

THE MESSENGER

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

*"Behold I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.
The voice of one crying in the wilderness; Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight." Mark 1:2-3*

August 2021

VISION:

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

MISSION:

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

CORE VALUES:

Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

Sunday School Begins August 15

St. John The Baptist's Sunday School is back and expanding with the Highest Number of teachers and classes!

We are excited to see all our children & families return to learn.

Read on for more details of what Sunday School will look like this year!

Fr. Stavros' Message

Are You All In? Why Not?

Several years ago, the Tampa Bay Lightning (Yay, Go Bolts, Stanley Cup Champs for the second year in a row) had a marketing campaign entitled "All In." If memory serves, it was about new ownership which was all in on upgrading the stadium and spending the money to bring in the best players. I guess it worked because they have been the best team in hockey for the past two seasons (and really the past three, even though they got swept out of the playoffs). Can you imagine if the slogan had been "Tampa Lightning—We're ½ In!" No one would have taken them seriously.

That's because in most, if not all facets of life, success comes from being All In. In fact, can you think of any area of life where it's not okay to be All In? If you can, please tell me, because I can't think of one. Here are some examples of places where we need to be all in:

~Can you imagine if you went for a job interview and said to your potential employer, "please hire me, I'll be half in." No way you get that job.

~How about playing on a sports team—"Coach, I want to be on the team, I'll be half-in, I'll come to half of the practices." No way you make the team.

~How about when you are sick and go to the doctor—"doctor, I'll take half of the medicine." No way you get healed.

~Applying for college—"I want to come to this college, I'll be half in, I'll come to class half of the time." No way they let you in.

~What about marriage—"Will you marry me, I'll be half in." No one is going to marry you.

There is no way you get anywhere in life being "half in." Just about everything worthwhile involves being ALL IN.

Salvation works in the same way. Can you imagine standing before the awesome judgment seat of Christ, making a case why He should let you in to Paradise. **"God, please let me into heaven, I was half-in on faith."** No way you get in.

Many times, when I talk about faith and Orthodoxy, people look at me like I'm from another planet when I talk about being committed. It's like the church is speaking some other language than the rest of the world. Really it isn't. We have to be ALL IN on everything else in order to be successful. Why wouldn't we think we need to be ALL IN on our salvation?!

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There Are No Covid-Protocols This Month

As per both the Florida State government and the Metropolis of Atlanta, there are no covid protocols. We are fully open. If a person wishes to continue to wear a mask, they are certainly welcome to. There should be no judgment. As we have written in the past, vaccine status should also not be discussed as it is divisive and our churches seek unity. Should anything change regarding covid protocols, we will certainly update everyone.



The theme for St. Stephen's Summer Camp this year was "All In." We came up with this theme because there was a lot of speculation at how we would have camp amidst the pandemic. We wanted people to know that we were ALL IN on the idea of doing summer camp, we were committed to offering the same kinds of activities that we've always offered.

Once at camp, our curriculum, what we imparted to the campers and staff, all were related to this theme.

I want to share the highlights of this theme, because what we talked about at camp relates to all of us right now as we emerge from the pandemic, especially to those who are not coming to

church often or at all, to those who are not ALL IN.

We began by reviewing what it means to be all in on FAITH. We reviewed the Creed, the basic tenets of what it means to be an Orthodox Christian. This fall, it is important for us to review what it is we believe. Perhaps you can consider taking the Orthodoxy 101 class in September, joining the Prayer Team, or just coming back to church on a regular basis for those who aren't. It's hard to expect someone to go all in on something they don't know. So the first step on going ALL IN on our faith is to go ALL IN on learning about the faith. However, it doesn't end there. Sadly, for many people it does end there. Many people think that if they know enough facts about Christ to win a Sunday school trivia contest that that is enough. It is not enough to know ABOUT Christ, we have to know CHRIST.

Which brings us to our second lesson from camp, which is about being ALL IN on faith. We studied several saints who went ALL IN on faith to the point that they were able to work miracles, to radiate Christ's light in ways that brought people to Christ, and for some of them, to witness for Christ to the point of dying as a martyr for Him. Once we understand Who Christ is, the next step is to go ALL IN on living for Christ.

The next day of camp brought up the discussion of the "tools we need" to go ALL IN. These things are foundational to living the Christian life. Even one of them will weaken our faith and keep us from going ALL IN.

Prayer is our communication with God. There is no relationship without communication. This isn't a Christian idea—it's common sense. You can't have a relationship with someone without communication. We can't have one with God if we don't communicate with Him.



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Worship is often viewed as “going to church to check a box.” In one group, I asked everyone how they were feeling, and they said “tired, stressed, etc.” I asked them to take two minutes and give everyone a hug. After two minutes of exchanging hugs, I asked everyone how they felt and they said “much better.” We all know how we benefit from physical touch. This is one of the reason why the pandemic was so difficult, because we didn’t get hugs, handshakes, and other expressions of physical touch. Studies have been done on inmates in solitary confinement who don’t touch anyone and this lack of touch leads many to insanity. In the hospital, a patient can tell the difference between a clinical touch from a medical professional and the touch of a family member. In worship, specifically in the Divine Liturgy, we touch God and God touches us. Holy Communion is like getting a hug from God. To absent from this physical contact with God is akin to being absent from physical touch from others.

Scripture Reading is something that none of us do enough of. Scripture reading is like filling ourselves with nutritious food. Most of us wouldn’t leave home without having breakfast or a cup of coffee, something to get us going in a positive direction before we venture out into the stressful world. Reading Scripture is a great way to fill our souls before we head out into the world.

Fasting is not about deprivation but about discipline. There

are many ways to discipline ourselves that don’t involve food. Of course the most basic discipline is from food. If you are not “fasting” at all, let’s have a conversation about you can be more disciplined in your faith.



Fellowship is an important part of being a Christian. Because Christians don’t live out their Christianity in isolation. We live as part of a community—a family, friendships, in our church community, in the greater community. Fellowship includes encouragement, patience, understanding, and listening, among other things.

Almsgiving is the forgotten tool. It includes generosity and giving to those who are in need, either directly, or indirectly. Giving to the church is often indirect giving, as the church collects and distributes to those who are in need.

Thankfully at St. John, we provide opportunities to grow in all six of these ways. We have frequent services, the Prayer Team provides daily encouragement in understanding the Scriptures, we are constantly encouraging people to pray and praying for those who are in need, we present fasting in a positive light, we offer many opportunities for fellowship, especially in our ministries, and in 2020, we broke our parish record for charitable giving and are on track to break this record again this year.

ALL IN on ourselves. This doesn’t mean “all about ourselves”, nor does it condone egotism. This lesson was about how we think of ourselves. Many of us have a negative self-image. Some of us struggle with anxiety and depression. The pandemic hasn’t been good for any of us on these fronts, as it has exacerbated both. God doesn’t want us to be anxious. We read in Matthew 6:22-33 about how anxiety doesn’t add anything to our lives. Rather, it diminishes them. Jesus tells us about the lilies of the field, how beautiful they are. He asks us to look at the grass that is alive and



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tomorrow is cut down. And He tells us that if He made these so beautiful and special, that we are even more beautiful and special. He concludes the passage by telling us to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness and all the other things will be added to us.

At summer camp, we spend a great deal of time and effort on encouraging each other and building each other up. In a particular activity where people offer encouragement to one another, it was interesting to see the little things people pick up on. For instance, someone offered me encouragement by complimenting something that to me was a nothing but to them was a big deal. I would never have thought that something I did that was innocuous to me meant something to someone else. I would never have known unless they told me. When people do good by us, we should tell them. When people do not do good by us, we should tell them nicely.



Here's a fact—if you put positivity into someone, they are likely to have a positive response. If you put negativity into someone, they are likely to have a negative response. But if you put nothing into someone, they are also likely to have a negative response. Putting nothing into someone is as bad as putting a negative into them, because when you don't give any feedback to someone, it leaves them room to be filled with doubt, the same way they would be if you put something negative into them.

Part of the reason (not the only reason) we are filled with anxiety is that we don't know where we stand with people. Part of the reason we feel empty is because we are not being filled with encouragement. When a person feels full, they are content, they are less likely to be anxious, they are less likely to do sin-

ful and destructive things. These happen when people feel empty.

One of my favorite activities at camp is the ropes course. I'm a big fan of experiential learning. One of the obstacles on the ropes course is a 12 foot wall that people have to get over. They can help one another. Some from below can lift, some from above can lift. Eventually everyone gets over. However, if someone jumps on the ankles of the person going up the wall, the people at the top pulling up will fail, because gravity will be on the side of the person pulling down. The rhetorical question I asked everyone one is "are you a person who pulls other people up or a person who tears them down?" It's a question we should all consider.

God is ALL IN on us. This was the lesson on Thursday, the day the whole camp went to confession. God is ALL IN on us, even after the pandemic, even when we act like the Prodigal Son and waste everything we've been given. God is still all in on us, He still wants us, He still love us. ALL that we need to do is turn back to Him in repentance. All we need to do is literally choose to go ALL IN and we are in with Him.

We have to get the others ALL IN. The final lesson of the week was about getting others ALL IN. There are many people who have changed the channel during the pandemic. There are many people who have stopped coming to church regularly. There are many people who were ALL IN at one point who are now less than all in. There are people who have never been in who need to be invited in. This is the work of the church, the Great Commission given by Christ in Matthew 28: 18-20, for us to go and make disciples of all nations, get all the people ALL IN.



I NEED YOU TO BE ALL IN! I wrote this month's message while in California visiting my mom, who has not been doing well. With the time change affecting my body, I'm writing early in the morning California time when everyone is still sleeping. I announced in church on Sunday, July 11, that I would be taking some time away to see my mom, then hopefully go on vacation, then probably see my mom again. I recently completed 100 consecutive Sundays at St. John without a break.

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MANY PEOPLE ASKED ME “WHAT CAN I (THEY) DO TO HELP?” They understand that this is a critical time for my mom, and obviously for my family being so separated from our family in California. People generously offered rides, meals, and prayers, for which I am very thankful. I’ve been thinking about your question “What can you do to help?” The answer is simple:

I NEED YOU TO BE ALL IN!

We don’t need people ALL IN only when it’s a crisis. That doesn’t work at a job, in school, in a marriage or anywhere else. We need people ALL IN, all the time, in anything that they are doing that is worthwhile.

1. We need you ALL IN on worship, every Sunday. For those who haven’t been coming, it’s time to come back. Not once to see, but every Sunday. It’s time to be ALL IN on worship.

2. We need you ALL IN on Sunday school for your children, every Sunday. It seems that we always start off strong, only to lose steam and limp to the finish. Let’s be ALL IN all year this year.

3. We need you ALL IN on GOYA, because if we don’t infuse our teens with Christ, when they are 18 they are going to leave the church and not come back. Our college students not only face the daunting task of going to new churches in new cities where they don’t know people. They face the challenge of roommates who don’t believe in God and who are not going to encourage their faith. We need to give our teens as much as Christ as possible, because once they leave, they are going to have to “live off their savings” so to speak, because they won’t be getting help or encouragement.

4. We need you ALL IN on Stewardship (and other administrative aspects of church). I probably spend 40% of my time on parish administration, which takes away time from pastoral care and ministry. We need to streamline the administrative aspects of this parish, beginning with stew-

ardship. There is really no reason why we are still trying to track down people who haven’t filled out a form for this year. It’s August!

5. We need you ALL IN on fellowship. There is a community aspect to our parish. We encourage each other, we help each other, we look out for each other and we check up on each other. This is the role of every parishioner.

6. We need you ALL IN on generosity. One mission of the church is to help those who are in need. Last year, we set a record for generosity, nearly \$35K went to charitable causes. This is one mark of a good church community. When we give of ourselves generously.

7. We need you ALL IN on our core values—love, worship, community, learning, service. When we all go ALL IN on these, our community will be able to project the message of the Gospel farther and farther.

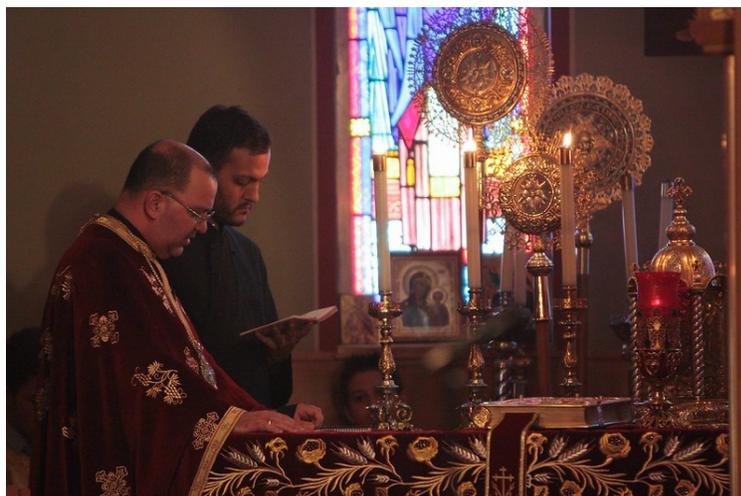


We spent 2.5 months in spring of 2020 all out. We’ve spend the last 15 months partially in. It’s time now, at long last, to go ALL IN. Remember, nothing worthwhile happens in life when we aren’t ALL IN. If the most important thing in our life is our eternal salvation, and the vehicle that helps us get there is the church, it is time to go ALL IN on Christ and the Church.

Are you ALL IN?

I’m so proud of our parish. We had 35 campers and 10 staff members participate in St. Stephen’s Summer Camp this year, the largest contingent in the Metropolis of Atlanta. Some of their reflection on camp appear later in this issue of The Messenger. Please take some time to read the thoughts of our young people.

+Fr. Stavros



The Dormition of the Virgin Mary and Why That is So Important to Us Today

By Fr. Stavros

*By the command of God, the God-bearing Apostles everywhere were transported through the skies on clouds.
And reaching your all-immaculate body, that origin of Life, they kissed it in grand veneration.*

The supreme Hosts of heaven arrived with their Master.

*Seized with awe, they ushered your inviolate body, which had hosted God. High above the earth, they went before you, and invisibly they
shouted to the angelic orders above them, "Behold, the Queen of all, the Mother of God, has arrived.*

"Lift up the gates, and give a formal heavenly reception to the Mother of the everlasting Light

"For the salvation of all humanity came through her. We are unable to gaze on her, and it is impossible to bestow worthy honor on her.

"For her excellence surpasses all understanding."

*Therefore, O immaculate Theotokos, as you now live forever with the life-bearing King who is your Son, intercede unceasingly, that He guard
us, your children, and that He save us from every hostile assault, since we are under your protection.*

And to the ages with splendor we call you blessed.

