

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

August 2014

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.

A Note of Thanks to the St. John Community

We would like to thank the entire community of St. John for the tremendous outpouring of love and support as we marked the passing of our beloved husband, father and papou, Nicholas J. Akrotirianakis. Thank you for the flower arrangements that came to the church and to our home, for the donations to memorial funds in California, North Carolina and in Florida, for the cards and calls and most especially for the prayers for our Dad over the past two and a half years that he so bravely fought cancer. Our Dad knew many of you, as he visited Tampa frequently before his illness. He always enjoyed his visits here and felt like another member of the St. John family. His last four Sundays, as he was unable to attend his church in California, he viewed the liturgy over the live-streaming of our parish, and participate in his last liturgies with our parish, with our congregation. That is a blessing that we will always remember. Thank you for loving our Dad. Please continue to have us in your prayers as we transition to live without him. May his memory be eternal!

With gratitude and love,

Barbara; Fr. Stavros, Lisa and Nicholas; Joseph, Sherese, Nicholas and Michael Akrotirianakis

Father Stavros' Message

As I sit down to write this month's message, I reflect on what a month it has been. As you all know, my Dad passed away on June 16, and many of my thoughts each day still go to my family and working through grief and transition to life without him. But even more thoughts go to the almost miraculous way that he passed from this life. I shared thoughts on my Dad in church on June 15, on what ended up being his last day on this earth. I shared a reflection on the end of his life on June 29 at his memorial service in our parish. And I've shared with many of you personally about how he passed from this life, in the hope of the Resurrection to everlasting life. Allow me one more opportunity to

write about my Dad, especially for those who receive this publication and are outside of our community as well as for those who were unable to attend any of the recent services. The lessons I've learned over the past month have been incredible. They have left lasting images in my heart and will make a lasting impact on my life. Please allow me to share a few remembrances of my Dad—his life and his death.

It was during our festival in 2011 that I received a call from my Dad saying that he has stage four metastatic cancer of his colon. Turns out my Dad had some symptoms

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of anemia and the doctor ordered a colonoscopy. Dad was 76 and it was his first time undergoing this procedure. If there was any mistake my dad made, it was not having a colonoscopy until age 76. If he had had one at any time before this, he probably would still be here with us. Colon cancer is one of the most preventable types of cancer, thanks to this test. But this only works in your favor if you get the test. So if you are over 50 (or if you are over 40 with a family history of colon cancer), please go get a colonoscopy. They are not painful. You are in and out of the hospital in a matter of hours, not days. I've always been squeamish about hospitals and procedures and even I have had one. They are not that big of a deal. If you haven't had one and you are of age, PLEASE go get one.

And so it was that in November 2011, Dad began a long fight against cancer. Doctors gave him 16 months from diagnosis to death. He managed to go 31 months. I lost track of how many rounds of chemo that Dad endured. He had major surgery in March of 2013, when part of his colon, intestines, liver and gallbladder were removed. There were triumphs and there were setbacks. There were times when Dad had great pain and there were times when his quality of life was good. My parents even visited Europe as late as last fall. During his time of illness, Dad welcomed two new grandchildren into his life, and this past Christmas, he shared a week with our son. If you don't remember me being gone, that's because Lisa and Nicholas went to visit my parents without me. When you have a job like mine, it takes some creativity sometimes to get our families together. Nicholas is off at Christmas, and I am not. So, while I was in Tampa last Christmas, Lisa and Nicholas went to spend it with my parents.

Things took a downturn earlier this year. It became apparent that Dad was not going to beat cancer. You wouldn't know it for two reasons—one he didn't want any of his friends to know. In fact people in Florida knew more about my Dad than people in California. I think Dad felt that if people knew he had cancer, he was more likely to die from it. If life could go on as if nothing was happening, maybe life would last longer. So Dad kept going to church each Sunday, kept climbing up and down the stairs to the choir loft, even as he lost weight and strength. He went to all the Holy Week services, got up every morning, lit his candle, prayed in front of his icons, tended his garden, cooked, enjoyed his grandchildren, and went about his life in the midst of his deteriorating condition.

It was late May when Dad was hospitalized and was in serious condition. Lisa and I and Nicholas had planned to go to California in late July to visit my family. My mom told us that I needed to come out sooner, that it would be all over well before the end of July. Next came a call from my brother saying Dad probably had two weeks to live and wouldn't make it to his birthday, June 20, when he would have been 79. My brother said, you can come now when it's still good, or you can come when it gets bad. I elected to go quickly, while it was still good. I knew when I went on the trip, that this was not going to be a regular visit, it was going to be the last visit. I was going to California to say good-bye to my Dad. By the time I got home on May 28, Dad was out of the hospital. His skin was jaundice. He had lost a lot of weight. Somehow, he mustered the strength to go to church with me on the feast of the Ascension, on May 29. We didn't go to the church he normally attends but to one of the neighboring churches. He still didn't want the people to know how sick he was. In fact, when I told Dad I was coming to California to visit him, he said "don't come, the doctors are all wrong, I will live at least one more year." The priest of the church we went to graciously allowed me to be the celebrant of that liturgy, so my Dad could watch his son celebrate the service in person one more time. I gave my Dad Communion one more time. And after church, we went out to lunch—Mom, Dad and me. It would be his last time out of our house. (This trip was a bunch of lasts actually). On two of the three nights I was there, my brother came over for dinner and we sat around the table, just the four of us, in the places we occupied when we were growing up. We had two last suppers together.

One night when I was home, my Dad asked me if we could talk. I sat down next to him on the couch, and what followed was probably the most meaningful experience I ever had with my dad—it was the opportunity I had to be both a son and a priest to my father. Dad said to me "Paidi mou, my whole life I have been afraid to die. And now my life is coming to an end, and I'm still afraid to die. Can you help me to not be afraid? Your mother has given me the gift of 46 years of marriage. Your brother has given me the gift of constant companionship. Can you give me the gift of taking away my anxiety and giving me some

hope?" And over the course of a couple of hours, we spoke of faith, we said the Creed together, we studied it, we read many Psalms and offered prayers. I'm good with analogies and so I gave dad this analogy.

When a person goes to college, they don't go with the idea of staying in college forever—the whole point in going to college is to get out of college and go on to something greater. And while you don't think of the end of college each and every day you are there, on many days, and especially as you finish semesters, you know you are a step closer to accomplishing what you came to college to do—to get out and go on to better things. When the end of college comes, you are a little sad, even a little nostalgic, because a chapter of your life is coming to an end. You look back with some happiness, maybe even you shed some tears, but the greater emotion you have is JOY because you are going to do what you came to college to do—leave and go on to something better.

And so it is with life—the purpose of this life is to prepare for eternal life. Our Lord promises us something greater is coming once our life on this earth is over. The goal of this life is to prepare for eternal life, and the purpose of the church is to teach us, to encourage us, to strengthen us, and as we did at the liturgy this morning, give us a foretaste of what is to come. So that we do not have to wait to die to experience the Kingdom of God, that we can experience it right here, and right now.

When our Lord was about to go to His Passion, He knew that His death was imminent. He got down on His knees and He cried to God the Father, If you can make this cup pass away from me, take it away from me, but not as I will, as You will. And later He prayed "Father what should I say, deliver me from this hour, for this hour I came here." I talked to Dad about this—what should we say to God, deliver you from this hour—for this reason God put you here in the first place—He made your whole life about this moment—He gave you talents and you used them. He gave you a family and you provided for us, you protected us, you loved us. And now we don't say for God to spare you from this hour—we should ask God to take you quickly to His heavenly Kingdom, so that you can have the good death. After all we pray at every Divine Liturgy, for a Christian end to our lives, peaceful without shame and suffering and for a good defense before the awesome judgment seat of Christ. We pray at every liturgy for a good death.

