

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

September 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.

An Invitation to our Community

Liturgy for my 10th Anniversary—September 7—The word “Eucharist” in Greek is “Eucharistia”. And from “Eucharistia”, we take the word “Epharisto,” which in Greek means “Thank you.” So “Eucharistia” means “Thanksgiving” and the Eucharist is the “Holy Thanksgiving.” People have asked me what I want for my ten year anniversary—What I want most is to thank God for ten great years by celebrating the Divine Liturgy, and sharing the Eucharist with you. So, on Sunday, September 7, I would love for EVERYONE in our community to come to the Divine Liturgy, so that I can thank God for you and pray to God to guide our next decade together. There will be an Artoklasia that Sunday, and we will pray to God to extend His blessings over our community and over my continued ministry in it. And when I distribute the antithoron that Sunday, I would like the opportunity to personally greet and thank everyone who is associated with our community. It would mean a lot to me to see EVERYONE in church on September 7.

Father Stavros’ Message

A Look Back and a Look Ahead—a Reflection on Ten Years of Ministry at St. John

It was a warm late August evening when we arrived in Tampa 10 years ago. I was told by His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios that I was moving to Tampa beginning in September 2004. I learned this in late June. We announced the transfer on July 4, that I was leaving Asheville. We came to Tampa for a quick and anonymous visit in late July. We purchased a home near the airport on the west side of town. The official announcement that I was coming to Tampa was made on August 4 at the Metropolis office in Atlanta. I met that day with +Andy Paloumpis+ (of blessed memory) and Chris Kavouklis, representing the Parish Council. In subsequent weeks I made a few phone calls down here—I remember speaking to Andy and to Chris, also to Elaine Halkias and Artie Palios by phone.

You could say that we swept into town like a hurricane and you wouldn’t be far off. A hurricane my first weekend in Tampa cancelled my first liturgy and my first scheduled wedding (George and Zackie Ameres, who got married a few weeks later). I remembered being hunkered down at the Tahitian Inn for eight days, as our moving truck wouldn’t bring out stuff because of the hurricane. I remember venturing out to McDonalds on a flooded Dale Mabry and getting an egg McMuffin at 3:00 p.m. That was the last time I had one of those—normally I do not like those things but food supplies were scarce so we gratefully at whatever we could find.

The church had no electricity for my first liturgy which was actually on Wednesday,

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September 8, the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary. There were five people in church that morning and we celebrated the way they did in the old days—no lights, no air conditioning and no microphones. Kind of an inauspicious beginning. Our stuff arrived later that day and we moved into our house and shortly thereafter moved my stuff into the church office. Back then, the church office was in what is presently the bookstore and the priest office was in the small room behind it. On September 26, there was yet another hurricane and another cancelled liturgy. Interestingly enough, I lived in New England for six years and never missed a Sunday liturgy because of weather (snow), and moving to “sunny Florida” I missed two liturgies in the first month.

Back in 2004, The Messenger was a twice-yearly publication. We had no ushers. There were only two boys in the altar my first Sunday. And the prosthora was purchased exclusively from a bakery in Tarpon. There were only a handful of kids in GOYA. And none of our GOYAnS had ever been to St. Stephen’s Summer Camp. We hadn’t participated in the Oratorical Festival in years. Just about everything in the altar was in disrepair. The church had blue carpeting. And a leaky roof. Most significantly, the church was less than half-full each Sunday. There were just over 200 stewards in 2004.

Fast forward to 2014, we see that a lot has changed. The Messenger is now a substantial publication and comes out 11 times per year. We have an army of ushers. And an army of altar boys—most Sundays we have more than 10 in the altar. In fact, we have FORTY young men signed up to serve in the altar this year. Here’s one other AWESOME thing about the altar boys—going forward, beginning this year, most of these altar boys are young men I baptized. How cool is that!

Early on in my tenure, a generous donor enabled us to purchase all new robes for our altar boys. Many generous donations have enabled us to get all new furnishings in the altar, from the sacred vessels to the altar cloths. We have several people who offer the Prosthora, including our Sunday school students baking it many times per year. Our GOYA numbers over 30 teenagers. And this year, nearly 20 people from our church attended St. Stephen’s Summer Camp as campers or counselors (see separate articles). Thanks to Peggy Bradshaw, we’ve participated in the Oratorical Festival for the past several years, and have had our students get to the Metropolis level of competition. Along the way we replaced the carpeting (now red), put a new roof on the church, fixed the iconography and many other things that have been in disrepair (like the air conditioning) (repairs are ongoing). We relocated the offices to the current locations and created a bookstore. We have well over 300 steward families who call St. John’s their home. Stewardship in 2004 was about \$120,000 per year. For this year we are nearing \$400,000 for our goal. Our church is packed just about every Sunday of the year. We’ve got a youth choir. We have several Bible studies (see separate article), an Orthodoxy 101 class, a welcoming committee, and we’ve just hired our first pastoral assistant, Charlie Hambos. There are two adult retreats held each year and one GOYA Lenten Retreat (combine all of that and we’ve had 30 retreats). There have been 20 GOYA lock-ins in the past ten years. St. John Greek Orthodox Day School closed in 2012, and we currently rent our facilities to an organization called Smart Starts, which just converted their school to a charter school. We have three dance groups, a bookstore, a senior group (Young at Heart) and a food pantry. We feed the homeless once a month with our community outreach and do many other service projects throughout the year.

Looking at the parish registry, since September 2004, there have been a total of

114	Weddings
255	Baptisms
68	Funerals
53	Chrismations

The Divine Liturgy has been celebrated an average of 100 times per year. That’s nearly 1,000 liturgies in ten years. Combine that with the sacraments, Lent and Holy Week Services, Paraklesis in August, and all the other services held during the year, all totaled, I have stood at the altar of St. John’s nearly 2,000 times in ten years.

Some things that were here in 2004 that are still here in 2014—an outstanding choir, directed by Artie Palios, and an outstanding chanter, Nick Andreadakis. I’m thankful to have shared the liturgical life with them over the past decade and hope we have many more years to share the worship services together. Over the years, we’ve added some new music and a few new faces to the choir. We have done 10 more years of the Junior Olympics and 10 more years of the Greek Festival. The leadership of both has changed, and there have been significant upgrades to the Festival.

Charlie Hambos was a 16 year old teenager who was in the altar my first Sunday. He’s now 26, a graduate of our seminary, and our first pastoral assistant and I couldn’t be more proud of him. Sometime in this next decade, I look forward to him taking his place at the altar as a priest.

There have lots of things that have happened in my personal life these last ten years. When I arrived in Tampa, I was a few pounds lighter and had a lot more hair. We also did not have any children. That changed in December 2006 with the arrival of our son, Nicholas, who is now nearly 8. My parents and in-laws have made several visits to Tampa over the years. Sadly, my Dad passed away just shy of my ten years in Tampa, on June 16 of this year. With the exception of two years (2012-2013), I have directed and continue to direct St. Stephen’s Summer Camp. I also spent two years working with the choirs of our Metropolis, and over the years have travelled to many churches both in the area and out of it, to offer retreats.

I remember my first Sunday, September 12, 2014. I remember that I had mixed feelings that morning. I had left a ministry in Asheville, NC, where I have served for 4.5 years and knew every member by name. On my last Sunday in Asheville, when I distributed Holy Communion, I knew every name. On my first Sunday in Tampa, I didn’t know ANY name. And I wondered, would I ever get to know everyone.

Well ten years have passed, almost in the blink of an eye. There have been triumphs and mistakes, mountains and valleys. But as I cross over from one decade and enter a second, my overwhelming feeling is one of gratitude and joy. I’m grateful to God for the many meaningful experiences I have had in the past ten years. I’m grateful for the miracles I have witnessed, as people have turned their lives towards Christ. I’m grateful for every time someone has told me that they pray for me and my family. I’m thankful to have shared your joys—weddings and baptisms—and your sorrows. I’m honored to have shared your burdens in the sacrament of confession. I’ve enjoyed sharing knowledge at retreats and classes. And I’ve loved the impromptu conversations, of which there are too many to count, that have happened at the most unlikely times. These are what bring the true richness to my life and ministry. I’ve spent ten namedays, ten Christmases, and ten Holy Weeks with the same congregation, at the same altar. I hope and pray that there will be many more.

September is the kick-off month for many events at our church. It sets the tone for the rest of the liturgical year. As you know the church year begins September 1 of each year. That’s why I’m so glad I began my ministry on September 1, 2004. There are many events in September which are listed throughout this issue of the Messenger. There is a GOYA lockin on September 6. Small group Bible Studies kick off the week of September 8. Sunday school will kick off on September 14. Our first youth Sunday of the fall is September 28. A pre-teen retreat will be held the same day. And the Orthodoxy 101 fall class will start September 29.

Looking Ahead to the Next Ten Years

When I arrived in Tampa, I never gave much thought to how long I’d serve here. Only God knows how long that will be. As I said in a recent sermon, every day is a gift, and today is all we know for certain, actually this moment is all we know for certain. If it is God’s will, I hope I’ll still be here in September of 2024. That seems so far away when I right it. But in 2004, 2014 felt far away and here we are.

Since I am a history person though, as well as a goal-oriented person, I’ll go on record putting down a few goals to achieve by 2024 (and if I’m still here in 2024, I’ll reprint this list to see how we did), and let’s see how far we get in achieving them.

1. **Retain a greater percentage** of those who get married and baptize children in our parish. If we had 255 children under age 10 and their families in church—all those who got baptized in the past ten years, we'd need a larger church RIGHT NOW!!! And we'd probably have 450-500 families right now!
2. **Building an infrastructure—getting everyone involved**—we have lots of people who have talents. All talents are needed to move our church forward. And getting everyone involved in a ministry is a great way to build community and further the message of the Gospel. We've developed new ministries over the past ten years and we hope to develop even more new ones in the next ten. So, if you aren't involved yet, I encourage you to do so.
3. **Increasing our stewardship**—our giving of not only time and talent but of financial resources has increased and must continue to increase. People are understanding more and more what sacrificial giving is all about, and that there is JOY in giving to Christ's Church in Tampa. If our stewardship went from \$120,000 to \$400,000 in ten years, what if it went up by the same percentage in the next ten years. Think about all the possibilities for growth, ministry and outreach that a 200% increase in stewardship could bring!!!
4. **Increasing our ministries, especially Community Outreach**—as I said above, there are many new ministries that have been added to the church these past ten years. And the one I'm most proud of is our Community Outreach. Once a month, a large group from our church feeds the homeless at a church downtown. Several times a year, we do parish-wide volunteer events at Metropolitan Ministries. We've established a food pantry to feed those who don't have food. I hope to establish a ministry of giving rides to people, as well as a sustained visitation ministry to care for the sick, and hope that these two things can be achieved in the next year or two. But we want to make outreach to the community central to what we are doing as a parish.
5. **Paying off all of our debts**—the church has a sizeable mortgage because of the school building that was never paid off and the debts created by the former school. While the new charter school that rents our space is enabling us to stay current on the mortgage, it would be nice at some point to make a push to retire the mortgage so that income from the school could be revenue and could be put to other projects, not just repaying past debt. This is not the priority THIS year, but hopefully in the next ten, we'll get it done.
6. **Updating our buildings**—We continue to make repairs on our buildings, which are good and well used buildings, but which are getting older and in need of repairs. We slowly and steadily are patching up things that are in need of fixing.
7. **Adding a second priest**—we've taken the big step of hiring a pastoral assistant in 2014. This is going to allow our community to continue to grow both in quantity and in quality. Over the next ten years, we will hopefully see our pastoral assistant become an assistant priest, and going forward, maintain a standard of two full-time clergymen working in this parish.
8. **Dare I say it?**—enlarging our church—If the next ten years play out the way the last ten years have, if we double our congregation in the next ten the way we did in the last ten, we will need a larger church. Of course, this goal depends on the continued growth of our church, the continued establishment of our infrastructure, the continued growth of stewardship and the retiring of our loan. That's why this goal is last on the list. But goals are not achieved unless they are set—why not set the bar high? This is a goal that God-willing we will move toward in the next ten years—maybe not achieve (but who knows) but move forward towards achieving it.

