November 2017

VISION:
Love God, Love your neighbor and spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ as an Orthodox Christian community.

MISSION:
The mission of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is to welcome and serve people with love, truth, joy and peace, and to create an environment that encourages all to seek salvation through Orthodox Christianity.

CORE VALUES:
Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

Father Stavros’ Message
There are THREE Festivals in November

As we turn the church calendar to November, there are three festivals on our calendar. First, there will be 15 celebrations of the Divine Liturgy in the month of November. Second, our Greek Festival is November 10-12. And third, during November we celebrate Thanksgiving. This month’s message is about these three festivals. I hope we will all plan to participate in our Greek Festival, in as many celebrations of the Divine Liturgy as possible, and that we will all have a blessed and meaningful Feast of Thanksgiving.

The Greek Festival
There are lots of reasons to have a Greek festival and there are lots of good things that can come out of the festival. The festival, first and foremost, is a needed fundraiser for our church. Many people don’t realize how much it actually costs to run a church. There are fixed expenses, including our mortgage, utilities and insurance. Combined, these cost about $300K. There is also our allocation to the Archdiocese, which is about $86K. So, there is nearly $400K that is spent before we hire one person or do one ministry. Combine personnel, ministries, office costs, costs of supplies and charitable giving and that brings our budget to $700K. We raise about $450K in stewardship, which leaves us to raise the rest on candles, the tray, other donations, and yes, the Festival. We hope to net about $100K from the festival.

What We Need From You
1. It takes a lot of manpower to carry off the festival during the festival weekend. So, we need volunteers.
2. The thing that can bring the most pure profit to our festival is the raffle. Please buy a raffle ticket if you have not done so already.
3. Most people come to the festival by word of mouth, so encourage your neighbors and your co-workers and non-Greek friends to come. Put a sign on your lawn or at your business or both.

A Sense of Community
You learn a lot about people when you work in close quarters with them for the weekend. The festival is a great opportunity to meet people in our community. Make it a goal to meet at least three new people from our community this weekend, one new person each day. And after the festival is over, I hope we will not only have made some income for our parish but that the parishioners can strengthen and build bonds with new people.

Come and See—The Spiritual Benefit of the Festival
Ever since we moved the festival to our church grounds, we have always opened up the church for tours of our sanctuary. A few years ago, we added a presentation by our choir of Orthodox Church music. As we deepen our understanding of the Christian faith and as I deepen my understanding of the priesthood and the role of the church, I hope we are seeing a greater and greater need and opportunity to share the joy of being a Christian. It would not be an exaggeration to say that at least half of the people who live in the Tampa Bay area are unchurched, meaning they don’t go to any church. Probably half of the people who will patronize our festival are unchurched. When those people are already on our property, we should invite them to come and see our church. This year, I hope that collectively we will be more intentional in inviting people to come see our church sanctuary. When you meet peo-
people at the festival, in the food line, or at the raffle booth, or on the dance floor, ask them if they’ve come into the church yet, and if not, encourage them to take a church tour. It’s just a simple invitation that everyone can offer.

**We are taking it another step this year.** Our Welcoming Ministry is going to set up a tent in front of the church to more formally welcome people to the church tours and to hand out information about our church and Orthodoxy to our visitors. We then plan to ask people who take the tour, if there is anyone who would like to know more about our faith, and invite them back for a dinner a couple of weeks after the festival. Jesus told us to make disciples of all nations. He didn’t tell us what our success rate had to be, only that we are to call others to salvation. I am excited to see what it will be. Other parishes have had success in bringing the unchurched into our faith through this method, which is one of the reasons we want to try it at our parish in conjunction with the festival. At the festival, I encourage you to invite as many people as possible to come and see our church.

**The Divine Liturgy and Why We Celebrate It So Often**

The purpose of the Divine Liturgy is for us to partake of Christ in the Eucharist. That is why we have the Divine Liturgy. We can sing, we can pray, we can read the Bible and we can learn in other forums. The unique thing about the Divine Liturgy is that here and only here, we have the opportunity to partake of Christ, to touch the Divine God.

In the early church, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated on a daily basis. People communed every day. In monasteries this is still done. In most parishes, however, the Divine Liturgy is celebrated on certain pre-scribed days. The Divine Liturgy is celebrated every Sunday, in honor of the Resurrection of Christ. It is celebrated on all the feast days of Christ—Nativity, Epiphany, Transfiguration, Palm Sunday, Pascha, Ascension, and Holy Cross Day. It is celebrated on the Feast days of the Virgin Mary—Her Nativity (September 8), Entrance into the Temple, (November 21), Her Presentation of Christ (February 2), the Annunciation (March 25) and her Dormition (August 15). It is celebrated on feasts of the Evangelists, Apostles and the major saints in the life of the church. Again, there is a specific schedule that priests are supposed to follow, specific days that are to be honored with a Divine Liturgy. Priests can add to this list, but are not supposed to subtract from it. (Obviously, in July when I’m at summer camp, some are missed, but I actually plan vacations so as to avoid missing important Liturgical celebrations.)

I’m writing specifically on the Divine Liturgy this month, because in the month of November, we are going to celebrate the Divine Liturgy FIFTEEN times in our parish. There are four Sundays. There are set feast days that are supposed to be marked with the celebration of the Divine Liturgy—November 1 (Sts. Cosmas and Damian), November 8 (Archangels), November 9 (St. Nectarios), November 13 (St. John Chrysostom), November 13 (St. Matthew), November 21 (Entrance of Virgin Mary in the Temple), November 25 (St. Katherine) and November 30 (St. Andrew). (Please see liturgical calendar for schedule as well as brief explanation of the lives of these saints). We will also celebrate the Divine Liturgy on the Eve of Thanksgiving (Wednesday, November 22) and on the Friday and Saturday of our Festival (November 10-11). Why during the festival? Two answers—first, there was one year when the Friday and Saturday of the Festival were November 8-9 and it was required for us to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. We celebrated Liturgy on those two days and had the best festival ever, not only in terms of finances, but in terms of the overall mood and positive feel. Our Festival Committee actually commented on that to me and asked the next year for us to celebrate the Divine Liturgy on those two days as well. Because we can offer the Liturgy and wrap it around the context of the festival—For peace from Above, for this holy house, for our parish and city—we pray for all these things and more at the Divine Liturgy and all apply to our Greek Festival.

In last month’s message, I mentioned a Divine Liturgy we celebrated on September 12, right after Hurricane Irma passed through Tampa. We weren’t able to celebrate Divine Liturgy on Sunday, September 10 because of the storm. And having been spared damage by and large by the storm, it seemed like a good thing to gather to thank God for protecting us. As I was praying that Liturgy, I fit the circumstances of the hurricane into nearly every petition. We prayed for favorable weather (and thought about where the storm was still affecting people), for travelers (and thought about those who had evacuated and were returning home), for our civil authorities (and thought about the first responders and prayed for their safety) for deliverance from distress (and thought about those who had significant damage to their homes), and for those who were sick and suffering (and thought about all the people who were injured.

In the last month, there was Hurricane Maria (which devastated the Caribbean), Hurricane Nate (which hammered the Gulf Coast), the mass shooting in Las Vegas, which killed 58 and injured over 500, and the fires in California, which have killed at least 35 and have burned down thousands of homes. These were major events in our country. There have been other minor challenges in our city. And we’ve each faced personal challenges as well.

One beautiful thing about the Divine Liturgy is that almost every life circumstance can be wrapped into it. It doesn’t mention specific names or needs. However, our specific concerns can be wrapped into the “general” feel of the Divine Liturgy. In other words, we can celebrate the Divine Liturgy and always be able to fit our specific needs in its “general” prayers.

The Divine Liturgy speaks to any circumstance in life—recovery from a hurricane, a serious illness, anxiety, doubt, even joy and contentment. This is what makes the service so beautiful and timeless. The same prayers and petitions can be offered time and time again but they can be heard in a different way by different people, because specific needs can be brought to mind as we offer general prayers. The Divine Liturgy was a lot more meaningful to me the day after a hurricane because my mind was very focused on the words of the service and how they related to our specific situation. If you participate in the Divine Liturgy and bring to mind specific things related to your life and your personal situation, this is another way to get more out of this beautiful service.

**We Come to “Celebrate”—A Spiritual Glendi**

When we gather for the Divine Liturgy, the proper verb used to describe the service we are offering is “to celebrate.” We “celebrate” the Divine Liturgy. The priest (or bishop) presiding over the Divine Liturgy is called the “celebrant.” Any oth-
er clergy participating are called the “co-celebrants.”

The use of the word “celebrate” is intentional. Think of when we use the word “celebrate” in our lives. We celebrate birthdays and holidays. We don’t “offer” them, or “mark” them. We celebrate them. We have parties, we have great anticipation for them, we put on our best clothes, we clean our houses, we decorate, we revel. This is how we should approach each “celebration” of the Divine Liturgy. Each celebration is just that, a celebration. This is why we put on our “Sunday best” clothes, why we should go to bed at a reasonable hour the night before, why we should arrive on time or early, and why we should come with joy. For what greater “celebration” can there be than celebrating Christ and receiving Him?

One Hierarch of the church once described the Divine Liturgy as a “spiritual glendi.” “Glendi” is a Greek word that describes a party that lasts hours, where there is eating and talking and laughing and dancing, and no one is in any rush to leave. The Divine Liturgy should be like this—there is partaking of Communion, singing, (in some liturgical traditions like in Africa, there actually is dancing) and no one is in any rush to leave.

When people arrive late, or don’t participate, when there is a stale feel to the Divine Liturgy, it is hard to see it as a celebration. However, when people come with enthusiasm, when they participate, when they understand, then the character of the Divine Liturgy changes to the celebration that the Lord intends for us to have with Him, each time we gather for the Divine Liturgy.

**NOW, the Most Important Word of the Divine Liturgy**

The MOST IMPORTANT word of the Divine Liturgy is found in the first line of the service. “Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages.” It is the word “now.” Why is that so important? Because most people think of the Kingdom of God in either past or future tense but not as a present reality. We think back to God creating the world and to the ministry of Christ 2,000 years ago. We think to the future and what it will be like when and if we are allowed to enter the Kingdom of God. We tend not to think of the Kingdom of God in the present. And yet, when Christ came to earth, He said in many places, “The Kingdom of Heaven IS at hand.” It was obviously present in the person of Jesus Christ, who came to earth 2,000 years ago. And it is continually present in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

In instituting the Holy Eucharist, Jesus took bread and said, “This is my Body;” and He took the cup and said, “This is my Blood.” By receiving His Body and Blood, the Kingdom of God is united with us. Christ is present in our midst and in us. So, the beginning line of the Divine Liturgy is an invitation to this banquet, it is an invitation to be present with Christ, right here and right now. We hope to enter His Kingdom and live there forever. But forever can seem like a long time from now. Through the Divine Liturgy, we enter the Kingdom NOW.

