

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

THE MESSENGER

“Behold I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.” Mark 1:2-3

December 2013

MISSION STATEMENT:

St. John Greek Orthodox Church is dedicated to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

VISION:

The church shall seek to fulfill its mission by:

1. Embracing the Spiritual Life of the Orthodox Church through regular prayer, worship, and frequent participation in the sacraments.
2. Supporting the Church through stewardship of time and talent and sacrificial giving.
3. Providing a welcoming, caring, loving environment.
4. Having its members exemplify Orthodox Christian character and morals.
5. Supporting ministries that facilitate the overall mission of the Church
6. Exemplifying commitment to community service and charitable outreach.
7. Creating an environment which encourages members to grow in their faith.

Father Stavros' Message

An Awesome Opportunity for our Parish

Can you do me a favor?

***On the day you receive this issue of “The Messenger”, please take 15 minutes to read my message.
It’s really CRITICAL that you read, digest and act on this message before December 8.***

I am writing this message the morning after the festival. My heart is filled with joy. Events over the past couple of weeks have left me inspired and energized. In this edition of the Messenger, you are going to read a reflection on one of the most powerful conversations I have ever had that has totally changed my view on the meaning of the word Thanksgiving. You are going to read about a miracle that took place at the festival. And you are going to find out a piece of good news that will change the future of our community if we allow it.

Let me write things in the sequence that they happened:

Two weeks before the festival, I attended the National Clergy Retreat in Naples, Florida. Three very important things happened during this event.

First, I had the opportunity to speak with His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios. His Eminence informed me (first in conversation, and secondly via a letter), that he will give his blessing for Charlie Hambos to come to our church next summer as our pastoral assistant, providing that the funds are there for us to be able to afford to take this step.

The second event was one that was personal to me. I had an AMAZING conversation with one of my brother priests, who told me about his special needs son and taught me a lesson about being thankful. You all know that I like to express myself in writing, hence the sometimes lengthy messages in The Messenger. Following our conversation, which occurred late on a Thursday evening, I found myself so inspired and energized that I could not sleep, and I took to writing. I wrote a reflection, entitled “What does it

Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis, Priest
2418 W. Swann Avenue, Tampa, FL 33609-4712
Office Phone: (813)876-8830 • **Fax** (813) 443-4899
E-mail: officestjohgoctampa@gmail.com
Website: <http://www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com>

Mean to Give Thanks?" It was written on the raw emotion that I was feeling at that very moment. I am reprinting it in The Messenger. I spoke about this conversation in my sermon on Sunday, November 3. For those who were here, what I said was a summary of this. Please take time to re-read this. And for those who were not here, this is a written reflection on one of the top five conversations I've probably had in my entire life.

The third event is also personal to me, but will have some effect on our community. His Eminence has asked me to direct the St. Stephen's Summer Camp for the Metropolis of Atlanta. I participated in this ministry from 2001-2011. After a two year break, I will again be part of this ministry.

The Festival

I am overjoyed about the success of our festival. Preliminary figures indicate this was the best festival ever in terms of revenue. The gyro booth did almost ten times the business it had in the past. What a difference moving that booth outside made! And with the addition of the ad book, which we did not have last year, as well as the newly created car raffle, the expanded children's area, more vendors, and the continued success of the OPA party tent, this festival undoubtedly was the best one ever from a financial standpoint.

This is SECONDARY, however, to what we accomplished as a community, in the true sense of community. All fall, we have been growing in our "Just Say YES" attitude. And it paid off at the festival. I first wish to commend the five men who came together and said YES to chairing the festival. It is hard to believe that our first organizational meeting was on September 9. The Festival Advisory Board (FAB) came together, did a LOT of work in a short amount of time and pushed our festival to another level. I want to thank Mike Xenick, Alkis Crassas, Florin Patrasciou, Theodoros Panopoulos and Perry Katsamakis for saying YES, stepping up, and leading our festival. There are too many people to name who made contributions large and small. There were people who stepped into new positions, and people who stepped forward to do what they have been doing for years. There were weeks and weeks of preparation involving many people. So, thank you to everyone who helped in any way for our festival. Each of you should take a measure of joy in its success.

In addition to the financial success of the festival, I am thankful to God for the fellowship success of the festival. The fellowship of our people was great. We all signed a covenant in church on November 3. Thank you for supporting that endeavor, not just with your listening and signing but in your abiding by what you signed. I kept those covenants in the altar throughout the festival, I prayed for every person who signed one. The T-shirts we all wore not only identified to our guests who the workers were, but unified us as part of the same team. And whether it was someone scooping rice on the line (and thank you, no traumatic rice events this year) or face painting in the kids area, taking order for gyros or working at the bar, it was nice to see everyone unified, friendly, welcoming and genuinely joyful, even while working really hard.

I'm convinced that our festival was the best ever because we brought Christ into it as never before. I prayed about who could lead the festival. Every encounter with the FAB, began and ended with prayer, every day of the festival began by called the Holy Spirit "upon us and upon these gifts here presented" and with the FAB in church for extra prayers. **When we put the Lord first, everything else just falls into place.**

A miracle is when God allows something extraordinary to happen, even in the most ordinary of circumstances. One of our parishioners, who was supposed to be working on another part of the campus, found himself in the back of the church on Saturday afternoon. At the same time, a festival patron entered the church. Our parishioner, mentioned to this patron that Saturday was the feast of St. Nektarios, the patron saint of cancer patients, as he showed her the icon in the narthex. After my church tour, the woman and her husband approached me. She said that her mother had just been diagnosed with stage four cancer. We ended up talking for an hour, and praying together. A little miracle because that confluence of circumstances couldn't have happened without God's help, and it also could not have happened without the spiritual awareness of our parishioner. **Another example of working hand in hand with God to make something extraordinary out of something quite ordinary.**

Now, there is just one thing about the festival that is not meant as a downer, but needs to be said. And that is, in addition to a lot of hard work by a lot of people, we LUCKED out on the weather. Had our festival been one week earlier, we wouldn't be feeling so good today. On November 2 it rained, and rained and rained. Our soccer field was flooded. There would have gone our parking. There would have gone our kids' area. There would have gone the OPA Party Tent, the gyros and the bar. I am thrilled about how our festival went. I'm just saying that we can't tie the future good fortune of our parish to the weather. And that's what we do each year—we gamble on the weather. And so far we have been lucky. We have to prepare in case our luck runs out.

This is why we need to eventually take the festival out of the operating budget. . .

This is why we need to increase our stewardship. . .
Please keep reading.

Changing the Way we Do Stewardship

By the time you get this issue of The Messenger, you will have received in the mail a package of stewardship materials. This will include a booklet about stewardship and a time and talents pledge form for 2014. I hope that you will spend some time reading and going over the stewardship information.

There are some really important things to know about stewardship in our parish:

1. **Stewardship is not all about money**—I'm placing emphasis on the financial aspect of stewardship because that is where our greatest need is and where the most immediate concern is. We are trying to significantly raise the stewardship goal for 2014, from \$300K to \$400K. But we are also trying to enhance the ministries of our church, most of which are dependent on people offering time and talents. We are always in need of people to sing in the choir, to teach Sunday school, we could use another chanter (as we only have one who is available full time), office volunteers, stewardship committee members and many other things to be found on the time and talents form.
2. **Our budget for 2014 will be somewhere between \$750-800K**—it is still being drafted as I write this.
3. **Where does the money go?**—as you see from the stewardship materials, it costs well over \$200K for maintenance, insurance and utilities

to maintain our parish. This assumes that nothing really big breaks down. Another \$100K goes towards our mortgage. Another \$50K is our allocation to the Archdiocese, which goes to support the ministries of the Archdiocese. So, you see we are out \$350K just to have the buildings on our property, before we pay a priest, or have a program.

4. **Breaking down the cost**—It costs over \$2000 per family per year to operate our parish. It costs over \$15,000 a week to operate our parish. It costs a little over \$2,000 per day to operate our parish.
5. **Not everyone fills out a stewardship form and this is a problem**—I went through our mailing list and found at least 100 families that I know, that come to church at least semi-regularly (and some every Sunday) who do not fill out a stewardship pledge form. Many people who helped out at the festival, it turns out, are not on our list of 300 stewards because they did not fill out a form. We need EVERYONE to fill out a form. Why?
 - a. Because this is the only way to gauge how much revenue we expect to receive for stewardship for this coming year. Some people say “you know I give” and the answer is actually, “no, I don’t.” I don’t have any idea how much you are giving unless you put on a form how much you intend to give. Totaling up the forms allows us to plan a budget. How can we hire personnel if we don’t know if we have money to pay them? None of us would take a job without some defined compensation plan, if our employer told us “hey, don’t worry about it.”
 - b. The only way to quantify how many members we have is based on who fills out a form. If someone asks me how many “members” do you have in your parish, the only adequate answer is how many stewardship units we have, how many families have filled out a form.
 - c. There are lots of young adults, people in their mid to late 20s who do not pledge—if you are over 18, not a student and employed, you need to fill out a pledge form. Even if you start by giving a small amount, start somewhere and then move up each year.
6. **The best way to offer your financial stewardship is either weekly or monthly**—When you offer stewardship regularly, you will find that it is easier to give. It is easier to give \$20 a week than it is to give \$1000 in a lump sum. If you increase your stewardship by 20%, that’s only \$24 a week, an amount that is hardly noticeable. If you set up a direct pay out of your bank account, you won’t have to remember to write a check either. It will just become part of what you each month.
7. **To “Give” involves “sacrifice”**—Jesus tells us in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 6:31, “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you, for even sinners love those who love them.” The same is true for stewardship. If you are a millionaire who offers a thousand dollars a year to the church, what real credit is that to you? Anyone can “do without” what amounts to spare change. Giving involves sacrifice. We are not only called to make a financial sacrifice. We also must make sacrifices of time and talents. We are all busy, no question. I hope you will consider the amount of time that you give to the church using the talents you have been blessed with. Love involves vulnerability. And faith involves trust even when you don’t know the outcome. An interesting quote from Dean Karnazes, which was sent to me recently, says

“Struggling and suffering are the essence of a life worth living. If

you’re not pushing yourself beyond the comfort zone, if you’d not demanding more from yourself—expanding and learning as you go—you’re choosing a numb existence. You’re denying yourself an extraordinary trip.” Christ’s gift of salvation to us came only with extreme sacrifice. Our acceptance of this gift also must involve sacrifice.

