St. Nicholas Chapel

St. Nicholas – the 4th century Greek bishop and saint, famed for his charity whose gift-giving gave rise to Santa Claus – is the patron of the Byzantine Catholic Church in the United States. He is also patron of the Greek Catholic Union (GCU), the oldest fraternal benefit society for Rusyn immigrants and their descendants. Founded in 1892, the GCU promotes unity, education, and assistance for its members. The society was headquartered for most of the 20th century in Homestead, the heart of Pittsburgh’s steel valley. In 1987 it moved to Beaver, Beaver County.

The GCU historically has had a close relationship with the Byzantine Catholic Church. Many local units, or “subordinate lodges,” grew out of the parishes and a spiritual advisor is one of the regular officers. Membership is limited to those of the Catholic faith (Byzantine or Latin Rite) of Rusyn or Slav descent, or their spouses.

GCU membership peaked in the 1920s at over 130,000 in more than 1,000 lodges. Current membership is over 40,000. In the 21st century, the GCU operates largely as an insurance organization with assets of over $1 billion.

Adjacent to the GCU headquarters in Beaver is the Saint Nicholas Chapel that mirrors the churches in the homeland of the GCU’s founders, who came from the Carpathian Mountains in present day Slovakia and western Ukraine. The chapel is a New World re-creation, constructed of various hardwoods. It is open and free of charge. A Museum with Carpatho-Rusyn, Byzantine Catholic, and GCU historic artifacts is located on the chapel’s lower level. Reservations are required and may be made by calling the GCU at 1-800-722-4428. Sunday Divine Liturgy is celebrated at 10:30 AM. Pictures and additional information are available at the website www.gcuusa.com.