The call to the Divine Liturgy is also a call to leave the world temporarily. Time stops in the Divine Liturgy—we do not measure it in minutes and seconds. We transcend time, and we transcend all the roles we have—we cease to be teachers or spouses or parents or doctors and we stand as children in the presence of our Father.

We acknowledge the Trinity—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We acknowledge the Divinity of the Trinity, calling the Trinity “blessed.” We acknowledge the power of God when we refer to His Kingdom. We acknowledge that God is timeless, when we speak of His Kingdom now and forever and to the ages of ages. And we speak of the Kingdom as a present reality, through the word “now.” That’s why it’s important to come on time—because the first line is actually the most important one!

**Lord, Have Mercy - It is the Faithful who actually offer the prayers**

A priest at summer camp gave a sermon that I will never forget—it was so profound, to me at least, that I wanted to share his thoughts with you. His sermon was about the importance of congregational singing. And his thesis was that the responses ARE the prayers during the litanies offered by the priest or deacon. The petitions are prompts to remember certain things in prayer. When the priest says, “For the peace from above and for the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord,” he is prompting the congregation to pray for peace from above and the salvation of their souls, and the people are answering in prayer “Lord, have mercy.” In other words, “Lord, have mercy and offer us the peace from above and salvation of our souls.”

Think how it would sound if the priest offered a set of petitions and there was no response given to any of them. The priest would be giving a bunch of prompts and there would be no response, no action taken in regards to any of them. This is why it is necessary for people to be present for the Divine Liturgy. There can be no Divine Liturgy with just the priest. There has to be people present to offer the responses to the prompts, in essence, to offer the prayers of the service. The priest offers prayers throughout the service that are “inaudible” or not heard by the faithful. However, it is the faithful that are offering “audible” prayers in the form of the responses, the “Lord, have mercy” and the “Grant this, O Lord” that are sung throughout the service.

As previously mentioned, worship is meant to be work, not just something we watch. And the work of the Divine Liturgy is for the faithful to “pray” the responses to the petitions throughout the service.

**Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; sing the glory of His name; give to Him glorious praise! Say to God “How terrible are Thy deeds! So great is Thy power that Thy enemies cringe before Thee. All the earth worships Thee; they sing praises to Thee, sing praises to Thy name.” Psalm 66: 1-4**

Every line of the Divine Liturgy that is offered by the celebrant has a response from the people. The first line of the Divine Liturgy was an invitation into the Kingdom and the response was “Amen.” In between the first line and the last line, there are many responses of “Lord, have mercy,” and “Grant this, O Lord,” as we offer petitions, as well as many hymns of praise and supplication. As the service comes to an end, the final statement by the people is “Amen,” which again means, “let it be so.” Let the prayers we have offered in this service be answered in God’s way, in God’s time. Let this miracle of the Divine Liturgy, which we have offered, indeed guide us through our lives into everlasting life.

The Divine Liturgy is like the ultimate parable. To the untrained eye or the hardened soul, it is just a play starring a
What the Divine Liturgy does (or should do) for us

Before the Divine Liturgy begins, when the priest prepares the Holy Gifts at the Service of the Proskomide, the first prayer he offers is a hymn from the feast of the Nativity. In Luke 2:20, we read “And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” After seeing Christ with their own eyes and becoming the first human beings to behold our Savior, the Shepherds returned to lives that were humdrum at best. Their encounter with Christ hadn’t changed their social status. It hadn’t changed their state of poverty or their lack of popularity. It changed THEM. It changed their hearts.

And this is what the Divine Liturgy can do for us. After we leave the Divine Liturgy, we will return to the same jobs, the same families, the same challenges and the same stresses. The Divine Liturgy doesn’t necessarily change any of these things. But the Divine Liturgy changes US. When we attend often, when we are active in worship, and when we apply the things we pray for to our everyday lives, the Divine Liturgy changes people. It can change you. It can change me.

I’m reminded of the story of the ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19. Jesus encountered ten lepers who asked to be healed. He told them to go and show themselves to the priests. He didn’t heal them in one quick moment. They trusted in His words enough to make their way to the priests and as they were going, they realized that they had been healed. The Divine Liturgy, I believe, works in the same way, over the course of our lives. We are not perfected in faith in one quick moment. We are not perfected at one Divine Liturgy. But over the course of our lives, the Divine Liturgy, if celebrated properly before, during and after the service, can perfect us in faith. It is a wonderful aid on the journey to salvation.

As we exit the church at the end of the Divine Liturgy, we come to the priest to receive a blessing, as well as a piece of antithoron. (In the Slavic Tradition, the faithful venerate a blessing cross, held by the priest.) The antithoron or blessed bread is offered to the people. Traditionally it was given to those who did not partake of the Holy Gifts, hence the word “anti (instead of) thoron (the Gifts).” It is also a sign of fellowship between people; we share fellowship by “breaking bread” together.

I remember as a child, we were taught to receive the antithoron and then walk to the door of the church, and that right before exiting, we were to turn around, face the altar one more time and make the sign of the cross. We make the sign of the cross as we face the altar in honor of the Holy Communion, Christ Himself, that resides in the Tabernacle on the back of the altar table. This final gesture reminds us to remember what Christ did for us, what He does and what He will do. It reminds me of the words exchanged by the clergy when they offer the “kiss of peace”: “Christ is in our midst. He was, He is, and He ever shall be.” As we exit the church and re-enter the world, we return with joy and with renewed purpose, remember that Christ is with us always, “to the close of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

Jesus says, in Matthew 5:14-16, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” The Divine Liturgy makes our light burn brighter. If our lights are burning strongly, they burn even brighter. And if our lights are going out, the Divine Liturgy rekindles them. The Divine Liturgy enables us to take our light back out into the world, stronger and stronger each time, so that we can share the Light of Christ, through our words and our actions and that through His grace, more can come to know Him through us.

Speaking personally, my life feels more in balance when I go to church on Sunday, and on the rare occasion that I don’t, I find that I am truly missing something. I don’t avoid missing the Divine Liturgy because of any sense of superstition or obligation. Rather, I don’t like to miss out on the joy of the Divine Liturgy. As our parish becomes larger and my responsibilities become greater, there has always been a temptation to eliminate a few of the weekday Divine Liturgies. However, I find if anything, I am adding more of them. Because I realize how much I want and need to be at the Divine Liturgy.

In the early church, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated on an almost-daily basis. In modern times, the Divine Liturgy is celebrated each Sunday and on pre-scribed feast-days. In a given year, I have the privilege of celebrating the Divine Liturgy close to one hundred times, sometimes more. I try to celebrate each as if it was my first and my last, as a hierarch of the church once encouraged me.

I encourage you to attend the Divine Liturgy as often as possible, but not to merely attend, to come to worship, to work, to pray, to sing, to learn and to commune. It is my fervent hope that each of you will allow yourselves to be moved by Christ in this Divine Service. And it is my hope that you will discover the joy and ecstasy of the Divine Liturgy by reflecting more carefully on its timeless words. If nothing else, this article on the Divine Liturgy has given you the opportunity to pause and to think more deeply about what we hear in the services and to realize that the Divine Liturgy is not something to be taken lightly, or attended casually, or infrequently, but something of infinite value. It is, in fact, the most precious thing we have in this life. For where can we, the sinful human being, look upon, touch and become one with Christ Himself? There are two answers. In heaven. And in God’s Heavenly Kingdom brought to earth, the Divine Liturgy.

During the month of November there will be 15 opportunities to attend the Divine Liturgy. And throughout the year, there are many opportunities besides Sundays to attend the Divine Liturgy and receive Holy Communion. What a beautiful opportunity there will be to receive Christ often this month. In fact from November 8-13, for six days in a row, the Divine Liturgy will be offered, the only time of the year besides Holy Week that this is possible at St. John. So, I hope you will take advantage of opportunities this month and in other months to receive Christ often. In the Divine Liturgy, after the Consecration, the prayer that is offered lists SIX reasons to receive Holy Communion:

So that they (the Gifts) may be to those who receive Them:
For vigilance of soul
Forgiveness of sins
Communion of the Holy Spirit
Inheritance of the Kingdom of heaven  
Confidence before You  
And neither in judgement of condemnation.

There are six positive results of receiving Holy Communion that are listed at each Divine Liturgy. And there are MANY more besides these. Each time we receive Holy Communion, we are strengthened in these ways and in other innumerable ways as well.

THANKSGIVING

On November 23, we will celebrate the Feast of Thanksgiving. Sadly, this holiday is marked by eating, shopping and football. Many of us have forgotten the historical background of this holiday, that the Pilgrims were so thankful to God for getting them through their first winter in a new land, that they made a day just to thank God. For some, Thanksgiving is the only time they gather with family to share a meal. For some, it is the only time prayer is said around the table. And for some, it is the only time they vocalize things they are thankful for. Thanksgiving should not just be a one day celebration, but being with family, praying at the table, and vocalizing things we are thankful for should be part of daily life.

In Greek, the word for “thanks” is Efharisto. The Greek word for “thanksgiving” is Efharistia. Efharistia is also the Greek word for “Eucharist.” Holy Communion (Theia Efharistia) is the “Holy Thanksgiving.” There are three other words that are embedded in the word Efharistia. Ephi is the word for “blessing.” Haris means “grace.” And Hara means “joy.” So, in thanksgiving, blessings, grace and joy are intertwined. And in the Eucharist, we receive blessings from God as well as the grace of God, both of which bring us joy.

As you are reading this message, pause for a moment and bring to your mind some of the things that YOU are thankful for. A good thing to do every day in prayer is to remember at least five things for which you are thankful. (For those who have a hard time knowing how to pray, I suggest a rule of 5—first thing in the morning, offer to God five things for which you are thankful, five people whom you wish to pray for and five things you need help with today.)

In many of Christ’s miracles, the first thing He did was give thanks, i.e. before multiplying the five loaves and before instituting the Eucharist. So, we are supposed to give thanks for all things.