8. **It’s time to move from surviving to thriving**—We spend a lot of time and effort trying to raise funds just to keep our church going. I don’t know about you but I worried every day before the festival when I checked the weather report for the week, hoping that rain wasn’t coming our way. If we can increase our stewardship, we won’t have to worry about surviving. We can focus on thriving. We can focus on growing instead of just maintaining. We can spread the Gospel instead of struggling to guard what we have.
9. **We are a ministry centered church—our budget needs to reflect that!**—We spend ONE percent of our budget on ministries. This means that Choir, Sunday school, Youth ministries, retreats, college student group, guest speakers and Junior Olympics each get well less than one percent of our parish funding. Ministries are how we grow the church, learn about our faith and serve others. One reason to increase our stewardship is so that we can eventually raise this number.
10. **Consider and Compare what successful Protestant Churches are doing regarding staffing issues**—The average Protestant Church employs one paid staff for 70 regular attendees, one paid staff for 150-200 youth, and one paid pastor for every 150 adult members. Using this model, for a parish of our size, we should employ two full time priests, one full-time youth director, two full time office staff and a full time property manager. As of this moment, we have one priest, a part time property manager, one full time office administrator and to save money at present, a couple of volunteers who are going to answer the phone temporarily. At a minimum, we need a pastoral assistant (and eventually second priest), TWO FULL time office administrators (including book-keeper) and a full time property manager. The average Protestant church utilizes 50-60% of it’s budget on salaries/benefits. Why? Because the average Protestant Church is ministry centered and in order for the ministries to thrive, there needs to be paid, committed employees, who job it is to do the work of the church. And why is this important? Because the churches that are growing are following this model. Our salaries are just over 40% of our budget.
11. **It’s time to include not just what we can afford to get away with but what we want to see from our church**—And the first thing we want to see is more charitable giving and less nickel and diming. To that end, we are going to raise our charitable giving to 2.5% of the budget, which is still miniscule. We should want to eventually see 10% as the goal for charitable giving. In the budget for 2013, only ONE percent of our budget went to charity. For 2014, we are upping that number to 2.5%. We are going to be changing our way of sending money to charity by placing charities in the budget. We will put \$500 for Holy Cross Seminary in the budget. We will put in money for St. Basil’s, for the Ecumenical Patriarchate Charities, and for natural disasters. This way, we will fund charity through stewardship, not through second trays. Beginning in 2014, there will be a second tray only for the emergency fund of our church. All other charitable contributions will be handled through the budget.
12. **Becoming a church of first responders**—As we were enjoying our festival, the Philippines were hit by a catastrophic Typhoon. Over

10,000 people have been declared dead. The needs are immediate. Has our church responded yet? Not until next Sunday, when we can pass a second tray to help. IOCC (International Orthodox Christian Charities) has already mobilized assistance. If we had money set aside for charitable giving, as we intend to we could have already had funds on the way. An increase in stewardship is a way to make this a reality.

- 13. The most important addition will be budgeting for a pastoral assistant**—The simple truth is, for a parish our size, we need more than one priest. This is our long-term goal. The interim goal is to add a pastoral assistant. His Eminence has given his blessings for us to hire Charlie Hambos for this position.
- 14. We need a team attitude**—In an athletic contest, the only statistic that truly matters for the committed and unified team is the “W” on the scoreboard at the end of the game. When every team member seeks to do his or her best for the team and plays unselfishly, seeking the team first ahead of personal glory, this is how a team wins. We need to think of the church as a team in which we each play a critical role. When we each do our part, the church can win souls for Christ. And when another person comes to know the Lord, we all share a part in that victory. As for credit, we need to think about what God is writing in His book on our life. As long as I’m in God’s Book of Life, that’s really the only credit I need. I need eternal credit, not earthly credit.

Sometimes God calls us to have a leap of faith—I recently told the story of a family who attended our church for a short period of time many years ago. The father was a college professor who supported his four children and in-laws who lived with them. On the day I was moving out of my old house in West Tampa to my current home east of town, the gentleman called me and said he needed to speak with me. When I told him that I could not come to the office because I was supervising the movers at my home, he readily agreed to come meet me at home. He explained that his job offer wasn’t what he was told it was going to be, and that he was going to have to look for other work and that he needed a place to stay. He asked if I knew anyone who had a free room or two he could use. Of course, this was one of those “God moments” when I said to myself, “I have a whole house he could use.” After calling Lisa and explaining this to her, we agreed to let his family live in our house at no cost. We hadn’t sold the house yet anyway. We were worried about having to pay two mortgages, and on top of that, decided that we should pay the utilities for this family while they lived in our house, so they truly could live there at no cost. After three months, we had lost what we figured was \$10,000 in potential rent and utilities. I said to Lisa “one day this man is going to get a job offer and that’s the day we will get an offer on the house.” Sure enough, that’s exactly what happened. One morning the man called me to say that he had a job offer in the Midwest. That afternoon, we got an offer on the house. And later in the afternoon, we got a second offer on the house, for \$10,000 more than we were asking for. I can’t tell you how many times Lisa and I have taken leaps of faith like this, and while not everyone comes with financial reward, more often than not, our faith is rewarded in some profound way. The experience of letting someone live in our house, of taking a leap of faith, was one of the most rewarding things we’ve ever done.

Such is the nature of stewardship—give God the first. It will come back to you in some way.

Before you make your stewardship pledge for 2014, please read the story which follows on being Thankful. Because your stewardship pledge, not just the financial piece but the time and talent piece, says a lot about what is important to you. It says a lot about your faith. It says a lot about how you are thankful to God for what He has given you.

Concluding Thoughts

The Table is richly laden—We just have to step up and eat—if our church was in a depressed area, if our congregation consisted solely of senior citizens, if our church was in decline, if we were burying more than we are baptizing, it would be hard to set goals or see the future with optimism. This is not the case. Our church is in a growth posture, in an area of the country that is growing, we are a young congregation, and our church is growing. Look at the church each Sunday—standing room only, tons of children, a long Communion line, an awesome choir, the altar is filled with altar boys. Look at the days that are not Sundays—nearly 80 people attend one of SEVEN (that is an amazing number) Bible studies each week, 150 children in Sunday school, 30 active GOYAns, a full slate of worship services. Look at the calendar for December—there is hardly a day where there are not scheduled activities at the church. We had an awesome festival. Our Metropolitan has given his permission for us to bring on a pastoral assistant, and not just anyone, someone we know and love and know we can work with, someone who has “skin in our game.” We stand in front of a table filled with the richest buffet. We shouldn’t be content to eat bologna when we can eat filet mignon. The table is set, we just have to step up and dig in!

The Just Say YES campaign leads us now to this critical moment in time. Our parish seeks to take our game to the next level. Will you Just Say YES to the following questions:

- ☐ Will you increase your giving of time, talent and treasure to insure that our stewardship goals are reached for 2014?
- ☐ Will you attend church on Sunday, December 8, our stewardship Sunday?
- ☐ Will you come on time at 10:00 a.m.?
- ☐ Will you participate in the service by singing along with the choir?
- ☐ Will you prepare to receive Holy Communion, so that every member not only prays together but communes together?
- ☐ Will you pray about what you are going to offer to Christ and His Church in 2014?
- ☐ Will you give sacrificially but do so with joy, faith and hope?
- ☐ Will you bring your completed stewardship form?
- ☐ Will you join with me on December 8 in taking our community to the next level?

Just Say YES!

With love in the Lord,

+Fr. Stavros

Presbytera Lisa, Nicholas and I wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2013!!!

What Does it Mean to Give Thanks?

By Fr. Stavros

It is not often that one feels like he stands in the presence of someone who is very special, even holy. It is rare that someone stands in the presence of someone who has peace and acceptance of the life he has, rather than complaining about the life he covets. It is rare that someone stands in the presence of someone who has steadfast faith in God, even when life has dealt him what many would consider a bad hand. As we approach the season of Christmas, our thoughts will be focused on the giving and receiving of gifts. On Halloween night, as many of our children were getting candy from their neighbors, I had the opportunity to receive a gift. I met a man in the corner of a crowded and noisy room, and somehow, despite the noise, it felt like we were alone. And he shared with me something I will never forget. He talked to me about gifts in a way that no one has spoken to me about gifts. During our conversation, I learned the true meaning of the word "Thanksgiving". No, this isn't a monk from Mount Athos. He isn't a bishop or renown scholar. He is not a famous author (though he should write his story, he can tell it better than I can). He is a brother priest, who had a calling like I did, who undoubtedly had dreams and aspirations for his ministry and family, just like I do, and whose life took a turn he never expected. Please read on. . .

I recently had an opportunity to attend the Archdiocesan Presbyters Council National Clergy Retreat held in Naples, Florida. To be honest, I wasn't looking forward to this event—it was right before the festival, it was four days away from my family, I was going to miss Halloween with Nicholas and every time I go away, it seems to take forever to recover from the work that piles up when I'm gone. Just another thing on the ever growing calendar of events that I couldn't wait to see come and go.

