

# Frequently Asked Questions about Saint Nicholas National Shrine at the World Trade Center

## What is Saint Nicholas National Shrine? Why is it important to rebuild Saint Nicholas?

The original Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church cast a reverent and faithful shadow on the World Trade Center. Greeks purchased the row house in 1892 as a community home, and it became the Saint Nicholas Church in 1916. For many Greeks immigrants, it would have been their first stop after seeing the Statue of Liberty and disembarking from Ellis Island. The little church was a spiritual jewel, open to all. Generations of New Yorkers, Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, would stop in to light a candle, say a prayer, or just sit quietly.

Everything changed on 9/11. Saint Nicholas was completely destroyed in the collapse of World Trade Center Tower Two during the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. During the weeks and months that followed, Archbishop Demetrios of America presided over numerous funerals and memorials for the many Greek Orthodox Christians who died that fateful day. He participated in interfaith and ecumenical events, at city, state and national levels. And most importantly for Saint Nicholas, the only house of worship destroyed on 9/11, the Archbishop inaugurated a dialogue with then Governor George Pataki to rebuild the church.

The tradition of hospitality that Saint Nicholas exemplified throughout the twentieth century will continue at the new location which is located in close proximity to the old site, on the same block. There will be a Meditation/Bereavement space and a Community center, housed in the upper levels above the Narthex, to welcome visitors and faithful.

Once rebuilt, Saint Nicholas, like the Parthenon that graces the Acropolis, has the potential to inspire millions for generations to come. The parish will continue to function as a parish of the Archdiocese and it will also be a National Shrine on hallowed ground. It will shine as a spiritual beacon of hope and rebirth to cherish the memory of those who were lost that fateful day and to build a better future for generations yet to be born.

## Why did Saint Nicholas become a National Shrine?

The terrorist attack that destroyed the World Trade Center Towers and the Saint Nicholas Church affected our entire Nation and the whole world. For that reason, the Encyclical of the Holy Eparchial Synod of our Church in America is so compelling. As the Hierarchs state:

*"The new Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church at Ground Zero will be much more than a rebuilt parish. It will be a National Shrine of our Holy Archdiocese and a place of pilgrimage for our Nation and the whole world."*

The Archdiocese and the Parish had always seen that such an evolution for this historic parish of Manhattan was the logical next step. Not only is the mission and presence of Saint Nicholas at Ground Zero a national undertaking, but also likewise are the costs and responsibilities.

## What is the mission of Saint Nicholas National Shrine?

Certainly, Saint Nicholas will continue to function as a parish of the Archdiocese, and it will also be a National Shrine for all who come into its warm embrace. The scope of its mission will span the globe, as literally millions of visitors to the September 11<sup>th</sup> Memorial and Museum will also visit Saint Nicholas. This expanded mission of Saint Nicholas as a National Shrine of the Greek Orthodox Church of America is commensurate with its presence at the epicenter of history that defines the twenty-first century.

In his exhortation to the community, Archbishop Demetrios stressed the enormous visibility of the rebuilt Church. He noted that as a National Shrine, Saint Nicholas would welcome all and be a House of Prayer for all people. The Archbishop said:

*"This church will not be just a national shrine, but also an international shrine. It will show the will of all people to rebuild and resurrect from the ashes of 9/11. This will be a church for all to light a candle for the beloved that were lost on September 11th. This church will be a Greek Orthodox National Shrine on Hallowed, Sacred Ground."*

As a Greek Orthodox Parish, the full cycle of services will be held. And as a welcoming haven of spiritual wealth and health, the Church building – the nave, narthex, and the bereavement space – will be a vital and indeed necessary component of the new World Trade Center.