(Doxastikon of Great Vespers, Dormition of the Theotokos, Trans. by Fr. Seraphim Dedes)

On August 15, we celebrate the Dormition of the Virgin Mary. This feast is also known as the "Falling Asleep of the Virgin Mary," in Greek, "Koimisis" and "Assumption of the Virgin Mary." The word "Assumption" is used to describe how her body was "assumed" into heaven. The Dormition of the Virgin Mary is critically important to each of us, which is why the day of her death is "celebrated." Let's explore why.

First, some background.

God created the world.

He created it out of love.

He created man and woman in His image and likeness. His intention for us was to live in communion (union) with Him.

That union was severed at the Fall. Prior to the Fall, there was no sin and there was no death. The Fall ushered in both sin, death, and a whole host of other problems, like sickness, temptation, etc. Death became the ultimate indignity, as it not only ended life, but put the human being in a state of eternal estrangement from God. Everyone who died now went to Hades, where they were held captive by this darkness and estrangement.

God did not want us to live in this state. He wanted to redeem us. His plan for our redemption was to send to Incarnate Jesus Christ so that He could die for our sins, in other words so He could pay the debt of sin that each fallen human being owed God.

In order to Incarnate Christ, God sent Him into the world in a way that is familiar with us. He was "born" into the world. He was not "born" into existence. That is a critical distinction. Christ, also called the Word of God, Logos of God, Son of God, etc. existed eternally with God. He is uncreated. His Incarnation into the world

took place at a certain time in history. In order to bring Christ into the world, God chose a Virgin named Mary for this task. Mary became the "ladder" (one of many names ascribed to her) by which Christ came down from heaven to earth. Mary became the "Theotokos," which means "God-bearer," because she bore God in her womb and became His earthly Mother.

The Virgin Mary was obedient in answering God's call to bear His Son. She was obedient in being a Theotokos. She remained obedient and faithful to God throughout her life.

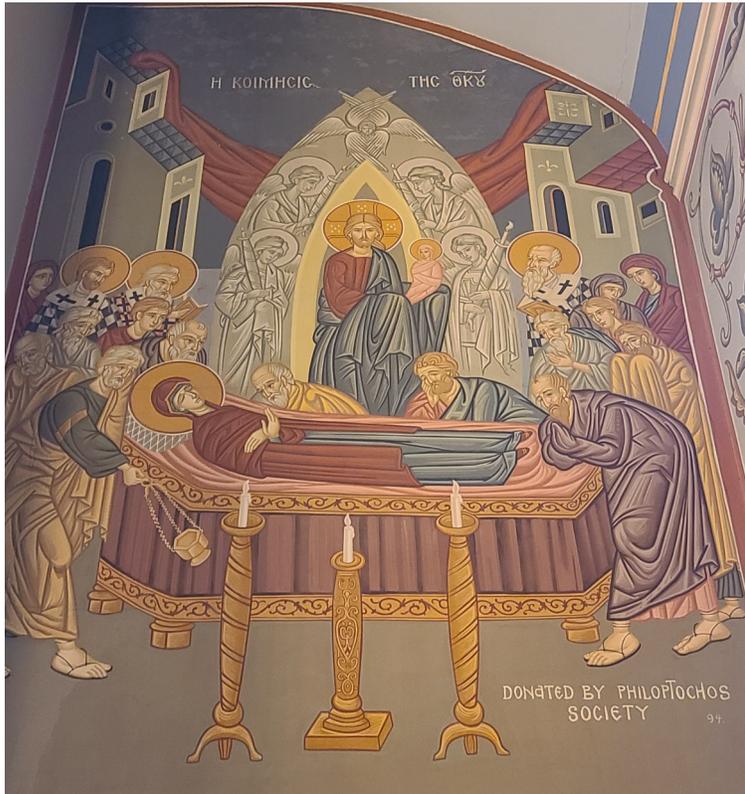


We know that Christ was crucified, died, was buried and rose from the dead. That alone is "awe-some" in every sense of the world. However, if the story just ended there, with Christ ascending into heaven, it would still have meant a sad end for the rest of humanity. What makes the Resurrection and Ascension critically important is that it paved the way for it to happen for the rest of us.

The Dormition of the Virgin Mary shows how the Resurrection from the dead can happen to the rest of us, because she is one of us. When the Virgin Mary passed away, all of the Apostles were gathered by the

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Spirit and carried on clouds for her burial. That is all except for Thomas. After her burial, Thomas arrived, and was shown to her tomb. When the tomb was opened, it was empty, except for her belt. This shows that she was “assumed” (where Assumption comes from) both soul and body into heaven. The icon of the Dormition shows the body of the Virgin Mary, laid out for her funeral, with Christ over her, carrying away her soul, wrapped in white bands. This icon prefigures the Resurrection for all people who place their faith and their lives in the hands of Christ.



A note about Vespers: In the Orthodox Tradition, the day begins with the sunset. Thus the feast of the Dormition, August 15, begins with the sunset on August 14. A service called Vespers is held at sunset that day. We will hold Great Vespers for the Dormition on Saturday, August 14 at 6:00 p.m. There is a tradition in the Orthodox Church that on Good Friday, an embroidered icon of Christ entering the tomb is placed in a wooden tomb. The icon is called the “Epitaphios” which literally means “in the tomb” and it is placed in the tomb which is called a “Kouvouklion.” There is a tradition that at the Dormition, we use an icon of the Virgin Mary going into the tomb, in other words an “epitaphios of the Virgin Mary” which is also placed into a Kouvouklion. Because I have always personally believed that the Kouvouklion for Christ should only be used for His Epitaphios, we have never kept the other tradition of the Epitaphios and Kouvouklion for the Virgin Mary. In 2020, we had a small Kouvouklion built for Holy Week, because there would be no one in church because of the covid-19 pandemic. Because we now have two kouvouklia, we will use the larger one for Christ on Good Friday, and the smaller one, we

will use going forward for the Virgin Mary. We also have a beautiful Epitaphios of the Virgin Mary.

The service of Vespers foreshadows the feast that follows the next day. In the same way, the Old Testament foreshadows the New Testament. The Old Testament is a foretelling. The New Testament is a fulfilling of what was foretold. In the same way, the Vespers is a foreshadowing of the Feast, and the next day, the Divine Liturgy inaugurates the feast. At Vespers, there is generally no Scripture reading from the New Testament. Rather, there is a Psalm from the Old Testament and usually three other readings from the Old Testament. At the Divine Liturgy, we hear an Epistle and Gospel from the New Testament, in addition to receiving Holy Communion, the New Covenant.

At the Vespers of the Dormition, there are three Old Testament readings. One is from Genesis 28:10-17 and is the story of the dream Jacob had about the ladder coming down from heaven. This dream foreshadows the Virgin Mary as the aforementioned “ladder” by which God came down from heaven to earth.

Much of our hymnology is used for teaching purposes. In other words, not every hymn praises God or supplicates God (asks God for something), though a fair amount of them do one or the other. The overwhelming majority of hymns, however, are didactic, or teaching hymns. Such is a lengthy hymn of Vespers which teaches us about her Dormition and its significance. Here is the hymn again, with some notes:

By the command of God, the God-bearing Apostles everywhere were transported through the skies on clouds. The Apostles had been scattered to the far corners of the earth to preach the Gospel and fulfill the Great Commission to baptize all nations. They were miraculously transported to the deathbed of the Virgin Mary, all except Thomas who arrived later, by Divine design, in order for the empty tomb of the Virgin Mary to be revealed.

And reaching your all-immaculate body, that origin of Life, they kissed it in grand veneration. The icon of the Dormition shows the Apostles and many others making a grand funeral service for the Virgin Mary.

The supreme Hosts of heaven arrived with their Master. Several phrases in this hymn prefigure our own death, and when we study this hymn with this in mind, when we think of our own death or the death of our loved ones, it not only lessens the sting but puts a very joyful tone to what is generally something that is painful. Imagine all the angels in heaven arriving with Christ to take the soul of your loved one, or to take your own soul. This would not be something to dread, but something to celebrate.

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Seized with awe, they ushered your inviolate body, which had hosted God. The word "Theotokos" means "God-bearer." The Virgin Mary was Theotokos because she held Christ in her womb. While we will not be called upon to do that, we are each given the opportunity to be a "Theotokos" because we have the unique opportunity to carry Christ within us through the receiving of Holy Communion. We have this opportunity again and again, to receive more and more of Him. The effect of having Christ within her cause her body and her life to be inviolate. It should motivate us to be the same. We should recognize that after receiving Holy Communion, we are "hosts of God," a "Theotokos" in our own right.

High above the earth, they went before you, and invisibly they shouted to the angelic orders above them, "Behold, the Queen of all, the Mother of God, has arrived. Again, imagine this announcement being made about you, or someone you love. All of the angels carrying us to heaven, and announcing that another "Theotokos" has arrived. This was indeed a cosmic event, an event where the whole universe was rejoicing. And this is what a Christian end to life is supposed to be like, a celebration of all the angels that another righteous soul is coming home to heaven.

"Lift up the gates, and give a formal heavenly reception to the Mother of the everlasting Light. We've all receive invitations to weddings, baptisms and parties where the name of the person/people being honored are advertised with great fanfare. We have been to formal receptions and we know that at these, people wear their best clothes, and eat off the best plates, and generally have the best time. Imagine a reception being given for you in heaven, where all the saints and angels attend, and where Christ Himself opens the door for you to enter. It's really a joyful thought. These are the kinds of thoughts we should be having about heaven, when it comes to thinking about the end of life for ourselves or our loved ones. Of course, we do not know what day our "heavenly reception" is going to be. So we must be "dressed" at all times, with a clean heart and pure soul, ready for whenever that call by the angels is going to come.

"For the salvation of all humanity came through her. We are unable to gaze on her, and it is impossible to bestow worthy honor on her. For her excellence surpasses all understanding." In our divine services, we use many beautiful hymns and phrases to remember the Virgin Mary. One of the most well-known is the hymn "Axion Esti" which is chanted at most Divine Liturgies, right after the Consecration of the Holy Gifts. It says "It is truly right to bless you, Theotokos, ever-blessed, most pure and Mother of our God. Greater in honor than the Cherubim and in glory greater beyond compare than the Seraphim, you without corruption gave birth to God the Word and are truly Theotokos, you do we magnify." She is the greatest human being that ever lived, a model for all of us.

Therefore, O immaculate Theotokos, as you now live forever with the life-bearing King Who is your Son, intercede unceasingly, that He guard us, your children, and that He save us from every hostile assault, since we are under your protection. The Virgin Mary is by extension, the mother of all of us. Every child has a special bond with its mother that it will not share with anyone else, even its father. That bond is built because a mother carries the child inside of her. We pray that we will establish a special bond with Christ by carrying Him inside of us. But we also have a special bond with the Virgin Mary, as our mother, which is why we offer prayers and supplications to her, especially in our times of struggle. When a child is in trouble, the first place he or she goes is to their mother. And if a mother isn't able to solve the problem, she is always able to provide comfort and reassurance. Thus, we pray that through her intercessions, she will entreat Christ to guard us, and save us from every hostile assault.

And to the ages with splendor we call you blessed. The Virgin Mary will never be forgotten. Not by us. And certainly not by God. We pray that this is the destiny for each of us. That we will be remembered in a positive way by others for what we did in life. And most importantly, that we will be remembered by God for what we did, and will be rewarded by Him, as was the Virgin Mary, with a grand entrance into heaven, and eternal blessedness to the ages of ages.

The Feast of the Dormition will be preceded by the Paraklesis Services of Supplication the Virgin Mary. This service can be done in any time of need, sorrow or distress. As you recall, last year we were doing them weekly throughout the time of the pandemic, in order to ask for the intercessions of the Virgin Mary before Christ on our behalf. This service allows us to submit specific names and needs to be prayed for. We did this service often last year as a way to pray for our entire community by name during a time when we could not gather all together. It can be offered at any time. Traditionally, it is offered during the first fourteen days of August, which is also a fast period, asking for strength and intercession from the Virgin Mary as we prepare to mark this great and important feast of her Dormition. Paraklesis will be held on August 2 (6:00 p.m.), 4 (10:00 a.m.), 6 (6:00 p.m.), 9 (6:00 p.m.), 11 (6:00 p.m.) and 13 (10:00 a.m.).

Great Vespers, including the Procession of the Epitaphios of the Virgin Mary will be held on Saturday, August 14 at 6:00 p.m. We will of course celebrate the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, August 15, the Feast of the Dormition. The Feast of the Dormition, like many of the feasts of our church, is celebrated for more than one day. It is celebrated from August 15-23. Thus the Epitaphios and Kouvouklion of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary will be displayed for veneration on the solea at every service during that time.

Charlie's Good-Bye Message

Editor's Note: This was the announcement Charlie Hambos delivered on Sunday, May 23. We wanted to print it in The Messenger for everyone to read.



In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Christ is Risen!

I have always wanted to tell you about my earliest childhood memory of St. John's.

The kitchen floor.

That beige tile. On that beige tile were a couple of upside down milkcrates. On the milkcrates sat, Dr. Demetri Halkias, Peter Choundas and Michael Halikoytakias and a few others. There was a big aluminum stock pot in the middle of them. They had those dirty white aprons on stained

with pastitso sauce and probably some lamb blood. They were sitting in a circle peeling onions by hand. This was my start here at St. John's. Mary Nenos somehow met my parents and enlisted their help to transport food from our kitchen here on Swann Avenue to the Convention Center where we used to have the Greek Festival. Once we got there, we walked into what I remember being a small narrow kitchen. On one end, I think I remember Spiro Georgiou with some sizzlin souvlaki on one end and Mary Nenos on the other end, elbow deep in Loukoumades dough.

I remember when the ceiling collapsed one of the many times it did.

In the office somewhere, there is a picture of me by a tree outside the old media center which is now where the school building is. There is another picture of me somewhere dressed a lamb or sheep, I think, for the Christmas Pageant when we used to have it in the gym.

I remember having Sunday School in the administration in the back room which used to be the science lab. Cindy Xenick wasn't my teacher there but I know she remembers having me as a student.

This community has come a long way. Please remember

that this is your community. This is a community that strives to be Christ Centered and lives by our core values of Love, Community, Learning, Service and Worship. Be proud of being a part of this community. Whether you have been a member forever, a few months or if today happens to be your first day. Get involved. Get engaged. In the next couple weeks and beyond, we will be asking for help in many ways. Step up to the plate. Help us grow stronger and closer and intentional about everything we do.

I love this community and it has been more than evident that this community loves me.

Serving in the altar with Fr. George, Fr. K and then side by side with Fr. Stavros. Not only serving on Sundays with Fr. Stavros but serving in the office sometimes 24 hours a day and definitely 7 days a week for many weeks in a row. That's not a complaint. That's just how it goes.



Fr. Stavros, there aren't enough words to describe you and what you mean to me, but here are few: Loyal, patient, kind, Spiritual Father, Shepherd, Friend, Brother, Father, Author, Intentional, never-stops, won't stop, logical, rational, caring, loving, list-making, compassionate, calm, courageous, strong and most of all A Priest. Since 2004, you have taken this community to a whole new level. It wasn't easy. Sometimes it still isn't easy. It will probably never be easy. That is because where ever a group of people, whether it be 2 or 500 are trying to grow closer to Christ, Satan is not too far away. So keep it up. It was an honor working so close to you for so many years. This past year has been one of the most challenging but we did it and that includes all of you here today. Father Stavros, I remember when I told you I felt the call to be a priest when I was in High School and you walked me all the way through, finishing college, entering the seminary and even slowly but surely making the Pastoral Assistant position a reality. I remember when I left, I told you that you gave me the wings and now it was my time to fly. I just happened to get to fly home.

Continued...

Well, here I stand, and I'm going to say it again. Father Stavros, you gave me the wings to fly and this time when I land it's going to be a little farther away. You will always be a part of my ministry wherever it takes me. Thank you for everything that you have done for me in these past 18 years. May God continue to grant you many years in your ministry here in Tampa and in every person you inspire through your writings and your words.

Mom, Dad, George and Joe. You have seen me at my worst and my best throughout this whole journey thus far. I can not thank you enough for being the best parents and best brothers. There is no way we could have done this without you. You picked me up when I went down and encouraged me so much along the way.

Debbie, thank you for putting up with all my craziness in the office and being the stable force. You have supported me in more ways than you can imagine. You were always there, always offering words of wisdom. You are like the office mom and we are just your kids.

Felix, thank you for fixing the things that I break and showing me how to repair anything from a hole in the wall to an air conditioning unit. Thank you most of all for teaching me patience. When a project was started and it didn't work out right away, you always said that these are how these things happen and you just have to be patient and not rush through anything.

Alex, you have stepped up in so many ways. Thank you for being patient with me. From our days in seminary together, to our road trips to the Diakonia Center and to working in the office side by side. You have taught me to be a better listener, a more intentional Orthodox Christian and to keep a positive outlook on life. We love you, Alex and Ana Hosanna.

I'm usually a big fan of saying that God has a plan for our lives. Perhaps I have told you or perhaps you have told me. I know that he does. It's just I like to make him work for it. He'll say, Charlie here is the plan for your life. And I say, Lord, not now, not yet, then I make a turn that isn't a part of the original plan. But God just creates a detour. But it also happens in His time. His time might just be waiting for me but I know he has better things to do. Becoming a priest was always a part of the plan. Certainly I may have forgotten it, when I was climbing on the roofs here, helping fix broken pipes or even climbing into the attic of the church right over the dome for over a week to try to stop further damage of the iconography.

It always came rushing back. Salvation. The journey to salvation. Watching all of you on your journey to salvation. Living our life through the Sacramental Life of the church, when celebrating a baptism, a wedding or even a funeral. Visiting someone in the hospital. Talking to someone in my office. Or helping our community survive some of the toughest pastoral situations that one could face. It was always the plan and this community allowed me to grow, to learn every aspect of the ministry, the land-

lord business, Parish Council meetings, envelope stamping, technology, and the list goes on and on and on. So because of the leadership here and the Parish Councils past and present I feel more prepared than ever.

The call would come one day, I knew it would. Certainly, Elefteria, my beautiful fiancé, my rock and my biggest fan and I did not think it would happen before we get married on November 14 this year, but it did.



Working for the church is a little bit like the military. Not just because we are a part of the army of the Lord but because when it is time for us to go and to serve a place where there is a need. We have to go. When the Bishop calls. It's like God Himself, telling us to go. So we have to go. We have to trust God. We have to trust the Church and we have to go where we are called to go.

Starting on August 2, this year, I will begin serving at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church of Greater Orlando as their Pastoral Assistant until the beginning of 2022, when at a time yet to be determined, God-willing, will be ordained to the Diaconate and then shortly after to the Holy Priesthood and will serve at Holy Trinity as the Assistant Priest.

I love you all. Elefteria and I won't be very far. Thank you so much for everything you have done.

Christ is Risen!

The Maccabees

By Dora Morgan

Editor's Note: Our Monday Night Bible Study read all 4 Books of The Maccabees throughout this past year. In short, the books detail the heroism, faith and struggle of a small group of righteous Jews who did everything in their power even unto death and martyrdom to uphold the Jewish Law and maintain the proper Temple Worship. Their main enemy was the Greeks during this time period after the death of Alexander the Great and only 100-200 years before Christ came. Dora Morgan offered this beautiful reflection in one of our studies and wanted us to publish it for all to read and be inspired to study this often overlooked area of scripture. The Maccabees are commemorated as Saints in the Orthodox Church on August 1.

When, it was announced, that at the next Bible Study the subject of the reading and discussion it will be: The Books of the Maccabees (The Maccabees), I wasn't in favor of it.

Perhaps, I rushed to form my opinion without first to study The Maccabees.

Well, to my big astonishment by studying all 4 Books of The Maccabees, I enriched my knowledge by learning a very important part of the Old Testament concerning the Jewish Nation's history.

They had unshaken faith towards the Almighty God and the Law of their Forefathers.

They always were protecting their inheritance—the Promised Land—and the integrity of their people.

They had dedicated their entire life to build their nation, with endless wars, with incredible courage, with titanic conviction, endurance, with great leadership ability, with sacrifices of themselves and their families, with prosecutions, hunger and above all the horrific tortures that a lot of them had to endure, without ever renouncing their deep faith towards God and to the prophets, even in their last breath. They secured and paved the road for generations of Jews to come.

Their four cardinal virtues were: prudence, temperance, courage and justice.

The Jewish people by establishing their beloved and blessed nation, they created a chain link, which eventually that chain link will extend to century that our Lord Jesus Christ was born.

So, in my view, the Jewish Nation gave us the best ever present—Our Lord and Savior—and is our lowly hope, that, if we walk His pathway and follow His footprints, He will give us a splendid award, “eternal life.”

The translator of The Maccabees in his 4th and last book explains to the reader in a philosophical way, what inspired the Maccabees' generation and here is the conclusion of his opinion:

“Devout reason is sovereign over the emotions” so, “the devout reason conquered the emotions.” Everyone should take note of this devout opinion.

I am so delighted that we studied The Maccabees. It was an eye opener and a very eventful narrative. The reader will carry along the details on how part of the history of the Old Testament; which is the background of the New Testament—kept building the foundation and got connected with the New Testament.



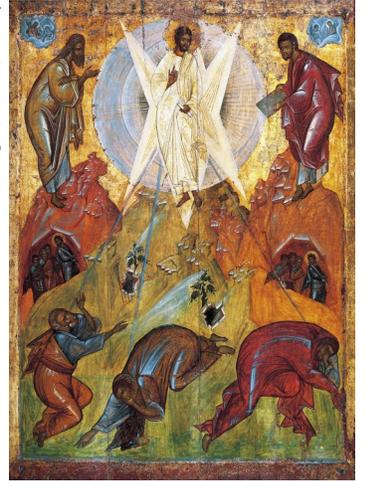
Liturgical Schedule for August 2021

Sunday, August 1	Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Monday, August 2	Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary—6:00 p.m.
Wednesday, August 4	Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary—10:00 a.m.
Friday, August 6	Transfiguration of our Savior Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary—6:00 p.m.
Sunday, August 8	Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Monday, August 9	Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary—6:00 p.m.
Wednesday, August 11	Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary—6:00 p.m.
Friday, August 13	Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary—10:00 a.m.
Saturday, August 14	Great Vespers for the Dormition of the Virgin Mary—6:00 p.m.
Sunday, August 15	Dormition of the Virgin Mary Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, August 22	Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Friday, August 27	St. Phanourios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, August 29	Beheading of St. John the Baptist Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Wednesday, September 1	Beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year—The Indiction Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, September 5	Zechariah and Elizabeth, Parents of St. John the Baptist Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Wednesday, September 8	Nativity of the Virgin Mary Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.

Liturgical Notes for August

Paraklesis Services of Supplication to the Virgin Mary to Be held in August

The service of Paraklesis or “Intercessory Prayer” to the Most Holy Theotokos, the Mother of God, is chanted during the fasting period of the first fourteen days of August, preceding the Feast of the Koimisis or “Falling Asleep” of the Virgin Mary, which is August 15. In this service we ask the Theotokos to pray for us and to intercede for us with her Son and our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not the Theotokos who saves us. God saves us. Thus we do not pray to the Theotokos, but we pray through the Theotokos, that through her intercession, we may find favor with God. The Paraklesis service is chanted not only for fourteen days in August, but can be chanted in at any time of the year, for those who are in need of prayer in time of sickness, despair, struggle, or any occasion, since any of life’s experiences provide us an opportunity for prayer. The Paraklesis Service consists of soft, melodic chants of supplication to the Virgin Mary, and lasts about an hour. It is also one of few services in the church where we commemorate individuals out loud during the service. You will find a place to write the names of you and your families, loved ones and friends (who are living) to be commemorated at the Paraklesis Services in the August Messenger. The Feast of the Dormition will be celebrated on Sunday, August 15. We should all attempt to keep the fast, at least from meat, during the first fourteen days of August, and we should each plan to receive Holy Communion on August 1, 6, 8 or 15. Paraklesis dates for 2021 are: August 2 (6:00 p.m.), 4 (10:00 a.m.), 6 (6:00 p.m.), 9 (6:00 p.m.), 11 (6:00 p.m.) and 13 (10:00 a.m.). After August, Paraklesis will be held once a month.



Friday, August 6 - Transfiguration of our Savior We read in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke, how Jesus was Transfigured on Mount Tabor in the presence of His Disciples. Matthew 17:2 says, “His face shone like the sun and His clothes became as white as the light.” Jesus was shown in the fullness of His glory as God, and standing beside Him were Moses and Elijah, the two greatest prophets of the Old Testament. This showed the Disciples that the man Jesus was indeed God as well, and pre-figured His glory at the Resurrection and Ascension.

Saturday, August 14 - Great Vespers for the Feast of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary—In the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church, the day begins with the setting of the sun. On August 15, we celebrate the Dormition of the Virgin Mary. But the actual feast begins with the setting of the sun on the evening of August 14. An evening service, called Vespers, announces each new day. In most parishes, Vespers is only offered a few times a year. For instance, in Tampa, we do Vespers on January 6 in the evening, as the prelude of the feast of St. John the Baptist on January 7. There are a few others times of the year we offer this service as well. This year, we will begin a tradition of celebrating Great Vespers on August 14. There is a tradition of an “Epitaphios” of the Virgin Mary. Most of us know the term “Epitaphios” as it relates to Christ in the tomb. In fact, the word “Epi-Taphios” literally means “in the tomb.” On Good Friday, we lay the “Epitaphios” of Christ into the Kouvouklion, the tomb of Christ. There is a tradition of doing the same thing on August 14, laying an “Epitaphios” (icon of the Virgin Mary in the tomb) in a Kouvouklion. I’ve personally thought that the Kouvouklion should be used once a year, only for the Body of Christ, which is why we have not done this service previously. However, because of the pandemic, Felix, our maintenance man, built us a small Kouvouklion because we did not use the regular one this year. So, now we have two Kouvouklia, the regular large one and now a smaller one. We have also acquired a beautiful Epitaphios of the Virgin Mary. On August 14, this year and every year going forward, we will use the Epitaphios of the Virgin Mary and place it in the small Kouvouklion. And on Good Friday, we will utilize the large Kouvouklion for the Epitaphios of Christ. Great Vespers on August 14 will be at 6:00 p.m. We will display the Epitaphios of the Virgin Mary and the Kouvouklion from August 14-23 (which is the leave-taking of the Dormition.



Names to be Commemorated for Paraklesis

Please write the names of all those whom you wish to be commemorated in the Paraklesis Services this August.
Please mail into the office or bring to church as soon as possible.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Sunday, August 15 - Dormition of the Virgin Mary—This is one of the Twelve Major Feastdays of the Church Year, and commemorates the Falling Asleep of the Virgin Mary. When the Virgin Mary died, all the disciples were present, save for Thomas, who could not get there in time for the funeral. When Thomas arrived, they opened the tomb for him to pay his respects to the Virgin Mary. The tomb was found empty, save for the belt of the Virgin Mary. Her body, along with her soul, had been assumed into heaven. This shows us that those who are righteous will be taken to heaven. It is not just Christ who went to heaven, but all of us can go. The Virgin Mary was not God—she was one of us, and shows to us, in the most excellent example, of what it means to live a life of obedience to God. We honor her above every person, even every angel, as we chant, “Greater in honor than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim (Cherubim and Seraphim are two order of angels, the ones who stand closest to God), you without corruption gave birth to God the Word, and are truly Theotokos, you do we magnify.”

Friday, August 27 – St. Phanourios Not much is known about the life of St. Phanourios, only that an icon appeared on the island of Rhodes around 1500 A.D. This icon depicted scenes of his life and martyrdom and also is a miraculous icon. St. Phanourios is the patron saint of lost things. There is a tradition of baking a “Phanouropita” (St. Phanourios cake) when one has lost something or found it. It is brought to the church and blessed and prayers are offered for the family who brought it.

Sunday, August 29 - Beheading of St. John the Baptist St. John the Baptist, according to the Gospel accounts, was beheaded in prison. St. John had spoken out against Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. This man had a lawful wife, the daughter of Arethas, the King of Arabia. Without any cause, and against every commandment of the Law, he put her away and took to himself Herodias, the wife of his deceased brother Philip, to whom Herodias had borne a daughter, Salome. He would not desist from this unlawful union even when John, the preacher of repentance, the bold and austere accuser of the lawless, censured him and told him, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife" (Mark 6: 18). Thus Herod, besides his other unholy acts, added yet this, that he apprehended John and shut him in prison; and perhaps he would have killed him straightway, had he not feared the people, who had extreme reverence for John. When Salome, Herodias' daughter, had danced in order to please him and those who were supping with him, he promised her -- with an oath more foolish than any foolishness -- that he would give her anything she asked, even unto the half of his kingdom. And she, consulting with her mother, straightway asked for the head of John the Baptist in a charger. Hence this transgressor of the Law, preferring his lawless oath above the precepts of the Law, fulfilled this godless promise and filled his loathsome banquet with the blood of the Prophet. So it was that that all-venerable head, revered by the Angels, was given as a prize for an abominable dance, and became the plaything of the dissolute daughter of a debauched mother. As for the body of the divine Baptist, it was taken up by his disciples and placed in a tomb (Mark 6:21 - 29). We commemorate this event each year on August 29, which is also a strict fast day. As St. John the Baptist is the patron saint of our parish, we honor this feast day, and we pray for his intercessions over each of us and our parish.



Wednesday, September 1 - New Ecclesiastical Year/Day of the Environment - His All Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, declared many years ago that September 1, the day on which we begin the New Ecclesiastical (Church) Year, also be set aside to pray for our environment. Not only do we thank God for His blessings of the past church year, and ask for Him to bless us in the new year, but we also offer prayers for our environment, which are needed more and more in the world where our environment is threatened as time passes.

Χρόνια Πολλά! Happy Nameday!

EFKLEOS, ELESΑ, MARKELOS, SOLOMONI - AUGUST 1

JUSTINIANOS - AUGUST 2

OLIMPIOS, SALOMI - AUGUST 3

EKSAKOUSTODIANOS, MAXIMILIAN, VIOLETA - AUGUST 4

NONA - AUGUST 5

EVMORFIA, MORFOULA, SOTIRIS - AUGUST 6

ASTERIOS, ASTERO, ASTRINI, NIKANOR - AUGUST 7

MYRON, TRIANTAFILIA, TRIANTAFILIOS - AUGUST 8

IPPOLYTOS, IRO, IRON, LAURA, LAVRENTIOS - AUGUST 10

EFPLOUS - AUGUST 11

PHOTIS - AUGUST 12

PANAGIOTIS, DESPOINA, ELONA, GETHIMANI, HELIOTALAKTI,

KATHOLIKI, KRISTALO, MARIETA, MARINIKI, MARY, MARIA, MARIOS, MARCY, PRESVEIA, THEOTOKIS - AUGUST 15

ALKIVIADIS, APOSTOLOS, DIOMIDIS, GERASIMOS, SARANTIS, SERAPHIM, STAMATIA, STAMATIS - AUGUST 16

LEFKOTHEA, MIRON, STRATON - AUGUST 17

ARSENIOS, FLOROS, LAVROS - AUGUST 18

ILIODOROS, SAMUEL, THEOHARIS - AUGUST 20

AGATHONIKOS, THEOPREPIOS - AUGUST 22

EIRINAIOS, MALAMATI, POTHEINOS - AUGUST 23

AITOLIA, EFTIHIS - AUGUST 24

BARTHOLOMEOS, TITOS - AUGUST 25

ADRIANI, ADRIANOS, NATALIA - AUGUST 26

ARCADIA, ARCADIOS, FANOURIOS, LIBERIOS, OSIOS - AUGUST 27

DAMON - AUGUST 28

ARKADIOS - AUGUST 29

ALEXANDER, EVLALIOS, FILAKAS - AUGUST 30

St. John the Baptist Community News

Community News

Welcome Back Event Sunday, August 15—There's a lot for our community to celebrate on August 15. We will celebrate together the feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos and celebrate our return of all our ministries, including Sunday School. We will mark these new beginnings with a luncheon to follow after Divine Liturgy in the hall.

Meeting of Ministry Heads—There will be a meeting of our ministry heads on Wednesday, August 18, from 6:30-9:00 p.m. to discuss the calendar and reinvigorating our ministries after 18 months of the pandemic. The meeting will be held in person in the Kourmolis Center. Please make sure at least one person from each ministry is present, even if the ministry head cannot participate. Each ministry may bring as many participants as wish to come.

New Pastoral Assistant Coming in September—The Parish Council has decided to hire James Haritos to fill the pastoral assistant position being vacated by Charlie Hambos. James will begin his ministry with us on September 1. A bio on James will appear in the September issue of *The Messenger*. *He visited our church at the end of May and knows many of our GOYAnS from summer camp 2019.*

Prayer for School Students - Sunday, August 8—All school students and teachers (high school and below) are invited to participate in a special prayer that will be held at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on August 8, prior to the beginning of the public school year. Fr. Stavros will offer a special prayer for all of our students and teachers as they begin the new school year.

Prayer for College Students - Sunday, August 15—All college students and professors are invited to celebrate the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, August 15 with us. At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, Fr. Stavros will offer a prayer for all college students as they begin a new school year.

GOYA Meeting - Sunday, August 15—Our first GOYA meeting of the new school year will be held on Sunday, August 15 from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner will be provided. One parent of each GOYAn is asked to attend the meeting. Also, there will be a parents' meeting, while the GOYAnS meet with Fr. Stavros, to go over procedures for the year, review the yearly calendar, fill out emergency forms and arrange for parents to sign up to do a meal for one of the meetings.

GOYA Lock-in - Saturday, August 21—Our GOYA will have an end of summer lock-in on Saturday, August 21, beginning at 4:00 p.m. and ending after Divine Liturgy on Sunday, August 22.

GOYA Dodgeball Tournament-Saturday, August 28 in Tarpon Springs—Stay tuned for details.

Mandatory Altar Boy Meeting & Training Sunday, August 22

All altar boys are requested to attend a meeting on Sunday, August 22, following the Divine Liturgy. We will go over procedures on how the altar boys serve, updating and making a few small changes. This meeting is important for new altar boys but also older ones, as we seek to continue to improve our service. The meeting will last approximately 1 hour. Each boy is asked to have at least one parent present. New Schedule to take effect on August 22. As of publication time, the new altar boy schedule is still being finalized. All altar boys will receive a copy of the new schedule prior to August 22.

12 Disciples Program—In August 2020, we started a program called "The 12 Disciples." There are twelve pages of names that comprise all the members of our parish. Father Stavros prays for all twelve pages of names at Paraklesis. The idea for this program is for each "disciple" to take one page of names and pray for that group of people every day. For every twelve "disciples" who sign up, every page of people will be prayed for. We currently have 44 "disciples" meaning that each person in this community is being prayed for by at least five people every day. If you'd like to join this program and receive a page of people to pray for, please contact Matthew Balasis (mathewbalasis@verizon.net).

College Student Get together—We will have one final get together for college students this summer on Wednesday, August 4, at 6:30 p.m. All college students are invited to attend. A free dinner will be provided. Please RSVP to Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com.

College student addresses—If you have college students or are a college student, please send your school address, phone number and email to the church office by the end of August.

Adopt a college student—We started an adopt a college student program two year ago. We will be contacting all those who had college students they "adopted" last year and making sure you want to continue, as well as reorganizing which students are still in college, who is new to college, who has graduated college, etc. If you would like to participate and adopt a college student, please send your name to Father Stavros and Alex by August 15. If you were part of this program last year, you don't have to contact us, we will be contacting you. Only people who are new to the program need to contact us.

Parish Registry

Baptism-George Demetrios Halkias, son of Demetrios and Camille Halkias, was baptized on Sunday, May 30. Athanasios Halkias was the Godfather. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism-Charles Richard (Efstratios) Bedan, son of Matt and Christi Bedan, was baptized on Sunday, May 30. Zoe Bassos was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism-Mila Helena Koumi, daughter of Andrew Koumi and Anja Maucen, was baptized on Saturday, June 19. Stephanie Ewert was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Chrismation-Patti (Mary) Estelle was Chrismated on Sunday, June 20. David Stefanescu was the sponsor. Congratulations!

Wedding-Pablo Francisco Ferreira da Costa and Nikki Vasiliki Triantafilou were married on Saturday, May 22. Dimitra Triantafilou was the sponsor. Congratulations!

Wedding-Terry Fields and Kathleen Costianes were married on Saturday, June 5. Nina Pazos was the sponsor. Congratulations!

Wedding-Daniel Jeffrey LeMay and Jazmyn Talor Singh were married on Sunday, June 13. Father Stavros presided of the funeral which was held at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Tarpon Springs. Alex Condorteanu was the sponsor. Congratulations!

Wedding-Brandon Edmonson and Laura Paloumpis were married on Saturday, June 19. Andreas Paloumpis was the Koumbaro. Congratulations!

Funeral-Demetrios (Jimmy) Fotopoulos passed away on Thursday, June 10. The funeral was held on Monday, June 14. May his memory be eternal!

Funeral-John Krinos passed away on Friday, July 2. The funeral was held on Tuesday, July 6. May his memory be eternal!

Condolences to Stephan Athan, whose wife DeeAnn passed away on May 23. May her memory be eternal!

Condolences to the Fotopoulos family on the passing of George Alex Fotopoulos, on May 29. May his memory be eternal!

Men's Group—The Men's Group will meet on Sunday, August 29, at 5:00 p.m. We will walk to a nearby restaurant and have dinner and then come back to church for a discussion, concluding by 7:30 p.m. All men of the community are welcome to participate.

Women's Bible Study will begin again on Tuesday, September 7.

Monday Night Bible Study will resume in September. Stay tuned for details.

Tuesday Night Book Study will resume in October. We likely will be continuing with Nikolaos of Mesogaia and Lavrentiki's books. If you are interested in joining the next Book Study, please contact Alex.

Youth Worker Registration Continues in August — Attention all youth workers and ministry leaders. July begins the registration period for fall volunteers who wish to work with a children's ministry or participate in certain leadership positions. Many of you already complied with the new GOA guidelines this past fall and will only have to complete online training and reregister. Others will need to register, undergo a background check and complete the online training. The Youth Protection Committee will e-mail all existing youth workers of their current status and requirements, including the registration form. Within a week or so afterwards, you will receive emails from Praesidium (aka: Armatus Learn to Protect) with links to complete the requirements. Please do so within ten days or the links expire..

Junior Olympics 2021 Highlights

Junior Olympics were held June 11-12 with nearly 160 GOYAns participating from different churches. A special thank you to Michael & Bessie Palios for organizing this year's Junior Olympics and a special thank you to everyone who helped make the return of this even smooth, safe, and fun!



St. Stephen's Summer Camp Highlights

St. John sent 35 campers and 10 staff to St. Stephen's Summer Camp this year. Thank you to everyone for making this a safe, fun, and edifying camp experience!



St. Stephen's Summer Camp Testimonials

I learned so much at camp this year and had so much fun meeting new people. There were many fun, engaging, and educational activities throughout the week. My favorites were the ropes course and conversations during many different times of the day. At the ropes course we did many different challenges such as trust walks while blindfolded which allowed us to learn important lessons while having fun with the people in our cabin. Towards the end of the week we had the opportunity to participate in confession with the priest we would feel most comfortable with; this is something we would not have had a choice over outside of camp. I am so glad that I had the opportunity to go to camp this year. It was an incredible experience that I will never forget.

-Abby Moran (10th grade)

This year was my third year at St. Stephen's camp. With the theme of "All In" this year, we spent the week learning what it means to be "All In" in many aspects of life. I feel like I personally realized how important it truly is to be All In in my faith. Being at camp and disconnecting from the rest of the world is such a fulfilling experience you can get nowhere other than at camp. This experience and having so much time spent with God has allowed me to grow in a way you only can at camp. I've made so many genuine friendships with amazing people who have helped me to discover myself and grow in a way I didn't even know was possible. Fr. Stavros, Charlie, my counselors, and all of the St. Euphemia girls all helped me so much and I know that my camp family will always be there for me no matter what. Being a camper at St. Stephens has been a wonderful experience I wouldn't trade for the world.

-Madeline Moran (12th grade)

This was my first year at St. Stephen's Summer Camp. The camp was one of the most fun things I've ever done. The best part was swimming in the lake. I also liked the Ropes Course. There were many challenging and fun activities on the Ropes Course. The rope swing was the BEST!

-Nathan Moran (7th grade)

My name is Emily and this was my first time going to St. Stephen's camp. As we were driving into camp, I couldn't help but think that I would be a little home sick. As it turns out getting homesick was the last thing on my mind. I had a great camp experience. Being in St. Katherine's cabin allowed me to make a ton of new friends and bond more with the friends I already knew. I loved everything about camp. Some of my favorite activities were the encouragement walk, the sing along and hang time with Charlie. I also looked forward to alone time every day, it was peaceful and calming. It was easy to pray without distractions and I felt closer to God. I learned more about our faith, teamwork, trust, and friendship. Not having my phone or electronics for a week was great. It was so nice not to feel the need to check my phone notifications and social media every minute. My friends and I made so many new memories, have a ton of inside jokes, and made a lot of bracelets (I cannot see my wrist because of how many I have on). Thank you Father Stavros, Charlie, the St. Katherine cabin's councilors and the entire week 2 staff for making our camp experience an amazing one! I am ALL IN for next year!!

-Emily Nicklow (9th grade)

I am a rising 8th grader and this was my first year going to the St. Stephen's camp. Week 2 of camp was great and I had an amazing time! I was a little nervous about going to camp especially on drop off day, but with the encouragement of my Tampa friends and after seeing Father Stavros and Charlie, I felt right at home! It was also great to meet and make new friends from other places. My councilors, Artemis and Lily, welcomed me with excitement and helped all of us get settled in St. Helen's cabin. I loved everything about camp especially the sing-alongs and the dance. The view of the lake was really pretty and the church looks so pretty across the lake. I learned more about my faith, trusting your friends and I felt closer to God. It was perfect and I can't wait until next year!

-Maria Nicklow (8th grade)



August 2021 Sunday School Update

**WELCOME
BACK**



OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL IS EXPANDING WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF TEACHERS AND CLASSES!

We have 25 staff members and have added a class to separate the Pre-K3 students from the Pre-K4 students. WE PRAY THAT ALL OF YOU WILL RETURN AFTER THE CRAZIEST YEAR EVER. WE HAVE FAITH THAT IF WE BUILD IT, YOU WILL COME. All of the 25 teachers are looking forward to serving the children of St. John's for the 2021-2022 school year. Our first day of Sunday School is August 15. Please make sure to register your children online. You should of received an e-mail to do so by now. If not, please let us know. We need this information for our records.

WE ARE PROUD TO ANNOUNCE OUR OUTSTANDING STAFF FOR THE 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR. THEY ARE:

Director of Sunday School: Vickie Peckham

Music/Special Programs: Maria Xenick

Toddler 2's Program (Must be 2 years old by Sept. 1st): Jenny Paloumpis

Pre-K 3 (Must be 3 years old by Sept. 1st): Alexis Scarfogliero –Teacher and Zackie Ameres - Assistant

Pre-K 4 (Must be 4 years old by Sept. 1st): Denise Panos - Teacher and Rachel Zaharis - Assistant

Kindergarten: - Debbie Nicklow - Teacher and Donna Trakas - Assistant

Grade 1: Jenivieve Elly- Teacher and Maraquet Edquid - Assistant

Grade 2: Georgia Kane - Vivian Samuel - Co Teachers and Nicole Mantzanas - Assistant

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

Grade 4: Debbie Ferekides

Grade 5: Vickie Peckham

Grade 6: Sarah Sengsouvanha

Grade 7 and 8: Betty Katherine Katsamakias - Teacher and Marina Choundas/Stephanie Moran - Assistants

High School:

Girls: MaryAnn Konstas - Teacher

Boys: Alex Limberatos - Teacher

Oratorical Director: Peggy Bradshaw

Prospora: Melissa Krinos

The teachers will meet with Father Stavros for a Sunday School Teachers' Retreat on Sat. Aug. 14. This is a wonderful way to start the new Sunday School year. Father Stavros is such an inspiration to all of us and we look forward to our retreats with him every year.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO CHARLIE HAMBOS for all he has done for our Sunday School throughout the years. To describe all that he has done would take a full page in this messenger. He is loved by all of our families at St. John's and he will truly be missed. We wish him the best of luck in Orlando.