The retreat was an enjoyable experience. We got to spend three days in a nice hotel and had some great meals. We actually were allowed to dress casual for part of the time—it was nice to see priests laughing in our shorts and flip flops. It was nice to reconnect with some of my classmates and schoolmates who I hadn't seen in a long time and wonderful to meet in person priests I have spoken to on the phone and just to put faces with names. We had three outstanding speakers. One in particular spoke about some of the pains of his family and his ministry with us in a way that showed both poise and guts. It's hard to admit weakness to yourself, never mind doing it in front of 150 of your peers. We had discussion groups where people shared the joys and the pains of their ministries, their successes and their struggles, their triumphs and their failures. It was comforting to know that these men who stand before the holy altar are not perfect, that they struggle in the same ways that I struggle, that they struggle in the same ways that everyone struggles. Just because one decides to follow Jesus Christ does not mean a life free from struggle. And I was reminded that these, my brother priests, who decided to dedicate their lives to the service of the church, are also struggling—from balancing responsibilities as a priest and a family man, to coping with the stresses and stressful personalities of parish life, to struggling against temptations that are all around all of us, to struggling to maintain focus, and hope and joy in God.

I had an encounter with one priest that was unexpected, and some-

thing I will remember for the rest of my life. I first met this priest, I will call him Fr. John (not his real name), when I was at the seminary. To be exact, I met him on September 14, 1994. He was a young clergyman at the time, and was in the travelling party with the Archbishop. I remember looking at him with some sense of awe and even a little envy—here was a young man already close to the power base of our Archdiocese. I began a fantasy of wanting to be just like him, to be accomplished and in a position of prominence at a young age. I saw him periodically though we never said a word to one another. He probably didn't even notice my curious and somewhat jealous gaze. I have followed his career—he was appointed to serve what I think is a very nice community, a plum parish you might call it, at a very young age. Again, something I would want to aspire to. I imagined that he must have a great ministry, and a great family to go along with it.

Over the years, there were some tough times at his church, I learned about. I knew about two horrific occurrences in his parish over the years (which I will not write because I do not want to reveal where this parish might be). His ministry has not been all roses—I guess that happens to every priest in every parish at some time. But again, he's someone I have always looked up to. I have spoken to him on a couple of occasions over the almost 20 years since I first met him. When we met at the retreat, he remembered my name (as we had spoken on the phone before), and once we had spoken for a few moments, I think he remembered my face to.

I felt blessed and maybe even emboldened because I was speaking to "the great Fr. John." Now that I was speaking to him, I wondered "What can I say?" "How are you?" and "How is your parish" seemed like easy things to say to someone I don't know hardly at all. He asked me the same questions and within a half a minute the questions turned to our families. "How old are your children?" I asked. To which he replied, "Actually it's only one child, and he's 19." "Wow," I said, "You must be empty nesters." To which he replied, "Actually our son still lives at home. He has no use of his arms and legs so he needs extra care and can't go to college." Inside, I felt kind of stupid for being so forward. The thing is, he didn't seem bothered by this fact that he had only one son who is severely handicapped. I don't remember what else I said but the conversation ended shortly thereafter, and I was left to my own thoughts.

My view of Fr. John had changed radically in this short conversation. I saw him in a totally different light. I wasn't thinking of how cool I thought Fr. John was anymore, of his "glamorous" parish or my impression of him as a popular priest. I found my thoughts dominated by his situation. I thought of how he must struggle not to get angry with God. I wondered how having a very sick child must affect his family, his marriage, his ministry, his relationship with God, and his outlook on life. Most fathers dream of their sons going to college, getting married, giving them grandchildren and watching after them in old age. For this man, none of these dreams is probably going to come true. I decided that I needed to see Fr. John again, if for nothing else, to ask him the names of his wife and son, so that I can pray for them.

I finally managed to find Fr. John amidst this myriad of priests on the last night of our retreat. I said to him that I really was moved by our short conversation two nights before. And I asked him for the name of his Presbyteria and his child so that I can pray for them. And then I asked him "How do you do it? How do you make it as a priest with such a positive outlook on life when you have a situation that outwardly appears so dire?" His answer, "Stavros, everything we have that is good is a gift from God. As we pray in the Liturgy, 'for every good and perfect gift is from Above, right?' When you wake up in the morning, and you draw your first breath of a new day, and you see that first breath as a gift, then everything that follows that first breath falls into place. Because the second breath is seen as a gift, and the third and so on. Every morning when I wake up, I thank God for that first breath, and everything else just seems to fall in line after that."

Fr. John and his wife were told that their only child, a son Theodore (not his real name, Theodore means gift of God, that's why I chose this pseudonym) would never walk. I don't remember the medical terms he told me but there are problems with his son's spinal cord in two directions, to the front and to the side, like some extreme form of scoliosis I imagine. On top of that, there are digestive issues and a serious seizure disorder. The doctors said he wouldn't live for very long. Theodore did learn to walk with some difficulty as a baby. But he had a serious seizure when he was about six years old. The seizure would not stop for 45 minutes. The seizure has left him unable to walk or to use his arms or legs. Fr. John told me that the ambulance came to get his son during the seizure and take him to the hospital. His wife rode in the ambulance with Theodore, still in the throes of a seizure, while he followed in a car. As they arrived at the hospital, his wife, Presbyteria Maria (not her real name) said to Fr. John, "what were you praying for as you were driving over here?" Of course, you'd think that a priest of our church would be praying for a miracle, summoning the assistance of all the saints and angels. Or maybe he'd be praying for "God's will to be done. Or maybe he wasn't praying at all. Maybe his reaction was that of an angry man, angry at God for the terrible illnesses of his son, angry at what might be his impending death. What Father John told me shocked and inspired me. And this is the moment of our conversation that I will NEVER forget. In this moment of anguish, he had offered a simple prayer to God:

"THANK YOU for the gift of our son."

WOW!!! At a moment where perhaps his only child was about to die, the words of his prayer were words of thanks. He told me that his wife smiled and said "I was praying the same."

As I said before, Fr. John, wearing a polo shirt and slacks, as he was during this conversation, looks like the average guy eating at McDonald's or shopping at Lowe's. He likes to laugh and watch sports and has a great sense of humor. And two of the many lessons I took away from this encounter were: first, you never know what kind of cross your neighbor is carrying. Second, you don't have to be a recluse to be a holy man.

I asked Father John about his son. Does he go to school? No, he's home-schooled. Does he eat? Father John proudly tells me how he "cooks" for his son, grinding up food in a blender and feeding his now

adult son, who cannot feed himself. His son doesn't speak, so he communicates "without words." Is he able to get out much? No, because he is at high risk to contract illness which could prove fatal. Does he go to church? No, he's an online parishioner. (Father John has the liturgy at his church streamed live online each time he offers a service and this is how his son worships.) How about Presbyteria Maria? Does she ever go to church? No, she stays home so that she can "worship" with our son, after all, worship is a corporate act. I give them Communion each Sunday before I go to church. And how about you and your wife, do you ever get to go out together? No, but once in a while, I bring food home from a restaurant and we have a "date" at home. Father John tells me that there are no vacations because his son can't travel. He tells me that many nights, his son wakes up at night so he takes "the night shift" so Presbyteria can sleep since she is "on" all day. And he was so thankful to be at this retreat, because it is a needed respite from the busy-ness of his life. Made me feel kind of foolish to think that for me this retreat was a bother, but for Fr. John, it was his "vacation" this year. I ask Fr. John what is the life expectancy for his son. He says he doesn't know, but then none of us know our life expectancy. He tells me how he lives for today, grateful that there is a today. I ask him if he ever gets angry. He has his moments, for sure, but mostly he focuses on being grateful for what he has. After all, he says, "I live with a saint, my son. And another saint, my wife. Even though he can't talk, I learn from him every day. I learn patience, and I learn joy. While most people see life through many shades of grey, my son doesn't have that film over his life that other people have over theirs. He sees goodness, and in him, I see goodness as well."

I cannot sleep. I have written down everything I can remember about our conversation. I feel like a hypocrite. He has so little, and yet feels so blessed. I have so much, and I feel ungrateful. I have the privilege of seeing my family in church each Sunday. He does not. I cannot imagine going to church alone for every service. I wonder what that must feel like on Sundays, or Christmas, or Pascha. And yet many times I drag myself to church. I complain about the tediousness of raising a child even though it is temporary—he won't be like this forever. Father John's life is like that movie groundhog day—it's the same routine day after day and that routine is never going to change—and yet he has more joy and peace than I do.

My encounter with Father John, in the corner of a noisy room, I hope will be life-changing. The first change is that I'm going to commit to praying for Fr. John and his family every day. When I am not motivated to pray, the memory of this conversation will help inspire me to pray. I will try harder to not complain about things. I will try harder to live in the moment and not look too far ahead. I will try to be more appreciative of what I have and less negative about what I don't have. I'll try to spend more time looking at how I can improve myself, rather than how good I think I am in relationship to others. I will try to be more grateful in all areas of my life—a more patient and grateful husband and father, a more patient and focused priest, a kinder and gentler person. And I won't complain about being tired because Father John rarely gets to sleep through the night and still somehow manages to be an attentive father, good husband, and priest of a parish that is significantly larger than the one I serve. I will try harder to find joy and peace and not be so demanding.

We, as a society, seem to be obsessed with getting. We seem to almost demand the latest technology, we curse heavy traffic, we will go crazy with Christmas shopping. When we don't get exactly what we want, we'll be disappointed in the giver and quickly return the gift. We'll find ways to complain about just about anything. We'll seek credit and "take our toys home" when we don't get the credit we feel we deserve. We will seek to make a legacy others will remember—whether it's throwing our child the biggest wedding to impress our friends, or having our name etched in stone somewhere so that it will never be forgotten.

