

History Of St Georges Terre Haute.

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The Saint George Antiochian Orthodox Church of Terre Haute, Indiana, was founded by a few immigrants from Syria, more especially from Ein el Charra, a small village which nestles at the foot of Mount Hermon, southwest of Damascus. In the next few years many other Syrian immigrants to America chose to settle in Terre Haute and by 1910, the Syrian community was well on it's way to becoming a unique segment of this area. Because of strong ethnic ties and because of an inability to express themselves adequately in the English language, they remained a closely-knit group, living side by side in the northwest area of Terre Haute and meeting in each other's homes. They became a sound and well-established part of the Terre Haute scene. It should be noted here that not all the immigrants from Syria to this area were of the Orthodox faith, therefore at no time should Orthodoxy and the Syrian nationality be thought of as being synonymous.

In 1925, Woodrow G. Corey, traveled to Cleveland, Ohio to attend a convention. There he met another visitor to the conclave, the Right Reverend Antony Bashir, who at that time was commissioned by the Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch to organize parishes in the United States. In 1927 Woodrow Corey left for Indianapolis, taking with him a delegation of three men, namely Nicholas Corey, Sam Corey and Charles Maloof. This group met with Father Antony and outlined plans for the Church in Terre Haute. One week later, Rev. Bashir arrived in Terre Haute and immediately set the wheels in action for the organization and establishment of the Church. A constitution was drawn up and notarized on May 6, 1927, naming the community parish "The St. George Syrian Orthodox Society." This Constitution was duly recorded in Vigo County Courthouse on May 11, 1927. A Board of Trustees was organized and the following parishioners were named as it's administrators: Ferris Shahadey, Sam Tanoos, Skander Corey, Nicholas Corey, Sam Corey,

Saleem Nasser, William Kassis, Michael Ellis, Assad Saikley, Sam George, Charles Saikley and Charles Maloof.

Shortly after organizing, a drive was begun with Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike participating enthusiastically and wholeheartedly and brought in the sum of \$2,400.00. During the drive, the attention of the building committee was drawn to a piece of property – the Voorhees Public School, located at 635 North 5th Street, which was for sale as a result of school redistricting. This location was accessible to nearly every parishioner and it seemed the most desirable site for a church . Conversion began, and the first floor became the Social Hall while the second floor was converted into the Church Proper. Other first floor rooms were retained as classrooms.

As the years passed, the Church became the center of the social, as well as religious activities of the Syrian Community. It began to fill the great cultural void that before had been unfilled. For it's faithful members and their non-Orthodox friends, this Church served as a bridge between the Old World from whence they came and the new World in which they had settled.

Father Antony organized and taught weekly Arabic classes in conjunction with religious instruction, sot that the youth of the community could pray and converse in their mother tongue. The pastorship of Father Bashir drew to a close in 1930, when he accepted the position of pastor of the Archdiocesan Church of Detroit. Father Bashir served in Detroit for five years and then was elected by the Holy Synod and was consecrated under the hands of the late Patriarch of Antioch, Alexander III, as Archbishop of New York and all North America.

The Very Reverend Exarch George Corey of Katana, Syria, filled the vacancy left by the departure of the Reverend Bashir in 1930. Father George was visiting with his family in Terre Haute when he was asked to take over the pastorship of the parish. The date was September 1931. He remained in Terre Haute until 1935 when he left to return to Syria.

The parish was left without a spiritual head until 1936, at which time Father John Khoury came to guide the congregation. Father John served for two years and left in May of 1938. He was followed by Reverend Elias Hamaty, who pastored the parish until 1940.

The subsequent years of 1940 through 1961 represent many transitions in the life of the St.

George Orthodox Church. The new and first generations of the American born Syrian Orthodox was gradually becoming a greater part of the American scene. Between the years of 1940 and 1946, the congregation had no less than six priests: The Reverends John Khoury, Razook, Jerome Yared, Thomas Abodeely, Nicholas Nahas and A. Rihbany. Some served for a period of two years – others for only a few months.

During this same time period, many of the parish's young men and women were drafted or enlisted into the armed forces. With the coming of World War II, many of these commissioned and non-commissioned servicemen were sent overseas to various theatres of war. All served with distinction as had their fathers before them in WWI.

In 1947 following the war, the pastorship of St. George was taken over by Reverend George Ghannam, who had come to America to visit with relatives. After complying with the necessary immigrations laws, Father Ghannam remained in America. While he visited his sister, Maheeba Corey, in Terre Haute, he was offered the position as pastor of the Church. He accepted and soon began his formal study of the English language. During the next five years, he was able to retrieve many who had left the Orthodox Church. Unfortunately, Father Ghannam left in 1951 to take over the parish of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Once again the doors of St. George were closed for a period of two years.

