

## **Knowing the Future - Building the Vision**

After touring ten local churches and three Greek Orthodox communities in the Los Angeles area a great deal of important information has been gathered by the Building Committee to assist us in developing our future plans. The focus groups were also helpful in getting some specific needs from the leadership of various ministries. The Parish Council is also devoting discussion time and reviewing the process as it develops. In the midst of discussions on square footage and budget forecasting, it is apparent a discussion is also necessary concerning the purpose and usage of the new buildings. On one level, we simply need them to accommodate church growth. We need an adequate banquet facility so that we can all gather for fellowship and dinners. These are common things that any group of people might consider when developing a new facility. As a Christian community however, there must be something more to our purpose than just constructing buildings. Every aspect of Christian community life needs to be referenced back to its purpose for existence – back to its vision.

The first thing Christ did before beginning His mission was to bow his head before St. John in the river Jordan. St. John protests that it is he and not Jesus who needs to be baptized. As God's appointed Messiah, Jesus is perfect man and has come to re-create humanity through His death, resurrection and by Water and the Spirit. John knows this and Jesus responds by saying this must happen so that He can fulfill His mission. Jesus has come to serve humanity and not to be served. He comes to shed his blood on the Cross in order to be crowned "king of kings." Our king is a crucified king, a servant king, Who teaches that there is no other way to regain one's own kingship other than by becoming servant kings. The Christian vision proclaims God's kingdom as the ultimate goal of all our actions and projects. In other words, we are embarking upon creating structures that are meant for "God's business" and the proclamation of His gospel and His Kingdom having come.

v To have the Cross as the only criterion of everything in the world, the ultimate measure of all life and action.

v To reject the world – as an end in itself, a value in itself, a beauty or meaning in itself, its self-sufficiency, self-centeredness, wickedness and corruption.

v To accept this world as God's gift to us and the means of our growth in Him and communion with Him. Creation is the object of God's infinite love and care.

This means that whatever a Christian community creates it is meant to be used to bring others to the knowledge of this truth and the Way of life – the Way of the Cross. There are sixty million people in the United States un-affiliated with any church, faith, or religious organization. Assumption has approximately 1,200 individual souls associated with the community. How are we to reach the 221,000 people who live in Scottsdale who many have yet to associate themselves with a Christian community? To answer this question we must turn to God and pray about what it is that He wants to do through us and the buildings we are about to create.

The Church building as the “House of God” is meant for those who are parishioners, who are Orthodox Christians. Today, anyone can join in Sunday worship but in ancient times, worship was “closed” to only the initiated and baptized Christians. A worship service in the Orthodox Church was never used as a means of bringing people to the faith but was for those who were in the faith and members of the body of Christ. This does not mean that God doesn’t use a beautiful liturgy to convert us and inspire “outsiders” who are present but it is not how the early church grew. Most visitors are overwhelmed by the otherworldliness of our worship that speaks a “language” they simply cannot comprehend even when it is done in English.

The new buildings we create can be utilized in such a way that they serve as a bridge that can indeed bring those who are outside, inside our beautiful Church. In visiting many of the popular Bible based communities in the valley most utilized familiar comfortable forms of community life that were more like a college campus or holiday resort. Cafés, outdoor lounging areas and sports grills, themed children’s theatrical multimedia activity centers that look like amusement parks, dimly lit auditoriums with a contemporary Christian worship team and a pastor who may be preaching the gospel of Christ or the gospel of pop-psychology. One can sip a latte and at the same time listen to the Pastor’s message on a big screen television in the café. There is nothing inherently wrong about utilizing familiar comfortable spaces for a Christian community. What is critical is the ultimate purpose or goal of such things. Do they lead people to Christ and His Kingdom or are they ends in themselves, objects that in some way replace authentic Christian life with the comforts of living in luxury?

There is an opportunity here for us to creatively design and develop buildings that express an ancient and living faith to a modern world. The Orthodox Way has been shaped by an ancient culture, influenced by highly developed arts, by music, icons, theatre, architecture ~ all solidly based upon the unchanging tradition of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I ask that everyone prayerfully seek our Lord’s guidance in shaping the vision for our future facilities. I invite you to gather together with friends and share your ideas and visions with one another about how we can bring people to Orthodoxy. Please then share these ideas with the Building Committee so they can become incorporated in the vision for our future.

Your co-worker in Christ,  
Fr Andrew