And now I'll make another prediction, and this one is not a positive prediction—in the next ten years, it's going to get harder to be an Orthodox Christian. Ten years ago, there were no I-pads, I-pods or smart phones. We weren't all addicted to our devices. There is

most definitely an anti-Christian sentiment in our country, and an anti-Christ sentiment. The moral fabric that once wove our society together is in even more tattered shape than it was ten years ago. Just in the first week of August, we've been bombarded with news of the Ebola virus outbreak, the ISIS crisis in Iraq, and the apparent suicide of a popular actor. More people than ever are suffering from depression. And the pace of life just keeps moving quicker and quicker. I often wonder will we still have a cross on our church, or "in God we trust" on our currency. While I believe the world needs the saving message of Jesus Christ more than ever, I do not believe that the world believes that. And the distractions and temptations that increasingly surround us will make it harder to stay faithful to the Christian Faith and how we practice it.

Last September, we kicked off a marketing campaign called JUST SAY YES! The genesis of this campaign was a question I was asked about 14 months ago—how do we get the church to grow at a time when the churches worldwide are shrinking. The answer—Just Say YES!!! From the time of the Apostles, through the early centuries when Christianity was a persecuted religion, through the centuries of heresy, the Ottoman oppression, communism in the 20th century and up through the present day—there have always been people who have stood up and said YES for the Faith, YES for Christ, YES for the Gospel, and YES for hope of eternal life.

I believe that the next ten years are going to be critical years for our church and for our faith—we will no longer be able to be sideline Christians. We need to all get in the game before the game passes us by. We need to get off the fence and get ourselves ALL IN on our faith and practicing it in our lives.

We need to say YES to praying for ourselves and our world.

We need to say YES to helping those around us.

We need to say YES to inviting and encouraging others to join our parish and walk with CHRIST.

We need to say YES to the Great Commission, to baptize all nations, to seek and to save the lost.

We need to say YES to worshipping each Sunday, to praying for peace in the world, beginning with peace in our own families, in our own community, in our own city.

When I heard God's call to the priesthood during college, I am thankful that I said YES.

When I heard God's call to be the priest in Tampa, I am thankful I said YES.

And for every challenge God has helped me overcome, I am thankful I said YES.

I can do nothing without God. But with God, I can do just about anything. When I say YES to God, I believe that I can do just about anything. After all, we read in Philippians 4:13, in one of my favorite passages in the Bible,

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!

I can do all things (when I say YES to) Christ who strengthens me!

If I live to see 100, I will always know that "a tithe of my life" (and counting) was spent at St. John's as your priest. And I will always be grateful to God for making my path pass through Tampa. With this, I close one decade of ministry and I open the second decade. I thank God and I thank you for ten wonderful and memorable years at St. John. May we, through His Grace and mercy, enjoy many more together, in health and in joy!

With profound gratitude and love,

+Fr. Stavros

Who took the first selfie?

By Charlie Hambos

According to the Oxford dictionary online, a selfie is “a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website.” The example sentence read, “occasional selfies are acceptable, but posting a new picture of yourself everyday isn’t necessary.” Its origin is from the early 21st century from self + -ie.

The term was made popular with the song “Selfie” by a group called The Chainsmokers and at the time of writing this article the music video had almost 197 million views on YouTube. The slightly inappropriate music video details two girls as they prepare for a night in the club discussing their rendezvous and other stuff, but before they do anything; they have to take a selfie. Now the trend is all over the place. It is popular to take selfies everywhere. It can be with people or in certain locations. The epidemic is not restricted to our youth but has spread throughout the age spectrum.

Although this word, which has been made an official word in the dictionary, has only been around since this decade of the 21st century, someone took a selfie a long time ago. The question is, Who took the first selfie?

“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:26-27)

There ya go! So after God created the heavens and the earth, the firmament to separate the waters, the moon and the sun, the water creatures and the birds and the land animals, then he stopped and took a selfie. Every single person on this earth is created in the image and likeness of God. We don’t have to look at the icon of Christ on the iconostasis or in the many other icons to see our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we just have to look at one another. As much as we are running away from Christ because we believe ourselves to be the savior of the universe, he is all around us. Also, whatever we do to one another and ourselves, we indirectly do to Christ. When we hate a friend, we hate Christ. When we speak ill of someone or judge them, we are speaking ill and judging Christ. If we physically, emotionally or psychologically abuse someone, we do all of those things to Jesus Christ himself.

When we were created, we were created perfect. “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” Isn’t that strange? We is first person plural. We were made in the image and likeness of the Holy Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Their relationship is one bonded by peace, love and the grace, which is bestowed on all of us. The problem was what happened after the fall. When humanity fell, our image became tarnished and now we spend our lives in the content state of repentance to remove the smudges off the image of Christ we were created in and in the ones around us.

Before the fall, we were perfect like God. After the fall, we were no longer perfect. God created us so that we could have a relationship with Him. He wants to be with us but if we don’t want to be with Him, it isn’t a relationship. He gives us that choice. If we didn’t have the choice then it would not be a relationship, we would be robots and he would be the master controller. If you are in a relationship and you want to be with the other person but the other person doesn’t want to be with you, then it isn’t a relationship.

Since God still wanted to have this relationship with us and we messed it up the first time, He had to some how give us another chance to establish this relationship. Humanity was perfect and now, we were subject to temptation, sickness, worry, hunger, depression and death. God was not susceptible to these things so the equation between God and us was imbalanced. So how did He balance the equation? What is done on one side must be done on the other. In order to give us a second chance God had to become susceptible to these things. Because we were created in His image and likeness, He sent his only begotten son, Jesus Christ, a human, to become susceptible to all of those things and to balance the equation.

Jesus Christ had to die in order to give us eternal life. So he was tortured, crucified, died and resurrected on the third day for our salvation.

We still have the choice to be in a relationship with God. Obviously, He wants to be in a relationship with us. It’s kind of hard to not be in a relationship with someone who we are created in the image of. It’s almost like we can’t run away. We can but it will eventually catch up to us.

How can we be in a relationship with God? Just say thank you! In fact, Eucharist comes from *ευχαριστώ*. Thus when we receive communion, the Eucharist, we are saying thank you to God. Not only are we saying thank you but also we are encountering the body and blood of Christ and thus we become more like Him. So the next time, we take a selfie, let’s think about Him, who took the first selfie and created us out of love and yearns for us to love Him back.

JUST SAY YES!

We will continue with part two of a monthly article 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.

SAYING YES TO GOD

I must confess I have a hard time relating to Mary. She's everything I'm not—at least in the natural. Quiet. Submissive. Willing to trust God.

Had an angel appeared to me telling me I'd been chosen to carry the Son of God in my womb, I would have asked a lot more details before I said, "May it be me as you have said." And chances are a praise song would not have been the first thing out of my mouth (Luke 1:46-55). Instead of pondering these things in my heart, as Mary did, I would probably have raced out the door to buy a maternity shirt with word MESSIAH printed on the belly and HIGHLY FAVORED BY GOD on the back.

But oh, how I want a spirit like the mother of Jesus had. I want to be able to say yes to the Lord without asking why and where and how. Unfortunately, I understand all too well what Richard Foster writes about in *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*: "To applaud the will of God, to do the will of God, even to fight for the will of God is not difficult. . . until it comes at cross-purposes with our will. Then the lines are drawn, the debate begins, and self-deception takes over."

It is one thing to want God's will and quite another to do it. As we've seen, the human heart has a huge capacity for self-deception, and our flesh is contrary to His ways. So even when I'm nodding yes to Him, too often my actions are saying no.

That's why I keep returning to King David's prayer in Psalm 50: "Create in me a clean heart, O God: and renew a right spirit with in me" (verse 10). However, it is the last phrase of this prayer I've come to appreciate in a special way: "and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me" (verse 12).

A willing spirit—that's what I need. A heart and a mind that yes to God and a will and a body that set that yes in motion. Philippians 2:13 tells us that the Holy Spirit is more than able to help us both "to will and to act according to his purpose." Without this help, I don't know that I could ever manage to do what God wants me to do.

What has God been asking of you lately? Does it feel impossible? Does it feel like perhaps He chose the wrong person for the task? Do you find yourself listing reasons you can't rather than the ways He can?

If so, let me share with you a little lesson I've been learning lately. A lesson Mary has been teaching me.

You see, it's not our job to accomplish God's will. That responsibility belongs to Him alone. Our job is simply to say yes to whatever specific tasks He puts before us. Then to follow through, one request at a time, with our lives as well as with our mouths: "May it be to me as you have said."

Obedying then simply believing that God will do what He says He will do. Even when it doesn't make sense.

Experiences of St. Stephen's Summer Camp

Below are reflections by the teenage campers and adult counselors of our parish who attended St. Stephen's Summer Camp this past July. They are funny, insightful and inspiring. Please take time to enjoy these testimonials. Read them with an open mind and heart. Jesus says that we are to be like children if we are to enter into the kingdom of Heaven. So as you read them, reflect on your own heart—does your heart reflect the innocence and joy of childhood?! Whatever age we may be, the joy expressed by these articles below is a joy we should all strive for, whether we ever go to camp or not. Enjoy!

Val Courialis, 11th Grade Camper

The few days I spent at St. Stephen's Camp was an exceptional experience for me. The new memories I made, people I met, and lessons I learned within the time I spent there left me smiling for days afterward. I was introduced to many Greek Orthodox priests who I conversed with and helped guide me further down the path of righteousness. The camp activities I participated in taught me what it means to have a family outside of home. My cabin members and I, from St. Luke, have all become brothers under Christ as we worked together and talked with one another for a whole week.

Not only was camp a spiritual experience, but a home away from home. At St. Stephen's, you felt at home. With the activities, get-togethers, dine-ins, and discussion sessions, all the campers felt like one big, fat, Greek family. We were all the same, yet, at the same time, different. Our mentalities, spiritual perspectives, questions, and beliefs about the Lord and the church were in just. But each individual at camp was unique at the same time.

One of the greatest things about camp was that everyone had their own little nicknames. I was fortunate enough to have a few, "Piano Man", "The Smart Guy", and "The Impersonator" – I was given several upon several opportunities so share my talent of playing the piano with everyone at camp, express my knowledge of our faith as Orthodox Christians, and throw in a few lines quoted from Christopher Walken, Schwarzenegger, the Godfather and more!

At camp, no one criticized you like others would in the outside world. Instead, they rejoiced with you and celebrated the coming-togetherness of all. We all embraced our talents and were at peace with each other; something that I could only wish would spread to places other than just camp. But that's what makes St. Stephen's Camp to invigorating, the fact that you are at true, harmonic peace, all the time!

Overall, I absolutely loved camp and will definitely return next year, and will one day become a camp counselor and be able to send my children there when I father my own children.

Thank you Father Stavros and everyone else at camp that made my first time at St. Stephen's one hundred times better than I had thought initially going in!

Eirene Olga Courialis-7th Grade Camper

St. Stephen's camp was a wonderful place for me. I am so lucky and grateful I went. I am even luckier I get the opportunity to return next year and enjoy it again. Making 15 new best friends was definitely one of my favorites. I can definitely say that a lot of the girls are going to be lifelong friends. Even though we woke up every morning at 7:15am and ended our days at 12:00am, it was worth it because there wasn't a time in your day where there was a dull moment. Most importantly, I learned a great deal about God and my faith. Of course I know praying is important, but now I take it into more serious account. For instance, I do not pray about what I want, but of the things I am thankful for, when I am in need, and even when I am happy in life. Also I learned how to become a more humble and forgiving person, and I will continue to use what I learned at St. Stephen's Camp in my everyday life. I prayed to God, thanking Him for the whole, overall experience, which I absolutely cannot wait until next year!

Laura Paloumpis-12th Grade Camper

St Stephen's camp is where I made most of my best friends and where I have learned to trust people and build real relationships. Friendships are not just about the fun times

but also about the hard times. At camp you experience so many fun times between the ropes course, the singing and swimming in the lake. Especially for me this year, my cabin bonded so much and we know we will always be there for each other. Camps like St Stephens are so important for getting closer to God and finding people that help you do that. It's truly an amazing experience and I encourage the whole youth to go.

Alexandra Patrasciou-7th Grade Campers

I'm going into 7th grade and this was my first year attending Saint Stephens's camp. I was very nervous going into it, but in the end I'm so happy I went. It was fun to share the experience with my friend Artemis and have Father Stavros as the camp director. I had the opportunity to meet so many wonderful people while I was there, starting with fellow campers, the counselors, and spiritual fathers. I also learned more in depth about our faith, and did many new things I never thought I would be able to do.