A lot of tears were shed by both of us during this conversation. I told Dad that I had been visited in a dream by a one of our parishioners in Tampa who passed away many years ago, a man I consider to be very righteous. This man came to me in a dream many years ago to tell me how happy he was in heaven. The night that Dad was in the ER on May 24 and the night before Ascension, he came again to me in my dreams—the first time he said in a soft and reassuring voice—"I am waiting for your dad"—and he said it over and over again. The second time, he spoke to me in a firm, almost anxious voice—"Tell your Daddy I'm waiting for him, and please don't keep me waiting." I told this to my Dad—I said "Dad, you go ahead and go, there is someone waiting for you." Dad knew this man. I said "Dad there is someone you know waiting for you, and he's happy and you are going to be happy too."

Dad asked me how to prepare to die—we talked about his life, the joys, the sorrows. We prayed specific prayers. Every time I spoke to Dad after my visit, we would say the Creed over the phone. On the three Sundays between when I visited and when he passed away, he would watch the liturgy in Tampa on the computer live stream and we would say the Creed in Greek together—Dad from his bed in California, me from the altar in Tampa. Dad would end every conversation on the phone the last couple of weeks with the words of Jesus from John 5:24—"Truly I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life. He shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."

I told Dad, you know how each year on Good Friday, we go around the church in a procession and then they lift up the Kouvouklion so we can all go under it, this is our foreshadowing of this verse. When we pass under the Kouvouklion, under the body of the dead Christ, this symbolizes our own death. And after we pass under the Kouvouklion, we enter the church, which represents heaven. Every year, we mark this ritual—we foreshadow our passage from life, through death, to everlasting life. If you recall, on

Good Friday night, that was my sermon, remember the picture we handed out that night? Though I didn't say anything that night, I knew then that Dad was making his last walk under the Epitaphios. Dad got to make that walk for real on June 16—he had spent every Good Friday of his life, every Sunday morning, every morning at the Kandili practicing for that moment.

When we ended our conversation, Dad said to me "Thank you paidi mou, your mother gave me the gift of her love. Your brother gave me the gift of joy. And you gave me the gift of hope in the everlasting life. I am no longer afraid to die. I'm actually now looking forward to it. Thank you that you took away my fear and you gave me hope. Na exeis tin euhi mou." I never knew what that phrase meant by the way until I was an adult despite the fact Dad ended every conversation with that—it meant that I had his blessing. It was his way of saying I love you but even more than that, he was wishing me to be blessed.

I'm sharing this with you, my beloved parishioners and friends, because like my Dad, many of you have spent a lot of time in this church and others. You have your icons, you light your candles, you go to church regularly and I'm sure that some of you are still afraid of death. When we greet each other at a funeral with the words, "Zoe se esas," "life to us," it is as if we are thanking God that is was not us this time. When what we should really be thinking is the words they say at a wedding to the one who is yet to be married, "Ke sta dika sou, ke sta dika mas," may we find ourselves as prepared as Dad was in his final days and weeks on this earth. And if you are scared about death, this is why we have our church and why we have priests, so that we can have these meaningful conversations with them. If you are someone of any age, but especially of an older age, who lives in fear of death, who has not found God or the peace of God, please come and talk to me about it. You don't need to come for confession necessarily, but come for conversation. Bring your questions, talk about your fears. I don't want anyone here to die in fear. But I also don't want you to live in fear either. My Dad told me, that night 18 days before He died, that his greatest regret was that he didn't have this conversation years earlier, that he didn't shake his fear of death with the hope in God's mercies and greatness until the last few days of his life. I'm thankful to God that he found them, that he had that good death—Christian, painless, blameless and peaceful, and at home, that he always hoped for, and I pray that he will have a good account at the awesome judgment seat of Christ.

Many people, when a person dies, feel regrets that they didn't get to say what they wanted to say. Many people have told me "I wish I had even a half an hour more with my loved one to say good-bye the way I wanted to. I had this opportunity, and I definitely took advantage of it. I got to say goodbye to my Dad in the way I wanted to. To say what I wanted to say to him, for him to say what he wanted to say to me, to thank him for being the best Dad a son could hope to have, to tell him I love him and to receive his blessing one final time. Many people don't get to do that. I'm so glad I did. There were two lessons to be taken away from this. When it is obvious that the end of life is coming, say your goodbyes when the time is still good. Don't deny what is happening for so long that you don't get that chance. Most importantly, any of us can die suddenly at any time—don't wait until someone is dying to tell them how you feel about them. Do that in life, do that throughout life, in the good times and in the bad time.

I regret sometimes that I live so far away from my Mom and Dad. But I do because I am a priest, and I am a priest because of their faith. My Dad and Mom offered a prayer to God on the Sunday of the Holy Cross in 1971, that if God would give them a son, they would name him Stavros for the Holy Cross and dedicate him to God. I was born one year later, to the date that they offered their prayer. And my whole life I felt a calling to the priesthood, which I have followed, even though it took me far from my parents. My parents asked for one son—God blessed them with two. One they got to keep, my younger brother Joseph, and me they had to give back to God and to the church. I left home 20 years ago this month.

Dad joked with me that night, "Are you going to do my funeral?" I said "Is that what you want me to do?" He said "well, I didn't give you back to God so you could sit in the pews at my funeral and watch someone else do it. Go and do my funeral with the other priests—that is where you belong." Dad also joked with me and said "well, I did right by my two

sons. What more could a father want from his two sons—a lawyer and a priest? Joe, the lawyer, kept me out of trouble in this life. Stavros the priest, hopefully keeps me out of trouble in the next. That was our Dad—a sweet, fun, beautiful man that we all loved, who made all of our lives better for knowing him.

Dad passed away in the early morning hours of June 16. It was surreal to stand in our bathroom at 4:15, and over a three-way call with my Mom and my brother to offer a Trisagion for my Dad. We went home the next day to lay Dad to rest. Dad's funeral was held on June 20, which would have been his 79th birthday. My brother and my Dad share the same birthday by the way. Dad's funeral was amazing—so many friends came to pray with us and support us. Dad finally opened up in his final days to his friends that he was dying. I saw people from my childhood that I hadn't seen in years and heard about how they all loved my Dad. We celebrated liturgy before Dad's funeral. Dad loved the Liturgy. The choir he had sang in for so many years came and sang the responses. They left his seat in the back row empty. There were four priests at the altar—including a friend from San Diego who I hadn't seen in 8 years. We speak on the phone a couple of times a month—we are go to people for each other. He didn't even know my Dad but faithfully prayed for him for years. A real friend. Then we celebrated Dad's funeral.

The end of the funeral service was special as well. The last act in a funeral service is one not usually witnessed by the congregation. Many times it is witnessed by the immediate family, other times only the priest alone. The priest puts oil and earth over the body of the deceased. The oil and the dirt put symbolic bookends on an earthly life—the spiritual life begins with an anointing with oil of reconciliation before one is baptized. And before one is committed again to the earth, there is a final anointing with oil. The scriptures say we came from the dust and to dust we shall return—this is why dirt or earth is put on. The rubrics of the services do not say where the oil or earth is to come from. So for Dad's funeral, the oil and the earth that were used were also special—remember the kandili that Dad lit every day? Well, he always added oil to the kandili, but never emptied it to clean the glass, he just added to it every day—thus there is oil that has been in that kandili for years, perhaps since our childhood. I put some oil from that kandili on my Dad. As for the dirt, years ago one of our parishioners was in Crete, near Dad's childhood home. Back then, Dad was not sure if he would ever return to Greece. Eventually he did in 2006. But one time Dad lamented to me that he never thought he would touch the soil of Crete again. So, many years ago, when I first gave some thought that this day might come, I asked a parishioner who was visiting Dad's home down to bring back dirt from Crete to save for his funeral one day. I combined the Cretan dirt along with some from our backyard and thus most of Dad's life was represented in the dirt going with him. He was buried under his home soil—from his childhood home and his adult home

Dad had a dream shortly before he died. He told me that he dreamt that he was standing outside the royal doors of the altar at St. Anthony, the church where I went as a child, where my parents and brother attend.. He said mom was nearby but not with him. And he was wondering why was he there, and that he was in a place where he shouldn't be, where only the priests go. He asked me what I thought the dream meant—I told Dad that the Royal Doors represent the gates of heaven, and that the priests are allowed to enter these gates temporarily each time they celebrate the Holy Services of the church. I told Dad that he was probably standing right outside the gates of heaven waiting for them to be opened to him. Mom was nearby because one day they will open for her, but not now.

