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

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

Father Stavros’ Message

Leading with “The WHY”

Happy New Year!

So this is Christmas, and what have you done? Another year over and a new one just begun. And so this is Christmas, I hope you have fun, the near and the dear one, the old and the young. A very Merry Christmas, and a happy New Year, let’s hope it’s a good one, without any fear.

These lyrics are from the song “Happy Christmas” by John Lennon, which many of us are familiar with. John Lennon was an atheist, so I can safely say I don’t agree with his religious views. I do, however, like some of his music. It is thought-provoking, to say the least.

On January 1, we will turn over the calendar to another new year, 2017. We’ll put away the Christmas decorations, watch some football games, and go back to work and school. We might even make some resolutions of things to do this coming year, which some of us will keep for a while, or maybe even for good. Most resolutions, however, will be given up on within a month of the New Year beginning.

I’ve been thinking a lot about the words “purpose” and “why.” Maybe it’s because I’m a middle-aged man, well into my career, marriage and parenting, and it’s natural to do some reflecting on these things at this stage. Or maybe it’s because I just haven’t thought about them in a while. Maybe it’s because I’ve turned the calendar on the New Year so many times and many years I feel like this song—another year over, and now time to do it over again. As we begin this New Year, I invite and encourage you to meditate on these two words—“purpose” and “why.”

Ask yourself these questions:

What is my purpose?
Why did God put me on this earth?
Why did I get married?
What is the purpose of my marriage?
Why am I a parent?
What is the goal in raising a child?
Why am I in the line of work I am currently in?
What was the initial reason for choosing my career path?
Was there some noble cause I forgot about a long time ago?

And write down some honest answers for yourself. I’ve listened to some presentations called “Ted Talks,” which many of us are familiar with. And they encourage us to lead with the “why” question before tackling the “what’s” and the “how’s” of life. Most of us are so busy with our “what’s” and our

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Another year over, and a new one just begun. —

remember one not focused on being a priest, because I very much am. But became a priest to go to parish council meetings, or to work on ence in the lives of people by sharing the joy of Christ. I didn't calling from God that I couldn't do. So this is your career, and what have you done? Or "So this is your marriage, and what have you done?" “Another year over, and a new one just begun.” It’s very easy to forget the why we got married or why we chose our career or why we had children. I know I forget sometimes. And I know others do as well.

So, here is a challenge as we begin this year. Take out a piece of paper and right down your "what’s”—write down the roles that you have in your life. Spouse, parent, job, person with unique talents, overreater, parishioner, encourager, Christian, etc. Then for each one, write down your "why—"why did you get married? Why did you have children? Why do you belong to St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church? Why do you lack compassion? Why are you sad? Why do you eat poorly? Why do you love cooking? Take all of your positive and negative “what’s” and try to put a “why” behind them.

Then, take your “what” and your “why” and write a “how” to improve them. How can I be a better Christian? How can I be a better spouse? How can I be a better parent? How can I be better at my job? How can I be more patient, more forgiving, more compassionate, more encouraging? How can I gossip less? How can I be more Christ-like?

Take some time and go back to your purpose. For instance, I became a priest for two reasons—To answer what I felt was a calling from God that I couldn’t ignore; and to make a difference in the lives of people by sharing the joy of Christ. I didn’t become a priest to go to parish council meetings, or to work on budgets or to cajole people into giving money to support the church. When I’m focusing on parish administration, then I lose focus on why I became a priest. I’m not saying that I’m not focused on being a priest, because I very much am. But when I struggle in my priesthood, it is because I have lost focus on my original why. Which is why it is important to always remember one’s “why” so when you are losing focus, you have a starting point to return to.

Our church is currently in the process of implementing a strategic plan (more on that below). And the first thing to do in a strategic plan is to write a vision and mission statement, followed by a list of core values—to establish the WHY of the organization. And then the “what” and the “how” follow—the decisions on what and how are based on the why. So, as an exercise, as you contemplate your New Year’s resolutions, take a few moments, take a piece of paper and write out your why—what are you all about. Why do you think God put you here? Answer the questions posed above. Write down your core values—what is on your list? Honesty? Integrity? Being approachable? Being an encourager? Once you have established your core values, and your purpose, then hold each decision you make up to your core values and your “mission statement.” If what you are thinking doesn’t match, then you don’t do it.

A decision to lose weight and exercise (an annual resolution for many of us) is not a “why” decision. I want to live a longer, healthier and more productive life is a “what.” Diet and exercise are “how.” But the why is “I was placed here by God to love Him and help my neighbor, using my talents to do both.” If I lose my health or if I don’t feel healthy, then I can’t meet my why. Again, it starts with the why. How about making prayer part of your diet and exercise regimen? Leading with the why will help you accomplish the what and the how.

Next, make a list of goals related to your “why’s”. Some of these goals can be short-term—to be achieved within a few months. Some can be medium term goals, to be achieved in this year. And other goals can be long term goals, things that will take 1-5 years to complete. Set spiritual goals, self-improvement goals, family goals, marriage goals, etc. If you need help in figuring out your why, talk to your spouse or your friends, or your priest.

I think a lot of us, myself included, get so busy, that the marking of seasons is just that, a marking of the seasons. Living life according to a “why” that has Christ at the center means that Christmas comes with joy, and that Pascha comes with renewal, and that each day is lived with purpose, because we see each day as a gift that He made for us, and we rejoice and are glad, and productive in it.

The WHY is salvation. That is why God put us here.

The HOW is to glorify God and love neighbor.

The WHAT pertains to our unique talents and life circumstanc- es, the way we express our how, the way we work towards the “why”.

The WHEN is TODAY!

There are 365 days in a year. But there is only one day today. Psalm 118:24 tells us “This is the DAY the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.” It doesn’t say this is the month, the year, or the decade. It says “This is the day.” So go and make the most of today. And putting this to the song I quoted above, ask yourself each day “so this is Wednesday, (or whatever day of the week it is), and what have I done (to glorify God and help my neighbor today)?” Put together a good day, and strive to do that every day, and you’ll have a good year. Live each day with purpose, remember your “why”.

Keep John Lennon’s song in your mind, so that when we get to next Christmas, and you hear “So this is Christmas and what have you done?” you can honestly say, I’ve found my why, my purpose and I’m living out my purpose each day. And “another year over and a new one just begun” isn’t a depressing statement, like “where did the year go, what do I have to show for it” but rather a statement of “2017 was a milestone year in my life!”
You Are a Needed Part of This Church

My message to this point has focused on finding your personal "why" so that you can let that lead the "what you do" and the "how you do it" in your life. We are going through the same journey in our parish. Allow me to speak to you on two very important aspects of our church life that you have an integral part in.

Strategic Plan

Proverbs 29:18 says “Without a vision, the people perish.” This is true. Without a vision, we just go through a year, then flip the calendar and start all over again. The mission of the church is more than just year-to-year survival. And yet that becomes the vision of the church in many churches. We are in the process of developing a Strategic Plan for our parish—The first stage of this is establishing a vision, a mission and core values, and then making plans for the next ten years based on vision, mission and core values. The strategic plan needs input from many people in order to be successful. Why? Because this plan is for our whole church, not just the priest, the Parish Council and the strategic planning committee. Everyone will be part of implementing the plan, and so we want everyone’s help in creating the plan. This will happen through some surveys that will be sent out, including one that will go out in mid-January. We need everyone to take a few minutes to fill out the survey, because the results of the survey will affect the goals that we set for the community, which is our community, as much mine as it is yours.

Why do we need a strategic plan?

There are two reasons. First, without a vision, we will perish, because without a vision, there is no direction. Second, because what we are doing is not fulfilling the mission of the church to the fullest extent possible, and what we are doing is not sustainable. We all know that the church building is too small, but we are also a church that seeks to grow. Growth is inhibited by a church building that has no more room to add anyone. One priest makes for a long communion line, and often times a long lag in getting the pastoral services you want and need. We need to seriously outline a roadmap to adding an additional priest and additional personnel. We have a debt of over one million dollars that inhibits putting money into additional personnel, property, and expansion of facilities. We have aging facilities that will need some maintenance just to remain as they are, without expansion. We also have a growing community, a lot of children, and some great ministries. So we have a lot going for us. What we need to do is work from our strengths to shore up our weaknesses and to move our church forward to the next level, which is BEING the church rather than DOING the church. The goal of the strategic plan is to address all of these opportunities and challenges and to create a roadmap for the next 10 years of our parish. Again, when asked for information, or for help, please step forward enthusiastically and contribute to this very important chapter in the life of our parish.

