4 students in the T/TH class. Classes suspended in Spring of 2020 due to COVID pandemic. A new Health and Safety Plan was put together by the Preschool Advisory Board for classes to resume in the Fall of 2020.
- The Book Mobile continues to offer a vital ministry to our community, under the leadership of Paul and Kay Benos and all the staff who assist in this ministry. During Pandemic, Susana Troop assumed responsibility of the Bookmobile ministry.

### **Youth & Young Adult Ministries**

#### **HOPE & JOY (4 years old – 6<sup>th</sup> grade) – Led by Fr. Theodosios Palis, Fr. Hector Firoglanis, and a parent Advisory Group.**

- **Bi-Monthly JOY gatherings** during Family Night events which take place Sunday evenings, to emphasize fellowship, learning about the faith, and prayer – ministry suspended due to COVID pandemic.
- **Holy Friday Retreat** – Cancelled due to COVID.
- **Vacation Church School** – Cancelled due to COVID
- **Camp Nazareth Summer Camp Program** – Cancelled due to COVID
- **Altar Boy retreat** – Cancelled due to COVID; Fr. Theodosios offered small group instructions to the incoming altar boys.

#### **GOYA (7<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade) – Led by Fr. Theodosios Palis and a Parent Advisory Group**

- **Family Night** – A bi-monthly meal that brings together HOPE/JOY children, Goyans, and parents at the church – ministry suspended due to COVID pandemic.
  - Goyans meet with Theodosios, Fr. Hector, or a guest speaker for business meeting and Bible Study.
  - Hope and Joy children participate in group activities organized by Theodosios and other volunteers.
  - A guest speaker or Fr. Hector leads Bible study for parents.
- **Holy Friday Retreat** – Canceled due to COVID.
- **Camp Nazareth Summer Camp Program** – Cancelled due to COVID
- **Camp Nazareth Fall and Spring Retreats** – In addition to summer camp, Fr. Theodosios Palis takes one or two 15-passenger vans filled with Goyans and OCF student counselors to the Camp Nazareth weekend retreats each Fall and Spring – Spring Retreat cancelled.
- **Holy Protection Monastery** – Cancelled due to COVID.
- **Oratorical Festival** – Cancelled due to COVID.

- **Dance Groups**
  - Goya Dance Group led by Despina Proithis, Alexandra Schramm, and Angie Efstration. They practice regularly and perform at the Greek Bazaar, the March 25<sup>th</sup> Program, and other venues in and around Lancaster County.
  - Joy Dance Group is led by Yanna Nachtigal and Dana Panagopoulos. They practice regularly and perform at the Bazaar and March 25<sup>th</sup> program.
  - Hope Dance Group led by Jenna Ioannidis and Lambrynee Maillis. They practice twice a month and perform at the March 25<sup>th</sup> program, Greek Bazaar, and other events.
    - Dance groups suspended activities in spring due to COVID.
- **GOYA Basketball:** Participation in various Metropolis tournaments and scrimmages throughout the year along with regular practices after Bible Studies/meetings. Practices held on Thursday evening and led by our GOYA parents/coaches: Luke Tsoflias, Manny Marinos, and Stephan Gerovasilis (boys team) and Nicholas Kambouroglou and Katerina Zalalas (girls team).
- **GOYA Soccer:** Participate in a regional tournament each May and various scrimmages throughout the year; Practices, held on Tuesday evenings at the church, are led by Mr. Taso Marinos – Soccer tournament cancelled due to COVID.

**Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF) and Young Adult Ministries – Led by Fr. Theodosios Palis**

- **OCF** – Meet directly with students of Millersville University, F&M College, and HACC (Lancaster Campus) each Tuesday evening at the church during the semesters.
- **Young Professionals (YoPro)** – This group meets regularly with the OCF students.

**Inter-Orthodox & Ecumenical Dialogue/Evangelism and Outreach**

- Our parish continues to be very active in the OCCSCP (Orthodox Council of Churches of South Central Pennsylvania) as follows:
  - The Orthodox Clergy meet bi-monthly for Bible Study (or con-celebration of a Divine Liturgy) and fellowship.
  - The Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers and meal on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020 – hosted by the St. Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church in Steelton, PA.
- **Senior Citizens Luncheon** was hosted by Sts. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church in Reading, PA, on December 9.
- **Food Hub** -- Our parish continues to be very active in the Lancaster County Council of Churches [now called the Food Hub] and supports this ministry with an annual \$15,000 donation from our parish's Philanthropy Account. The ministries of the council serve many needs in the city of Lancaster including food, clothing, shelter, counseling, spiritual direction, job training, and much more. The parish philanthropy fund and the Philoptochos Society financially support the ministry of the LCCC.
- **Off the Streets** - Led by Joanne Martin, the Service & Outreach Committee has partnered with "Off the Streets Now" to help homeless families in Lancaster City transition to a permanent home. This is done through the organization by providing furniture and paying for the security deposit. Volunteers from Annunciation Church come together every fifth Saturday throughout the year to help move in a family. It is truly a blessed and rewarding experience for our parishioners who have participated.
- **Crisis Relief Food Box Program** – During the COVID crisis, the Service and Outreach Committee of Annunciation Church began a new ministry on May 21, 2020, distributing and delivering 125-150 food boxes to our neighbors in need. The food boxes are ordered and delivered to our church from the Food Bank of Central PA. Distributions take place every other Thursday morning from 9:30 – 11:30 AM.
- **Grocery Store Gift Card Program** – The Church Office gives gift cards to people in need who come to our church for financial assistance. Gift cards are donated by the Philoptochos and parishioners.

