

On November 16th we will Name Our Church! (and Metropolitan Gerasimos will be officiating!)

Just imagine for half of your life everyone called you “Arizonian” or “Hey you, Christian”. You did not have a personal name but only a general title that describes your identity. For almost a decade, the Orthodox Community here in Flagstaff has been known as the “Greek Orthodox Mission of Northern Arizona”. This title does not give the assurance of permanency which would be expected from the Church that been in existence for 2,000 years. We hope to have a presence that is permanent, especially as we journey toward the Kingdom of Heaven where the Lord will know us by name. Through God’s grace the community in Northern Arizona has grown both spiritually and in numbers and we are approaching quickly the day God will reveal to us what we will be called, and that day is Sunday November 16th.

The Process

Prayerfully for more than six years we have looked for guidance on what to call ourselves. Through the wisdom of our bishop his Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos, we were counseled to patiently wait for the appropriate time when the mission would have sufficient maturity to go through the process of naming our church. In May of 2007 we received the hierarchal blessing to name our community. Therefore in the past 16 months we developed a course of action, narrowed the possible list to an initial 16 names, we spent 3 months of educating ourselves on the potential names, then through stewardship selection the list was narrowed down to 10 and now each name is being evaluated and presented to the community as a whole by different stewards. Shortly all the stewards will be individually asked to select a name and the top three choices will be placed in a vessel. Following Divine Liturgy on the 2nd Sunday in November, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, one name will be drawn and our name will be chosen.

What does this mean for our community?

As a community we are going to have both tremendous blessings but also tremendous responsibilities. We are now going to have a saint or feast day to which we can all relate. The words to the festal hymn of our church’s name will be embedded on our hearts. The images of his or her life will permeate our labors so to transform our efforts into Godly endeavors. Our prayers will be fortified through the intercessions of His holy ones. We are also going to be challenged by the knowledge that we have a righteous standard to follow in our patron saint because the saints of the Lord have run the course of the race and arrived victorious. Through endurance, hope and loving perseverance we will follow the example of the saints, and continuously remain in the arena to spread the gospel of peace throughout the entire world. This means we must stretch ourselves when the world is telling us to give up. This means we must look at ourselves and learn where we need to change so to become perfect as the Father is perfect. This means after we have become utterly frustrated and overwhelmed with the pressures of the world we must relinquish it all into the Lord’s hands and excel as devout disciples powered by the strength of the Holy Spirit. This means we, at the same time, must live in utmost gratitude and thanksgiving, a life of *Eucharist* (which is Greek for

gratitude), by seeing how the Lord has utilized us by bringing our community to this blessed point of Godly growth. As a community we have begun this process of following the saintly Christ like examples of the martyrs before us and we will continue. The path is narrow and the laborers are few but no one said that salvation was obtained in a bowl of cherries but rather through the Cross. The name that the Lord reveals to us will seal our path to establishing a permanent presence of Orthodox Christianity here in Northern Arizona which will be glorified until the end of time.

What the future holds?

When will the end of time come? Some say it is right around the corner. With economic strife, wars and conflicts persisting, disasters and floods occurring, it seems like the apocalypse is upon us. But be careful, for almost 2,000 years people have predicted that the end time is upon us. Therefore as Orthodox Christians we humbly admit that the 2nd coming could be tomorrow or not for another 20,000 years, we just need to be ready every moment no matter when it occurs. We need to plan for tomorrow but live for today. This is what we are doing by prayerfully identifying the name of our blessed community.

The future also holds the probability of relocating our place of worship into a facility where we will be the sole occupants. This will proclaim a statement of stability and affirming the permanent presence that our new name will give. We are also in a critical time of selecting and obtaining land which will be the home of the first Eastern Orthodox Church by piercing the skies of Northern Arizona. We proceed responsibly, with faith in God and in the thoroughness of rolling water over a river bed, not to missing one detail. We are in such an exciting time in our church. We must continue to pray to our Lord to guide us step by step, that His will may be done.