Stewardship

2016 was a banner year for stewardship - we ended the year with 392 families, and over $430K pledged, both record breaking numbers for our parish. There are, however, two areas where we need to improve in our stewardship. First, the median average pledge was $600. That means that half of the stewards pledged more than $600 and half pledged under that amount. The higher average is skewed by some very large pledges. Second, it still takes many months, in fact, most of the year, to get everyone to get a pledge form in.

Stewardship is the primary means by which we financially support our parish. We need to raise a certain amount of income “just to stay in business.” So, the early part of the stewardship campaign is just to “survive” another year. In some ways, we become the lyrics “another year over and a new one just begun.” Once the budget has been met, and everyone has pledged, then the church can thrive—THEN the real work can begin. Because the real work isn’t to just survive, it is to make a difference! It is to spread the Gospel! That’s why we want to “ensure survival” by getting all the stewardship forms in within a short period of time, so we can spend the rest of the year BEING the church and not just DOING it.

Your Stewardship reflects your understanding of the faith—Each of us has a role in learning and spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The church is the base from which we do both. In the church we worship, we teach, we learn, we provide healing and encouragement through counseling and through ministries and fellowship. Your stewardship—your talent and financial giving—enables the church to fulfill its sacred mission. The person who doesn’t think they play a role in spreading the Gospel invests little of themselves in the life of the church. A person who comes to church only a couple of times a year does not understand the faith. Because the Christian faith calls us to be a regular part of the community, so that we share in Divine fellowship through Holy Communion and spiritual fellowship with other members of the community. A person who “pays” to belong see the church as a club or organization, not as a spiritual hospital, or the vessel to salvation.

Your stewardship reflects joy and love - Acts 20:35 says, “In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ We’ve all had the experience of buying and receiving gifts on Christmas. Think about the joy that you had when you bought the perfect gift for a loved one or friend. Remember the joy you felt when you saw their joy when they opened your gift. Remember how good that felt. At that moment, you didn’t think about what the gift cost, you were filled with joy about how the gift was received.

Your stewardship is your gift to Christ and to the church. You don’t see the faces necessarily of the people who receive these gifts. You don’t see the faces of the people who are renewed through confession. Or who receive prayers at the hospital. Or who are joyfully married. However, your contribution to the church enables all of these things to happen. Your contribution allows all of these blessings to occur.

Your stewardship reflects your vision of the church - Does God want a church that just survives? Or one that thrives? Does He want a church that is static or dynamic? We know that He wants a church that is thriving and dynamically spreading the faith.

So, what kind of church do you want to have? Do you want a church that is growing and dynamic? Or one that is static and just getting by? Do you believe in investing talent and treasure for the greater good of Christianity? For instance, let’s say that your children are grown and gone and you don’t have any need for Sunday School as a ministry. It is still important to you that we have a dynamic Sunday School, so that our children learn
about the Lord? Because when you offer stewardship to the church, you are offering a child (though not necessarily yours) a chance to learn, a spiritually lost person a chance to be found, a sorrowful person a chance to find joy. All of these things happen through your stewardship.

A new way to look at stewardship of time - We all know that the buzz-words of stewardship are “time, talent and treasure.” We all know that the treasure piece is our financial contribution. And talent refers to what talent we offer to the church—perhaps we serve on the parish council, or sing in the choir, or teach Sunday School. Usually we lump in time along with talent. So, we say “I give my talent along with my time for the choir or the parish council, etc.” Actually, we are giving talent to these things. Our pledge of time is a personal offering. Stewardship of time refers to the time we spend in worship, in reading scripture, in private prayer, in learning about the faith, and in helping out other people, in giving time to minister to others. That is why stewardship of time is the most important stewardship because in offering time, this is how we grow in our personal faith, which inspires our giving of talent and treasure.

We are a good parish. But let’s move from good to great! Let’s take the next steps. My hope and my goal is that 2017 is going to be the year our parish re-states our why. I hope you will help us make that statement by making your own personal statement of your why as it relates to your Christianity. The “what” pertains to our ministries. And our ministries succeed through our “how” which is your stewardship. As we grow in our understanding of the faith, the why, we will grow and change in our “what” and our “how.”

Thank you for your stewardship to our parish. If you have turned in a form for 2017, thank you. If you haven’t turned in a form, please do so TODAY!!! And if you can give any more in terms of talent or treasure, please resubmit a form. Anything you can give brings the joy of Christ back to you and to others.

I’m so proud of our parish for making a bold statement with charity—this year we will give an additional $2,000 to charity—$600 to prison ministry, $600 to International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) and $800 to buy food for the Matthew 25 ministry we support with Community Outreach. This is awesome!

Going back to the song, let’s not “hope it’s a good year”, let’s work together to make it a good one, a great one, one that brings glory to the Lord, and shows love for our neighbor, whether that person is across town, across the aisle in church, or across the table at home.

Happy New Year 2017! May God bless you with health, peace, joy and purpose!

+Fr. Stavros

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**Update from the Strategic Planning Team**

In 2016 we saw the ‘kick-off’ of Strategic Planning at St. John the Baptist with an initial meeting in October. We assembled a diverse group of parishioners to form our ‘core’ Strategic Planning Team (SPT). We welcome the New Year, with a strong plan in place for continued progress. We will dig deeper into the 6 core elements of any successful strategic plan - Vision, Mission, Core Values, Strategic Areas of Focus, Strategic Goals and Action Plans. We disturbed our first survey in November and asked for feedback from the community on the current ‘Mission/Vision’ Statement of St. John the Baptist. We received some good qualitative feedback but unfortunately only 18 responses. These responses allowed us to have a productive brainstorming session and initial redesign of the ‘why’ of our church and involvement at St. John the Baptist but we can do better as a community for future surveys!

This is a Strategic Plan for St. John the Baptist (all of us) and we need your feedback and support as this process continues. Be on the lookout for our Next Survey and please take time to participate and let your voice be heard! If you have any feedback/questions please contact Fr. Stavros, **Marc Edquid** edquidma@gmail.com or **Gary Ward** gward2020@gmail.com (Team Leaders)
**Liturgical Schedule for January**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sunday, January 1</strong></td>
<td>St. Basil - Happy New Year! Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
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<td><strong>Altar Boys:</strong> Anyone Attending May Serve</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Ushers:</strong> Florin Patrasciou, Mike Kavouklis, Tammy Christou</td>
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<td><strong>Coffee Hour:</strong> Young at Heart</td>
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<td><strong>Wednesday, January 4</strong></td>
<td>Royal Hours of Epiphany 9:30 a.m.</td>
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<td><strong>Thursday, January 5</strong></td>
<td>Eve of Epiphany Vesperal Divine Liturgy of St. Basil 9:00 a.m. Blessing of the Waters 10:15 a.m.</td>
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<td><strong>Friday, January 6</strong></td>
<td>Divine Liturgy at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Tarpon Springs 9:30 a.m. Great Vespers for St. John the Baptist at St. John the Baptist 6:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Clergy from the Tampa Bay area will participate in this service. The Philoptochos Society of our parish will host a reception following Vespers.</td>
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<td><strong>Saturday, January 7</strong></td>
<td>Feast of St. John the Baptist Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m. Clergy from the Tampa Bay area will participate in this service. The Parish Council will host a luncheon following the Divine Liturgy.</td>
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<td><strong>Sunday, January 8</strong></td>
<td>Sunday After Epiphany Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
<td><strong>Altar Boys:</strong> Captains and St. Matthew <strong>Ushers:</strong> Ron Myer, Marcus Calpakis, Peter Theophanous <strong>Welcome Committee:</strong> Greeters: Vanessa Aviles, Pablo Aviles; Ambassador: Kalliope Chagaris; Caller: Peggy Bradshaw <strong>Coffee Hour:</strong> Vasilopita Sunday Luncheon</td>
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<td><strong>Sunday, January 15</strong></td>
<td>12th Sunday of Luke Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
<td><strong>Altar Boys:</strong> Captains and St Mark <strong>Ushers:</strong> John Alexander, John Christ, George Trimikliniotis <strong>Welcome Committee:</strong> Greeters: Genie Carter, Helen Cauthorn; Ambassador: Carole Fotopoulos; Caller: Julie Palios <strong>Coffee Hour:</strong> Oratorical Festival Fundraiser</td>
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<td><strong>Tuesday, January 17</strong></td>
<td>St. Anthony Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
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<td><strong>Wednesday, January 18</strong></td>
<td>Sts. Athanasios and Cyril Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
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<td><strong>Sunday, January 22</strong></td>
<td>15th Sunday of Luke Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
<td><strong>Altar Boys:</strong> Captains and St. Luke <strong>Ushers:</strong> Brett Mourer, Wayne Blankenship, Amin Hanhan <strong>Welcome Committee:</strong> Greeters: Dwight Forde, Ewana Forde; Ambassador: Elaine Halkias; Caller: Betty Katsamakis <strong>Coffee Hour:</strong> The AHEPA Family</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Wednesday, January 25</strong></td>
<td>St. Gregory the Theologian Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
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Liturgical Notes for January

