

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OF SAINT ANDREW IN PATRAS

Catholics have lived in the city of Patras, and generally in the Peloponnese, since the beginning of the 13th century, during the time of the Franks. However, they became more established after Greece was freed from the Ottomans; the first congregation consisted of foreign diplomats, merchants, Italian and Maltese fishermen who came to Patras with or without their families.

The first churches were built after the Greek Revolution in 1821 (the previous ones were destroyed by earthquakes in 1717, 1785 and 1804) because the Turks did not allow the old churches to be renovated and new ones to be built. At that time, a Catholic church was built, not where the previous one was, but it was probably near the Castle of Patras.

According to the archives of the Catholic Archdiocese of Athens, while Ioannis Kapodistrias governed the country (1928-1931) and after the intervention of the French Consul Bertini, the Catholics of Patras received, a plot of 1000 laths where they initially built a temporary small wooden church, which was later replaced by the current church.

THE FIRST CHURCH (1838 – 1925)



Around 1836, the Catholic Bishop of Syros, Aloysius Maria Blancis, who was also the bishop of Patras during that time, recognized how important the city was because it connected the West to the East, decided to build a new and bigger church. On April 1838, Blancis toured around the Peloponnese, and on 19th May he arrived in Patras. Four days before his arrival, with the decree of the Government, Blancis became the **Apostolic Delegate of the Holy See**. When he arrived in Patras, he asked the congregation to help out, not only financially but also with their personal labour, to build the church by forming a **parish committee** under the lead of the parish priest, father Fransisco Cuculla. On 21st May 1838, they begun collecting funds,

with the first donation made by Bishop Blancis, while the task of building the church was given to the architect **Frederic Sousa**. The licence was granted on October 1838

and it permitted the construction of a church of 24 cubits in length and 14 cubits in width. On 19th November 1838 Bishop Blancis solemnly placed the corner stone in the presence of the city's Administrator and the Consuls of England, Austria, France and Russia. However, the construction ceased due to lack of funds. But with more donations made by various donors, including King Otto (which the parish priest at the time doubted), the construction of the church went on, and therefore, with many sacrifices, it was completed by June 1841.

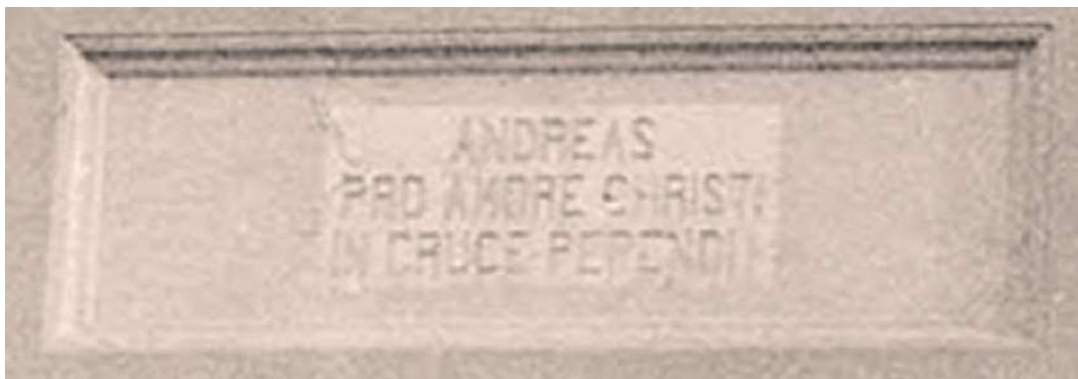
On 21st January 1839, the master builder, Fr Fransisco Cuculla, was replaced by Fr Nikolaos Varthalitis, who celebrated the first Mass in the incomplete church on 21st July 1839. Fr. Fransisco Cuculla returned again as parish priest on 27th September 1839.

On 17th June 1841, Bishop Blancis officially inaugurated the new church of Saint Andrew, which served the needs of the Catholics of Patras for 85 years.

The previous church is completely different from the one today, as one can see from the photograph below. Its main characteristics are its two low spires and the open space around it in front, where there was a sign that read in Latin:

«ANDREAS PRO AMORE CHRISTI IN CRUCE PEPENDIT»

“ANDREW FOR THE LOVE OF CHRIST WAS CRUCIFIED”



No one knows what happened to that sign or where it is or why it was never placed in the new church.