Father John represents everything that is good in our world. He personifies the word hope. Father John says he lives in the moment. And I know that he does. But I also know that he already looks to everlasting life, to being able to run in the fields of heaven with his son, to being able to worship at the heavenly altar with his family present. I pray that the Lord will continue to bless, strengthen and inspire Fr. John and protect his precious family. I pray that the Lord will send His angels to lighten the weight of the cross he is carrying.

I will try to refrain from using the word tired—Father John can use that word, he knows it's true meaning-- so I will say that I am now ready for sleep. I will lay down in bed in a few moments, and I will do

so with thoughts that are thankful. I am thankful at this moment for the encounter I had this evening. I did not expect this when I left home two and a half days ago. I am thankful that I have a bed to sleep on. I am thankful that I have the ability to use my hands to type this reflection, and that I have feet that will carry me across the room to the bed. I'm thankful that I have independence to have made this trip alone, to move about without assistance. I'm thankful for the remnants of the candy bar that I have been eating as I write, something someone gave me earlier in the day that I savor more tonight since I know that there are some who have no food, or who are unable to eat food the way I do. When I close my eyes tonight, I will say a prayer and thank God for this wonderful day. I will thank Him for my family. I will thank Him for Fr. John. I will remember Presbyteria Maria and Theodore. I will thank Him for all His blessings, large and small. And I will thank Him for the very breath that allows me to offer the prayer. And when I wake up tomorrow morning, my first thought will be one of thanks, that I am alive and breathing for one more day. I will hope, and I will try to work hard, to make sure that not only my first breath is one of thanks, but that all the breaths that follow are thankful as well.

Thank You Lord, for the gift you gave me tonight! Thank you, Father John, for showing me the meaning of thankfulness and hope!



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The Church: An Institution of World Peace

By Charlie Hambos

When we think of institutions of world peace the first one that comes to mind is the United Nations. Currently, there are 16 UN peacekeeping missions around the world across 4 continents. The largest is in Darfur with 26,612 personnel. Other peacekeeping missions include Cyprus, Lebanon, Kosovo, Democratic Republic of Congo and several throughout the Middle East. There are a total of 116,919 field personnel including military, police, international and local civilians as well as volunteers from over 117 countries. The UN peacekeeping missions have an annual budget of 7.23 Billion dollars.

These are only the established peacekeeping missions. Many have been around for over 60 years. In addition, these do not even include the many places where we see continual bloodshed and violence today.

The United Nations is not the only entity in our world that promotes and fights for world peace. The Church is another because the head of our Church, Jesus Christ, is the Prince of Peace. An example of how we fight for world peace is clearly seen in our worship.

In most of our Orthodox Christian services the clergy offer the Great Litany of Peace and the congregation through the encouragement of the choir or chanter responds with "Lord, Have mercy." Generally, or maybe it is because I hear the Great Litany of Peace at least two times per day, it seems that we don't really pay attention to these petitions. We can really lay some of the major stressors of our life such as our worries, cares, terrible things happening in the news, bad weather, sickness and death. How many of us really listen to what is being said in these petitions? Let's discuss a couple of them.

The Litany begins, "In Peace let us pray to the Lord." This petition encourages us to come together for worship in peace. Do we feel at peace when we come for worship?

The second says, "For heavenly peace and for the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord." We ask that the peace in heaven come down to the earth. Clearly, we have a lot more praying to do. We also pray that we begin to clean the clutter out of our souls.

The third one reads, "For peace in the whole world, the stability of the God's Holy Churches and for the oneness of all, let us pray to the Lord." One simple look at the news and we know why we need to focus on this petition. Throughout the world, violence still pervades. Bombings occurred in Pakistan, Iraq and Syria. Last month, we witnessed a mall shooting in New Jersey and the TSA agent recently shot in Los Angeles.

"For temperate weather, abundance of the goods of the earth, and for peaceful times, let us pray to the Lord." Last month, Super Typhoon Haiyan slammed into the Philippines. The destruction is immense, many people are without homes and many people have died. Throughout the world people are still struggling to get the proper nutrition. For the most part, it is hard to see that we are in peaceful times. We need to pray for them.

"For those who travel, by land, sea, air and space, for those who are sick or suffering or in captivity, and for their safekeeping, let us pray to the Lord." Travelling around the country and the world has dramatically changed over the past decade. Last month, a note from a Chinese labor camp worker made it to the shores of the U.S. highlighting someone in modern day cap-

tivity. We cannot forget about those who are in prison and prisoners of war.

Another petition mentions our country and our President and all those in civil authority. Headlines in the news on a daily basis show that there is not a whole lot of peace in the U.S. government.

The question is, How many of us can really relate these petitions to something that is happening in the world today, just as I did, right now? We aren't praying for abstract concepts. We are praying for real things that are actually happening in the world today.

Here is the real question. How many of us can see the peace that Jesus Christ has brought to the world? It seems pretty hard most times, but it is there.

In Isaiah 11:6-9, the prophet paints a picture for what peace in the world will look like. "The wolf will live with the lamb, the panther lie down with the kid, calf, lion and fat-stock beast together, with a little boy to lead them. The cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together. The lion will lie down together. The lion will eat hay like the ox. The infant will play over the den of the adder (snakes); the baby will put his hand into the viper's lair. No hurt, no harm will be done on all my holy mountain, for the country will be full of knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea."

These images of peace presented to us by Isaiah seem to be impossible but instead are meant to show us that only through Christ can peace be possible. It is our rebellion against God from the fall of Adam and Eve that has broken the harmony between humanity and nature and between one human being and the other. Through Jesus Christ, we have the forgiveness of Sin and the opportunity to reconcile with God, resulting in peace. This peace will not only lend itself to humanity but also to the animals and even to the snake that was responsible for causing the first sin.

It is God's intention for the world. Let us recall Christ's first word to the disciples after the resurrection: Peace! Remember it was Christ himself who said in the Gospel of John 14:27, "Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace which the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid." And later in verse 16:33, Christ says, "I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have hardship, but be courageous: I have conquered the world."

Since Christ has conquered the world, let us begin to look at the church as an institution of world peace beginning with the way we worship. Look at the things that are happening in the world which are not peaceful and give them to God by remembering them as we hear and respond to the petitions. Also, give thank for all of the peaceful things that do happen in the world. Even though the church doesn't have tanks, planes, 7.23 billion dollar budgets, and the support of 116 countries; we do have the peace of Christ and it is our responsibility to share.

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. If you would like to contact me, please e-mail me at Charlie.hambos@gmail.com or my address is 50 Goddard Avenue, Box 016, Brookline, MA 02445.

Liturgical Schedule for December

Sunday, December 1 Orthros 8: 45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Altar Boys: Captains and St. Luke (Christos Nenos, Dean Mitseas, Nicholas Katzaras, James Katzaras, Nicholas Yotis)
Ushers: David Voykin, Ed Gerecke, Pete Trakas
Coffee Hour: Andrew and Adrienne Trakas and Family

Wednesday, December 4 Feast of St. Barbara
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Friday, December 6 Feast of St. Nicholas
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, December 7 Orthros 8:15 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:00 a.m.

Sunday, December 8 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Altar Boys: Captains and St. John (George Hambos, Alexios Diniaco, Nicholas Alsina, Thomas Shearer, Antonio Bavaro)
Ushers: Mike Trimis, George Mitseas, Chris Kavouklis
Coffee Hour: Sunday School—Luncheon

Monday, December 9 Feast of St. Anna (Conception of the Theotokos)
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Thursday, December 12 Feast of St. Spyridon
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, December 15 Feast of St. Eleftherios
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Altar Boys: Captains and St. Matthew (Karter Lenardos, Gregory Koutroumanis, Harry Koutroumanis, Brigham Sibley, Benny Hidermichel, James Kavouklis)
Ushers: Florin Patrasciou, Kevin Fentress, John Alexander
Coffee Hour: AHEPA/Daughters

Sunday, December 22 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Altar Boys: Captains and St. Mark (John Karamitsanis, Lukas Karamitsanis, Andrew Mellon-Lynn, Dominic Garcia, Demetri Karounos, Grayson Borgeas)
Ushers: Nick Kavouklis, Perry Katsamakis, Peter Theophanous
Coffee Hour: Philoptochos

Monday, December 23 Royal Hours of Christmas 9:30-11:00 a.m.

Tuesday, December 24 Feast of the Nativity
Great Vespers 8:45 a.m.
Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great 9:30-11:00 a.m.
Altar Boys: Anyone Attending may Serve at the morning Liturgy
Church open for Prayer 5:00 p.m.
Orthros of Christmas 5:30 p.m.
Great Doxology 6:45 p.m.
Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom 7:00 p.m.
Altar Boys: Captains only
Coffee Hour: Parish Council Christmas Reception

Sunday, December 29 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Altar Boys: Anyone attending may serve
Ushers: Gregory Tisdale, John Tsibris, George Trimikliniotis
Coffee Hour: Young at Heart

Monday, December 30 Feast of St. Anyisia
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, January 1, 2014 Circumcision of Christ-Feast of St. Basil-New Year's Day
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Friday, January 3 Royal Hours of Epiphany 9:30-11:00 a.m.

Sunday, January 5 Forefeast of Epiphany
Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.
Blessing of the Waters 11:15 a.m.
Altar Boys: Captains and St. Luke (Christos Nenos, Dean Mitseas, Nicholas Katzaras, James Katzaras, Nicholas Yotis)
Ushers: Brett Mourer, Christopher Kavouklis, Amin Hanhan
Coffee Hour: Young at Heart

Monday, January 6 Divine Liturgy at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Tarpon Springs 9:30 a.m.

