

# Archon Arkitekton Christ J. Kamages

## FAIA, National Leader of Faith Community Design

EFFIE FOURAKIS



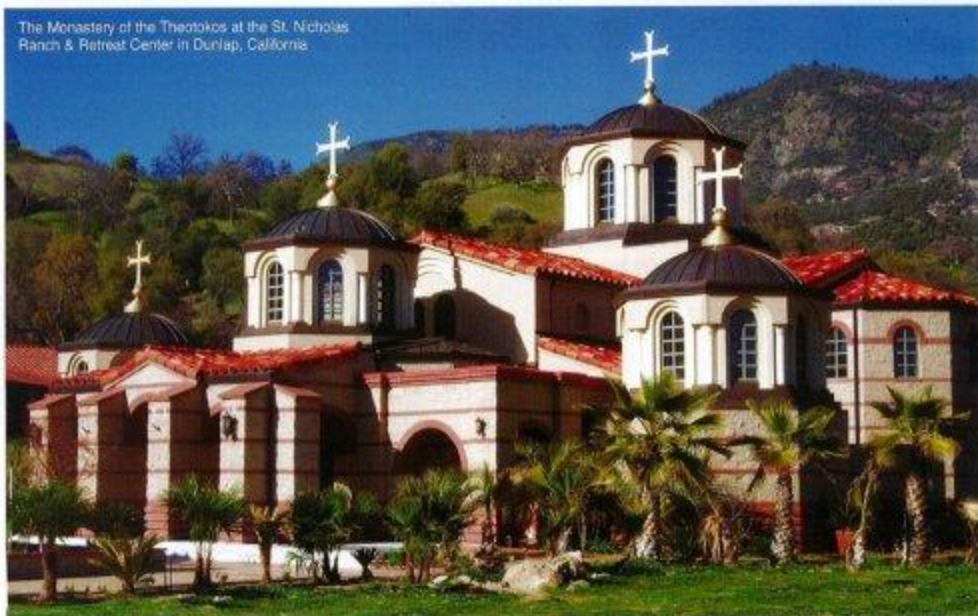
Christ Kamages  
 Photo Courtesy: Christ Kamages

**A**rchon Arkitekton, a two-word title that best describes Christ Kamages' lifelong commitment to faith and architecture. Christ's accomplishments were honored in 2000 when His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, acknowledging Christ's outstanding service to the Church and efforts in Ecclesiastical architecture, conferred this title to him, the first in contemporary history to hold this title.

Christ is not the first in his family, however, to hold the title Arkitekton, which means "master builder." With roots in Akrotiri and Halepa, Crete, Christ's maternal great-grandfather, George Kaloroumakis, was also an Arkitekton, and Christ's great-grandfather was an Arkitekton. The Kaloroumakis branch of Christ's family tree was involved in the development and building of three notable faith projects in Crete: The Monastery of Agia Triada in Halepa, Evangelismos Church in Halepa, and the Cathedral of Chania in Old Town Chania near the limani.

Christ grew up in the community of St. George Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Springfield, Massachusetts, where he was a member of the St. George Olympians Drum and Bugle Corp. His parents are the late George and Lula (Kaloroumakis) Kamages (Kamazes from the Poli) whose deep Orthodox traditions led him to consider a career in the priesthood. An apprenticeship with a Springfield architect, however, sparked his interest in building and introduced him to Byzantine style, revealing a way to combine faith and architecture. Receiving an MIT science

The Monastery of the Theotokos at the St. Nicholas Ranch & Retreat Center in Dunlap, California





The dome at St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church in Saco, Maine.

fair award for Byzantine architecture for his demonstration of how to place a round dome on a square base, confirmed his calling and launched his career and life-long devotion to design for the Orthodox faith throughout America.

Christ completed undergraduate work at the Boston Architectural Center and completed his Master's of Architecture studies at the State University of New York at Buffalo where he was an Assistant Professor in Design in the 1970s. He started at Cannon Design Inc. in Grand Island, New York, and Boston, and moved to San Francisco in the 1980s with The Ehrenkrantz Group, a firm that he later acquired and changed its name to EKONA Architecture and Planning, expanding his work from civic to church projects. The firm later become CJK Design Group, with over 100 faith and community projects completed throughout the United States and several in the works.

Acknowledging that the design and building of facilities dedicated to the glory of God is a sacred task, and that traditional sacred space is essential and vital to community life, Christ employs a unique, interactive approach to the design of sacred spaces for faith clients. His approach is centered on strategic planning and education of the community on the historical precedent and spiritual meaning of his designs. He has developed the Axios design, an expandable prototype for growing mission parishes, and the copyrighted Triad design, which uses Byzantine principles. This synthesis of the practical and the spiritual creates a sacred space illuminated from within, upheld and magnified by traditional Orthodox iconography and sculpture, the intersection of heaven and earth.