Dad had another dream just last week. He told me that he was in a harbor, though he couldn't tell if the harbor was in Greece or in Canada. And people were telling Dad to go and get on his boat, because it was time for the boat to leave. I guess Dad's ship came in on Monday, June 16. And when I think of June 20, I'm not going to remember that this is the day we laid Dad to rest—I will remember June 20 as the day a wonderful man was born, the man destined to be my Dad. I will remember that this is the day that my brother Joe was born, and though this wasn't a happy birthday for him, I know that it was a meaningful one. Every year on June 20, I will think of this day as the day Dad's dream came true—he stood before the Royal Gates of St. Anthony one more time, and God opened the gates and showed him the kingdom of heaven.

Dad was buried at Rose Hills Cemetery in our hometown of Whittier. Rose Hills is the largest cemetery in the world. There is a Greek Orthodox Section in the cemetery. They even built a small church there, which is name for St. Nicholas, my Dad's patron saint. They hold liturgy there several times a year. Dad is buried on a hillside about 300 feet from the Chapel.

I must say that upon returning to Tampa, I was overwhelmed with cards and calls and visits from parishioners. The number of people who turned out for Dad's memorial service on June 29, with the church packed as it is on Palm Sunday, was very humbling but brought me much joy.

My thoughts have quickly shifted—as I write this message on July 3, I'm busily preparing to leave for summer camp tomorrow. From 2001-2011, I was the director of our summer camp for the Metropolis of Atlanta. It is a ministry that has brought great joy to my life. In 2012-2013, I was shifted to another ministry, working with choirs and chanters of our Metropolis. In 2014, I've been asked by His Eminence to again direct our summer camp. This ministry brings great joy to me and to many other people. It is also filled with challenges. In Ecclesiastes 3, we read that “to everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven...a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to weep and a time to dance.” Two weeks before leaving for camp, I was in California, mourning the loss of my Dad. And now going to camp, I am going to laugh, I am going to dance. Many people, when someone dies, don't do either for a long time. They put on a long face, they put on black clothes (I wear black every day because of my job, not because of my Dad—I'll wear black the rest of my life because I am a priest). One lesson I learned from my Dad's passing is that life is short. In Psalm 118 we read, “This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” I found joy even on the day of my Dad's funeral. And I will find some joy in every day, especially when I'm at camp. Joy is a good thing. Every life should have some joy, even on the most difficult of days. I don't think that having joy is a bad or a disrespectful thing. Quite the contrary, not having joy is disrespectful of the day God made for you and me TODAY. Every day is a gift that we should open with joy.

I was somewhat emotional on June 15, the day before my Dad died, when I spoke in church. I was full of anxiety about being able to touch all the bases. What if Dad had died during summer camp? How can I be a camp director and on pins and needles? How can I have my brain in South Carolina and my heart in California? And on a practical level, I'm missing a lot of time at St. John right now because of Dad's illness, death, summer camp, going back to California for the 40 days and then a small planned trip with my small family. How can I touch all the bases? The only way I can is with God's help. I was very anxious about being able to do all this. But God's timing, again, has made all things possible. And that is how GREAT God is—in my life and in every other life. God came for Dad on the perfect day—I got to go home and grieve for a week, I got to have one

more Sunday with my Tampa family, to have Dad's memorial; I had 10 days to get the final preparation for summer camp done, He's given me clarity at 6:00 a.m. on July 3 to write the entire Messenger in one shot this morning, and it works out that I'll be able to go to California for the 40 day memorial right after camp is done. I am going to get to touch all the bases.

As I said in church on June 29, please continue to be patient—all the work will get done around camp and around family time. I've never taken my full amount of vacation time but I am taking it this year, it's just all in a short amount of time. Once school starts in August, it will be back to work full time for a long time, gearing up for what will be an awesome new academic year, now with Charlie Hambos aboard and with Bible study groups already well established. We are primed for what I know is going to be an awesome year. I'll close my message this month with the same prayer I used at the close of Dad's funeral, paraphrasing of one of the post-Communion prayers:

I will close my remarks paraphrasing the final words of the Prayer of Thanksgiving following Holy Communion:

Dad passed from this life in the hope of eternal life, and attaining to the everlasting rest, where the voices of God's Saints who feast are unceasing, and their joy, beholding the ineffable beauty of His countenance, is unending. For You, Christ our God are the true joy and the inexpressible gladness of those who love You and all creation praises You forever. Amen.

Thank you everyone, for your love, support and prayers, in honor and in memory of my Dad! May his memory be eternal!



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Receive Comfort from the Most Holy Theotokos

By Charlie Hambos

For many Floridians, August isn't necessarily our favorite month. It is way to hot and humid. We would rather stay inside where it is cool and where we won't begin to sweat within milliseconds of being outside. However, for the first two weeks of August, the Air Condition will not be the only place where we can run for comfort. Instead, we can run to the church for comfort as we offer the Supplicatory Canon to the Theotokos, also called the Paraklesis.

Here at St. John's the service is offered three times a week during the two week fasting period from August 1 to August 14. In some other places the services are offered everyday. Why do we fast during this period? In our Orthodox Christian Tradition we always fast in anticipation. We fast in order to prepare ourselves. We fast in order to deprive the body so that our soul can become stronger. The fast of the first two weeks of August are in order to prepare to celebrate the falling-asleep of the Mother of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. The feast, often called simply Panagias, is very important in our church and some may even place it as a greater feast than Christmas and second only to Pascha. Why? It is in the falling-asleep of the Theotokos, which gives us the hope of the resurrection of our soul and body. Just as the Theotokos, received Christ through the conception of the Holy Spirit, so Christ receives the soul of His mother and takes her through the gates of heaven into paradise. As believing Christians, one day our soul will also be cradled in the arms of Christ and he will take us through the gates of paradise.

So we offer the service of the Paraklesis to the Most Holy Theotokos during the first two weeks of August to prepare for the feast of the falling-asleep of the Theotokos. This service is also called the Supplicatory Canon to the Theotokos or the Intercessory Prayer to the Theotokos because in the service we are asking the Mother of God to intercede on our behalf before her Son, Jesus Christ to save and comfort our souls. There is a Great Paraklesis and a Small Paraklesis. In most churches the Small Paraklesis is the more popular. Personally, I look forward to August because I really love the Paraklesis service. In addition, there are supplicatory canons or Paraklesis for many of the saints of our church. That will be a discussion for another day.

Actually, it is in the word παράκλητος (paraclete) where we really find the meaning. This is what Christ promises to send to us before he ends his earthly ministry. "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you." (John 14:16,17 NKJV) In this particular translation it uses the word "helper." In other translations it says "comforter." In Greek, the word comes from both παρά (near) and καλεω (to call). Thus in total it means "to call near." We can do this when we are hurt or when we need help. After all, it is God who grants us comfort so that we may comfort others. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 it says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation

also abounds through Christ." So we ask the Theotokos to intercede to Christ for us to bring comfort. In one of the hymns it says, "I know you as the protection of my life, a steadfast shelter and refuge, O Virgin; disperse the host of my many temptations, and force away the demonic attacks from me; I pray to you unceasingly, from corruption of passions deliver me." This is just one of the many beautiful hymns that make up the service of the Small Paraklesis. It is in this service that we offer the names of our loved ones who are sick, suffering and in need of comfort.

This begs the question; can we only ask for comfort from the Mother of God during the first two weeks of August when we offer the Paraklesis service? The answer to this question is no. In some communities a Paraklesis service is offered weekly. At Holy Cross this was the case. It can be done anytime. More importantly, as was suggested by one of my professors to me, we can offer the Paraklesis service on our own and lift up the names of our friends and family who are sick, suffering and in need of comfort. I really really enjoy doing this on my own. I would encourage everyone to purchase the book, "The Service of the Small Paraklesis to the Most Holy Theotokos" by Holy Cross Press. Don't worry, the whole text of the service is also available online simply by Googling it. Learning the hymns is also a really cool thing and good practice so we can all sing together in the church. There is a plethora in Greek but the best in English is by Eikona. Just type Paraklesis by Eikona on Youtube and you will find the whole service in three parts. I could listen to it all day. Please take the time to do this. Please also take the time to join us in church. Refer to the schedule in this month's edition of the Messenger to see when we will be having the service in our church. I hope and pray that I will see you all there.