Great Vespers for the Feast of St. John the Baptist 7:00 p.m.

Tuesday, January 7 Feast of St. John the Baptist
Orthros 8:30 a.m. Hierarchical Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m.

Sunday, January 12 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Altar Boys: Captains and St. John (George Hambos, Alexios Diniaco, Nicholas Alsina, Thomas Shearer, Antonio Bavaro)
Ushers: David Voykin, Ed Gerecke, Pete Trakas
Coffee Hour: Vasilopita Sunday (Philoptochos)

SERVICES OF CHRISTMAS

~**December 23-Royal Hours of Christmas**-The service of the Royal Hours consists of Prayers, Hymns, Psalms and Old Testament prophecies that foretell the coming of Christ on Christmas. Also read are the Gospel passages of the feast of Christmas. There is no Communion at this service. Rather, it is a service of quiet meditation in anticipation of the Nativity. We will hold this service at 9:30 a.m. on Monday, December 23. We will celebrate the entire service by candlelight. This will be a wonderful and peaceful way to usher in the Feast of the Nativity.

~**December 24-Christmas**-There are traditionally two Divine Liturgies celebrated in connection with the feasts of Christmas, Epiphany and Pascha. On December 24, in the morning, we will celebrate the Great Vespers of Christmas followed by the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great. The Vespers of Christmas includes Old Testament Prophecy Readings. It is hoped that those with young children and those who do not drive at night will take advantage of this morning Liturgy, which will be celebrated on December 24 with Vespers at 8:45 a.m. and Divine Liturgy from 9:30-11:00 a.m. On the evening of the 24th, the Church will be open for a time of silent prayer beginning at 5:00 p.m. Orthros will be celebrated at 5:30 p.m., followed by the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom at 7:00 p.m. From 5:00-6:45 p.m., the church will be illumined only by candlelight. Many of you have made a tradition of coming to church for this vigil of prayer and the Orthros and Liturgy and many people who have done so have commented to me how powerful the celebration of Christmas was for them. Liturgy on Christmas Eve will be followed by a reception sponsored by the Parish Council in the Kourmolis Center, so that we can all break bread as a community on the feast of the Nativity of our Lord.

Services in December

December 4—Feast of St. Barbara and St. John of Damascus

On December 4, we celebrate the feastday of St. Barbara, a martyr for Christ who was martyred by her own father. On the same day, we celebrate the feastday of St. John of Damascus, a hymnographer of the church who also was a strong defender of iconography.

December 6—Feast of St. Nicholas

On December 6, we celebrate the feast of St. Nicholas, the patron saint of travelers. The tradition of Santa Claus is derived from St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, who was giving gifts to those less fortunate.

December 9—Feast of St. Anna—This feastday commemorates the mother of the Theotokos, and also the conception of the Theotokos, as it falls 9 months before the feast of her Nativity (September 8).

December 12—Feast of St. Spyridon—St. Spyridon was Bishop of Trimythous. Tradition is that each year, the remains of St. Spyridon are opened to reveal that his shoes have been worn out. They are changed each year. St. Spyridon continues to intercede for the souls of the faithful, wandering over the earth to do so.

December 30—St. Anysia—St. Anysia was martyred in Thessaloniki in the year 304. Her relics are interred in the altar table of our church. We have not celebrated her feastday in the past, but as our community is growing in its spirituality, it would seem appropriate that on the day we remember the life of St. Anysia, we should commemorate the day with a liturgy, since her relics are present in our church.

Services in our neighboring parishes—The month of December brings several church feastdays and other services related to Christmas and Epiphany that are being held in our neighboring parishes. They are listed as follows:

Tuesday, December 3

Great Vespers for Feast of St. Barbara-6:00 p.m. at St. Barbara in Sarasota

Thursday, December 5

Great Vespers for Feast of St. Nicholas-(Call for time). at St. Nicholas in Tarpon Springs

Thursday, December 26

Great Vespers for Feast of St. Stephanos-7:00 p.m. at St. Stephanos in St. Petersburg

Friday, December 27

Divine Liturgy for Feast of St. Stephanos-9:00 a.m. at St. Stephanos in St. Petersburg

Meeting Schedule for December

Sunday, December 1	Fall Parish Assembly	After Liturgy	Kourmolis Center
Tuesday, December 5	Young at Heart	11:30 a.m.	Floridian Hotel
Sunday, December 8	GOYA	5:00 p.m.	Kourmolis Center
Sunday, December 15	Philoptochos	After Liturgy	Zaharias Room
Monday, December 16	College Student Retreat	9:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m.	Kourmolis Center

Parish Registry

Baptism-Lucas Elly, son of Jonathan and Jenivieve Elly, was baptized on Sunday, October 20. Maria Xenick was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism-Liam (Jacob) Elly, son of Jonathan and Jenivieve Elly, was baptized on Sunday, October 20. Betty Katherine Palios was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism-Daphne Torres, daughter of Michael Torres and Michele Skourellos, was baptized on Saturday, October 26. Nicole Snyder, Lindsey Skourellos, Maria Mendoza and Jeffrey Snyder were the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

Wedding-Johannes Kidane and Marie Matthews were married on Saturday, November 2. Congratulations!

Small Group Bible Study Update

As was mentioned in Father Stavros' message, our first week of small group Bible Studies kicked off with 70+ people attending each week. Anyone is welcome to join a group at any time. Comments from group members appear below. Our remaining fall schedule is as follows:

Women's Group (for adult women of any age)

Location: Meets at the home of Debbie Kavouklis, 3315 Jean Circle, Tampa, FL 33629—Debbie lives in South Tampa, a mile or so from the church.

Group Leader: Debbie Kavouklis—you can email Debbie at dkavouklis1@verizon.net, or call her at 690-0155.

Meeting time: Tuesday mornings from 10:00-11:00 a.m. (coffee and refreshments at 9:30 a.m.)

December meeting dates: December 3 and 10

Men's Group (for adult men of any age)

Location: Kourmolis Center

Group Leader: Group Members rotate who leads each week. For more information, however, please email Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com or contact him at 813-394-1038.

Meeting time: Wednesday mornings from 7:00-8:00 a.m.

December Meeting Dates: December 4, 11 and 18

South Tampa Mixed Group (for any adults)

Anyone can attend this group but obviously this will be most convenient for those who live in South Tampa

Location: Home of Ellen Karaku, 4610 S. Ferdinand Avenue (South Tampa near Dale Mabry and Bay to Bay), Tampa, FL 33611. Ellen's home number is 813-835-0691 and her cell number is 813-240-3687. Her email is ekaraku@verizon.net.

Group Leader: Bessie Palios—Her email is bmp1126@yahoo.com, and her cell number is 813-523-0347. If you are going to attend this group, please RSVP to Ellen, Bessie and Fr. Stavros

Meeting time: Tuesday evenings from 6:30-8:00 p.m.

December Meeting Dates: December 3 and 10

North Tampa Mixed Group (for any adults)

Anyone can attend this group but obviously this will be most convenient to those who live in North Tampa, Lutz, Land O'Lakes, Wesley Chapel and Carrollwood

Location: Home of Michael and Artemis Conner. They live in Lutz near George Steinbrenner High School off of Lutz Lake Fern. Their address is 5524 Reflections Blvd, Lutz, FL 33558. Their number is 813-920-4404 and Michael's cell is 813-784-0182. Michael's email is conner.mike.01@gmail.com, and Artemis' email is artemisia004@yahoo.com. Please contact them before you attend the first meeting to get the gate code to their community.

Group Leader: Michael Conner

Meeting time: Tuesday evenings from 6:30-8:00 p.m. **(Note: This Change**

to Tuesday evening is a recent change)

December Meeting Dates: December 3 and 10

East Tampa Mixed Group (for any adults)

Anyone can attend this group but obviously this will be most convenient to those who live on the East side of town—Riverview, Brandon, Valrico, Seffner, Lakeland

Location: Home of George and Donna Hambos—They live in Valrico at 2604 Herndon Street, Valrico, FL 33596. Their home number is 813-651-9226 and Donna's cell number is 813-843-8412, and Donna's email is dhambos@msn.com

Group Leader: Donna Hambos

Meeting Time: Tuesday evenings from 6:30-8:00 p.m.

December Meeting Dates: December 3 and Monday, December 9

Young Adult Group (for adults ages 18-40)

Location: Homes of group members, this one rotates, contact group leader for location each week

Group Leader: Mary Ann Konstas, who can be reached at 813-215-9862 or at mapkonstas@gmail.com. Please contact Mary Ann if you are interested in joining this group so she can tell you where the next meeting will take place.

Meeting time: Wednesday evenings from 6:30-8:00 p.m.

December Meeting Dates: December 4, 11 and 18

Philoptochos

The Women's Ministry of Our Orthodox Church has always worked for the people who need assistance and help for over seventy years here in America. Our Chapter is part of the National and our Metropolis Philoptochos Society and adheres to their guidelines and by-laws. It is always the "Right Hand of The Church"

We will be starting our 2014 Membership Drive in January 2014 and invite all women, ages 18 to ??? to be a part of this "special" Ministry. You can also be a member of The Daughters of Penelope and Young at Heart, AND Philoptochos!

**Your Stewardship makes you a member of the largest Woman's Organization in the USA.

In the January Issue of the Messenger, we will list all that Philoptochos does for our Parish and the Tampa Bay Community. We are a Philanthropic and Charitable organization, helping all who are in need, young and old alike! Look for our Membership Table in the Community Center.

Please help us continue our Mission by joining! Thank you!

Looking for a Great Christmas Present?
Here is an AWESOME Book your loved ones will enjoy!

