



Australian Regiment requests Greek Orthodox Blessings for its Soldiers and Flags

This year marks a historic Double Celebration for the Parish of South-East Sydney as it honours the 50th anniversary since the founding of St Spyridon Parish in 1957 and the 25th anniversary since the establishment of St Spyridon College in 1983.

During the course of its brief but significant history, St Spyridon Church, whilst serving the spiritual needs of thousands of Greek Orthodox faithful residing in the South-East Sydney area, has also forged a strong and cohesive relationship with the community at large and has demonstrated its love for Australia by especially honouring the Anzac spirit.

Indeed, St Spyridon Church was dedicated by the late Governor of New South Wales, Sir Roden Cutler, V.C., as a War Memorial in honour of Greek and Australian soldiers who fell in the Two World Wars, during a Doxology Service conducted by His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos, on Saturday, 19th July 1975.

It was a bold and symbolic move by the founders of the Parish who, as proud immigrants themselves, wished to highlight the profound links between Greece and Australia, particularly as loyal allies in major conflicts around the world. A relevant plaque on the left hand wall at the entrance of the church records the details of its historic dedication as a War Memorial.

Following this, in 2002, the University of New South Wales Regiment approached the 'St Spyridon' Parish with the request that its Old Colours (Flags) be 'retired' in its War Memorial Church at Kingsford.

Consistent with ecclesiastical protocol, the Regiment's request was submitted for consideration by the Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia, His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos, who issued immediate approval for the proposal.

Clearly, the gesture on behalf of the Army was a fitting tribute to the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia and recognition of the role that the Archdiocese has played over eight decades in promoting the harmonious integration of the Greek people with this Nation. It was also an acknowledgement that the parish of St Spyridon, in particular, had gained enormous respect from the broader Australian community through its own regional activities.

Consequently, the old Colours were laid-up in an emotional Ceremony on Saturday, 3rd March, 2003. They were marched to the Church with the Band leading from the University.

The UNSWR Honorary Colonel, Major General Brian McGrath, RFD, hosted the parade which was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John Fielding, RFD.

Father Steven Scoutas, as Parish Priest of St Spyridon, officiated at the Thanksgiving Service, assisted by Father Anthony Vanikiotis. The Church was filled to capacity by parishioners, members of the local community as well as families, former members and friends of the Regiment, including a number of UNSWR Association members.

Major General McGrath and the immediate former Commanding Officer of UNSWR, Lieutenant Colonel Ian Lalas, RFD, (who as a young soldier was part of the UNSWR guard of honour at the dedication of St Spyridon War Memorial Church some 28 years previously, and who sadly departed this world just a few years ago) respectively accepted the Commanding Officer's invitation to hand the Queen's Colour and Regimental Colour to the Clergy for Laying Up.

On behalf of the Archdiocese, the Parish of St Spyridon received the Colours of the UNSW Regiment pledging that they would be positioned immediately after the Service. The relative plaque on the right hand wall at the entrance of the church states that the faithful of St Spyridon Parish will "respect the Old Colours as Australians, will defend them as Greeks and honour them as Christians". Records indicate that St Spyridon is the only Greek Orthodox church in Australia to have received the Colours of an Australian Army Regiment.

This year, it was requested by the Regiment that its soldiers march from its Headquarters at nearby Kensington to St Spyridon Church in order that prayers be offered to God by the Greek Orthodox Church for the remembrance of its fallen or departed members, for the safety of its serving members, and for the blessing of the new Colours.

With the appropriate endorsement by His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos, the Regiment marched to St Spyridon church preceded by the Band in splendid ceremonial uniform on the Feast Day of St Andrew, Sunday 30th November 2008, in what was to be a very moving Service attended by some 1,500 parishioners.

Led by the UNSWR Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Fomiatti, and attended by the Reviewing Officer, Brigadier Ian Spence, RFD, the Ceremonial aspects of the parade were planned and coordinated by the Regimental Sergeant Major, Wayne Friend, Warrant Officer Class One.

The new Colours (i.e. the Queen's Ensign and the Regimental Ensign) were received by the Parish Priest, Father Steven Scoutas. Together with Father Andrew Joannou, Prayers of Remembrance were offered for "the souls of all men, women and children who died for Australia in the Two World Wars and in other Conflicts around the world". Specific prayers were also offered for the welfare of the Regiment and for the blessing of its Colours.

The solemnity and order of the Service was vividly appreciated by soldiers of all ranks with the fervent solidarity of the entire congregation which broke out into spontaneous applause as the Colours exited the church. It was a thoroughly emotional occasion still being spoken about by the members of the Regiment and the St Spyridon faithful, weeks after the event.