One way to demonstrate thanksgiving is through acts of charity

Thanksgiving goes hand in hand with gratitude. If we are grateful to someone who gives something to us, we look for ways to honor the giver, to show our gratitude. Since God is the giver of all that is good, we honor God with our gratitude by following His Commandments. The two great commandments of the Lord for us are for us to love the Lord with all our strength, heart, body and mind. The second commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. How do we love our neighbor? We extend charity to our neighbor.

Charitable giving is supposed to be a regular part of our lives. Whether that is supporting the church through stewardship, or supporting a local charity or helping your neighbor, this is one of the commandments—to be kind to others. Pause again for a moment and think of other ways that you can be a good neighbor.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) tells us that our neighbor is everyone, and the one in the parable who acted like a neighbor was the one who had mercy and compassion on his neighbor. Acts of charity also show our mercy and compassion for other people.

It is easier to be kind to others when we are thankful for what we have. Charity and thankfulness go hand in hand. When we feel a sense of entitlement and are not thankful for what we have, we are less likely to be charitable towards others.

Partaking of the Eucharist, Holy Communion, is also an act of Thanksgiving to God for His gifts to us. So we receive Holy Communion as an act of thanksgiving, as well as obedience to His commandment, as well as our humility. This is the reason why we will offer the Eucharist the night before Thanksgiving, so that we celebrate our feast of Efharistia (thanksgiving) with the Theia Efharistia (the holy Thanksgiving, the Holy Eucharist).

The Lord tells us that we are to share with those who are in need, that the one with two coats is to share with the one who has none. In Matthew 25:31-46, we are told that our eternal judgment will be based on how well we have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, welcomed the stranger and visited the sick. Our entrance into everlasting life will be based in large part on how much we’ve show our thanksgiving to God through acts of charity, kindness and love.

If we think about it, we can probably all stand to do a little better in showing charity to our neighbor. Take a moment and think of constructive ideas on how to show charity/love for our neighbor. In our church, organizations like Philoptochos and Community Outreach give us opportunities to help our neighbor. But there are even more subtle and regular opportunities to help our neighbors, be they the person who lives next to us, or who works next to us. Patience, listening, keeping a confidence, offering a prayer, offering some tangible help, giving good advice, and calling to check up on someone are great ways to show charity/love for our neighbors. There are many other ways as well. Take a few moments and think of a few ways you specifically can help your neighbors. Think of who your specific “neighbors” are (spouse, children, people who live next to you, people who sit next to you in church, people who work next to you, friends) and make an intentional plan to show charity and kindness to them.

When we offer the Holy Gifts at the Consecration at the Divine Liturgy, we sing “We praise You, we bless You, we give thanks to You and we pray to You Lord our God.” Before we ask God for anything, we are supposed to praise Him, bless His Holy Name and Thank Him. This is in line with the prayer rule I have mentioned in the past—that we should thank God for five things, then pray for others and then pray for ourselves. But we begin our prayers with thanksgiving.

I’ll close this month’s message with a prayer from the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, because it captures both the spirit of Thanksgiving and the Eucharist.

Our God, the God who saves, You teach us justly to thank You for the good things which You have done and still do for us. You are our God who has accept-
ed these Gifts. Cleanse us from every defilement of flesh and spirit, and teach us how to live in holiness by Your fear, so that receiving the portion of Your holy Gifts with a clear conscience we may be united with the holy Body and Blood of Your Christ. Having received them worthily, may we have Christ dwelling in our hearts, and may we become the temple of Your Holy Spirit. Yes, our God, let none of us be guilty before these, Your awesome and heavenly Mysteries, nor be infirm in body and soul by partaking of them unworthily. But enable us, even up to our last breath, to receive a portion of Your holy Gifts worthily, as provision for eternal life and as an acceptable defense at the awesome judgment seat of Your Christ. So that we also, together with all the saints who through the ages have pleased You, may become partakers of Your eternal good things, which You, Lord, have prepared for those who love You. (From the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, Trans. by Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1988)

I look forward to seeing you at our THREE Festivals: The Festival of the Divine Liturgy (please try to attend as many as you can this month), the Greek Festival, and the Thanksgiving Liturgy. Have a blessed month of November!

With love in Christ,
+Fr. Stavros

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**Liturgical Schedule for November 2017**

**Wednesday, November 1**  
*Sts. Cosmas and Damian, the Unmercenary Healers*  
Orthros 9:00 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Sunday, November 5**  
*5th Sunday of Luke*  
Orthros 8:45 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Altar Boys:** Captains and St. John  
**Ushers:** Tammy Christou, George Mitseas, Florin Patrasciou  
**Welcome Ministry:** Greeters: Donna Hambos, Skip Higdon; Ambassador: Maria Karounos; Caller: Betty Katsamakis; Get Acquainted: Dwight Forde, Ewana Forde  
**Coffee Hour:** Community Outreach/Food Pantry

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**Please note the Divine Liturgy will begin at 9:00 a.m. from November 8 - 12 because of the Tampa Greek Festival.**

**Wednesday, November 8**  
*Feast of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel*  
Orthros 8:00 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 9:00 a.m.

**Thursday, November 9**  
*St. Nectarios*  
Orthros 8:00 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 9:00 a.m.  
*After Liturgy, the faithful will be anointed with oil of St. Nectarios*

**Friday, November 10**  
*Tampa Greek Festival*  
Orthros 8:00 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 9:00 a.m.

**Saturday, November 11**  
*Tampa Greek Festival*  
Orthros 8:00 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 9:00 a.m.

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**Sunday, November 12**  
*8th Sunday of Luke*  
Orthros 7:45 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 9:00 a.m.

**Altar Boys:** Anyone Attending may Serve  
**Ushers:** Nick Kavouklis, George Trimikliniotis, Peter Theophanous  
**Coffee Hour:** Tampa Greek Festival

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**Monday, November 13**  
*St. John Chrysostom*  
Orthros 9:00 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Wednesday, November 15**  
*Nativity Fast Begins*  
Sacrament of Holy Unction 6:00 p.m.

**Thursday, November 16**  
*St. Matthew the Evangelist*  
Orthros 9:00 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

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We Live-Stream every service!  
www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com
Sunday, November 19

9th Sunday of Luke
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Altar Boys: Captains and St. Matthew
Ushers: Ron Myer, Jim Armstrong, John Alexander
Welcome Ministry: Greeters; Julie Palios, Jenny Paloumpis; Ambassador: Sandra Pappas; Caller: Edie Kavouklis
Coffee Hour: Festival Appreciation

Tuesday, November 21

Entrance of Virgin Mary into the Temple
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, November 22

Evening Liturgy for Thanksgiving
Orthros 5:00 p.m. Divine Liturgy 6:00 p.m.

Saturday, November 25

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

Sunday, November 26

13th Sunday of Luke
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Altar Boys: Anyone attending may serve
Ushers: Brett Mourer, Josef Fenton, Amin Hanhan
Welcome Ministry: Greeters; Katherine Sakkis, Edie Kavouklis; Ambassador: Marenca Patrascoiu;
Caller: Vickie Peckham
Coffee Hour: AHEPA

Thursday, November 30

St. Andrew the Apostle
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, December 3

14th Sunday of Luke
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Altar Boys: Captains and St. Mark
Ushers: David Voykin, Ed Gerecke, Pete Trakas
Welcome Ministry: Greeters; Maria Koutroumanis, Lisa Alsina; Ambassador: Helen Cauthorn; Caller: Peggy Bradshaw;
Get Acquainted: Bessie Palios, Michael Palios
Coffee Hour: Bible Studies

Liturgical Notes for November

Wednesday, November 1 - Feast of Sts. Cosmas and Damian
Sts. Cosmas and Damian are the Patron Saints of the Philoptochos, as they went from place to place healing people and not taking any money for their services. Sts. Cosmas and Damian (called the Agioi Anargyroi) are also saints we pray for intercession to when we are sick, and are also patron saints of doctors. (in addition to St. Luke).

Wednesday, November 8 - Feast of the Archangels
This feast commemorates the Archangels Michael and Gabriel and all of the “bodiless powers” of heaven, all of the angels. The Archangel Michael Feast was prayerfully conceived by His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios upon arriving in Atlanta, as the annual double feast of the Metropolis family. Since 1998, the Metropolis family comes together in Atlanta on the weekend of, prior to or following the November 8 Feastday of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel. It is to honor and celebrate our Patron Saint and the lives of two people from each parish, who are living examples of the Orthodox Christian life and journey to Theosis. By extension, this special Metropolis feast also serves as the annual Metropolis celebration and thanksgiving for all devout stewards of the faith, giving their time and talent. Congratulations to this year’s award winners Brett Mourer and Elaine Halkias.
Thursday, November 9 - Feast of St. Nectarios
St. Nectarios is a “modern day” saint, a saint of the 20th Century, (Died in 1920, Canonized as a Saint in 1960), who was a bishop in Greece. St. Nectarios is the patron saint of cancer patients and is considered one of our “healing” saints, meaning that we invoke his intercessions when we are praying for those who are sick. Cancer sufferers and survivors are urged to attend this Divine Liturgy in order to pray for continued healing through the Intercessions of St. Nectarios. Father Stavros has oil from the tomb of St. Nectarios in Aegina, Greece, with which he will anoint the faithful in attendance at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on November 9.

Friday, November 10 & Saturday, November 11 - Divine Liturgy on ALL DAYS OF THE FESTIVAL
The Divine Liturgy can be celebrated any day of the year except Good Friday. As we have done in the past four years, which also coincides with the four best festivals we have ever had, we will be celebrating the Liturgy all three days of the Greek Festival, to ask the Holy Spirit to come down upon us and upon the Holy Gifts on what is an important weekend in the life of our parish. The Divine Liturgy on November 10, 11, and 12 will begin at 9:00 a.m., preceded each day by Orthros at 8:00 a.m.

Sunday, November 13 - Feast of St. John Chrysostom
St. John Chrysostom lived in the 4th Century. He was a Bishop of the Church and is recognized as one of the Three Hierarchs (together with St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory the Theologian). He received the title “Chrysostomos,” meaning “the Golden Mouth,” for his great ability to speak. St. John Chrysostom authored the Divine Liturgy that we celebrate on most Sundays. Therefore, we offer the Divine Liturgy on this day in honor of St. John Chrysostom.