Unbroken by Lauren Hillenbrand

Reviewed by Fr. Stavros

Unbroken, by Lauren Hillenbrand, is one of the most riveting and inspiring books I have ever read. It is the true story of Louis Zamperini, who was an Olympic track runner in the mile in the 1936 Olympics. Had he not had to stop training because of injury and military service, he probably would have become the first runner to run a sub-four minute mile. The story begins in a suburb of Los Angeles, where Louis is a trouble-making kid. He discovers an ability to run and run fast and becomes an international sensation. He is drafted into the military in the early days of World War II and became a bomber on a fighter plane. His struggles with homesickness and the regimented military life were a small comparison of the struggles that were to come.

Flying bomber missions, many times his squadron mates did not return home. Eventually on one mission, Louis' plane was shot down over the Pacific Ocean. He survived the crash with two of his crewmates, who sat in a life-raft in shark-infested waters with no food or water for 45 days. Eventually one of the two crewmates died. Exposure to the elements and starvation took a toll on his mind and body. And still the greatest struggle was still to come. Rescued by a Japanese ship, Louis and his crewmate were taken as prisoners of war by the Japanese. For two and a half years, he endured not only starvation and isolation, but beatings and torture at the hands of his captives.

Once he got out of the camp at the end of World War II, he returned to America to a hero's welcome but also had many deep-seated problems because of his years of suffering. He had a hard time being married, holding down a job, staying away from alcohol abuse and most significantly, releasing his anger. His greatest desire was to return to Japan and torment his former tormentors.

As he hit rock bottom, he found the Lord in a most unexpected way. He eventually became a Christian and melted his hardened heart to the point where he went back to Japan to embrace his former captors. The book goes on to tell of all the things Louis has done to help underprivileged boys and how he's still riding a skateboard into his 90s. He is currently 96 years old.

The book is a story of triumph and despair, defeat and redemption. It is not only an action-filled, page turning drama, but is filled with tear your heart out emotion. As I have admitted before, I am not a great reader and don't read many books. This book is probably in the top five of any book I have ever read. It will make a great Christmas present!

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Greek Festival-Volunteers Needed-As we all know, the Annual St. John Greek festival will be held November 8-10. Everyone's help is needed to make this festival a success. The festival hours are Friday, November 8 from 11:00 a.m.-midnight; Saturday, November 9 from 11:00 a.m.-midnight and Sunday, November 10, from 11:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Please note that Divine Liturgy will be held from 9:00-10:15 a.m. on Sunday, November 10. Help is also needed on November 6 and 7 for festival set-up and on November 11 for clean-up. A final sign-up day will be on Sunday, November 3, so please sign up to work at the festival on that day if you haven't already. If for some reason, you do not sign up to work at the festival, just ask for Betty Katherine Palios and she will direct you where to work.

Fall Parish Assembly-December 1-The Fall Parish Assembly will take place on Sunday, December 1, following the Divine Liturgy.

Get Acquainted Sunday, December 1-In an effort to get to know one another better, we are going to continue our "get acquainted Sundays" one Sunday of each month. We will have nametags and markers in the entry way of the Kourmolis Center and will ask that each person put one on during coffee hour and introduce yourself to at least one person that you do not know. This will serve to help us increase our fellowship and sense of community. Our "Get Acquainted Sunday" for December will be Sunday, December 1.

Our 8th Annual Advent Retreat will be held on Saturday, December 7-The topic of this retreat will be: "The Good News: Why the Bible is Important and How to Read It." It will be held from 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. on Saturday, December 7. Please see enclosed flyer.

Get Daily Bible Readings Sent to your Email or Phone-One of the best ways to start each day is by reading from the Bible. There are prescribed readings for every day of the year in the Orthodox Church. You can go on the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America website at www.goarch.org, go into the search box and type in "Receive Daily Readings," follow the prompts and have this valuable resource sent right to your phone or email. Reading the Bible is so important and for those of us who don't make the time or are lazy to reach for the Bible, have the readings sent in a way that is easy to remember. Spend some time this new ecclesiastical year in God's Word, the sacred Scriptures!

Parish Council Elections- Elections for the Parish Council will take place on Sunday, December 15, following the Divine Liturgy.

Christmas Reception-The Parish Council will sponsor a reception on December 24, following the Christmas Divine Liturgy, in the Kourmolis Center. Katherine Sakkis, President, is the chairperson of this event. Let us all come together to break bread and have fellowship on the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord.

The Sunday School Christmas Program will be held in the church at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, December 15.

Office Closed for Christmas and New Year Holidays-The Church Office will be closed on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, and on New Years' Day for these holidays.

The Daughter's of Penelope Alcmæon Chapter #167 of Tampa is planning a Christmas Scholarship and Social Dinner to be held at the Floridan Palace Hotel on December 20, 2013. The event will begin at 6:30 PM and is open to family, friends and community members who would like to come and celebrate with us. The price of the dinner is \$45 per person, including the gratuity. Seating is limited. Please make checks payable to 'The Daughters of Penelope' and make your reservation by December 9th, by calling Marina Paras (813.254.6980) or Edie Kavouklis (813.758.0305).

Deadlines for the Messenger and Bulletin-The Deadline for submitting something for the Messenger is the 10th of each month for the following month. The deadline for submitting something for the weekly bulletin is Tuesday afternoon at 5:00 p.m. for the following Sunday. All information for the Messenger or Bulletin must be sent electronically—don't just hand in a flyer. Full page flyers will not be placed in the Messenger unless space permits—this will be at the discretion of the staff. It is your responsibility to send in information that you would like printed in the parish periodicals. We are not going to "hunt you down" and remind you.



Scan to like St. John on Facebook
facebook.com/StJohnGOCTampa

St. John has a Facebook page. Please "like" our page and suggest it to your friends. Announcements are put on their frequently and we will also be posting photos in the near future.

PURCHASE LIGHTNING TICKETS AND SUPPORT OUR CHURCH

One of our parishioners is donating a number of their Tampa Bay Lightning Hockey Tickets to our CHURCH. They are great seats in the lower corner valued at \$122 each (Section 104, Row P, Seats 15-18). They are:

- + Sat. Dec. 7th 7:00 - Lightning VS. Winnipeg Jets-(Up to 4 tickets) \$75 each
- + Thurs. Dec. 12th 7:30 - Lightning VS. Detroit - (Up to 4 tickets) \$75 each
- Thurs. Dec. 19th 7:30 - Lightning VS. Nashville - (2 tickets) \$50 each

GREAT CHRISTMAS GIFTS;

- Thurs. Jan. 9th 7:30 - Lightning VS. Washington-(Up to 4 tickets) \$50 each
- Thurs. Jan. 16th 7:30 - Lightning VS. NY Islanders-(Up to 4 tickets) \$50 each
- Sat. Jan. 18th 2:00 - Lightning VS. San Jose - (Up to 4 tickets) \$75 each
- Thurs. Jan. 23th 7:30 - Lightning VS. Ottawa - (Up to 4 tickets) \$50 each
- Sat. Jan. 25th 7:00 - Lightning VS. Colorado - (Up to 4 tickets) \$75 each
- Thurs. Feb. 6th 7:30 - Lightning VS. Toronto - (Up to 4 tickets) \$50 each

+++Checks can be made Payable to St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church. If you are interested in any of these tickets please call the office (876-8830) or stop by. First come, first serve, and if the tickets are not purchased within two days of the game they will be returned to our donor.



Katherine Sakkis, CRS

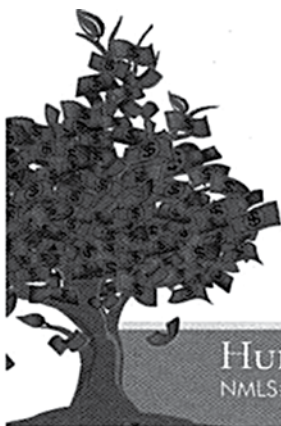
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Please call me and mention this ad, 10% of the commission will be given to the church.

MINISTRIES

COLLEGE DAY RETREAT

Fr. Stavros will hold a one-day mini retreat for college students. It will be from 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. on Monday, December 17. It will be a chance to discuss how college is going, how to be a Christian in a largely un-Christian college environment, and how to stay connected with God. There will also be time for fellowship and asking questions. Lunch will be served. This event is free of charge and all college students from our parish and neighboring parishes are welcome to attend. Please RSVP to Fr. Stavros by December 11.

JOY/HOPE

Community Outreach Opportunity for Hope/Joy Families-Sunday, December 22

Families are invited to assist at the Metropolitan Ministries Holiday Tent. There are many jobs to fill there, and even children can help. Bring a change of clothes (wear comfortable clothes, preferably jeans or pants and closed toe shoes.) We will eat lunch together at EVOS after church and head over to the Tent to volunteer from 2:00 – 4:00. What a great way to enjoy fellowship together and to put the hectic time of year into perspective by helping others and sharing our joy of Christmas! We are limited to 15 children between the ages of 8-12. They must be supervised by an adult. Please sign up online using the following link: www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0E4EA8AE2DAB9-community1

BIBLE STUDY

WITH DR. BILL MANIKAS

Dr. Bill's Bible study is held on Monday nights from 6:30-8:00 p.m. in the administration building at the church. The group will be concluding the Gospel of John which was begun in the spring. Anyone is welcome to attend the Bible Study. Bible study dates for December will be Mondays, December 2, 9 and 16.

YOUNG AT HEART

The December meeting will be held at the Floridan Palace 905 N Florida Ave. Tampa The date is December 3 at 11:30am. The upcoming Christmas show at the Hudson Theater December 15th right after church. As a reminder the YAH coffee hours after church on the upcoming Sundays will have Holiday Items available. Upcoming trip to the Ocala Monastery, date to be announced! DATE TO KEEP OPEN February 22nd 2014!!!! For the Apokriatioko Glendi Dance!!! We look forward to a wonderful time, prizes for best costumes will be awarded!!! Great dinner and live band!!!