More information will be provided about the first day of Sunday School in the bulletin and through our weekly e-mails to parents. Parents, if you don't get these weekly e-mails please let us know. Feel free to contact Vickie Peckham at vickiepeckham@gmail.com or 813-758-3102 with any questions, suggestions, or comments regarding St. John's Sunday School Program.

A Prayer from Parents for their Children as they begin a new school year

Dear Lord,

Thank you for the gift of a new school year. Thank you for our school community and the great education our kids enjoy. With gratitude I pray for the following:

CONFIDENCE. Help my children see themselves through your eyes and draw strength from their confidence in you. *“God is within her, she will not fall.” Psalm 46:5*

KINDNESS. Enable my children to be a blessing and a light to those they encounter. *“So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.” 1 Thessalonians 5:11*

WISDOM. Open my children’s hearts and minds to your ways, and enlighten them with insight into your will. *“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.” James 1:5*

SELF-CONTROL. Give my children the discipline to work hard, control negative impulses, and grow in the virtues that draw them to you. *“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” Hebrews 12:11*

STRONG RELATIONSHIPS. Surround my children with positive influences and godly friends who help them grow in your image and become the best version of themselves. *“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’” 1 Corinthians 15:33*

COURAGE. Instill in my children the courage to be true to themselves and faithful to you, even if it means standing alone. *“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” Deuteronomy 31:8*

FAITH. Fix my children’s eyes on the big picture and keep their minds in awe of your ability to create, control, and sustain the universe. *“The men were amazed and asked, ‘What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him.’” Matthew 8:27*

PEACE. Calm my children’s hearts when they feel stressed, worried, or lost. Remind them you are the God of peace, not confusion. Make your presence known as you carry them through trials and challenges. *“I am leaving you with a gift; peace of mind and of heart. And the peace I give you is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.” John 14:27*

CLARITY. Help my children hear your voice and see you at work in their lives. Make it clear what you want them to do. *“For God speaks again and again, though people do not recognize it.” Job 33:14*

FORTITUDE. Give my children strength and grit when they get tested, and help them recognize any escapes that you provide. *“And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” 1 Corinthians 10:13*

PROTECTION. Armor my children physically, mentally, and spiritually. Surround them with angels to guard them and guide them. Cultivate sharp instincts in each of them that allow them to be gentle yet smart. *“Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves.” Matthew 10:16*

HOPE. Equip my children to bounce back quickly from daily disappointments. Keep them anchored in the hope of heaven, the joy of Jesus, and the security of your promises. *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11*

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Community Outreach

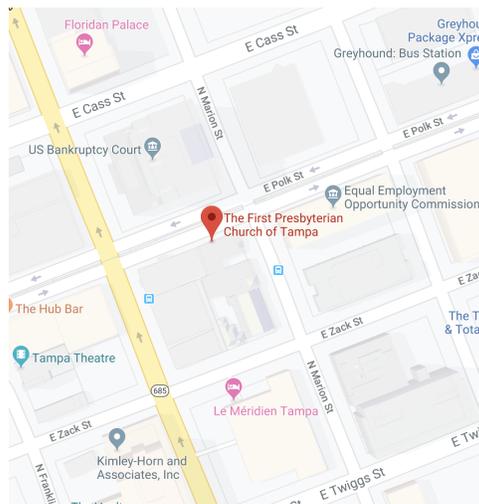
Saturday, August 21

We Want You to Serve with Us!

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.



Scan with your
Smartphone to
Sign-Up Today

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. Please contact our new volunteer, Sheila Vukmer, for any questions (412-719-1005).

10 Things I've Learned From Charlie Hambos

By Alex Limberatos

Well, August is here and we begin the bitter-sweetness of Charlie's transition from our family here in Tampa to his new flock in Orlando. The sweetness of this goodbye is seeing the new experiences that await Charlie on the horizon that will undoubtedly transform him. What is bitter about the goodbye is no longer having immediately near us our affable confidant and servant of God who has poured out his heart to us all. But with loss comes growth, and not only will Charlie grow in his new environment and new responsibilities, but we too can grow as we reflect on what he has taught us all this time in his service to us.

Charlie has left shoes—rather boots—for us that are hard to fill. They are hard to fill because they are uniquely fit to him, but nonetheless we will learn to grow in them. What I think is important as I reflect on my time working with Charlie is not so much the responsibilities and accomplishments that are ascribed to his name, but the character he exemplifies that can teach us how to improve in our personal and Christian lives. I invite you to consider one of Charlie's maxims or personality qualities that we can hang our hat on, to take a "page out of his book" for our growth and edification.

With that, I'd like to share my "Ten Things I've Learned From Charlie Hambos":

1) Remember to Pause

We've all seen that look Charlie has when he's juggling a few tasks or concerns at a time, but even in his logistical acrobatics he has stopped and given his full attention in pastoral emergencies. My first time meeting Charlie was while moving into the dorms at seminary; he was among the many students helping move 1st years into their rooms. Charlie was racing from the newcoming cars to the dorms with peoples suitcases and boxes. My parents and I had run into Charlie and stopped him to ask a question. I can't remember what exactly was troubling us, but I can tell you that Charlie stopped from his busy work to listen to us, to make us feel welcome, and make my transition into Hellenic College / Holy Cross peaceful. I had no idea who he was at the time, but the immediate sense I got from him when he paused to speak to us was his genuine spirit of pastoral presence and empathy. We all know how busy Charlie is, and I believe each of us has experienced how he has come to a full stop to address a need or concern we have with his undivided attention.

2) Slow Down

When we feel rushed, when we feel nervous, or when we feel eager, sometimes we rush and go full-force thinking this is what is best. When weeks are particularly busy, sometimes I might skim quickly in proof-reading the bulletin instead of reassuring myself I have time, or rush through a hymn when I feel nervous about switching modes. I've come to appreciate Charlie's "zen-like" demeanor, which I believe comes from a place of being present and attentive versus feeling reactive or rushed.

3) Laugh a Little

Charlie brings a lot of levity to the office. There are days we are stressed out and/or exhausted, but Charlie masterfully has been able to take something tiring or frustrating and give us a means to laugh. Some of the greatest laughs we've shared in the office is watching

him confound a few of the many scam calls we get into the office. Charlie's also taught me to not take myself too seriously. I know there's been mistakes I've made at the chant stand and in the office where I'm tempted to grimace or be hard on myself. And with a witty remark and a goofy face Charlie has reminded me not to take things too seriously, but to navigate those mistakes with grace and laughter.



4) Try Something New For Yourself

After a long hard day, many of us are inclined to wind down by going home and vegging out with our own personal comforts and distractions. Once a week, Charlie goes out sailing. Not only is there the pressure of performing your task on the boat to see to it that the crew is safe and the boat is following its course, but these outings are races against other sailboats and not necessarily recreational voyages out into the bay. I admire Charlie's hobby not only for it being a hobby that required stepping out of one's own comforts and trying something new, but that it is a committed hobby he has taken up for himself in order to unwind, despite how tiring I imagine racing a sailboat might be.

5) Get Curious

Something we all know very well about Charlie is how he is a jack-of-all-trades, our unlicensed handyman who we call in an emergency. I was originally going to write this header as "Learn Something New" but as I reflected on where Charlie's skills come from I thought it more appropriate to underline his curiosity. Curiosity is what helps us not take things for face value, to develop a greater interest and appreciation for a topic or a person. In Chaplaincy, I was taught that curiosity was the greatest measure of empathy, but now I have seen it's also a great measurement of aptitude. Charlie's ability to fix anything that break on property at the drop of a hat has come from his own personal research and time spent with others who know their trade. What I mean to say here is that Charlie not only gets curious and masters that which he knows he does not know, but I've also seen him get curious into the lives of others which helps foster the pastoral care he provides others.

6) You Can Always Say Something Different

I remember a particularly difficult encounter I had as a chaplain that didn't go so well. I had given a reflection and a suggestion with the best intention to a patient, but the individual had received it in the wrong way. I confided in Charlie the encounter who imparted upon me advice I won't forget, "even when you're

Continued...

right, there's a better way of saying what you have to say." Pastoral care is an art with so many nuances, not an exact science that we can just pick up from a text book. What I took from Charlie's advice is that honesty and truth ought to be coupled with tact and patience. Even when we feel we have said something difficult in the gentlest of way, we should seek new ways of how we can impart loving honesty so that it can be received better. Put simply, after any difficult conversation, it is on our part to wonder, "how could I have said it better?"

7) Be Generous & Hospitable

Where to begin? There's a lot of need in our Tampa area that I have seen Charlie not only help through his treasure, but through his time as well. Those who I've seen stop at our office in times of distress I've seen Charlie pause for—as mentioned before—and give that which is most precious to any of us: time and attention. He's pulled over to help those having car troubles, he's visited strangers in the hospital, and he's bought and brewed coffee and shared in fellowship with those who needed some kinship and caffeine. Philoxenia is a word we Greeks take much pride in, and like Charlie we should be eager to seek new ways we can foster such hospitality and love for the stranger.

8) Don't Forget To Ask

When I moved down to Florida, I was new to ministry all together coming fresh out of seminary. I was tempted to reinvent the wheel and handle my hurdles on my own for quite some time. Charlie often checked in to see how my transition was going, and I gained a lot of insight and support from him as I endeavored with new projects and met new challenges. But not forgetting to ask is a two-way street. We need to remember to ask for help instead of take all things onto our own shoulders, and we also ought to ask others in what ways we can help when we encounter people who might not think or feel they have to ask for help.

9) Give It Your All & Lean on God

We all know well that Charlie has an incredible work ethic. Instead of highlighting when he has given it his all, I'd like to point out how he has made it through long and hard days with little respite. My thoughts turn towards Jesus talking to His Disciples after they see Him talking to the Samaritan Woman (John 4:27). Sometimes we see

Charlie and we feel like the Disciples telling him to eat something. When I see Charlie giving it his all, I see him being sustained by doing God's work, by his sense of purpose in serving our Lord and His Church (John 4:34). The days I cannot fathom how Charlie wakes up to meet the next day refreshed, I am reminded to lean on God to be sustained and to let my purpose in serving Him sustain and nourish me throughout each day.

10) Serve Christ

Lastly and most importantly, Charlie has shown unique and awesome ways of serving Our Lord Jesus Christ. The most incredible ways I've seen him do this is through the Holy Thursday/Friday Vigil at the foot of the Cross. This is an awesome tradition Charlie instituted after boldly concluding, "Christ shouldn't be alone on the Cross." What is awesome about this to me is how Charlie looked at something we all see on Holy Thursday—our Lord nailed to the Cross—and saw and felt something different, and came up with a solution to this pang of leaving Jesus on the Cross alone. Out of this insight/feeling, a beautiful tradition emerged which I fervently hope we all preserve even after Charlie leaves...one that I hope Charlie will start at the new community (and any other community) he serves.

Above all these, what I have learned from Charlie is to see things with a fresh set of eyes, with a vision that goes past our own exhaustion, an insight that takes nothing for face value, to cultivate a perspective that is curious and creative all at once. This above all else, is the lesson I'm most grateful for from Charlie.



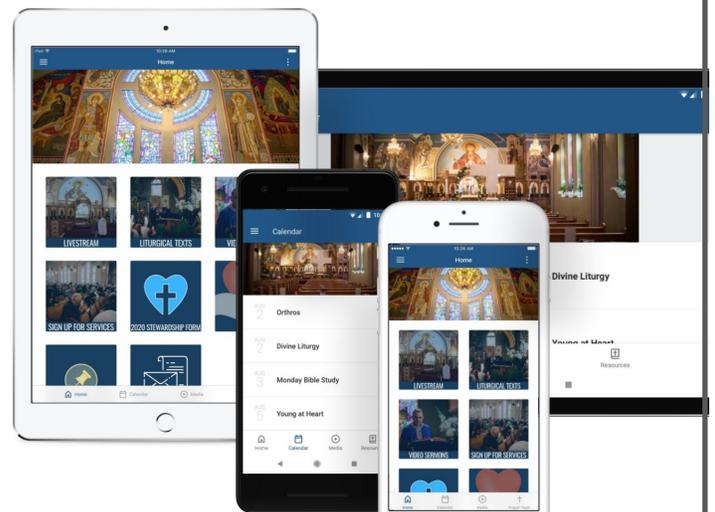
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Fifty-Two Verses in Fifty-Two Weeks: The Bible Project

By Fr. Stavros

Most of us don't spend enough time in the Bible. Sadly, some of us don't spend any time. Each week since January 2019, we provide in *The Messenger* and then repeated weekly in the bulletin, a verse or two. I choose verses that are meaningful to me, or well known or ones that have meaning in contemporary times, You are welcome to submit verses via email to me as well, as many of you have. 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, read it, memorize it and contemplate the verse each week. 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 August. 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. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you through your reflection on Scripture.

August 1-7

Restore us to Thyself, O Lord, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old.

Lamentations 5:21

The theme for August in our parish is ALL IN and coming back, getting back to where we were before the Pandemic. Shutting down the church was not easy to swallow but it was easy to do. We just shut everything down. The pace at which we have returned and restored has brought discussion and debate at every step. Now that we are fully open, it is time to be renewed and restored to what we were. Our ministries are going back to fully operational. The church is fully open, the choir and the altar boys are back. It is time for each of us to renew and restore ourselves fully into the life of the church. There were people before the pandemic whose involvement in the church was sporadic. And the pandemic didn't change much for them. However, there were many people who were faithful in their involvement in worship and ministry and the pandemic did

change that. It is time for those who have curtailed involvement to come back, and it is time for those who were on the fringes to become ALL IN. People talk about a "new normal" and I believe it is time for a new normal, a congregation that is fully ALL IN on faith, salvation, and the mission of the church and their personal involvement in it.

August 8-14

They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:31

Many of us were finally able to get away this summer and take a break after a long two years. A vacation and a change of scene is very restorative. Prayer and worship offer a change of scene, because they intentionally slow life down. Prayer can slow down life at any moment for any amount of time. Worship slows down life at specific moments in time for a more significant amount of time. Most of us are forced by circumstance to live our lives at warp speed. This leaves us tired, stressed and chaotic. Prayer and worship provide rest, lessen our stress and bring order into our chaotic thoughts and lives. Prayer and worship help us to continue to run and not be weary. They allow us to soar above the stress, above the fray, like an eagle soars above the ground. It is up to us to come to the Lord in order to find renewed strength.

August 15-21

The Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her."