Wednesday, November 15 - Holy UNCTION for the beginning of Advent at 6:00 p.m.
The forty day period of Advent begins on November 15. It is a period of fasting and reflective preparation. In America, Advent is marked by a period of shopping, decorating and parties, none of which really help us prepare spiritually to celebrate the great feast of the Nativity. As we have done in past years, we will hold a Holy Unction Service as we begin the period of Advent—it will be on Wednesday, November 15, beginning at 6:00 p.m. Please bring your Holy Week book as the service will follow what is in the Holy Week book for Holy Wednesday evening.

Wednesday, November 16 - Feast of St. Matthew the Evangelist
St. Matthew is the author of one of the four Gospels. It is customary to celebrate the Divine Liturgy on the feast days of the Four Evangelists, reading from their respective Gospels on their respective feastdays.

Tuesday, November 21 - Feast of the Entrance of the Virgin Mary into the Temple
The Entrance of the Virgin Mary (Ta Eisodia) Commemorates when the Virgin Mary entered into the Temple at age two to begin a life of service to God, in preparation for the awesome role she would play in the history of humanity as the Theotokos. This is one of the 12 Major Feastdays of the Orthodox Liturgical Year.

Wednesday, November 22 - Evening Liturgy for Thanksgiving
In Greek the word for Thanksgiving is “Eucharistia,” so the Holy Eucharist is the “Holy Thanksgiv-...ing.” As we celebrate Thanksgiving with turkey and the Dallas Cowboys on Thursday, set aside Wednesday to receive the Holy Thanksgiving. As is our custom at St. John, we will celebrate Divine Liturgy for Thanksgiving on Wednesday, November 23 at 6:00 p.m.

Saturday, November 25 - Feast of St. Katherine the Great Martyr
St. Katherine was born in Alexandria, Egypt in the third century. She was very wise and eloquent, successfully arguing for Christianity in the face of tyrannical rulers and philosophers. She was martyred in the year 305 and her relics were taken by Angels to Mount Sinai where they were discovered many years later. St. Katherine has the title “Pansophou” the “All-Wise.”

Thursday, November 30 - Feast of St. Andrew
St. Andrew is the first-called of the Apostles. He is also the patron saint of the Ecumenical Patriarchate
Creating Community Collectively Through the Spirit

By Charlie Hambos

Author’s note and correction: In this issue of The Messenger, we will continue to explore a few more chapters of “The Benedict Option” by Rod Dreher. In last month’s article, I wrote that Rod Dreher was not Orthodox. This was incorrect. He is indeed an Orthodox convert from Roman Catholicism. The premise of the “The Benedict Option” transcends denomination and seeks to create dialogue between Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox Christians alike.

The last leg of the trip involved a 6 hour high speed train ride from Nice back to Paris. There is no better place to read a book, with one of the most magnificent churches of France on its cover as the French countryside passes by at nearly 195 kilometers per hour. The book sat just for a brief second before I opened it. From across the aisle, “Excuse me! What is that book you are reading?” noticing the stunning cover photo of Mt. St. Michel. “It’s about Christianity in the west and all the problems it is facing, I said as I handed it over.” She read from the review on the back of the book out loud, “An insightful and optimistic plan of action for Christians who are starting to realize just how hostile American culture is to their faith.” She replied to herself, “Well, that doesn’t seem correct at all.” “Well, you would be surprised,” I said.

The Acts of the Apostles is sometimes called, “The Gospel of the Holy Spirit,” as it details the strategic action of the Holy Spirit as the early church established its roots and spread throughout the region and eventually to the whole world. (To learn more about the Book of Acts, please join us on Monday nights in the Administration Building, where we are currently studying this one-of-a-kind piece of scripture.) The early leaders of the Christian community including St. Peter, St. John and St. Stephen, were able to perform many miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit. Many questions arise as to why we don’t see the same power of the Holy Spirit manifested to us today with incredible instantaneous healings. Some may say, it is a matter of perspective. Indeed, miracles do happen around us all the time we just don’t have the eyes to see them. It appears that the early Christian community did something that we definitely don’t do. They put pretty much 100% of their faith in God. Not only their faith, but everything they had.

Shortly after the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, we see a glimpse of how the early believers operated. In Acts 2:44-47, we read, “And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” Here we see, in order to be a part of the community, they had to share all of their possessions and goods to those who had need. They would eat together and praise God with one heart. Later on in Acts, the same formula is repeated, and we see the reward and the punishment when it is followed. Barnabas sold his whole entire field and gave all of the money to the apostles. Ananias and Sapphira, a husband and wife, only gave a portion to the apostles and when confronted about their action, instantly died. We are lucky we don’t see this today. We see then that the people gave 100% of their faith and their possessions. They had nothing else to have faith in, only God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Today, we have our possessions and comforts and we more than likely only give God around 25% of our faith and way less of our possessions. Imagine the possibilities if we gave God 100%. We are trying to perform miracles with more than 75% of faith in ourselves. Of course, that’s not going to work.

In Chapter 4, Rod Dreher goes into the new kind of Christian Politics that we have to focus on because gone are the days of relying on one particular party or candidate to protect the sacred beliefs of Christianity. We cannot put our faith in politics either. We must put our faith in God. However, there are some concrete ways we can hope to make a difference. “The best that Orthodox Christians can hope for from politics is that it can open a space for the church to do the work of charity, culture building, and conversion.” Further on, he reiterates that Christians can not completely turn our back on the public arena but maintain our focus on prayer for our leaders despite who they are and strategically communicating to them. He suggests reaching out to the media, getting active on a local level, focusing on small achievable ways of making the Christian voice heard, most of all be respectful and polite. Finally, opening up a respectable dialogue amongst different denominations and even groups differing in opinion than ours but will uphold something like 1st amendment rights in unison. Dreher also strongly suggests that the ultimate goal of the church is to remain faithful to the teachings of Christ and not to be head-over-heels in politics. Instead, he refers to “antipolitical politics” based on the Czech playwright and political prisoner Vaclav Havel, in which we imagine many different things. “Think of teachers who make sure kids learn things they won’t get in government schools. Think of writers who write what they really believe and find ways to get it to the public, no matter what the cost. Think of priests and pastors who find a way to live outside of religious life despite condemnation and legal obstacles.” Basically, it has to be an individual movement. “By contrast, the politics of the Benedict Option assume that the disorder in American public life derives from disorder within the American soul.” As they say, the best way to fix the people around you is to fix yourself first.

We have a lot of work to do on our own souls before we can consider trying to save others. The best way to do all of this Dreher says is to separate ourselves from the mainstream. “Turn off the television. Put the smartphones away. Read books. Play games. Make music. Feast with your neighbors. Open a classical Christian School. Plant a garden, and participate in a local farmer’s market. Teach the kids how to play music, and start a band.” These are amazing ways and each of us has the opportunity to make a change and many of us do.

Chapter 5 offers some ideas on how to reverse the course that churches are heading in. As Orthodox Christians we are already maintaining a lot of these ideas. “The best witness Christians can offer to post-Christian America is simply to be the church, as fiercely and creatively a minority we can manage.” First he says, we should rediscover the past. That is the past of the
Church. Read the Church Fathers. Study the early development of the church. Second, is to rediscover liturgical worship. Dreher says, “Many Christians today (including some liturgical churches) believe that Sunday worship is merely expressive—that is, it’s only about what we the people have to say to God. However, in the Christian tradition, liturgy is primarily, though not exclusively about what God has to say to us. Liturgy reveals something of the divine, transcendent order, and when we submit to it, it draws us into closer harmony with that order.” Couldn’t have said it better myself. Dreher also reiterates through another author that “seeking spiritual highs” like a “church pep rally—is unsustainable.” A fixed Liturgy is one that will bring stability and unity. Dreher himself even praises the Orthodox Christian liturgical worship when he says, “The aroma of incense, the sound of church bells, the glow from candles, and the vivid hues of icons—all these make a powerful, prerational impression on the mind and prepare us for communion with the Lord in Word and Sacrament.” Third is to relearn the traditional habits of asceticism like fasting. Third, is church discipline. We must actually do what we believe and strive to live a life according to those precepts. However, Christ did not come to condemn but to give life. Fourth is to evangelize with goodness and beauty through the saints and the living artwork of the church. “The first Christians gained converts not because their arguments were better than those of pagans but because people saw in them and their communities something good and beautiful and they wanted it.” Finally, we must embrace the possibility of exile and martyrdom.

Chapter six is entitled “The Idea of a Christian Village.” We are social beings so it makes sense that the best way to grow as a community is in a community. “Jesus said the sum of the Law and the Prophets is that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind and love our neighbors as ourselves. To love requires loving others and letting others love you. Unless you have the rare calling to be a hermit, obeying God and being true to our divinely given nature means engaging in community life.” We can not expect politics to maintain the sacred ideas of family and community. Dreher suggests that families must turn their homes into domestic monasteries through regular times of prayer, reading the scripture and reading stories of the saints. A main facet of this idea is to keep church involvement first above all else. Dreher adds that we shouldn’t be afraid to not conform to what is happening around us. We also need to look after the friends of our children. “Though parental influence is critical, research shows that nothing forms a young person’s character like their peers.” Dreher also suggests that we shouldn’t idolize the family unit. “A healthy family will be a humble and forgiving one.” He also suggests that we need to live close to other members of our respective communities. “Why be close? Because as I said earlier, the church can’t be just the place you go on Sundays—it must become the center of your life.” Yes, this is true, only if we are making it the center of our life for the right reasons. We have to remember that we are all connected. If we are striving to become a community of one heart and mind then if one of our members has an issue or is suffering then we all are. We must also go beyond our community and establish relationships with other churches because in the end we are only going to have each other. Communities have their problems for sure so we can not idolize it but we must strive to keep the lines of communication open and resist segregation and separation. We can also not strive for perfection because it can be overwhelming. We have to at least start and gain the traction with hopes of perfection over time with many missteps along the way. Dreher has a lot of good points. We have a lot learn and there is a lot of opportunity for growth and love within each and every single one of us.

“So, do you work for the church?” the neighbor across the aisle in the train asked. “Yes, I do. The Greek Orthodox Christian Church in Tampa, Florida,” I replied. “Well, that’s something you don’t hear every day. I wish you the best of luck in everything.” After some further discussion with her and her friend (a former curator at the Louvre Museum and from Algeria), who also happened to be neighbors in their apartment building in Paris, I found myself being invited over to enjoy homemade couscous with lamb and vegetables a few days later, where our discussion continued concerning faith, art, culture and the future of our world.
Community News

Parish Registry

Baptism - Alexandra Bennet Louise Korakis, daughter of Alexander and Meg Korakis, was baptized on Sunday, October 15. Godparent was Chris Kavouklis. Na Sas Zisi!
Wedding - Traian Adrian Petril and Irina Tabac were married on Saturday, October 14. Ourania Stephanides was the Koumbara. Congratulations!
Funeral - Lula Milonas passed away on September 22. Funeral services were held on September 29. May her memory be eternal!