Sunday, January 1 - Feast of the Circumcision of Christ, St. Basil-New Year’s Day
Three things are commemorated on the first day of each year. First, the circumcision of Christ, which occurred historically 8 days after His Nativity. He was circumcised according to the rites of the Jewish law and given the name Jesus. Secondly, we commemorate the feast of St. Basil the Great, one of the Great Hierarchs of our church. St. Basil authored one of the Divine Liturgies used in our church, which is celebrated on his feastday. He also helped found monasticism. St. Basil was a friend to the poor, often baking bread with money in it and throwing it through the windows of widows and the poor. Hence the tradition of the Vasilopita, the bread with the coin baked inside, that we cut at the New Year. Finally, we are supposed to pray every day and commemorate all of life’s milestones with prayer. So, we open a new year, 2017, with prayer and the Divine Liturgy.

Wednesday, January 4 - Royal Hours of Epiphany
Like Christmas and Easter, there is a service of the Royal Hours which is celebrated in anticipation of Epiphany. This service consists of prayers, Psalms, hymns and Gospel readings which both foretell and recount this Great Feast of the church year.

Thursday, January 5 - Eve of Epiphany-Divine Liturgy, Blessing of the Waters
Also, like Christmas and Easter, the feast of Epiphany is commemorated with two celebrations of the Divine Liturgy, one of them on the forefeast (day before the feastday). Hymns of anticipation are sung at this service. Also, there is a service of Aghiasmos (blessing of the water) which is done at the conclusion of the Liturgy on January 5.

On Friday, January 6, we will NOT hold the Divine Liturgy at St. John the Baptist. Rather, we will all gather at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Tarpon Springs for Divine Liturgy beginning at 9:30 a.m., followed by the yearly diving for the cross at around 12:30 p.m.

Friday, January 6 - Great Vespers of St. John the Baptist
The Vespers Service is the service that begins the liturgical day. In our church, the day begins at sundown. Thus the feast of St. John the Baptist, celebrated on January 7, begins with the sunset of January 6. Properly celebrated, all feastdays should begin with the celebration of Great Vespers, including every Sunday which should begin with Great Vespers on Saturday evenings. Because this is not practical in most parishes, Great Vespers is celebrated in most parishes on a limited basis. We will, of course, celebrate the complete cycle of services related to our feastday of St. John, which will begin with Great Vespers. Clergy of the Tampa Bay area will take part in this service.

Saturday, January 7 - Feast of St. John the Baptist
The day after a major feastday often commemorates the secondary figure of the Feast. On January 6, we celebrate the Baptism/Epiphany of Christ, who is obviously the major figure. The secondary figure of that feast is St. John the Baptist, whose feastday we commemorate the next day, January 7. St. John is the LAST of the Prophets before Christ and the first of the Saints, those who believed in Christ. Righteous figures who came before Christ are called either “Righteous” or “Prophet.” Holy People who came after Christ are called Saints. St. John the Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist, as both titles. His life and his important work as the forerunner of the Lord is commemorated January 7. As this is the feastday of our church, many visiting clergy will be here to celebrate with us.
Sunday, January 8 - Philoptochos’ Vasilopita Sunday
If you would like to bake a vasilopita for our coffee hour to benefit St. Basil’s Academy please call or email Jeanie Nenos 813 451-9116/ jeanierrt@aol.com.

Tuesday, January 17 - Feast of St. Anthony
St. Anthony is recognized as one of the fathers of monasticism. He lived in the late 3rd and early 4th centuries. He founded a monastery in Egypt which still exists to this day. He authored many of the monastic rules that are still in practice today. He also was a major contributor to the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea in 325, where the Nicene Creed was first authored. He was one of the leaders against the heresies of Ariusianism.

Wednesday, January 18 - Feast of St. Athanasios and Cyril
St. Athanasios was born in 297 and was ordained a priest in 319. At the tender age of 28, he was one of the leaders of the First Ecumenical Council in 325 in Nicea, and defended the Faith against the heresies of Arius. He contributed to the development of the Nicene Creed which was authored in 325 and edited in 381 at the second Ecumenical Council. St. Athanasios became a bishop and later Patriarch of Alexandria.

Wednesday, January 25 - Feast of St. Gregory the Theologian
One of the Three Hierarchs, also lived in the 4th century. Was a friend and contemporary of St. Basil and St. John the Theologian. He was an accomplished speaker and writer, was the Bishop of Nazianzos and was one of the Bishops who presided at the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381, which finalized the Nicene Creed that we recite to this day.

Monday, January 30 - Feast of the Three Hierarchs
The Three Hierarchs are St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom. Each had his own feastday and all are honored together on January 30. Each of them lived in the 4th Century, each was an accomplished writer and speaker, each was a Bishop, each authored a Liturgy and each is remembered prominently in the history of our church to this day. The Three Hierarchs are Patron Saints of Teachers and Education.

Panagia Chapel at Diakonia Retreat Center
Hopefully we are all familiar with the Diakonia Retreat Center (DRC) that the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Atlanta has owned and operated since 2004. Many of our children have gone there for summer camp. Some of our adults have served as counselors. Some of our choir members and Philoptochos members and others have been there for retreats. The DRC is located near Salem, SC, and is a year round retreat center used by many ministries of our Metropolis. That’s right, it’s not just for summer camp. The center of any Orthodox institution is always a church. For the center of Orthodox Christians is receiving our Lord Jesus Christ through the Divine Liturgy and Holy Communion. After many years, His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios has embarked on the building of a church at the DRC. Dedicated to the Panagia (Virgin Mary), it will be used for worship at the DRC for generations to come. Because the DRC is something which belongs to the Metropolis, and we are part of the Metropolis, by extension, it belongs to all of us. So, His Eminence is presenting us with an opportunity for all of us to participate in furnishing the Panagia Chapel. He is asking all of us to contribute something for this church. There are many furnishings, related to the Holy Altar, that are needed. The Holy Altar Table itself is needed. The Bishop’s Throne, the Synthronon, the Icon screen, the side altars of preparation, icon stands, Chanter’s stand - all of these are needed. Wooden chairs called “Stasidia” will also be used around the interior perimeter of the church - the design calls for 75 of them. The stasidia will cost about $850 each and other items, up to $80K for the altar table and different costs in between. If you would like to donate any of these items, please see Father Stavros. If your ministry would like to consider donating something, please see Fr. Stavros.
The Book of Hebrews obviously isn’t for Christians. So, why read it? Well, actually, the Book of Hebrews is for Hebrews who converted to Christianity but wanted to return to Judaism because Jesus was kind of a weirdo and the new rules and regulations or lack thereof in order to attain salvation through that Son of God figure, definitely didn’t make sense. The author of the Book of Hebrews might be St. Paul but scholars suggest that it wasn’t completely St. Paul but definitely a disciple or two of his, so we will refer to the writer as author rather than say strictly St. Paul. It’s an important fact. So, because these Hebrews were having doubts about their new Christian faith, the book itself takes many of the Old Testament things like blood sacrifice, the High Priest, the Order of Melchizedek and other important doctrines of the Old Covenant and compares them to the New Covenant. For the purposes of this article, we will begin in Hebrews 10.

“We have then, brothers, complete confidence through the blood of Jesus in entering his sanctuary, by a new way which he has opened for us, a living opening through a curtain, that is to say, his flesh (10:19-20).” The Old Covenant required that the High Priest make a blood sacrifice for himself, his sins and the sins of the people. This blood sacrifice would be done in the temple, specifically in the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies. The New Covenant on the other hand has Jesus Christ as the blood sacrifice, shedding his blood for the remission of sins and life everlasting. His death on the cross split the curtain in two pieces thus giving the people direct access to the Holy of Holies. The way that the author of Hebrews says that the new curtain is the flesh of Christ is so unbelievable to think about, but is telling of who Christ is. This passage starts off with confidence, a rather strong word, but the only word we should have with the blood of Christ drenching our lives. We must have this confidence. It is a humble yet powerful confidence, which makes the devil, flee from our presence.