GOYA

GOYA Meeting-The GOYA meeting for December will be held on Sunday, December 8 from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided. We'll also have our annual Christmas party, with games and Christmas activities, as well as a spiritual discussion on the meaning of Christmas.

GOYA Christmas Card-GOYA will be doing their annual Community Christmas Card as a fundraiser for their events during the year. Sign-ups for the Christmas Card will be taken Sundays after church, on December 1, 8 and 15 or mail in your name (as you would like it to appear on the card) and check for \$25 made out to St. John GOYA by December 15

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Thank you to everyone who continues to support our Community Outreach ministry to serve the homeless and those in need. In addition to supporting First Presbyterian Church's breakfast for the homeless on the 3rd Saturday of each month (It will be December 21 in December and January 18, 2014), in December we will have an additional opportunity to work in the Metropolitan Ministries' Holiday Tent.

On December 22 from 2:00pm- 4:30pm, we will need 50 volunteers to help distribute food and toys to families in need for Christmas in the Metropolitan Ministries Holiday Tent just north of downtown Tampa. Volunteers in the Holiday Tent do a wide variety of tasks, including sorting canned goods, assisting families with registration on the computer, or walking families through the food shopping area (just to name a few). This is a great opportunity for families with children over the age of 8. Last year, approximately 30,000 families were served in the Holiday Tent with food for Christmas. You won't want to miss this fun church-wide opportunity to give back and get in the Holiday spirit!

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday School Christmas Program-The Sunday School Christmas program will be held at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, December 15.

Sunday School Christmas Party/Program Rehearsal-December 14-The Sunday School will have a Christmas Party and practice for the Christmas Program on Saturday, December 14, from 11:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. Lunch will be included. We will meet in the Kourmolis Center for crafts, games, decorating and lots of fun together. Please bring an unwrapped gift to donate to the Child Abuse Council. We will rehearse the Christmas program one last time in the church at the end of the party.

Fall Harvest Festival a Success-Over 40 of our JOY/HOPE Sunday School Students participated in our Fall Harvest Festival on October 27. Thanks everyone who helped out—what a wonderful event!!!

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS:

Thank you for the great start to our 2013-2014 Sunday School year. We've had record attendance thanks to all the teachers, parents, and children who are committed to our program.

CONGRATULATIONS to the Students who had PERFECT ATTENDANCE for the month of OCTOBER:

Pre-School: Billy Conner and Teddy Kafantaris

Kindergarten: Maria Nicklow and Zachary Carter

1st Grade: Emily Nicklow, Calliope Kafantaris, Maria Palios, George Xenick, Panagiotis Zelatis, Nicholas Carter, Ariana Coundas-Thatcher, and Ava Andrejkanic

2nd Grade: Niko Bavaro, Isabella Browne, Makis Crassas, Yiannis Laliotis, Toulia Trakas, and Kaitlin Zelatis

3rd Grade: Maria Bavaro, Gennaro Scarfogliero, Alexander Sotiropoulos, and Yanni Trimikliniotis

4th and 5th Grade: Antonio Bavaro, William Sotiropoulos, and Elizabeth Xenick

6th Grade: Sophia Crassas and Artemis Xenick

7th and 8th Grade: Savvas Ferekides, Sophia Krinos, and Joseph Hambos

High School: Nedi Ferekides, Arianna Krinos, and Larissa Krinos

We will acknowledge students with perfect attendance on a monthly basis this year. Every student should be able to achieve this goal at least once. We will keep track of Perfect Attendance for the year and award those students at our Graduation Ceremony.

We are very excited about our Weekly Topics that each classroom will include into their curriculum/program this year. The topics for the month of NOVEMBER were THE CHURCH BUILDING, THE CHURCH HIERARCHY and CHARITY, THANKFULNESS. We would like to thank Fr. Stavros for providing the teachers with weekly information about each topic.

Our children sang beautifully on Oct. 27th at our YOUTH SUNDAY SERVICE. We would like to thank Nedi Ferekides for reading the Epistle. The parishioners of St. John's are truly blessed to have such wonderful children.

We would like to thank Edie Kavouklis for taking our SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS PICTURES this year for our Sunday School bulletin board. We would also like to thank Kathy Kaburis for making classroom posters of The Lord's Prayer in Greek Phonetics.

We hope you support our SUNDAY SCHOOL STAIN GLASS WINDOW PROJECT by participating in our Spaghetti Luncheon on December 8th. We will also be selling Gourmet Christmas Cookies donated by South Tampa Sugar Mama after church on December 22nd. They are \$3 each and would make great stocking stuffers. We have raised over \$2100 and hope to achieve our goal of \$4500 by the end of this school year.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions, suggestions, or comments regarding St. John's Sunday School Program. Parents, If you do not receive our weekly e-mails about our Sunday School Program, please contact Vickie Peckham at 406-5626 or e-mail her at rpeckham@tampabay.rr.com.

Recognition of a Gift received via a trust

A kind person who wishes to remain anonymous passed away recently. She was not a member of our parish but a member at one of the area churches who had visited our church in the past. She left a lot of her estate to a combination of several churches, including ours, as well as our Seminary. We were both surprised and blessed that our church received this gift of \$23,000. That's the good news. The bad news—thankfully we received that money because we didn't have enough money to pay our own bills that month. Every contribution to the church counts not only in the eyes of the church, but the eyes of God. Let us work hard to learn the value of generosity.

Leave the Church in Your Will

Part of our life's legacy is the inheritance we leave our children. By leaving an inheritance, a part of us lives on through them. When preparing your will, you should consider leaving money to our church—this is the church of your children and part of their future can be positively impacted by leaving some of your inheritance to the church. The ability of the church to spread the Word of God is facilitated by everyone's stewardship. By leaving a portion of your inheritance to the church in your will, you remain a steward in perpetuity, but more importantly, you help cement a solid financial future for the church for your children and your grandchildren. If you are interested in leaving the church in your will, please contact Russell Sibley (church member) at rsibleylaw@gmail.com. Thank you for your consideration.

Friends of St. John—Some of you who receive The Messenger do not live in the Tampa Bay area or are members of other Greek Orthodox parishes. We would like to ask for your support of our parish as a "Friend of St. John". Your contribution as a "Friend" will help offset the cost of mailing The Messenger, among other things. Being a "friend" does not make one a steward of St. John or afford membership rights and responsibilities, but gives one who is a member elsewhere, an opportunity to make a gesture of financial support to our parish. If you are interested in being a "Friend of St. John", please fill out and return the form below. Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

Friends of St. John

Nicholas and Barbara Akrotirianakis

Mary Hatzikazakis—from Bristol, TN (who wrote to us: Thank you so much for the "Messenger". It is a source of inspiration and many times seems written directly for me! God works in mysterious ways! Please do continue to send it to me. Thank you.)

FRIENDS OF ST. JOHN

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

I wish to be a "Friend of St. John". I am enclosing a contribution in the amount of:

_____ \$50 _____ \$100 _____ \$200 _____ Other

Please mail this form and check to: St. John Greek Orthodox Church 2418 Swann Avenue, Tampa, FL 33609

MAYBE WE SHOULD WEAR WHITE MORE OFTEN...

By Fr. Athansios Haros

After our baptism, we were completely clothed in white. This tradition has been maintained since the earliest days of Christianity. In case you didn't know "why" we are clothed in white, it is to represent the purity of God's new creation PRESENT WITHIN US at the time of Baptism and Chrismation.

Unfortunately, most of us never consider the white gown after the reception is over.

When we wear white, whether at our baptism reception or in the public square, we are constantly aware, sometimes to the point of craziness, of ever little speck and ever little smudge we see. Many refuse to wear white for this very reason. In fact, we would NEVER participate in anything that we know would make our white garments dirty. An accident is one thing. . . .but nobody allows their white garments to get dirty on purpose.

So why aren't we as cautious about our souls? Isn't our soul worth more to us than our seersucker suit? Jesus said, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mark 8.36) Maybe if we remembered our souls were clothed in white, we would be more careful with the choices we make and the activities we do. Maybe we should wear white more often. . .

Fr. Athanasios Haros is the priest of Holy Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church in Florence, South Carolina.

JOB OR MINISTRY?

By Fr. Nick Louh

Some people have a job in the church. Others involve themselves in ministry. What's the difference?

If you do it just because no one else will. . . it's a job!

If you do it to serve God. . . it's a ministry!

If you quit because someone criticized you. . . it's a job!

If you kept on serving in spite of challenges. . . it's a ministry!

If you'll do it only so long as it doesn't interfere with other things. . . it's a job!

If you're committed to staying with it, even when it means letting other things go. . . it's a ministry!

If you quit because no one ever praised or thanked you. . . it's a job!

If you stay even though no one notices your efforts. . . it's a ministry!

If you do it because someone else said it needs to be done. . . it's a job!

If you do it because you sensed God saying it needs to be done. . . it's a ministry!

It's hard to get excited about a job.

It's almost impossible not to get excited about a ministry!

Some churches are filled with people doing jobs! A growing church is filled with people involved in ministry!

Fr. Nick Louh is the priest of St. John the Divine Greek Orthodox Church in Jacksonville, Florida.

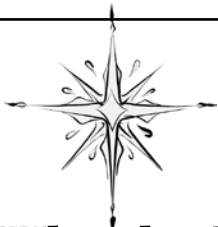
A Christmas Sermon

By St. Gregory of Nazianzus (AD 380)

Christ is born, glorify Him. Christ from heaven, go out to meet Him. Christ on earth, be exalted. Sing to the Lord all the whole earth; and that I may join both in one word, let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad, for Him who is of heaven and then of earth. Christ in the flesh, rejoice with trembling and with joy; with trembling because of your sins, with joy because of your hope.