There were so many fun and educational activities that I enjoyed. My favorites were learning all the camp songs, competing in Ultimate Warrior, and most of all doing the ropes courses and learning to trust people. I also liked participating in the church services and singing along to the hymns. The Diakonia Center was a great place to become closer to God and get away from everyday life, including technology. Many of my cabin mates have become close friends and we have kept in touch, I can really trust them all. Overall I had an amazing experience at St. Stephen's and can't wait to go again.

Dean Mitseas—9th Grade Camper

Hi, my name is Dean Mitseas, I am 14-years-old and I went to week 2 of St. Stephen's summer camp. This was my first time at camp. I got there the first day and was slightly awed by the place. It was all hills and grass, with the cabins clustered looking out over the lake, the chapel in the distance and the Diakonia center on the central hill, it was hugely different to the flatness of Florida.

In the days following I got to learn the lay of the land and got to know my cabin mates. The food was amazing and we were allowed seconds, which was very welcome! The days were a bit long, but they were fun filled so that wasn't a huge problem. The lake was cool and refreshing and the ropes course well-built and really fun. Our counselors were great and always there, and you could really trust them!

The ropes course was probably the best part of the day. It started with a trust walk, where we were blind folded and led in a line holding each other's shoulders. Then we would do activities that would rely on all of us working together. These included one that gave us certain holes in a spider web of cables, and had us lift each other through, trying to get everyone on the other side. Then we had to use ropes to move a camper in an A-frame. Another one had us trying to get to a jar inside of a rope ring that we couldn't cross. But the best of all was the trust fall! It had us falling off a platform into the counselors arms. All of these required us to rely on each other and helped us learn to trust one another. Overall I had a great time and would definitely go back next year!

Mia Lenardos-7th Grade Camper

St. Stephens Camp was a blast!!!! There were so many things to do there, but one of my favorites was when we went swimming in the lake and the ropes course. I loved going swimming because the water was so cool and it was so hot outside. Also, when you went to the lake you could go canoeing. That was really peaceful and relaxing! The ropes course was cool because of all the trust exercises like the wall, trust fall, and trust walk. Also, Father Stavros told me about how he got to pick out what trees to use and what area he wanted everything to go on.

One of my favorite memories was when I went up for communion on Friday and Father says “The servant of God” and I say the Greek version of my name, Maria, and Father says the English version of my name, Mia, at the same time. It was really funny! Also it was really funny when we would sing to get into the lunchroom first. Most of all, I learned that opportunities don’t could like this everyday so if that means putting down my cell phone for a week and enjoying the beautiful outdoors and my great new friends, it is worth it! I also learned that if you can just set down 5,10, or 15 minutes for God then it feels like your day is a whole lot better.

Karter Lenardos-9th Grade Camper

St. Stephens Camp was very fun and exciting. From hanging out in the cabin to going on the ropes course. The ropes course was a team exercise, like trust falls and a 15 foot wall with no ladders. The objective is to try to get over the wall as a team.

My personal favorite was swimming. Mainly because it was hot outside and the cool water felt good. But the “hot” up there is different than the hot we know in Florida. There was no humidity and the temperature was about 75 to 85.

Meeting people was another favorite. You meet people from not just Florida. I met people from as west as Alabma and as north as Tennessee and North Carolina.

Artemis Xenick-7th Grade Campers

I went to St. Stephen’s camp week three. It was my first year going to summer camp and I loved it. I met a lot of new people from all over. After the first day the girls in my cabin and I were already good friends and by the end of the week we were really close. The counselors that I had at camp were also very good. They were really sweet and made the whole week even more fun. One of my favorite things to do at camp was Ultimate Camp Warrior. It was a camp wide obstacle course where every camper took a turn and raced to be the Ultimate Camp Warrior. In the first round, a winner was chosen from every cabin and the next day the six finalists faced each other. It was fun because it was kind of challenging and you had to try hard to get through it.

Another thing that I liked was the Olympics. All the cabins were mixed up into six teams to compete against each other in relay races. Each team was lined up on the volleyball court and there was a priest at the end of every line. When one of the campers got down to the end of the line where the priest was, they would get hit by water balloons. By the end of the night everyone was exhausted and wet. My team actually ended up winning most of the races. One of the other things I really liked about camp was the food. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner were always DELICIOUS. They served mostly Greek food but some American food too.

I also enjoyed learning more about our faith. Every morning we had Orthodox life and every night we had something called hang time. In Orthodox life we learned more about our faith and we focused on the Creed. We learned more about the meaning of the Creed and more about our faith. Hang time was more like a discussion. Everyone asked questions and shared things about their life. Every day we started off by talking about a new topic. One day the topic was peer pressure and bullying. Hang time helped us to open up with each other and learn about how to deal with those types of things the right way. At camp we had church services every day. They were really nice because everyone would sing along and participate in the service and no one had to tell anyone to or force them to. Everyone would just sing the church hymns because they wanted to and that was the best part of the services. Every service a bunch of campers would go up to the chanter’s stand and help to lead the service.

Overall going to summer camp was a great experience in every way. It was lots of fun, I met a lot of new people, and St. Stephen’s made me feel closer to God. I am so grateful that I got to go and I can’t wait to go back next year.

Larissa Krinos-10th Grade Camper

My name is Larissa Krinos and I attended St. Stephen’s camp second week. It was my first time being so far away from home alone so I wasn’t sure I would have much fun. When I got to camp, instead of being in a cabin with the other ninth and tenth graders, I was

put into the older girl’s cabin with eleventh and twelfth graders. Luckily I wasn’t alone in the cabin, Chace Sibley had been bumped up as well. They keep you busy all day at St. Stephen from 7 in the morning to twelve at night. The church services that are held every morning and evening make you feel included. Everyone around you is singing, so you don’t feel embarrassed to do so. Despite being a church camp, you don’t sit around all day with your nose in a Bible. There are activities like the ropes course, where you learn to trust the people in your cabin by letting them lead you blindfolded. You get time to swim in the lake, and do arts and crafts every day. All of these things made camp one of the best experiences of my summer; but the best part was how nice all the counselors and all the campers were. If you go there knowing no one you’ll leave knowing everyone. I loved going to St. Stephen’s camp this year and I can’t wait to go back next year.

Aris Rogers II—Counselor

This summer I was a counselor during the last session (week 5) of St. Stephens Summer Camp at the Diakonia Center. It was also my first ever experience at camp. I had heard a lot of good things about the camp prior to arriving, but didn’t really know what to expect. I had my preconceived notions of how I thought it would be, but that did not do any justice to what I actually experienced as a counselor there. The camp grounds were beautiful and filled with foliage, water, and animals. Unplugging from distractions and being in the midst of nature and people was such a pleasant experience. It created an environment for campers to develop a bond and really get to know one another, which was evident in the tears of separation as campers departed at the end of the week. The schedule was filled with a lot of fun activities, church services, and REALLY good food (i.e. pastitsio, souvlaki, etc.). At one moment you could be going through a ropes course in the woods and another moment you could be fist pumping to music at the dance with some of the priests and your new friends. It was an all-around fun experience. There was a lot of singing of church hymns to the point it became habitual for campers and staff to sing these hymns while walking or cleaning their cabins.

However, I think the hallmark of my experience as a counselor was Thursday, the day that campers and staff got to go to confession. I was a counselor of the older boys and it was such a beautiful and emotional experience to see these young men come back from confession with tears of repentance and a new found peace in their lives. For many of them, it was their first time going to Confession or they hadn’t been in a very long time. I was brought to tears witnessing their humility and how they shared tears of joy and peace with one another after giving up their burdens in the Sacrament of Confession. I will never forget that day. To be able to witness all of this was a huge blessing for me.

Harry Koutroumanis-8th Grade Camper

This was my first year attending St. Stephen’s camp and it turned out to be one of the greatest summers of my life. I had never been away from my family before and I wasn’t really sure what to expect, but I instantly felt at home and comfortable with my counselors and the guys in my cabin. During camp, the most meaningful thing to me was the new friends I met. I made so many new friends from many different places. We all exchanged phone numbers and plan to keep in touch. I also really enjoyed the ropes course because everyone had to figure out how to work together. We learned to really trust each other.

Camp helped me to grow stronger in my Greek Orthodox faith. I am so proud to be Greek and I loved singing the hymns during the Liturgy. Everyday we would have alone time with God. This was a private time when we could go anywhere and just be alone with God to pray. I always felt closer to God after this time.

I now know for sure that after my senior year of camp, I really want to return as a camp counselor. I feel very grateful for my camp experience and look forward to next summer.

Maria Xenick-Counselor

Attending St. Stephen’s camp was my first experience going to any kind of camp, either as a camper or a counselor, not counting the time I was 12 and I was so homesick my parents picked me up! Not a great camp memory for sure! I was determined this time to make the most of this opportunity. Though it was difficult to leave my husband and other two children behind, I was blessed to go with one of my dearest friends, Marenca Patrascioiu,

and our two daughters. I was quite nervous to be the oldest counselor, especially going into this with no experience at all. We were counselors for the senior girls, and we had an instant bond with 15 new girls who could have been our 15 newest daughters. I also had the pleasure of teaching an Orthodox Life class to the group of youngest boys.

The Diakonia Center is simply beautiful. After a few days of getting the routine down, I was constantly reminded why I loved being a teacher and why I love to serve our Church – I love working with children! Having the perspective of a mother gave me the ability to encourage and nurture these young children and guide them through what would be THEIR camp experience. I loved that I became one of the “Mama counselors.” We had our bag with tissues, cough drops, extra snacks, etc. for our campers and fellow counselors. I tried my best to avoid my daughter and let her enjoy the camp without me looking over her shoulder. When we did cross paths it was just with a quick smile. I was so happy to catch up with her at the end of the week and hear about her wonderful experience!

The St. Stephen’s environment is based on a well-structured schedule, simplicity, and wholesome activities. They are at the same time, filled with pure fun AND faith. We had many opportunities to play, to eat, to worship, to sing, and to pray – and all of those fit at just the right time. I loved being surrounded by other young adults who served as counselors. Working with them was inspiring to say the least. Our outlook is so bright and positive as they in many ways are already leaders in our parishes across the Metropolis. My time spent as St. Stephen’s was a week-long journey that bolstered my faith, strengthened my trust in God and in our fellow Orthodox Christians, and encouraged and fostered lasting friendships.

I am so thankful to God for allowing me the opportunity to serve at St. Stephen’s. I’m sure my mom won’t believe what she reads when I say, I can’t wait to go back to camp next year!

Marenca Patrasciou-Counselor

After many years of anticipation and hearing so much about it from Fr Stavros, who always spoke with much excitement and joy about it, the day finally came for my daughter, Alex, to attend St. Stephen’s camp. Over the years I had spoken to many people from our church who had gone to camp in different capacities and I knew that one day I will volunteer my time and share this experience with my daughter and friends. I kept hearing that you have to be open and put aside any preconceived ideas and they were right! There were many highs and lows; however, my spirit was renewed, my existing relationships strengthened, made new friends, and overcome a few limiting beliefs. I took away from this experience so much more than ever imagined.

The camp program provides a safe and fun environment for the kids to find joy in simple activities while stretching and encouraging them to grow spiritually. There was a well thought out balance of fun and spirituality. The Diakonia Center is a beautiful place where you get to enjoy God’s creation to the fullest. The staff consists mostly of past campers who are eager to give back to the new comers a fun and exciting experience centered on our faith. Maria and I were both excited and nervous at the same time knowing that we would be the counselors for the girls’ senior cabin. We were blessed with an amazing group of 15 girls who connected with each other right away. They showed many qualities including leadership, creativity, compassion, trustworthy, camaraderie, and playfulness, just to name a few. It was a privilege and joy to witness them open their hearts, strengthen their faith, and find the courage to overcome challenges.

All of the church services took place in the outside chapel surrounded by nature which enhanced the worship experience. Thought-out the week we had two daily services, including two Divine Liturgy Services, a midnight Paraklesis service, blessing of the waters, and Holy Unction. After four days of much fun and trust building activities, the entire camp participated in the sacrament of confession. I was so pleasantly surprised to see all of our 15 senior girls sign up for it. There was something special in the air that day. You could see many being nervous, sad, or anxious while some were exited. Many walked in to confession carrying heavy burdens but walked out in tears of relief, hope, and an opportunity to start over with a clean slate. To participate in the sacrament of confession

it takes courage, trust and willingness to become vulnerable not just in front of the priest but Christ Himself. I can never forget the last camper coming out of confession with the priest walking besides him and both crying.