## What is the interfaith component of Saint Nicholas National Shrine?

As a witness to the boundless Love of God, which triumphs over violence and hatred, a special, interfaith and non-sectarian space has been dedicated for peaceful reflection and meditation to be used by people of all faiths and beliefs. The entire structure, including the nave, bereavement space (2nd floor) and social hall (3rd floor) will have programs of remembrance designed specifically for the surviving family members, inter-religious educational programs, cultural events and an integrated synergistic overall program of activities, exhibitions, etc. that are commensurate with the dignity and solemnity of the site. The inclusivity of the bereavement space within the structure that houses a particular house of worship signals the American democratic and religious ideal that the practice of one's own beliefs in no way hinders the beliefs of another. In fact, quite the opposite, it welcomes the belief of another. Thus the bereavement space is non-denominational and truly interfaith.

## How does the Saint Nicholas National Shrine fit with the mission of the Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society, Inc.?

As the duly accredited women's philanthropic society of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, Philoptochos undertakes:

To promote the charitable, benevolent, and philanthropic purposes of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, through instructional programs, presentations, lectures, seminars and other educational resources;

To preserve and perpetuate Orthodox Christian concepts and the Orthodox Christian Family, and through them, to promote the Greek Orthodox Faith and traditions, in accordance with its doctrines, canons, discipline, divine worship, usages and customs;

To promote participation in the activities of the Greek Orthodox community, with the cooperation of the Parish Priest and the Parish Council.

The rebuilding of Saint Nicholas will once again have enormous meaning in the life and welfare of many people, and as a national shrine, it will be used to offer millions of human beings, who walk through its halls, peace and spirituality in a place where terror once reigned.

The new Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church will once again have a Philoptochos chapter, and the National Philoptochos will support this chapter as it does all others throughout our Archdiocese and will maintain a presence at the Shrine.

## What was the process for choosing an architect to design Saint Nicholas National Shrine?

A special committee was formed which included both lay and clergy leaders of the Archdiocese as well as academic experts in church architecture to interview a select group of firms with international reputations for excellence. Archbishop Demetrios set the tone for this process:

*"The design for the church must respect the traditions and liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church, but at the same time must reflect the fact that we are living in the 21st century."*

In the end there was an overwhelming consensus by the committee advising Archbishop Demetrios in favor of the design and expertise of Santiago Calatrava. Calatrava developed his plan from a wealth of Byzantine precedents, including the famous monastery of Chora and the Church of Hagia Sophia itself.

## How does the size of the original Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church compare to the new Saint Nicholas National Shrine being built?

The original Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church that was located on Cedar Street was 1,359 square feet, whereas the new Saint Nicholas National Shrine being built at 130 Liberty Street, which is at the corner of Liberty and Greenwich, will be 4,450 square feet. This new church structure, which is over three times larger, will include the nave, bereavement space on the second floor and social hall on the third floor for events and programs.

## What is the overall project schedule?

The Ground Breaking for Saint Nicholas National Shrine will take place on October 18, 2014 at 12:00 p.m. All faithful are invited to be a part of this monumental and historic moment in the life of the World Trade Center, the Archdiocese and the country.

Following the Ground Blessing, construction will begin at the site. The Thyranoxia, or Opening of the Doors, is expected to take place during the Summer of 2016, which will not only celebrate the completion of construction, but the 100 year anniversary of the original Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, which opened in 1916.

## How is the reconstruction project managed?

The rebuilding committee is comprised of both lay and clergy leaders of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America including:

His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America

His Grace Bishop Andonios  
Father Alexander Karloutsos  
John A. Catsimatidis  
Jerry Dimitriou  
Michael Jaharis  
George Marcus  
Dennis Mehiel  
John Pappajohn  
Anthony Kouzounis  
Dr. Anthony J. Limberakis  
Dean Metropoulos  
Aphrodite Skeadas  
George S. Tsandikos

The construction will be overseen and managed by Archbishop Demetrios, Bishop Andonios and Jerry Dimitriou representing the Archdiocese along with Santiago Calatrava, Koutsoumitis Architects, Gorton and Partners, Turner Construction Company, and other sub contractors representing the external team of managers.

