

3. A Brief History of Our Parish

St. Nicholas officially began with its establishment as a mission of the Antiochian Archdiocese in 1995. However, a proper history of the parish should really begin nearly a century earlier.

On February 24, 1914, the first Orthodox bishop to have been consecrated in the United States, St. Raphael Hawaweeny, was on his way to Beaumont, TX, when his train stopped at Union Station in Shreveport. There he was met by members of the local Syrian Orthodox community. At that time there was no Orthodox church in Shreveport, and these faithful were eager to obtain the bishop's support for the founding of a parish where they could gather to worship God. They invited St. Raphael and his archdeacon to stay the night with them, which they did. St. Raphael spoke with them at length, encouraging and advising them. During their time together, the local faithful "decided to found an Orthodox Syrian church under his pastoral care and asked him to appoint a priest for the community."

For reasons known to God alone, the founding of this church was postponed for many decades. Just the next year after he visited Shreveport, Bishop Raphael departed this life, and has since been glorified in the Orthodox Church as a Saint. Though separated in time from St. Raphael's ministry as a bishop in this world, we consider the establishment of our parish to have been nonetheless the fulfillment of the blessing he gave to those spiritual forbears of ours, and in response to his prayers. Now St. Nicholas is a spiritual home not only for those of Syrian descent, but for many who have come to it from various backgrounds and walks of life.

Since 1995, we've watched a generation of children grow up immersed in the ancient Christian Liturgy — translated into English — something which the founders of our parish were particularly seeking. We've also reached a number of milestones along the way, including the purchase of our present property at 9100 Youree Drive, the completion of our current building in February, 2002, and the consecration of our Holy Table by His Grace, Bishop Basil, in September of 2009. We strive to keep our attention on Christ by emphasizing spiritual growth within the St. Nicholas community, even as we seek to share the Orthodox Christian faith with those around us in the Shreveport/Bossier community. Our dreams include the continued deepening of our life in Christ, ongoing growth in our ability as a community to reflect the love of God to those around us, and the construction of a permanent church building (temple), with the present building being transformed into our parish hall.

Now almost a century has passed since St. Raphael's visit to our city sparked a desire among those Orthodox Christian Syrians to found a local parish under his pastoral care. Thanks be to God, through St. Raphael's prayers, and those of our patron Saint, Nicholas the Wonderworker, as well as with the support of our Bishop, BASIL and our Metropolitan (Archbishop) JOSEPH, and many dear friends in our Archdiocese and from elsewhere, we have a growing Orthodox parish right here in Shreveport, LA. We trust that by God's grace we will continue to grow in love for God and for one another, and that the Lord will use our humble church family for his purposes within the surrounding community.