While I was there I was comforted by the feeling and knowing that higher power is watching over all of us. It is not easy to provide our children with a week of entertainment based on our faith, surrounded by like minded people, an environment that would strengthen and nourish their spirit, and learn how to have a personal relationship with our Lord. I am very grateful to Father for encouraging me to go, Maria for being such a supporting friend, and the Metropolis for offering the program. The camp program is a true blessing for us as parents and our children! I will cherish the memories, experiences, and miracles of this week my whole life.

David Voykin—Counselor/Music Director

St. Stephen’s Summer Camp at the Diakonia Retreat Center is an amazing, adventurous experience. As a camper or a counselor. The benefits to participating in the summer camp program makes for a spiritual, physical and emotional experience. Setting time aside to be alone with God; to reflect and meditate along with participating in morning and evening services, magnifies the beauty of the Diakonia Center’s grounds. The views are spectacular and you are greeted by wonderful, caring people. The staff maintain over two hundred acres of mountain paradise and we are blessed to have such a treasure available for our youth and our Metropolis to enjoy. In my two visits as a member of the staff at St. Stephen’s, I have come away with many pleasant and lasting memories. I encourage you to get to know our Diakonia Retreat Center and its many positive opportunities for growth. Your spirit will thank you...

Charlie Hambos-Counselor/Assistant Director

Goal #1 is safety. Goal #2 is creating an environment for the campers to grow in their Orthodox Christian faith. Goal #3 is fun. These are the top three goals of St. Stephen’s Summer Camp. Safety is key, not only physical safety but emotional, psychological and spiritual safety, because most of our youth can’t find a place to feel safe in these areas, camp provides that space. If St. Stephen’s did not create an environment for the campers to grow in their Orthodox Christian faith then it would be no different than any other camp. At camp, our youth are able to calm the confusion between what the Orthodox Christian faith is and how to apply it to their life. Starting and ending their day in church, surrounded by committed Orthodox Christian priests and learning about their faith all help achieve this goal. The sacramental life is also rich. Confession, communion and unction are all offered. More importantly, the daily life at camp becomes a sacrament. Sometimes how the Orthodox Christian faith is practiced at the parish level does not necessarily express the faith correctly. At camp, we are able to live the Orthodox Christian life on a daily basis and hope that that we take just a crumb home with us. Who doesn’t want to have fun? We are away from our parents and our daily struggles of life in a safe environment. It is a great place to just have fun and be free. Whether it is singing to the top of your lungs at the camp sing-a-long or diving through the mud at the Ultimate camp warrior, camp can and is a blast.

This year, I was truly blessed to spend three weeks at St. Stephen’s. I would like to thank Fr. Stavros for that opportunity as well as my church community of St. John’s for also allowing me to go that long. By supporting Fr. Stavros as the director of the camp and myself as one of the counselors, our community is helping spread the faith throughout the Metropolis of Atlanta and should feel very proud to be offering this. Each week had a different director, campers, counselors and flavors but same goals.

There is a story that I would like to share. During the second week, the two oldest cabins were going through confession time. Many of them left the building that they were waiting in and moved down near the waterfront and sat in groups. Some had already gone for confession and others were waiting. My campers were swimming at the waterfront. I could see that the Holy Spirit had really moved some of these older campers through confession so I asked them as a group, “Do you feel the Spirit moving around you?” My camp persona is very goofy and lots of fun so naturally they thought I was making a joke. I was serious. I challenged them to see and to feel the Holy Spirit. They looked at me like

I had three heads. As Orthodox Christians we believe that it is the work of the Holy Spirit which makes the bread and wine the body and blood of Jesus Christ, which sanctifies the water during Epiphany, which joins the man and woman to become one at the sacrament of marriage, which drives our spirit of repentance and absolves those sins to create in us a clean heart. The Spirit moves at camp and throughout our world. Is it moving you?

Why Can't St. John's be like camp? Actually, it can!—By Fr. Stavros

By God's grace and with the blessings of His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios, I returned to summer camp for the first time in three years. It was a blessing to share this experience with nearly 20 people from our parish, a large contingent of campers as well as adult counselors. It's interesting to spend a week away from Tampa with parishioners—they see me in a different light (wearing shorts, launching endless barrages of water balloons) and I see them in a different light—we have some very innocent and beautiful children and some VERY talented adults.

What makes camp so good? It's safe, it's spiritually beneficial and it's fun. In trying to nail down exactly what it is that makes this place so memorable, I've come up with the following:

- 1. We unplug at camp**—campers and staff leave their cell phones at the door. For 15 days (I was there for two sessions), I did not drive, read a newspaper or check news on the Internet. I sent only a handful of emails and made only a few phone calls. I totally unplugged from the world and all of its stresses. In place of my "worldly cares," I inserted lots of laughter, conversation, and tears. Getting away from the modern world takes one back to when the world was slower, and we get back to the basic human being, the one who laughs, cries and sings without the benefit of a phone or a video game or a karaoke machine.
- 2. We sing at camp**—Where would we be in our church without the choir or the chanter doing much of the singing for us? The services wouldn't be nearly as beautiful as they are. At summer camp, there were many services where there was neither a priest nor an adult counselor at the chanters stand. The entire camp sang the responses to the services.
- 3. We pray at camp**—We do not pray all day, but we pray throughout the day. We pray as a camp at two services each day—Orthros in the morning and Vespers at night. We hold a Divine Liturgy each week, as well as Paraklesis with Holy Unction offered. We pray individually, when we sit "alone with God" for 15 minutes each morning, when all camp activity and noise stops and there is silence, alone with God and the sounds of nature. We pray before and after each meal, thanking God for our food. And we pray in small groups—sometimes two or three, sometimes ten or twenty. We pray with each other and for each other. We pray out loud and this feels not only not awkward, but is really very nice.
- 4. We learn at camp**—This isn't Bible study camp, see below under the "fun" section, but we spend time learning each day—we have a curriculum, this year is was "I believe, do You? a study of the Creed." We learned many lessons in the faith through the Orthodox Life Classes and the Hangtime Devotionals held each day.
- 5. We have fun at camp**—canoeing, crafts, ropes course, camp Olympics, Ultimate Warrior, campfire, sing-a-longs, talent show, music, swimming, basketball, volleyball, soccer, we broke 4,000 water balloons one week, inside jokes, silliness, a dance on the last night, making s'mores in a microwave because the campfire got rained out, staying up late—we had lots of fun at camp.
- 6. We let down our guard when we go to camp**—I've told campers and staff alike, that if you want to get the most out of camp, you have to let your guard down, lose your inhibitions and check your "cool card" at the door. Camp activities are designed to take people out of their comfort zones, to grow and to stretch what they know about the faith and about life. How does falling backwards off a 7 foot high platform into the arms of people you can't see sound? It's kind of scary the first

time. Actually, it's kind of scary every time I do this—add four times a week times 26 weeks, I've done this 100 times and it's still scary. It's still hard to cede control. But you, it's really neat to be able to cede control to people who are less than half my age and know that they have my back. It's really neat to be able to work with staff who are college students, many of them former campers, who I can totally trust to come through for me. There is an emphasis at camp on community building, trust building and meeting new people, on stretching and growing, in spiritual ways, in emotional ways, in many ways.

- 7. We take care of one another at camp**—one of the favorite activities at camp is the trust walk, where campers are paired off and one of the two is blindfolded and walks around in the ropes course, over and under obstacles. This activity is fun, but serious. When a person can't see where they are going, they rely on someone else to take care of them, to watch out for their safety and well-being. They totally cede control to another person, giving them complete trust. The partners switch roles so that everyone gets a chance to do this. And then with each group, after we are done, we talk to them about taking care of one another, not only at camp, but outside of camp. This includes the kid who has no one to sit with at lunch, or when our teens start dating, taking care and protecting their purity, looking out for the kid at the party who is compromised rather than taking advantage of this person. At camp, we go everywhere as a cabin—when someone can't find their shoes, the rest of the cabin helps, so that one or two campers aren't left behind, everyone goes everywhere together.
- 8. We confess our sins and start over at camp**—almost 100% of the people who go to camp participate in the Sacrament of Confession. No one is forced to go. Priests are available all week for the staff and all the campers go on Thursday. The experience of hearing confessions—and I heard nearly 50 of them in two weeks—is both uplifting and disturbing. It's sad to hear the depth of sorrow and pain that people are carrying in their souls, from the oldest adult to the youngest camper. But more than that, it is uplifting to see people come to confession scared and wounded, and watch them leave filled with joy and spiritually healed. It is a miracle just to be able to watch this transformation happen right in front of my eyes. Where many adults avoid confession in our parish, at camp, the children and counselors are eager to participate. One counselor told me the first day, "can we do confession TODAY? I've been waiting for this opportunity for months." How awesome is that!
- 9. We cry at camp**—I cry more at summer camp than I do the rest of the year. I cry for many reasons. Sometimes I cry for sadness because something I hear in confession is so sad. Sometimes I cry for someone who can't cry for themselves. Sometimes I cry because I recognize my own shortcomings. But most of the time, I cry because it is just so beautiful. Listening to 100 teenagers singing a hymn, or jumping up and down for Jesus doing one of our camp songs makes me cry tears of joy. Seeing the beauty of nature, and going back to the basics of how God created us, it fills me with tears of joy.
- 10. We live in a counter-culture when we go to camp**—the camp culture is based first on Christ. And secondly, it is based on trust. Not more than an hour or two goes by during the day that there isn't a mention of Christ. And the whole camp is set up to run on trust. Campers trust the counselors, counselors trust the campers, we work for the balance of spirituality and fun and we trust that we will find it. We set boundaries, regarding safety and rules and trust that people will stay in those boundaries (and they do!!!) Those who are on staff, from the director to the newest staff member, everyone has each other's backs. It's a good feeling to be able to trust co-workers, even ones I do not know well. There is a great sense of security that while I'm in one area of the camp leading one activity, others are in their respective areas leading, and doing so with safety, inspiration and fun.

This is why everyone who goes to camp loves it so much.

If you have kids who are camping age and haven't gone to camp, please consider sending

them.

If you have kids who will soon be of camping age, get them excited!

If you'd like to serve as a counselor or staff member and experience camp for yourself, let me know.

And if you're wondering, why all this stuff about camp, I'm not interested in going to camp, how does this affect my life as a member of St. John, well the answer is simple. We can bring these elements that make camp so fun and so fulfilling, right to our parish of St. John. And we don't need to experience them only for a week or two in summer, these can be our guides throughout the year.

We can bring these elements of camp to our parish, and to life outside of camp.

1. **We can unplug**—one of the best things about worshipping on Sundays is that I have to shut my phone off in church. Unplugging from the phone in worship, and leaving the phone off in the coffee hour will help us reclaim our basic humanity—where we talk to one another face to face, and where we speak to God and He speaks to us.
2. **We can sing**—we have a great choir at St. John. On an average Sunday, twenty people are leading the worship in the choir. They are not our performers or our singers. They are our leaders, and are supposed to be leading us in worship, leading us in singing the responses, which we are supposed to sing right along with them. There is something really beautiful about releasing inhibitions and just singing.
3. **We can pray**—we can pray alone, and we can pray together. We can open and close our meetings with prayer, whether a priest is there or not. We can pray for one another, both in our private prayers and when we are face to face with someone. The most intimate thing you can do in life is to offer up a name in your prayers to God. And any of us can do that at any time, with anyone. On a recent Sunday, I mentioned being “together with God” with another person—that will be a Messenger article for another month. But we should start praying out loud with our spouses, with our children, with our parents, with our friends. There is an innate desire to do this. We are born with that desire and we choose to suppress it. If we act on this desire, we will find that it is something that is easy and fulfilling to do.
4. **We can learn**—there are ample opportunities to learn in our parish, whether it is a Bible study, Orthodoxy 101, a retreat or just a conversation with me or with Charlie or with one another, there are so many opportunities to learn. No one should be pleading ignorance and lack of spiritual knowledge, when there are so many opportunities for getting this knowledge.
5. **We can have fun**—we don't need to be drunk or rude or crude in order to have fun. We learned that at camp. We have fun, and lots of it, and it is Christian and wholesome. We can do this here in our own church. Water balloons anyone?
6. **We can let our guard down and leave our comfort zones**—this is probably the most challenging thing in a parish where everyone knows everyone for a long time. We have our friends and those who are not our friends. We have pride and we get defensive. Sometimes we have agendas and find ourselves at odds with other people. But if we can learn to let our guard down and leave our comfort zones, to check our cool cards at the door, and let go of past failures and frustrations, we can have a lot happier of a time in our community. Camp allows us to manufacture this environment quickly, because there aren't the years of history with the campers (though there are with some of them). Doing activities that foster a sense of teamwork and group identity—we are Orthodox Christians, members of St. John, etc. will help in this regard. Small group Bible studies help in this regard because in small groups, we SHARE about ourselves, our lives, our struggles and ultimately about our faith.
7. **We can take care of one another**—When we see someone we know who is not

in church, we can call them. When we know someone is having a hard time, i.e. has had an illness or a death in the family, or has lost a job, or just needs a friend, we can be the beacon of hope for them. When someone needs a ride, or someone to sit with at coffee hour, or looks lost at the festival, or their kid needs encouragement to go to Sunday school or the altar, there are ample opportunities for us to care for one another.

