



## St. Athanasius Orthodox Church Takes Long View While Building Home of Its Own

By Gina Potthoff, Noozhawk Staff Writer | [@ginapotthoff](#)



The Very Rev. Father Nicholas Speier of St. Athanasius Orthodox Church at the Sumida Garden Lane site of what will soon be the new home of his parish in Goleta. “It’s been an exciting journey for us,” Speier says of the church’s decades-long quest to build a church campus. “It’s taught the church to be patient.” (Gina Potthoff / Noozhawk photo)

Goleta congregation hopes to move into brand-new church on Hollister Avenue next year

Six years ago, the steadily growing congregation of [St. Athanasius Orthodox Church](#) was all set to build a permanent home on a parcel of church-owned land on Hollister Avenue in Goleta.

When the recession hit, however, the worshipers who loyally crowded into a small Isla Vista church every week found they could no longer contribute the funds necessary for construction.

Seven years later and the church’s 300 parishioners — now in a leased location at 5580 Calle Real — are once again poised to move into a worship home of their own, as construction of the [long-awaited dream](#) barrels toward a hopeful completion of sometime next year.



"It's really been a dream of the church — an effort of the church — since 1975," said the [Very Rev. Father Nicholas Speier](#), the parish pastor.

"It's been an exciting journey for us. It's taught the church to be patient. We're not a very wealthy parish, so it's been kind of moving along at a steady pace."

Born out of a grassroots evangelical movement near [UC Santa Barbara](#) in the late 1960s, Speier said St. Athanasius purchased 22 acres along Hollister Avenue near Ward Drive about 15 years ago. The church had previously tried unsuccessfully to build a new church near its original location in central Isla Vista.

The church acquired proper permits to build a sanctuary, a fellowship hall, an administration/education building and a small chapel on the northern five acres of the Hollister Avenue property. The remaining 17 acres are leased for orchards and other agriculture use.

After funds became scarce, the church sold its original Isla Vista property and moved temporarily into the Calle Real location.

The long wait developed an end date last year, as landscaping and parking lots were completed and concrete poured for the foundation of the fellowship hall — the only structure currently under construction due to funding limitations.

Frames for that building, which will serve as the church until the sanctuary is built, were going up last week under the watchful eye of Scott Jacobs, a long-time St. Athanasius parishioner and the contractor in charge of the project.

Jacobs told [Noozhawk](#) he couldn't think of a more rewarding, personal project.

"This is a significant upgrade," said Jacobs, noting the church is planning to accommodate 500 parishioners. "All of the landscaping has a biblical component. The church serves the community as much as it does its own 300. It's not just about us."

Officials say construction of the church, which will be located at 300 Sumida Garden Lane, is on budget and on schedule to be completed in a 10-year time frame as part of the church's efforts to build for the future.

"We've been thinking about this for 20 years," Jacobs said. "We're taking a 100-year view."

Speier reiterated the church's gratefulness at finally having its own home in the community, even if it

means waiting several more years for the dream design to completely come to fruition.

“We’re kind of in a place now where (fundraising is) just going to be what we’re doing for many years to come,” he said. “Having a roof over our heads now is going to allow us to do many things. I think I know what I’m doing for the rest of my life.”

— [Noozhawk](#) staff writer Gina Potthoff can be reached at [gpotthoff@noozhawk.com](mailto:gpotthoff@noozhawk.com). Follow Noozhawk on Twitter: [@noozhawk](#), [@NoozhawkNews](#) and [@NoozhawkBiz](#). Connect with [Noozhawk on Facebook](#).



St. Athanasius Orthodox Church plans to build a sanctuary, fellowship hall, administration/education building and a small chapel on five of the 22 acres it owns on Hollister Avenue near Ward Drive in Goleta. (St. Athanasius Orthodox Church rendering)

[http://www.noozhawk.com/noozhawk/article/st.\\_athanasius\\_orthodox\\_church\\_builds\\_a\\_home/](http://www.noozhawk.com/noozhawk/article/st._athanasius_orthodox_church_builds_a_home/)