It has been a great first month as Pastoral Assistant. Thank you all so much for supporting me throughout my time at Holy Cross and as I begin my new post here at St. John's. I look forward to growing in Christ with each and every member of our community. Please do not hesitate to e-mail me with any questions or concerns or to add some names to my personal list of names that I pray for on a daily basis. My e-mail is Charlie.hambos@gmail.com. My mailing address is 2604 Herndon Street, Valrico, FL 33596. May the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ be with you always. Through the intercessions of our Most Holy Theotokos.

JUST SAY YES!

Beginning this month, we will introduce a monthly series to the Messenger to encourage and inspire you to continue to Just Say Yes! The following is an excerpt from the book Having a Mary Spirit: Allowing God to Change us from the Inside Out, by Joanna Weaver. The monthly excerpts will come from a chapter of the book titled A Willing Spirit. It is a beautiful study on both the Virgin Mary and the concept of saying Yes to God.

A PATTERN TO FOLLOW—in Honor of the Virgin Mary (whose Dormition we commemorate August 15)

Though she wasn't perfect, Mary did many things right. Therefore, as a godly woman and a faithful mother, she set an example for us to follow.

- An obedience and willingness to say yes to God.
May it be to me as you have said (Luke 1:38).
- A heart that believed the impossible and responded with praise.
My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior (verses 46-47).
- A submission to God's will and His timing.
She treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart (2:19).
- A heart that made requests but refused to make demands.
Do whatever He tells you to do (John 2:5).

Most of all, she exemplifies a heart of love that followed Christ to the cross and died to itself so that it might live with Him.

Because for Mary, Jesus's death was not the end. In a very real sense, it was a new beginning. After her Son's resurrection and ascension into heaven, Mary joined the disciples in the Upper Room as they waited for the promised coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14).

But after the birth of the church on the Day of Pentecost, the mother of Jesus disappeared into biblical anonymity. And perhaps that is best. For while she was an incredible woman, a tender mother, and a faithful disciple, I believe Mary would want to focus on Jesus. For He is the true treasure. Christ is the One we should ponder, worship, and adore.

And yet I want to learn from His mother as well.

I want my life to be a Bethlehem. I want to be a portal through which Christ may come into my world.

I want my heart to be a womb in which Jesus is not only birthed, but also a throne which He rules and reigns.

I want to have a Mary spirit.

For I believe God is still looking for willing people through whom He can work His purposes and perform His plans. People who say yes instead of asking how. People willing to sell all they possess in order to buy an ordinary that just might hold the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45-46).

Mary was that kind of person.

I wonder, what God could do through you and me if we stopped questioning His plan, stopped trying to understand, and simply said yes. What new, miraculous work could God accomplish in our world if just one or two of us said, "May it be me as you have said" (Luke 1:38)?

I don't know about you, but I want to find out.
"Here am I. Send me" (Isaiah 6:8).

Book Review

by Father Stavros

As you know, I'm not the greatest of readers, but in the past few months, with all the airplane travelling I have done, I have managed to read three books and hope to read more over the summer. One pertains to the life of Jesus, and the other two are for sports fans, which have both inspiring and religious overtones. I highly recommend the following:

Killing Jesus by Bill O'Reilly—Yes, it's THAT Bill O'Reilly, the Fox News political commentary, but his book on "Killing Jesus" has nothing to do with American politics, though it does touch on the politics of Rome and Judea at the time of Jesus. In the introduction to the book, O'Reilly says his intention is not for this to be a spiritual book, but rather a history book. It gives the history of what was happening at the time of Jesus and provides the historical background for why the crucifixion came about in the way that it did from a historical perspective. He goes back in time and talks about Roman Legions and how the soldiers were trained to be blood-thirsty. He writes about the death of Julius Caesar and how the Roman rulers ruled not only with an iron fist but how many were insecure that they could be assassinated at any time. The relationship of Rome (Pontius Pilate) and Israel (High Priest Caiaphas) is examined in detail. We learn also about who were the Pharisees and the Saducees, the scribes and the Sanhedrin. He discusses Jewish practices of purifications and ritual baptism, the significance of Passover and layout of Jerusalem. If you want a better understanding of the historical backdrop of Rome and Judea at the time of Christ, I highly recommend this book, not to be read in place of the Bible obviously, but to be used to help understand the political and social climate that existed at the time of Christ. Whether you like Bill O'Reilly's politics or not, you are sure to get a lot out of this book.

Wherever I Wind Up by R.A. Dickey—R.A. Dickey is a major league baseball pitcher for the Toronto Blue Jays. He was a Cy Young Award winner in 2012 (best pitcher in baseball) for the New York Mets. He is

also a sexual abuse survivor. This story chronicles his traumatic childhood, the demons that led him to attempt suicide in the minor leagues and the long road that led him to baseball glory. This book is not only for the baseball fan but for anyone who has survived sexual abuse or other types of crises in life. It is an inspiration book about not giving up and chasing your dreams despite the obstacles. There is also a lot of good baseball action in the book, and since R.A. Dickey is a modern player, you'll read about things going on in contemporary times on contemporary teams. An inspiring read!

The Closer by Mariano Rivera—Mariano Rivera is the most dominant relief pitcher in the history of baseball. He just retired from the New York Yankees last fall. But he didn't start off as a hall of fame pitcher. He was a high school drop out who worked on his dad's fishing boat in one of the poorest areas of Panama. He tried out for the New York Yankees with a borrowed glove and wore shoes with holes in them. From the poorest of neighborhoods, he rose to fame and stardom. Yet, the guiding force behind his success is a deep-seeded relationship with Christ, who he talks about continuously throughout the book. Yes, there are lots of good baseball stories in this book as well. But there are a lot of Biblical quotes and inspiring stories. He gives a refreshing take on how to deal with pressure and speaks about his overwhelming sense of gratitude for being able to live out his boyhood dream. In an era where athletes show a sense of entitlement and ego, this book offers a refreshing look at someone who never took anything for granted, enjoyed every moment on the field, and who has given back millions of dollars to help people. Two thumbs up for this one!



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Liturgical Schedule for August 2014

Friday, August 1

Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, August 3

Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone attending may serve

Ushers: Greg Tisdale, Demetrios Halkias, George Trimikliniotis

Welcoming Committee: Peggy Bradshaw (Greeter), Vickie Peckham (Greeter), Amy Karantaris (Ambassador) Donna Trakas (Caller) Dwight Forde and Ewana

Forde (Get Acquainted Sunday)

Coffee Hour: Palios Family

Monday, August 4 Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 6:00 p.m.

Wednesday, August 6

Transfiguration of our Savior

Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, August 10 Orthros 8:45 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone attending may serve

Ushers: Brett Mourer, Wayne Blankenship, Amin Hanhan

Welcoming Committee: Mike Palios (Greeter), Bessie Palios (Greeter), Skip Higdon, (Ambassador), Genie Carter (Caller)

Coffee Hour: Community Outreach

Monday, August 11 Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 6:00 p.m.

Wednesday, August 13

Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary

6:00 p.m.