8. **We can confess our sins and start over**—we don't have to wait for camp, or Lent, or Christmas, or any time in particular to do this. The sacrament of confession, and the joy that it brings at a new start on life is available at any time. And when you wish to go to confession, that becomes the top priority on my list. If you've never felt the JOY of confession, I encourage you to not put it off. Most people think that confession is painful. It is, but not for long. The overwhelming emotion after confession is JOY!
9. **We can cry**—It's okay to cry, that why God made us with that emotion. Crying helps us release frustration and failure. It also allows us to react to beauty. There isn't one Holy Week that I have not cried at some point. Sometimes I cry at funerals, and sometimes even spontaneously at a Divine Liturgy.
10. **We can live in a counter-culture**—If our church is not separate from main-stream culture, it will not survive. If our church is a club or a corporation, it's not going to survive. The church has to become a hybrid between a home (where the family hunkers down and shares the joys and the daily struggles of life) and a hospital (where people who acutely sick can go to find healing. There are many people who have broken homes and can use the support of a loving spiritual home. And there are many people who are acutely sick, or even mildly so, that can use the spiritual healing that can only come from the church. It's ironic at camp that when you tell kids to hand in their phones, they are not happy about it. When you ask them mid-week, do you want your phone back, they don't care about the phone. Camp culture runs counter culture to the mainstream—that's why campers and staff love camp so much—not because we are being rebels, but because we're reclaiming the basic US, the basic human being. The world needs to reclaim decency, respect, morality, love, joy and hope. And the church can help in this regard. We can be that home of decency, respect, morality, love, joy and hope that our world is in such desperate need of.

And we can fall in love with our church, and with Christ in Tampa, just as much as we do at camp. We don't need to take a week off and go three states away to recommit ourselves to our faith. We don't have to be a teenager either. To me, camp is a beautiful experience each time I get to do it. But more than that, what we do at camp serves as a guide for what to do and how to be when I'm not at camp.

Safety. Creating an environment that encourages people to grow in their faith. Fun. These are the three goals of our camp. A place where people feel safe. A place that encourages spiritual growth. A place that's fun where people want to come back again and again. These should be the three goals of our parish. They will have the same effect on our church and our congregation as they have on camp and our campers and staff.

2014 marked two milestones in regards to summer camp—first, it was the ten year anniversary of the first time we went to the Diakonia Center for summer camp, just two months before I began my ministry in Tampa. In ten summers in Tampa, we've sent well over 100 people as either campers or counselors to this program. Secondly, and this is a personal milestone—This year was the 12th year I directed St. Stephen's (I directed from 2001-2011 and again this year). And when the camp season finished, over the 12 years, I have directed 26 weeks of camp. That means that half a year of my life has been spent directing summer camp. I thank God blessing me with this gift, I thank Metropolitan Alexios for blessing me with this opportunity, and I thank you—starting with my family as well as our parish—for your support and your prayers during the many weeks I have been away from our parish at summer camp these past many years!

THE DRUG THAT YOU WATCH BY FR. MARK SIETSEMA

“Guard your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.” Proverbs 4:23

I find nursing homes depressing, and I'm sure I'm not the only one. I wonder, though, if others share my reason.

It's not the smell. It's not the sight of old age and death. It's that there is no escape from television screens. In nursing homes they are everywhere. They are all on, and all the time, too. The volume is usually up so high that you can hear your neighbor's program three doors down. We are living in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, where in the Park Lane Hospital for the Dying, “at the foot of every bed, confronting its moribund occupant, was a television box.”

Worse yet are the places where two people share a room. I die a little every time I find one of our parishioners a captive audience for the roommate's set, glowing day and night. It doesn't go off for sleep or doctor's visits. It doesn't go off for prayer or Sacraments. It doesn't even go off when the roommate leaves the room. Its ads keep blaring, its laugh-tracks titter maniacally, its “Call NOW!” 800-numbers drill into the skull through sheer repetition.

Keep your fire and brimstone: for me, this is hell.

And hell is growing. Television screens are metastasizing everywhere. Are you waiting for a flight, passing time in the terminal reading a book? You'll need Jedi-like powers to tune out the drone of Headline News all around you. Taking the family out to eat? Nowadays it's fine dining to go to a place without video screens in all four directions. They're in the doctor's waiting room. They're at the football stadium. They're at the Y. They're in the maternity ward and in the funeral home.

I have a friend who calls TV “the drug that you watch.” Television really is a lot like a street drug: it might have limited beneficial uses, but for the most part it makes people sick, stupid, poor, and hooked. Television is a slow-acting poison. The more you ingest, the quicker the sickness sets in. So far I don't have many regrets in life, but one of them is almost all of the hours I have spent in front of a TV.

Need some facts? Here are a few from Michel Desmurget's book on the subject, *TV Lobotomy*.

- A child of 2 who watches TV for an hour a day doubles her chances for attention deficit disorder.
- A child of 3 who watches two hours a day triples his odds of being overweight.
- A child of 4 who watches violent cartoons quadruples his chances of behavioral problems in elementary school.
- A child of 7 who watches one hour a day increases her chances by a third of not earning a high school diploma.
- A child of 15 who watches sex-heavy shows like *Desperate Housewives* triples her likelihood for a teen pregnancy.
- An adult between 40 and 60 who watches an hour a day increases his likelihood of Alzheimer's disease by 33%.
- A 60-year-old who watches four hours a day has twice the heart attack risk of one who watches two hours a day.
- Television makes people sick and stupid. It makes them poorer, too.

How so? If you didn't watch so much, you would probably have more in savings. Television exists to advertise. That's how TV networks and stations make their money. They don't produce shows because they have a heartfelt mission to inform or entertain you. They simply need filler to stick in between the commercials. The programming exists to keep you watching from commercial break to commercial break. And aside from the ads, when they're not directly hawking stuff, through the programming they sell you a consumerist

lifestyle.

So what's wrong with advertising? Just this: one doesn't need to advertise anything people really need. If they need it, they'll come looking for it. You advertise things in order to create a demand for something for which there is no real need—laughing Elmos and puke-green milkshakes and minivans with built-in VCRs. No one needs these things. They want them because a commercial told them to. Watching television is intentionally exposing yourself to a con man who is trying ever to wheedle one more buck out of you.

TV also makes the Church poorer. It's a sad fact, but the majority of stewards in our parish and in the Archdiocese pay more each year for cable TV than they give to the church. The Lord rightly said, “Where your treasure is, there shall your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21). Follow the money trail in your life: does it lead to Christ or to a Cable package? If every one of our families gave up TV for just one month and donated that amount to the parish, the church would have money for just about everything it needs.

Is TV addictive? Industry executives will deny it (taking their cue from the tobacco companies), but there's no denying one's own experience. People go through symptoms like withdrawal when their television is taken away. People keep watching for more hours than they know is good for them, in the classic sort of denial familiar to anyone who knows an alcoholic. Already back in 1971, a researcher named Herbert Krugman discovered that TV-watching had the same effect on the brain as some opiate drugs.

Just try to have a conversation in a room where there is a video screen on: your eyes are drawn to it almost involuntarily. Television consultants have figured out down to the split-second just how rapidly they have to flash new images on the screen to keep you riveted. Think of how often the camera shifts nowadays: that's the product of industry research. It keeps you hooked, just like a live wire fastens your grip around it as it electrocutes you.

Television is the drug that you watch. The goal of this article is to convince you to Just Say No. The most effective fast we could each keep this Lent would be to give up half of our TV viewing time per week. It is perhaps the single best step you can take for progress in your spiritual life. You will have more time, more energy, more self-control, and more happiness.

Are you bored? Cut out the very thing that causes much of modern boredom.
Are you depressed? Go cold turkey on the device that dulls your brainwaves.
Are you fearful? Ditch the tube and especially TV news (which plays on our fears).
Are you down on yourself, low in esteem? Stop watching the machine that fills your mind with images impossible for a normal person to match up to.
Are you overweight? Switch off the Mesmerization Machine, throw out that bowl of chips, and get up and moving instead.

Dear Parishioners, I challenge you to make a conscious effort to cut down on your television watching, and to use the time trying new things. It is a matter of spiritual health. Saint Paul counsels (Ephesians 5:16), “Redeem the time, for the days are evil.” Life is short and opportunities are fewer than we tend to think. Make the most of the time God gives you in this world. Start by swearing off the drug that you watch.

[If you want to read more about the baleful effects of television, check out Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* or Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.]

**Fr. Mark Sietsema is the Presiding Priest at the Holy Trinity Church in Lansing, MI.*

Liturgical Schedule for September 2014

Sunday, September 7 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Altar Boys: Captains ONLY
Ushers: Nick Kavouklis, Perry Katsamakis, Peter Theophanous
Welcoming Committee: Greeters—Betty Katsamakis, Vanessa Aviles; Ambassador-Lisa Alsina; Caller-Edie Kavouklis
Get Acquainted Sunday-Dwight Forde, Ewana Forde
Coffee Hour: Small Group Bible Studies

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

Thursday, September 11 **Day of Remembrance of 9/11—Prayer for Peace in the World**
Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary-Memorial Service 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 at the Conclusion of the Divine Liturgy
Altar Boys: Captains and St. Matthew (Gregory Koutroumanis, Harry Koutroumanis, John Palios, Brigham Sibley, Benny Hidermichel, James Kavouklis, Andrew Patrasciou)
Ushers: Greg Tisdale, John Christ, George Trimikliniotis
Welcoming Committee: Greeters-Julie Palios, Donna Trakas; Ambassador-Christene Worley; Caller Toulia Courialis
Coffee Hour: AHEPA/Daughters of Penelope

Sunday, September 21 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, Peter Chandler)
Ushers: Brett Mourer, Wayne Blankenship, Amin Hanhan
Welcoming Committee: Greeters-Sandra Pappas, Jamie Broderick; Ambassador-Jeanie Nenos; Caller-Vickie Peckham
Coffee Hour: FC Tampa (Festival Committee Tampa)

Sunday, September 28 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, Genaro Scarfogliero, Andrew Thatcher)
Ushers: David Voykin, Ed Gerecke, Pete Trakas
Welcoming Committee: Greeters-Skip Higdon, Katherine Sakkis; Ambassador-Helen Katzaras; Caller-Peggy Bradshaw
Coffee Hour: Young at Heart

Monday, September 29 **Feast of St. Kyriakos (Charlie's Nameday)**
Orthros 9:15 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, October 5 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Altar Boys: Captains and St. John (Thomas Shearer, Nicholas Alsina, Antonio Bavaro, Jonah Blankenbaker, Yianni Trimikliniotis, Nicholas Oliver, Athansios Oliver)
Ushers: Mike Trimis, George Mitseas, Chris Kavouklis
Welcoming Committee: Greeters-Lisa Alsina, Donna Hambos; Ambassador-Carole Fotopoulos; Caller-Amy Kafantaris
Get Acquainted Sunday-Perry Katsamakis, Betty Katsamakis
Coffee Hour: Choir-Church Musicians' Sunday

Wednesday, October 8 **Sacrament of Holy Unction** **9:30 a.m.**

Sunday, October 12 Orthros 8:45 a.m. **Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.**
Altar Boys: Captains and St. Matthew (Gregory Koutroumanis, Harry Koutroumanis, John Palios, Brigham Sibley, Benny Hidermichel, James Kavouklis, Andrew Patrasciou)
Ushers: Florin Patrasciou, Kevin Fentress, Tammy Christou
Welcoming Committee: Greeters-Marenca Patrasciou, Genie Cater; Ambassador-Donna Trakas; Caller-Ewana Forde
Coffee Hour: AHEPA/Daughters of Penelope-Founders Day Luncheon

Liturgical Notes for September

Nativity of the Virgin Mary-September 8-Major Feast Day-Placed right after the beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year (September 1), this feastday commemorates the birth of the Virgin Mary to her parents, Joachim and Anna. It is one of the 12 Major Feast Days of the Church year.

