Hierarchical Visits in Early January

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America will visit our Parish on Sunday, January 5. His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros has served as Archbishop of America for six months. He is making his first pastoral visit to the Tampa Bay area. In fact, on January 5, His Eminence will celebrate his first ever Divine Liturgy in Florida, and he has chosen our parish in which to celebrate. This is truly a special honor for us. Please make plans to worship on Sunday, January 5. Orthros will begin at 8:15 a.m. with Divine Liturgy at 9:30 a.m. We will hold a luncheon in His Eminence’s honor after Divine Liturgy, so that we may greet and get to know our new Archbishop.

Either His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios or His Grace Bishop Sevastianos will visit our Parish on January 6-7 for the Feastday of our Parish. It was not known at press time which Hierarch of ours will visit, only that one of them for sure will be with us for Vespers of St. John the Baptist on the evening of January 6 beginning at 6:30 p.m. and on the morning of January 7 for Divine Liturgy at 9:30 a.m. Please reserve January 5-7 for three days of special services in our parish.

Special Thanks to Three Special People

Alkis Crassas, Sandra Pappas and Mike Xenick

I want to begin the New Year by thanking three special people who have contributed a significant amount of time to our parish over the past six years. For the past six years, Alkis Crassas, Mike Xenick and Sandra Pappas have served on the Parish Council. All came aboard in January 2014 and have played a pivotal role in the life of this community, as we have really worked to change the paradigm of how we advance the Gospel. Any “victories” of our parish over the past six years would not have been possible without their hard work and sacrifice. Alkis has served as our President for six years. He is one of the most positive people I know. He is the consummate optimist. He sees problems as challenges and worked efficiently and joyfully to overcome them. Alkis also took on the role of the Festival Chairperson (yes, it was a committee, but there was one overall head and it was Alkis). Mike served as our Vice-President for six years. Mike has been a presence on the Parish Council for many years before that, having served as President years ago, and in recent years, before this term, as our finance chairperson. While on the Parish Council, Mike served (and will continue to serve) as the liaison with our charter school. He also handled the logistics for the Festival, giving up a week each year to basically live at St. John. Mike also has continued to sing faithfully in the choir. Sandra served as the Secretary for five out of the past six years. She took our record-keeping and transparency to a new level. Sandra has also served as co-chair of the Stewardship Committee for six years. We see that stewardship has gone to unprecedented heights, in large part due to her efforts. Not only have these three people been big forces behind the scenes, most important, they have been front and center almost every Sunday in worship. A big thank you also to their spouses, Aime, Maria and Gary, for sharing them so selflessly with our community. Thank you Alkis, Mike and Sandra for a job well done!
Father Stavros’ Message

A New Decade

What do an iPad, Instagram, Nexus, Kindle Fire, 4G Networks, I-Message, Minecraft, Snapchat, Uber, Tesla, Drones, PlayStation 4, Alexa, Echo, Windows 10, Apple Watch, Apple Air Pods, Pokemon Go and Fortnite have in common? Ten years ago, on January 1, 2010, they did not exist. And now, these and so many other things are things we all know and many of us use. When the last decade began, what things did you think would happen in the next ten years? Did those things happen? What surprised you? What disappointed you?

On January 1, we will begin not only a new year, but a new decade. While we will hopefully enjoy many YEARS of life, at the most we will enjoy ten decades. So this January is one of, at the most, 10 days like this we will have in our entire lives. It is a time to wonder and to daydream about the things that may happen to us in the next ten years. Perhaps college or marriage or children. Or perhaps college for our children, marriage for our children and grandchildren. Perhaps retirement. There are probably some people wondering if they are entering their last decade. And many more who won’t give this a thought, but who will not be here when we enter the 2030s.

A study of history in the 20th century calls the 1920s the “Roaring Twenties,” a period of prosperity post World War I and before the Great Depression of the 1930s. History also reminds us that we remember decades starting with the 20s, 30s, 40s, etc. No one talks about the 00s and the 10s without putting a 19(10) or 20(10) in front of them. It is the 20s and the decades after that seem to drop the century number and just focus on the decade. For those who will be still alive in 2050, you will look back with some kind of nostalgia (hopefully) for the 20s (2020s).

I daydream also about the last decade and the next one. Ten years ago, our son had just turned 3. Now he is a teenager. In the next decade he will hopefully go to both high school and college. Ten years ago, my father was alive. I wondered at the beginning of the decade whether he would make it to the end, and of course, he didn’t. I wondered ten years ago would I still be in Tampa in 2020, and by God’s grace I still am. There are countless things—both surprises and disappointments—as I reflect on the past decade. As I look ahead to the next decade, I wonder what kind of things will be in store for me—I think about my marriage, my child, my ministry, where I live, and even my life itself. What will become of me in the next decade?

I also think of our society. The last decade has brought an incredible amount of technological advance. It has also brought an incredible regression in moral behavior, and normalizing of behaviors previously considered immoral. It has brought advances in medicine, but also complications as we live longer. Marriage, family and raising children I believe are more challenging than they were ten years ago. I think we have more stress. We certainly have more opportunities to sin. And our lives are more public and shared than ever before. We get news in real time, with no delay at all. Violence is part of the daily news cycle. And Christianity is on the downswing, though thankfully not in our parish.

The 2010s was a good decade for our parish of St. John. A quick glance into our parish registry shows that in the last ten years, we have had 239 baptisms, 50 Chrismations, 92 weddings and 74 funerals. The ratio of baptisms to funerals is a good sign, and also a rare one, as many Orthodox Churches, have a 4-to-1 ratio of funerals to baptisms. All told, we had 1,857 services at St. John in the 2010s. We’ve had many changes in ministry heads, including Parish Council, Philoptochos, Stewardship, the choir and our chanters. Just for fun, I went back and looked at the Messenger from January 2010, and the only people who are in the same positions they were in back then are: Tom Georgas (ushers), Vickie Peckham (Sunday school director), Engie Halkias (Altar Angels), Magda Myer (Adult Greek School) and Fr. Stavros (Proistamenos). ALL other ministry leaders changed. And many new ministries were added.

In January 2010, I ceded the front page of the Messenger to a pre-teen girl named Arianna Krinos, who wrote an amazing article on “What the Orthodox Church Means to Me.” Today Arianna is a first year graduate student at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and is engaged to be married. It’s amazing to see the very interesting things that have happened to our children in the last decade, how many went to college, how many are married, how many have kids of their own.

Our stewardship goal in 2010 was $300,000 and no one thought we could attain it. In 2009, we hadn’t collected even $250,000. In 2019, our stewardship topped $500,000 for the second year in a row. At the beginning of 2010, our number of families was 336. As we begin a new decade, it’s just under 400. Now, there are many families who have moved, and sadly, many more who have dropped out. Remember across America, there was a 38% decline in church attendance in the past decade. So the fact that our parish is actually growing in an environment like this is an accomplishment worth noting. As we begin this new decade of the 2020s, church attendance, Sunday school
enrollment, and GOYA participation are at all-time highs. There are, however, some challenges. If all 239 children who were baptized in the past decade came to church, they would nearly fill the building, and that doesn’t count their parents or siblings or the 50 adults that were Chrismated. As I look back at who was in leadership positions as we began 2010, I am a little saddened to see names of people who are no longer part of our community, and it’s not because they passed away or moved. Some simply left the church—they either got mad, busy, or just stopped.

The journey through the Christian life is certainly not an easy one. Christians do not exist in isolation. They exist in community. We can’t follow God’s commandment to love our neighbor if we have no neighbor. So, we exist in community. We have a community in which we live, the City of Tampa, the United States, etc. We have small communities within our community—our school community, our neighborhood, our workplace, etc. And we have our church community. Because we are human beings who sin often, and who sin against one another, it is easy to get frustrated or even disillusioned with community. We may get tired of the politics in our country, or the rules in our neighborhood, or with the other parents at school or with annoying people at work. By and large we manage to get by and stay in these communities. I’m not sure if it is because church is the most voluntary of communities or because we expect more from the church, but the church seems to be the community that people most easily drop out of. I’m not sure how to stop that other than encourage our community to be an encouraging community, and to encourage people to be honest, patient and forgiving. If we retained everyone who walked through the doors of our parish in the last decade, our congregation would easily be double what it is. And if everyone who came to our church in the past decade came every Sunday, we’d easily need a building four times the size of the one we have. I hope and pray that one goal each of us has as we begin the 2020s is to be a member and a participant in the life of the church throughout this decade, in good times and in tough times, in busy times and in frustrating times.

In this past decade, I have received Holy Communion well over 1,000 times. Has that changed me? Am I a better Christian than I was a decade ago? This is a sobering question. In fact, it makes me feel like calling my Spiritual Father to discuss it. Because in many ways, I’m not a better Christian than I was ten years ago. In many ways, I’m still struggling with the same issues. Does that mean that my participation in the life of the church is an act of hypocrisy? Perhaps in some ways it is. I am comforted by one thought, which comes from the Gospel of Matthew 28:16-17:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him but some doubted.

Jesus directed His disciples to do things, in this case, to go to a mountain. All of them showed up. They even worshipped Him. However, in that moment, some were doubting. There are moments I show up for worship (or for prayer, or Scripture reading, or moral living, charity, etc.) and I have my doubts. Tragedies in this community, perceived corruption in the national church, the never ending cycle of negative news, as well as personal struggles and failures, have made me question the faith, and even have doubts about it at times. But I have showed up, doubts, struggles and all. If God rewards effort, which I believe He does, my effort in “showing up” I hope is pleasing to Him. As we begin this new decade, I encourage you to “show up” for Christ daily in prayer, weekly in worship, frequently in the Eucharist, at least once per year in confession, occasionally through a retreat or religious education opportunity, and throughout your life in opportunities to serve others. Whether you do these things with great gusto or great doubt doesn’t so much matter as much as that you do them, and do them consistently. Just like the disciples had their doubts, and denials, and even though all but one abandoned the Lord when He was on the Cross, they all showed up long enough to become convicted and convinced that it was all true. And then they led lives that glorified God and brought others to Him.

Our One Word for 2020: TIME

For the past two years, we have chosen one word for our community, one word that we tried to have unite our community. In 2018, the word was “Engaged.” The idea was to get as many people as possible engaged in the life of the community. As we turn the calendar on 2020, we have more people than ever engaged in some way in the life of the community. In 2019, the word was “Blessed.” The idea was to help us be grateful for our blessings and to share our blessings through generosity. Our community has been more generous than ever. Our stewardship total for 2019 was the highest in the history of our parish. And the amount of money going to charity was the highest it has ever been.

The word for our community for 2020 is TIME.
we hope to be in ten years. Second, and most important, time is our most treasured commodity, it is our most valued currency. Because none of us has enough of it. So when we give someone our time, it is truly a special thing. People are pulled in all kinds of directions for all kinds of things so time has become even more valuable. I can’t tell you how many times I have counseled people who have said to me “I wish my spouse and I had more time together,” or a teenager who says “I wish my parents spent more time with me.” I’m not sure anyone has ever said to me “I wish my spouse would spend more money on me,” or “I wish my parent spent less time with me.” Jesus says in Matthew 6:21, For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. If time is the thing we treasure most, it stands to reason that wherever we spend our time, that’s where our hearts are. If we audited our time honestly, where do we spend more time—social media, sports, or on our phones or gossiping with friends? Or with family, tending to our marriages, in prayer, worship or charity? If we are honest, most of us spend way too much time on social media, sports, phones and idle gossip and not enough with our spouses, our children, and, most especially, with God.

We have a finite commodity of time. People say you can always get more money, but you can’t ever get more time. Most of us have made bad financial decisions. It may have been a bad investment or a bad purchase, or purchasing something we ended up not needing or using. And by and large, one can recover from these kinds of mistakes. Missing a child’s concert that will never happen again is a mistake that can’t be corrected.