The next ten years (1951 to 1961) challenged the initiative and resourcefulness in four priests: Father Benjamin Hoffiz, B. C. Mahfouz, Peter Krochta and Gregory Rowley.

Discouraged, the membership began to dwindle. The Church structure began to show signs of deterioration. These factors, combined with the growing apathy of the congregation, disturbed a few of the dedicated members. These faithful were aroused to a degree of action which plunged them into an era that was to revive the community in Terre Haute. In 1950, the stimulating idea of a

new church building was introduced and the idea caught on quickly. Again the community began to dream, for again they were faced with a common need.

By 1955, everyone was eager to take action. The Board of Trustees elected Joseph Malooley as it's President. A Syrian Orthodox faithful, and a successful businessman, Joe was the right leader for the new drive. Mr. Malooley was reelected as president for the next seven consecutive years – time enough to fulfill the reverie of the people and to prove himself worthy of this calling.

Again the building fund was activated and the Board began to direct its' attention to locating a site suitable for the new Church. Eventually one was located in the 1900 block of South Fourth Street and plans were set into motion for the purchase of the site. Over the years, the Ladies Society of St. George (in existence since the founding of the old Church in 1927) had accumulated \$4,000.00, the right amount needed to purchase the new site, so it was done.

On August 3, 1956, the various bank accounts were pooled. The Thomas Little Construction Company was awarded the building contract and construction began in 1957. After four months, the building was completed.

Now the new Church was ready for dedication. On the 4th day of May 1958, Archbishop Antony Bashir – the same man who thirty years earlier founded the small Orthodox Church in Terre Haute, returned as the Church's Hierarch to dedicate the new edifice. Him Eminence presided over the day's festivities, assisted by the new parish pastor, Father Peter Krochta, who was on loan from the Russian Archdiocese.

The new Church was built, consecrated and dedicated – but the work of the building committee was not yet finished. With a new upward surge in activities of the congregation, it soon became apparent that a meeting place was needed. In 1959, plans were formulated to annex a social hall to the Church. The construction of the annex was awarded to Mr. Albert Laham.

Father Krochta began his pastorship on December 15, 1957, and was immediately taken to the hearts of the congregation. On August 9, 1959, he was urgently recalled to the Russian Archdiocese. The priest who followed Father Peter was the Reverend Gregory Rowley, a converted Episcopalian

Minister. After a brief stay, Father Rowley left the parish on December 15, 1960.

Once again the Board of Trustees was forced to petition the Archbishop for another priest. This time it's efforts were concentrated on a young seminarian from Canton, Ohio, who had just completed his theological training at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary in New York City.

A delegation headed by Joseph Malooley traveled to the city of Canton to view this young Sub-Deacon. After observing one Sunday the committee returned to Terre Haute without having met or spoken a word to the Sub-Deacon.

Immediately this committee requisitioned Archbishop Bashir to ordain this young man as a priest for the Terre Haute parish. This urgent request was complied with on February 12, 1961, one week after his ordination to priesthood, the Reverend Father George Rados celebrated his first Divine Liturgy in the Church of St. George at Terre Haute, Indiana.

The following 15 years brought amazing advances within the parish. With the return of many people who had strayed from the Church and with the conversion to Orthodoxy of individuals of non-Syrian stock, the membership slowly increased.

A new generation came of age and promptly rekindled the interest of the congregation. The Choir, S.O.Y.O., Teenagers, Ladies Society – all functioned independently, but with one common objective, which was the benefit and progress of the Church. These combined efforts were reflected in the high respect in the community for the St. George Church and it's parishioners.

By August of 1962, a new rectory was built and furnished to house the priest and his family. It stood on the same property on which the Church and Social Center were located and was constructed at a cost of \$30,000.00.

The history of the Church could not be complete without reference to the death of Metropolitan Archbishop Antony Bashir, the founder of our parish. The Archbishop died in New England Baptist Hospital of Boston on February 15, 1966. Neither time nor space is sufficient here to give credit to the great

accomplishments of this most outstanding leader. His memory is unequalled in the reminiscences of all those who knew him.

Due to the fact that no preparations were made for a successor to Archbishop Bashir, the Archdiocese found itself in a very precarious situation. On August 5, 1966, the Holy Synod solemnly elected the Right Rev. Philip Saliba as Archbishop of New York and all of North America.

Early in 1969, it became evident that the congregation had outgrown their Social Hall and was in need of larger facilities. Dinners featuring Syrian foods for the general public, along with Hafliis were well received and proceeds earned became a major source of income for the Church. Again the building committee answered the call to duty and they began to formulate their plans. Approximately \$87,000.00 was spent on the construction of the new larger Social Center. Mr. Albert Laham again served as general contractor on the project – with the able assistance of Father George Rados. Father Rados devoted many hours of planning and physical labor on the redesign of the Sunday school classrooms, which were carved out of the old Social Hall. The building was complete in 1970.