Luke 10: 41-42

These verses are read on all the feasts of the Virgin Mary, including her Dormition on August 15. Many people misinterpret this verse as being demeaning to those who work. Running around like Martha is a part of every life. Can anyone really afford to be like Mary, and sit at the foot of Jesus all day listening to His teaching? The best portion in life is the spiritual portion, which we partake of when we center our lives around God, rather than trying to fit God around our lives. We shouldn't be anxious and troubled about many things on Sunday mornings, as an example. We should eagerly come to the needful thing, the Divine Liturgy and Holy Communion. In our busy lives, we shouldn't forget the needful things of prayer, reading Scripture, generosity, fellowship and fast-

Continued...

Fifty-Two Verses in Fifty-Two Weeks: The Bible Project continued...

ing. It will always be a challenge to be a “Mary” in a “Martha” world, to center our lives around Christ when the world seems to be calling us to do anything but that. In giving out our portions of time, let us not forget to give the first portion to the Lord. In seeking our share of portions of income and possessions, let us not forget to receive portions of grace from the Lord.

August 22-28

Then Moses summoned Joshua, and said to him in the sight of all Israel, “Be strong and of good courage; for you shall go with this people into the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them; and you shall put them in possession of it. It is the Lord who goes before you; He will be with you, He will not fail you or forsake you; do not fear or be dismayed.”

Deuteronomy 31: 7-8

August is often an anxious month for people. School starts, young people go away to college, traffic is heavier, and there is the collective angst as the pace of summer ends and pace of fall picks up. Many times we feel like Joshua, headed off into a “strange land.” This year, it probably feels even more strange, as we wait to see what life looks like as we emerge from the Pandemic. The words that Moses said to Joshua apply to us today. We should be strong and of good courage. We need both. God will provide both. We should allow the Lord to walk before us. He should lead, we should give Him the lead, and we should follow. God will not fail us or forsake us. His plans might be a little different than ours, His timing might not match our timing, and this is where faith and trust come in. Let Him lead, keep walking, have no fear or be dismayed, God is with you, God is with us. Take things one step at a time, one day at a time. We do an activity at camp called the “trust walk,” where two people are paired up and one is blindfolded. The one who cannot see must follow the one who can. Most people after the activity is over actually prefer following, because when one is able to let go and follow, it is actually relaxing. Life is like a long version of the

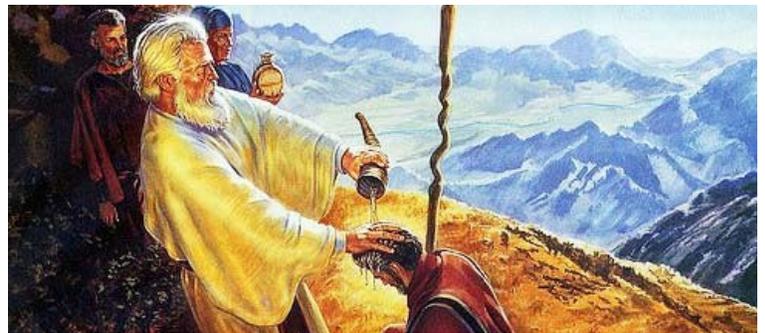
trust walk. God leads, we follow. And where He leads is glorious, even though we can't see it fully as we walk along.

August 29-September 4

For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.

Isaiah 30:15

Might makes right and the loudest voice wins, so says the world. God's world functions differently. In quietness and trust is where our strength comes from. We each need more quiet time with God. We need open hearts to pour out our thoughts to God. We need ears to listen for His quiet, still voice. The voice of God can be found anywhere, but it is muffled by loud music, by cheering in stadiums, by angry politicians and incessant advertising. Most people turn on the noise the minute they get up and it's on until the minute they go to sleep. We need to take time to turn off the noise and just BE with God—whether that is prayer, worship, thought, reflection. We need to recharge not with more noise and activity but with silence and stillness. Many people store up their quietness and stillness on a one or two week break in summer, only to quickly tire after returning to the frantic pace our lives are going. It is imperative for our souls (and our stress levels) that we take time to slow down and be quiet. This is where we will find the inner strength that comes from God.



Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 3200 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 6 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 Alex at alex@stjohntpa.org and ask him to add you. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email Alex 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 prayerteam365@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.

**The Prayer Team has a new dedicated website: PrayerTeam365.com
Check it out! Search by topic and grow in your faith today!**

We're Resuming the Pre-Pandemic Kolyva Protocol

1. Memorial Services MUST be scheduled through the church office at least two weeks in advance of when you want the service.
2. Memorial services for 40 days and one year will be done on the Sunday closest to the appropriate date. All other memorials will be done on the designated Memorial Sunday each month.
3. Please let the office know when you call or email whether you will be providing your own kolyva or whether you wish for the Philoptochos to provide. If a family chooses to make their own Kolyva(es), the family will be responsible for scooping the Kolyva(es) in the kitchen after the Memorial Service to share with the entire community.
4. If the Philoptochos does the kolyva, there is a \$100 charge for this service-checks may be made payable to "St. John Philoptochos."
5. Also, please send the church office all of the names you wish to have commemorated at the memorial service, and how many pews, if any, you would like reserved for your family.



Using Amazon Smile to Donate to St. John - If you use Amazon Smiles, make sure to choose our church so a donation will be given to our parish every time a purchase is made. So far, since August 2017, we have made **\$864.59**. Every bit helps!

Prayer List: Lord Jesus Christ, Physician of our Souls and Bodies, visit and heal your servants: Lillian Thomas; Scotty; Desi Serreira; Ashley Kladakis; Dora Kallas, Kathy & Andrew Bouzinekis; Anastasia; Amanda, Andrew, Colton, Miranda, Charlotte Elizabeth, Nuha, Nabeel, Michael, Amal, John, Elaine, Olga, Virginia Georgiou, Ron Myer, Toula Tsaros, Fr. Pat Legato, Nellie Pringle, Yolanda Webb, Angela Bougas, Tony Ekonomou, Ron, Jason Vickers, Rex Garrison, Tina Chakonas, Ann Demas, Alex Martinez, Adriana Martinez, Aaron Martinez, Christina Noel Kouzes Houck, Evangeline Xeroteris, Nichole Ross, Daniel Ross, Daniella Ross, Ashley Henderson, Natalie Henderson, Chris, Debbie, James, Avery, Lily, Jacob, Jesse, Ann, Rosario, Antonia Caffentzis, Alissa, John, Angela, Joey, Christine Scourtes, Steven, Matthew & Family, Phyllis, John Zelatis, Reagan, Peter Zaharis, Alexandra Ferrarolis, Leon & Despina Botham, Cindy Xenick, Mary Ellen Evdemon, Marie Sofia Panagopoulos, Maria Hursey, Chris Vamvakias, John Myer, Mike Trimis, Robert and Alice Stoccardo, John Alexander, Michael Romero, George Hambos, Dean Kondilis and Family, Bill and Nancy Manikas, Patricia Costello, Anastasia Smyrnakis, Ekaterina & Anna Shushaalykova, Dora Koudouna, Ana Mourer, Debbie Phelps, Mary Voykin, David Voykin, Anne Sakellaris, Denise Badrane, Sia Blankenship, Don Payne, Zhana Temelkova, Stanislava Terzieva, James, Jude and all victims of war, terrorism, crime, natural disaster, and all of whom we are unaware.

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.

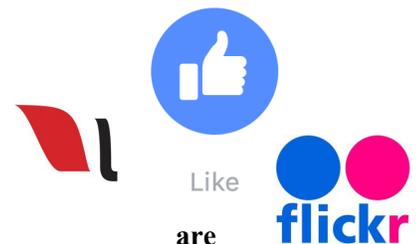
Live Streaming

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: stjohntpa.org,
2. Scroll the mouse over the "Multimedia" tab on the menu bar,
3. Click "View Liturgy,"
4. Then click on the link where it says, "Check out our live stream of the Divine Liturgy here <http://new.livestream.com/accounts/2454446>. **All of the services 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



St. John's Bookstore Reopens

Our bookstore is fully stocked and open for business each Sunday following the Divine Liturgy. Stop in to check out our new merchandise, new pricing, and new look. We gladly accept special orders and can help you find the icon, book, or gift you've been searching for. Interested in occasionally manning the bookstore? See Presvytera Denise for more information.



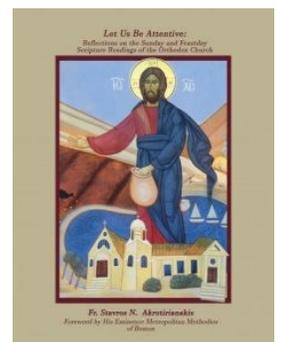
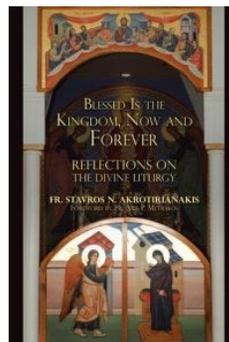
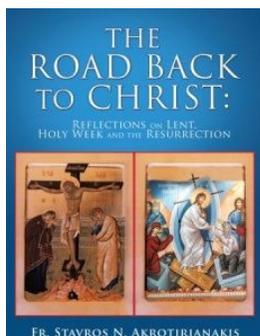
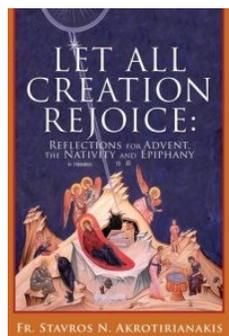
Father Stavros has authored four books that are available both in the bookstore and on-line. They are entitled:

Let All Creation Rejoice: Reflections on Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany

The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection

Blessed is the Kingdom, Now and Forever: Reflections on the Divine Liturgy

Let us Be Attentive: Reflections on the Sunday and Feastday Scripture Readings of the Orthodox Church



St John Greek Orthodox Church's Young-At-Heart Ministry

We welcome people of all ages to join us as a member or as a friend of YAH.

MEETING DATE AND TIME:

We normally meet on the first Thursday of every month unless otherwise noted.

LOCATIONS:

St. John Greek Orthodox Church – Kourmolis Center 2418 W Swann Avenue, Tampa, FL
Local Restaurant - as selected

July 1st Meeting - The Young at Heart ministry of St John's had a meeting July 1 and we played Bingo while we were waiting for the Acropolis Restaurant to deliver lunch. The winners received prizes. We had 11 winners but Christina Scourtes had won the most. We called Mary Nenos at the hospital and we sent her prayers and wished her well. Thank you Fr. John for your blessings, Presbytera Denise for managing the food orders, Diane for the prizes and Alex for your organizational help.

	Apr	Mar	April	May
Phoned	15	27	20	40
Left Messages	8	5	1	3
Visited In-Person	1	4	1	3
Sent Cards	2	1	4	2
Left Text Messages	3	3	1	3

June 4th Meeting- We want to thank our YAH members and friends who attended our June 4th Dinner Social at the AHEPA Epiphany City Chapter 16 House in Tarpon Springs. We were served a choice of baked fish or chicken, salad and dessert. Our visit helped the AHEPA House with their goal to restore and preserve the historic building at 20 W Tarpon Avenue. It is open to the public every Friday from 5 pm. We had over 23 people in attendance.



OUR COMING EVENTS

Aug 5: meeting will be held in the St John Kourmolis Center.

We will be having a discussion on future events.

St John Greek Orthodox Church's Young-At-Heart Ministry (Continued)

For more information,
contact Michael Trimis, President,
813-784-4872 (vm/t)
TrimisM@gmail.com

Mary Nenos, Vice President
813-508-5553
MaryNenos@gmail.com

Happy Birthday to Fr. John and Miss Loretta

We continue to reach out to those who are homebound during the pandemic as part of our Church's Core Values: LOVE, COMMUNITY & SERVICE

Dora Morgan reported the total number of homebound people contacted:

PAST ACTIVITIES

July 1, 2021 – Bingo for prizes and catered by Acropolis Restaurant,

June 4, 2021 - We attended a dinner social at the AHEPA House in Tarpon Springs.

We traveled to Tarpon Springs to St Michael Shrine, lunch and Easter Specialty Food Shopping on April 22nd

April 7, 2021 - We attended **Pre-Sanctified Liturgy** as a group.

April 22, 2021 - We visited Tarpon Springs for our **Easter Specialty Food Shopping** at Greek Boys Inc.

We held **socially distant IN PERSON and Zoom** meeting in the Kourmolis Center

June 4 2021, May 8th 2021, April 3rd 2020, Mar. 6th 2021, Dec. 5th 2020, Nov. 7th 2020

Our discussions were on the **CHURCHES THAT TOUCHED OUR LIVES** were on.

Feb 6th, Jan. 9th, Aug. 5th, Sept. 3rd & Oct 1st.

July 2nd, 2020 – Revisited 60 years ago in the years 1960 to 1969

March 5th, 2020 - Visited St Michael Greek Orthodox Shrine in Tarpon Springs

January 2, 2020 – Lunch at the new Psomi Bakery and Restaurant

December 7, 2019 - Trip to the Show Palace Dinner Theatre featuring Elf the Musical

October 5, 2019 - Ybor City Museum State Park and lunch at the Soup Stone Grill



Be Safe in the Sun!

From St. John's Nursing Ministry & Faith Community Nursing

Summer is a great time to get outdoors and enjoy our beautiful Florida weather, parks and the beaches with our friends and family. It is important when enjoying outside activities that we remain aware of Sun exposure and take precautionary measures as necessary.

Sunlight is the main source of UV radiation, even though UV rays make up only a small portion of the sun's rays. Different types of UV rays reach the ground in different amounts. About 95% of the UV rays from the sun that reach the ground are UVA rays, with the remaining 5% being UVB rays.

Does UV Radiation from the Sun Cause Skin Cancer?

Yes, most skin cancers are a result of exposure to the UV rays in sunlight. Both basal cell and squamous cell cancers (the most common types of skin cancer) tend to be found on sun-exposed parts of the body, and their occurrence is typically related to lifetime sun exposure. The risk of melanoma, a more serious but less common type of skin cancer, is also related to sun exposure, although perhaps not as strongly. Skin cancer has also been linked to exposure to some man-made sources of UV rays.

What other problems can UV Rays Cause?

- UV rays, either from the sun or from artificial sources like tanning beds, can cause sunburn.
- Exposure to UV rays can cause premature aging of the skin and signs of sun damage such as wrinkles, leathery skin, liver spots, actinic keratosis, and solar elastosis.
- UV rays can also cause eye problems. They can cause the cornea (on the front of the eye) to become inflamed or burned. They can also lead to the formation of cataracts (clouding of the lens of the eye) and pterygium (tissue growth on the surface of the eye), both of which can impair vision.
- Exposure to UV rays can also weaken the immune system, so that the body has a harder time fending off infections. This can lead to problems such as reactivation of herpes triggered by exposure to the sun or other sources of UV rays. It can also cause vaccines to be less effective.



What can I do to Prevent Sun Damage?