“And we have the high priest over all the sanctuary of God. So as we go in, let us be sincere in heart and filled with faith, our hearts sprinkled and free from any trace of bad conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us keep firm in the hope we profess, because the one who made us is trustworthy (10:21, 22).” The High Priest again would perform the sacrifice, but Jesus Christ is both the one who makes the sacrifice and who is the sacrifice itself. Because of this as it says, we must enter the sanctuary filled with true faith and free from any bad conscience. The sanctuary is our church and consistently walking in the loving presence of God throughout our life. We must have a true faith and we must clear our conscience of sin so we can grow in love towards God and one another. As Christians, what we have more than any other group in the whole world is hope. We have hope in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

“Let us be concerned for each other, to stir a response in love and good works. Do not abstain yourself from your own assemblies, as some do, but encourage each other; the more so as you see the Day drawing near (10:23-25).” Because we have the hope in Jesus Christ, it must manifest itself in love and good works. We have to be concerned with one another. We must be concerned for their souls. In everything we do in word or in deed affects the soul and the body. The hope of Jesus Christ also affects the soul and the body ourselves. We must share this hope with others and not keep it to our self. It is this hope that encourages and strengthens all things no matter what. Sometimes, we feel it would be better if we just kept the hope to ourself. Or sometimes, it’s hard to even stay hopeful but we must continually infuse our self with the hope of Jesus Christ and also infuse others with that same hope.

“With so many witnesses in a great cloud all around us, we too, then, should throw off everything that weighs us down and the sin that clings so closely, and with perseverance keep running in the race which lies ahead of us. (12:1)” The previous chapter details the lives of many of the all stars of the Old Covenant including: Abel, Cain, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Samuel and the Prophets. These are the witnesses of the faith in a great cloud, which surround us. For Christians now, we not only have these Old Testament all stars as saints but also all of those who have fought for the Christian faith. When seated in an Orthodox Church, the saints, who did everything in their life for Jesus Christ, surround us. We are not only to emulate them, we are to throw away our sins and push away the temptations so that we can achieve what they achieved. They were humans just like us and they were able to achieve holiness. If they could do it than we can do it. We need to ask for their intercessions in everything we do because there is a spiritual war going on and we need them on our side to defeat the enemy.

“Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection: for the sake of joy which lay ahead of him, he endured the cross, disregarding the shame of it, and has taken his seat at the right of God’s throne. Think of the way he persevered against such opposition from sinners and then you will not lose heart and come to grief. In the fight against sin, you have not yet had to keep fighting to the point of bloodshed (12:2-4).” We must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. When Peter was walking on the water, he could only do so if he kept his focus on Christ. When he stopped focusing on Christ and saw the tumultuous waves and storm that was around him, he immediately began to sink. The Evil One does not want us to keep our eyes focused on Christ and he will do everything he can to keep our focus on the storm around us. Forget about the Evil One, it was Jesus Christ, who died the most awful death in the most torturous fashion on the cross. The cross, to this day, is still one of the worst, most painful and shameful ways to die. Christ was not ashamed. Because He was not ashamed, He endured for our salvation and sits at the right hand of God. Better yet, He is still with us. He doesn’t just sit up there and do nothing. He fought against the sinners. So we must fight against sin. We haven’t had to keep fighting until the point of bloodshed but we may be shedding a lot of spiritual blood fighting against the devil. We have to keep our focus on Christ.

Remember Christ in 2017, the hope He gives and remember to engage the Cloud of Witnesses in your spiritual struggle each and every day. I pray that the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood that sealed an eternal covenant, may prepare you to do his will in every kind of good action; effecting in us all whatever is acceptable to himself through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever, Amen. (13:20-21).
Community News

Parish Registry

Baptism - William (Vasilios) Michael Tsibris, son of Ath and Hillary Tsibris, was baptized on Saturday, November 19. Evangline Tsibris Cummings was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism - Jaxon John Pagliuca, son of Christopher and Anastasia Pagliuca, was baptized on Sunday, December 4. Olga McRink was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism - Melanie Kate Axelrod, daughter of Scott and Christine Axelrod, was baptized on Sunday, December 11. Natalie Curtis was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Wedding - Demetrios George Halkias and Camille Christine Curry were married on Saturday, November 19. Athanasios Halkias was the Koumbaro. Congratulations!

Funeral - Matthias Petranellis passed away on November 22. His funeral was held on Monday, November 28. May his memory be eternal!

Registry Statistics

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*We set an all time record for most baptisms in a year!

Parish Council Election Results

Congratulations to George Chagaris, Demetrios Konstas, Catherine Mitseas, Aris Rogers II, Dante Skourellos and Despina Sibley who were elected to the Parish Council. They join Alkis Crassas, Mike Xenick, Sandra Pappas and Carole Fotopoulos to comprise this year’s Parish Council. Thank you to our Election Committee of Tammy Christou, Joann Dalakis, Dr. Bill Manikas and John Mitchell. Thank you also to Skip Higdon and Byron Nenos for their long time service on the Parish Council. Ed Gerecke and Despina Sibley have also decided to leave the Parish Council. We thank them also for their long time service to the Parish Council. The Parish Council, according to the by-laws, will be appointing two people to serve in their places.

Community Outreach - Saturday, January 18

St. John the Baptist's Community Outreach will be serving breakfast to the Homeless at the First Presbyterian Church in Downtown Tampa from 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. The church is located at 412 Zack Street. The entrance is on Polk Street. Grab a cup of coffee and come help us! We love to see new and old faces!

Ye Holy Krewe of Tampa Gasparilla Parking Fundraiser

On Saturday, January 21 and Saturday, January 28, we will be renting out the church parking lot for Gasparilla Parking. This year the children’s parade is on January 21, and the main event is on January 28. If you are interested in volunteering a few hours to help the church make some easy $$$, and also have a good time socializing while directing traffic, please contact John Kokkas, the Captain of Ye Holy Krewe, at 727-992-4165 or johnkokkas@hotmail.com. The primary hours needed are approximately 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. each Saturday. This is a very easy and fun way to generate income for our parish.
GOYA - January 8, Mother/Son and January 22 Father/Daughter
There will be two meetings in January one on January 8 and the other on January 22. At the January 8 meeting, Fr. Stavros will be meeting with mothers and sons (no dads). So, all moms are asked to come to the meeting on January 8 with their sons. Charlie and the other advisors will be meeting with all the girls. The meeting on January 22, Fr. Stavros will be meeting with fathers and daughters (no moms). So, all dads are asked to come to the meeting on January 22 with their sons. Charlie and the other advisors will have a meeting with the girls on that date. Both meetings will be from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. All GOYAns are invited to both meetings.

Orthodoxy 101 Class will be held in January
Fr. Stavros offers this class two times per year, in spring and in fall. However, this class has been taught so many times that we may be at a saturation point. IF you are interested in taking this class, please email Fr. Stavros by January 15—a minimum of 7 need to sign up in order for this class to happen. 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.
◆ 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.
◆ 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.

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. This class will only be held if there are a minimum of 7 people who will commit to doing it, so please sign up by January 15.

Prayer for Teachers on Sunday, January 29
On January 30, we celebrate the feast of the Three Hierarchs, who are also the patron saints of teachers. On January 29, immediately prior to Holy Communion, we will offer a prayer for all teachers and anyone who works in education in our community.

Young Adult Ministry
Our young adult ministry group has a monthly dinner/discussion night at the church. For January, it will be Sunday, January 15, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. Please bring $10 to cover the cost of dinner. Other events will be scheduled. Please check the weekly bulletin or church website for more details.

Sunday, February 5
Super Bowl Sunday of course, but it is also “Souper Bowl of Caring” Sunday as well. This is a nationwide, youth-led initiative to tackle hunger across our country. Over 3000 Churches, youth groups, and other organizations will be collecting non-perishable items and monetary donations for local food banks. More details next month!