I knew someone years ago who was obsessed with the idea of building a grand house, with many bedrooms, entertainment areas, pool and lots of amenities for his children and their friends. He worked long hours for many years, promising to cut back once he had enough money to build his palace. Over the years, he spent less and less time with his children, who began to resent him more and more. By the time he got the house built, his kids had left for college and never came back to visit because they had no relationship with him. This is the story for lots of us. We’re so obsessed with getting stuff that we neglect to spend time where it matters most.

I’ve known more people who have spent their lives in the pursuit of riches and possessions who have come to the end of their lives realizing that they have no relationship with Christ. On their death beds, they confront a harsh truth that if it’s all true, everything about Christ and salvation, that they’ve spent no time preparing their souls to meet the Lord and die scared.

One thing that for sure has changed for each of us in the past decade—we are ten years closer to that moment when we will stand before God and answer for how we spent our time on this earth. None of us knows if we will be here at the end of this decade. I entered the past decade in my 30s. If I live to the end of this decade, I’ll be nearly 60! Time is passing by, for sure. The sand in the hourglass of each life empties more with each passing year. Is there a sense of gratitude for the time we have, or a sense of entitlement that we are owed a certain amount of time? And most important, is there a sense of urgency to spend our time wisely and in ways that are spiritually profitable?

Rank these three statements for your life in order of importance:
1. I love God
2. I love my neighbor
3. I love myself

There is the classic acronym JOY, J-Jesus, O-Others, Y-Yourself. The complete life allows time for all three. The first of the time goes to the Lord. The first moments of the day, the first morning of the week, the first thoughts when beginning a new task, and the first fruits of the time we spend working. Ideally, the first goes to the Lord. Is Jesus the first on your list?

Are you a J-O-Y, or a Y-O-J? or a Y-O-j? (if there is any room left after the Y and O are taken care of).

Some amount of time should be spent on the others. Our spouses and our children, our families and friends, they should receive a portion of our time. In working at our jobs, probably the place we spend the most time, there should be a consciousness that we don’t just work for money, but we work for others. Whether they are parishioners, clients, students, customers, or employers, we all should see our work under the umbrella of working in a spirit of love for our “neighbors.” And we should spend some time with others we don’t know. Everyone should do a little bit of volunteer work every year.

And finally Y—ourselves. There has to be time for ourselves. There needs to be time to sleep, to rest, to relax, and to exercise. Someone suggested to me doing a half-hour of “inconsequential behavior” every day, whether that is reading, watching TV or working a crossword puzzle, doing 30 minutes of activity each day that is stress free.

So, each day, spend a few moments checking in with the word “Time.” And ask yourself how you spend your time? And are you a J-O-Y, a O-Y, a J-O, a Y-O, or a Y?

Time is also an important element in the life of our community. How do we spend our time here? A look at the calendar each month shows that the activity we do the most at St. John is worship, which is a worthy expense of our time. We worship not only on Sundays but on many weekdays as well. The highest expression of life is to receive Christ in the Eucharist. This coming year, there will be 100 opportunities to do that. How many will times will you partake? There will be nearly 150 times we will gather for worship corporately (this does not include baptisms, weddings and funerals). How much time will you spend worshiping? There are three Bible studies going on in our community at present, the Prayer Team message goes out every morning—how much time will you give to these things? Will you commit to bringing your children to Sunday school and GOYA, so that they can spend time getting to know who Jesus is? Will you spend at least one Saturday at community outreach, feeding the hungry?
When we invest time in something, your emotion, your heart follows. It also works the other way, where you heart is, when you find something or someone you love, then you spend time there. If you love football, you invest time watching it, as an example. So whether you lead with your time or with your heart, eventually the two become intertwined. Whether you want to invest time so you can love God more, or whether you love God and want to invest more time, it doesn’t matter. Just know that the two go hand in hand. And because most of us know that our relationship with God isn’t as strong as it could be, I encourage you to invest time this year in that relationship, and you’ll see a stronger relationship by the time the year is over. You’ll be a better Christian and a better steward of your life, your money, your family, your job and everything else when you invest your most important commodity, time, with the Lord.

**My One Word for 2020—Renew**

I love the concept of the one word for each year. Many people, myself included, make a list of New Year’s Resolutions that in short order we not only fail to keep, we fail to remember. It’s easier to remember one word, and even I had a hard time remembering my word last year. (It was “today” and my word for 2018 was “faithful”). If we can remember one word, and check in with that word each day, it can really alter the course of our year in a great way. Along with the one word, pick one Bible verse that relates to your word, and stick it somewhere you can see it, say the verse each day, and check in with your word once a day.

My one word for 2020 is RENEW. The Bible verse that goes along with this word is Psalm 50:10, Create me a clean heart, o God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Why this word? When I think of the word renew, one thing that comes to mind is renewing a library book. In the old days, when we all went to libraries to get books, we would check out the book for a certain amount of time, and then if we wanted to extend the time, we had to renew the book. We had to go down to the library and get it stamped again. Renewal didn’t just happen on its own, it’s something we had to make happen. Every year, we have to renew memberships and subscriptions and some of these renewals happen automatically.

Our faith is a combination of automatic renewal and intentional renewal. We don’t have to pay a fee or go anywhere to continue to be an Orthodox Christian. When the year flips over to January 1, I’ll automatically be an Orthodox Christian. What needs to be more intentional in my life is a more intentional effort to pray, to eat right, to exercise, to manage my time, to tend to my marriage and my son, to be a better priest, a better friend and a kinder and more patient person. As we begin 2020, I want to “renew” myself, with God’s help, on all of these things. That’s why I picked this word for myself.

I encourage you to pick a word to define your year for 2020. I also kind ask that you email me your one word (and all it needs to be is a one word email with your one word) by January 15 (you can email it to frstaw@gmail.com) so that we can make a one word “Wordle” of all of our words as we have done the past couple of years. Every month, I’ll ask someone to write a reflection on their one word, why they picked it, and how it is going for them in 2020. If you’d like to volunteer to write a few paragraphs, please let me know.

**Goals for the 2020s**

As we begin a new decade of the 2020s, I wanted to write down a few goals that I would like to see our church accomplish. I do not know if I’ll be alive or serving in Tampa when we begin the year 2030. But if I am, I know that I’ll look back to this issue of the Messenger just as I looked back to the Messenger from January 2010. So here are some goals I would love to see our church accomplish this coming decade, regardless of whether or not I finish it as your priest:

- **Spread the Gospel to more and more people, retaining who we have and adding to our number**—Notice that the first goal isn’t to add another priest, pay off the mortgage or anything else. It is to spread the Gospel to more and more people. Because when we do that, the other stuff will all fall into place. And before even spreading the Gospel to more people, we need to work to retain those we already have. Again, if all the people who got baptized in the past decade and their parents were around, we’d have to double the size of the church building just for them. Christ told us in the Great Commission, that we are to go out and baptize all nations. That’s the most important mission of the church, to spread the Gospel to as many people as possible, and so this is the number one goal of our parish. We ended 2019 with nearly 400 families. How many will we have in 2030?

- **Cultivate More Leadership**—This is a constant struggle. It is not only finding leaders, but the right leaders. It is also utilizing leaders without burning them out. More leaders make more ministry possible and also distribute the work load in a parish more evenly. We started to work on a strategic plan in the past ten years, which helped us clarify our mission, vision and core values. In the next decade, we need to continue to develop a strategic plan based on the mission, vision and core values we have committed to.
As I looked at the leadership page on the back of the Messenger from ten years ago, and realize that only five of the people on it are still in the same position, it is very likely that in this coming decade, most of those positions will change again. Who is going to step forward to fill the needs we have, as well as the needs that will be created?

Community based ministries—This past fall, we started our first community based ministry, Grief Share. Grief Share is offered to anyone in the local community who is grieving, not necessarily people who are Orthodox. In fact, one person who attended Grief Share is not Orthodox. And this is a great thing. The role of the parish is not only to spread the word of God, but to minister to the people in the community in which the church finds itself. Whether that is feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, comforting the bereaved, or encouraging the alcoholic, helping the illiterate, and many other kinds of ministries I hope we will develop in this coming decade.

Pay off the mortgage—get out of the landlord business—In order to minister to our community on a more full-time basis, we need to have full access to our property. At present, we don’t have the use of most of our property for 12 hours a day. At some point in this coming decade our church (as early as 2022 and as late as 2027) will have the choice to continue to be in the landlord business or to get out of the landlord business and be a church. Also at some point in this decade, we will finally pay off the mortgage that our old school so irresponsibly plunged us into. This, in my opinion, will be a very critical decision we make because it will cement our identify as a church for years to come. I am hoping that we will choose to not have a tenant here long term. That will be a community choice, obviously. I’m just going on record, and will continue to do so, that I hope we will take our community a different direction when the opportunity presents itself.

100% of budget on stewardship—We’ve made great strides in stewardship. We have also taken away passing trays and charging for candles. I hope we will continue in this trajectory of raising stewardship and not nickel-and-diming for funds. We continue to fund a growing percentage of our budget on stewardship and I hope in this decade, we will get to 100% of our budget funded on stewardship. This will make the Festival something we can have for fun, or for charity, or for other projects, rather than it being a necessity.

10% of the budget to charity—We are working our way, one percentage point at a time, to giving away 10% of our budget to charity. We are at 6% for 2020. I hope we will be at 10% well before the end of the decade. That means that at some point, an even more substantial amount of money $70K+ will be going back into the community in which we find ourselves, to feed the hungry, cloth the naked, help the one who has had a disaster, etc., all the things that Christ told us we should be doing.

Add to personnel—Notice that I didn’t put this as the first goal. Because adding personnel doesn’t guarantee us any of the goals above. However, if we achieve the goals above, adding to personnel happens naturally and easily. At some point in this decade, I hope we will have two or more priests serving our community full time. In the past ten years we have added two full time pastoral assistant to our ministry team. I hope we will continue to add in the decade to come, so that we can more effectively minister to even more people.

Notice also that expanding our church is not a goal, at least not a goal that I have. Why? Because that goal, if it is a goal, must be driven by the community. A decision to expand a church can polarize a community, or can put the focus of a community on a building instead of on Christ and community. If this idea becomes a goal, it needs to be done by the community as a community, and to be done with continuity that doesn’t upset what the community is already doing.

Conclusion

In the past ten years, the city of Tampa has grown, our parish has grown and yes, even the Messenger has grown. I enjoy writing. I enjoy ministering. And I enjoy being your priest. If God so wills, I hope I’ll be writing to you in January 2030, though I leave myself open at all times to His will for my ministry and my life. What I do know, as we enter a new decade together, is that I will give my best effort to be a good steward of what He has given me, starting off with my time and how I spend it. And if we all do that, we can have a good decade of the 2020s, making a difference by honoring Christ in our little corner of the world.

I wish you a Happy and healthy New Year 2020 and a blessed decade of the 2020s!

With love in the Lord,

+Fr. Stavros
In this modern era, especially in Western societies, the need to fit in to a certain group and feel at ease has increased to the point that it has even affected religious groups, in particular Christianity. Throughout the world, there are countless denominations and variations of the Christian faith which may be overtly present in the Protestant groups especially in the United States of America. As a quick example, an average town in the state of Texas may be home to at least four different protestant churches, let alone other Christian churches such as Roman Catholic and Orthodox. The main cause of this is the increasing normality of religious pluralism in Western society at the present moment. Most of the time, the creation of new churches come about due to several interior factors which contribute to disunity within any given community as many people often regard their own individual perspective to be of greater importance or even value than that of the collective body of the Church.