Get Acquainted Sunday, November 5

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.

Community Outreach - Saturday, November 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!

Meeting, Sunday, November 19

The November GOYA meeting will be Sunday, November 20, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided.

Young Adult Ministry

Our young adult ministry group has a monthly dinner/discussion night at the church. For November, it will be Sunday, November 5, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. Please bring $10 to cover the cost of dinner. Other events will be scheduled.

Let all Creation Rejoice:
Reflections for Advent the Nativity and Epiphany

This book is a series of short daily reflections on the scripture readings of Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany, to be read between November 15 and January 7. Order your book today at www.xulonpress.com/

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 990 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 2 years! Over half of our parish receives it daily, as well as many people outside of our parish. Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email Charlie at charlie.hambos@gmail.com and ask to add you

Charitable GIVING to People in Dire Need

Over the years, as we’ve gotten a better understanding of stewardship, we’ve been able to include “Charitable Giving” as a line-item in our parish budget. Through your generous offerings of stewardship, we were able to send $1,302 for Hurricane Harvey Relief and $2,075 for Hurricane Irma Relief. We will also be sending a contribution for Puerto Rico in the wake of Hurricane Maria. Continued prayers for people affected by these storms. All donations have been sent to IOCC (International Orthodox Christian Charities) which has only a 2% overhead and because it donates to people of all denominations, it is eligible for matching funds from the U.S. government
Thank you for the great start to our 2016-2017 Sunday School year. We’ve been having record attendance thanks to all the teachers, parents, and children who are committed to our program.

We will keep track of Perfect Attendance for the year and award those students at our Graduation Ceremony. Currently there are over 40 students with Perfect Attendance.

The Sunday School Topics for the month of October were: READING THE BIBLE, THE CREED, THE CHURCH BUILDING AND VESSELS, THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND HOLY COMMUNION-DIVINE LITURGY-WORSHIP. We would like to thank Fr. Stavros for supporting our Sunday School and Charlie Hambos for his visits to our classrooms. In October he conducted lessons about our Church Vessels in our Pre-K, First Grade, Middle School and High School. Our THIRD and FOURTH Graders also learned about and made Prosphora for our church on October 15th under the direction of Melissa Krinos.

Our second YOUTH SUNDAY of the year took place on October 15. We would like to thank our Sunday School students for singing our church hymns so beautifully and Savvas Ferekides for reading the Epistle.

Our HALL of FAITH program is to encourage our children to memorize and understand the Lord’s Prayer and the Creed. Our Pre-K through 3rd Graders should be focusing on the Lord’s Prayer and our 4th graders through seniors will focus on the Creed.

+++Congratulations to Aspasia Panos (1st Grade) who just got in the Hall of Faith for reciting The Lord’s Prayer.
+++Congratulations to the following students who just got in the Hall of Faith for reciting The Creed: Maria Palios (5th Grade), Kaitlin Zelatis, Eleni Katzaras, Abigail Moran, Demetri Passalaris, and Toula Trakas (6th Grade).

A thank you goes out to Olya Clifton for taking our Sunday School Pictures again this year. Please look for the new pictures on our Sunday School bulletin board.

The Pre-Teen Retreat took place on Sunday, October 8, and was a huge success for our students and parents in 4th-7th grade. This retreat was also presented for our GOYANS that same evening. Special thanks to Maria Xenick for organizing this again, and to Maria, Dory Passalaris, Charlie and Fr. Stavros for leading our sessions. The retreat was repeated for our GOYAns on October 15. The Theme was “You are the Light of the World.”

**SUNDAY SCHOOL CALENDAR**

**Sunday, November 5**  
Youth Sunday (6th-8th Grade Music at 11:50 a.m.  
Prosphora (6th Grade)

**Sunday, November 12**  
Greek Festival  
No Sunday School Classes

**Sunday, November 19**  
Topic: Charity/Thankfulness  
GOYA 5:00 p.m.

**Sunday, November 26**  
No Sunday School Classes

**~Save the Dates~**

**Metropolitan Ministries’ Boxes of Hope**  
Saturday, December 9

**Metropolitan Ministries’ Holiday Tent**  
Sunday, December 17

Our Community Outreach program assists with a ministry called “Matthew 25.” Matthew 25 sponsors the breakfasts that we serve on the third Saturday of every month. They also have a closet of used clothes which are given to those who need them. If you are cleaning out closets and have clothes you don’t need, please contact Charlie. We have people who will gladly take these clothes to the Matthew 25 clothing closet.
The Annual St. John the Baptist Tampa Greek Festival is
November 10-12, 2017

This is our largest fundraiser and provides an opportunity to unite as a Parish to support our Festival. Our Staff, Festival Committee, Area Heads and many Parishioners are working hard on the final details. It is not to late to Volunteer, Promote & Support our Festival! Help showcase our Orthodox Faith as well as the food & dancing. Bring your Orthodox Positive Attitude for this fun filled weekend! OPA!

How can You Help?

SUPPORT THE RAFFLE
This year, we are raffling off a brand new car or $20,000 cash plus great secondary prizes
GOAL: Sell or purchase 2 Raffle Tickets
Make checks payable to St. John Greek Orthodox Church. If you wish to buy/sell the raffle tickets online and pay with a credit card, visit tampagreekfestival.com. (Great opportunity for distant relatives!!)

VOLUNTEER
We have over 1,200 Volunteer Slots to fill over the 3 day weekend and help needed the week before setting up and decorating. Sign up to volunteer at TampaGreekFestival.com or contact Sandra Pappas at tpagreekfestival@gmail.com or 813-785-3747.
GOAL: Volunteer for at least two shifts.

SPREAD THE WORD & PROMOTE
Facebook: Share our posts on Facebook. Thanks to your help, we now have almost 8,000 likes and followers on our Facebook Page. Let's continue to grow this number!

NextDoor: For those of you who are not familiar with this site, it is a very simple website designed to communicate with your local neighborhood. If you are not a member, please join at Nextdoor.com and spread the word with your local neighborhood.

Signage: Share our Posters via email with friends and family along with your local communities, work, teams, etc.

Fun Fact: Based on our analytics from prior years, we estimate that Facebook and word of mouth are responsible for bringing 60% of our attendees.
GOAL: Spread the word using at least one of the areas above.

HELP WANTED
Monday, November 4 at 9:00 a.m.
We will be covering the Gym Floor.

Festival Days & Hours
Friday, November 10 11:00 a.m. – 11:00 p.m.
Saturday, November 11 11:00 a.m. – 11:00 p.m.
Sunday, November 12 11:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.
What Stewardship means to me...

Eleni Pessemier has been a member of St. John the Baptist since her family (her parents are Tom and Christy, and her younger sister, Natalia) moved here from Seattle in 2014. She was very involved as a choir member and instrumental in the Youth Ministry of their former parish of Holy Apostles Greek Orthodox Church in Shoreline, WA. Eleni was very active in GOYA, St. Stephen's Summer Camp and the Oratorical Festival when she was in high school. Eleni graduated from the IB Program of Riverview High School in Sarasota, FL. Now a sophomore at The University of Tampa, majoring in English Literature, she plans to become a college professor. Eleni is a member of the choir, Assistant 1st Grade Sunday School Teacher, Assistant Parea Dance Group Instructor, participates in the Orthodox Christian Fellowship at USF and served last summer as the arts and crafts co-director at St. Stephen’s Summer Camp. We are proud to know Eleni and inspired by her dedication to the life of the Church.

We as Christians are called to be stewards—giving a portion of our time, talent and treasure to God, in form of helping the Church and those in need. Stewardship can be hard, and it easily slips my mind as something I should want to be doing. I sometimes try to make excuses and let myself be tempted to say that I’m too busy or I need to keep my time and money for myself, but then I remember that I have been given so much, and all of it comes from God. I don’t think stewardship should feel like a chore. God doesn’t want us giving grudgingly to Him, He wants us to give joyfully and with love.

One part of stewardship that I think we as Orthodox Christians could focus more on is actually tithing ten percent of our earnings. Can you imagine how many problems could be solved if every practicing Christian actually gave ten percent back to God? Giving tithe can be a struggle, but it helps to make it the first thing we do after earning anything. If we treat tithing as a given and do it to honor God, it feels easier. I believe God will always make sure that we are provided for—even more so when we are generous and act out of love for Him. I’ve heard stories about and experienced myself that giving even when it feels hard usually results in feeling more relaxed and content than before.

Just sitting here at my desk, I’m reminded of how blessed I am. I have everything I need and a whole lot of luxuries, too. I have a family and friends who love me, a comfortable place to sleep, good books to read, classes and professors I like and that are giving me a valuable education. Even just small things like nice pens to write with, a fall candle to make my room feel warm and cozy, and a spoon to stir honey into my tea remind me of how blessed I am. All these things are good, and it’s so easy to just think I got them for myself or was given them by someone I care about and stop at that. But Who created me and is the reason I was born into my family? Who caused my friends to come into my life? Who gave me the talents and skills to get an education and a job that will allow me to earn money? Everything, everything I have comes from God. The least I can do is use what He gave me for good. Giving and being a steward is so much more meaningful when it is an act of gratitude.

Thinking back to times I’ve been stuck outside in the rain or sick in bed or lost on an agonizingly long hike with my family, how can I not be grateful for the comforts around me? And even in the most difficult situations in my life, there is always something good and God-given to be thankful for. Yet I forget so easily. I constantly need reminders to be thankful and give with a willing heart. Sometimes I don’t feel like waking up in the morning for church or spending time to pray before bed, or I feel too busy to help with a volunteer project — telling myself I need a break, I deserve it, and just about any excuse that will allow me to get back in bed instead. But every single time, without fail, that I make the right decision and do something for God instead of myself, I am rewarded with extra energy, a clearer mind, and things just going so much better.

In the long run, being a good steward helps my life to go smoother and makes me a happier person, because stewardship is part of what helps me to put God first. So if it feels difficult to devote part of my time, talent or treasure to God, I try to remember that the things I’m giving are not even really mine; they came from God in the first place. All He’s asking is for us to return a tiny bit back to Him, and it ends up giving us something in return even still because it feels good to give back.

Any adults interested in volleyball?