Friday, August 15

Dormition of the Virgin Mary

Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, August 17 Orthros 8:45 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone attending may serve

Ushers: David Voykin, Ed Gerecke, Pete Trakas

Welcoming Committee: Tammy Christou and Marenca Patrasciou (Greeters); Donna Hambos (Ambassador) Sandra Pappas (caller)

Coffee Hour: Young at Heart

Sunday, August 24 Orthros 8:45 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone attending may serve

Ushers: Mike Trimis, George Mitseas, Chris Kavouklis

Welcoming Committee: Debbie Kavouklis and Jenny Paloumpis (Greeters); Katherine Sakkis (Ambassador), Martha Kapetan (Caller)

Coffee Hour: Philoptochos

Friday, August 29

Beheading of St. John the Baptist

Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, August 31 Orthros 8:45 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone attending may serve

Ushers: Florin Patrasciou, Kevin Fentress, Tammy Christou

Welcoming Committee: Carole Fotopoulos and Jeanie Nenos (Greeters), Bessie Palios (Ambassador), Megan Rindone (Caller)

Coffee Hour: Young at Heart

Sunday, September 7 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Altar Boys: New Schedule to take effect
Ushers: TBA
Welcoming Committee: Betty Katsamakis and Vanessa Aviles (Greeters), Lisa Alsina (Ambassador), Genie Carter (Caller); Theo and Marissa Panopoulos (Get Acquainted Sunday)
Coffee Hour: TBA

Monday, September 8 **Nativity of the Virgin Mary**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Thursday, September 11 **Remembrance of 9/11—Prayer for Peace in the World**
Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, September 14 **Universal Exaltation of the Holy Cross**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Procession of the Holy Cross

Altar Boys: new schedule to take effect
Ushers: TBA
Welcoming Committee: Julie Palios and Donna Trakas (Greeters), Helen Katzaras (Ambassador) Toula Courialis (Caller)
Coffee Hour: TBA

Liturgical Notes for August

Paraklesis Services of Supplication to the Virgin Mary

The service of Paraklesis or "Intercessory Prayer" to the Most Holy Theotokos, the Mother of God, is chanted during the fast period of the first fourteen days of August, preceding the Feast of the Koimisis or "Falling Asleep" of the Virgin Mary, which is August 15. During these fourteen days, the church observes a period of fasting, and the celebration of the Paraklesis Services. In this service we ask the Theotokos, the Mother of God, to pray for us and to intercede for us with her Son and our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not the Theotokos who saves us. Only God saves us. Thus we do not pray to the Theotokos, but we pray through the Theotokos, that through her intercession, we may find favor with God. The Paraklesis service is chanted not only for fourteen days in August, but can be chanted in at any time of the year, for those who are in need of prayer in time of sickness, despair, struggle, or any occasion, since any of life's experiences provide us an opportunity for prayer. The Paraklesis Service consists of soft, melodic chants of supplication to the Virgin Mary, and lasts about an hour. It is also one of few services in the church (another being the Artoklasia, the service of the Five Loaves), where we commemorate individuals out loud during the service. Enclosed in this Messenger is a paper on which to write the names of you and your families, loved ones and friends (who are living) to be commemorated at the Paraklesis Services in August. Please mail these to the church office, or bring them to the services. Paraklesis services will be held four times this August—Friday, August 1 (6:00 p.m.); Monday, August 4 (6:00 p.m.); Monday, August 11 and Wednesday, August 13 at 6:00 p.m. Please make an effort to attend at least one of these services to pray for you and your loved ones. The Feast of the Dormition will be celebrated with Divine Liturgy at 10:00 a.m. on Friday, August 15. We should all attempt to keep the fast, at least from meat, during the first fourteen days of August, and we should each plan to receive Holy Communion on August 10 or 15.

Transfiguration of our Savior-August 6-We read in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke, how Jesus was Transfigured on Mount Tabor in the presence of His Disciples. Matthew 17:2 says that "His face shone like the sun and His clothes became as white as the light." Jesus was shown in the fullness of His glory as God, and standing beside Him were Moses and Elijah, the two greatest prophets of the Old Testament. This showed the Disciples that the man Jesus was indeed God as well, and pre-figured His glory at the Resurrection and Ascension. Right after the Transfiguration, Jesus began to tell His disciples upon His upcoming Passion and Resurrection. The event of the Transfiguration probably happened only a few weeks before Palm Sunday. But since this feastday is so important, so it would not be lost in Lent, the Church has placed it on August 6, 40 days before the Feast of the Holy Cross (September 14), since the feast is tied to the Passion and Cross of Christ. Also, on August 6, we bless grapes, because it is the season of the harvest, in both material terms—this is the time of the year we harvest grapes. But also in spiritual terms—this was the time Jesus, through His blood, was going to harvest His followers into His kingdom.

Beheading of St. John the Baptist-August 29 - St. John the Baptist, according to the Gospel accounts, was beheaded in prison. We commemorate this event each year on August 29, which is also a strict fast day. As St. John the Baptist is the patron saint of our parish, we honor this feast day, and we pray for his intercessions over each of us and our parish.

COMMUNITY NEWS

New Altar Boys-Anyone young man entering 4th grade this fall or older is eligible to serve in the Altar at St. John. Please let Fr. Stavros know if you are interested by August 10. This coming year, there will be four teams. The new schedule will take effect on September 1. **There will be a meeting for all altar boys on Sunday, August 24 following the Divine Liturgy. All altar boys are requested to attend to go over procedures for how to serve in the altar. This meeting will last approximately 1 hour.**

2014 Archangel Michael Award Winners-Every year, the Metropolis of Atlanta recognizes one adult and young adult (or person who has made significant contribution to the youth) from each parish for their outstanding contributions to the life of their parish. They are recognized at a banquet and Divine Liturgy each November, which are held in Atlanta and presided over by His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios. This year, our award winners are **Donna Hambos** and **Betty Katherine (Palios) Katsamakis**. Congratulations Donna and Betty Katherine, and thank you for your outstanding contributions to our parish of St. John!

Small Group Bible Studies to resume in September—We will be resuming our small group Bible Studies the week of September 7. We will also be having a traditional bible study beginning in September as well as the Orthodox 101 fall class. Please see the bulletin and the September Messenger for details.

Successful Junior Olympics-A big THANK YOU goes out to Byron Nenos for organizing the 29th Annual Junior Olympics, which was held on June 13-15. Over 130 GOYAns and advisors from around North Florida participated this year. Thanks to Byron for the many hours he spent organizing this wonderful and successful event. Special thanks go to Elaine Halkias, George and Donna Hambos, Christine Scourtes, Ed and Terri Gerecke, Artie Palios, Mary Nenos, Peter Nenos, Kalliope Chagaris, Paula Karagounis, Angel and Lisa Alsina, George Halkias, Demetri Halkias, Thanasi Halkias, Christine Wagner, Dean and Maria Koutroumanis, Russell and Despina Sibley, Jenna Mingledorff, Christina Gerecke, Alexandra Gerecke, Tom Paloumpis, Alex Halikoytakis, John Mitchell, Stan Evdemon, Jeanie Nenos, John Nenos, Billy Nenos, Sia Blankenship, Stefan and Kara Katzaras, Helen Katzaris and many, many others who helped run the venues, drive and work in the kitchen to make this event a success.

Meeting of Ministry Heads-A meeting will take place for the heads of all ministries for the purpose of putting together a calendar for the upcoming year. The following ministry heads are requested to attend: Day School, Choir, Sunday School, Olympics, GOYA, Festival, Dance Groups, Philoptochos, Parish Council, Bookstore, Senior Group, Greek School, AHEPA. A mailing went out in the middle of July with a draft of a calendar to use as a starting point for important dates of the new school year. Please bring your ideas, your schedules, your plans and your ideas about hosting coffee hour to this meeting. It will be held in the Zaharias Room following Divine Liturgy on Sunday, August 10.

And to our High School Grads headed off to college, please send Fr. Stavros your new mailing address so we can add you to the Messenger list and keep you up to date with the goings on at St. John.

Get Acquainted Sunday—August 3-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 August will be Sunday, August 3.

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!

Constant Contact Emails-Our parish utilizes Constant Contact as a way of staying in touch with parishioners, particularly on subjects that are time sensitive, i.e. funerals, special events, and last minute announcements. To keep you apprised of news in our parish, we will probably be sending out 1 (and no more than 2) message per week. This is an effort not to clog your inbox but to keep you informed of the goings on in our parish.

Anyone interested in being an usher-Tom Georgas, our head usher, is always looking for people to assist him as ushers of our church on Sundays. Those who serve as ushers are assigned a Sunday to serve every 5-6 weeks and also during Holy Week. The ushers insure that we continue to have good order in our services by directing us to empty seats, answering questions, welcoming new people, and guiding people at Communion and after church. You can find Tom at Georgas@verizon.net.