This notion is not foreign, however, to the Orthodox Church. In the United States, for example, in the early quarter of the twentieth century, the amount of Greek Orthodox churches nearly doubled even though the amount of Orthodox Christians only marginally increased. This was due to a political rift between those who supported the monarchy of Greece and those who supported a democratic form of government. Though this was a political issue grounded in the nation of Greece, the immigrants in the United States saw it to also be their responsibility to align their parish according to their own individual opinions regardless of the fact that the Church is beyond any political or national boundaries as may be seen in Galatians 3:28. This fact of the Christian Faith is, however, compromised due to human error and selfishness which thus contributes to the downfall and distortion of the overall idea Christian spirituality. This distortion is perhaps an example of bricolage which is keenly explained by Scot McKnight:

In this postmodern spirituality, Christians simultaneously believe in Jesus Christ, confess Christian beliefs, follow Jesus Christ, and participate in all kinds of Christian things and, at the same time, believe a number of things that undermine those beliefs but not their following of Jesus Christ, and it seems to have little impact on their spirituality.

The main idea which should be underlined from the above text is that people truly believe in Christ yet also hold beliefs that undermine the basic tenets of Christianity as a whole while still maintaining the affirmation Christ as the Savior. Even so, McKnight holds that this problem has little to no impact on a Christian’s spirituality. This is certainly problematic to those who truly hold Orthodox teachings in a true fashion. As stated by Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra:

A basic condition for the spiritual life is that we should understand that, on our own, we can do absolutely nothing. No matter how hard we try, the spiritual life is something that someone else gives to us. And the “someone else” is the Spirit of God, the Comforter, the “treasury of good things and the giver of life”, the treasury from which all the riches of spirituality come forth, the source from which the spiritual life emerges and overflows... Of course, sometimes we get confused, and think that to be spiritual means to be a “good person”: not to steal, not to kill, not to go to bad places or with bad friends, to go to Church on Sunday, to read spiritual books, and so on. But no, this is not the spiritual life. ...a spiritual person, a true Christian, is someone whose entire life is sworn to God. A spiritual person is an athlete who has burst into life, who stands out from the crowds of human beings, and runs with all the speed of his soul to heaven.

By analyzing the remarks of Elder Aimilianos, it is clear that no Christian may truly achieve anything on his own. This is due to the fact that one must rely upon the intercession of the Holy Spirit to enlighten oneself which comes through way of active work and repentance as it is not something which is granted easily but must be constantly worked at. Elder Aimilianos also refers to the issues of reducing Christianity to a certain ethical way of life rather than a Faith. This is a most dangerous concept that has taken hold of many in the postmodern society. In other words, many believe that to be a true Christian is to merely follow a certain set of rules or go to church services the recommended amount of times throughout the calendar year. The Church is currently facing this devastating reality. To believe this would be to reduce the entire life and death of Christ Jesus to nothing more than a mere teacher who spoke charismatically and taught people of the time and posterity the way in which to love one another. By doing so, His Incarnation and Resurrection from the dead are moot as there is no significance if He is only an ethical teacher whose miracles are nothing more than stories.

The entirety of the Christian goal regarding Spirituality may be surmised in the following manner: “God became human (without ceasing to be God) that humanity might become God (without ceasing to be human). This summarizes the basic Orthodox Christian tenet of theosis which is defined simply as man becoming like God. This idea, however, is not easily put into practice nor achieved as it requires much vigilance and active participation in the spiritual life. What does this mean exactly and how does one participate in the spiritual life? It is explained in the Gospel according to Mark that “if anyone wishes to follow after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his soul will lose it; but whoever loses his soul for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:34-35). This selection from the gospels substantiates the claim made by Elder Aimilianos that a Christian who wishes to attain the Spiritual life must be completely sworn to God. As we begin a new year and new decade, let us all hold these goals close to our hearts in our spiritual journey to become closer to Christ and one another.
## Liturgical Schedule for January 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, Jan 1</td>
<td>Circumcision of Christ/St. Basil/New Year’s Day</td>
<td>Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday, Jan 4</td>
<td>Royal Hours of Theophany</td>
<td>9:30 - 11:00 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday, Jan 5</td>
<td>Forefeast of Theophany</td>
<td>Orthros 8:15 a.m. Hierarchical Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Altar Boys: Captains only</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ushers: Tammy Christou, Jim Armstrong, Tom Georgas</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Mike and Maria Xenick</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caller: Maria Karounos</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coffee Hour: Luncheon in honor of Archbishop Elpidophoros</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bookstore: Bill Manikas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, Jan 6</td>
<td>Divine Liturgy in Tarpon Springs</td>
<td>9:30 a.m.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Great Vespers for the feast of St. John the Baptist</td>
<td>6:30 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, Jan 7</td>
<td>St. John the Baptist</td>
<td>Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday, Jan 12</td>
<td>Sunday after Theophany</td>
<td>Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Altar Boys: Captains &amp; St. John</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ushers: Brett Mourer; John Alexander; Amin Hanhan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Donna Hambos, Skip Higdon</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ambassador: Julie Palios</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Caller: Vickie Peckham</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Coffee Hour: Vasilopita Sunday</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bookstore: MaryAnn Rose, Rita Bedran</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday, Jan 17</td>
<td>St. Anthony</td>
<td>Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday, Jan 19</td>
<td>12th Sunday of Luke</td>
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<td>Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Louis &amp; Georgia Stratigakos</td>
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<td>Ambassador: Marenda Patrascoiu; Maria Karounos Caller: Maria</td>
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<td>Katsamakis</td>
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<td>Coffee Hour: Altar Angels &amp; Kaburis Family</td>
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<td>Bookstore: John and Anetta Alexander</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday, Jan 26</td>
<td>15th Sunday of Luke</td>
<td>Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Altar Boys: Captains &amp; St. Mark</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ushers: Nick Kavoukis, George Trimiklinitis, Peter Theophanous</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Michael &amp; Bessie Palios</td>
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<td>Ambassador: Tanya Robinson</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Caller: Christine Worley</td>
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<td>Coffee Hour: TUVWXYZ Families</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bookstore: David Voykin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, Jan 30</td>
<td>Three Hierarchs—St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, and St. John Chrysostom</td>
<td>Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### A Note on Visiting Priests
In the coming months, Fr. Startton Dorzenski, a recently retired priest whose children belong to our parish will be with us on some Sundays, as well as Fr. George Ioannou will be with us from time to time. We welcome them and will appreciate their help at Divine Liturgy on Sundays. Just an FYI, it is still a goal to have a second full-time priest serving our parish in the near future, and other priests serving here does **NOT** mean our goal has been met, or has changed.
Liturgical Notes for January 2020

Wednesday, January 1 - Feast of the Circumcision of Christ/St. Basil - New Year’s Day
Three things are commemorated on the first day of each year. First, the circumcision of Christ, which occurred historically 8 days after His Nativity. He was circumcised according to the rites of the Jewish law and given the name Jesus. Secondly, we commemorate the feast of St. Basil the Great, one of the Great Hierarchs of our church. St. Basil authored one of the Divine Liturgies used in our church, which is celebrated on his feastday. He also helped found monasticism. St. Basil was a friend to the poor, often baking bread with money in it and throwing it through the windows of widows and the poor. Hence the tradition of the Vasilopita, the bread with the coin baked inside, which we cut at the New Year. Finally, we are supposed to pray every day and commemorate all of life’s milestones with prayer. So, we open a new year, 2019, with prayer and the Divine Liturgy.

Saturday, January 4 - Royal Hours of Epiphany 9:30-11:00 a.m.
Like Nativity and Pascha, there is a service of the Royal Hours which is celebrated in anticipation of Epiphany. This service consists of prayers, Psalms, hymns and Gospel readings which both foretell and recount this Great Feast of the church year.

Sunday, January 5 - Eve of Epiphany - Divine Liturgy, Blessing of the Waters
The Feast of Theophany commemorates several things: First, and most well-known, it commemorates the Baptism of Christ. Christ was baptized in the Jordan River by St. John the Baptist. Second, at the moment of His descent into the River, the Jordan River reversed its course, and all of Creation changed its course with the presence of the Christ. Third, the Holy Trinity was made manifest for the first time in human history, as the Son of God was in the water, the Holy Spirit hovered over as a dove, and the voice of God was heard. The feast of the Theophany is the manifestation of God, as well as the Baptism of Christ. The name “Epiphany” refers to the enlightenment of the world. After the Divine Liturgy, there is a service called the Blessing of Waters during which water is blessed and sprinkled over the church and over the people as a way to renew and reconsecrate ourselves on this feastday. Please make every effort to attend the Divine Liturgy and come to reconsecrate yourself as we remember the day that the world was renewed through the baptism of the Lord. His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America will officiate at the Divine Liturgy.

Monday, January 6 - Great Vespers of St. John the Baptist - 6:30 p.m.
The Vespers Service is the service that begins the liturgical day. In our church, the day begins at sundown. Thus the feast of St. John the Baptist, celebrated on January 6, begins with the sunset of January 6. Properly celebrated, all feastdays should begin with the celebration of Great Vespers, including every Sunday which should begin with Great Vespers on Saturday evenings. Because this is not practical in most parishes, Great Vespers is celebrated in most parishes on a limited basis. We will, of course, celebrate the complete cycle of services related to our feastday of St. John, which will begin with Great Vespers. Either Metropolitan Alexios of Bishop Sevastianos will preside at the Great Vespers. Priests from around the Tampa Bay area will take part in this service.

Tuesday, January 7 - Feast of St. John the Baptist
The day after a major feastday often commemorates the secondary figure of the Feast. On January 6, we celebrate the Baptism/Epiphany of Christ, who is obviously the major figure. The secondary figure of that feast is St. John the Baptist, whose feastday we commemorate the next day, January 7. St. John is the LAST of the Prophets before Christ and the first of the Saints, those who believed in Christ. Righteous figures who came before Christ are called either “Righteous” or “Prophet.” Holy People who came after Christ are called Saints. St. John the Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist, as both titles. As this is the feastday of our church, either Metropolitan Alexios or Bishop Sevastianos will officiate at the Divine Liturgy, assisted by the clergy of the Tampa Bay area.

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

Thursday, January 30 - Feast of the Three Hierarchs
The Three Hierarchs are St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom. Each had his own feastday and all are honored together on January 30, ironically because of a controversy over which was the greatest. (Imagine a church meeting where we debated which saints were the most important!) Each of them lived in the 4th Century, each was an accomplished writer and speaker, each was a Bishop, each authored a Liturgy and each is remembered prominently in the history of our church to this day. The Three Hierarchs are Patron Saints of Teachers and Education.
Sunday, February 2 - The Presentation of Our Lord into the Temple

The Presentation of Christ is a major feastday of the church and commemorates the day, 40 days after the Nativity, when Christ was brought to the temple when He was 40 days old. According to the Law of Moses, every male child was brought to the temple on its 40th day, together with a sacrifice of pigeons or turtle doves by the parents, and the child was “consecrated Holy to the Lord.” Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the temple on His 40th day, because it was the law to do so. In the temple was a priest named Simeon, who was an older man, who had been promised by God that he would not die until he saw the Christ. When Simeon saw the baby Jesus, he knew in his heart that this was the Lord’s Messiah. He took the child in his arms and prayed “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light to enlighten the Gentiles and for glory to Your people Israel.” (Luke 2:29-32) This prayer is recited over every child in the Orthodox Church when they are brought to church for the first time when they are 40 days old. That’s where this beautiful tradition comes from.

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 2162 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 4 years! 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 him to add you. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email Charlie or follow the link at the bottom of the daily emails to do so. If you want to forward to a friend, please use the “forward to a friend” option. Also, make sure frstav@gmail.com has been added to your contacts so that these emails stay in your Inbox rather than going to the Junk or Spam folders.

No Basketball on Sundays - Sunday coffee hour is for fellowship, not for sports. Basketballs flying in all directions makes it unsafe for people who are sitting and eating. We’ve tried to curtail this but to little avail. Please cooperate by refraining from playing basketball in the Kourmoris Center during coffee hour.

No passing of trays — As of January 1, 2019, there will no longer be a tray passed at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy. It is our hope that everyone will increase their stewardship in order to bridge this gap. Increased stewardship and less nickel-and-dime (trays) are the mark of a strong parish. This new policy is in line with our desire to be a strong parish. There will be a tray in the narthex. You can deposit your stewardship checks in that tray, give additional donations in that tray or ignore the tray. There is no charge for the small candles. The large candles (the red 7-day ones) will still cost $5.

NEW PROCEDURE FOR UNCLAIMED COFFEE HOURS - We are excited to present a NEW procedure for hosting our weekly parish coffee hour for the weeks where no ministry has signed up for coffee hour. Certain letters of the alphabet according to last name, have been assigned to each open date. We will be emailing a link to a Sign-Up Genius. Please sign up for those Sundays which correspond to your last name. You may sign up for one or more items which include, set-up, serving, bringing items, or clean up on any particular date. Please see the dates and suggested items below. We would like to see as many different people as possible sign up, so that the burden will not fall on anyone repeatedly. It is also important that our worship experience not be compromised by putting on the coffee hour. Finally, if a family would like to pool together to go a coffee hour, to honor a loved one who has passed, or mark another occasion, please let us know and we’ll reserve that date for your family. If there are any questions, don’t hesitate to call the church office at 813-876-8830. Thank you for helping us to create an environment that encourages fellowship and community.

Policy for Letters of Recommendation

Every year, Father Stavros gets many requests for letters of recommendation for students to get into college or for scholarships. Here are some guidelines to assist those who will be making these requests.

The person for whom the letter is being written needs to contact Father Stavros, not their parents. Please give Father at least two weeks’ notice to write a letter. Please send your information to Father in an email at frstav@gmail.com.

1. Your current school, year of study, major, and career objective
2. The name of the scholarship, who it is to be addressed to, and whether the letter is to be mailed, or given to the student in a sealed envelope.
3. The kind of scholarship that you are applying for - is it for sports, or writing, or business, etc.
4. The due date of the letter
5. Some information about yourself that will be helpful in writing the letter - i.e. if the letter is for leadership, please send leadership activities.
Fifty-Two Verses in Fifty-Two Weeks: The Bible Project

By Fr. Stavros

In January 2019, we began the “Fifty-Two Verses in Fifty-Two Weeks” Bible Challenge, to memorize one Bible verse per week for fifty-two weeks. I will provide a verse per week (four or five per month in The Messenger and then repeated weekly in the bulletin). I will choose verses that are meaningful to me. You are welcome to submit verses via email to me as well, as many of you have.

Most of us don’t spend enough time in the Bible. Sadly, some of us don’t spend any time. If you want a challenge, do the following:

- Memorize the verse of the week.
- For a greater challenge, read the entire chapter of the book that the verse comes from.
- For a greater challenge, read the entire book where the verse comes from.

Another challenge to consider is to keep a journal and contemplate the verse each week. Read it, memorize it, and then contemplate it. Allow the Holy Spirit to move your mind and your thoughts and then write down those thoughts and keep them in a journal. If you do one reflection on Scripture each week, you will have the best book that could be. A book written by you, for you, guided by the Holy Spirit, who will guide your thoughts as you read the Scriptures.

Below are verses for the month of January. There is one verse for each week. I have written a few comments below each verse to get your mind going. Don’t let my thoughts be your interpretation. Contemplate the Scripture each week and let it speak to you. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you through your reflection on Scripture.

January 5-11

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Luke 4:18-19

This week many of our children go back to school. The holiday season is now over and we now dig in for the new year. What place with the Lord take in your life this year? Will this be His year, the year He gets the first fruits of your life? This week’s verse is from the beginning of Christ’s ministry, when He went to the temple and was given a book to read from the Prophet Isaiah. He read from this section and then revealed to the temple leadership that the prophecy had been fulfilled in His person. Even though these words were spoken by Christ, in reference to the Messianic signs that would be fulfilled in His person, these things are actually all present in us. The Spirit of Lord is on each of us, through our Chrismation, when we receive the Holy Spirit. We are anointed, in the sense that we are chosen by God, the same way that prophets and kings were chosen by God to be His people, to be His leaders. We are anointed in the same way. We are to preach the good news to the poor, meaning to spread the Gospel to those who are spiritually poor because they have not heard it. We are to proclaim release to the captives, meaning giving hope to those who are held captive by their circumstance—sadness, poverty, illness.

We are to help the blind recover their sight, in the sense that those who have become spiritually blind through sin, we have the responsibility to encourage them to repent and get their spiritual sight back. We are to set free those who are oppressed, by treating all with kindness and making sure that we do not oppress anyone. And finally, we are to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. Every year should be an acceptable year of the Lord. So, put the Lord out in the front of you throughout this year!

January 12-18

Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11: 28-30

Life is tough. We all carry some heavy burdens. Where do you go for relief? Alcohol? Food? TV? Or do we cast our burdens on Christ? Do we take our burdens on Him? Every time we enter the Church, ideally we should feel unburdened and unfettered by the stresses of life that are outside. We should enter God’s Church to relax and recharge. However, this recharge and relaxation does not need to be limited to Sunday mornings. It is available in prayer at any time. If we don’t feel that our burdens are lifted by our Christianity, perhaps it is because we have not fully “yoked” ourselves to Christ. A yoke that is between two animals prevents them from walking in separate directions. It keeps them in step with one another. Truly yoking ourselves to Christ will keep us in step with Him, will keep us walking His path. And if His path is love and peace and hope, then our path will be filled with these things as well. So I encourage you to yoke your life to Christ, through prayer and worship and the other things that keep us in step with Him, and I pray that we will continue to provide a worship experience that will help give us a sense of rest and peace every time we enter the Church.

January 19-25

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.

Psalm 23:4

The At some point in every life, we will feel as though we are in the valley of the shadow of death. It may be because we have experience the death of a loved one. It may be because we’ve experienced the death of a dream, the loss of a joy, the breaking up of a marriage, the ending of a friendship, a financial setback, an unexpected move and a myriad of other circumstances. In the Psalms, we are assured that at the time we feel like we are in the deepest and darkest valley, that we do not walk through it alone. God walks with us. And not only does God walk with us, He gives us tools to walk through the valley with confidence. His rod and staff comfort us. What does that mean? Rod and staff? These were the instruments of the shepherd, used to guide and protect his sheep. Christ is the shepherd; we are the sheep. That doesn’t mean that we are lacking in intelligence, like sheep. We are pretty smart compared to them. It means that, like sheep, we may not always know or understand where we are going. But our shepherd is Christ, if
we allow Him to be. And He will lead us through the valleys of life. Thus, there is no need to fear. Because we know that love and fear cannot exist. (I John 4:18) When Christ walks with us, when we allow Him to love us, there is no need to be fear, because His perfect love will cast out all fear. We will all walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Some of you who are reading this may be in that valley right now. Have no fear, Christ walks with you. He will never abandon or forsake you.

January 26-February 1

_An athlete is not crowned unless he competes by the rules._

2 Timothy 2:5

Super Bowl Sunday is this upcoming Sunday and most people in America will tune in to see this game, if for nothing else, the commercials. We will see the best athletes in their sport competing to be crowned best in the world. What if the winning team is caught cheating? They would probably be disqualified and go down in history in disgrace. That’s because we want to see the best team win, the one that competes the best, not the one who is aided by cheating. Centuries ago, in the Ancient Olympics, the athletes were now crowned because they won, but merely because they took the field. This is not an ancient spin on the modern idea that “everyone gets a trophy.” No, it was based on an idea that what makes an athlete a winner is that he or she competes by the rules, and that he or she has prepared himself or herself to take the field for competition. The reward is in the training itself and qualifying to compete. We know that now-a-days, people cheat in order to compete. Steroids and blood doping are two ways people gain unnatural and unearned advantages over the competition. There is no nobility in cheating. And any victory gained through cheating, whether on the athletic field, in the classroom, or in the corporate world, indeed rings hollow if the one competing didn’t do so by the rules. God crowns effort, not success. So God would rather see an honest effort than a hollow success. Compete well, but compete fairly in all you do this week. Be honest, and give your best effort. This is what pleases God. It may not be what pleases your coach if he is willing to win by cheating, but this is what pleases God.

St. John the Baptist Community News

Parish Registry

**Adult Baptism**-Kevin (Joseph) Bilthouse was baptized on Sunday, November 24. Alexandros Chuchas was the Godparent. Na Sas Zisi!

**Double Baptism of Teenagers**-Austin (Jacob) Long and Summer (Danielle) Long were baptized on Saturday, November 30. George and Sarah Pentzakis were the Godparents. Na Zisoune!

**Teenage Baptism**-Hunter Alan “Michael” Perry was baptized on Sunday, December 8. Charlie Hambos was the Godparent. Na Sas Zisi!

**Funeral**-John Michaels passed away on November 8. Funeral service was held on November 22. May his memory be eternal!

**Condolences** to Theodora Morgan, on the passing of her sister, Haritomeni Halkiadaki, on December 3. May her memory be eternal!

**Condolences** to Edie Kavouklis, on the passing of her mother, Marilyn Porter, on December 6. May her memory be eternal!

**Registry Statistics for 2019**

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Get Acquainted Sunday, January 12

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.

**Men’s Group** - Our men’s group meeting for January will be Sunday, January 12, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. We will meet at church at 5:00 p.m., walk to a nearby restaurant for dinner and fellowship and then return to the church for discussion. All men of our parish are welcome and you can bring your non-Orthodox friends as well. Our February meeting will be Sunday, February 16.
Meeting of Ministry Heads, January 13- On Monday, January 13, there will be a meeting of ministry heads in the Kourmolis Center from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Each ministry head is requested to attend and other members of each ministry are invited to attend. If the ministry head cannot attend, please ask someone else in your ministry to attend, so that all ministries are represented.

GOYA

January 19 Mother/Daughter Retreat, Regular meeting for boys-- The GOYA Meeting for January will be Sunday, January 19. All MOMS are invited to this meeting along with their daughters for a mother/daughter retreat. This will last from 5:00-8:00 p.m. with dinner, presentation, special time for moms and daughters to talk and a closing prayer in church. The boys will have dinner at 5:00 p.m. followed by regular sessions. At our February meeting (February 23), we will have a father/son event and a regular meeting for girls.

GOYA Clearwater Event - Our GOYAns will be participating in the GOYA Clearwater Winter Retreat on January 24-26. Anyone interested in attending needs to contact Michael and Bessie Palios by January 10.

Ye Holy Krewe of Tampa Gasparilla Parking Fundraiser

On Saturday, January 18 and Saturday, January 25, we will be renting out the church parking lot for Gasparilla Parking. This year the children’s parade is on January 18, and the main event is on January 25. If you are interested in volunteering a few hours to help the church make some easy $$$, and also have a good time socializing while directing traffic, please contact John Kokkas, the Captain of Ye Holy Krewe, at 727-992-4165 or johnkokkas@hotmail.com. The primary hours needed are approximately 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. each Saturday. This is a very easy and fun way to generate income for our parish.

Orthodoxy 101 Class will Begin in February

Fr. Stavros offers this class two times per year, in the spring and in the fall. This will be a Four-week course of study on Monday nights to make people aware of the basics of being an Orthodox Christian. The classes will be part lecture, part discussion, with lots of time for questions and answers.

Who should attend the Orthodoxy 101 class?

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

The four sessions will be done as follows:

Monday, February 3 A Tour of the Orthodox Church: What we see in the Church and what it means
Monday, February 10 Orthodox Spirituality—Introduction to the Sacraments
Monday, February 17 The Divine Liturgy—This will actually be a “teaching” Liturgy on the solea of the church. If you have taken the class, or if you wish to only attend THIS session, please feel free to do so.
Monday, February 24 Orthodox Traditions—fasting, icons, prayer and separating Theology from “yiayialogy” Classes will be held on these three Mondays from 6:30-8:30 p.m. and will be held in the CHURCH Sanctuary.

Please sign up with Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com, so he has enough materials for everyone. There is no charge for this class.

Counting the Wins for our Community!

We’ve got lots of interesting people doing lots of interesting things in our community. If something notable happens in your life, please submit a short blurb to the office. We love “counting the wins” of our parishioners.

George Cantonis named President of Hellenic College/Holy Cross School of Theology—George and Maria Cantonis have been members of our parish for several years. Though George “flies under the radar” in our community for the most part, and travels a lot on business, he attends our parish whenever he’s in town. On December 10, he was named the 11th President of Holy Cross Seminary. Indeed this is a prestigious honor for him and also reflect on our parish. Congratulations George!

Second “Come and See” Dinner a success—On Tuesday, November 19, we had our third annual “come and see” dinner. People from our festival who wanted to come and see more about our church came to a dinner that evening. Several parishioners also invited neighbors and friends to come and see. Overall, there were 50 people in attendance, including about 25 who are not members of our church. If we are called as Christians to call people to "come and see” who we are, this is a great event in the life of our parish. Thank you to Maria Xenick and the Welcome Ministry of our church for organizing this event, and to all the ministry heads and parishioners who came.

Young Adult Ministry Sunday, January 26

The YAL will have our dinner and discussion. We’ll meet at 5:00 p.m. in the Kourmolis Community Center, walk somewhere close by to have dinner, then walk back for some discussion. Please RSVP to Charlie if you are going to attend. Dates may change. Charlie will send an email.
Parish Council Elections—Congratulations to Amin Hanhan, Demosthenes Mekras, Euripides Panos, Ryan Rindone and John Zelatis, who were elected to the Parish Council for 2020-2021. They join Jim Armstrong, George Chagaris, Nicholas Katzaras, Edie Kavouklis, Jimmy Konstas and Gary Ward to comprise this year’s Parish Council. Thank you to our election committee of Skip Higdon, Martha Kapetan and Nancy Manikas.

Sunday School Teachers’ Seminar, January 11- On Saturday, January 11, from 9:00 a.m.-noon, there will be a seminar for all Sunday school teachers.

Prayer for Teachers on Sunday, January 26-On January 30, we celebrate the feast of the Three Hierarchs, who are also the patron saints of teachers. On January 26, immediately prior to Holy Communion, we will offer a prayer for all teachers and anyone who works in education in our community.

Philoptochos Vasilopita Sunday Sunday-January 12 is Vasilopita Sunday. Philoptochos will be hosting coffee hour and will be serving Vasilopita. If you would like to make a Vasilopita for the coffee hour please contact Jeanie Nenos @ 813 451-9116 or Jeanie.nenos@moffitt.org. We hope to have a large number of Vasilopita so that parishioners can purchase whole pitas to take home as well. All proceeds from Vasilopita Sunday will go to St. Basil’s Academy.

Philoptochos Retreat February 1-All members of our Philoptochos society are invited to participate in a retreat on Saturday, February 1, from 9-1 with Fr. Stavros. The topic is on “Prayer and Encouragement.” There will also be opportunity to bring the questions about our faith that you’ve always wanted answered. More details to follow.

Bible Studies are Continuing

Monday Night Bible Study (for everyone)
Location: Administration Building meeting room
Studying: The Book of Revelation
Group Leader: Charlie Hambos
Charlie.hambos@gmail.com, 813-843-8471
Meeting time: Monday evenings from 6:30–8:00 p.m.
Meeting Dates: January 20 and 27.

Women’s Group (for adult women of any age)
Location: At the church
Group Leader: Rotates between members and Father Stavros
Meeting time: Tuesday evenings from 7:00 - 8:00 p.m.
Meeting Dates: January 14, 21, and 28.

Century Club (for any adults)
Location: At the church
Group Leader: Charlie Hambos
Charlie.hambos@gmail.com, 813-843-8471
Meeting time: Monday evenings from 6:30–8:00 p.m.
Meeting Dates: January 20 and 27.

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: John Kokenis
jkokenis@stjohntpa.org; 630-306-7716
Meeting time: Tuesday evenings from 7:00-8:30 p.m.
Meeting Dates & Topics:
January 14--Hymnography of Christmas
January 21--Meaning of Epiphany
January 28--Importance of the Presentation of Christ

GriefShare Ministry Starting on Tuesday, January 14
It may be hard for you to feel optimistic about the future right now. If you’ve lost a spouse, child, family member, or friend, you’ve probably found there are not many people who understand the deep hurt you feel. This can be a confusing time when you feel isolated and have many questions. “Going to GriefShare feels like having warm arms wrapped around you when you’re shivering.” Grief-Share groups meet weekly to help you face these challenges and move toward rebuilding your life. Each GriefShare session has three distinct elements: Video seminar with experts, support group discussion with focus and personal study and reflection. We will meet from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. in the Administration Building Meeting Room on Tuesdays (note date change), starting January 14, for 13 weeks, ending on Tuesday, April 7. For January, GriefShare will meet on January 14, 21, and 28. For more information please contact Donna Hambos at 813-843-8412 or dhambos@msn.com. Books for the program will be provided. Donation for the book suggested but not required. Open to all family and friends. Griefshare remains open enrollment with support towards healing and hope. You can begin at any time. If you attended last semester and missed a day or two, you can come for those days or repeat the whole thing.

OCMC Mission Sunday As they do every year, Philoptochos is going to sponsor its ninth Annual Missions Sunday to support overseas Orthodox Missions on Sunday, February 2. Philoptochos will sponsor a luncheon to benefit missions work, with all proceeds going toward the Mission Center.

Sunday, February 2 Super Bowl Sunday of course, but it is also “Souper Bowl of Caring” Sunday as well. This is a nationwide, youth-led initiative to tackle hunger across our country. Over 3000 Churches, youth groups, and other organizations will be collecting non-perishable items and monetary donations for local food banks. Mark your calendars to help HOPE/JOY collect donations to be given to the children at HOPE CHILDREN’S HOME - a Christian home that takes abused, unwanted, discarded or orphaned children and is entirely supported by churches, private individuals and organizations.
Philoptochos News

Christmas Luncheon:
We began our holiday season at Maggiano's with 40 in attendance, at our annual Christmas luncheon. Thank you to our guest speaker, Father Stavros, as he spoke on the word "Philotimo"

Veterans Update:
THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR DONATIONS!!!! St. John's along with the "Boodle Brigade" of Tampa Bay we were able to wrap, package and send 50 boxes of donations to our troops. The beautiful Veteran Card's made by our Sunday School and a local Elementary school were also included. The cards will be the first thing our Veterans will see when they open the boxes. Your donations were sent to Korea, Afghanistan, Poland and 2 Army Post Office Boxes where they would distribute.

God's Harvest: (Children Helping Feed Local Children) Our newest Philoptochos Project.
Children in Hillsborough Country are given free or low cost meals during the school year, however, during weekends and holidays some of these children have very little food and may go hungry. We chose 5 and 6 year old students at Ruskin Elementary School who are affiliated and work very closely with our Philoptochos Member Christine Worley, Executive Director PCAT Family Literacy. Philoptochos has received several donations including, rice, cereal bars, cheese and crackers, snacks, oatmeal, beans, tote bags, vegetable and books from our Sunday School students. Some items were donated by our local grocers. Our Sunday School students packaged the items up on Dec 14th during their Christmas Party. The tote bags will be delivered to Ruskin Elementary and handed out by our Philoptochos ladies to the Ruskin Children on Monday Dec 16th.

Spring of Tampa Bay
Thank you to George and Elaine for providing the lunch, it was delicious. Once again, your generosity was overflowing and were greatly appreciated!!!! The items collected will be distributed to women and children who are victims of domestic violence in the Tampa Bay Area.

Feeding Children Project
On behalf of Philoptochos and the Parish Council, we are honored to be hosting this event with our fellow Christians of Christ the King Church on Sunday January 19, 2020. What a great way to spend National Christian Unity Day with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Together we will be packaging food to feed 20,000 children.

More information and sign-up to follow via email.
St. John Greek Orthodox Church’s Young-At-Heart Ministry

Open to everyone

MEETING DATE AND TIME: First Thursday of Each Month at 11:30 a.m. (unless otherwise posted)

LOCATION: Zaharias Room in Peter and Sophia Kourmolis Hall at St John Greek Orthodox Church.

Everyone is welcome. We have added 2 new members this month for a total 31.

We welcome people of all ages to join our email list as a member or a friend of YAH.

Lunch is either a pot-luck lunch or we visit one of our local parishioners’ restaurants.

OUR ACTIVITIES INCLUDE
· Welcome new members
· Celebrating Birthdays,
· Wellness committee visitations
· Sharing and giving thanks to recent happiness events
· Games and activities
· Humor Time

OUR TRIPS INCLUDE
· January 2 we will have a lunch meeting at the new restaurant Psomi
· Our December trip at the Show Palace Dinner Theatre featuring Elf the Musical on December 7th was a great success. We had 28 people attend the musical comedy play. Pictures are Included.

The YAH Ministry is guided by our Church's CORE VALUES of Love, Worship, Community, Learning, and Service.

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<th>OUR OCTOBER ACTIVITY INCLUDE</th>
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<td>LOVE</td>
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The Orthodox Church has compiled a lectionary (i.e., a list) of Scripture passages to be read during the Liturgical year. Father Stavros’ newest book contains reflections on the Scripture passages read in Orthodox churches each Sunday and on major Feastdays of the Liturgical Year.

Father Stavros’ most recent book exhorts us to treasure the Epistle and Gospel passages in God’s Word that the Church has prescribed for us to be read on Sundays and Feastdays. It will be an invaluable aid in helping us understand the most well-known and often-heard New Testament readings.

The Bible is the most magnificent book ever written. Yet, it is intimidating to many people. In addition to encouraging us to appreciate and cherish the Holy Gospel readings prescribed by the Church, Father’s book will also help us to feel more comfortable in reading other books in Scripture, which are similarly God-inspired.

Father’s newest book is available in the bookstore. We would love to hear from you, particularly what you think of this book after reading it.

P.S. If there is an Orthodox Christian religious item that you would like the bookstore to order, please contact us. We are often able to get a discount as a bookstore.

Brett and Ana Mourer
We would like to wish everyone in our parish a blessed New Year and hope that you had a wonderful Christmas with your family. The first half of our Sunday School year has been extremely busy and successful thanks to all the teachers, Fr. Stavros, Charlie Hambos, John Kokenis, the parents, and especially the students of St. John’s.

This year's Christmas Pageant was the best ever. Our students are very talented and all the parts could be heard clearly. All of our actors did a fantastic job. Were the animals adorable? How did you like the song “Mary Did You Know?” We would like to thank all of Fr. Stavros, Charlie Hambos, the Sunday School students, teachers, and parents for helping to make this pageant a HUGE success.

A big thank you goes out to Zackie Ameres for planning the Christmas Party on Saturday, December 14. We would also like to thank all the children, teachers, and parents for making the afternoon such a success! Thank you to Bavaro’s Pizza for donating the delicious pasta. This year, in addition to all the Christmas crafts, the children packaged up Boxes of Hope for Metropolitan Ministries. They also donated books and prepared lunch bags for the students at Ruskin Elementary. Our children are truly experiencing the JOY of GIVING.

Thank you to all the children and families who came to the Sunday School/ Hope & Joy Christmas Party.

We boxed 25 meals, 7 turkeys, and collected $990 through our St John community’s generosity! In total 64 deserving families will enjoy a donated Christmas meal.

We also collected books and bagged 60 care packages of snacks and meal staples for underserved students at Ruskin Elementary’s reading program in partnership with Philoptochos.

We made Christmas crafts, had a delicious pasta meal donated by the Bavaro Family (Thank you!!) and practiced for our pageant which was beautiful!!

We had a wonderful time giving our talents and celebrating the true joy of Christmas.

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**January 2020 Sunday School Calendar**

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<tr>
<th>Sunday, January 5</th>
<th>Topic: Epiphany/St. John</th>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday, January 11</td>
<td>Sunday School Teacher Retreat 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday, January 12</td>
<td>Topic: St. Basil/Vasilopita</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday, January 19</td>
<td>Youth Sunday (6th-8th Music 11:50) Topic: Moral Decision Making Kolyva: 5th &amp; 6th Grades GOYA Meeting 5:00 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday January 24-26</td>
<td>GOYA Clearwater Winter Event</td>
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“Souper Bowl of Caring”

Which team will raise the most donations for the children of Hope Children’s Home?

Sunday, February 2 is not only BIG game where we cheer for our favorite football team, it is also “Souper Bowl of Caring” Sunday a nationwide, youth-led initiative to TACKLE hunger! Pick your favorite team and join our HOPE/JOY youth ministry collect donations to be given to the children at Hope Children’s Home – a Christian home that takes abused, unwanted, discarded or orphaned children and is entirely supported by churches, private individuals, clubs and organizations.

Our Sunday school children will be near the side doors on Sunday, Feb. 2md holding pots to collect your cash donation or food item. Pick your favorite team’s pot to donate to! The BIG winner: HOPE CHILDREN’S HOME!

HOPE AND JOY PRESENTS

Movie and Pizza Night

Featuring

Dora and the Lost City of Gold

Friday, January 24, 2020
at 6:30 – 8:30 pm
St. John Greek Orthodox Church
Kourmolis Hall

Grab your favorite blanket, come in your pajamas &
Join us for pizza, popcorn, treats & movie fun!
All children ages Pre-K through 6th grade welcome!

R.s.v.p. to Zackie by: January 20th
zackiec@yahoo.com or 813-245-3813
~ January 2020 Stewardship Message ~

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Matthew 6:21

Please give back your Time, Talents and Treasure in 2020!

We wish everyone a Happy New Year and pray your time spent rejoicing in the birth of our Christ Savior brought peace, joy and love to your Christmas Holiday. We thank our many loyal Stewards of 2019 and your support of our church Vision & Mission. Your gifts enable us to spread the word of Christ and support Orthodox and non-Orthodox charities throughout the year.

The month of December can be fulfilling, sad, exhausting and joyous often at the same time. We encourage you to find moments in this New Year to slow down and recharge. Commit your ‘Gift of Time’ to worship, prayer and study to deepen your Orthodox Christian life.

Next month we’ll provide a summary of year-end Stewardship & updates for the new year. Stewardship Sunday celebrated on December 8, 2019 brought a show of community support for our beloved church. We pray that everyone that attends St. John on a regular basis becomes a Steward of His church! Please don’t wait to make your commitment for 2020.

Good to Know ~ Stewardship Housekeeping

♦ It’s not too late to complete your pledge commitment for 2019. We can address any questions you have regarding your remaining commitment.

♦ Tax Letters will be compiled in January 2020 to reflect donations received in the 2019 calendar year.

♦ We now accept online credit card payments through PayPal. This option is provided for convenience. Consistent donations are a tremendous help for our church operations and easy to set up with Internet Banking or Electronic Funds Transfer directly through your bank. Please visit our website for more detail.

♦ YES - Stewardship Pledge Forms really are required and can now be completed on-line. They not only provide family information on areas of interest and talents but also help us determine how much income the Church can expect to support our operations. Pledge Forms and current contributions are required to meet the Uniform Parish Regulations (UPR) of our Archdiocese as well as our local by-laws, which enable participation at Parish General Assembly Meetings, Nominations and Voting for Parish Council in December.

Please feel free to share your thoughts to the office email - office@stjohtpa.org or speak directly with Fr. Stavros, Sandra Pappas or Pete Trakas -Stewardship Co-Chairs. We are here for YOU!

NEW WEBSITE FOR THE DIAKONIA RETREAT CENTER

WWW.THEDIAKONIARETREATCENTER.COM

Please give the new and improved website a visit to support the ministries of our Holy Metropolis of Atlanta.
Weddings, Divorces, Baptisms, Funerals, Memorials as well as Office, Fundraisers, and Hall Use Procedures

The Greek Orthodox Church is not a church of rules. But without some guidelines to go by, there would be chaos. The following guidelines are rooted in Orthodox Tradition and Canon Law. These guidelines are printed in The Messenger in the beginning of each calendar year, and it is a good idea from time to time for people to review them. These guidelines have been copied from the 2019 Yearbook of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Please review them, and keep them in mind when planning for your important life events. If you have any questions, please contact Fr. Stavros.  
(Special requirements specific to sacraments at St. John the Baptist appear in italics.)

Weddings

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

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

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

In cases involving the marriage of Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christians, the latter must have been baptized in water, in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Church cannot bless the marriage of an Orthodox Christian to a non-Christian. The couple should be willing to baptize their children in the Orthodox Church and raise and nurture them in accordance with the Orthodox Faith. There is a list of religious groups that Orthodox are prohibited from marrying, i.e. Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and others. Fr. Stavros can provide you with this list. This is IMPORTANT to consider when you begin to date someone. Make sure your children are aware of this! Because circumstances exist where a couple is dating where one of the two is not eligible to be married in the Orthodox Church, and this causes heartache in the relationship and often leads to someone leaving the church.

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

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

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

**Days when marriage is not permitted**

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

**Prohibited Marriages**

The following types of relationships constitute impediments to marriage:

Parents with their own children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren or Godchildren of the same Godparents; Brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law; Uncles and aunts with nieces and nephews; First cousins with each other; Foster parents with foster children or foster children with the children of foster parents.

Godparents with Godchildren or Godparents with the parents of their Godchildren. (In the Chrismation of an adult, one has potential marriage impediment. For any questions regarding, please see Fr. Stavros)

A date cannot be set for marriage unless one of the parties getting married, NOT THE PARENTS, contact Fr. Stavros, who sets all the dates for weddings. In order for the date to be locked in, one person in the couple has to come and meet with Fr. Stavros to go over the wedding procedures. Pre-Marital Counseling is also required for weddings at St. John the Baptist. There is a two-fold requirement. One is that the couples need to meet with Fr. Stavros for two sessions. Second, the Metropolis of Atlanta requires couples participate in a Saturday regional pre-marital counseling seminar, called “The Journey of Marriage.” Contact the Metropolis of Atlanta or visit the Family Life Ministry section of their website for dates in 2020. For people who wish to be married at St. John the Baptist who are not members anywhere, a substantial fee is imposed for use of the church, thereby encouraging all those who wish to have the sacraments of the church to be members in good standing. Also, the Koumbaro/ Koumbara for a wedding must be in good sacramental standing. If they are not members of St. John the Baptist, they must bring a letter from their parish priest saying that they are in good sacramental standing. Otherwise, there will be a fee imposed as well.

**Baptisms**

A person who wishes to sponsor a candidate for Baptism or Chrismation must be an Orthodox Christian in good standing and a supporting member of an Orthodox parish.

A person may not serve as a Godparent if the Church has not blessed his or her marriage or, if civilly divorced, he or she has not been granted an ecclesiastical divorce, or for any other reason he or she is not in communion with the Orthodox Church. Baptisms may not be performed from during Holy Week.

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

**Funerals**

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

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

**Memorials**

Memorial services may not be chanted from the Saturday or Lazarus through the Sunday of Thomas, or on any Feastday of the Lord or any Feastday of the Theotokos. We customarily do not offer memorial services on the 1st Sunday of Lent (Sunday of Orthodoxy) or the 3rd Sunday of Lent (Sunday of the Holy Cross), or the Sunday after September 14. In 2020, the Sundays when NO memorial services will be offered include: January 5, March 8 (Sunday of Orthodoxy), March 22 (Sunday of the Holy Cross); April 12 (Palm Sunday); April 19 (Pascha); April 26 (Sunday of St. Thomas); June 7 (Pentecost); September 20 (Sunday after Holy Cross Day).

Memorial Services may be scheduled through the church.
Organ Donation
The Orthodox Church allows the faithful to donate organs after death if they wish.

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

Some Guidelines Unique to our Parish
In line with the guidelines from the Archdiocese provided above, we also have some guidelines for things in our parish that are helpful to review as we start the new year. The Parish Council has adopted what is below with the approval of Fr. Stavros. Most of these guidelines are old, though a few of them are new. For the “Good of the Order” at our church, we ask that everyone cooperate in following these guidelines. Please read these over carefully and if you have any questions, please address them to the Parish Council or Father Stavros.

PROCEDURES FOR THE OFFICE:

- The deadline for submitting information for the weekly bulletin is Tuesday at 5:00 p.m.. All submissions must be sent electronically to office@stjohnpta.org.
- The deadline for the Messenger shall be the 10th of the month. As a cost cutting measure we reduced the size of the Messenger, so no full page flyers will be put in. All submissions must be sent electronically via email. Simply send in your event information to office@stjohnpta.com.
- Events may be advertised a maximum of two months prior to the event date for The Messenger and four weeks prior for the bulletin.
- Open Office Hours and Monday - Friday 10:00 a.m. - 2:00p.m. Or By Appointment Only. If you wish to see Fr. Stavros or the office staff, you must make an appointment. Also, when meeting with the office staff, or when meeting with Father Stavros on a non-pastoral matter, please be efficient with your time. There is lots of work that goes on in the office and constant interruptions make for little progress. Planned appointments are fine, they are not interruptions.

FUNDRAISERS/HALL USAGE:

- All fundraisers and events by ministries or church affiliated groups should be scheduled at the August calendar meeting. For those, not scheduled at this meeting; please submit your event request to the Parish Council; via the office email office@stjohnpta.org.
- Please clean up the kitchen after your event. No food, trays, utensils, etc., should be left on the counters, sink, or drying rack. Please throw away all trash and wash all dirty dishes, trays, etc. and return to the appropriate places.
- All contracts for caterers, bands, etc., made in the month. As a cost cutting measure we reduced the size of the Messenger, so no full page flyers will be
- Additionally, when a Ministry needs to setup a table for a special purpose - Information/Sales - The ministry must call the church office to reserve a table during coffee hour.
- Lastly, any Ministry that wants to charge for a lunch (not on the original schedule) will need to get approval from the Parish Council by sending written notice prior to the monthly Parish Council Meeting.
January is National Glaucoma Awareness Month

Glaucoma is a leading cause of blindness and vision loss and has no symptoms in its early stages. Glaucoma is a condition where the eye's optic nerve is damaged due to increased pressure in eye.

The purpose of this article is to help educate on the disease, including early detection, signs and symptoms, risk factors, treatment options and prevention.

Symptoms:
- Mostly asymptomatic but few common symptoms are:
  - Loss of peripheral or side vision
  - Seeing halos around lights
  - Vision loss
  - Redness in the eye
  - Eye that looks hazy (particularly in infants)
  - Eye pain
  - Narrowed vision (tunnel vision)

Treatment:
Treatment aims at reducing the intraocular pressure and preventing further damage to the optic nerves.