September 11-Day of Remembrance-This year marks the 13th year anniversary of the terrorist attack on America on 9/11/01. Despite the years that have passed since that awful day, feelings and emotions are still riding high. It is appropriate to stop and reflect not only on a tragic day in the life of our country, but to pray for peace in a world that is beset with hostility, not only overseas but on the streets of our own city. On September 11, we will hold a Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary at 10:00 a.m., with a Trisagion service at the conclusion of the service. If you have time, please stop by our church to worship and pray for peace in the world and for recovery and healing of those who suffered and still suffer because of that terrible day.

Exaltation of the Holy Cross-September 14-Major Feast Day-Commemorates the finding of the Precious Cross of Christ by St. Helen in the year 325. This day is equal in solemnity to Good Friday, as it draws our attention to the supreme sacrifice made by the Lord for us. Connected with September 14 is the Tradition of the Vasiliko. St. Helen went in search of the Precious Cross. In Jerusalem, she found the hill of Golgotha. But she did not know where to search for the cross. Vasiliko (Basil), a sweet scented plant, was found growing on the hillside. She looked beneath the Basil and that's where the cross was found. It is the Tradition of the Church that a Procession is held on September 14, where Basil is placed on a tray along with a cross and it is carried above the heads of the faithful. As September 14 falls on a Sunday this year, we will hold the procession of the Holy Cross only once, on the Feastday.

St. Kyriakos-September 29-St. Kyriakos lived in the 5th Century. He was a monk who also was a priest, who was renown for his writing and his piety. He reposed peacefully at the age of 90.

Orthodoxy 101 Class to be held in September

Fr. Stavros offers this class two times per year, in spring and in fall. This will be the SAME CLASS so no need to take it again if you already have. This will be a three-week course of study on Monday nights to make people aware of the basics of being an Orthodox Christian. Who should attend the Orthodoxy 101 class?

- ~Interfaith couples—this will help the non-Orthodox person understand more what is going on in our church when they attend.
- ~Anyone who is considering joining our church. Going forward, this class will be a requirement for those who wish to join our Orthodox faith.
- ~New converts to Orthodoxy—For those who recently joined our church and who want to know a little bit more about it.
- ~Anyone who wants to know more about the basics of our faith, or who wants a refresher course in the basics of Orthodoxy is encouraged to attend.

The classes will be part lecture, part discussion, with lots of time for questions and answers. The three sessions will be done as follows:

Monday, September 29	A Tour of the Orthodox Church: What we see in the Church and what it means
Monday, October 6	Orthodox Spirituality—The Seven Sacraments and the Divine Liturgy
Monday, October 13	Orthodox Traditions—fasting, icons, prayer and separating Theology from "yiyalogy" (what our grandparents taught us wasn't always right)

Classes will be held on these three Mondays from 6:30-8:30 p.m. and will be held in the CHURCH Sanctuary. Please sign up with Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com, so he has enough materials for everyone. There is no charge for this class.



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COMMUNITY NEWS

Welcome Monica Gjerde, our new Executive Assistant—We are making a change in our office personnel. Monica Gjerde is our new Executive Assistant, whose primary job is to assist Fr. Stavros in the office. Debbie Bowe is going to become our book-keeper. With a two-person office, we hope to be more efficient and better serve the needs of our parish. Monica is Greek Orthodox, and has recently relocated from Atlanta to Tampa. She has worked in a similar capacity in the school system in Georgia and for many years has served as the Assistant Director of St. Stephen's Summer Camp. Welcome aboard Monica! For email purposes, please contact Monica at officestjohngoctampa@gmail.com. If you need to contact Debbie via email, please email her at debstjohntpa@gmail.com

The Greek Festival is Coming—Mark your calendars and save the date, Greek Festival is coming **November 7-8-9**. There will be a festival organizational meeting on **Monday, September 8** at 7:00 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Anyone wishing to help is welcome to attend. Booth chairs and area coordinators will be invited by FC Tampa (That's Festival Committee of Tampa, not a soccer club). Also, in September, the raffle will be rolled out and we'll begin selling tickets for what was a very successful and profitable part of last year's festival. So, stay tuned, lots more festival information to follow in the weekly bulletin, through constant contact and on the website.

Get Acquainted Sunday—September 7-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 September will be Sunday, September 7.

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.

Live Streaming of Divine Liturgy-We are now live-streaming the Divine Services of the Church. If you go to our website, www.greekorthodox-churchtampa.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.**

Donations needed for flowers for Feast of the Holy Cross—We need a donation of \$350 for flowers for the tray for the procession of the Holy Cross on September 14. Please call the office if you are interested.

Memorial Monies—Every time someone in our community passes away, people make donations to the parish in memory of the person who has passed away. About the time of the 40 day memorial service, the family is informed who made donations to the church in memory of their loved one. Over the years, there has been lots of confusion over what should happen to that money. For instance, if \$1,000 comes in, in memory of someone, does this person's family have a say-so in what the money is spent on? Some families have come back years after the death of a loved one wanting to "spend the \$1,000 that is there" in memory of their loved one, as if this is a bank account that the family can draw on at any time. Again, this has created some confusion, and in a few cases, bad feelings. The Parish Council decided effective September 1, 2012, this is how memorial money will be handled. When a person dies, about the 40 days, the church will inform the family how much money was collected and at that point, ask which of four options the family would like to do with the money that has been donated. They are as follows:

1. The Altar Fund/Discretionary Fund—money can be put towards the purchase of something needed in the altar. However, the altar has many nice, relatively new things in it, so the list of items to be purchased is rather small. Also, if only a small amount of money comes in, it may not be enough to purchase the thing that is needed. Therefore it would go towards the purchase of something, so that when enough money is amassed, then that item can be purchased.

2. Buildings and Grounds—We have a very large and beautiful facility that is constantly in need of repair and updating. If money is donated to buildings and grounds, it would be used for things that require maintenance and updating, like the air conditioning, and other systems of the church, new equipment, etc.
3. Current campaign—The church, at any point in time, is working on a major “campaign” to get some project done. Right now, that campaign is repairing the stained glass windows. In other years, we have done campaigns to repair iconography, replace carpeting, etc. If this option is chosen, then the money will be put in the fund for the current campaign.
4. General Fund—The general fund is where salaries, utilities and the day to day operations of the church get paid from. And obviously this is the most important fund, because if we don’t fund the day to day operations of the parish, then all the beautiful things in the altar, the icons, and the church building go for naught.

Using this new system will still give each family a chance to say where they want the money to go, while at the same time, avoiding any confusion and misunderstanding and allowing the money to be spent in a timely fashion, rather than sitting for what amounts to years, sometimes, in the memorial fund. If you have any questions about this, please see Fr. Stavros or Alkis Crassas, Parish Council President.



Scan to like St. John on Facebook
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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.

We need Vasiliko (Basil) for the services of the Holy Cross—Please bring Vasiliko for Sunday, September 14. As the feastday falls on a Sunday this year, we need lots of Vasiliko for the tray. Please bring it to the kitchen by 10:00 a.m. on both days, so we have time to make up the tray.

Parish Registry

Condolences to Chris Mantzanas and family on the passing away of his father, Louis, on July 16. May his memory be eternal!

Condolences to Alkis Crassas and family, on the passing away of his grandmother, Maria Kapetanaki, in Greece, on July 28. May her memory be eternal!

Condolences to George Hambos and family, on the passing away of his mother, Melanie Hambos, in New Jersey on August 6. May her memory be eternal!

BIBLE STUDY WITH with Charlie Hambos

Our Monday night Bible Study will resume on Monday, September 15. Charlie Hambos, our Pastoral Assistant, will lead the Bible Study this fall. We will be studying the book of Romans. Every Monday, we'll meet from 6:30-8:00 p.m. in the administration building. So bring your Bible and come join Charlie for Bible Study. Everyone is welcome!

JOY PRE-TEEN RETREAT Sunday, September 28

Our St. John JOY is hosting a workshop for all pre-teens grades 4-7 (roughly ages 10-13) on Sunday September 28, beginning after church from 12:30-3:00 p.m.. All children and their parents are invited to attend. We will have activities and games, guest speakers on a variety of topics including self-esteem, bullying, prayer and making Godly choices. Please contact Maria Xenick (813) 839-9897, mpxenick@gmail.com if you and your children will be attending. See enclosed flyer for more details.

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

The Sunday School Staff is looking forward to serving the children of St. John's for the 2014-2015 school year. Our first day of Sunday School is September 14th. Please make sure to register your children on the first day of school if you haven't already done so. We need this information for our records and for communication.

WE ARE PROUD TO ANNOUNCE OUR OUTSTANDING STAFF FOR THE 2013-2014 SCHOOL YEAR. THEY ARE:

Director of Sunday School: Vickie Peckham

Assistant Director of Administration: Tammy Christou

Assistant Director of Music/Special Programs: Maria Xenick

Music Assistant: Pam Irwin

Pre-K (3 and 4 year olds): Alexis Scarfogliero – Teacher and Bessie Palios - Assistant

Kindergarten: - Debbie Nicklow

Grade 1: Melissa Krinos

Grade 2: Marina Choundas and Heidi Borgeas - Co-Teachers

Grade 3: Stamie Garcia and Amy Kafantaris - Co-Teachers

Grade 4: Debbie Ferekides

Grade 5 and 6: Vickie Peckham

Grade 7 and 8: Kara and Stefan Kataras - Co-Teachers

High School: Peggy Bradshaw and Isidoros Passalaris – Co-Teachers

The teachers met with Father Stavros and Charlie Hambos for a Sunday School Teachers' Retreat on Aug. 23rd. This was a wonderful way to start preparing for the new Sunday School year. The teachers feel blessed to have Father Stavros guiding us as teachers. He is such an inspirational teacher and has provided each of us with a collection of lesson plans. We are also looking forward to Charlie's involvement with the Sunday School this year. He will provide a children's sermon on Youth Sundays and also visit each of our classrooms throughout the year.

Sunday School Classes will begin on September 14—Sunday School Registration will take place on August 31 and September 7 following the Divine Liturgy each Sunday.

First Youth Sunday—September 28—Every month, from September through May (see enclosed calendar), we are going to have one Sunday designated as Youth Sunday. On Youth Sunday each month, all Sunday school students are requested to be

in church no later than 9:50 a.m., and to sit near the choir in the small section on the right side of the church (or in the front pews on the right side if there are too many to fit in the small section). We will sing along with the choir and there will be several hymns where the children will sing on their own. This is a great way for them to learn the hymns of our church and to inspire our congregation with their angelic voices. The first youth Sunday will be September 28.

Sunday School Mission Statement

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

Sunday School Vision:

The Sunday School Program shall seek to fulfill its mission by:

1. Embracing the Spiritual Life and Joy of our Orthodox faith through regular prayer, worship, and frequent participation in the sacraments.
2. Support the Church through stewardship of time, talent, and sacrificial giving.
3. Providing our students with a welcoming, caring, and loving educational environment.
4. Having the Sunday School Staff and Students exemplify Orthodox Christian character and morals.
5. Providing strategies for our children to rely on their faith and values, when confronted with challenging circumstances and temptations, as they travel through their teens and into adulthood.
6. Teaching our students why this vision is important—why it is important to embrace the Spiritual Life by defining and teaching what is the Spiritual and Sacramental Life of the Orthodox Church; what is stewardship and why it is important; and teaching Orthodox Christian character and morals.

Please feel free to contact Vickie Peckham at 406-5626 with any questions, suggestions, or comments regarding St. John's Sunday School Program.

MINISTRY FAIR-SEPTEMBER 7

As we do each year, we are going to have a Ministry Fair on Sunday, September 7. Each of our ministries will set up a table and display information about their ministries. This will be a great opportunity to see what is going on at St. John and sign up to be a part of it. The following ministries will be represented. What follows below is what each ministry is about. If you would like to join one of them or get more information about one of them, please do so. Getting involved in a ministry is a great way to make new friends, explore new talents, serve the church, grow in your faith and have lots of fun!

