



St Andrew's Theological College: A Life-Changing Journey



Left: The Greek Orthodox Parish and Community of the Resurrection of Christ, Kogarah. Right: The Very Revd Dr Doru Costache, Senior Lecturer in Patristic Studies, Mr Anthony Papantoniou, Associate Lecturer in Patristic Studies, and students sharing inspiration and ideas in the College's library.

On Sunday 13 April 2014, the Philoptochos of the Greek Orthodox Parish and Community of the Resurrection of Christ, Kogarah, hosted a Palm Sunday Fundraiser Luncheon in order to create awareness of and to support St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College. The Very Revd Archimandrite Sophronios Konidaris, himself a graduate of the College and its chaplain, kindly gave me the opportunity to speak to the parishioners and friends in attendance about my journey through undergraduate studies at the College, my current role as a faculty member, and how these have equipped me for my postgraduate studies as a PhD candidate at the University of Sydney. The following is an adapted version of my presentation.

Eight years ago, I began a journey that would change my life. I had just completed a diploma in building studies and was thinking about attending University. Most of my friends at the time were enrolled in University, undertaking degrees in various fields of study such as law, economics and the sciences. I, on the other hand, was more interested in the humanities, meaning that I was thinking about a potential career as a teacher or an academic. At the same time, I was re-discovering my Orthodox roots, attending the Divine Liturgy and fellowship, and reading about the life of the Church, its rich heritage and tradition. In light of all of this, I applied for both a Bachelor of Arts at the University of New South Wales, and a Bachelor of Theology at St Andrew's Theological College, and was accepted into both.

For reasons that I can only attribute to the hand of divine providence, I chose St Andrew's. In what I am about to say, I do not mean to disparage the secular University establishment from which I myself am currently benefitting as a doctoral candidate at Sydney. I just want to highlight one thing, and that is uniqueness. St Andrew's is unique. Let me explain why. Today we tend to compartmentalise, religion is one thing, study and work are another, which leads to inconsistency in our behaviour; as though we can't study or work in a Christian manner, and as though the Christian life doesn't involve a degree of theological reflection and labour. At St Andrew's, the Church's way of life and rhythms frame an excellent program of tertiary studies in order to address both one's aspirations to become a good Christian, and to prepare one for an active and rewarding future as a priest, academic, teacher, or social worker. This holistic experience, where both the mind and heart are engaged and nurtured in a spirit of traditional Orthodoxy and rigorous scholarship, is entirely unique

in the Australian tertiary sector, insofar as St Andrew's, accredited through the Sydney College of Divinity, is the only Orthodox tertiary education provider in the Southern Hemisphere.

Let me share my own experience. As an undergraduate student at St Andrew's I was encouraged to attend chapel for the morning and evening services, Matins and Vespers. To many this might sound like an unnecessary responsibility, or even a burden. But to those of us who have been exposed to the liturgical hymns, with their rich symbolism and pedagogical value, the opportunity to attend these brief services can only be construed as a blessing. As part of my undergraduate program, I studied the Greek of the New Testament, early Church and Byzantine history, Patristic Studies (the writings of the Fathers of the Church), and many more subjects that contributed to my understanding of the history and theology of the Orthodox Church in a way that is immediately relevant to its contemporary circumstances, to my own experience within it, and - to think in terms of job prospects - to a career in the humanities. It was at St Andrew's that I was inspired by the lectures of its founding Dean, His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos, whose vast erudition opened up to me the writings of great poets, philosophers, and theologians. It was at St Andrew's that I benefited from the advice and friendship of its chaplain, the Very Revd Archimandrite Sophronios Konidaris, who has always offered me opportunities to contribute to the life of this parish, as indeed he has done today. It was at St Andrew's that I was granted guidance, both academic and spiritual, by the Very Revd Dr Doru Costache, Senior Lecturer in Patristic Studies, whom you know as contributing to this parish and who always offered me opportunities, even as an undergraduate, to take part in the life of the College. With the support of my colleagues, Fr Doru and Dr Philip Kariatlis, and with the blessing of the Dean, I was accepted as a faculty member of St Andrew's once I completed my honours degree in Church History in 2010. My dream to become a teacher had not only been fulfilled; it had been surpassed. How so? At St Andrew's, teaching is more than just about communicating information, the raw material or data that one needs for an immediate practical purpose, to tick a particular box. At St Andrew's, teaching is about formation; the shaping of one's mind and heart in the spirit of the Orthodox tradition, which takes place in several ways:

Spiritually, as represented by chapel, the content of some of the units, and the fact that the College's calen-

dar is inseparable from the liturgical life of the Church; for instance, major Church feasts are observed as holidays, and students are encouraged to attend activities and assist at various parishes throughout Sydney. Moreover, the College has close ties with two local Greek Orthodox monasteries, namely the Holy Monastery of the Mother of God Pantanassa in Mangrove Mountain, and the Holy Monastery of St George, Springwood.