Again, the darkness is past; again Light is made; again Egypt is punished with darkness; again Israel is enlightened by a pillar. The people who sat in the darkness of ignorance, let them see the great Light full of knowledge. Old things have passed away, behold all things have become new. The letter gives way, the Spirit comes to the front. The shadows flee away, the truth comes in on them. Melchizedek is concluded. He who was without Mother becomes without Father (without mother of His former state, without father of His second). The laws of nature are upset; the world above must be filled. Christ commands it, let us not set ourselves against Him. O clap your hands together all you people, because unto us a Child is born, and a Son given unto us, whose government is upon His shoulder (for with the cross it is raised up), and His name is called The Angel of the Great Counsel of the Father. Let John cry, prepare the way of the Lord; I too will cry the power of this Day. He who is not carnal is Incarnate; the Son of God becomes the Son of Man, Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever. Let the Jews be offended, let the Greeks deride; let heretics talk until their tongues ache. Then shall they believe, when they see Him ascending into heaven; and if not then, yet when they see Him coming out of heaven and sitting as Judge.

This is our present Festival; it is this which we are celebrating today, the Coming of God to Man, that we might go forth, or rather (for this is the more proper expression) that we might go back to God - that putting off of the old man, we might put on the new; and that as we died in Adam, so we might live in Christ, being born with Christ and crucified with Him and buried with Him and rising with Him. For I must undergo the beautiful conversion, and as the painful succeeded the more blissful, so must the more blissful come out of the painful. For where sin abounded grace did much more abound; and if a taste condemned us, how much more does the passion of Christ justify us? Therefore let us keep the Feast, not after the manner of a heathen festival, but after a godly sort; not after the way of the world, but in a fashion above the world; not as our own, but as belonging to Him who is ours, or rather as our master's; not as of weakness, but as of healing; not as of creation, but of re-creation.



Please join us for the Eighth Annual Advent Retreat

The Good News: Why the Bible is Important and How to Read It

Do you feel like your spiritual life suffers during the hectic holiday season?

Come join us in reviving your spirit as a community just in time for Christmas!

Saturday, December 7th - 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
St. John Greek Orthodox Church
2418 W. Swann Avenue~Tampa, FL~33609-4712
813-876-8830
Retreat Leader: Father Stavros Akrotirianakis

- 9:00 a.m. The Divine Liturgy—come into the church for service, registration after
10:00 a.m. Registration/Refreshments
10:30 a.m. Session One Where Did the Bible Come From?
11:45 a.m. Session Two Why is the Bible Important?
12:45 p.m. Lunch
1:30 p.m. Session Three How We should read the Bible, and how it is read in Church

There will also be ample time throughout the day to ask questions about pertaining to the Bible as well as other general questions about our faith and our church.

- 2:30 p.m. Reading of the Christmas Gospels and Closing Prayer

Cost is \$15 per person. Lunch will be provided.
Adults only please.

Please return this registration form by mail or take it to the Church Office by December 2! We look forward to seeing you there!

Name: _____

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Email: _____

Address: _____

Will you be attending with other family members? _____ If yes, please list:





You are invited to our annual

Sunday School Christmas Party

Saturday, December 14

11:00am – 3:00pm

Lunch included!

The Kourmolis Center



Join us for crafts, games, decorating
and lots of fun together!!

**Please bring an unwrapped gift to
Donate to Champions for Children*

We will rehearse the Christmas program one last time in church
at the end of the party!



Help Decorate our Church for Christmas
You May Buy One or More Poinsettias and/or Red Candles for the Windows
In Honor of a loved one, for the Good Health of Family
Or in Memory of a loved one

This is a wonderful way to honor someone special in your life

Donations Needed for Christmas

Poinsettias (many needed to decorate church) \$25 per plant
Red Vigil Candles for Windows \$15 per candle
Flowers for Icon of Christmas in Narthex \$50

Donations Needed for St. John's Day—January 7

Flowers for Icon of St. John in Narthex \$50
Wreath of Flowers over St. John Icon on Iconostasion \$75

Name _____

I wish to donate: _____ Poinsettias (at \$25 per plant)
 _____ Vigil Candles for windows (at \$15 per candle)
 _____ Flowers for icon of Christmas in Narthex (\$50)
 _____ Flowers for icon of St. John in Narthex (\$50)
 _____ Flowers for icon of St. John on Iconostasion (\$75)

For the health of _____

Or In memory of _____

Please send form and check to the church office, attention: Nick

Please detach and send into the church office for Community Christmas Card

GOYA COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS CARD

Name (as you would like it to appear on the Christmas Card) _____

Phone Number _____

Please make check for \$25 out to St. John GOYA and mail this form along with payment to the church office by December 15. Thank you and Merry Christmas!!!



December 2013

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Parish Assembly Meeting Fast Day	2 Dr. Bill's Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Fast Day	3 Women's Bible Study 9:30 a.m. Young at Heart 11:00 a.m. Bible Study North 6:30 p.m. Bible Study South 6:30 p.m. Bible Study East 6:30 p.m. Fast Day	4 Men's Bible Study 7:00 a.m. St. Barbara Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. YAL Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Fast Day	5 Adult Greek School 6:00 p.m. Fast Day	6 St. Nicholas Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Fast Day	7 Orthros 8:15 a.m. Liturgy 9:00 a.m. Adult Advent Retreat 9:00-3:00 p.m. Fast Day
8 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Stewardship Sunday GOYA 5:00 p.m. Fast Day	9 St. Anna Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Dr. Bill's Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Bible Study East 6:30 p.m. Fast Day	10 Women's Bible Study 9:30 a.m. Bible Study North 6:30 p.m. Bible Study South 6:30 p.m.	11 Men's Bible Study 7:00 a.m. YAL Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Fast Day	12 St. Spyridon Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Adult Greek School 6:00 p.m. Fast Day	13 Fast Day	14 Sunday School Christmas Program Rehearsal/Christmas Party Fast Day
15 St. Eleftherios Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Sunday School Christmas Program Fast Day	16 College Student Retreat 9:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m. Fast Day	17 Fast Day	18 Men's Bible Study 7:00 a.m. YAL Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Fast Day	19 Fast Day	20 AHEPA/Daughters Scholarship Dinner Fast Day	21 Community Outreach Fast Day
22 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Holiday Tent Metro Ministries Event Fast Day	23 Royal Hours of Christmas 9:30-11:00 a.m. Fast Day	24 CHRISTMAS SERVICES Great Vespers 8:45 a.m. Liturgy of St. Basil 9:30-11:00 a.m. Orthros 5:30 p.m. Liturgy 7:00 p.m. Christmas Reception Fast Day	25 Christmas Day No Services	26 No Fasting until January 5	27	28
29 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	30 St. Anyisia (Her Relics Interred in our altar table) Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	31				

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

2418 W. Swann Avenue

Tampa, FL 33609-4712

Office Phone: (813)876-8830

Fax (813) 443-4899

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ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

Timetable of Services

Sundays: Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.
Weekdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.

Parish Priest: Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis

813-876-8830 (office) 394-1038 (cell)

frstav@gmail.com

Parish Council:

Katherine Sakkis, President 813-309-1073

Bill Manikas V. President 813-716-8185

Diane Trimis, Secretary 813-968-9038

Skip Higdon, Treasurer 813-831-9021

Nick Antonakakis 813-477-6639

Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668

Carole Fotopoulos 813-982-0947

Byron Nenos 813-789-0729

Dante Skourellos 813-765-9534

Despina Sibley 813-251-5384

David Voykin 727-415-5603

Stewardship Chairperson:

Bill Manikas 813-716-8185

.....

Office Staff:

Debbie Bowe-Administrative Assistant 813-876-8830

Office Fax: 813-443-4899

•Choir: Artie Palios, Director 813-831-1294

Jim Leone, Organist 813-254-7844

•Chanter: Nick Andreadakis 813-876-8830

•Sunday Sch.: Victoria Peckham 813-406-5626

Maria Xenick 813-839-9897

•Finance Committee: Mike Xenick 813-340-8737

•Adult Greek School: Magda Myer 813-909-2327

•AHEPA: Mike Trimis 813-968-9038

•Community Outreach: Chairperson

Betty Katherine Palios 813-215-9862

•Daughters: Diane Trimis 813-220-3389

•Food Pantry: Anetta Alexander 863-224-3001

•GOYA Adv. Elaine Halkias 813-968-9129

Byron Nenos 813-789-0729

•JOY/HOPE: Maria Xenick 813-839-9897

•Young Adults (YAL) Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862

•Philoptochos: JoAnn Hartung, Pres. 727-432-0228

•Oratorical Festival Chairperson

Peggy Bradshaw: 727-244-1374

•Young at Heart: Nick Antonakakis 813-477-6639

Mary Nenos 813-935-2096

•Jr Olympics: Byron Nenos 813-789-0729

•Ushers: Tom Georgas 813-985-0236

•Altar Angels:

Engie Halkias, Viorica Kirby & Sia Blankenship. 813-932-5859

•Bookstore: Jon & Pamela Irwin 813-679-4113

•H XAPA ΜΑΣ Dance Group:

Alex De Maio & 813-340-9668

Marina Choundas 813-877-6136

•Glendi Dancers: Jenna Mingledorff 813-610-7365

•Panigyri Dancers: Vanessa Aviles 813-221-2194

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is a parish under the spiritual and ecclesiastical oversight of His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios of the Metropolis of Atlanta, of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America in the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

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Website: www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com

“May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father and the Communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” From the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom