

# Planning for our Future

## A discussion with Fr. Panagiotis conducted by Jimmy Samartzis

**Samartzis: You've been our Proistamenos since last August. What's your perspective on the current state of our Church?**

*Fr. Panagiotis: We are a parish that has been through a lot of change over the past few years. It is a parish that has a rich history and a very proud heritage. It is a parish that has proven time and again that it is a leader in serving its community and modern day needs. I'm working to ensure that the Church creates an environment whereby our members are supported spiritually and in life. My goal is to restore the vibrancy and health of our Church and community.*

**Samartzis: What is your vision for Saints Peter and Paul?**

*Fr. Panagiotis: I continue to get to know many of our members and am appreciating the expectations that you have of me and of the Church. I am listening right now and would like us to work together to shape our future. We need to understand who we are and how we're evolving in order to set a course for the future. We don't have a good grasp of that yet. I have lots of questions. How many of us are in interfaith marriages? How many members converted to Orthodoxy? What segment of life's journey are our members currently on and where are they headed – what are their needs moving forward? How many of our members understand our liturgy? How many understand it in Greek? What age children are in our community? All of these questions are key to understanding what we must do as a church in order to meet the current and evolving future needs of our community.*

**Samartzis: Those of us that have had the chance to work with you closely are impressed by your abilities and competency to be our spiritual and community leader. Many of us also see you as a developing leader that is building credibility and experience. What are your thoughts for those members who are asking themselves these questions?**

*Fr. Panagiotis: I know that I have to earn the respect and belief from our members that I will serve them well. There are two key tenets that guide me every day in this role. 1) I am stimulated by the intellectual and spiritual appeal of orthodoxy. We are a community that is driven not only by blind faith, but by understanding. My spiritual development and education enables me to help us along this journey to better understand our religion, its meaning, its beauty – and most importantly, to make*

*it relevant to who we are today. 2) I see the opportunity for us to grow together. The success of our church cannot be driven by a single individual's plan. We need to chart our course together. Perhaps because of where I am in my journey, I remain flexible to do what is best. I will try things and with each effort I may succeed or fail. I will remain transparent and honest.*

**Samartzis: You mentioned the strategic planning effort that is underway at our last Assembly meeting. What is it and what do you hope to achieve from it?**

*Fr. Panagiotis: I believe we need to take a step back, understand who are and what we need from the church, and chart out a thoughtful approach that ensures we build the ministries that best support our community. I have assembled a Strategic Planning Committee that is comprised of representatives from the parish. They are guiding the project. The plan will be developed by all of us in a very inclusive and transparent manner.*

How can I get involved in the strategic planning effort?

- 1 Complete the Census – help us understand the makeup of our church (launches June)
- 2 Complete the satisfaction and needs survey – tell us what we do well and we need to improve (launches August)
- 3 Join planning teams to set the course for the future – you have an active role to develop the plan (launches September)
- 4 Actively engage and support the new direction and programs (January 2016 and beyond)

**Samartzis: What work has the Committee done to date?**

*Fr. Panagiotis: We are taking a very deliberate approach to interview parish and ministry leaders, high school students, members who are actively engaged and those who have fallen away, and clergy. These initial interviews are helping us develop an initial understanding of what we do well, what needs may exist that are not being fulfilled, and what we don't do we well that we need to address. This is only a starting point that we will build on with your help.*

**Samartzis: So, what's next and how can I get involved?**

*Fr. Panagiotis: I encourage all of you to participate in our Census that we are launching in June. We need to understand who makes up our parish in order to help develop the best ministries, and to support your spiritual and life fulfillment. Later in the summer, we will launch in an anonymous satisfaction survey. Through the survey, we will hear from all of you on what we do well, what we don't do well, what needs you have that we need to fill, etc. Finally, all of this data and information will shape 3-6 major focus areas for us. You will have the opportunity to participate directly in building the plan for each focus area. This process is about us working together and I want to encourage you to join me in charting our future.*