Pedagogically, as represented by the high standard of teaching executed through face-to-face lectures and distance education, which are offered to a student cohort that currently includes young and old, lay and clergy, married and monastics, males and females. Students in both face-to-face lectures and distance education modes have access to an online interface where they can download course material, listen to recordings of lectures, and access countless resources relevant to their studies. Such sources are also available at our library, which has one of the biggest patristic selections in Australia.

And on the level of **research**. St Andrew's excels at quality research, especially in the field of patristic studies, and this is because of the annual patristic symposium, launched in 2009 by its conveners the Very Revd Dr Doru Costache and Dr Philip Kariatlis with the blessing of His Eminence. At these symposia, internationally renowned scholars have given presentations based on various aspects of the lives and writings of the Church fathers and saints. These presentations have later appeared as scholarly articles in the second volume of the College's journal, *Phronema*, which is published bi-annually. *Phronema* itself has an international board of referees, and together with the symposia it demonstrates the growing maturity of St Andrew's as a research institution dedicated to promoting a genuinely Christian scholarship as a witness to the Gospel in the academic milieu. This witness leads me to my final level of formation (although I am certain more could be mentioned), and that is:

Outreach. St Andrew's engages with the broader community in several ways. Having just mentioned the symposia, it is perhaps important to note that recently a collective volume, *Cappadocian Legacy*, which is based on the first three symposia and edited by its conveners was published; and there are plans to publish a second



Cont. from previous page

collective volume based on the last two symposia. Last year, a catechetical initiative was launched which took members of the faculty to Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, and Perth to give day-seminars on the Nicene-Creed to the faithful. This year, an ecclesiastical program was launched which will allow those unable to apply for an accredited degree to be able to undertake course units tailored specifically to preparing one for ministry within the Church. Academic events held at the premises of the College, as well as the contribution of faculty members to the life of the Church in a number of ways, have ensured that St Andrew's continues to be 'plugged in' to the community; witnessing to the Gospel in various ways and on different levels.

As a student and later a faculty member of St Andrew's, I have been decisively shaped by, and have taken an active part in, the various formative dimensions of the College just discussed. I have presented papers at all of the symposia, published articles in *Phronema*, the collective volume, and engaged in outreach through catechetical lectures in various cities across Australia, and local engagement in parish communities. If I look back at myself eight years ago, as a young man about to embark on undergraduate studies, I realise how truly blessed I am that I chose to study at St Andrew's instead of anywhere else. I must confess that I could not have anticipated the holistic education offered to me by the College - which I reiterate, is unique - nor could I have foreseen the opportunities it has given me in both the Church and as a fledgling academic.

In relation to the latter, my years at St Andrew's have equipped me with instrumental tools that I have been able to implement in my current research at the University of Sydney. As I mentioned earlier, I am undertaking a PhD at the University, in the department of Studies in Religion, on the city of Constantinople. As many of you know, Constantinople, which is modern day Istanbul in Turkey, was the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire for over a thousand years; and it was within the context of this empire that Orthodox culture flourished. Had I not been taught Byzantine history at St Andrew's, I would never have been able to continue researching this city, which I had the opportunity to visit in 2011. It is my hope that the research I am currently undertaking will enrich the Church History discipline at St Andrew's by endowing me with the information and experience I need to create more course units, so that when I finish my PhD, God-willing, I shall be able to give something back to the place from where I have learned so much.

