

# 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*

# September 2022

### 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

**His Grace Bishop Sevastianos of Zela will celebrate the Divine Liturgy with us on Sunday, September 18**

### **Fr. Stavros' Message**

#### **A Greek Festival of Radical Generosity November 4 and 5**

#### **Introductory Facts**

It's been three years since we've had a Greek Festival. A lot has changed in those three years:

- We had a pandemic which did not enable us to have the Festival in either 2020 or 2021.
- We've done well financially, because of your generosity in stewardship, and we haven't needed the festival to pay our operating expenses.
- We had many people who were material to the success of past festivals either pass away, move away, or move on (are no longer part of our parish for whatever reason).
- We are now debt-free—we've paid off the mortgage that the church held for 20 years, paying off the school building, as well as hundreds of thousands of dollars of debts that our old school ran up. We did this without a capital campaign. We did it through your generosity and stewardship. Thank you and congratulations to our community. This is a victory for all of us!
- The cost of food and everything else has gone up markedly since November of 2019, the last time we did this.

#### **Some Challenges**

Because of some of these factors, the church faces the following challenges in trying to put together a Greek Festival:

val:

- With food costs going up, we are going to have to mark up prices or expect lower profit margins or both.
- We don't have the manpower that we once had, which means that many things we did in house will have to be outsourced and purchased.
- These two challenges mean that the church most likely cannot expect to make a profit of \$150K as we did the last time we had the Greek Festival in 2019.
- One of the reasons to have a Greek Festival is as a fundraiser. The truth is that we can't expect to raise the funds we've raised in the past.

#### **For fun and fellowship, instead of for funds**

There are other reasons to have a Greek Festival:

- It brings OUR community of St. John together for a weekend. It's fun to rub elbows with parishioners while working at the Festival. It gives us something to celebrate as a community.
- It gives us a chance to share our faith and culture with the Greater Tampa Bay area.
- It's fun—our kids (and adults) have missed dancing, among other things.

**If the focus is on fun and fellowship, we shouldn't stress out doing this**

If the focus is on fun and fellowship,

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we shouldn't be stressing out for months before the Festival.

- We should put on a Festival that we can handle comfortably, which means scaling down the size and scope of the Festival.
- There will not be vendors this year, which saves us on the manpower that was needed to recruit vendors and will save us on the space that the vendors occupied on our property, especially in the Kourmolis Center.
- We are not going to have a raffle. That is also extra work, and probably isn't in the spirit of what we should be doing anyway. It seems incongruent to be selling tickets for a game of chance in a tough economy.

### Here's what we are going to do

- The Greek Festival will be smaller than in previous years. The set up will mostly be in the front of the church and in the hall. There will not be vendors, so there will be more seating in the hall, and the tent in front will be larger so there will be more seating in the front. The back lot will be used primarily for handicap parking and drive-thru/take-out orders.
- The Greek Festival will be shorter than in previous years. We will be open Friday from 4:00-10:00 p.m. Saturday, we will be open from 11:00 a.m.-midnight. And there will be no Festival on Sunday.
- We will have the many traditional elements of the Greek Festival that our patrons love to see and that we love to provide:
  - Live Music
  - Greek Dance performances by our three dance groups
  - Amazing food and pastries
  - Tours of our church, as well as a Saturday performance by our choir.
  - A LOT of fun
- There will be Divine Liturgy on Friday, November 4 and Saturday, November 5. It is our long-standing tradition to call the Holy Spirit down on US (our parish) and our gifts (the Eucharist) each day we have a



Festival, so that before one item of food is served, that we have already offered the Grand Banquet which is the Divine Liturgy.

### What are we going to do on Sunday, November 6?

- THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WE ARE GOING TO DO FESTIVAL WEEKEND. Rather than have an early Divine Liturgy that is sparsely attended and done quickly so we can all work at the Festival, we are going to celebrate Divine Liturgy at 10:00 a.m., our regular hour for the Divine Liturgy. We will have choir and Sunday school, two things we traditionally don't have on Festival Sunday. At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, we will have a memorial service to commemorate all the people who have passed away



since our last Greek Festival. It was brought up at one of our Festival meetings, the number of people that have passed since our last Greek Festival, and the questions were posed, "when will their names be said? Will they be remembered or forgotten?" Most certainly they will be remembered, in a memorial service on Sunday, November 6.