Fr. Stavros to be out of town August 6 (after liturgy)-August 9—Fr. Stavros will be on vacation from August 6-9. He will be the celebrant at all services in August. For any pastoral needs on August 6-9, please contact the office.

Live Streaming of Divine Liturgy-Thanks to the hard work of Kevin Fentress and Paul Assimiades, and an anonymous generous donation, we are now live-streaming the Divine Services of the Church. If you go to our website, www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com and find on the menu bar the live streaming option, you can easily tune into the Liturgy if you are unable to attend. Please bear in mind that watching a service on your computer is not a substitute for coming to church. You should attend church in person. However, for shut-ins, people who have a hard time getting to night services, parents with babies, if you are at home on a week-day and want to hear a week-day service, if you are sick, or can't make the service for some reason, or if you are out of town, please feel free to tune in. The services are live-streamed only and will not be archived.

Connection Cards—We now have what are called “Connection Cards” in the pews of our church. Obviously we want everyone to be connected to our church. If someone is new to our church, we should encourage them to fill out a connection card and join our church. **If your contact information has changed, please fill out a connection card and send it to the office so we can update your address, email, etc.**



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.

Parish Registry

Baptism—Caroline Grace Anton, daughter of Alex and Kristen Anton, was baptized on Sunday, May 25. Godparents were John and Liliana Andreopoulos and Alan and MaryPat Miguel. Na Sas Zisi!

Chrismation-Suzanne Pileggi was Chrismated on Sunday, June 15. Her sponsor was Maria Costas. Congratulations!

Wedding-Perry Katsamakis and Betty Katherine Palios were married on Sunday, May 25. Koumbaroi were Theodoros and Marisa Panopoulos. Congratulations!

Funeral-Daniel Karpelenia passed away on May 29. His funeral service was held on June 6. May his memory be eternal!

Condolences to Mary Maas, on the passing away of her mother, Joan Maas, on May 29. May her memory be eternal!

Condolences to the Skourellos family, on the passing of Rose Rodriguez, maternal grandmother of Dante and Petros Skourellos, on Tuesday, June 3. May her memory be eternal!

Condolences to Fr. Stavros and Lisa on the passing of Nicholas Akrotirianakis (Father’s father) on June 16. May his memory be eternal!

Condolences to Pam Irwin on the passing of her mother Pat Botner, on June 23. May her memory be eternal!

Names to be Commemorated for Paraklesis

Please write the names of all those whom you wish to be commemorated in the Paraklesis Services this August. Friday, August 1; Monday, August 4;Monday, August 11 and Wednesday, August 13, services will be at 6:00 p.m. Please mail into the office or bring to church as soon as possible.

AHEPA

AHEPA FAMILY RECRUITING MEMBERS

The AHEPA Family invites all members of the Community to join us. Please consider joining one of the following: AHEPA (adult men), Daughters of Penelope (adult ladies), Sons of Pericles (young men) & Maids of Athena (young ladies). After liturgy we will have tables in the Kourmolis Center on the third Sunday of the next three months each month with applications & detail information on these great organizations. The AHEPA family mission is to promote Hellenism, Education, Philanthropy, Civic Responsibility, Family and Individual Excellence. Contact our Recruitment Chairman Ron "Kuriakos" Myer at (813) 523-5583/aspis60@yahoo.com or the AHEPA President, Gus Paras at (813) 254-6980 or the Daughters President, Edie Kavouklis at (813) 813-758-0305.

GOYA

Our first GOYA meeting of the new school year will be held on Sunday, August 24, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner will be provided. One parent of each GOYAn is asked to attend the meeting also—there will be a parents' meeting with GOYA Advisor Elaine Halkias while the GOYAns meet with Fr. Stavros to go over procedures for the year, review the yearly calendar, fill out emergency forms and arrange for parents to sign up to do a meal for one of the meetings.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday School Teachers Seminar—August 23—Our Sunday School teachers are invited to attend a seminar on Saturday, August 23, beginning at 9:00 a.m. Fr. Stavros will lead sessions and answer questions, as we prepare for the beginning of the new Sunday School Year!

Sunday School Classes will begin on September 7—Sunday School Registration will take place on August 24 and August 31 following the Divine Liturgy each Sunday.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Thank you to everyone who continues to support our Community Outreach ministry to serve the homeless and those in need. For those who don't know, we serve breakfast at First Presbyterian Church on the third Saturday of each month from 8:00-10:30 a.m. Upcoming dates are Saturday, August 16 and September 20. For more information or to sign up to serve one Saturday, please contact, please contact Betty Katherine Katamakis at bettypalios@gmail.com or 813-468-1596.

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Has 2014 been Our Year of Faith? It's Not too Late.

By Charlie Hambos

In January, I listed 25 ways to make 2014 our year of faith. How did we do? To be very honest, I didn't do that great. The year isn't over yet and as summer comes to a close we might be looking for a spiritual boost. I am republishing the list from January with one or two changes. We need to take a look and see what we have done and work on a couple others. I would love to hear about your experiences with this list. Remember, let's take our faith to a new level. Don't think to hard about it. Don't make a schedule. Just try one thing at a time. There is no particular level of importance. So pick a few, if not all and run with them.

1. Find your Saint – Figure out who your patron saint is. Google him or her and read about them. Chances are really good we will learn something exciting.
2. Get the Daily Readings app or e-mail – Head over to the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Website and sign up for the Daily readings e-mail or download the app for your device of choice. Read the scripture each day and learn about the saint of the day.
3. Come to Orthros – Every Sunday before Divine Liturgy, Orthros is celebrated. Listen to the hymns rejoicing in the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and also the Saint or feast of the day. Plus, then we will be there early for Divine Liturgy.
4. Go to Weekday Liturgy – At least once a week, St. John's celebrates an Orthros and a Divine Liturgy for a particular saint of the church or a feast day. There is something about going to church on another day besides Sunday that is really good for the soul.
4. Join a Bible Study group – By now, we have heard about the wonderful happenings of the Small Bible Group Studies that are happening. Involving ourselves with the faith more than on Sundays is always something beneficial.
5. Listen to some Byzantine Chant on Youtube – Search Byzantine chant. There are a lot of good things there. English, Greek, Slavonic.
6. Visit myocn.net – This is a great resource all around. There are many informative podcasts on the church as well as contemporary issues.
7. Invite a friend to church – One of our goals as Christians is to spread the Gospel to all the nations. We can start with our friends. Many people do not go to church because they are never invited. The Orthodox worship experience is meant to be very interactive and never boring. We have a fantastic choir. Not to mention the iconography and stain glass windows which are just beautiful.
8. Go to as many Paraklesis as Possible – Look at our Liturgical Schedule for August and try to go to at least 2 of these services a week. The Paraklesis or the Supplication Service to the Virgin Mary is where we call upon the Mother of God to intercede for us to her son, Jesus Christ. The Theotokos will bring you great comfort.
9. Follow along in services – We have the Red/Maroon/Burgundy Divine Liturgy books. There are also the spiral bound books with phonetics and English. Read the prayers that we don't usually hear. They are really moving.
10. Like St. John's on Facebook! Then invite your friends.
11. Follow uplifting things on Facebook, Twitter and other Social Media – Throughout the day, scrolling through feeds and feeds of what our friends our doing will more than likely leave us feeling pretty empty inside. Break it up by following "Orthodoxy on Purpose," "Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America," "The Philokalia: Daily Readings," "Orthodoxy Heterodoxy," "Saint Catherine's Vision." These are just a few that I subscribe to. Pass it on too!
12. Just say yes!
13. Pray in the morning and at night – We hear it all the time. It doesn't have to be long and wordy or even from a book. Just say hello, thanks and do the sign of the cross.
14. Learn something new – We all have those times where we see something and want to know what it means. This goes for our entire life but what about the church and our faith. Think about something and learn more about it.
15. Iconography – Stop, look around and enjoy the beautiful Iconography of our church. Each one is a window into heaven. Just as we look into the scene depicted, the scene is looking at us and inviting us to keep our eyes on Christ.
16. Make a prayer list – Start with family and friends. Then add those who are sick. Add the prayer list from the bulletin. It will make your relationship with each of those people better and get us one step closer to God.
17. Talk to someone new – Many people need a friend or just a hug or just an open ear. We need to make ourselves more available.
18. Explore the Gospels – The Life of Christ and his teachings. Plus each Gospel has a different twist. There is a lot more there than what we hear in the church each Sunday.
19. Explore St. Paul – St. Paul is simply incredible. His letters are something to cherish. My personal favorite is Ephesians. Or start by reading 1 and 2 Timothy and pretend that you are Timothy receiving the words of Paul.
20. Read the Psalms – Every Orthodox service uses the Psalms. Why not make it a bigger part of our life.
21. Get on the attitude of gratitude – Just say thank you, especially to God for giving us another day, for friends, family and everything that we have. If we remember what we are thankful for we will be much happier.
22. Say hello! – To a friend or a stranger at church, at school, in the store or wherever we go. There is nothing to lose.
23. Forgive – In Matthew 6:14-15 Christ says, "Yes, if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours; but if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failings either." Wow! We have to pay attention to this.
24. Love one another – "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. You must love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew 22:36-40
25. Write a friend a note! – Just say Thank you! Or Hello! It's something nice and it shows someone that we are thinking about them.