That, in brief, is my story. But it is just one of many. Many St Andrew's graduates can be found, like Fr Sophrony, amongst the reverend clergy of the Archdiocese. One graduate of the College, His Grace bishop Iakovos of Miletoupolis, is the first Australian born Orthodox bishop; and the Abbots of the two monasteries mentioned respectively above, namely the Very Revd Abbots Eusebios Pantanassiotis and Kyriakos Stavronikitianos, are also graduates. Other graduates can be found completing their PhD's, teaching at universities or high schools, undertaking social work or other postgraduate research degrees, writing and publishing academic articles and books, hosting fellowships and chanting at parishes both near and far; in short contributing, in too many ways to mention, to the building up of the Orthodox Church, which is the body of Christ, for the glory of God. I encourage everyone to visit the St Andrew's homepage - www.sagotc.edu.au - in order to find out more about the College, including the various degrees on offer, the respective modes of study, and up-and-coming events that are open to the public. Thank you.

Mario Baghos

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St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College



An activity of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia

I would like to say Thank you to the Board of Governors and Management Committee for bringing me on board as the inaugural 'Coordinator' of the Bribie Island Retreat and Recreation Centre. I am excited to be actively working in this role, and can see an amazing opportunity to build and maximise the use of our current facilities. I look forward to being directly involved in marketing our services within the broader community, and to extend our capability to where this will be regarded as a high class facility in an idyllic location. Keep an eye out for additional marketing information which will be distributed throughout the South East Queensland region and on a national level to the Greek Orthodox communities & parishes. The Centre will also embrace the new age of technology with our website - www.gobribieisland.org and Facebook profile receiving a makeover in coming weeks.

Open for Business

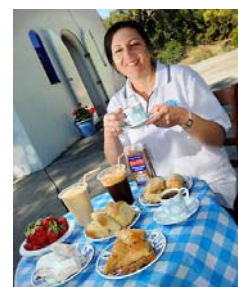
Yes - we are well and truly open and ready for groups to come and stay with us, either for a day trip / conference, or for longer term camp stays. We can cater to a range of community and charity groups, with a key focus on youth, church, sporting and school groups. We have accommodated our first couple of groups, and the feedback received thus far has been excellent. As we continue to improve and build our facilities, I aim for this positive feedback to be a trademark for the Centre. Some of our key facilities include the following:

- Car parking and a coach set down area to Church, Amenities Block, Cabins and Auditorium, which is fully accessible for people with a disability
- 7 modern cabins (sleeping up to 54 persons), each with toilet & shower; 1 Cabin is designed to be fully compliant for people with a disability. 1 Cabin has been assigned as a Group Leader's cabin & includes kitchenette and dining area
- Church dedicated to Panagia Theotokos
- Separate Amenities block - toilets including for persons with a disability, storage room, food preparation area and barbeque cooking facilities
- A spacious dining and conference Hall / Auditorium which can accommodate up to 250 people with a fully equipped kitchen, dry store, cold room, commercial laundry facility, storage room, office and toilets - including for persons with a disability
- Audio visual facility in Auditorium includes ceiling projector and large screen, remote access keyboard and mouse to the screen, excellent for general display or running a Conference. An 8m x 3m stage can also be set up in this Facility

Please feel welcome to contact me on 07 3475 3000, mobile 0419 509 935 or email coordinator@gobribieisland.org to discuss your next Booking enquiry, and I will gladly help to clarify any questions you may have.

Bribie Island Paniyiri 2014

Planning and marketing activities continue to be led by the sub-committee for the Bribie Island Paniyiri, which will take place on SUNDAY 6 JULY 2014. A variety of festivities will be enjoyed on the day, commencing with a morning service in the Church, before moving into traditional Greek food, sweets, fun and entertainment. A precise schedule of activities will be available soon as we continue to finalise logistics of the event. With the expanded size of the site, the Paniyiri Sub-Committee is planning a wider range of activities than in the past.



Donations

We are extremely grateful for donations and bequests which have been received to date. Through these efforts, and with a substantial Federal Government Grant, Stage 1 (Chapel) and 2 (Auditorium and Cabins) have been completed. Stage 3 lies ahead which will include construction of remaining Cabins, grounds infrastructure and sporting fields to be established. As we pursue this development, we are concurrently looking to expand the current capabilities and operational requirements of the Centre.

If you would like to make a donation, or have questions that you need to clarify, please feel welcome to contact us. A member of the Board of Governors (President - Mr Emanuel Kallinicos), Management Committee (Chairman - Mr Stathis Efstathis) or I will also be happy to discuss.

Matt Bender

Coordinator - April 2014

Bribie Island Retreat and Recreation Centre