- The Sunday after the Festival, we traditionally have an appreciation luncheon. We will have this appreciation luncheon right after church on Sunday, November 6. We will:
  - Eat the leftover food
  - Dance—we will keep the

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- bandstand set up from Saturday night
- We'll do our traditional kalamatiano with the entire community around the Kourmolis Center
- We will stop at 3 or so and all help clean up the Kourmolis Center. And by 4:00 p.m., we can all hopefully head for home.

**And here's the second most important thing we are going to do at the Greek Festival. We're going to give all the proceeds to charity.**

During the early months of the pandemic in 2020, the activity of the church was restricted to just worship services. We set a record in 2020 with 245 services. The other thing we did in 2020 was set a record for how much we gave to charitable causes. We broke that in 2021. And we will shatter that in 2022. Because we are going to give over and above our budget for charity and give the festival proceeds to LifePath Hospice and Love, Inc., two local charities. The money that comes into our Festival will be from local citizens. And the money that we profit will go back into the local community.

For those who don't know what these two charities do: LifePath Hospice provides FREE care for people at the end of life. They offer equipment such as hospital beds in homes so people can stay at home as long as possible. They offer nurses, social workers and other people who help facilitate the dying process, both for the person who is dying and for the struggling/grieving family. They offer pain management. They oftentimes enable someone to die at home. They enable people to die with dignity. ALL of us know people who have benefited from hospice care. Both of my parents passed under hospice care.

Love, Inc. provides a hand-up, rather than a hand-out, to people who are on the streets. They help people get jobs, stable housing, and to get back on their feet. Instead of keeping the cycle of homelessness and poverty going, they are trying to break the cycle and help people lead productive and meaningful lives as productive members of our community.



I said this many times in 2020, that the early church had two specific things it did—it preached the word of God (worship) and it served tables for the hungry (philanthropy). There were no Greek Festivals, or basketball tournaments. There was also no church communities plunged in debt like we were.

So, we're going to make a statement this year—we're go-



ing to express our parish according to the basics of Christianity—all of us will worship on Sunday, and all the proceeds of the Festival will go to philanthropic causes.

Because, before we are a community of Greeks, or GOYAns, or dancers, or friends, or even stewards, we are a community of Orthodox Christians. And Orthodoxy Christianity, and each Orthodox Christian community serves TWO purposes above all others—we worship and we serve.

And those are two of our core values.

LOVE—As we resume our annual Greek Festival, we will lead with love. Love for God, love for one another, love for our culture and food, and love for sharing these things with others.

WORSHIP—Worship will be central to our Festival. We will celebrate Divine Liturgy on November 4-5-6, and on November 6 (Sunday), we will all gather together to thank God for our weekend, and to remember those who are no longer here with us.

COMMUNITY—We will open our doors to the greater Tampa community, and we will share fellowship within our own community.

LEARNING—We will again open our church for tours, a performance by our choir, and have our welcome ministry on hand all weekend to answer questions and welcome people as they walk through the doors of our sanctuary.

SERVICE—We will serve the people of our community, not only serving

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food, but giving the proceeds of what we receive back to the community.

### **Wait, wait, Father! Are you crazy? We might need that money!**

When I first arrived at St. John in 2004, we had \$2M in liabilities and \$50K in liquid assets. That means there was \$50K between us and selling property. We paid off a \$2M debt, and we did it without a capital campaign. We chiseled away slowly at the debt, and we've done so many other things because of stewardship. We've been generous, and God has been generous to us. We offered of ourselves and He has multiplied our offering. Remember the miracle of the five loaves and two fish? Something small was offered to Christ and He multiplied it and made it not only sufficient for what was needed, there was even an excess of leftovers.

### **Let's Make a Statement**

Is this kind of radical generosity an act of faith? Yes, you bet it is. But we are people of faith, and so an act of radical generosity is in line with faith.

Will this year's Greek Festival make a statement? Yes, you bet it will. First, that we are back, after three years away. And second, we are better than ever, because we are now more focused on what we should be, a church that serves its local community.