Remember, please share your experience with this list and ask me about more resources to enhance your faith this year. Just write me a quick note at Charlie.hambos@gmail.com or call me at 813-843-8471 or leave me a voicemail at the office 813-876-8830 ext. 102. God Bless you and thank you for making St. John's your home away from home.

Stewardship Welcoming Committee

Our Welcoming Committee has been busy at work for the last few months. We have welcomed over 50 new people, averaging 2-4 new people each week. It is a rewarding service to our church and to those who are coming to St. John for the first time.

The Welcoming Committee wants to encourage new people and visitors to learn about Saint John Greek Orthodox Church in Tampa, FL and to feel at home in our church, in the fellowship hour, and in the many other activities that comprise our parish life. The ultimate purpose of this committee is to actively invite our fellow Orthodox Christians in our community to worship with us, that we greet them warmly, welcome all who enter our doors, offer a place to serve in ministry, and make all feel included. Our goal is to create an experience that is both spiritual and familial, leading them to further serve God and others.

If you are outgoing, friendly and have a love of our Church, then this is the place for you! We need many volunteers to help each week greeting our newcomers and making introductions. We will have a team of four people each Sunday to serve on a rotating basis as greeters in the church and as ambassadors in the Kourmolis Center during coffee hour. We will also need a team to make follow up phone calls to our new potential church members to give them a personal, immediate connection with our parish community. We would love to have enough volunteers so that the commitment would only be once every two –three months.

The positions on the welcoming committee include:

Greeters—two people who greet our parishioners and especially new people at the door each Sunday and get “connection cards” from new people and anyone who needs to make changes in their “connection” to the church.

Ambassador—one person in the hall who helps connect new people with members of our community

Caller—one person who each week follows up with the new people in the church to offer encouragement and assistance in getting them integrated with the community.

If you are interested in joining this ministry, please contact Maria Xenick at mpxenick@gmail.com.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Hebrews 13:2

Meeting Schedule for June/July

Tuesday, August 5	Young at Heart	11:30 a.m.	TBA
Sunday, August 10	Ministry Heads	Following Liturgy	Zaharias Room
Tuesday, August 12	Parish Council	6:15 p.m.	Multipurpose Room
Saturday, August 23	Sunday School Teachers Seminar	9:00 a.m.	Kourmolis Center
Sunday, August 24	GOYA	5:00-7:30 p.m.	Kourmolis Center

Stewardship Update (as of July 15)

	2014	2013
Pledged Families	304	265
Amount Pledged	\$380,804.04	\$294,668
Average Pledge	\$1,252	

If you have pledged for 2013, we sincerely thank you for your support of our church. If you have not pledged for 2013, we ask that you please do so today. If you need a pledge form, please contact the church office and we'll be happy to send you one today. As you can see, we are ahead of last year's pledged amount (good) but behind last year's pledged number of families. Please make your stewardship pledge TODAY if you haven't done so. In order to be considered a member of good standing of the church, you must fill out a form every year. If you need a pledge form, please contact the church office. Thanks!

Sports vs. Church

November 13, 2013—taken from the www.familydiscipleshippath.com website

WARNING: The following may make you uncomfortable...may even make you mad!

Last Sunday morning I found myself sitting on a soccer field with one of my children for a tournament game. It was a beautiful morning. The sun was shining. I was enjoying some fabulous coffee.

I was also experiencing great frustration and conflict. I was frustrated because I could count 20 families from our church who were also at sports games that morning. This meant that these families were not at church.

I was also conflicted as I reflected on how I got into this situation. My husband and I know the value of church family. We know that consistency is very important for our children to build relationships with their church family and to grow as disciples of Christ. We have made many decisions over the years to say "no" to other things in order to say "yes" to church. And, yet, here I was on a soccer field on a Sunday morning! A couple weeks earlier the coach gathered the parents around and presented this opportunity for the soccer tournament that would land on a Saturday and Sunday. The way it was put to us, I felt like I had no choice but to participate. The team wouldn't be able to play in the tournament unless everyone chose to play. If we said no, we would be letting down 12 other kids.

So, here I was sitting on the sidelines of a soccer game contemplating the predicament of so many families. Many families I've talked to about this feel like they have no choice for a variety of reasons. Maybe it's a sport that our kids love, maybe there are opportunities that would be missed if we pulled our kids, maybe we feel an obligation to a team, maybe there's real potential in our little athletes that may never be recognized. There are many reasons that we come to the decisions that keep our families away from church. I completely understand how we get there – but I also know the long term effect that missing church will take on our families. And that's the predicament that has been tormenting me.

Now, I'm not saying that one missed Sunday is going to derail your children's spiritual growth. But I have noticed that our society is set up to undermine this discipline of regular fellowship with our church family. So unless we are very vigilant to protect our church commitment, we can quickly find that one Sunday missed has become many Sundays missed, and before long church has ceased to be a habit and is reduced to something we do when we don't have anything else to do on Sunday mornings.

When we say "yes" to one thing, we are saying "no" to something else. I have seen it too easily happen that without meaning to reject church, families are saying "yes" to extracurricular activities – but this "yes" is also a "no" to consistency at church activities and developing relationships with our church family. I have spoken to so many parents who spend years on the field, at the pool, on the ski slopes, in the gym, or in the studio and

when they get to the other side of these years have deep regrets. Their children don't want to go to church, they don't have relationships with peers or leaders who know and love Jesus, and they have not developed the discipline of making church a priority. These parents who now have grown children have expressed that they would do it different if they could go back and do it again. I have had several parents with grown children express that it was not worth it. They did not carefully guard their priorities and allowed other commitments to push out what was most important. They can look back and see that the time spent on other activities directly affected their children's relationship with church and this directly affected their relationship with God.

Church attendance is not the goal...however, church is the way that God has provided for people to grow in their knowledge and love of who God is and build relationships with other disciples and from this time of focusing on Jesus and connecting with others who love Jesus we can go out into the world and spread the good news of Jesus Christ and his love with others.

I'm back to my predicament....I know that church is important....I also feel like I don't have a choice sometimes. Can we learn from the parents that have gone before us? Can we step back a bit and think about the adults that we are raising? What if our children get to their early 20's and have no relationship with God or other disciples of Jesus? Will we look back and say, "Well, at least they made it to the championships!"? Or will we look back with regrets and disappointment that our priorities were not reflected on our calendar?

Like I said earlier, this particular weekend I could count 20 families in the same position that I found myself in. Most were also frustrated and feeling helpless. Most of my friends find themselves making this no-win choice at some point in the year depending on the season. Many families are even sacrificing rest and are so busy and going so hard that they are making themselves physically sick.