Greek Dance Groups—I Hara Mas dancers are the children's dance group; The Glendi Dancers are the teenage dance group; and the Panigyri Dancers are our adult group.

AHEPA/Daughter's of Penelope—Promotes Hellenic culture and education by having fellowship gatherings and offering scholarships.

Greek Festival—Each November, our church sponsors the annual Greek festival, which shares our culture and faith with the Tampa community.

Sunday School-Weekly Sunday school classes teach our children about the Orthodox Faith. We are always looking for volunteers to teach our classes and we encourage those with children to bring them every Sunday

GOYA-This is our teenage group for young people in 7-12th grades. They participate in a monthly spiritual encounter, social events, retreats and sponsor a Lenten retreat each spring.

HOPE/JOY-Youth ages 3 years old through 6th grade come together for spiritual retreats, social events and service projects.

Small Group Ministry—There are at present six small groups that gather each week to discuss the Bible, Orthodoxy and

the Christian life. They are led by lay people and meet in various locations throughout Tampa.

Bible Study—A traditional Bible study is offered once a week at the church in the evening.

Community Outreach—St. John is affiliated with an interfaith coalition to serve food to the homeless in Tampa Bay once a month on Saturdays, with additional opportunities during the year.

Philoptochos—The Annunciation Chapter is a women's organization of the parish dedicated to providing aid for the poor and needy and enriching our parish life.

Choir—Our choir sings on Sundays and at other services throughout the year. They practice on Wednesday evenings and anyone interested is welcome to join.

Welcoming Committee—This a group of people who welcome new people to our parish, get people connected and help to grow our parish on a weekly basis. Those who serve get on a list and serve on a rotating basis.

REAL (REPRESENTING EMERGING ADULT LEADERS)— This is a New Ministry!

REAL Group (Representing Emerging Adult Leaders) Are you 18-30 years old, in college, grad school, recently graduated or just starting your career and not quite sure which group is for you? Choose this one. There will be no set curriculum. Just trying to live Orthodoxy in a not-so-Orthodox world. Meeting locations will vary each week. The group leader is Charlie Hambos, who can be reached at 813-843-8471 or at charlie.hambos@gmail.com. Please contact Charlie with any questions or he will contact you. #liveorthodoxy

GOYA

GOYA Meeting for September—September 21—Our regular GOYA meeting for September will be Sunday, September 21, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided.

Lock-In/Camp Reunion on September 6-we will be having a lock-in/camp reunion for our GOYAnS as well as GOYAnS from neighboring parishes who went to summer camp, on Saturday, September 6, beginning at 5:00 p.m. We will have games, sessions, discussions and food. We will be spending the night in the Kourmolis Center and then attending church on Sunday, September 7. Please RSVP to Elaine Halkias by September 1 if you are interested in attending.

A Second Year of Small Group Ministry Kicks off in September

Last September, we kicked off the first ever small group ministries in our parish. For those who participated, it was a great experience. These groups gather once a week to study the Bible, discuss how to apply scripture to daily life, pray together and become small spiritual support groups. These sessions are discussion based, not lecture based. This is an opportunity to work side by side with each other to learn more about the faith. As group members get to know one another on a deeper level and as groups become more committed, you'll see that the groups will not only become a resource to help learn and live the faith, but through these groups, we'll eventually help "carry one another's burdens and so build up the body of Christ", as we are told to do in Galatians 6:2. And this is what the church is all about—helping one another through this life, on the journey to everlasting life.

NEW PEOPLE ARE WELCOME TO JOIN A GROUP AT ANY TIME! With the groups starting again after summer break, it's a great time to join one!

I'm reprinting some comments made by participants in last year's groups.

Each week I look forward to our Wednesday morning bible study. The group study and discussions have allowed me to enhance my knowledge of my faith, provides me with a better understanding of the Bible and has allowed me to become closer with other members in the group. I pray that this will become a permanent part of our church community and will continue to grow with new members from one week to the next.

-A member of the Wednesday morning Men's Group

Much thanks go out to Donna and George Hambos for their leadership and the use of their beautiful home for our Bible Group. We have met new friends and have learned the way of life that the Lord has taught in his teachings. I must say that we are a FAMILY now and have learned ways of life within the group. Excitement is filled when we meet and exchange our ideas on the studies put forth. Satisfaction is met when we leave and have taken our learnings and set them forth in everyday life. I cannot leave without saying that the food also plays a role in our GROUP. A great job by all in gratifying our hunger. Thanks to all. God Bless All!

~A member of the East Tampa Group

I am very delighted to be a part of this small group ministry. Meeting other Greek Orthodox Christians and being able to share our faith with each other has brought me great joy. I especially liked it when you came to visit after we had met as a group for a few weeks and opened up a questions/answers session. I did not realize that you were so educated and informed about religion. There are a lot of things about being Orthodox that we don't know and these small groups are a great way to learn more about our Faith, meet other Christians and grow in Christ. Thank you for going through with this.

~A member of the North Tampa Group

"I am loving the Men's Small Group Wednesday mornings for a few reasons... First, getting up and meeting from 7:00AM-8:00AM makes it really difficult to be late to work. Also, I've grown up in St Johns my entire life and I feel like I am

just 'getting to know' the fellas I've seen at church this whole time, which is a great feeling. I love the fact that we are growing as a group, talking, opening up, and learning about Christ and his teachings from his word, and learning and supporting each other more each week. It is great that we invite and host people outside of our Church community as well!"

~A member of the Wednesday morning Men's Group

Thank you for your enthusiasm and effort in creating the Bible Study groups. It has become an enriching experience and the highlight of our week. We especially, like the intimate small group format, which has allowed us to connect with other members of the church and form friendships and a fellowship that otherwise, might not have occurred. We appreciate the structured lesson plan that you have presented, because it stimulates meaningful discussions about our faith and a deeper understanding of the Bible. More importantly, it provides an opportunity to freely express ourselves in a safe environment and discuss intimate feelings and thoughts about our faith and other personal issues.

~A member of the North Tampa Group

The bible study has been a true blessing and will bring our church members much closer. We are making connections and sharing beautiful discussions about our faith, challenges and God's many blessings.

~A member of the women's group

I thank the Lord for my small study group. We are fortunate and diverse in the East Tampa Group. We have children who join us for our quick dinner. Then as we study our Orthodox Bible, we have all ages, with considerably unique views: teens, young adults, middle aged, senior aged (me). The life experiences, the love of the Holy Word, the shared and uplifting prayers, and the graceful direction of our leader---all are truly beautiful. The openness, honesty, humor, and intelligence we each bring to our group discussions are a huge help to me in my journey in Eastern Orthodoxy. What could be more satisfying than the words of the Holy Bible to ponder and share with each other in such a welcoming setting? I look forward to Tuesday evenings and I read my Bible even more since I have joined this group. It inspires me to search more, appreciate more, and respect others more.

~A Member of the East Tampa Group

For a couple of months now, you've been reading about the formation of small groups at St. John. These groups will gather once a week to study the Bible, discuss how to apply scripture to daily life, pray together and become small spiritual support groups. These sessions will last about an hour and will be discussion, not lecture, based. This is an opportunity to work side by side with each other to learn more about the faith. As group members get to know one another on a deeper level and as groups become more committed, you'll see that the groups will not only become a resource to help learn and live the faith, but through these groups, we'll eventually help "carry one another's burdens and so build up the body of Christ", as we are told to do in Galatians 6:2. And this is what the church is all about—helping one another through this life, on the journey to everlasting life.

Some FAQ's about the small group ministry:

- 1. Who leads these groups?** The groups will be led by people of the community, with guidance from Fr. Stavros. Fr. Stavros is providing the curriculum as well as training for the leaders of each group. Fr. Stavros will also visit each group periodically and be available as a resource at all times to each group.
- 2. How often do the groups meet?** The groups will meet once a week, running the same schedule as the school year. That means there will be a week off at Thanksgiving, a few weeks off at Christmas, a week off for spring break and one for Holy Week, and the groups will be in recess for summer.
- 3. Are we on "Greek time" or "American time" for these group meetings?** The answer is AMERICAN time—the groups will start and end on time. The morning meetings will last an hour—they will start ON TIME. Of course, if group members wish for the meeting to go longer, that will be up to each group, but they will end at the time advertised. The evening groups may last longer because they will involve eating—probably a pot luck each week, with each member bringing a small dish to share, again, this will be up to the group how this works.
- 4. I don't know the group leader or host. Am I just supposed to show up at the house of someone I don't know, is that okay?** YES, the group leaders are expecting to have people they don't know come to their homes. You probably want to call or email the group leader if you need information or directions but yes, you are welcome to join any of the groups.
- 5. Can I bring a non-Orthodox spouse or friend to these groups?** ABSOLUTELY. One of the reasons we are starting these groups is because several members of our parish are attending Protestant Bible studies, because they have been invited by co-workers or friends. If you have a friend or co-worker who you think would benefit from small group ministry, please invite them.
- 6. I don't know the Bible very well, is that a problem?** NO, not at all. In the small group, you are going to study the Bible together, by reading short passages and answering questions about how the passage relates to life in general and to your life specifically.
- 7. What are the requirements to be in a group?** There are some expectations of group members:
 - a. Commit to participating every week (or nearly every week, obviously, we know people travel, kids get sick, etc., but the idea is that you will attend on a regular basis)
 - b. Respect what other people have to say. In a discussion where people are sharing experiences, they need support and validation, not judgment.
 - c. Everybody participates—when you go to small groups, it is expected that you are going to participate in the discussion. Again, this is not a lecture, or a traditional Bible study where the priest or professor gives a

lecture. A group leader leads a discussion in which all group members participate.

d. Everybody commits to praying for the group members. The best way to bear one another's burdens is to do so through prayer. Group members will pray for one another.

- 8. Which group should I join?** The one that is easiest for you to attend. There are groups in different parts of town. If you'd rather drive farther and go to a different group, by all means do so. Just pick ONE group and stick with it.
- 9. Do I RSVP or just show up?** Please RSVP to the group leader (in the case of the South Tampa group, RSVP with the host as well since they are two different people) so they know how many to expect. .

As of the printing of this month's Messenger, we haven't figured out who is going to host and lead the North Tampa Group. Hopefully by the time you receive this issue of the Messenger, this will be resolved. These small groups will begin the week of September 7 (except for the Young Adult Group which will meet later in September).

The Women's Group and the Tuesday evening groups will meet for the first time on Tuesday, September 9.

The Men's Group will meet for the first time on Wednesday, September 10.

The Tuesday Evening Groups will meet for the first time on Tuesday, September 9.

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. (9:30 a.m. for coffee and refreshments)

September Meeting Dates: September 9, 16, 23, 30

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

Location: St. John Greek Orthodox Church in the Administration Building in the meeting room—there will be signs the first week directing you where to go

Group Leader: Father Stavros for the first one but we are going to rotate this among group members. Please email Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com or contact him at 813-394-1038.

Meeting time: Wednesday mornings from 7:30-8:30 a.m.

For this early morning group, bring your own coffee or breakfast food if you wish—we will not be providing these things.

September Meeting Dates: September 10, 17, 24

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 Helen and Ken Cauthorn, 3922 W. Palmira Avenue, Tampa, FL 33629. Helen's Number is 813-505-1059 and her email is hcauthorn@chubb.com

Group Leader: Bessie Palios—Her email is bmp1126@yahoo.com, and her cell number is 813-523-0347.

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

September Meeting Dates: September 9, 16, 23, 30

North Tampa Mixed Group As of the printing of this month's Messenger, we haven't figured out who is going to host and lead the North Tampa Group. We hope to have this remedied in the near future.

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.

September Meeting Dates: September 9, 16, 23, 30

Young Adult Group (for adults ages 18-40)

Location: TBA

Group Leader: Betty Katherine and Perry Katsamakis. We are still working out the meeting location but if you are interested in this group, contact Betty Katherine at 813-496-1596 or at bettypalios@gmail.com.