What is going to happen as a result of what we are doing? The truth is, no one knows. We might have a festival where no one comes. We might have a festival where everyone comes. One thing is for certain, we won't have to stress about the weather, or did we sell enough raffle tickets to break even. Because whatever we profit we are going to give away anyway.

Many times in our practice of Orthodoxy, we hear the phrase "leave room for the Holy Spirit." And that certainly applies here. We're going to do our part, and then we will leave room for the Holy Spirit to do His part. When

we talk about people converting to Christianity, we do not convert them. We invite them, the Holy Spirit is what converts and convicts the hearts of people to turn to Christ. The goal of this Festival isn't to convert anyone. It is merely to serve our community, to serve food and entertainment for a weekend, followed by a donation that will serve some important charitable causes.

We are going to present our Greek Festival in this way this year, and then we will let the Holy Spirit do the rest.

And when the weekend is over, we can all walk away thinking not "I raised some money to help pay bills" but "I/we did something to help people in real need."

I am thankful to Mike Xenick, our Festival Chairman, and John Zelatis, our Parish Council President, as well as our Parish Council for eagerly embracing this vision of the Greek Festival.

So, mark your calendars for November 4-5-6, for a Greek Festival of radical generosity. And seriously, we are going to need a lot of help not only that weekend but between now and then. In order to make a witness of radical generosity when it comes to our proceeds, we are going to need some generosity of time and talent from our people to pull this off. Please help as you can. And let's all work together to bring back something that has been a source of pride for our parish and joy to the greater community, as we put on a Greek Festival as we never have before, a Greek Festival of Radical Generosity!

With love in the Lord,  
+Fr. Stavros



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## Happy New Year! By: Vasili Panagopoulos

Each year on January 1, many of us keep the tradition of having a “New Year’s resolution.” We reflect on ourselves, and create a list of resolutions of good habits and practices that we wish to keep for the coming year, such as: exercising weekly, doing a random act of kindness once per day, read a certain amount of books throughout the year, strive for better grades, etc. We create this list, with hopes of holding true to it until the following year, because we want to better something about ourselves.



You may be asking yourself, “Why is Vasili talking about New Year’s resolutions in September?” The reason is because we are entering the New Ecclesiastical Year, as we do every year, on September 1. According to *The Synaxarion: The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church* by Hieromonk Makarios of Simonos Petra, “On this day the Church of Christ observes the Indiction or proclamation of the beginning of the ecclesiastical year.”

As we enter this new Ecclesiastical year, let us take time to reflect on ourselves spiritually, and create a list of resolutions that we will strive to keep until next September. Hieromonk Makarios continues: “September is the time for harvesting the fruits of the earth and for making ready for a new round of growth, so it is proper to honour the beginning of the agricultural cycle by giving thanks to God for His loving-kindness towards His creation.”

If September is the time that we prepare the earth for another season of growth, let us use this month to prepare our souls for another season of spiritual growth. The fruits that we should be looking to plant within us, are the fruits of the Spirit. In St. Paul’s letter to the Galatians, he instructs us to “Walk in the Spirit” and if we do so, we “shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” The works of the flesh, St. Paul tells us, are: “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revel-

**“...THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GENEROSITY, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS, AND SELF-CONTROL.”  
GALATIANS 5:22-23**



ries” (Gal. 5:1-21) all of which he tells us will not let us enter the Kingdom of Heaven. There are some pretty serious sins listed here, as well as transgressions that may be committed daily or hourly. How, then, are any of us going to enter the Kingdom of Heaven? Three things are needed: repentance, confession, and practicing the fruits of the Spirit, which are: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23).

This is the challenge, the “new year’s resolution” I have for all of us as we enter this Ecclesiastical new year: Practice the fruit of the Spirit.

### **Be loving**

Be loving to yourself, and to your neighbor.

### **Be joyful.**

Be joyful, always! (In today’s world, we need it!)

### **Be longsuffering.**

Be patient with your family, friends, and your neighbor. Remember, God’s will be done.

### **Be kind.**

It doesn’t cost you a nickel to be kind to someone, nor does it require any effort. Hold a door open, smile, be polite, call a friend, and say thank you!

### **Be good.**

Be righteous. Jesus Christ says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

### **Be faithful.**

Be faithful to yourself, to family, to friends, but most importantly, be faithful to God. May we all hear the Blessed words when we pass from this life to the next: “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.”