Is there anyone interested in a volleyball night, either once a week or once a month at the church. This would be non-competitive, just for adults who want to exercise a little bit. The target night would be Thursday night. Please let Fr. Stavros know if you are interested. If enough people are interested, we will put something together after January 1.
~ Stewardship Update ~

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God’
Hebrews 13:16

We sincerely thank the Loyal Stewards of St. John the Baptist as we quickly approach year end and prepare for our 2018 Stewardship Calling. Your sacrificial giving helps sustain our church Vision & Mission. We are called as Christians to ‘Give Back’ for our blessings in life… really quite a small sacrifice. The fundamental meaning of Stewardship is simple – everything belongs to God. And it’s interesting to know there are some 500 references in the Bible about prayer, but there are some 2300 references about offering financial assistance to the Church to assist in transforming people. Without your gifts our church could not sustain, grow and ultimately transform people.

We have all received gifts (in the sense of different skills) and material treasures. We encourage you to share both to your church as we build upon the beautiful foundation and spread the word of Christ. Imagine how much our community outreach and ministry programs could multiply if everyone practiced true Stewardship! We all have more that we could give in Time, Talents and Treasure yet we often hold back when it comes to our beloved church. A new Stewardship year provides time to reevaluate our level of giving.

This month we highlight a heartfelt message of giving and sacrifice from Eleni Pessimier, one of our young parishioners. For most people it takes years to fully understand the meaning of Stewardship but Eleni is blessed to feel and share Gods Grace by giving back the gifts HE has provided.

Please visit our website to complete your Stewardship Pledge Form and make your gift today if you haven’t done so for 2017. It’s not too late. For any questions, please speak directly with Fr. Stavros, Sandra Pappas or Pete Trakas Stewardship Co-Chairs. We are here for YOU!

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<th>Year to Year Comparison ~</th>
<th>2017*</th>
<th>2016*</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pledged Year to Date</td>
<td>$412,776</td>
<td>$432,072</td>
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<tr>
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*YTD as of 10/11/17 & 10/12/16

Someone Else Suddenly Dies

Rev. Andrew Demoteses

All of the members of St. Athanasius Church were deeply saddened to learn this week of the sudden and unexpected death of one of our parish’s most active members, known to us all by the affectionate name of Someone Else. As we approach the many activities of the months ahead, we must reflect, all of us, upon this very sobering and distressing news.

The untimely passing of Someone Else creates a loss that will be very difficult for the parish to fill. The reason for this, of course, is that Else has been very active and faithful member of the parish for many years, and for every one of those years, Someone always did far more than a normal person’s share of parish work. Whenever a position of leadership and responsibility had to be filled, this wonderful person was looked to for inspiration and results. “I’m sorry I don’t have the time to help, but I’m sure you’ll find Someone Else” was the often heard answer. Whenever there was a job to do, a class to teach, a meeting to attend, or a voice needed for the choir, we often found ourselves saying, “I have to pass this time, perhaps Someone Else can do it.”

Although they always tried to give anonymously, it has long been common knowledge that Someone Else was one of the most generous givers in the parish. Whenever we have felt financial need, we all assumed that Someone Else would make up the difference.

Someone Else was a wonderful person, but one person can only do so much, and everybody expected too much of Someone Else. Now that Someone Else is gone, we wonder what we are going to do. Since we can’t depend on Someone Else to do everything for us any longer, then all of us together must do the work necessary to meet the needs and serve the areas of ministry in our parish.

Fr. Andrew Demoteses is the interim Proistamenos of St. Athanasius Greek Orthodox Church in Arlington, MA
Welcome Ministry

Over the three days of our Annual Greek Festival, approximately 9,000 people come to our church property. If 10% take a look at our church, attend a tour or choir presentation, that’s 900 people. If 10% of those are searching for a church home, that’s 90 people who may come back for more.

Imagine the Greek Festival is a first date, and we are really excited to invite our visitors to come back to meet our family and get to know us better! It is really difficult to invite people to our Divine Liturgy. For those who don’t have a church home or any experience of attending church, there is no context for understanding what is happening and there is really no chance for them to participate.

For the Greek Festival, our Welcome Ministry is introducing a new Greeter Table at the front doors of our church throughout the weekend. This way, people who are curious about our church building and our faith will be welcomed with a personal greeting, will be given the chance to ask questions, and take some materials – pamphlets, welcome folders - home with them. We will have a sign up for anyone wanting follow up materials emailed to them: The Prayer Team, The Messenger, the weekly constant contact messages from our parish. We will have sample materials from our bookstore as well.

We are also going to offer a chance for them to return to learn more about our faith in several different ways:

- We will host a “Come and See” event for anyone who wants to get to know us better. This will be held on Tuesday, November 28. This will be a free dinner, followed by comments and greeting by Father Stavros, and prayer time in our church. We want our most hospitable parishioners on board to welcome this group of people to our campus for fellowship and learn a little bit further about our faith. This also gives us the opportunity to invite anyone who is seeking a church home to simply come to know us better.
- We will then send an invitation to our beautiful candlelight Christmas prayer service on Monday, December 18th. If you haven’t been to this service, this is an opportunity during the hustle and bustle of the season to pause for some peace and quiet prayer time.
- Lastly, in January (dates to be determined), Father Stavros will host another installment of Orthodoxy 101 and these same people will be invited to experience a deeper understanding of our faith.

What do we need?

For Tuesday, November 28
Your support!
Your presence!
Welcoming our guests at a table,
Serving food,
Sitting and eating with our guests,
Answering their questions,
Introducing them to others.

We’d love to have a great crowd of our church family to help host this first ever event! If you are interested in helping in any way, please contact Maria Xenick at mpxenick@gmail.com or 813-765-3587.

Make a Plan to Amplify Your Impact
Join the St. John Legacy Society

Those parishioners who include St. John Greek Orthodox Church in their estate plans will become founding members of the St. John Legacy Society, a new initiative to help provide for our beloved church’s future. If you would like to extend your stewardship of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church of Tampa to make a lasting impact, there are several gift arrangements to choose from.

Whether you would like to put your donation to work today or benefit our church after your lifetime, you can find a charitable plan that lets you provide for your family and at the same time supports St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church. If you have additional questions on updating your will or are considering adding a gift to St. John, please contact Fr. Stavros at 813-876-8830 ext. 103 or frstav@gmail.com for more information. Please be sure to seek advice from your financial and legal advisors, and discuss your charitable plans with your family.

If you include St. John in your plans, please use the church’s legal name as previously stated and Federal Tax ID # 59-1170684. Additionally, please contact Fr. Stavros at 813-876-8830 ext. 103, (email frstav@gmail.com) so that we may include you as a founding member of the St. John Legacy Society and properly thank you.
Thank You Hunger Heroes

For I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.
Matthew 25:35

The Philoptochos would like to thank all those who participated the weekend’s Feeding Children Everywhere event. Over 80 volunteers ranging in age from 8 to 90 packaged 20,000 meals in less than 90 minutes! The meals we packaged will go to serve those in need in both Hillsborough and Pinellas counties. A special thank you to Cindy Xenick for inspiring us to take on this project and Jeanie Nenos for chairing the event. Together we can make a difference.
Small Group Bible Study
Our Bible Studies are going in full swing. New people are welcome at any time!

Monday Night Bible Study (for everyone)
We are studying the Book of Acts
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.
Meeting Dates: November 6, 20 and 27

Women’s Group (for adult women of any age)
Location: Meets at the home of Debbie Kavouklis, 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)
Meeting Dates: November 7, 14, and 28

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: Michael Palios
mpalios@gmail.com 813-523-0346
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.
Meeting Dates: November 1, 8, 15, and 29

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 & Ellen Karaku
bmp1126@yahoo.com 813-523-0347
ekaraku@verizon.net 813-835-0691
Meeting time: Tuesday evenings from 7:00-8:30 p.m.
Meeting Dates: November 7, 14 and 28

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
Basil & Dorothy Nosal - Fredericksburg, VA

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 the Baptist 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.
Are All Orthodox Christians Supposed to Evangelize?  
By Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick

The following is culled from comments I made on a Facebook thread in a private group in which it was being alleged that most Orthodox Christians aren’t meant to function as missionaries. The argument was mentioned that the Lord’s command to go into all the earth and preach the Gospel was given only (or mainly) to the apostles. Allowance was made for certain rare people who have a special calling, saying that “you can’t give what you don’t have.” It was also suggested that hermits may be the proper exemplars of Orthodox mission. These are my (somewhat edited) responses. Yes, it’s something of a rant, but my purpose here is to call out an argument, not any particular person.

I do not believe in the salvation of anyone who does not believe in the salvation of others. – St. John Chrysostom

Forgive my frankness, but any argument that basically means that the Church (or even most of it) is done with mission is, frankly, cowardly garbage. It’s one that’s been made for a long time, of course, but “Am I my brother’s keeper?” is not the argument of someone we should be imitating. We are our brothers’ keepers.

I can’t stand it when apostolic is reduced to a badge of authenticity rather than seen for what it is — a command to go forth. Good news is news — that means going and talking, not simply waiting around for people to show up. Any method of Church life that basically encourages people to treat the Gospel as a private possession is fundamentally treasonous to the Kingdom.

Yes, I am indeed kind of mad about the fact that we don’t imitate our own saints very much in this regard.

It may be that not all of us are called to be apostles, but we are indeed all called to be apostolic — or we are not in the Church. We may just as easily say that not all of us are called to be one or holy or catholic — which is of course nonsense.

Why is it that of the many commands Jesus gave to His apostles, it is this one alone — the very last one — that is so often singled out as “just for the apostles,” when there is of course no indication from the text that this particular command was supposed to be exclusive to them? And do we have one Father saying that this command was exclusive to them? One?

We are all sent — any kind of “mission” that doesn’t involve being sent isn’t mission at all. That is what the word means. And so does “apostolic,” by the way. We are sent.

Evangelism isn’t reducible to knocking on doors or being active in Orthodox media, etc. The point is that we are all sent. None of us is not sent. We are the Church — the apostolic Church, the Church with a mission, the Church whose purpose is to encompass all of mankind in the love of the Trinity.

As Abp. Anastasios of Albania has famously said, just as it would be unthinkable to have a Church without liturgical services, it is equally unthinkable to have a Church without mission.

