

## **GREEK SCHOOL HISTORY AT HOLY CROSS CHURCH**

*By Mrs. Vaso Tonas*

Greek school at Holy Cross started about ten years after the founding of the Church in 1956, during the exciting times of construction of the Church when the Reverent Fr. Katsaris was the priest.

Vasili Chapralis reflects that he and Theodore K Pappas, both parish council members in 1966, undertook the responsibility to find ways to provide afternoon Greek school classes for the Holy Cross community children. Thus the first teacher, Mrs. Efrosyne Stylianou, was hired and the first site was a public school in Redwood City. To accommodate the growing community, two other public schools opened the doors: one in Millbrae, where Mrs. Vaso Tonas was hired to teach in 1969 and the other in Belmont with Mrs. K. Kalmar in 1971. The enrollment at each site was between 15 to 23 students. Shortly after, the neighboring Catholic church of the Immaculate Heart also offered their classrooms and their Hall Facilities for our Holiday program celebrations.

A new chapter of the Greek School began when the Community Center and the Classrooms were completed in 1978 when the Reverent Fr. Stevenson was the priest. While Mrs. Tonas continued teaching, more teachers were hired to accommodate and expand the school. With the new classrooms Greek school started developing its new character by offering lessons in smaller classes to provide individual attention to student's needs. The K to 6<sup>th</sup> grade school system was implemented which was indeed a significant milestone. The school now attracted more students from its own and other parishes. About the same time the school started offering evening classes for adults and teenagers. The adult class was mainly taught initially by Mrs. Effie Kalafatis and later by Mrs. Maria Frangos.

Many talented and committed teachers taught in the Greek school at Holy Cross, some for short periods of time and some have continued teaching for many years and to this day. The school and whole community owe a sincere gratitude to everyone.

With the new classrooms and the growing number of students, many parents started to get involved as teacher's aids and especially to assist the school in preparing for the celebration programs (i.e., Christmas, Greek Independence, Graduation, etc.). As the community and the needs of the Greek School were rapidly growing, in 1983 the parents and teachers formed the PTO (parent-teacher organization) with the Reverent Fr. Contos as its spiritual leader and Mrs. Tonas as its director. Mrs. Jenny Hatzopoulos was elected as the first PTO president, followed by many other dynamic ladies of our parish who served either as president or board members. Together, teachers and parents were instrumental in forming the Greek School library, hosted several teacher seminars, sponsored many school benefit activities (i.e., bake cake sales and luncheons) and prepare the traditional "Greek Corner" (Ελληνικη Γωνια) at our festivals.

In 1989, Fr. Contos was succeeded by the Reverent Fr. Peter Salmas. The school now started publishing a news letter "Ελληνικο Φως" informing the community of the Greek

School activities and presenting some essays and art. In the years that followed, teacher Mrs. Theodora Kounalakis acted as Co-director and in 1998 she and Mr. Kleon Skourtis formally took on the responsibility to join Mrs. Tonas as Greek School Co-directors through her retirement in 2004. Thereafter, they took over as Directors of the School.

Also, year 1998 was a very important event for all the Greek Schools in the Bay area: the establishment of the “Office of Greek Education“ in San Francisco with first appointed counselor Mr. Mavromatis. Since then the Office has helped the schools in many ways, by introducing new books and school materials, by sponsoring students and teachers to participate in the ‘Paideia Omogenon Project’ and lately by bringing teachers from Greece. They also strongly advised to expand the teaching hours and offer pre-school classes. The Greek School of Holy Cross accepted that challenge. With the efforts of the teaching staff, especially Mrs. Katerina Chiotis, the school took a new direction with the addition of the pre-school program and increase in school days and hours. By taking this important step the Greek School has accomplished another important milestone in the chapters of its 40-year history.

Over the past 40 years the School faced many challenges but through hard work and sincere dedication the teaching staff and parents took on those challenges and developed one of the most successful Greek schools in the Bay area. With the continued hard work and dedication by all, teachers and parents, and the continued support by the Church, new chapters of success and accomplishments will be added to the Holy Cross Greek School’s history of the future.