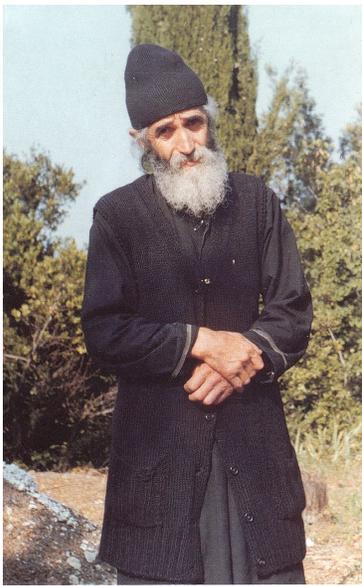
### **Be gentle.**

Do not be quick to anger, frustration, or judgement. Be gentle with those around you, and always make excuses for the other person, for you do not know what someone else is going through.

## Have self-control

Have self-control over everything! Control your thoughts. St. Paisios of Mount Athos says,

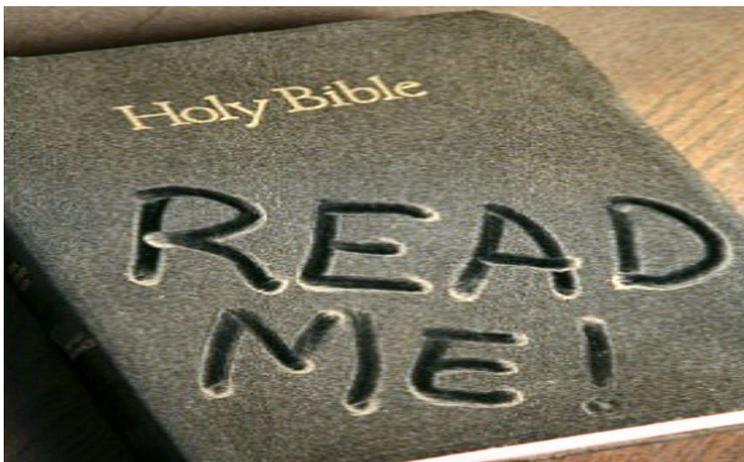
“Evil thoughts are like airplanes looking for airports. They are flying, but they must not land” (Spiritual Counsels III: Spiritual Struggle). Every sin originates from a thought, so we must learn to have self-control over our minds to have self-control over everything else. The best way to have self-control, to break the bonds of



our passions and be free from sin, is with prayer and with fasting. But, when we fall short, we run to the church for protection. Exercising control of yourself spiritually, is recognizing the need for Christ to “enter under your roof into the habitation of your soul” (Precommunion Prayer from St. John Chrysostom), which He does when we receive His Body and Blood. When receive Him, with proper preparation, we can then obtain true self-control.

I challenge you to self reflect on your spiritual life from this past year, and create goals for yourself. Push yourself to do more than what you did last year. Perhaps some of these goals include:

- Attending more services: our Church calendar is filled with services. Plan ahead and make an effort to attend more services than you did last year
- Go to Confession: receiving Communion and going to Confession go hand-in-hand, and you shouldn't have one without the other.
- Read: read the Scriptures or spiritually edifying books daily, even if it's one chapter, or even a few lines. We all read the news, articles, or social media posts for hours. Dedicate a one minute to the Bible, or a book on a saint.



- Pray: take time everyday, even if it's only thirty-seconds to be with God. If you are already praying, increase your prayers!
- Fast: fasting is not supposed to be a dreadful practice, but rather a change of focus. When we fast, we focus less on our physical needs and supplement with prayer. In other words, we gain our strength from prayer and Communion and not from the physical nourishments of food.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us enter this Ecclesiastical new year with a new sense of zeal and drive to become closer with Christ! As is customary, we will be having Divine Liturgy on Thursday, September 1 at 9:00 a.m. to start out the new year by receiving Holy Communion. If you are not able to attend, I strongly encourage you to start your “Ecclesiastical new years resolution” on Sunday, September 4 at the Divine Liturgy.

Through the intercessions of our Lady the Theotokos, and of all the saints, may we have all of Christ's blessings in this new year!