Meeting Time: Thursday Evenings at 7:30 p.m. **First Meeting will be Thursday, September 25 at 7:30 p.m.**

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Meeting Schedule for September

Saturday, September 6	Camp Reunion-GOYA Lock-in	5:00 p.m.	Kourmolis Center
Monday, September 8	Festival Organizational Meeting	7:00 p.m.	Kourmolis Center
Thursday, September 11	Young at Heart	11:30 a.m.	Zaharias Room
Tuesday, September 16	Parish Council	7:00 p.m.	Admin Building
Sunday, September 14	Philoptochos	After liturgy	Zaharias Room
Sunday, September 21	AHEPA/Daughters of Penelope	After liturgy	TBA
Sunday, September 28	Pre-Teen Retreat	After liturgy	Library

Stewardship Update

	August 15, 2014	August 15, 2013
Number of Pledged Families	306	271
Total Amount Pledged	\$381,474	\$301,017.25
Stewardship Goal	\$400,000	\$300,000

For those who have pledged this year, thank you for your generous support of St. John Greek Orthodox Church. For those who have pledged, please send in your pledge form today. Extra forms are available in the church office. Remember, the church relies on your generosity to not only keep it's doors open, but to offer it's many ministries. We all benefit from the church. We all must do our part in support of our church!

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Highlights on the Calendar 2014-2015

Saturday, September 6	Camp Reunion/GOYA Lock-in
Sunday, September 7	Fr. Stavros 10 year anniversary Liturgy
Monday, September 8	Festival Organizational Meeting
Tuesday, September 9	Small Group Bible Studies begin Women's group Tuesdays at 10:00 a.m. South Tampa Tuesdays at 6:30 p.m. East Tampa, Tuesdays at 6:30 p.m.
Wednesday, September 10	Men's Bible study begins, Wednesdays at 7:30 a.m.
Sunday, September 14	First Day of Sunday School
Monday, September 15	First Day of Charlie's Bible Study—every Monday at 6:30 p.m.
Sunday, September 28	Pre-Teen Retreat
Sunday, October 12	AHEPA/Daughters of Penelope Founder's Day Luncheon
Sunday, October 19	JOY/HOPE Fall Festival
Wednesday, October 22	Liturgy of St. James in the Evening
Sunday, October 26	Parish Assembly Meeting
Friday, November 7-Sunday, November 9	Greek Festival
Saturday, November 22	Adult Advent Retreat
Tuesday, November 25	Metropolitan Ministries Service Project after liturgy
Wednesday, November 26	Evening Liturgy for Thanksgiving
Sunday, December 7	Stewardship Sunday
Saturday, December 13	Sunday School Christmas Program Rehearsal/Christmas Party
Sunday, December 14	Sunday School Christmas Program
Sunday, December 14	Parish Council Elections
Monday, December 22	College Christmas Retreat
Wednesday, December 24	Christmas Services
Tuesday, January 6-Wednesday, January 7	St. John Feastday Vespers and Liturgy
Sunday, January 11	Vasilopita Sunday
Saturday, January 24	Gasparilla Children's Parade Fundraiser
Saturday, January 31	Gasparilla Adult Parade Fundraiser
Saturday, February 7	GOYA Lock-in
Saturday, February 14	Young at Heart Apokreatiko Dance
Saturday, February 21	Saturday of Souls—Liturgy at Garden of Memories Memorial Park
Sunday, February 22	Sunday School Pre-Lenten Retreat
Monday, February 23	Beginning of Great Lent
Sunday, March 1	Sunday of Orthodoxy
Friday, March 6-Sunday, March 8	GOYA Lenten Retreat
Saturday, March 21	Adult Lenten Retreat
Sunday March 29	Greek Independence Day Luncheon/Program in Tampa
Sunday, April 5	Palm Sunday
Friday, April 10	Sunday School Good Friday Retreat
Sunday, April 12	PASCHA
Sunday, April 19	Parish Picnic
Sunday, May 17	Last Day of Sunday School Classes
Sunday, May 31	Pentecost
Friday, June 19-Sunday, June 21	Junior Olympics

Youth Calendar 2014-2015

Saturday, September 6
Sunday, September 14
Sunday, September 21
Sunday, September 28
Sunday, September 28

GOYA Lock-in/Camp Reunion 5:00 p.m.
First Day of Sunday School Classes
GOYA 5:00 p.m.
Youth Sunday
Pre-Teen Retreat

Sunday, October 12
Sunday, October 12
Sunday, October 19
Friday, October 24-Sunday, October 26

Youth Sunday
GOYA 5:00 p.m.
JOY/HOPE Fall Festival
St. Stefanos GOYA Volleyball Tournament

Sunday, November 2
Sunday, November 9
Sunday, November 16
Sunday, November 23
Sunday, November 30

Youth Sunday
Greek Festival-No Sunday School
GOYA 5:00 p.m.
Boxes of Hope Assembly
Thanksgiving Weekend—No Sunday School

Sunday, December 7
Sunday, December 7
Saturday, December 13
Sunday, December 14
Sunday, December 21-Sunday, December 28

Youth Sunday
GOYA 5:00 p.m.
Sunday School Christmas Program Rehearsal-Christmas Party
Sunday School Christmas Program
No Sunday School Classes

Sunday, January 4
Sunday January 11
Sunday, January 25

Sunday School Classes Resume
GOYA 5:00 p.m.
Youth Sunday

Saturday, February 7
Sunday, February 15
Sunday, February 15
Sunday, February 22

GOYA Lock-In
Youth Sunday
GOYA 5:00 p.m.
Sunday School Pre-Lenten Retreat

Sunday, March 1
Friday, March 6-Sunday, March 8
Sunday, March 29
Sunday, March 29

Sunday of Orthodoxy-Icon Procession
GOYA Lenten Retreat
Youth Sunday
GOYA 5:00 p.m.

Sunday, April 5
Friday, April 10
Sunday, April 12
Sunday, April 19
Sunday, April 26
Sunday, April 26

Palm Sunday—Procession with Palms
Good Friday Sunday School Retreat
PASCHA-no Sunday School Classes—Easter Egg Hunt at noon
Parish Picnic
Youth Sunday
GOYA 5:00 p.m.

Sunday, May 17
Sunday, May 17
Sunday, May 17
Sunday, May 31

Youth Sunday
Last Day of Sunday School
GOYA 5:00 p.m.
End of the Year Sunday School Party

Sunday, June 7
Friday, June 19-Sunday, June 21

GOYA 5:00 p.m.
Junior Olympics

Isaiah 30:21

*Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear
a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."*

**Choices:
How to make Godly decisions
A workshop for pre-teens and their parents**

St. John Greek Orthodox JOY
invites all pre-teens and their parents
to join us for an afternoon of discussion, activities, and
prayer.

***This Retreat is geared towards pre-teens in grades 4-7,
approximately 10-13 years old.***

**Sunday, September 28, 2014
12:30 – 3:00**

St. John Greek Orthodox Church
2418 Swann Ave

Proverbs 3:5-6

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart;
do not depend on your own understanding.*

*Seek his will in all you do,
and he will show you which path to take*

*For more information or to RSVP, please email or call
Maria Xenick – mpxenick@gmail.com, (813)839-9897*

Remembrance, Prayer, and Gratitude

—A Reflection on 9/11 by Fr. Jim Paris

On this anniversary of that fateful day of 9/11/2001, I am sure that all of us have a unique story to share. Presvytera and I remember sitting at the breakfast table with the television on and then the news broke to show one of the Twin Towers on fire. I recall saying that this cannot be an accident, because it is such a clear day. I was deeply concerned, and then, a large dark object (almost in slow motion) came around the other Tower and flew right into it. Doubt was erased. We were under attack. Our sense of invulnerability because of our size, power, technology and our insulation between the two great oceans evaporated forever. From that point on, America was different. We could no longer be complacent. More than the Twin Towers were shattered that day; our concept of impregnability was also shattered, and when the Pentagon was hit—just down the GW Parkway from where we were living—the realization that anything was possible, hit us like a lightning bolt.

This tragic event will shape our generation just as the assassination of JFK in 1963 shaped our parents' generation. I remember my mother and her friends always talking about what they were doing when they saw the reports coming across the television. Most of the mothers had many children in those days and worked in the home. My mother was nursing my brother Paul, while Maria was by her side, and I a toddler, was destroying her 38 records by playing them over and over again in my father's den. They recall it like it was yesterday when they were dialing those heavy black phones and burning the phone lines incredulously with neighbors and friends. For them, Camelot was over. Now, like our parents, we have our memory of the shattering of an illusion.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we give thanks to God for this great nation of ours. We are so blessed with peace, opportunity, and prosperity. However, we must remember to never expect perfection in this fallen world that is in so much need of God's Grace. Nevertheless, we must and will go bravely forward and live our lives to the best of our abilities in all circumstances—good and bad—for our families, for society, for our country, and for the world. America took a blow that day, but we are standing proudly and continue to carry the torch beckoning peoples to live up to their full potential in freedom for the glory of God. The blow merely woke us up to reality. Prayerfully, it has made us wiser, smarter, stronger, and more united. Having been woken from our slumber of complacency, hopefully we will now concentrate on what is truly important and lasting: God, family, and friends.

That fateful day, we saw heroes, bleeding, dirty, and disheveled, emerge from the clouds of dust, wounded valiantly limping out of the rubble, and a weary flag bowing in remembrance of the dead and in honor of the brave. Structures were destroyed and bodies broken, but spirits ascended and hope prevailed. Eventually, the noise abated and the clouds dissipated, the familiar bright blue skies of New York Harbor then came into view. The Light overcame the darkness, and behold: the Statue of Liberty stood proud like a fearless, unmoved sentinel. Her noble visage and statuesque silence spoke volumes and betokened an unassailable reality: America still carries the torch.

Three thousand may have died, but countless heroes emerged. On this day, we bow and offer a prayer in remembrance of our fallen Americans, and we pray for their families who are still suffering the loss of their family members and friends. We give thanks to those who did their best to help, protect, comfort, and heal on that fateful day and the weeks and months that followed. Many are still trying to heal, and no matter what, many will never really be quite the same. That day changed all of us forever. As we rebuild, we will likely build higher, bigger, and stronger, but let us not forget to rebuild our relationships, and especially our relationship with Christ, for in the end, this is the only eternal relationship—and mysteriously—the only relationship that will reunite all relationships forever once we have passed from God's Good Earth. God bless America.

In remembrance of those fallen, in prayer for those who suffer, and in gratitude for the brave, I humbly remain,
Fr. Jim Paris is the Proistamenos of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Clearwater, FL.

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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

Barbara Akrotirianakis—Whittier, CA
James and April Dellas
Mary Hatzikazakis—from Bristol, TN

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

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



~ September 2014 ~

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
**Fast Day Car Raffle Fundraiser from 9/28-11/2	1 Labor Day Office Closed	2	3 ** Adult Dance Practice 7:00 p.m.	4 Adult Dance Practice 7:00 p.m.	5 **	6 GOYA Lock-in/ Camp Reunion 5:00 p.m.
7 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Get Acquainted Sunday Ministry Fair Glendi Dance Practice	8 Nativity of Virgin Mary Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Festival Meeting 7:00pm	9 WBS 9:30 a.m. BSE 6:30 p.m. BSS 6:30 p.m. Parish Council 7:00 p.m.	10**Men's Bible Study 7:30 a.m. Adult Dance Practice 7:00 p.m.	11 Paraklesis—Day of Remembrance 9/11 10:00 a.m. Young at Heart 11:30am	12**	13
14** Holy Cross Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. First Day of Sunday School Classes Glendi Dance Practice Philoptochos Meeting	15 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	16 WBS 9:30 a.m. BSE 6:30 p.m. BSS 6:30 p.m.	17**Men's Bible Study 7:30 a.m. Adult Dance Practice 7:00 p.m.	18.	19 **	20 Community Outreach
21 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. GOYA 5:00 p.m. AHEPA/DOP Mtg.	22 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	23 WBS 9:30 a.m. BSE 6:30 p.m. BSS 6:30 p.m. Fr. Stavros at Clergy Retreat 9/23-9/25	24**Men's Bible Study 7:30 a.m. Adult Dance Practice 7:00 p.m.	25 Young Adult Bible Study 7:30 p.m.	26 **	27
28 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Youth Sunday Pre-Teen Retreat Glendi Dance Practice	29 St. Kyriakos Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Orthodoxy 101-part 1 6:30 pm	30 WBS 9:30 a.m. BSE 6:30 p.m. BSS 6:30 p.m.	BSN-Bible Study North Tampa BSE-Bible Study East Tampa BSS-Bible Study South Tampa WBS-Women's Bible Study			

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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:

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•Glendi Dancers: Jenna Mingledorff 813-610-7365

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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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“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