OCMC Mission Sunday
As they do every year, Philoptochos is going to sponsor it’s 6th Annual Missions Sunday to support overseas Orthodox Missions. Philoptochos will sponsor a luncheon to benefit missions work, with all proceeds going toward the Mission Center.
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<td>January 1</td>
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<td>January 6-7</td>
<td>Feast of St. John the Baptist</td>
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<td>January 8</td>
<td>Vasilopita Sunday</td>
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<td>February 5</td>
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<td>Parish Oratorical Festival</td>
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<td>Ecumenical Prayer Service at Christ the King Catholic Church</td>
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<td>February 25</td>
<td>Saturday of Souls Liturgy at Garden of Memories - Blessing of Graves</td>
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<td>February 26</td>
<td>Forgiveness Sunday - Sunday School Pre-Lent Retreat</td>
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<td>March 4</td>
<td>Sunday of Orthodoxy-Procession of Icons</td>
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<td>Sunday School Good Friday Retreat</td>
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<td>Parish Picnic</td>
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<td>May 21</td>
<td>Last Day of Sunday School</td>
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<td>May 25</td>
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<td>June 16-18</td>
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<td>June 21-24</td>
<td>Metropolis of Atlanta Clergy - Laity/Choir Conference</td>
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<td>July</td>
<td>Metropolis of Atlanta’s St. Stephen’s Summer Camp</td>
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<td>August 6</td>
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<td>Dormition of the Theotokos</td>
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<td>December 10</td>
<td>Sunday School Christmas Program</td>
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<td>December 24</td>
<td>Christmas Service</td>
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What Stewardship Means to Me

By Jean Jolly

The Stewardship slogan for 2017 is “Do what pleases God.” Fr. Stavros asks us to look into our hearts and answer some important questions concerning this slogan. Do we believe that it is necessary to commit to a pledge because it is pleasing to God? Do we believe that our money is a gift from God and that our pledge reflects our commitment to Christ? Do we believe that Christ expects us to express our gratitude for His gifts by giving back a percentage of our money through stewardship? Do we believe that our stewardship is preparation for our final accounting before Christ?

The answer to these questions for my husband and me is “yes,” as it has been for the last twenty-five years. We did not come to this answer easily. The first hurdle we had to overcome was the very idea of pledging. We had always given to the Church, but we were reluctant to pledge because we never knew what financial emergencies might arise during the year. It made more sense to us to give what we had available without being committed to a certain amount. Although we never hesitated to commit to a mortgage or car payment, somehow, we could not bring ourselves to make the same type of contract with our church. Over the years, as our faith and hope in Christ grew, we became willing to make this annual pledge the first item in our budget. Each year we increased the amount of our pledge, and each year it seemed a little easier. This is not to say that it has always been easy, but we feel that necessary sacrifice on our part is more than worth it.

At this point in our lives, Jim and I feel strongly that we will be judged by God for what we did with His material gifts to us. We believe in the biblical tithe and make our pledge accordingly. We find great joy in giving our Creator this gift.

~ Stewardship Update ~

‘Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit’ Romans 15:13

Stewardship Sunday, December 4, 2016, was a day to celebrate our faith and offer our gifts to God as a community with love. Fr. Stavros spoke of the joy in giving and we came together as a community to give on this beautiful Sunday! We are humbled and grateful for the 157 families that turned in Pledge Forms including 6 new families! Many Stewards increased their pledges, some significantly, which is also great news. To date we have $269,351.00 pledged for 2017! We are answering our calling from God with a blessed start to our New Year!

We thank everyone who has turned in a pledge form to date. If you have not completed your Pledge to St. John the Baptist please take time to do so today – you may complete the form online or pickup a hard copy in the Church Narthex or office. Please help us achieve our goal of 100% participation for all Stewards of St. John the Baptist, by February 2017! We would like to get the year started with a solid foundation of faith in our church and Gods work.

And please don’t forget the Talents section as you complete your pledges. As a church we often have needs that require some expertise and we keep track of everyone’s talents in our church software - Parish Data Systems. It takes many helping hands throughout the year to meet our church needs and we will be calling from time to time to ask for support!

~On behalf of the Stewardship Committee we wish everyone a Blessed New Year and thank you for your support of God’s Church in Tampa~

Please let us know that your loved ones are sick or hospitalized!

There have been several instances over the past several months where parishioners have ended up in the hospital and we did not know about it. This leads to misunderstandings and even hurt feelings as to why we did not go visit someone. If we do not know, we cannot go! Please let the office know or email Father Stavros directly at frstav@gmail.com when a loved one is in the hospital or if you know of anyone that is sick and would like us to visit them. Father and/or Charlie will be happy to visit. Thank you!
News from St. John Legacy Society
A Tax-Saving Way to Help
St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

If you are 70½ years old or older...See Your Generosity in Action

If you are 70½ years old or older, you can take advantage of a simple way to benefit St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church and receive tax benefits in return. You can give up to $100,000 from your IRA directly to St. John without having to pay income taxes on the money.

This law no longer has an expiration date so you are free to pay your annual stewardship gifts to St. John this year and well into the future.

Why Consider This Gift?
Your gift will be put to use today, allowing you to see the difference your donation is making. You pay no income taxes on the gift. The transfer generates neither taxable income nor a tax deduction, so you benefit even if you do not itemize your deductions.

If you have not yet taken your required minimum distribution for the year, your IRA charitable rollover gift can satisfy all or part of that requirement.

If you include St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in your estate plans, please use our legal name and Federal Tax ID # 59-1170684. Additionally, please contact Fr. Stavros at 813-876-8830 ext. 103, (email frstav@gmail.com) or call Debbie Gavalas at 813-505-8901 so that we may properly thank you and include you as a founding member of the St. John Legacy Society.

Sandra Pappas
Carole Fotopoulos

Archangel Michael W inners from 2016 recognized!

We congratulate again Carole Fotopoulos and Sandra Pappas who were awarded the Archangel Michael Award from our parish in 2016. Father presented the awards in church on Sunday, December 4. We thank you for your stellar stewardship to our community!
We would like to wish everyone in our parish a blessed New Year and hope that you had a wonderful Christmas with your family. The first half of our Sunday School year has been extremely busy and successful thanks to all the teachers, Fr. Stavros, Charlie Hambos, the parents, and especially the students of St. John the Baptist.

This year's Christmas Program was the biggest and best ever. Our students are very talented and all the parts could be heard clearly. We would like to thank all of our Sunday School students, teachers, and parents for helping to make this pageant a HUGE success. Maria Xenick has been producing this program for a number of years and we can not thank her enough for her commitment to our children, our music program, and our church.

A big thank you goes out to Debbie Nicklow and Amy Kafantaris for planning the Christmas Party on Saturday, December 10. We would also like to thank all the children who attended the Sunday School / Hope & Joy Christmas party, to all the GOYAn’s that volunteered to help and to all the parents that helped make the afternoon such a success! This year in addition to all the Christmas crafts, the children made fleece blankets that will be donated to hospitalized teens at St. Joseph’s Children’s Hospital. It was a fun service project that will bring a smile and warm wishes to a hospitalized teen. We also collected over 35 unwrapped toys that will be donated to the Hope Children’s Home. Thank you to all and a special thank you to Bavaro’s for donating the delicious Penne alla Vodka pasta and to ABC Pizza for donating the delicious salad for our lunch.

Many of our Sunday School students worked at the Metropolitan Ministries Holiday Tent this season. It was also wonderful to see our children participate in our BOXES OF HOPE project on Sunday, November 20. Helping others is such an important part of our Faith.

Our Greek Festival was a huge success. It was beautiful to see our students involved in helping our church. What a perfect example of Stewardship!!! Giving of their TIME; washing trays, serving food, cleaning tables, etc. And of course of their TALENTS…Greek Dancing! To see our children dressed in costume and dancing with pride, was pure joy and always a highlight of our Festival.

Our Sunday School topics for the past few months were CHARITY - THANKFULNESS, STEWARDSHIP, and of course the NATIVITY OF CHRIST.

**DATES TO REMEMBER - JANUARY:**

- **Sunday, January 1:** No Sunday School Classes
- **Sunday, January 8:** Topic: Vasilopita/St. Basil and the Epiphany & GOYA 5:00 p.m.
- **Sunday, January 15:** YOUTH SUNDAY Prosphora (4th Grade) & Charlie: Pre-K
- **Sunday, January 22:** Topic: Sacramental Life of the Orthodox Church & Charlie: Kindergarten & GOYA 5:00 p.m.
- **Sunday, January 29:** Topic: Light of Christ/Making Faith Personal & Charlie: First Grade

**A Message to Our Youth from Alexis Scarfogliero**

I hope everyone has recovered from the Festival by now. I just wanted to take a minute to thank everyone for all of your help, donations, or both. I especially would like to thank all of our youth. I know I have said this before, but I really love and I am so impressed by our kids at Saint John’s! So many of them spent hours helping me in the kids area and I know there were many that spent hours helping in other areas too. There were even multiple festival guests that noticed and mentioned how awesome it was that the whole community comes together and they loved seeing so many kids and teens working right alongside the adults. Which again, just shows how great our kids are!