Furthermore, a technical support team for the project is comprised of Archdiocesan staff and other stewards of the Church.

## How much will it cost to build Saint Nicholas National Shrine?

While the Archdiocese is still in the budget and bidding process, the current budget to rebuild Saint Nicholas National Shrine is estimated at approximately 38 million dollars in hard construction costs.

## How is the construction of Saint Nicholas National Shrine being financed?

The rebuilding of Saint Nicholas will be partially financed through an initial major gifts campaign and also through a national, multi-faceted fundraising initiative. The Holy Eparchial Synod, under the chairmanship of Archbishop Demetrios of America, has called for every parish of the Archdiocese to voluntarily make a one or two year commitment in order to raise the necessary funds. His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios has asked National Philoptochos to commence a campaign so that every faithful member of Philoptochos makes a gift of \$100 which can be accomplished through a group effort or as individuals. By participating in this manner, the entire national Church will become stakeholders in Saint Nicholas.

## Who will oversee the fundraising campaign?

The Rebuilding Committee is led by His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios and will be spearheaded by Fr. Alexander Karloutsos, who is supporting Philoptochos' fundraising initiative along with our Spiritual Advisor, His Grace Bishop Sevastianos of Zela.

## How much money has already been raised?

Total contributions since September 11, 2001 are approximately \$7.2 Million.

## What sources have contributed major funding for the project?

The Archdiocese has received major gifts from around the world. The Greek Government contributed approximately \$260,000 in 2002. The Greek people, through contributions collected in Greece and through telethons contributed approximately \$375,000. In addition, the rebuilding of Saint Nicholas National Shrine has been an international effort, with countries and organizations spanning the globe contributing to this worthy cause. These include, amongst others, the City of Bari, Italy and the Embassy of the State of Qatar, as well as interfaith organizations from around the

country such as The American Jewish Committee, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Albany and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Boston. Additionally the Archdiocese has commitments from the National Philoptochos, Leadership 100, AHEPA, the Metropolises, Parishes and major donors around the country. These commitments, along with other pledges received, total approximately 20 million dollars for the rebuilding effort.

## How is the government supporting the building of Saint Nicholas National Shrine?

As of this time, the Archdiocese has not received any funding from either the government or any other agency for this project.

## Has the parish received any insurance compensation? If so, how will these funds be used?

1.2 million dollars in insurance compensation was received after 9/11, and these funds are being used for the construction of the new church.

## Once complete, what is the estimated annual operating budget of Saint Nicholas National Shrine?

The annual operating budget is not yet finalized, but will incorporate the realities of running a facility of this magnitude. The expected source of revenue is a combination of membership contributions, visitor contributions, major gifts, etc.

## How will Saint Nicholas National Shrine be staffed?

Saint Nicholas is expected to employ the following positions: Presiding Priest, Chanter, Assistant Chanter (part time), Administrative Staff, Maintenance and Janitorial Staff, as well as Gift Shop Attendants (four part time). In addition, outside companies will most likely be contracted for full-time Security.

## How will the faithful, including Philoptochos members, and the general public be able to visit Saint Nicholas National Shrine?

Over the coming year and a half, both the parish leadership and the Archdiocese will be working together to determine the details that will encompass the experience of visiting Saint Nicholas National Shrine. Plans regarding visiting hours, parking, tours, and other salient details will be communicated to both the faithful of the Archdiocese and the general public as they are made available and will most likely coordinate with the September 11<sup>th</sup> Museum which is directly across the street.

## How can I contribute to Philoptochos' fundraising initiative toward the rebuilding of Saint Nicholas?

Make a contribution via check made payable to your local Philoptochos chapter in your Metropolis and earmarked for the Saint Nicholas National Shrine at Ground Zero.

**In addition, each and every member of our Archdiocese is asked to contribute to the rebuilding process through their prayers and by spreading the good news with others.**