- It's not possible, or healthy, to avoid sunlight completely, but there are ways to help ensure you're not getting too much sun:
- If you're going to be outside, stay in the shade, especially during midday hours, is one of the best ways to limit your UV exposure from sunlight.
- Protect your skin with clothing that covers your arms and legs.
- Wear a hat to protect your head, face, and neck.
- Wear sunglasses that block UV rays to protect your eyes and the skin around them.
- Use sunscreen to help protect skin that isn't covered with clothing.



Take Advantage of the Parish Assistance Program

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is excited to share that, beginning May 1st, we will be offering a Parish Assistance Program, PAP, with BayCare Behavioral Health. The PAP program will provide our parishioners access to free and confidential counseling services - offering additional support when life's challenges become overwhelming. The PAP utilizes a network of faith-based providers and are sensitive to the values and beliefs of those they serve and provide compassionate care to children, adults, parents, and seniors.

Parishioners can contact BayCare to request up to three free and confidential counseling sessions from a licensed mental health professional. The BayCare helpline, 800-878-5470, is answered 24/7 by mental health professionals. Many BayCare therapists are also offering telephonic and virtual counseling sessions to help parishioners maintain their emotional wellbeing during these trying times.

Through BayCare Behavioral Health, parishes enrolled in this program allow access to services for their parishioners who are suffering from emotional turmoil that results from the challenges of everyday life which span a lifetime. The BayCare network of providers understand the importance of compassionate care and are sensitive to the values and beliefs of those they serve.

You can get more information on the BayCare Behavioral Health Community Services Program on their website at: <https://baycare.org/services/behavioral-health/our-specialties/community-health-services>

Help is available for life issues including:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Family discord
- Marital problems
- Substance abuse issues
- Behavioral issues



BayCare
Behavioral Health

Prayers of Protection from the Coronavirus

www.goarch.org

A Prayer To Be Offered in the Morning

Lord our God, You who are rich in mercy, and with careful wisdom direct our lives, listen to our prayer, receive our repentance for our sins, bring an end to this new infectious disease, this new epidemic, just as you averted the punishment of your people in the time of David the King. You who are the Physician of our souls and bodies, grant restored health to those who have been seized by this illness, raising them from their bed of suffering, so that they might glorify You, O merciful Savior, and preserve in health those who have not been infected. By your grace, Lord, bless, strengthen, and preserve, all those who out of love and sacrifice care for the sick, either in their homes or in the hospitals. Remove all sickness and suffering from your people, and teach us to value life and health as gifts from You. Give us Your peace, O God, and fill our hearts with unflinching faith in Your protection, hope in Your help, and love for You and our neighbor. For Yours it is to have mercy on us and save us, O our God, and to You we ascribe glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever, to the ages of ages. Amen.

A Prayer To Be Offered in the Evening

Lord Jesus Christ our God, You traveled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.” At Your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of this virus, that we may experience Your healing love. Heal those O Lord who are suffering with this pandemic's illness. May they regain their strength and health through medical care. Heal us from our fears, which prevent nations from working together and neighbors from helping one another. Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to a disease that knows no borders. Lord Jesus Christ, healer of all and physician of our souls and bodies, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow. Be with those who have died from the virus. May they be at rest with You in Your eternal peace. Be with the families of those who are sick or have died. As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair. May they know Your peace. Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process. May they know Your protection and peace. Be with the leaders of all nations. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve. Give them the wisdom to choose long-term solutions that will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks. May they know Your peace, as they work together to achieve it on earth. Whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness or only a few, Lord Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare. In place of our anxiety, give us your peace. For You are the Physician of our souls and bodies Christ our God and to You do we offer glory, thanksgiving and worship together with Your eternal Father and Your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Another Prayer, To Be Offered At Any Time

O Holy Father, God of unknown, uncreated depth, You are beyond all description and expectation. You are the Creator of all worlds, physical and metaphysical. As You are only love, in love You created everything that truly is. Through Your Son, everything has form and purpose, and through Your Spirit, everything lives and moves back toward You. O Father, we are troubled by this scourge that is infecting Your people around the world. From the ancient Fall away from You, there are many consequences that we cannot begin to understand. As traces of this pestilence are being studied in labs, we shiver at its demonic malevolence for destruction, especially of the frail and the elderly. Our hearts are open to You, loving Father; we come to You as children, meek and lowly. We beg You to help the doctors who work to find a cure. We beg You to help our leaders to put away childish things, to forget political advantage, and to be good stewards of their people. We beg You to help us to be wise ourselves and to care for human life in the least of those around us. We cry out to You as One Who did not send this plague. We cry out to You as One Who only heals and redeems. You did not send this, but we know You can destroy it. So Father, cease this plague, and turn it back to the abyss from which it came. Heal Your people, the humanity of this earth, cleanse us and strengthen us toward You. We are weak, but You are strong, and in our weakness Your strength is revealed. Help us, we beg You, in the Name of Your Son, the Great Physician, Who, together with You and our Comforter, the Holy Spirit, Are due all glory and honor, to the ages of ages. Amen.

Beware of Emails or Text

Messages Asking for Gift Cards

This is a common and very scary thing that is happening. People who are impersonating as Fr. Stavros have been emailing people and asking them to buy gift cards, scratch off the back to reveal the code, take pictures of the code and email them the pictures. Fr. Stavros would never under any circumstances ask for a gift card via email. If you receive an email like this, please call Fr. Stavros or Alex immediately. Many people these days are falling victim to scams like these. Please double check and even triple check any emails or phone calls that ask for money even if it looks real. Any questions? Please contact the office.

Opt-in on *The 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. We will no longer be mailing *The Messenger* unless you ask us to.

**Have questions?
Just need to talk?
Worried? Sad? Happy?
We are here for you.**

Fr. Stavros
813-394-1038

Fr. John
678-637-4425

Alex
262-370-0586



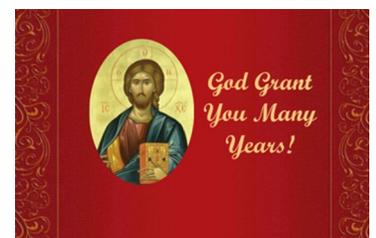
Happy Birthday!

James Apockotos-August 1
Sierra Fulkerson-August 1
Zinnia Letobarone-August 1
Ilianna Matassini-August 1
Zachary Chandler-August 2
Susan Fallieras-August 2
Nicholas Kalojiannis-August 2
Olga Papaconomou-August 2
Vasiliki Gallos-August 3
Evangelos Laliotis-August 3
Christian Perry-August 3
Penelope Calamunci-August 4
Maggie Kavouklis-August 4
Jacqueline Renaud-August 4
Megan Rindone-August 4
Andreas Thompson-August 4
John Gialamas-August 5
Aleks Lakic-August 5
Catherine Eggleston-August 6
Daphne Anderson-August 7
Lucas Elly-August 8

Gabriela Fotopoulos-August 8
Michael Mantzanas-August 8
Presbytera Loretta Karpelenia-August 10
Lindsey Skourellos-August 10
Nikolas Massey-August 11
Scott Olsen-August 11
Jimmy Reader-August 11
Judith Zeban-August 11
Ava Snyder-August 12
George Fallieras-August 13
Laura Paloumpis-August 13
Conner Price-August 13
Yianni Lambrou-August 15
Matthew Peckham-August 15
Nicholas Apostoleres-August 16
Louis Papaefstathiou-August 16
Natasha Stroud-August 16
Jason Williams-August 16
Ekaterini-Petranelis Mangarides-August 17

Michael Meadows-August 17
Dean Naum-August 17
Cathryn Sandborn-August 17
Will Apostolos-August 18
John Kavouklis-August 18
Isabella Kokkas-August 18
Marian Preston-August 19
Demetri Roussos-August 20
Jeannie Spirides-August 20
Elias Tziotis-August 20
Emma Melton-August 21
Dimitrios Papaconomou-August 21
Dante Skourellos-August 21
Angelo Scopelianos-August 22
Richard Voisey-August 22
Demosthenes Mekras-August 23
Abigail Moran-August 23
Caroline Anton-August 24
Christina Stilian-August 24
Martha Kapetan-August 25

Markissa Findlay-August 26
Carmen Robinson-August 26
John Christ-August 27
Olivia Skourellos-August 27
Robbie Gabel-August 28
Thomas Georgas-August 28
Panos Zelatis-August 28
Kathryn MacLaury-August 30
Stephanie Sandborn-August 30
Chase Wernke-August 30
Luke Santana-August 31
Zacharias Sarantos-August 31



Thank You to all of Our Friends!

Barbara Akrotirianakis - Altadena, CA
Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL
Demet & Eleni Anagnostiadis - Bethesda, MD
Nicholas & Doris Andreadakis - Lititz, PA
George & Maria Andros - Birmingham, AL
Nicholas Anton - Dunedin, FL
Gaby & Alicia Atik - Treasure Island, FL
Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL
Richard & Mickie Bass
Katherine Beasley - Vero Beach, FL
Christopher & Jaime Brewer - Tampa, FL
Pete & Carol Caldwell - Ringgold, GA
William Camarinos - Alexandria, VA
William & Kanella Jane Chapman - Ellenton, FL
Nicholas & Sondra Chronis - Mt. Pleasant, SC
Emmanuel Chrysakis - Palm Harbor, FL
Victor & Cynthia Cucuz - Tampa, FL
Fr Stratton & Pres. Denise Dorozenski - Sterling Heights, MI
Eric & Artemis Mellen - Longwood, FL
Eleftheria Garos - Palm Harbor, FL
Peter George - Tampa, FL
Ron & Maria Gregory - St. Petersburg, FL
Gabriel Hurst - Largo, FL
Michael Ibrahim - E. Brunswick, NJ

Judith Jogerst
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI
Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL
Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL
Demetrius & Katherine Klimis - Boardman, OH
John & Cathie Koch - New Port Richey, FL
Tommy Kolouris - Tampa, FL
Sharon Kush - Tallahassee, FL
Evangelos & Helen Liras - Tampa, FL
Fr Michael & Pres Virginia Massouh - Seminole, FL
Kathleen Spanos Mendez - Ponte Verda, FL
Charles Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA
Kay Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA
Basil & Dorothy Nosal - Fredericksburg, VA
John & Deanna Palmer - Greenville, SC
Theodora Pappas Poletis - Nottingham, MD
Luke & Arianna Quinn - Arlington, MA
Nadine Raheb
Pericles & Fotini Stamatiades - Asheville, NC
Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI
Lillian Thomas - Dyer, IN
Wesley & Melisa Thompson - Clearwater, FL
Christopher & Georgette Tsavoussis - Dunedin, FL
William Yotis - La Grange, IL

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.**

On the Lighter Side

If you think you are smarter than the previous generation, 50 years ago the owner's manual of a car showed you how to adjust the valves. Today it warns you not to drink the contents of the battery.

Before coffee: I hate everybody
After coffee: I feel good about hating everybody

Everyone wants to change the world but nobody wants to change the toilet paper roll. Be the change!

Do you know what they call people who hoard books? Smart. ~Lisa Scottoline

Some husbands hold their wife's hand in malls because if they leave her hand, she'll go for shopping. It looks "romantic" but it's actually "economic."



On the Serious Side

"A wise man was asked "What is anger?" He gave a beautiful answer, "It is a punishment you give to yourself, for somebody else's mistakes." Unknown

A monk asked a holy man: how can we perform miracles? The Holy Saint answered:

If you teach a person to read the Bible, you have opened the eyes of the blind.

If you teach a person to help the needy, you have healed the paralyzed.

If you teach a person to go to church, you have healed the crippled.

If you lead someone to repentance, you have raised the dead.

Now go and perform miracles!

Once a man was asked "what do you gain by regularly praying to God?" The man replied "Nothing. . .but let me tell you what I lost: anger, ego, greed, depression, insecurity, and fear of death." Sometimes, the answer to our prayer is not gaining but losing; which ultimately is the gain.



Today you could be talking to someone who is trying their best not to fall apart. So whatever you do today, do it with kindness in your heart.

"God will not give you more than you can handle."

"We do not want you to be uninformed. . .about the troubles we experienced. . .We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. . .But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead." II Corinthians 1: 8-9

Once you carry your own water, you will learn the value of every drop.

4 generation fade:

1. Parents don't make church a high priority for their kids
2. Kids grow up and make it less of a priority for their kids
3. Those kids grow up and make it no priority for their kids
4. Those kids grow up with no concept of God

Priorities today impact generations!

If you are going to "put someone down," put them down on your prayer list.

I don't understand "withholding communion." It's not the prize for the best performance. It isn't a gold star for top marks. It's grace and we're not the ones giving it. "But what if someone unworthy receives it?" Uh, that would be "everybody."

Everyday I say to myself, today I will begin.

~St. Anthony of the Desert



Pretty Good—by Charles Osgood

There once was a pretty good student
Who sat in a pretty good class
And was taught by a pretty good teacher
Who always let pretty good pass.
He wasn't terrific at reading,
He wasn't a whiz-bang at math,
But for him, education was leading
Straight down a pretty good path.
He didn't find school too exciting,
But he wanted to do pretty well,
And he did have some trouble with writing
Since nobody taught him to spell.
When doing arithmetic problems,
Pretty good was regarded as fine.
5+5 needn't always add up to be 10;
A pretty good answer was 9.
The pretty good class that he sat in
Was part of a pretty good school,
And the student was not an exception:
On the contrary, he was the rule.
The pretty good school that he went to
Was there in a pretty good town,
And nobody there seemed to notice
He could not tell a verb from a noun.
The pretty good student in fact was
Part of a pretty good mob.
And the first time he knew what he lacked was
When he looked for a pretty good job.
It was then, when he sought a position,
He discovered that life could be tough,
And he soon had a sneaking suspicion
Pretty good might not be good enough.
The pretty good town in our story
Was part of a pretty good state
Which had pretty good aspirations
And prayed for a pretty good fate.
There once was a pretty good nation
Pretty proud of the greatness it had,
Which learned much too late,
If you want to be great,
Pretty good is, in fact, pretty bad.

Editor's Note: This matches Fr. Stavros' Message about being ALL IN. Pretty good is pretty bad, just like not going ALL IN makes for a mediocre outcome in anything, especially in our journey to salvation.



Insurance and Grace

Anonymous

I was at the grocery store this morning and heard a loud crash and something shattering. Being nosy, I walked towards the sound and saw some people whispering and looking back to the end of the next aisle. When I walked down that aisle, I saw an older lady had hit a shelf and many things had fallen to the ground and broke. She was kneeling on the floor embarrassed, frantically trying to clean up.

I felt so bad for her, and everyone was just standing there staring at her. So I went and knelt beside her and told her not to worry and started helping her pick up the broken pieces. After about a minute, the store manager came and knelt beside us and said, "Leave it, we will clean this up." The lady, totally embarrassed said, "I need to pay for all this first." The manager smiled, helped her to her feet and said, "No ma'am, we have insurance for this, you do not have to pay anything!"