Lastly, while we don't have any final numbers yet, it does look like the kids area did quite well. What lends to this is that almost everything gets donated by all of us, which only helps further advance our potential profits.

So again, I wanted to thank everyone for all of your help!
Hope & Joy Presents

Movie & Pizza Night

Featuring

Zootopia

Friday, January 20, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in the Kourmolis Center

Bring your favorite blanket and enjoy a night of fun, food & fellowship with your friends!

Please RSVP to Debbie by January 16 at debbienicklow@hotmail.com or 813-690-0671.

Thank you for your support of Boxes of Hope!
Philoptochos 2017 Membership Drive!

We are on the MOVE for a Great New Year!

We Invite all women ages 18 to 118 to join the St. John the Baptist Philoptochos Annunciation Chapter!

Membership Drive: January thru April, Suggested Stewardship is $30.00. However, we accept whatever you have in your heart to give. Your donation makes you a member of the National, The Metropolis and our Local Chapters of Philoptochos…

THANK YOU SO MUCH AND HAVE A HAPPY AND HEALTHY NEW YEAR 2017

Name__________________________________________________________   Date________________________________

Street Address_________________________________________________________________________________________

City_____________________________________  State______________  Zip_______________________________

Home Phone__________________________                      Cell___________________________

Please circle which number is the preferred contact:  HOME/ CELL

E-mail address___________________________________________________________

The Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society, Inc., is the duly accredited women's philanthropic society of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. The mission of the Society shall be:

- To aid the poor, the destitute, the hungry, the aged, the sick, the unemployed, the orphaned, the imprisoned, the widowed, the handicapped, the victims of disasters, to undertake the burial of impoverished persons and to offer assistance to anyone who may need the help of the Church through fund raising efforts; and
- To promote the charitable, benevolent, and philanthropic purposes of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, through instructional programs, presentations, lectures, seminars and other educational resources;
- To preserve and perpetuate Orthodox Christian concepts and the Orthodox Christian Family, and through them, to promote the Greek Orthodox Faith and traditions, in accordance with its doctrines, canons, discipline, divine worship, usages and customs;
- To promote participation in the activities of the Greek Orthodox community, with the cooperation of the Parish Priest and the Parish Council.

Please return from to: Jeanie Nenos, 14506 Nettle Creek Rd, Tampa, FL 33624
Or the Philoptochos mailbox in the church office.
Prideful vs. Grateful
by Alkis Crassas, Parish Council President

Prideful is a common condition. It’s an expression of comparison, superiority, winning; in other words, separation. It’s a product of the mind, the ego, the head, and leaves one closed off.

Grateful comes more from the heart than the head. Grateful recognizes that it’s about more than just you. There is a sense that you have been supported in some way; you feel inclusion, shared joy, and an uplifting energy.

As we say good bye to 2016 and hello to 2017, I feel tremendous gratitude. I’m grateful for you as the reader and parishioner of St. John the Baptist. You make this community shine and vibrate with an attractive, welcoming energy. I’m grateful we’re on this journey together, seeking to better understand Our Maker, leading Christ-like lives, … and (once a year) uniting to sell gyros!

We have again grown as a parish, both in numbers, in programs, and in spirit thanks to the leadership, dedication and hard work of Fr. Stavros. I am grateful to have such an amazing priest leading our community. I’m also thankful for the office staff, the Parish Council, the ministry leaders, and the countless volunteers that make St John the Baptist the “home” of so many. Thank you all for everything that you do!

May God bless you and our parish!

PS: What are you grateful for?

Thank You to all of Our Friends!

Barbara Akrotirianakis - Whittier, CA
William J Camarinos - Alexandria, VA
Richard & Mickie Bass - Asheville, NC
Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL
Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI
Perry & Fay Stamatiades - Asheville, NC
Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI
Wesley & Melissa Thompson - Clearwater, FL
Demitrius & Katherine Klimis - Boardman, OH
Mary Spanos - St. Augustine, FL
Bessie Bliziotes - Palm Cost, FL
Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL
Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL
William & Kane Chapman - Palmetto, FL
Lillian Thomas - Highland, IN
Kathleen Mendez - Ponte Vedra, FL
Theodora Poletis - Baltimore, MD

Friends of St. John the Baptist - 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 by being a “Friend of St. John the Baptist.” 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.

Thank you for your consideration of our parish.
Friend of St. John the Baptist:

Name: ____________________________
Address: ____________________________
Phone: ____________________________ Email: ____________________________

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

$50  $100  $200  Other

Please mail this form and check to: St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church 2418 W. Swann Ave Tampa, FL 33609
THE AHEPA FAMILY OF TAMPA HOPES THAT EVERYONE HAD A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND WISHES EVERYONE A HAPPY NEW YEAR WITH HEALTH, HAPPINESS, PEACE AND PROSPERITY FOR ALL.

ANNUAL AHEPA FAMILY OF TAMPA SAINT JOHN DAY DINNER
The AHEPA FAMILY of Tampa is having our Annual Saint John Day Dinner again this year on Thursday, January 7, 2017 in the evening, at the Floridan Hotel, beginning at 6:30 p.m. with dinner at 7:00 p.m. Guests will include the Supreme President of AHEPA, Andy Zachariades; the Supreme Vice President of AHEPA, George Loucas; the Supreme Secretary of AHEPA, Carl Hollister; the Grand Vice President of the Daughters of Penelope Eva Jean Fomalont; Grand Governor Zone III Kathy Papadimitropoulos; the Immediate Past Grand President of the Daughters of Penelope, Connie Pilallis, and Greek Consul General in Tampa, Florida, Adamantia Klotsa. In Attendance will also be District Lodge members from the AHEPA and Daughters of Penelope Citrus District 2 Lodges; past district governors of Citrus District 2 and other Districts and past supreme lodge members and other dignitaries.

We invite everyone, to attend this elegant, inspirational and motivating evening with the leaders of our Hellenic-American community throughout the United States. Please make your reservations by calling (813)254-6980.

AHEPA FAMILY SCHOLARSHIP DINNER AND CHRISTMAS SOCIAL
On December 17, 2016 the AHEPA FAMILY hosted the annual SCHOLARSHIP AND CHRISTMAS SOCIAL DINNER at the Floridan Hotel, once again awarding scholarships to the young members of our community. Scholarship recipients included George N. Hambos Jr., Gregory James Koutroumanis, Larissa Alexandra Krinos and Katherine Chace Sibley.

The AHEPA Family Scholarship Program began in 2010 and this is the seventh year that we have awarded scholarships to worthy students of our community. To date the AHEPA Family has awarded over 30 scholarships worth over $35,000.

EPIPHANY EVENTS IN THE TAMPA BAY AREA
Epiphany is a holiday which is celebrated throughout the Tampa Bay Area with many visitors joining us for the festivities. The following are some of the events that are scheduled:

January 5 - AHEPA Annual Epiphany Banquet - Cocktails 6:00 p.m., Dinner Follows, Dancing Tarpon Springs Yacht Club - 350 N. Spring Blvd, Tarpon Springs, FL Call Tim Keffalas (727)510-3934 for reservations.

January 6 - Church Services & Epiphany Procession - Orthos 8:00 a.m., Blessing of Waters 12:00 p.m. St. Nicholas Cathedral - 36 N. Pinellas Avenue, Tarpon Springs, FL Everyone is Invited to Attend & Participate in the Church Services & Epiphany Celebration.

January 6 - Epiphany Glendi - 12:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. St. Nicholas Community Center - 348 N. Pinellas Avenue, Tarpon Springs, FL Food, Drink, Live Music & Dancing - Everyone is invited to Celebrate Epiphany

WALK TO END ALZHEIMERS
Ahepa and Daughters of Penelope participated in the “WALK TO END ALZHEIMERS” again this year. The event was led by Maria Zabetakis and the Daughters of Penelope. A great time was had by everyone and they raised over $2,000 for the cause to end Alzheimer’s as part of the Hillsborough WALK which raised over $400,000. BRAVO TO ALL!

AHEPA FLORIDA LEGISLATIVE DAY
AHEPA Legislative Day is scheduled again this year it will provide an opportunity for AHEPA family members including Ahepans, Daughters, Sons and Maids to go to Tallahassee for education about how our legislature works and for face to face meetings with legislators. The event is being organized by Lycurgus Chapter 12 for the District Lodge and will involve all Ahepans in the State. Join us again this year for this educational and fun filled trip.
Small Group Bible Study

Small group Bible Studies are now underway. 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.