We do not know much of how that previous church was decorated. The only remaining icons are those of Saint Andrew and of **Our Lady of Sorrows** (1890). The icon of St. Andrew was made in 1842 in Rome by Enrico Bartolomei and was sent to Patras in 1843 as a present by Cardinal Fransoni, head of Propaganda Fide (**Congregation for the Promulgation of the Faith**).

The icon depicts the Saint with his cross, it is painted on canvas, with dimensions of 2.5 X 1.6 meters and on the bottom one can see; on the left, the artist's signature along

with the date, and on the right, the text below that was added by father Cucculla, when the icon was sent to Patras.



ICONEM HANC OCULIS ET ANIMO AEQUE
ADMIRANDAM CARDINALIS FRANSONIUS
FIDEI PROPAGANDAE PRAEFECTUS PATRENSI
CATHOLICORUM COETUI DONO MISIT
PASTORIS FRANCISCI CUCULLAE GREGIS HIC
UNIVERSI LAETITIA GRATES MEMORIA A.R.S.
MDCCCXLIII.

This sacred image, which is admired with the eyes as well as with the soul, was sent by Cardinal Franson, head of the committee for the Promulgation of the Faith, as a gift to the Catholic Parish of Patras, to the joy of all the local flock of Fr Fragkiskos Koukoullas, in eternal memory, Anno Domini 1843.

THE CHURCH TODAY (1925-2020)



During the first twenty years of the 20th century, the Catholics of Patras numbered up to a few thousand. They had arrived from Italy, mainly for professional reasons. In 1915 and after the death of Fr Petros Vitalis, Fr Ioannis Sinigalias became the parish priest and his main concern was the continuously rising number of Catholics in the city and therefore, the old church could not meet their needs. So, this very active and determined, don Giovanni (as they used to call him), who was also from Patras, was put in charge of the difficult task of expanding the church. The church that was designed by architect Karavella, was built in two phases. The first phase began in June 1925 and was completed by June 1928: the church was partially demolished and the front of the new church was built, including the spire, the two side walls and the ceiling. On 21st April 1937, the

second phase began, were the old church was completely demolished and a new one was completed. Despite the police stepping in and interrupting the building of the

church for various reasons, it was finally completed a few months later. In 1949 the painting of the church began which was gradually completed by 1953.

The church today is double the size of the old one and the second biggest one in the Archdiocese of Athens, after the Cathedral of St Denis in Athens. The church is sublime and grand with simple ornaments. The plaster ceiling which stands out, was made by Paschalis Allegretti, a member of the Patras congregation. As mentioned above, what remains of the old church is the grand icon of Saint Andrew which is placed in the centre of the sanctuary, and the icon of **Our Lady of Sorrows**. The two chapels within the church – on the left is the chapel of St. Joseph and on the right the chapel of **Our Lady of Mount Carmel** – bare the artworks of Varouchas, which were completed in 1920 and 1925. The two religious paintings on canvas (representations of Christ's and St Andrew's martyrdom) were done by Nik. Atzaritis, who was an artist from Patras (1956). The two big bells were donations, one from the Minister of Foreign Affairs Vasileios Roufos, who later became the mayor of Patras, and the other from the congregation.

After 60 years, in the middle of 80s, some renovation was made to maintain the church, but the destructive earthquake of 1993, that struck Patras, severely damaged the church. The parish priest at the time, Fr Apostolos Varthalitis, undertook the burden of renovating it. The main tasks were to strengthen the balance of the building and for that a special technique was used while the other works consisted of replacing the marble, painting the inside of the church with special paints, preserving the icons, etc. The costs were mainly covered by a bank loan but equally important was the congregation's financial support and personal labour.

We must point out that the construction of the first and the new church was done exclusively with the money, labour and donations of the thousands known and unknown members of the congregation of the Catholic community of Patras. A congregation with an unfettered and constant parish life of nearly two hundred years in Western Greece who, with their limited financial means and under the leadership of each parish priest, continue to care and try to keep this unique church maintained; at the same time, they participate in different social activities not only for the Catholics of Patras and its region, but for all the citizens, regardless of their religion or ethnicity.

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PHOTOGRAPHS:

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