

## ICON A FITTING EASTER PRESENT

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After weeks of praying beneath scaffolding and falling bits of plaster, parishioners of a Greek Orthodox church in Glenview will celebrate Easter under a dome filled with elaborate, newly installed images of Christ and his followers.

The Pantocrator, a face described as the all-seeing God, is the central icon of a painted 40-foot diameter dome at Sts. Peter and Paul Greek Orthodox Church, 1401 Wagner Rd. That image is encircled by two rings, one depicting 16 saints and another showing the procession of the divine liturgy, or God in heaven with 15 angels.

*"It is probably one of the prettiest, most breathtaking domes around,"* said Leon Skan, co-founder of the church, where scaffolding was removed two weeks ago.

Skan co-chaired a committee that spent seven months reviewing the works of 200 artists and visiting 20 churches before selecting iconographer George Filippakis of New York to do the job.

The Byzantine design, painted on canvas and then adhered to the inside of the dome along with 41,000 gold leaves for background, is one of only two in the United States. Both are modeled after a dome painted in 1547 within a monastery on Mt. Athos in northern Greece.

The completion of the Glenview dome, a \$310,000 project, is bittersweet because the work was started under the direction of Rev. George Scoulas, who died in October after 26 years as its pastor. The church serves about 800 families.

*"It was a project we wanted to do for many years,"* said Mary Scoulas, his widow. *"I'm certain that it turned out exactly as he had hoped."*

Before he died, Rev. Scoulas selected the 16 saints to be depicted in the dome, using inclusiveness as his theme. Four women, for instance, are featured in the piece.

*"On the top of his list was the first saint in North America, because most of the members of our parish were born in America,"* Mary Scoulas said. *"He chose one of our own, so to speak."* St. Herman, a Russian-born man who immigrated to Alaska in 1794, was canonized as an Orthodox saint in 1970.

Church leaders first approached an artist about finishing the dome 30 years ago, but they lacked the finances for it. A few years ago, a \$100,000 donation served as the catalyst for making the project a reality. The church sent out one letter requesting money and quickly collected more than enough for the job, Skan said.

Elaborate, colorful images are part of Greek Orthodox tradition, said Rev. Evagoras Constantinides, acting pastor at Sts. Peter and Paul until a permanent pastor arrives in June.

*"I am very thankful to God this thing is finished,"* said Constantinides, who said it was difficult working around the scaffolding. *"Any church that does not have the dome completed looks like an empty church. Now they have the crown and glory of the church, the Pantocrator."*

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