Monday Night Bible Study (for everyone)
We will be studying Hebrews
**Location:** St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in the Administration Building meeting room
**Group Leader:** Charlie Hambos
charlie.hambos@gmail.com, 813-843-8471
**Meeting time:** Monday evenings from 6:30–8:00 p.m.
**January Meeting Dates:** January 9, 16, 23, 30

Women’s Group (for adult women of any age)
**Location:** Meets at the home of Debbie Kavouklis, Debbie lives in South Tampa, a mile or so from the church. 3315 Jean Circle, Tampa, FL 33629
**Group Leader:** Debbie Kavouklis dkavouklis1@verizon.net, (813) 690-0155.
**Meeting time:** Tuesday mornings from 10:00-11:30 a.m.
(9:30 a.m. for coffee and refreshments)
**January Meeting Dates:** January 10, (January 17 at the church for liturgy), 24, 31

Men’s Group (for adult men of any age)
**Location:** St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in the Administration Building in the meeting room
**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 7:30-8:00 a.m.
For this early morning group, bring your own coffee or breakfast food if you wish—we will not be providing these things.
**January Meeting Dates:** January 11, 18, 25

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:** At the Church in the Library
**Group Leader:** Bessie Palios bmp1126@yahoo.com, 813-523-0347.
**Meeting time:** Tuesday evenings from 7:00-8:30 p.m.
**January Meeting Dates:** January 10, 17, 24, 31

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 2604 Herndon Street, Valrico, FL 33596
**Group Leader:** Donna Hambos dhambos@msn.com, 813-843-8412
**Meeting Time:** Tuesday evenings from 6:30-8:00 p.m.
**January Meeting Dates:** January 10, 17, 24, 31

St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

**Sermons on Youtube Channel Each Sunday**
Father’s sermons each Sunday are available on our YouTube channel. Just go to YouTube and type in “St John GOC Tampa” and you’ll find them. If you miss a sermon or wish to hear a sermon again, you’ll find it there!

**You Like our Facebook page?** Like our page and suggest it to your friends. Announcements are posted frequently so you are up to date with everything going on at St. John the Baptist. You can find our page at StJohnGOCTampa.

**Live Streaming** - All of our services are being video recorded and are available on our Livestream page.
To access this page
1. Go to our Church’s website: greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com,
2. Scroll the mouse over the “Multimedia” tab on the menu bar,
3. Click ”View Liturgy,”
All of the services are available to watch at anytime.
For Weddings, Divorces, Baptisms, Funerals and Memorials

The Greek Orthodox Church is not a church of rules. But without some guidelines to go by, there would be chaos. The following guidelines are rooted in Orthodox Tradition and Canon Law. These guidelines are printed in The Messenger in the beginning of each calendar year, and it is a good idea from time to time for people to review them. These guidelines have been copied from the 2016 Yearbook of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Please review them, and keep them in mind when planning for your important life events. If you have any questions, please contact Fr. Stavros. (Special requirements specific to sacraments at St. John the Baptist appear in italics.)

Weddings

For the union of a man and woman to be recognized as sacramentally valid by the Orthodox Church, the following conditions must be met: The Sacrament of Matrimony must be celebrated by an Orthodox Priest of a canonical Orthodox jurisdiction, according to the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church, in a canonical Orthodox Church, and with the authorization of the Metropolitan.

Before requesting permission from the Metropolitan to perform the marriage, a Priest must verify that: a) Neither of the parties in question are already married to other persons, either in this country or elsewhere (if a person comes to the United States after age 18, they need to provide a letter from their country of origin that they are indeed free to marry); b) the parties in question are not related to each other to a degree that would constitute an impediment; c) if either or both parties are widowed, they have presented the death certificate(s) of the deceased spouse(s); d) if either or both of the parties have been previously married in the Orthodox Church, they have obtained an ecclesiastical as well as civil divorce. (The Ecclesiastical Divorce process is done after the civil divorce becomes final, and involves counseling with the parish priest, forms that are filled out, a review by the Metropolitan, a divorce hearing which in the Tampa Bay area is held in Clearwater, and this process usually takes several months to complete. Fr. Stavros will not set a wedding date for anyone until an ecclesiastical divorce has been secured, so please plan accordingly, the ecclesiastical divorce process often takes several months.) e) the party or parties who are members of a parish other than the one in which the marriage is to be performed have provided a certificate declaring them to be members in good standing with their Church for the current year; and f) a civil marriage license has been obtained from civil authorities.

No person may marry more than three times in the church, with permission for a third marriage granted only with extreme oikonomia.

In cases involving the marriage of Orthodox and non-Orthodox persons may be members of the wedding party, but may not exchange the rings or crowns.

A baptized Orthodox Christian whose wedding has not been blessed by the Orthodox Church is no longer in good standing with the Church, and may not receive the Sacraments of the Church, including Holy Communion, or become a sponsor of an Orthodox Marriage, Baptism, or Chrismation. A non-Orthodox Christian who marries an Orthodox Christian does not thereby become a member of the Orthodox Church, and may not receive the Sacraments, including Holy Communion, serve on the Parish Council or vote in parish assemblies or elections. To participate in the Church’s life, one must be received into the Church by the Sacrament of Baptism, or in the case of persons baptized with water in the Holy Trinity, following a period of instruction, by Chrismation.

Canonically and theologically preclude the Orthodox Church from performing the Sacrament of Marriage for couples where one partner is Orthodox and the other partner is a non-Orthodox Christian. As such, Orthodox Christians choosing to enter such marriages fall out of good standing with their Church and are unable to actively participate in the sacramental life of the church. While this stance may seem confusing and rigid, it is guided by the Orthodox Church’s love and concern for its member’s religious and spiritual well-being.

The Sponsor (koumbaros or koumbara) must provide a current certificate of membership proving him or her to be an Orthodox Christian in good standing with the church. A person who does not belong to a parish, or who belongs to a parish under the jurisdiction of a bishop who is not in communion with the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, or who, if married, has not had his or her marriage blessed by the Orthodox Church, or, if divorced, has not received an ecclesiastical divorce, cannot be a sponsor. Non-Orthodox persons may be members of the wedding party, but may not exchange the rings or crowns.

Days when marriage is not permitted

Marriages are not performed on fast days or during fasting seasons or on the feasts of the church as indicated: September 14 (Holy Cross Day), December 13-25 (Christmas), January 5 and 6 (Epiphany), Great Lent and Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, August 1-15 (Dormition Fast) and August 29. Any exceptions can only be made with the permission of the Metropolitan.

Prohibited Marriages

The following types of relationships constitute impediments to marriage:

Parents with their own children, grandchild or great-grandchildren or Godchildren of the same Godparents; Brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law; Uncles and aunts with nieces and nephews; First cousins with each other; Foster parents with foster children or foster children with the children of foster
Godparents with Godchildren or Godparents with the parents of their Godchildren. (In the Chrismation of an adult, one has potential marriage impediment. For any questions regarding, please see Fr. Stavros)

A date cannot be set for marriage unless one of the parties getting married, NOT THE PARENTS, contact Fr. Stavros, who sets all the dates for weddings. In order for the date to be locked in, one person in the couple has to come and meet with Fr. Stavros to go over the wedding procedures. Pre-Marital Counseling is also required for weddings at St. John the Baptist. There is a two-fold requirement. One is that the couples need to meet with Fr. Stavros for two sessions. Second, the Metropolis of Atlanta requires couples participate in a Saturday regional premarital counseling seminar. Contact the Metropolis of Atlanta or visit the Family Life Ministry section of their website for dates in 2017. For people who wish to be married at St. John the Baptist who are not members anywhere, a substantial fee is imposed for use of the church, thereby encouraging all those who wish to have the sacraments of the church to be members in good standing. Also, the Koumbaro/Koumbara for a wedding must be in good sacramental standing. If they are not members of St. John the Baptist, they must bring a letter from their parish priest saying that they are in good sacramental standing. Otherwise, there will be a fee imposed as well.

**Baptisms**

A person who wishes to sponsor a candidate for Baptism or Chrismation must be an Orthodox Christian in good standing and a supporting member of an Orthodox parish. A person may not serve as a Godparent if the Church has not blessed his or her marriage or, if civilly divorced, he or she has not been granted an ecclesiastical divorce, or for any other reason he or she is not in communion with the Orthodox Church. Baptisms may not be performed from during Holy Week, or on any of the Great Feastsdays of the Lord.