During this period, many of the young people were again called upon to serve their country in the Vietnam war era. The people of the church answered the call and many served in branches of the armed forces. Many others were involved in continuing their education in institutions of higher education. What a difference a generation makes!

From illiterate grandparents who struggled to make ends meet, this generation saw the value of education and began to experience the American dream.

This era also witnessed the expansion of the church community. As first and second generation parishioners became older and their children married, new converts became part of the church. No longer was the church exclusively part of the Syrian-American community. As Orthodox from the church married non-Orthodox, the church began to grow again with new members marrying those who grew up in the church. In addition, many others started to come to the Orthodox Church from other communities such as Clinton, In. and from the Romanian Community. The coming decades would see the church continue

to grow to include those from Greek, Russian, Romanian and other various backgrounds.

On June 24, 1975, a long awaited event took place. On that glorious day, Metropolitan Philip Saliba and Archbishop Michael Shaheen effected a union of the two North American Archdioceses. This union was canonically ratified by the Holy Synod of Antioch on August 19, 1975. St. George of Terre Haute is proud to note that the Most Reverend Michael celebrated his first Liturgy in Terre Haute after being elevated to priesthood on August 19, 1951.

All good things must come to an end and so it did in August 1976, when Father Rados was transferred and assigned to the Orthodox Church in Washington, D. C. For almost 16 years, he had filled the hearts of the entire community with his love and devotion. He had a profound influence on all Churches and peoples in the area and brought a new dedication of principle and a reawakening of the spirit of Christian love. He left an indelible mark on all who were fortunate to have been exposed to his teachings, his quality of ethics and his pure sense of reverence.

Our good fortune continued in August, 1976, with the arrival of Father Samuel David as pastor of St. George Church. Father Samuel was ordained on May 16, 1976, at New Castle, Pennsylvania at St. Elias Church, after receiving his theological training from Duquesne University and Late Vocations Programs of the OCA, Archdiocese of Pittsburgh, West Virginia. For many years he had been molding the minds and bodies of students not only in America but in many countries in the Middle East. Recognizing the deep sense of loss that prevailed, Father Samuel eagerly assumed the responsibility of carrying the torch of Orthodoxy and immediately began his pastoral duties. Athlete, teacher, a quiet man who, after many years in the professional world, discovered the thing he wanted to win most – the souls of men for God and Jesus Christ.

From 1980 to June 1988, Fr. Daniel Rohan served our parish. As a newly ordained priest, the quiet, soft spoken, pious man eagerly began his pastoral duties. Fr. Dan served long and well, with great respect in the community. In 1988, Fr. Daniel asked for and received a transfer to the area of his family home in Youngstown, Ohio.

Reference should also be made of the fact that a parishioner felt inspired to pursue ordination to the diaconate. Louis Corey was ordained in 1983. Four years later, Subdeacon Elias was ordained a deacon by metropolitan Philip, and continues to serve our parish with love and dedication.

On July 1, 1988, St. George Orthodox Church was blessed with the arrival of Fr. Anthony Yazge and his wife, Stefanie, who are both graduates of St. Vladimir's Seminary. Fr. Anthony was immediately taken into the hearts of the parishioners. He brought with him a mind open to the needs of a youthful congregation. A young man full of enthusiasm, and an intense eager interest in serving Christ and His Church, he has brought together all factions of the parish into a center of religious learning and related social activities.

Father Yazge was transferred to the Antiochian Village in 2005. The Church received the grace of having Fr Stephen Rhudy as pastor. He retired in 2007 and succeeded by Fr David Moretti. In 2011 he was moved to the OCA jurisdiction. Fr Paul Matar was assigned to St George in 2010.

Thanks to the generosity of Dr. William Nasser, the St. George Social Center was completely remodeled in 1994 and is now considered the most beautiful in Terre Haute. In addition, a large donation by Sarah Shahadey in memory of her husband Frank Shahadey made possible the enlarging and remodeling of the kitchen in the Social Center. The donation was a catalyst in an effort spearheaded by Kal Ellis and led to the raising of funds to spend over \$100,000 on the kitchen project. Many parishioners have volunteered their time and efforts over the years to ensure that expenses are paid and the church continues to operate. The "Sweepstakes" is an annual event that was started by the late Abe Malooley and has raised thousands of dollars toward improvements in the church and grounds. The event held before the Great Lent each year is one that is greatly anticipated and attended by many in the community.

We should never forget Christ's promise to the Church that "the gates of Hell shall never prevail against it."

God grant this church many years