Could there be a better way? What if we ALL joined together and said, "NO! No more sports on Sundays!"? When we were kids, there was never anything scheduled on Sundays. We never had to choose between sports and church. Sundays were saved for church and family and gathering with friends. Can we reclaim our Sundays if we all worked together?

I propose that we give it a try! I also will say that even if our society won't cooperate, for me and my family I will do what I can to maintain consistency for my children to be at church and build relationships with other kids and youth who know and love Jesus! I will not tell you what is best for your family...I will encourage you to take some time out to prayerfully consider this, talk it over with your spouse, and make sure your priorities determine your calendar and not the other way around.



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BRIDGEPREP ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

A Bilingual Academy for Learning

What is a Charter School?

Charter schools are new, innovative public schools that are accountable for student results. They are designed to deliver programs tailored to educational excellence and the needs of the communities they serve.

Charter schools are one of the fastest and most successful growing reforms in the country. Based on the belief that America's public schools should meet standards of excellence and be held accountable, parents are lining up to choose these innovative public schools that are able to meet the individual needs of their children.

Charter schools operate on three basic principles:

- § **Choice:** Charter schools give families an opportunity to pick the school for their child.
- § **Accountability:** Charter schools are judged on how well they meet the student achievement goals.
- § **Freedom:** While charter schools adhere to the same laws and regulations as all other public schools, they are freed from the red tape that often diverts a school's energy and resources away from educational excellence.

Why are charter schools so popular?

- § **Educational quality:** Charter schools make sure every child has access to a quality education. With the freedom and choice to do so, charters set higher standards.
- § **Focus on the children:** A charter school is set up around the needs of children. The focus of the program is designed to help children succeed, no matter what it takes.
- § **Safer, stronger communities:** Charter schools engage local businesses and organizations to help provide resources and services to

"Where learning is a journey!"

Bridgeprep Academy believes every child learns best in a safe, nurturing and stimulating environment where high academic expectations, self esteem, good character and an appreciation for the arts are promoted. Bridgeprep Academy's mission is to provide a challenging academic curriculum that will encompass an enriched Spanish language program, technology and experiences that will enable students to develop in all areas. Bridgeprep Academy's goal is to educate well rounded individuals and enable students to reach their maximum potential.

Bridgeprep Academy is an "A" rated K-8th grade school and offers a first class education which also includes an extended Spanish language program. The Spanish language program consists of one hour per day of Spanish language instruction for speakers and non-speakers of the Spanish language in all grade levels. The goal of the dual language program is to educate students to develop proper reading, writing and language skills in Spanish and English.

The school is also committed to providing a technology rich environment with access to the media center, mobile lab top carts and computers, promethium boards, and educational software programs such as Accelerated Reader, Reading Plus and Ticket to Read.



BRIDGEPREP ACADEMY CHARTER | For more information on locations:

www.bridgeprepacademy.com

305.595.8822

Appreciation for the Arts

Bridgepoint Academy consider Art and Music education an essential part of making a child's education well balanced. Research studies point to strong relationships between learning in the arts and fundamental cognitive skills and capacities used to master other core subjects, including reading, writing, and math. The school is dedicated to the arts, which deepens their engagement, expands their opportunities for learning and nurtures an appreciation in students for the arts. Students are introduced to different composers, various instruments, learn to sing, as well as, use mediums such as watercolor, paints, art history lessons and exposure to artists from across the centuries to further enhance their artistic knowledge.



PROGRAM OFFERINGS

Instructional Support:

The students will be exposed to state adopted instructional curriculum and differentiated instruction by highly qualified and trained staff. Target student academic support will be available for those students requiring small group interventions and advanced academic instruction will be available for those students demonstrating high academic achievement. The school offers an engineering program for gifted students that integrates engineering and technology concepts and skills with elementary science topics.

Before & After Care/Enrichment Classes:

Enrichment classes are offered on campus for a fee. We support and promote programs that provide opportunities for the children to grow physically, culturally, intellectually, and socially. Activities include ballet/dance, karate, tee ball/baseball, soccer, tennis, golf, art, music, yoga, tutoring, cheerleading, flag football, basketball, chess and drama. The School office can provide you with a list of the specific programs that are being offered after school and their fees. Quality before and after care options are also available for parents needing care and home work assistance for their children.

Parental Involvement:

The school provides many opportunities for parents to get involved. Volunteers are welcomed to sign up to do story time, assist at festivals, provide materials for special events, activities, and/or celebrations. The goal is to build a strong partnership between the school and home in order to best serve the children's educational and social needs. Parents will be required to serve a minimum amount of volunteer as part of their parent contract. In addition, the parents will be encouraged to actively participate in the PTA in order to be a voice in their child's education.

Monthly Newsletter & Calendar, Family Fun Events and Parent Workshops:

The School's Monthly Calendar is available online to keep parents informed of their children's activities at school, promote the monthly activities, family fun events, and workshops. Throughout the school year in an effort to encourage parental involvement and create a community amongst the school and families, family fun events and parent workshops will be coordinated. Family Fun Events are a great way to bring families together to participate in fun activities that everyone can enjoy and create long lasting memories for the school, the children, and their families. Family fun events encourage and allow the children and their families to interact socially outside of the typical school day and/or school environment.

Field Trips & Hands on Learning:

Teachers will provide students with opportunities to explore and learn from the environment outside of the classroom, to make the learning come alive, and provide the students with experiences that will make the learning fun. Educational field trips are an integral part of the instructional program as they provide participants with first hand experience and hands on learning related to the topic or concept being discussed in class and help solidify learning. They also provide unique opportunities for learning that extend beyond the four walls of the classroom and deepen their knowledge.

How to Apply to Bridgeprep Academy Charter Schools?

- ξ Go to www.bridgeprepacademy.com
- ξ Click "I want to apply." on the bottom left corner.
- ξ Choose the location you are interested in applying.
- ξ Fill out the Application of Interest and click submit.

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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—Whittier, CA

James and April Dellas

Mary Hatzikazakis—from Bristol, TN

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



~ August 2014 ~						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
3 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	4 ** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	5 ** Young at Heart 11:30 am	6 ** Transfiguration Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	7 **	1 ** Beginning of the Dormition Fast Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	2 **
10 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Meeting of Ministry Heads after Liturgy	11** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	12 ** Parish Council 7:00 p.m.	13 **	14 **	15 Dormition of the Virgin Mary Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	16 Community Outreach
17 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	18	19	20 **	21	22**	23
24 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. GOYA Kick-off 5:00pm	25	26	27**	28	29 ** Beheading of St. John the Baptist Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	30
31 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Wedding						

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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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

Pastoral Assistant: Charlie Hambos

813-876-8830 (office) 813-843-8471 (cell)

charlie.hambos@gmail.com

Parish Council:

Alkis Crassas, President 813-690-3867

Carole Fotopoulos, Vice-President 813-982-0947

Sandra Pappas, Secretary 813-835-3898

Dante Skourellos, Treasurer 813-765-9534

Nick Antonakakis 813-477-6639

Catherine Mitseas 813-571-0685

Ed Gerecke 813-229-4306

Skip Higdon 813-831-9021

Mike Kafantaris 727-821-0193

David Voykin 727-415-5603

Mike Xenick 813-340-8737

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Debbie Bowe-Administrative Assistant 813-876-8830

Office Fax:

813-443-4899

Stewardship Chairperson:

Pete Trakas 813-505-2193

•Welcoming Committee:

Maria Xenick 813- 839-9897

•Choir: Artie Palios, Director

Jim Leone, Organist 813-254-7844

•Chanter: Nick Andreadakis

813- 516-6081

•Sunday Sch.: Victoria Peckham

813-406-5626

•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: Debbie Nicklow

813-920-0892

Amy Kafantaris

727-743-1297

•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: Carole Fotopoulos 813-982-0947

Mary Nenos 813-935-2096

•Jr Olympics: Byron Nenos 813-789-0729

•Ushers: Tom Georgas 813-985-0236

•Altar Angels:

Engie Halkias & 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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The **Messenger** of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is published on a monthly basis. Publication is the first of each month. Deadline for notices and announcements for the Messenger is the 10th of each month. You may send announcements to the church office or through email to: stjohnoctampa@gmail.com

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