For people who wish to have a child baptized at St. John who are not members anywhere, a fee is imposed for use of the church, thereby encouraging all those who wish to have the sacraments of the church to be members in good standing. Also, the Godparent must be in good sacramental standing. If they are not members of St. John, they must bring a letter from their parish priest saying that they are in good sacramental standing. Otherwise, there will be a fee imposed as well.

**Funerals**

Funeral services are permitted on any day of the year, except for Sunday and Holy Friday, unless permission is granted by the Metropolitan. If you wish to have a service outside of the church, it will not be a funeral service. It will either be a Memorial Service or a Trisagion. A funeral service must be in an Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church does not allow for cremation. This is based on Ezekiel’s vision of a valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37) and St. Paul’s writing that the Body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19) and thus must be treated with dignity even in death and allowed to return to its elements naturally. The Orthodox Church will not allow a funeral service for someone who has been cremated. Many people have mentioned in their will their desire to be cremated. Please discuss this with Fr. Stavros if there are any questions regarding this, and make the appropriate changes, because Fr. Stavros cannot grant oikonomia (dispensation) and do a funeral service if someone has been cremated.

Additionally, eulogies offered in the church at a funeral service may only be offered by an ordained Orthodox clergyman. If members of the family wish to offer testimonials, these may be done at the funeral home the night before the funeral or at the makaria luncheon.

**Memorials**

Memorial services may not be chanted from the Saturday or Lazarus through the Sunday of Thomas, or on any Feastday of the Lord or any Feastday of the Theotokos. We customarily do not offer memorial services on the 1st Sunday of Lent (Sunday of Orthodoxy) or the 3rd Sunday of Lent (Sunday of the Holy Cross), or the Sunday after September 14. In 2017, the Sundays when NO memorial services will be offered include: March 4 (Sunday of Orthodoxy), March 18 (Sunday of the Holy Cross); April 9 (Palm Sunday); April 16 (Pascha); April 23 (Sunday of St. Thomas); June 4 (Pentecost); Transfiguration (August 6) and September 17 (Sunday after Holy Cross Day) and December 24.

Memorial Services may be scheduled through the church office. You must contact the church at least two weeks in advance of when you want the service. Please let the office know when you call or email whether you will be providing your own koliva or whether you wish for the Philoptochos to provide. If the Philoptochos does the koliva, there is a $75 charge for this service-checks may be made payable to “St. John Philoptochos.” Also, please send the church office all of the names you wish to have commemorated at the memorial service, and how many pews, if any, you would like reserved for your family.

**Organ Donation**

The Orthodox Church allows the faithful to donate organs after death if they wish.

**Forty-Day Blessings**

Forty-Day Blessings for babies may be done on any day. The prayers of this service connect the 40 day churching of the baby with the mother of the child (if she is Orthodox) receiving Communion. Thus, if this service is offered on a Sunday, Father Stavros schedules them at 9:30 a.m., prior to the Divine Liturgy, so that the new mother can receive Holy Communion in the context of the Divine Liturgy.

**Some Guidelines Unique to our Parish**

In line with the guidelines from the Archdiocese provided above, we also have some guidelines for things in our parish that one helpful to review as we start the new year. The Parish Council has adopted what is below with the approval of Fr. Stavros. Most of these guidelines are old, though a few of them are new. For the “Good of the Order” at our church, we ask that everyone cooperate in following these guidelines. Please read these over carefully and if you have any questions, please address them to the Parish Council or Father Stavros.
The Prayer Team continues and now at 23 months it is still continually growing. The Prayer Team is a daily reflection that Fr. Stavros sends out to any one who wishes to receive it. It comes out each morning at 12:30 a.m. via Constant Contact. From Monday - Friday each week, Father writes on various topics. On Saturday - Sunday, he writes reflections on the Divine Liturgy. If you are interested in joining the prayer team, send a one-line email to either Fr. Stavros or Charlie and they will add you to the daily email list.

Fr. Stavros Publishes Second Book!
The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection is now for sale!. It is a series of daily reflections to be read from the beginning of Triodion (this year that is February 5) through All Saints Day (this year that is June 11). Pick up your copy today so you can begin reading it on February 5. This book costs $18.99 and all monies taken in at the bookstore go to the church.
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| 2418 W. Swann Avenue  
Tampa, FL 33609-4712  
Office: (813) 876-8830  Fax: (813) 443-4899 |
| officestjohnoctampa@gmail.com  
www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com |

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**St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church**

**Timetable of Services**

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

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

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**Parish Priest**  
Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis  
813-876-8830 (Office)  813-394-1038 (Cell)  
frstav@gmail.com

**Pastoral Assistant**  
Charlie Hambos  
813-876-8830 (Office)  813-843-8471 (Cell)  
Charlie.hambos@gmail.com

**Parish Council**

- **George Charalambides**  
  727-420-1920
- **Alki Crassas**  
  813-690-5088
- **Carole Fotopoulos**  
  813-982-0947
- **Jimmy Konstas**  
  813-220-7352
- **Catherine Mitsea**  
  813-571-0658
- **Sandra Pappas**  
  813-785-3147
- **Aris Rogers, II**  
  813-309-5575
- **Dante Skourellos**  
  813-765-9534
- **Mike Xenick**  
  813-340-8737

**Office Staff**

- **Monica Gjerde**, Office Manager  
  813-876-8830  officestjohnoctampa@gmail.com
- **Debbie Bowe**, Bookkeeper  
  debbiewbdtampa@gmail.com  fax: 813-443-4899

**Adult Greek School**

- **Magda Myer**  
  813-909-2327

**AHEPA**

- **Giorgos Paris**, President  
  813-234-6908
- **Altar Angels**  
  Engie Halkias  
  813-912-5895
- **Sia Blankenship**  
  813-968-8855

**Basketball**

- **Perry Katsamakis**  
  516-403-3118
- **Jimmy Konstas**  
  813-220-7352
- **Charlie Hambos**  
  813-843-8471

**Bookstore**

- **Bill Manikas**  
  813-960-3679

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**Chanter**

- **Nick Andreadakis**  
  813-516-6081

**Choir**

- **Artie Palios, Director**  
  813-831-1294
- **Russ Loosvitz, Organist**  
  727-488-2782

**Community Outreach**

- **Betty Katherine Katsamakis**  
  813-468-1396

**Dance Group**

- **H XAP A Mα, Alexandra De Maio**  
  813-340-9668
- **Bessie Palios, Marquett Edquid**  
  813-422-8963
- **Parea, Marina Choundas**  
  813-877-6136
- **Anna Maria Bavaro**  
  732-239-9085
- **Panigi Bond, Vanessa Aviles**  
  813-221-2194

**Daughters of Penelope**

- **Chris Frazier, President**  
  813-661-2290

**Finance Committee**

- **Gary Ward**  
  813-846-3898

**Food Pantry**

- **Anetta Alexander**  
  813-758-2689

**Gasparilla Parking**

- **John Kokkas**  
  727-992-4615

**GOYA**

- **Maria Koutoulmanis**  
  813-245-3854
- **Kara Katzaras**  
  772-643-5364

**Hope/Joy**

- **Amy Kafantaris**  
  727-743-1297
- **Debbie Nicklow**  
  813-690-0671

**Junior Olympics**

- **Bryon Nenos**  
  813-789-0729

**MOMS**

- **Mary Ann Konstas**  
  813-215-9862
- **Lindy Skourellos**  
  813-503-7845

**OCF**

- **Charlie Hambos**  
  813-843-8471

**Oratorical Festival**

- **Peggy Bradshaw**  
  727-244-1374

**Philoptochos**

- **Lisa Alina**  
  813-728-1094

**Small Group Bible Study**

- **East, Donna Hambos**  
  813-843-8412
- **Men, Fr. Stavros**  
  813-394-1038
- **South, Bessie Palios**  
  813-523-0347
- **Women, Debbie Kavouklis**  
  813-258-5571

**Stewardship**

- **Sandra Pappas**  
  813-785-3747
- **Pete Trakas**  
  813-505-2193

**Sunday School**

- **Vickie Peckham**  
  813-406-5626

**Usher**

- **Toni Georgas**  
  813-985-0236

**Visitation Committee**

- **Charlie Hambos**  
  813-843-8471

**Welcome Committee**

- **Maria Xenick**  
  813-765-3587

**Young at Heart**

- **Carole Fotopoulos**  
  813-982-0947
- **Mary Nenos**  
  813-935-2096

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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.