With love in Christ,

Vasili



## **AXIOS! AXIOS! AXIOS! To Deacon Kyriakos (Charlie) Hambos**

Charlie Hambos was ordained a Deacon on Friday, July 29, at the Diakonia Retreat Center in Salem, South Carolina, by the laying on of hands of His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta. Charlie's baptismal name is Kyriakos, in other words his patron saint is St. Kyriakos. At the ordination, the Metropolitan used the name "Kyriakos" to ordain him and so he will be called "Deacon" and soon "Father" Kyriakos going forward. His ordination to the priesthood is scheduled for Sunday, August 21, at the Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity in Orlando, where he will serve as the assistant priest. We will post pictures of that in the October Messenger as our September Messenger goes to press on August 15. Below is the ordination speech that Deacon Kyriakos gave at his ordination to the Diaconate. It expresses his thoughts about being ordained, and he had some very nice things to say about our parish as well. Please take a few minutes and read this very moving speech.

### **Ordination Speech for the Ordination to the Holy Diaconate**

**By Charlie Hambos**

**July 29, 2022**

**Diakonia Retreat Center**

Your Eminence Metropolitan Alexios, I stand before you and the entire church with fear, with faith and with love, with your blessing.

In the sixth chapter of the book of Isaiah, the prophet tells us that the Lord poses a question to him: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Your Eminence, it is only by the Grace of God and through His infinite mercy, that I, in my sinfulness and unworthiness can dare present myself before you and Almighty God to answer this question, to ask to be ordained to the Holy Priesthood.

In the Prayers before the Divine Liturgy, which are read during the Doxology by the clergy at the Holy Altar, at the very end, is where I find the one of the most powerful commands offered by a Deacon, if one is present, or by a priest, in any liturgical service of the church, "It is time for the Lord to Act." "Καὶρὸς τοῦ ποιῆσαι τοῦ Κυρίου." This happens a few lines before the Divine Liturgy begins, before the Priest Exclaims, "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The clergy, simple men, unworthily stand at the Holy Altar and pray that It is time for the Lord to act because at the Divine Liturgy, we ask the Holy Spirit to Descend upon the bread and wine which become the Body and Blood of Christ. It is in the Liturgy that Heaven and Earth meet. Many people have been praying for this time. And now, through many of the ups and downs that I have faced on this journey to ordination, It is indeed time for the Lord to Act.

God has called me for a long time. Sometimes I heeded his call and sometimes I ran away. The only time, I felt true peace in my heart is when I followed the call. I know for a fact that if I did not follow the call to become a priest, and I went to stand before the Awesome Judgment Seat of Christ after passing on from this life, I believe that He would be disappointed. I can only hope and pray that even though, now I stand before the Holy Altar seeking the Holy Priesthood, that, Our Loving and All-Merciful God will not be disappointed in my Diakonia, my service to His Church and to His People.

Your Eminence, I came to you over 13 years ago to ask your blessing to attend Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts and I am grateful that you gave me your blessing to do. What I learned there only scratched the surface to what is needed to be a servant of the Lord. The real education began when I began my service as Pastoral Assistant at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Tampa, where I served faithfully for seven years. There, under Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis, is where I learned the true joy and the true sorrow that is found in the life of a priest.

In the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 20, the Mother of James and John came up to Jesus and begged that her two sons would sit and the right and left of Christ in His Kingdom. Christ replied to her that she didn't know what she was asking and that those places are only granted by God the Father. When the rest of the disciples heard this they got upset and thought Christ had favored the brothers, but Christ said this, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man

came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” In the world, it is done a certain way but in the Kingdom of God it is done a differently. In order to be first, you must be last. The greatest are the servants of the Lord. The Greek Word Diakonia means service. The Deacon of the church is a servant of the church. Your eminence, this word, Diakonia is a word that is close to your heart as it is the name of the place where we stand today, the Diakonia Retreat Center. I stand here today called “to serve and not to be served,” not because I want to be first, but because it is what God wants for all us.

Before going to seminary, I studied Psychology in undergraduate because I knew that in my life I wanted to help people. As I studied more and more I realized that there was no place for God in psychology and this is when I knew that the only true healing can be found in the church. Through my service as a priest, as a Doctor of the Soul, through God’s Grace and Mercy, I want to help people fill the holes in their hearts with God and not with the things of this world. Yet, I myself admit that I still have many holes in my heart to fill but in the prayer which is about to be read over me, we will ask for the divine grace, which always heals that which is infirm and completes that which is lacking, May we continue to ask the Holy Spirit to come down upon us in this fashion.