The “great holiness magnet” theory (just work on your own salvation and wait and see if someone happens to notice) sounds great on paper not because it is the teaching or practice of the saints but because we are cowards and don’t actually care about the salvation of others. Any mission strategy that precludes the actions of Jesus and the apostles themselves is no missionary strategy at all. Christians aren’t passive gurus who draw flocks of disciples to themselves by virtue of their reputations. (Indeed, the saints flee from such reputation.) They are precisely missionaries.

Do we have hermits? Of course. But they are the extreme rarity, even among monastics. It makes zero sense to hold them up as the paradigm of evangelism. Why not the apostles? Really — why not the apostles? The Church is built upon them as the foundation, not on the hermits.

It is said that you can’t give what you don’t have. Fair enough. But what do you have? You are a baptized Orthodox Christian, a bearer of the royal priesthood of Jesus Christ, an apostolic member of the Body of Christ. You already have that.

You do not have to be ordained to holy orders. You are already equipped for mission work. You don’t have to be some advanced ascetic to engage in it. Did the Samaritan Woman have to have some special calling and advanced ascetical achievement before she went back home and told them about the Messiah? No. Did Philip for telling Nathanael? Did Andrew for telling Peter? One could go on and on.

Yes, get training if needed for a specific context. But don’t wait.

The point is that we love because He first loved us. If you can’t give that to people, then you are saying that God hasn’t loved you. And that, of course, is nonsense. You cannot give what you don’t have — okay. But you have Jesus Christ. If you’re not going to go give Him to people, you are saying that you don’t have Him.

We are sent. We are not called to sit. We are sent. We should all be actively looking for ways to connect people to Jesus Christ. My anger at this issue is at the Church-hamstringing argument that would turn us into quietists and cloaks that in the false mantle of piety and humility. It is not pious or humble to neglect the perishing. It is cowardly.

If you don’t have a missionary spirit, it’s because you don’t care that people are dying in their sins. You’re literally willing to let that happen and not do anything about it. So, yes, that angers me. Why? Because it’s a betrayal of what the Church is in her very essence.

We may not all be called to be sent across the planet or out on the lecture circuit, etc. But we are indeed all sent. We have to be actively looking for ways to bring Jesus to people, not just wait for them to come asking. Yes, we’re all imperfect. Of course we’re imperfect. It’s one thing to realize that one is not
doing one’s job as a missionary, but it’s another to deny the job altogether.

The Church’s foundation is the apostles and prophets. If we’re not apostolic and prophetic, we may want to check if we’re not actually in the Church.

Addendum

Now that this post has been aired out for a few days, I want to address some of the disagreements and misunderstandings (and frankly, misreadings) that I’ve seen in response.

First, I am in no way denigrating monasticism, including its eremetical type. I am very much in favor of monasticism. I have directed friends toward monasticism (including one who has been happily a monk for a good many years now) and rejoiced when I learned friends made it there on their own. All three of my sons have saints in their names who were monastics and even hermits. I pray for the proliferation of monasteries in the United States and elsewhere. I support them with my words, my time and my money. Let me be emphatic: I am very pro-monasticism.

I also believe profoundly in the evangelistic value of monastics, including hermits — not just for their prayers but also in the many cases of such people “going” and “preaching” (two of the stipulations in the Great Commission). I can think of many sainted ones who did just that — Columba of Iona, Aidan of Lindisfarne, Cosmas of Aetolia, Raphael of Brooklyn, Cyril and Methodius, etc. The list goes on. Both “staying and praying” and “going and preaching” are effective evangelistic tools for monastics to be using.

The problem comes when we hold up monastics as the paradigm for evangelism and especially when we focus on exactly the wrong things. What do I mean? One way is when we define them as the “real missionaries,” note that we are not monastics ourselves, and then conclude that missionary work has nothing to do with us. And of course holding them up as the real missionaries doesn’t seem to spur people into such ascetical ways of life, i.e., “Since missionaries are monks and since I am supposed to do evangelism, then I will go become a monk.” Is that happening? No, not very much.

What about the famous dictum of St. Seraphim of Sarov? (“Acquire the Spirit of peace and thousands around you will be saved.”) Should we just sort of work on our own holiness and expect that that will do the trick? Of course, working on your holiness is right and proper and critical. (In fact, if you are a baptized, chrismated Orthodox Christian, you actually do have the Spirit of peace already! Of course evangelism will be more effective the more fully His presence is known in us.) But that is not the actual model that we see in Scripture or in the lives of the saints, i.e., just pray a lot, repent a lot, and wait for people to come to you.

But what about as a precursor to more active evangelistic work? Of course we should not go off half-cocked. But we also shouldn’t be waiting around for some undefined moment when we’re holy “enough” to be missionaries. (How do you know when?) The Lord even sent the Apostles (both the Twelve and the Seventy) out before they had been fully initiated into the truth by Him. The point is that we should be giving what we have, even if it is a little. We should of course realize when we have only a little. But still give it.

I had one priest tell me that his experience is that most Orthodox Christians are already doing that! I was amazed that his experience is so blessed. But that has not been my experience. My experience is that most Orthodox Christians are content to keep their Orthodox faith a private possession and experience — neither outreach nor “inreach” are their concern. They simply do not care. And for an excuse they may well cite these ideas about evangelism being only for certain people or times (yes, there are some who even claim that the whole world has already heard the Gospel, so that’s done).

Finally, let me reiterate what I think evangelism actually is. It is not proselytism, where a message is imposed on other people, they are pressured to convert, etc. I don’t believe that evangelism should be obnoxious. I do not believe that it has to be aggressive. (How do you know when?) They simply are their concern. They should do their job as a missionary, but it’s another to deny the job altogether. I support them with my words, my time and my money. Let me be emphatic: I am very pro-monasticism.

Very Rev. Archpriest Andrew Stephen Damick

The Very Rev. Archpriest Andrew Stephen Damick is pastor of St. Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church of Emmaus, Pennsylvania.
Welcome to the Parish Council
The Structure of the Greek Orthodox Church

For the next several months, we will be printing excerpts from a pamphlet entitled “Welcome to the Parish Council,” which has been put out by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. The material covered not only relates to the work of the Parish Council but how the church is set up to run in the United States, the relationship between clergy and laity, between parish and Metropolis and Archdiocese, and between ministries and parish. It is interesting and relevant information for all to read, whether you serve on the parish council or not.

The Process of Making Decisions

All meetings of the Parish Council should start and end with a prayer and a brief Spiritual message given by the Priest, thus setting a spiritual tone for the deliberations of the Council.

The practice of a consensus model of decision-making has been adopted by some of our parishes. This practice is based on St. Paul’s counsel to the ancient Church in Philippi: as Christians, we are to “be of one mind, having the same love and being in full accord,” each person, in humility, “looking not to your own interests, but to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:2-4).

The many benefits of a consensus agreement exceed those of a decision based on a “yes” or “no” vote. Specifically, decisions made by consensus are shown to increase levels of participation, effectiveness, and sustain commitment. They enhance parish culture and sense of community and reduce costs of time and resources. While Robert’s Rules of Order works by ensuring speed and efficiency through a majority rule by vote, decision by consensus seeks to have everybody support the decision that needs to be made. Moreover, this process builds the sense of unity in a community rather than simply voting for or against something. Most importantly, making a decision in consensus involves “making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3), inviting the Holy Spirit to guide the Parish Council in making the best possible decisions.

One good example of a consensus decision model at work is in the deliberation of a jury where all members must reach a unanimous decision. For the purposes of a Parish Council, a consensus decision model is to be preferred because it encourages opposing sides to reach out and understand each other, make a sincere effort to find common ground, and arrive at a solution based on the principles of our faith. It requires openness, trust, and a commitment to be united as a Council. If the Parish Council is united, the Parish will be united; but if the Council is divided, then division will spread to the entire Parish.

Stewards of God’s Church

God has entrusted us with His Church. The Parish Council is entrusted with the administration of the local Parish. As Parish Council members, we should always remember that we are not the owners, but rather the stewards of our Church. The Parish with all its property, resources and people, belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ. We are entrusted with the ministry of Christ in our local Parish, and are accountable as its stewards to our Church Hierarchs, and ultimately to the Lord.

We should remember that in addition to attending the regular meetings of the Parish Council, we should attend the Divine Liturgy not only on Sundays, but also on the feast days of our Church. We should participate in the sacramental life of the Church, practice prayer daily, and be examples in giving of our time, talents, and resources for the work of the Lord.

The President & the Parish Council

The officers of the Parish Council, especially the president, must carry the burden of many demands and obligations. Such officers are called upon to be administrators, personnel directors, financial overseers, but above all, mature Christians. Much can be achieved, when the Priest, Parish Council president, and Parish Council members think, act, and work “in one mind and in one heart.”

It is imperative to note that the Parish Council president is the chairman of the Parish Council and not the president of the parish community. The president does not govern the parish, but rather he/she facilitates the works of the Council. The judicious president will be a good listener and avoid hasty decisions. When in doubt as to what decision to make, the president will seek to discern the answer by prayerfully asking this foundational question: “What course of action will best serve the overall welfare and progress of our parish?” In drawing up the agenda for Parish Council meetings and General Assemblies, the Parish Council president should always consult with the Parish Priest.

In order to better serve the Church, the Parish Council president should conduct meetings in such a way that decisions are made based on consensus as noted earlier. Consensus does not mean unanimous agreement, but rather that Parish Council members can live with the decision, strategy, approach, etc., that is being proposed, and support it publicly. It is crucial for the Parish Council president to remain objective during discussions. His or her job is to run the meetings in such a way as to facilitate decision-making by the whole Council. The President should not use the office to push his or her own ideas through. To this end, it is customary and beneficial for Presidents of Parish Councils not to cast a vote, except when his or her vote would change the outcome of the question (by either breaking a tie vote or making one). The President must be the moderator of discussions, endeavoring to allow both sides to be heard, and ensuring that even unpopular opinions are allowed opportunity for expression.

There may be times when votes must be taken due to the requirement of the GOAA Regulations (sale or purchase of property, approval of contracts etc.), or when there is not sufficient time to reach consensus on a decision that must be made immediately. However, advance planning should always be made to avoid such situations if at all possible.

Above all, in pursuing the high duties of this office, the Parish Council president should seek to open his/her heart to the Holy Spirit in the bond of peace.
The Role of Transparency in a Parish

In order to combat the spread of rumors and misinformation, the Parish Council must be transparent in its operations and strive to maintain a culture of respect, peace, love, and unity. It must openly share information regarding plans, decisions, and finances with the rest of the community in order to keep everyone well-informed on the administrative aspects of Parish life.