If you have read this far, I would like for you to give me a minute. Wherever you are, close your eyes, and imagine God doing the same for you!

Collecting the pieces of your broken heart from all the blows life has thrown at you. The bill for your faults, sin and folly has already been paid through the precious blood of Christ. God will heal all your wounds. He wants to gently lift you to your feet again, clean up your mess, and pick up all the broken pieces. He wants to heal you! He wants to take care of your soul!

We can have that same insurance and it's called GRACE!

Making a Child go to Church

Recently a mother asked me, "Should I make my son go to church?" I answered, "Yes, definitely." Then I explained: "What do you say when your son decides that he does not want to go to school? What did you say when he was little and did not want to take a bath? How did you react when he was sick and did not want his medicine?"

Every right-thinking parent recognizes the importance of these matters and gives the child no opportunity to decide for himself. Instead, parents explain the importance of going to school, taking a bath, or taking medicine when sick. So, Mom and Dad, take time to explain the importance of going to church; then simply say to your son or daughter: "In our family we all go to church and that includes you!"

"Train up a child in the way he should go." Proverbs 22:6

**Important things to remember when you are married or
in a serious relationship**
Anonymous

Don't ever assume your partner feels loved.

Date nights are a must.
Doesn't matter if you go out, or stay in.

Talking openly about what you want to change in your relationship is important.

Learn each others love language.
We all don't perceive love the same way.

Go to bed mad sometimes.
Don't force a resolution.
Sleeping on it does help.

When you get into a fight, don't just say "I'm sorry". Say what you are sorry for, and how you will react differently next time.

It will get boring sometimes.
Every couple goes through the "boring" stage.
It's normal.
It will fade.
This is the time in your relationship you will have to put the most effort in.

Some days you will have to pull more weight than your partner, and vice versa.

It's important to check in on each other's mental health.

It's okay to go to couples counselling.
It helps.
It doesn't mean you two are ending, or failing.

Talk about money.
Talk about your financial goals.
Let your partner know what you expect from them, and vice versa.

Turn off the phones an hour before bedtime and just talk to each other.

Ask questions like,

"What do you need to see more of from me?"
"How can we understand each other better?"

And most importantly, be kind to each other.

Love each other.

Fight for each other.

Remember, love is never easy, and it's one hell of a ride.

But damn, is it ever beautiful, and worth it.

There's a Hole in My Sidewalk: The Romance of Self-Discovery
By Portia Nelson



Life Chapter 1:
I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I fall in.
I am lost... I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes forever to find a way out.

Life Chapter 2:
I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place.
But, it isn't my fault.
It still takes me a long time to get out.

Life Chapter 3:
I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in. It's a habit.
My eyes are open.
I know where I am.
It is my fault. I get out immediately.

Life Chapter 4:
I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

Life Chapter 5:
I walk down another street.

THINK AGAIN: WHY RELIGION IS GOOD FOR US

By Mark Clark



Religious people live, on average, seven years longer than non-religious people.

“Hold on, what?” you might be saying.

Fair enough. Let’s back up.

In his book *Think Again* organizational psychologist Adam Grant says that we can’t be afraid to be influenced by actual data in forming ideas versus what we thought was the case, or what we feel is the case or what we would rather be the case, in any given scenario.

For example, would we be open to changing our views on something we really believe in if data arose that said our prior conclusions had been wrong? Oftentimes we reject such data for a plethora of reasons, the most powerful of which is that we have become comfortable in our beliefs about things, and contrary data messes with that.

“When it comes to our knowledge and opinions,” Grant says, “we often favor feeling right over being right... we favor the comfort of conviction over the discomfort of doubt.”

This is a scary thought, but is proven over and over again in the realm of psychology, and as a pastor, I have seen it over and over again in ministry – whether that be people who hold hard against a theological conclusion that the Bible is clearly laying out because they have prior ideas, or behaviors that don’t line up, or people who have an interpretation of a passage and can’t stand the thought that maybe that isn’t saying what they thought it was.

We see this right now in our political debates online, whether they be about actual politics or the downstream discussions popular right now about vaccines, COVID orders, church and state debates, etc.

People have their views and they believe and promote data and ‘facts’ that support those views and ignore contrary data. It’s true about all of us.

The lack of humility on one side or the other should be your first clue that maybe the person you are staring at isn’t open to think again or look at an issue from a different angle at all.

You know what they say: to a hammer everything is a nail.

To some people right now every idea, news story, piece of information they receive is only meant to fit into the narrative they have decided is true already, and that’s that. There is no convincing them otherwise. It’s a scary place to be, to be honest.

Jesus warned against people who aren’t so much deceived by others, though of course that is a part of this kind of person’s situation as well most times, but those who are self-deceived.

And therein lies part of the problem: we don’t know what we don’t know.

Thus, I would say humility and open-mindedness to data and ideas is central to us as we find our way through this new world.

WHICH BRINGS US TO MY POINT:

I want to turn this idea of ‘thinking again’ and aim it at an idea so rooted in the post-Christian west that I am sure it will mess with our brain a little. It is the idea that religion is good, indeed, great for society as a whole.

Of course the popular narrative of the western world over the last one hundred years or so, and especially the last 30 or 40 has been that religion is ‘poison’ as the famous atheist Christopher Hitchens used to argue. That religion creates war and atrocity, judgmentalism and racism, intolerance and ignorance, across the populace. Images of people denying science, hating others, doing violence against people, rule the day.

I grew up with this narrative. Not explicitly told me by people of course, but by osmosis. Through my education, reading, movies, television, the news, general conversations with friends.

This is the assumed truth of our western story. Atheism, or at least agnosticism, produces a better, more progressive society. Religion, a stunted or even backward trending society. So much so that in Universities and in the public square today it is just part of the unspoken story, and because it is thus, it also in some ways, goes unchallenged too.

BUT WHAT IF THE DATA SAID OTHERWISE?

What if your anecdotal story of that one religious uncle you know, or that one group on Facebook that time, was all called into question by the facts? Would you be willing to change your mind?

I don’t imagine a short blog post like this will do that, but let’s at least start the conversation. I would like to think you are open to ‘think again’ when it comes to this question, and I think you should, and here’s why.

The data tells us we’ve been wrong all along, and that story of the triumph of secularization is just plain false when we ask the question: how religion impacts and affects the cities, neighborhoods, communities, nations and individuals it exists within.

More pointedly, when the question is: does it have a positive or a negative impact on culture, the overwhelming reality is that it has a positive, not a negative one. In fact, it isn’t even close. The atheists are wrong. And by a long shot.

A STARK CONTRAST (SEE WHAT I DID THERE?)

Rodney Stark is one of the most celebrated and respected sociologists of religion in the world. “He has written over 30 books, and more than 140 articles on subjects as diverse as prejudice, crime, suicide, and city life in ancient

Continued...



Rome, and has twice won the Distinguished Book Award from the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion.”

In one of his books which I read recently he sketched out some fascinating conclusions based on detailed sociological data that are so contrary to popular opinion and the assumed narrative of the post-Christian west that most will greet them with a filter of suspicion, or outright disbelief, but as we said above, that doesn't mean they aren't true – only that we may be victims of our own self-selected confirmation biases, fooled by our own carefully curated news, opinions and information, if not about a number of things in our lives, certainly in regard to the areas Stark explores using America as a microcosm example of the west at large.

So what areas does he explore and what are his conclusions? And what does it mean for us?

HIS CONCLUSIONS

There are a hundred and one things his data concludes which you can read for yourself in more detail, but here are some of the more interesting ones. And again, let's remind ourselves, his conclusions are based on actual research done by an actual sociologist and his colleagues, not what passes today as research – i.e. a google search, and a scroll of your Facebook feed, and that website which has those Youtube videos by that doctor.

In his rigorous and pointed style Stark shows that the academic literature routinely ignores evidence of religion's beneficial social effects. He demonstrates that religious people:

- Are the primary source of secular charitable funds that benefit victims of misfortune whatever their beliefs
- Dominate the ranks of blood donors and other prosocial behaviors
- Are much less likely to commit crimes
- Far more likely to donate their money and time to socially beneficial programs and to be active in civic affairs. (The impact of religious people on volunteering alone is an estimated \$47 billion annually in the United States alone!)
- Enjoy superior mental health – are deemed happier, less neurotic, and far less likely to commit suicide
- Enjoy superior physical health – have an average life expectancy more than seven years longer than that of the irreligious
- Read more than their irreligious friends and neighbors

- Are less likely to believe in the occult, UFO's, Bigfoot, etc.
- More apt to marry, less likely to divorce, and report higher degrees of satisfaction with their spouse.
- Religious husbands are far less likely to abuse their wives or children. This is of course contrary to the story that religions create systems of oppression in the home because of 'male patriarchy'.
- Religious fathers are more likely to be involved in youth-related activities such as coaching sports teams or leading Scout troops, etc.
- Religious couples enjoy their sex lives more, women are more likely to have regular orgasms, and sex happens more often. They are also far less likely to have an affair.
- Religious students perform better on standardized achievement tests, are far less likely to drop out of school, obtain better jobs upon graduation, and are far less likely to be on unemployment (the studies for all of these and especially this one and all surrounding crime stats, etc., factor in races/geographies across the U.S.)
- In 247 studies done between 1944 and 2010: religion has a positive effect on society in regard to crime, deviance and delinquency.
- Crime rates in the US compared to the decidedly less religious countries of Western Europe are glaringly less in many categories, with the exception of homicide rates: Denmark has nearly two-and-a-half times as many burglaries per 100,000 people, and is exceeded by Austria, Switzerland, the U.K., Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands. The same is true for theft, and assault rates.
- Urban stats going from present-day back to the 1920s shows that the higher a city's church membership rate, the lower its burglary, larceny, robbery, assault and homicide rates.

I point all of this out to not only because it plays a fascinating role in forcing us as individuals to constantly be open to re-thinking what we thought was true and why we thought it was so (a much-needed posture of humility is needed in this regard on both sides of the political aisle), but also to challenge the powerful, overarching narrative of our time – that God and religion have no place in society and that the real hope for us is *fill in the blank: education, technology, the arts, science – as if those are antithetical to religion.*

Not only is that a simplistic, reductionist narrative to sell the public, it is blatantly wrong.

The data not only doesn't back it up, it actually draws the opposite picture.

That without religious people and groups, society as a whole, including most importantly, the marginalized, would be far worse off.

We see this reality play out over and over again. Nicholas Kristof, a columnist for the New York Times wrote an article years ago wherein he explored the work of an unknown evangelical Christian doctor who ran a hospital in Angola, where the child mortality rate was the highest in the world. He raised his family in one of the most dangerous places in the world.

Continued...

Kristof writes:

“Most evangelicals are not, of course, following such a harrowing path, and it’s also true that there are plenty of secular doctors doing heroic work... But I must say that a disproportionate share of the aid workers I’ve met in the wildest places over the years, long after anyone sensible had evacuated, have been evangelicals, nuns or priests.”

That of course doesn’t mean that religion is true, that is for another day – but it is to say, importantly, that skeptics need to be careful in their argument against Christianity and religion based on a purely social argument.

They need to tread far more carefully when they want to argue that somehow religion is toxic to a culture. It is not. See even the latest arguments from thinkers like David Berlinski, in his *The Devil’s Delusion*, a secular philosopher /scientist who sees a connection between many of our social ills and atheism, especially in the realm of the question of meaning, and how people absorb suffering.

Sure, ‘this’ or ‘that’ version of religion could be toxic, admittedly, it could lead to racism, or oppressive attitudes toward women, or minorities, etc. That is still true, and something we need to always be fighting, especially given that the central story of Christianity in particular is its central figure, Jesus, dying and serving to raise others up, not being opposed to any, but loving all.

Bad versions and applications of religion are everywhere, and we need to be weary of them.

Stark’s point is not that we should ignore those proclivities, but that we do need to get a far clearer and fuller picture of the positives of religious impact on the west in a cultural moment when the narrative around it is almost exclusively negative.

CONCLUSION

I am not a sociologist, but I am a pastor which means I have a lot of conversations with people who are opposed to Christianity. A lot of them over the years point out how bad the idea of God is for the world.

That story is popular and well-told over and over again so much so that it lives in our consciousness as a fact.



I share this data to simply ask the skeptic to be willing to stop doing what they ask religious people to stop doing on the daily: spreading false-hood.

The idea that religion is bad for society simply isn’t true and it isn’t true in a hundred different ways. Are you willing to adjust your framework of the world and the question of God and the church around data versus what you have heard, or want to be true?



We all have to be willing to doubt our doubts and at least take a second or third look at the question of God as it relates to the experience of individuals, societies, cities, nations, towns, which of course, include your own communities, and be open to the idea that in the end the God hypothesis may prove to be harder to leave behind than we once thought, or, in the spirit of today’s arguments, we may not want to leave it behind at all, because it may be our only way to accomplish socially what we all desire.

You ever wonder why Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., cited the prophets of the Bible in his Letter from Birmingham Jail, versus an atheist manifesto?

Because his larger vision, his dream, could only be accomplished by it being built on a foundation of transcendence.

That is what gave humankind it’s equality. The fact that it was made in the image of God. Not the state, or reasons of the social class, or because it was a more enlightened primate, or whatever other reasons for equality and justice we construct.

His argument, like Wilberforce and so many others before him, was that social good and flourishing was rooted in God. As others have pointed out, it wasn’t that America needed less religion, but better religion.

If we are going to reach the post-Christian west, we need to hold tightly to idea not that individuals alone need to come to know God, but that in knowing him there will be a horizontal impact on the world around it.

A good and flourishing impact that brings shalom even to people who don’t agree with it. Life-giving, not toxic. Serving, not taking. Loving, not judging.

Facts don’t adjust because we feel they should.

We are better to adjust in light of them instead of burying them beneath bias. The truth will set us free, Jesus said. Seems like it is setting others free as well.

Whether they appreciate it or not.

Mark Clark is Senior Pastor of Village Church in Vancouver.

~ August 2021 ~

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Going Away Celebration for Charlie	2** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	3**	4** Paraklesis 10:00 a.m. College student discus- sion 6:30 p.m.	5**	6** Transfiguration Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	7**
8** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Prayer for students	9** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	10**	11** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	12**	13** Paraklesis 10:00 a.m.	14** Sunday School Teacher Seminar Vespers 6:00 p.m.
15 Dormition of the Theotokos Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Prayer for college students Welcome back event First day of Sunday School GOYA 5:00 p.m.	16	17	18** Meeting of Ministry Heads 6:30 p.m.	19	20**	21 GOYA lock-in 4:00 p.m.
22 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Altar Boy Meeting	23	24	25**	26.	27** St. Phanourios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	28 GOYA Dodgeball Tour- nament
29** Beheading of St. John the Baptist Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Men's Group 5:00 pm	30	31	** indicates Fasting Days			

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Saturdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. **Sundays:** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

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

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Youth Protection

Volunteer Needed!

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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.