Risk Factors:
- Glaucoma tends to run in families. In some people, scientists have identified genes related to high eye pressure and optic nerve damage
- Because chronic forms of glaucoma can destroy vision before any signs or symptoms are apparent, be aware of these risk factors:
  - Having high internal eye pressure (intraocular pressure)
  - Being over age 60
  - Being black, Asian or Hispanic
  - Having a family history of glaucoma
  - Having certain medical conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and sickle cell anemia
  - Being extremely nearsighted or farsighted
  - Having had an eye injury or certain types of eye surgery
  - Taking corticosteroid medications, especially eyedrops, for a long time

Prevention:
- Get regular dilated eye examinations. Regular comprehensive eye exams can help detect glaucoma in its early stages, before significant damage occurs. As a general rule, the American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends having a comprehensive eye exam every five to 10 years if you're under 40 years old; every two to four years if you're 40 to 54 years old; every one to three years if you're 55 to 64 years old; and every one to two years if you're older than 65. If you're at risk of glaucoma, you'll need more frequent screening. Ask your doctor to recommend the right screening schedule for you.
- Know your family's eye health history. Glaucoma tends to run in families. If you're at increased risk, you may need more frequent screening.
- Take prescribed eyedrops regularly. Glaucoma eyedrops can significantly reduce the risk that high eye pressure will progress to glaucoma. To be effective, eyedrops prescribed by your doctor need to be used regularly even if you have no symptoms.
- Wear eye protection. Serious eye injuries can lead to glaucoma. Wear eye protection when using power tools or playing high-speed racket sports in enclosed courts.

Marcelle Triantafilou, RN-BC, BSN
Nursing Ministry
St. John’s is proud to offer a new ministry for families with special needs:

**Connect Through Christ**

According to the US Census, 18.5% of American Children under age 18 are Special Needs Children. That doesn’t mean that they aren’t smart, talented, or capable. Just that they have specific challenges that a “typical” student would not face.

There are four major types of special needs children:

- **Physical** – muscular dystrophy, chronic asthma, epilepsy, etc.
- **Developmental** – down syndrome, autism, dyslexia, speech delays, processing disorders
- **Behavioral/Emotional** – ADD, bi-polar, oppositional defiance disorder, etc.
- **Sensory Impaired** – Blind, visually impaired, deaf, limited hearing

Our mission is to break down barriers that keep children with disabilities and their families from being able to participate in the Church community. By discretely identifying families that Connect Through Christ can serve we hope to assist in providing a life long relationship with Christ. For more information please contact Lindsey Skourellos at 813-503-7845 and lskourellos@yahoo.com or Dante Skourellos 813-765-9534 and d_skourellos@yahoo.com

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**Youth Protection Update**

Please be aware that the youth protection enrollment for ecclesiastical year 2019–2020 has begun and will continue this month. Prior to this starting date, you will receive email communication regarding what steps to take if you are volunteer who works with children or leads our Church. We ask that you keep an eye out for these emails and read the Messenger for updates as our methodology may change due to the new requirements. Thank you for serving so faithfully at St. John’s.

Yours in Christ,
Catherine S. Mitseas, ministry head
Nick Katzaras, Parish Council Liaison

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**Website & Email Update**

Our new web domain is STJOHNTPA.ORG

**New email addresses:**

Debbie: debbie@stjohntpa.org
Charlie: chambos@stjohntpa.org
John: jkokenis@stjohntpa.org

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**Confidential Request for Counselors from Fr. Stavros**

We’ve all asked for and been asked for references for different kinds of people. I.e. Do you know a good plumber or a reliable lawn care service? I would like to put together a resource manual of mental health professionals in this area to help people from our parish who need certain kinds of services. I’m looking specifically for the following:

1. Therapists/counselors who can counsel
   a. People in grief
   b. Teenagers
   c. Marriage counseling
   d. Other general counselors/therapists who you’ve had a good experience with.

2. Anyone good programs for people who are struggling with addictions (Drugs, alcohol, etc.)

While I do a lot of pastoral work that involves counseling, there are certain areas that either I’m not qualified to offer assistance in, or more likely, unable to engage in long term counseling/therapy. However, without first-hand knowledge of these kinds of counselors in our area, I am at a loss as for where to direct people to go. If you some recommendations, please know they will be kept in confidence. If you are really concerned about anonymity, please send an unsigned note to my attention (this is the only time I will read an anonymous note). I really want to put together a list of resources to be able to recommend to our parishioners. Thank you.
Hello and WELCOME! My name is Greg Melton and on behalf of our Community Outreach Ministry I want to thank you for your interest in participating with our group. On the third Saturday of each month, we volunteer our time to provide for those of our community in need in downtown Tampa. We partner with Matthew 25 local charity, USF Medical School, and Metropolitan Ministries to serve breakfast, provide clothing, and care for the medical needs for our guests.

To Volunteer: Go to our Sign Up Genius, see URL below or can the QR CODE and sign up.

Place: First Presbyterian Church @ 412 Zack Street East, downtown Tampa. The entrance for volunteers is on the Polk Street side of building.

Time: 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Volunteer Check-In Process:
1) Sign in and choose the job you want on the Duty Sheet
2) Prepare and wear your name tag
3) Don’t be shy…if not sure where to go or what to do to get started, ask someone who looks like they know what they’re doing.
4) Set up and Preparation 8-9 a.m., Serving 9-10:15 a.m., Cleanup 10:15-10:30 a.m.

Matthew 25 founders Peggy & Mike Kanter, as well as Bill Stone from Metro Ministries, are Go To people if you have questions or need direction on where you may be needed when you arrive.

Here is the URL for the Sign Up Genius for every upcoming 3rd Saturday of Month. Find the dates that work for you and sign up.
https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0f48a5a62da3f49-community

Please don’t hesitate to ask any questions. Thank you and God Bless
Greg Melton  813-967-2074  gmelt12@gmail.com

Our Food Pantry is very active helping people near and far in the Tampa Community.

Here are some special requests we have:
- Pasta
- Spaghetti Sauce
- Tomato sauce/chopped tomatoes etc.
- All kinds of white flour
- Canned Tuna
- Canned Chicken
- Canned fruits and vegetables
- Body Wash
- Gluten Free Foods and Flours
- Cereal
- Whole wheat rice and pasta
- Men's and Women's razors and shaving cream (travel size)
- Toothbrushes
- Gift cards in any amount for Publix, Walmart or Save-a-lot

All food items offered are accepted. Thank you for supporting those who need it the most. For more info and questions about our Food Pantry please contact Anetta Alexander at 813-758-2689 or exchange2861@yahoo.com.
My One Word for 2020: Unite
By Thomas Sakaris

I chose the word Unite because I believe we are at our strongest and best able to achieve our goals through the unification of our diverse talents. However, the task of establishing unity is not easily achieved.

Unity is a difficult task because “all people are different; all people are complex.”

This statement has defined my leadership approach for over 40 years and has made me focus on the fact that we all have different talents that are formed either through nature, nurture or both. It is important for the leadership within any organization to recognize, accept and develop individuals with diverse talents. It has been my experience that we should create an environment that allows for the expression of ideas and opinions that may deviate from the norm but are based on core values. If these ideas are constructive and reasonably developed, they may help organizations adapt and remain relevant in today’s rapidly changing environment.

The Brothers of AHEPA Chapter 12 have voiced many new and creative ideas for our 2019-2020 plan. My goal as President of AHEPA Chapter 12 is to unite their vast and diverse experiences so that we can bring to fruition initiatives that will enable us to be aligned with the core values of the St John’s community.

Thomas and Barbara Sakaris are long time members of our community. Thomas is the current president of AHEPA.

Opt-in on Messenger

In an effort to be more environmentally conscious, we will be mailing the Messenger ONLY to those who ask. If you wish to receive the Messenger by mail, you certainly may. We just ask that you indicate on your stewardship form, or let the office know, that you wish to receive the Messenger by mail. Beginning in January 2020, we will no longer be mailing the Messenger unless you ask us to.

St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

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

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

Pictures
Go to Flickr.com and search “St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church” or go to www.flickr.com/photos/stjohngoctampa
2019 GREEK FESTIVAL STATISTICS AT A GLANCE

A huge THANK YOU to all who volunteered, contributed, supported, and visited our festival this year. Without you, we would not have been able to be so successful!

- 9,393 Happy Guests
- 360 Dedicated Volunteers includes many that just showed up
- 123 Dancers in 5 Dance Groups bringing some serious Kefi
- 8,869 Homemade Pastries – 5,450 Koulourakia, 2,019 Kourambiedes & 1,400 Finikia
- 10,000 Hand Rolled Dolmades + 600 Vegetarian Dolmades
- 580lbs of Ground beef for 175 trays of Home made Pastitso
- 3,821 Lamb & Chicken Gyros (48% Increase) & 1,540 Orders of Fries & 6,000 pieces of bread
- 7 Church Tours with 135 on average equals 945 guests viewing our Beautiful Church
- 75 Welcome Packetshanded out
- 3,821 number of OPAs over the Festival Weekend
- 597 Raffle Tix Sold & 3 very happy winners
- 1,680 Greek Salads & 527 Feta Sides enjoyed by all
- 1,297 orders of Loukomades & 823 Frappe & Greek Coffees
- 31 Hours of Greek Music
- 9,466 FaceBook Likes & 4,456 check-ins on Social Media
- 82 Volunteers in one final Kalamatianos Dance
Teacher born, raised, and educated in Greece with over 22 years of experience teaching the Greek language. Adult classes for beginners taught @ St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church 2418 W. Swann Ave, Tampa, FL 33609. Classes are held at 6:00 - 8:30 p.m. on Thursday evenings, starting on October 3, 2019. This will be the first of three sessions, with each session lasting three months.

Price per session is $100 for church members and $125 for non-members.

Contact Ms. Magdalini Myer: at (813) 909-2327, aspis69@aol.com or the church office at (813) 876-8830.

**Want to Learn Modern Greek?**

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church Adult Greek School

- **Speak Greek**
- **Read Greek**
- **Write Greek**
- **Basic Grammar & More.**
- **Some Greek History**
- **Book Included in Price!!**

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.
THE BASICS

What Is Anxiety?

The New York Times recently published an article called, "Why Are More American Teenagers Than Ever Suffering From Severe Anxiety?" The author chronicled several teens' battle with anxiety over the course of a few years.

The article questioned why we're seeing such a rise in anxiety among today's youth. As a psychotherapist, college lecturer, and author of 13 Things Mentally Strong Parents Don't Do, I agree that anxiety is a widespread issue among adolescents. It's the most common reason people of all ages enter my therapy office.

Some young people are overachieving perfectionists with a crippling fear of failure. Others worry so much about what their peers think of them that they're unable to function. Some have endured rough circumstances throughout their young lives. But others have stable families, supportive parents, and plenty of resources.

I suspect the rise in anxiety reflects several societal changes and cultural shifts we've seen over the past couple of decades. Here are the top 10 reasons:

1. **Electronics offer an unhealthy escape.**
   Constant access to digital devices lets kids escape uncomfortable emotions like boredom, loneliness, or sadness by immersing themselves in games when they are in the car or by chatting on social media when they are sent to their rooms.

   And now we're seeing what happens when an entire generation has spent their childhoods avoiding discomfort. Their electronics replaced opportunities to develop mental strength, and they didn't gain the coping skills they need to handle everyday challenges.

2. **Happiness is all the rage.**
   Happiness is emphasized so much in our culture that some parents think it's their job to make their kids happy all the time. When a child is sad, his parents cheer him up. Or when she's angry, they calm her down.

   Kids grow up believing that if they don't feel happy around the clock, something must be wrong. That creates a lot of inner turmoil. They don't understand that it's normal and healthy to feel sad, frustrated, guilty, disappointed, and angry sometimes, too.

3. **Parents are giving unrealistic praise.**
   Saying things like, "You're the fastest runner on the team," or "You're the smartest kid in your grade," doesn't build self-esteem. Instead, it puts pressure on kids to live up to those labels. That can lead to crippling fear of failure or rejection.