- The clergy are often invited to speak about Orthodox Christianity in many settings around Lancaster County, including schools, churches, and nursing homes. We also meet with many college students and other inquirers and offer tours of our sanctuary to help promote and educate others about our faith. Each semester, a group of 60 students from Conestoga Valley come to Annunciation Church for a one and half hour tour and lecture about the Orthodox Faith.

### **Other Ministry Highlights**

- **Bereavement Support Group** – The parish began a Bereavement Support Ministry and had it’s first meeting on February 27. The ministry was spear-headed by Dr. Tom Miller, chairman of the Education Committee, and the first meeting was led by a guest chaplain from the Hospice Center of Lancaster County. Unfortunately, the planned monthly meetings did not continue due to the COVID pandemic, but a good start will allow us to resume this ministry in the future.
- **Addiction Presentation** on Sunday, October 6, 2019, with guest speaker Joel Jakubowski who presented an overview of the drug problem in our country, while providing tools and resources for a healthy response to addiction behavior.
- **Advent Retreat** on Saturday, December 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, featured Dr. Philip Mamalakis, who presented on the topics: “Strengthening Your Marriage” and “Raising our Children to Succeed.”
- **Lenten Retread** – Scheduled for Saturday, March 21, with Dn. Stephen Muse, PhD, was cancelled due to COVID pandemic.
- In 2020 I served on the Summer Camp Curriculum Committee of the Metropolis which works with the Metropolis Camp Ministries Coordinator, Youth Director, and other clergy to implement the summer camp curriculum and program each year.
- I continue to offer spiritual support and counsel by attending the many administrative meetings of our parish, including: Parish Council, Philoptochos, Stewardship Committee, Finance Committee, Bazaar Committee, Sunday School, Greek School PTO, Marketing Committee, Personnel Committee, Preschool Advisory Board, Service & Outreach, and the Education Committee which oversees the Sunday School curricula, helps to coordinate the parish study groups, and plans for guest speakers and retreats.

### **Other Parish Highlights**

- **Live-Stream** – New Audio-Visual System was installed in our Church in mid-March, just before the outbreak of the Coronavirus Pandemic. It has helped to keep our parish connected.
- **New Bathroom addition** to the church began in 2020.
- **Food Box Ministry** – a bi-weekly distribution and delivery of food to those in need began on May 21, 2020.
- **Library Project** – Parish library was renovated and updated – by Thomas Troop, Susana Troop, and Maurice Fokas – with new books and an online cataloguing system for signing out books
- **Restored Pangari and Icon Stand in Narthex** – Took place during the “Red Phase” when there was minimal traffic in the Narthex.
- **Pilgrimage to the Kardiotissa Myrrh-Streaming Icon** – The Kardiotissa was scheduled to visit our parish on Saturday, September 12. The visitation was canceled due to COVID, so over 80 parishioners drove separately to St. George’s Orthodox Church in Taylor, PA, on the morning of September 12 to offer a Paraklesis service and venerate the Kardiotissa.
- **61<sup>st</sup> Annual Bazaar** – November 2-3, 2019 was another great success under the direction of co-chairpersons Kosta Kontanis and Alexandra Schramm. Thanks to all who assisted in this major endeavor.
- **Gyrofest** – Our Spring fundraiser, the Gyrofest, scheduled for Saturday, May 9, 2020, was cancelled due to the COVID pandemic.
- 1/3 of the proceeds from the Bazaar and Gyrofest (\$78,000 annually) go towards charity, so missing out on the Gyrofest will negatively affect our Philanthropy account in 2021.

### **How the Coronavirus has Affected our Parish Life**

Our parish adapted well to the COVID crisis and continues to adapt. We were prepared to offer a high quality audio-visual stream to our parish's YouTube channel and Facebook page at the beginning of the pandemic, with a new A/V system and high quality camera having been installed into our church sanctuary by the beginning of March. The livestream received over 4,000 views on Pascha and was attracting over 1,000 views for the Sunday Liturgies – gradually decreasing to around 400-500 views as we entered the green phase and more parishioners began to attend services in person.

Fr. Theodosios worked hard to reconstruct our parish website to make it more user friendly. We implemented a Vanco online giving system that has made it easier for parishioners to give their stewardship online. Our parish's YouTube page has increased from around 300 to 1,900 subscribers since the beginning of the pandemic in March.

All ministries went online with Zoom meetings, and in March I began to offer a weekly livestream book study from 6-7pm (before the Paraklesis service) on Wednesday evenings – consistently receiving 100-200 views each time. I plan to continue this format after the pandemic ends, as it offers an opportunity for more people to benefit from the studies we work hard to prepare.

We have been developing a hybrid youth ministry that combines online ministry with socially distanced in-person ministry.

We have established phone chains to check in on homebound parishioners and to send care packages to parishioners in nursing homes.

The parish has adapted well to the COVID restrictions in place during liturgical services. We have every other pew blocked off and can safely accommodate up to 180 worshippers depending on the size of family units seated together. Any carryover is directed to the social hall where a live stream is set up.

Sadly, we have lost around five active families who now attend a Russian Orthodox Church in Reading that does not require mask wearing and social distancing. Overall, however, our parishioners have adapted well and stewardship has remained steady.

We are grateful to God and will continue to adapt and grow by God's grace.

In Christ's service,

Fr. Hector Firoglanis  
Pastor