Some of Christ Kamoges' ancestors from Crete. Seated left to right: his Great Grandfather Georgios; his grandfather's sister Agrio; and Father Yannis, his great grandfather's brother. Standing left to right: Vasiliki and Irim

For many of his church projects, Christ also designs and commissions the iconography and furnishings, including artifacts for the altar, pulpit, throne, chanters' area and icon screen. He has worked with artisans from Greece, including wood carver Steve Kavroulakis of Chania, iconographer Dr. George Kordis, former professor of iconography at the University of Athens, and most recently with traditional wood carver George Loukakis of Chania. Christ designed the icon screen and artifacts for the Sts. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church in Washington, D.C., and these items were fabricated and installed by Loukakis earlier this year. The *Thyranoxia* (Opening of the Doors) of the new church was celebrated on October 28, 2017.

Among Christ's many other projects are the recently completed Faith Heritage Center of the San Francisco Greek Orthodox Metropolis at St. Nicholas Ranch & Retreat Center, as well as the

monastery, with a Byzantine cross installed and a place for a candle and photograph. The sloped granite surface allows a visual of his episcopal seal and inscription. The Metropolitan's body was interred there in 2005 and District 6 members hold a memorial service for him there every October, at the conclusion of the annual district retreat.

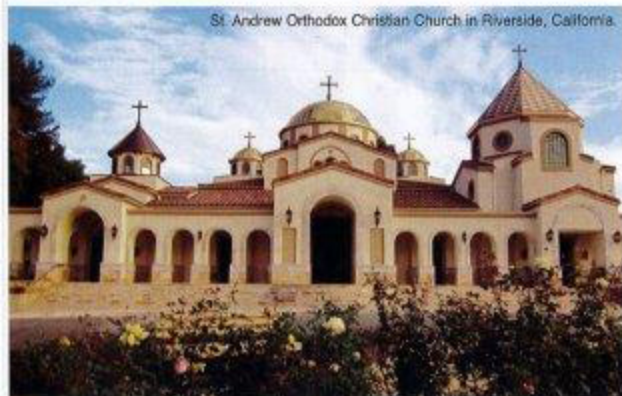
Christ and his wife Patricia live in San Rafael, California. They are founding members of the Pancretan Chapter of Marin and Sonoma Counties, of which Patricia is the current president. I first met the Kamages family in 1986 when Christ's position with The Ehrenkrantz Group brought them to the San Francisco Bay Area, settling in Marin County. Their then teenage children Peter and Keri were two of the first members of the Minoan Dancers, which my husband Vasilis and I had just created. Through the Minoans and our local parish, we became close friends. Christ even designed a booth to sell souvlakia for one of the Minoans' first fundraisers, complete with columns akin to the Parthenon! Our friendship was sealed in 1990 when they baptized our first child, Achilles, in Greece and a week later the four of us took him for his first communion at the Cathedral of Chania, one of the churches designed by Christ's forefathers. Patricia is also godmother to our daughter Elektra, who was baptized in the hospital the day she was born. The friendship between our families has deepened over the years, becoming one family, and culminated this past summer by spending time together in Crete again.

Christ and Patricia have four grandchildren: Nikolas and Alexis Kamages and Eleni and Katia Antonis. Nikolas is an accomplished high school baseball player and Alexis, Eleni and Katia are continuing the family's Greek dance tradition as members of the Minoan Dancers.

Christ's many awards and publications include:

- Elevation in 2015 to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 2015, one of the highest honors the AIA can bestow upon a member, recognizing the architect's significant contributions to architecture and to society
- Recipient of 2014 ELIOS Award of Excellence; ELIOS Charitable Foundation is dedicated to preserving and promoting the spirit and ideals of Hellenic culture
- Conferred the title of *Archon Arkitekton* in 2000 by His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
- Served as Chairman of the Board of the Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute (PAOI) for 12 years
- Past member of the Metropolis Council for the Metropolis of San Francisco
- Former member of the Archdiocesan Council
- Founding member of the ELIOS Society and the Pancretan Chapter of Marin and Sonoma Counties
- Author of *Ecclesia, A Facilities and Artifacts Handbook*, in collaboration with the late Rev. Leonidas Contos. *Ecclesia* is a guide for church communities to better understand the planning and design process. ■

St. Andrew Orthodox Christian Church in Riverside, California.



Monastery of the Theotokos at the Center in Dunlap, California, and the proposed St. Nicholas Orthodox Academy in Reno, Nevada, which includes a school, village and small church. Other finished projects include St. Katherine in Elk Grove, California, St. Sophia in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, Holy Trinity in Pittsburgh, St. Barbara in Durham, North Carolina, Holy Trinity in Columbia, South Carolina, St. Catherine in Braintree, Massachusetts, Holy Trinity in Carmel, Indiana, and St. Katherine in Naples, Florida. He is currently in the design phase with St. Sophia Church in Elgin, Illinois, St. Spyridon in San Diego, and St. Demetrios in Tucson, Arizona.

Of special note to members of PAA District 6, Christ designed the gravesite of His Eminence Metropolitan Anthony of Blessed Memory as well as the Monastery of the Holy Theotokos the Life Giving Spring at the St. Nicholas Ranch in Dunlap, California. Having promised the Metropolitan before his death in 2004 that he would design his tomb (τάφμα or 'free', as the Metropolitan stipulated), and after sketching some designs for him on a napkin, Christ worked with the late Bishop Anthimos of Olympos to design the gravesite to be harmonious with the