4. **Parents are getting caught up in the rat race.**
   Many parents have become like personal assistants to their teenagers. They work hard to ensure their teens can compete: They hire tutors and private sports coaches and pay for expensive SAT prep courses. They make it their job to help their teens build transcripts that will impress a top school. And they send the message that their teen must excel at everything in order to land a coveted spot at such a college.

5. **Kids aren't learning emotional skills.**
   We emphasize academic preparation and put little effort into teaching kids the emotional skills they need to succeed. In fact, a national survey of first-year college students revealed that 60 percent feel emotionally unprepared for college life.

   Knowing how to manage your time, combat stress, and take care of your feelings are key components to living a good life. Without healthy coping skills, it's no wonder teens are feeling anxious over everyday hassles.

6. **Parents view themselves as protectors rather than guides.**
   Somewhere along the line, many parents began believing their role is to help kids grow up with as few emotional and physical scars as possible. They became so overprotective that their kids never practiced dealing with challenges on their own. Consequently, these kids have grown up to believe they're too fragile to cope with the realities of life.

7. **Adults don't know to help kids face their fears the...**
right way.
At one end of the spectrum, you'll find parents who push their kids too hard. They force their children to do things that terrify them. On the other end, you'll find parents who don't push kids at all. They let their kids opt out of anything that sounds anxiety-provoking.
Exposure is the best way to conquer fear but only when it's done incrementally. Without practice, gentle nudging, and guidance, kids never gain confidence that they can face their fears head-on.

8. Parents are parenting out of guilt and fear.
Parenting stirs up uncomfortable emotions, like guilt and fear. But rather than let themselves feel those emotions, many parents are changing their parenting habits. So they don't let their kids out of their sight because it stirs up their anxiety, or they feel so guilty saying no to their kids that they back down and give in. Consequently, they teach their kids that uncomfortable emotions are intolerable.

9. Kids aren't being given enough free time to play.
While organized sports and clubs play an important role in kids' lives, adults make and enforce the rules. Unstructured play teaches kids vital skills, like how to manage disagreements without an adult refereeing. And solitary play teaches kids how to be alone with their thoughts and comfortable in their own skin.

10. Family hierarchies are out of whack.
Although kids give the impression that they'd like to be in charge, deep down they know they aren't capable of making good decisions. They want their parents to be leaders—even when there is dissension in the ranks. And when the hierarchy gets muddled—or even flipped upside down—their anxiety skyrockets.
We've created an environment that fosters anxiety in young people, rather than resilience. And while we can't prevent all anxiety disorders—there's definitely a genetic component—we can do a better job helping kids build the mental muscle they need to stay healthy.

Amy Morin, LCSW, is a licensed clinical social worker, psychotherapist, and the author of 13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do.

If You Sow Generosity, You Will Reap Generosity
By Rick Warren

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:6-7 NIV).

The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 9:6-7, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (NIV).

The principle of sowing and reaping applies to every area of life, not just your finances. Whatever you sow in life, you're going to reap. Whatever you deposit is going to be returned to you. If you sow criticism in life, you are going to reap criticism from other people. If you sow kindness, you're going to reap kindness. It's the law of the harvest. If you plant apple seeds, you don't get pears; you get apples. If you sow with generosity, you will reap generosity.

This is the principle of the harvest: Whenever you have a need, plant a seed. When a farmer looks at his barren fields, he doesn't gripe about it. He just goes out and starts planting some seed. If he only has a little bit of seed, he has a choice. He can either hoard it or give it away. If he holds on to it, that's all he's got. If he gives it away, God will multiply it. The amazing thing is this: You don't just reap what you sow. You always reap more than you sow! God set it up this way because he wants you to become like him. God is a giver. The only way that you're ever going to become like him is to learn to be generous. When you're stingy, you're like the Devil. When you're generous, you're like God. When you give it away, God multiplies it.

This sounds illogical—to give away when you have a need so that you will get more back. But that's why it requires faith! God says the way you get is by giving, not by holding on.

When have you received from God and others more than you gave away?

How should you decide what to give?

What is a need in your life right now? How can you give that very thing away to others?

Rick Warren is an evangelical Christian pastor and author.
Planning Funerals that Won’t Happen Today
By Lysa Terkeurst

“My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” Psalm 139:15-16 (NIV)

Several years ago, my then-teenage son came to me and asked if he could take his brother and sisters to go get ice cream. How fun! How thoughtful! "Sure," I said, "Let me grab my keys and we'll go."

"No, Mom — we sort of want to go just us kids," he quickly replied.

"Oh," and that's about all I could get my mouth to say as my brain started racing and reeling. In my mind, pictures started flashing of a terrible accident, a phone call from the police, planning a funeral and then thinking back to this moment when I could have said No.

And it was that strange sense that everything depended on me and my decisions that made me want to say: No. Absolutely not. You will stay home today. You will all stay home forever. I have to keep you safe.

Most of us moms live with this gnawing, ach- ing, terrifying fear that something will happen to one of our children. We carry the pressure that ultimately everything rises and falls on whether or not we can control things. And mentally, too often we plan funerals that won't happen today.

We do it because we know the realities of living in a broken world where car accidents happen. Tragedy strikes old and young alike. We have no guarantees for tomorrow. And that's really hard on a mama's heart. When I was a teenager, I lost my baby sister in a tragic way — so I know devastating realities can happen.

If you’ve lost someone you love, I wish I could reach through this screen, squeeze your hand and whisper, “I'm so sorry. I understand. It’s such a deep, deep pain.” And a pain that we fear happening again.

That’s where I was as I stood at the front window of my house fretting and watching as the entire contents of my mama heart piled into one car. And I realized I had a choice.

I could run myself ragged creating a false sense of control that can’t really protect them. Or, I could ask God to help me make wise decisions and choose to park my mind on the truth, which is:

God has assigned each of my kids a certain number of days.
My choices can add to the quality of their life, but not the quantity. They could be at home tucked underneath my wings, and if it's their day to go be with Jesus, they will go.

Our key verse confirms this: "My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:15-16).

Jesus conquered death so we don’t have to be afraid of it any longer.
Of course, the death of anyone I love would make me devastatingly sad, heartbroken and absolutely dazed with grief. But I don't have to be held captive by the fear of death.

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he [Jesus] too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Hebrews 2:14-15, NIV).

Death is only a temporary separation. We will be reunited again.
In 2 Samuel 12, when David's infant child died, he confidently said, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (v. 23b KJV). David knew he would see his child again — not just a faceless soul without an identity, but this child for whom he was longing. He would know him, hold him and kiss him. The separation death caused would be over.

I know these are heavy things to process on a Thursday morning. And I certainly don’t claim that these truths will help you never, ever fear again. But I do hope these truths will settle your heart into a better place. A place where your heart is consumed with truth instead of fear.

Dear Lord, the fear of something happening to one of my children is so raw. But if I focus on this fear, it will consume me. Instead, help me focus on You, so I'll only be consumed with Your truth, Your love, Your insights and Your power. Amen.

Lysa Terkeurst is president of Proverbs 31 Ministries and a New York Times best selling author.
COMMUNITY LIFE

Left: Lisa Alsina awarded the Archangel Michael award. Above: Come and See Dinner table setup.

SAVE THE DATE

1st Inaugural Blue Jean Ball

January 11, 2020

The Tampa Bay area Metropolitan Council, of which every church is a member through their priest and lay representatives, is organizing a blue-jean ball that will take place on Saturday, January 11, at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Tarpon Springs. The purpose of this event is to bring together people from this area to raise money to support the ministries that take occur at a place that is near and dear to everyone.

St. John has had the LARGEST CONTINGENT of campers from the entire Metropolis the last two summers. So, let’s make a goal to have the largest contingent of attendees at this blue-jean ball. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact me. Let’s get the word out and let’s go for a fun night out celebrating St. Stephen’s and the Diakonia Center.

**TICKET PRICES**

Adults: $75.00  
Children 12-18: $25.00  
Children under 12 are free
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<td>Orthros 8:45 a.m.</td>
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<td>Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
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<td>PCAT Book Sale</td>
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<td>Meeting of Ministry Heads 6:30 p.m.</td>
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<td>Philoptochos Board Meeting via phone</td>
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<td>HOPE/JOY Movie Night 6:30 p.m.</td>
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**St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church**

**2418 W. Swann Avenue**
Tampa, FL 33609-4712

**Office:** (813) 876-8830  **Fax:** (813) 443-4899
office@stjohntpa.org
www.stjohntpa.org

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813-876-8830 (Office)  813-394-1038 (Cell)
frstav@gmail.com

**Pastoral Assistant**
Charlie Hambos
813-876-8830 (Office)  813-843-8471 (Cell)
chambos@stjohntpa.org

**Pastoral Assistant**
John Kokenis
813-876-8830 (Office)  630-306-7716 (Cell)
jkokenis@stjohntpa.org

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Aikas Crassas, President
813-690-3867
Mike Xenick, VP
813-340-8737
Gary Ward, Treasurer
813-846-3898
Ryan Lydon, Secretary
704-564-2046
Sandra Pappas
813-785-3747
Jim Armstrong
954-295-6665
George Chagaris
727-420-1920
Amin Hanhan
813-846-2957
Nick Kazazas
863-581-2430
Edie Kavouklis
813-758-0305
Jimmy Konstas
813-220-7352

**Office Staff**
Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper
debbie@stjohntpa.org  fax:813-443-4899

**Adult Greek School**
Magda Myer
813-909-2327

**AHEPA**
Thomas Sakaris, President
201-819-2319

**Altar Angels**
Engie Hatkas
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**
Brett Mourer
813-376-9315

**Choir**
Pauline Spencer, Director
813-390-1782
Ruth Lovozovitz, Organist
727-688-2782

**Community Outreach**
Greg Melton
813-967-2074

**Connect Through Christ** -
**Special Needs Ministry for Children**
Dante and Lindsey Skourellos
813-765-9534

**Dance Groups**
ΠΧΑΠΑ ΜΑΣ,
Alexandra De Maio
813-340-9668
Bessie Palios,
813-523-0347
Maraquet Edquid
813-422-8963
ΠΑΡΕΑ,
Marina Choundas
813-877-6136
Anna Maria Bavaro
732-239-9085
ΠΑΝΠΥΡΙ,
Alexandra De Maio
813-340-9668

**Daughters of Penelope**
Nicole Leontsims, President
703-585-7490

**Finance Committee**
Gary Ward
813-846-3898

**Food Pantry**
Anetta Alexander
813-758-2689

**GriefShare**
Dona Hambos
813-843-8412

**Gasparilla Parking**
John Kokkas
727-992-4615

**GOYA**
Michael & Bessie Palios
goya@stjohntpa.org
813-523-0346

**Hope/Joy**
George & Zackie Ameres
813-245-3813

**Junior Olympics**
Dwight Ford
727-685-9028

**MOMS**
Mary Ann Konstas
813-215-9862
Lindsey Skourellos
813-503-7845

**Parish Nursing Ministry**
Marcelle Triantafillou
612-396-5026

---

**Orthodox Christian Fellowship**
Charlie Hambos
813-843-8471

**Oratorical Festival**
Peggy Bradshaw
727-244-1374

**Photography Ministry**
Karina Findlay
813-476-9632

**Philoptochos**
Jeanie Nenos
813-451-9116

**Small Group Bible Study**
South, John Kokenis
630-306-7716
Women, Fr. Stavros
813-394-1038

**Strategic Planning**
Gary Ward
813-846-3898

**Stewardship**
Sandrea Pappas
813-785-3747
Pete Trakas
813-505-2193

**Sunday School**
Vickie Peckham
813-758-3102

**Usher**
Tom Georgas
813-985-0236

**Welcoming Ministry**
Maria Xenick
813-765-3587

**Young Adults**
Charlie Hambos
813-843-8471

**Young at Heart**
Mike Trinim, President
813-784-4872
Mary Nenos, Vice President
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.