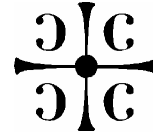


What Kind Of Church Do We Want To Build?



Fr. Nicholas Andruchow

In the Spring of 2005 our spiritual leader His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos asked us to “channel the energy and enthusiasm of the community into finding a permanent home for our mission.” In response to that, last fall we formed a building committee to lead our efforts in acquiring a location that we can call our own. A place we would not have to take down and put up our Icons, Altar, Service books, candles etc. A place which will be sacred to us not barraged from numerous demands and conflicts for worship scheduling time. A place which we can establish for our children’s children and as beacon for Orthodoxy in Northern Arizona. Do not be confused. Our current situation in the Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic church has been a blessing and continues to be but ultimately a physical building that we own and utilize is our foremost goal. This will become a reality one day but today I want to address a more serious issue. The most impressionable part of our Orthodox community here in Northern Arizona will not be the Byzantine architecture but **the building blocks that penetrate our inner soul and being**. St. Paul says “*that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you*”. (1 Cor. 6:19) Since this is true then we need to look more closely at how well we are building up our temple both physically and spiritually.

A Church of Love

In the letter of St. John the Theologian he states that “*The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*” (1 John 4:8) With this knowledge we must strive to fulfill the two greatest commandments as stated by Christ that “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. ... And ... You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” (Matt. 22:37-39) In loving God we have our entire life focused on him and this comes to a climax on Sunday when we partake of His flesh and blood. When we are truly in love with our Lord nothing would come in the way of being with Him in His holy temple on the Day of the Lord, Sunday. Not work, not vacation, not our studies, not exhaustion will separate us from our Lord and this is apparent by properly preparing and drawing near to partake of Holy Communion. Also following the 2nd great commandment we love others by sacrificing, like Christ did, for both our immediate loved one and those who are just acquaintances on the streets of Flagstaff or across the ocean in the Middle East. Our efforts to visit the sick and elderly at the *Infinia* nursing home cannot be the activity of just a few but we must all regularly (at least once every six months) participate in the monthly visits to comfort the ailing here in Flagstaff. Most importantly we must love one another in our own community. This is sometimes the most difficult because we see him or her potentially every week if not more. A wise priest told me once that true love is loving each other despite their shortcomings. Therefore despite the fact that the person next to you might be singing off key, despite the fact that he or she is obsessively controlling, despite the reality that the person in charge of coffee hour can not cook as well as your Yiayia (grandmother) we are called to love them. We must run from the evil one who wants us to subtly get under each others skin and lose patience and love for each other. In these ways of expressing love a church built on rock will surely be established.

A Church of Faith

Christ proclaimed to his disciples that “*Truly I say to you whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him*” (Mark 11:23) St. James adds to that by stating “*faith without works is useless.*” (James 2:20) This means that if we really believe in our Lord, then all things are possible, and we as Christians strive to accomplish God’s will. We need to emphasize

God's Will because yes if we put our mind to it we could possibly have 5 cars, 50 acres of golf course property and dozens of servants cleaning our house but is that what God really wants? The Lord wants us to serve Him and be at peace therefore we strive to do that by cultivating a godly environment spreading His church to all. This means we work hard with faith and a vision and then that that vision will become a reality one day. In addition we need to always have the strong belief that God will always take care of us. He will never let us down. We must let go and let God. A good example of this is the goal of the organization Habitat for Humanity. They build homes for poor people around the world. Their vision is to one day end homelessness on our planet. What an ambitious task but with true faith it is possible. Here in Northern Arizona we hope to build a church of faith. This means that we are not afraid to give 10% of our income to God's ministries through stewardship, nor are we confused about dedicating our time and skills to the church despite the world saying we need to just focus on ourselves and no one else.

A Church of Hope

Imagine if you were taken captive from your family, your home, your place of worship. How would you react? Would you be filled with anger, resentment, apprehension or would you look to your creator for hope and a light to guide you back to where you belong? As human beings we are in a sense held captive by sin, (Proverbs 5:22, Romans 7:23) not being of this world. (John 17:14) Remember we were originally meant to dwell in a garden of delight but because of sin we are separated from our original homeland. (Genesis Ch. 2 & 3) Our natural response is to be back in the garden of delight (our homeland) so being away from familiar surroundings can cause confusion, loneliness, unsettledness and agitation. An example of one who was taken from his land is in the life of the Prophet Daniel. He was taken captive by the Babylonians and was threatened by death so that he would abandon his Lord, the God of Israel. (Daniel 6) The way he responded is exactly how everyone one of us need to respond. He had hope! This was seen by him praying three times a day to the Lord. Despite the fact he was away from his homeland and was held prisoner, he never gave up hope that God would never abandon him and that He will always listen to his prayers. This is how we need to establish the church which lies inside of us. Our souls must radiate with the expectation that God really is there awaiting our petitions. We need to be in communication with our Lord. We all need to kneel down in front of an icon for 10 – 15 minutes a day and pray to our Lord. If you are not doing this, please start. This is the type of church we all want to participate in the church that leads us to eternal peace knowing that the Lord our God is guiding us and will always be with us.

Therefore we have answered the question, "What type of Church do we want to build?" Yes one day there will be a beautiful Byzantine Orthodox structure located in the Flagstaff area but most importantly there will be believers with the church in their hearts founded on faith, hope and love. Let us never lose sight of that goal and always strive to maintain our own body and souls as the beautiful edifice which serves as beacons to all in Northern Arizona.