

What's at the Center of Our Village?

Much can be learned about what is important to people by how they plan a city. For instance, what is found at the center of the city of Scottsdale? City Hall, a Museum, a Baseball Park and Fashion Square Mall. The way the founders plan a city reveals what's at the center of their lives. I am not aware of a Church at the center of downtown Scottsdale.

In a very short time a change will occur in Scottsdale that will say a great deal about the Orthodox Christians who live here. At the corner of 82nd street and Cactus road a traditional Orthodox Church shall be built. When people drive by the new Church a voice in their hearts will say, 'The Church is as the center of the lives of these people.' During the Campaign Pledge Drive, parishioners were invited to pray, "Lord, what do You want to do through me?" By praying this prayer many families discovered that the Church is the center of our lives.

The village my Grandfather Andrew was born in is located just outside of Patras on top of a mountain. The village consists of a narrow street and small dwellings. There are vineyards, fig trees and a couple of restaurants. The evenings receive a cool breeze from the Ionian Sea below as the sun sets with warmth and stillness.

At the town square there is a famous natural stream that has been pouring forth water for centuries and an Orthodox Church. The Church was not off on a side street but it's the first thing seen coming into the village. The Church was not built around the village but the village was built around the Church. When a service begins at the Church, the bells can be heard by every family living in the village.

When I was staying at the village there was a death. When someone dies the Church bell rings slowly one stroke at a time, and the villagers mourn together and remember their own lost. As we heard the bell ring my great aunt Irene who grew up in the village was with us. I looked out the window and saw a women being carried on a pallet by pall bearers as they sung hymns and processed to the cemetery. My aunt began to cry uncontrollably. The Church bells brought to remembrance her mother, her father and the pain of their loss. That experience imprinted in my memory how much the Church is at the center of life.

In 1996, with the guidance of Architect Tom Kenrick, a vision for the future Church was put together. The vision was to build an Orthodox Church that said something to the souls of people who would pass by it and who would worship within its walls. Churches were visited, people interviewed, and invaluable advice was taken. One thing that the new Church would say was that the soil out of which it was grown had the Church at it's center.

One hundred families came together and made pledges of commitment on December 6, 1998. 100 families made sacrifices and changes in living habits in order to plant the Church. It would not have been possible to raise over 1 million dollars in pledges had the Church not been at the center of the lives of these families.

There are new families now in our community who have arrived since we began our Pledge Campaign. These families are invited to learn more about our vision by attending an informal meeting on May 16, 2000; so that they may have the opportunity to express their commitment to Christ and His Church.

For the families that have been with us from the time of the Campaign and have yet to make a pledge- it's not too late. One thing that was learned from the Campaign was not that the Church needs our pledge but that as Orthodox Christians we need the Church. It's a matter of faith, hope and love and about placing the Church at the center of our lives.

The question needs to be asked where is the Church in the lives of those who have yet to pledge? By attending the divine serves one is witnessing their faith. By receiving the body and blood of Christ we are uniting ourselves to Christ and one another. By serving one another, the body of Christ is being strengthened. These things say the Church is at the center of one's life. Now it's time to show God that He is the center by making a commitment to Him to help build a dwelling place for Him.

The philosophy to raising funds at Assumption Church has been that the onus, the responsibility is ours. By going directly to the parishioners of Assumption over one million dollars in pledges has been raised. Before considering what fund raisers, might help, we need to look to ourselves for the answer. The prayer needs to be prayed, 'God what will You have me do, to help build Your Church?' In finding the answer to this prayer, the question of where the Church is in our lives is also answered.

In Christ's Love,
+ Fr. Andrew