Specifically, the Parish Council should inform parishioners of any decisions that will impact the Community, such as plans regarding facilities, ministries, and personnel changes. Financial reports on the income and expenditures of the Church must be given on a regular basis.

The Parish Council can communicate this information in a variety of ways: during meetings, after church services, through the internet and printed material. The effort of the Parish Council to remain transparent and keep parishioners informed greatly contributes to the wellbeing of the Church.

Creating a Culture of Gratitude

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing and give thanks in all circumstances – for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). It is important to create a culture of gratitude when conducting the duties and managing the ministries of the Church, creating a sense of community, service, and love for one another. This is done by showing thanks and appreciation for what others have given, whether it is through one’s actions or by publicly thanking a person or group of people, or simply taking people aside and thanking them for all their work and contributions within the Parish.

In such a way, a culture of gratitude is created where the entire Parish is united in service to the Church. Making people feel obligated, guilty, or excluded has no place in a Church that is trying to foster a culture of gratitude.

Examples of a culture of gratitude are seen throughout the life and history of the Church. St. Paul expressed his gratitude very passionately to God for calling him to salvation, to a new life in service to the Church (1 Timothy 1:12-14). We can learn from the example that St. Paul set for us, which is to live and work for God passionately in love and thanksgiving.

We give thanks to God for His blessings during the Liturgy, before meals, and for the gifts He has bestowed upon us. It is through this model that we can create a culture of gratitude within the Parish. This culture begins when we teach our children to say “please” and “thank you” and to respect and love one another. We also teach each other when we show our gratitude to one another. Only by the participation of the entire Parish can this culture be fostered where the Spirit of God is allowed to freely move and influence us.

How Does the Parish Relate to the Metropolis and to the Archdiocese?

The relationship of a Parish to its Metropolis or to the Direct Archdiocesan District is both spiritual and administrative. Each Metropolitan or the Archbishop is not only its spiritual leader, but is also its administrative leader and represents the Holy Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Holy Archdiocesan Synod and the Archdiocese to the Parishes in his Metropolis or Direct Archdiocesan District. In reality, he is the Spiritual Father of the community, but, because it is impossible for him to be ever-present in all the Parishes of his Metropolis or District, he appoints a Proistamenos (senior or head priest) to oversee the overall programs of the local parish in his place. The priest refers back to his Metropolitan or Archbishop for guidance and he is accountable to him.

The Proistamenos is an extension of the office of the Metropolitan or Archbishop and never should be thought of as an employee of the parish. The Archbishop or Metropolitan offers counsel and direction, interprets Church policy, and assists his parishes in the fulfillment of their ministries through the appropriate departments of the Archdiocese. He also oversees the transfer of priests, both leaving and entering his Metropolis, as well as visiting clergy and, in his Episcopal capacity, ordains worthy candidates to the diaconate and the priesthood with the consent of the Holy Ecumenical Synod. The Parish looks to the Metropolitan as a source of spiritual fatherhood and leadership, and also to his counsel, which is based upon his years of experience and service to the Church.

The central headquarters of the Archdiocese are located in the Archdiocesan Offices, at 8-10 East 79th Street, in New York City. The Office of the Archbishop, the Chancellor, and nearly all administrative offices of the national Church are located there. While most Parish matters are referred to the Metropolitan, there are others that, due to their nature, are served through the central offices of the Archdiocese: e.g., the payment of Parish financial obligations, clergy insurance and pension programs, educational materials for Catechism schools and Greek schools, and direction in Church policy on many ecumenical, social, and public matters. The Archdiocese provides a host of materials, advice, speakers, and counseling that are referred to or channeled through the Metropolis office.

The Parish Council should promote an understanding of the Archdiocese as a whole. Its members should therefore seek to understand and speak often about the ministries of the Metropolis and the Archdiocese. The Parish Council also addresses the importance of the local Parish to participate in Metropolis, District, and national activities, and the need to fulfill the Parish’s financial obligation towards the Archdiocese.

We also must not neglect to speak about the ministry, work, and plight of our Mother Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.
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WBS - Women’s Bible Study  
SBS - South Bible Study  
** - Fast Days |
| 1 **  
MBS 7:30 a.m.  
Sts. Cosmas and Damian  
Orthros 9:00 a.m.  
Liturgy 10:00 a.m. |
| 2 | Young at Heart  
11:30 a.m.  
Adult Greek School  
6 - 8:30 p.m. |
| 3 ** |
| 4 |
| 5 | Orthros 8:45 a.m.  
Liturgy 10:00 a.m.  
Youth Sunday  
YAM  
AHEPA/Daughters |
| 6 | Covering the Gym Floor 9:00 a.m.  
Bible Study 6:30 p.m. |
| 7 | WBS 10:00 a.m.  
SBS 7:00 p.m..  
NO BASKETBALL |
| 8 ** | MBS 7:30 a.m.  
Archangels  
Orthros 8:00 a.m.  
Liturgy 9:00 a.m. |
| 9 | St. Nectarios  
Orthros 8:00 a.m.  
Liturgy 9:00 a.m.  
Adult Greek School  
6 - 8:30 p.m. |
| 10 ** | Orthros 8:00 a.m.  
Liturgy 9:00 a.m.  
Tampa Greek Festival  
11:00 a.m. - 11:00 p.m. |
| 11 | Orthros 8:00 a.m.  
Liturgy 9:00 a.m.  
Tampa Greek Festival  
11:00 a.m. - 11:00 p.m. |
| 12 | Orthros 7:45 a.m.  
Liturgy 9:00 a.m.  
Tampa Greek Festival  
11:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. |
| 13 | St. John Chrysostom  
Orthros 9:00 a.m.  
Liturgy 10:00 a.m. |
| 14 | WBS 10:00 a.m.  
SBS 7:00 p.m..  
Basketball 8:00 p.m.  
Parish Council Candidate Seminar  
7-9 p.m. |
| 15 ** | MBS 7:30 a.m.  
Beginning of Advent Fast  
Holy Unction  
6:00 p.m. |
| 16 ** | St. Matthew  
Orthros 9:00 a.m.  
Liturgy 10:00 a.m.  
Adult Greek School  
6 - 8:30 p.m. |
| 17 ** |
| 18 ** | Community Outreach  
Alzheimers  
Walk-AHEPA |
| 19 ** | Orthros 8:45 a.m.  
Liturgy 10:00 a.m.  
Festival Appreciation Luncheon  
GOYA 5:00 p.m. |
| 20 ** | Bible Study 6:30 p.m. |
| 21 ** | Entrance of Virgin Mary  
Orthros 9:00 a.m.  
Liturgy 10:00 a.m.  
Basketball |
| 22 ** | Thanksgiving Eve Liturgy  
Orthros 5:00 p.m.  
Liturgy 6:00 p.m. |
| 23 ** |
| 24 ** |
| 25 ** | St. Katherine  
Orthros 9:00 a.m.  
Liturgy 10:00 a.m. |
| 26 ** | Orthros 8:45 a.m.  
Liturgy 10:00 a.m.  
GOYA Christmas card |
| 27 ** | Bible Study 6:30 p.m. |
| 28 ** | WBS 10:00 a.m.  
SBS 7:00 p.m..  
Festival Inquirers Dinner  
K-center  
6:30-8:30 p.m.  
NO BASKETBALL |
| 29 ** | MBS 7:30 a.m. |
| 30 ** | St. Andrew  
Orthros 9:00 a.m.  
Liturgy 10:00 a.m.  
Adult Greek School |
**St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church**

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 | Alyki Crassas, President | 813-690-3867 | Mike Xenick, VP | 813-340-8737
| Gary Ward, Treasurer | 813-846-3898 | Sandra Pappas, Secretary | 813-785-3747
| George Chagaris | 727-420-1920 | Carole Fotopoulos | 813-982-0947
| Jimmy Konstas | 813-220-7352 | Catherine Mitseas | 813-571-0658
| Ryan Kindone | 704-564-2046 | Aris Rogers, II | 813-309-5525
| Dante Skourellos | 813-765-9534 |
Office Staff | Monica Gjerde, Office Manager | 813-876-8830 | Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper | debstjohntpa@gmail.com | Fax: 813-443-4899

**Adult Greek School**

| Magda Myer | 813-909-2327 |

**AHEPA**

| Gus Paras, President | 813-254-6980 |

**Altar Angels**

| Engie Halkias | 813-932-5859 | Sia Blankenship | 813-968-8855 |

**Basketball**

| Perry Katsamakis | 516-403-3118 | Jimmy Konstas | 813-220-7352 |

**Bible Study**

| Charlie Hambos | 813-843-8471 |

**Bookstore**

| Bill Manikas | 813-960-3679 |

**Chantry**

| Nick Andreadakis | 813-516-6081 |

**Choir**

| Artie Palios, Director | 813-831-1294 | Ruth Losovitz, Organist | 727-688-2782 |

**Community Outreach**

| Betty Katherine Katsamakis | 813-468-1596 |

**Dance Group**

| Η ΧΑΡΑ ΜΑΣ, Alexandra De Maio | 813-340-9668 | Bessie Palios, | 813-523-0347 |
| Parea, | 813-877-6136 | Marina Choundas | 732-239-0085 |
| Anna Maria Bavaro | 813-221-2194 |

**Daughters of Penelope**

| Maria Zabetakis, President | 813-748-7079 |

**Finance Committee**

| Gary Ward | 813-846-3898 |

**Food Pantry**

| Anetta Alexander | 813-758-2689 |

**Gasparilla Parking**

| John Kokkas | 727-992-4615 |

**GOYA**

| Maria Koutroumanis | 813-245-3854 | Kara Katzaras | 863-669-6739 |

**Hope/Joy**

| Debbie Nicklow | 813-690-0671 |

**Junior Olympics**

| Dean Koutroumanis | 813-624-4620 |

**MOMS**

| Mary Ann Konstas | 813-215-9862 | Lindsey Skourellos | 813-503-7845 |

**OCF**

| Charlie Hambos | 813-843-8471 |

**Oratorical Festival**

| Peggy Bradshaw | 727-244-1374 |

**Philliopechos**

| 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 |

**Strategic Planning**

| Marie Edquid | 813-422-8940 | Gary Ward | 813-846-3898 |

**Stewardship**

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

**Sunday School**

| Vickie Peckham | 813-406-5626 |

**Uskher**

| Tom Georgas | 813-985-0236 |

**Visitation Committee**

| Charlie Hambos | 813-843-8471 |

**Welcome Ministry**

| 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.