Despite what I continue to think, I can not do everything on my own and my standing here at this time, seeking ordination, is a prime example. Allow me this time to offer thanks to those who are responsible for bringing me to this time, this time for the Lord to act.

First and Foremost, I want to thank God for giving me this opportunity to serve the church and being with me through the ups and downs, the blessings seen and unseen and I look forward to growing closer and loving to live in your presence.

Elefteria, thank you for joining me on this journey. Some people say that it is more of a calling for the wife of a clergyman than it is for the clergy themselves and I can see how this is true for you. For us, the ordination happening here at the Diakonia Center during St. Stephen’s Summer Camp is even more special for us because it was here that we built the foundation of a friendship that would lead to a relationship. May we always thank St. Stephen and the Panagia for guiding us towards one another here at St. Stephen’s. Thank you for loving me unconditionally. Supporting me no matter what. Thank you for showing me how to love others more and love God even more. This journey to salvation is our journey, just like the ministry, the service in the church has been given to both us. I love you so much and I look forward to many many more years with you and Christ, right in the middle.

Your Eminence, within just a year’s time, you celebrated our marriage in Tampa and I really wasn’t sure if you were going to lay your hands on me today, and I couldn’t be more surprised or happy that the Holy Spirit will be working through you. You have loved me and supported me since I asked for your blessing to go to seminary. Throughout these last couple of months, I know that you have been fighting for Elefteria and I. Thank you for all that you have done for us and will continue to do for us. Eis Polla Eti Despota.

Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis, my spiritual father, friend, co-laborer in the Lord’s Vineyard who is unable to be here today. My calling to the Priesthood got even louder when you became the Priest at St. John’s in Tampa in 2004. It was you who I first told about my calling and it was you who guided me every step of the way. We worked so close together for such a long time. Thank you for being patient with me. Thank you for highlighting my strengths and encouraging me in my weaknesses. As I have said many times to you and to many people, you were the one that gave me the wings and now it is my time to fly. It doesn’t matter how close or how far, you will always be a part of my ministry because you are one of the BEST Ministers and PASTORS I know. I look forward to the day where we will be serving side by side at the Holy Altar.

Mom, Dad, George and Joe, You have seen me at my worst which was pretty bad and you have seen me at my best and everywhere in between. Thank you for your unwavering love and support throughout all these years. Don’t stop now, cause I’m still going to need it.

To the clergy that have traveled near and far, especially my koumbaro, Fr. Chris Mihalopoulos, thank you for sharing this day with me and I look forward to serving with you.

Fr. Constantine Simeonidis, thank you for taking me under your wing. Thank you for your patience in this process. But at the same time, thank you for perseverance and support and for making this day, with His Eminence happen.

To family and friends that have traveled thank you for coming. I'm sure you have been more of a blessing to me than I have been for you.

Thank you to the community of St. John the Baptist whom I had the pleasure to serve as Pastoral Assistant for 7 years. Thank you for helping me learn all of the aspects of ministry and church administration. Thank you for sending me off to seminary every year and for rolling out the red carpet whenever I come home. St. John will always have a special place in my heart and my ministry will always be impacted by time there.

Thank you to the community of Holy Trinity in Orlando for welcoming me as Pastoral Assistant over the last year. You have made me feel right at home. I look forward to serving you in an even greater capacity as a member of the clergy. I know my feet are still too small for the shoes that Fr. Dimitrios Simeonidis, left me to fill but I'll keep doing my best.

To the staff of the Diakonia Retreat Center thank you for accommodating our families and guests for this day.

To all the campers and staff of St. Stephen's, thank you for being here. We hope and pray that Elefteria and I will always be people who you can come to during your greatest highs and your lowest lows. Remember what you were taught this week and the love of the faith you found here. Join us in our footsteps to serve the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength

We love you and thank you. It is time for the Lord to act. Master Give the Blessing. Despota ayie evlogison.





**AXIOS  
DEACON KYRIAKOS!**

## Heaven on Earth - Mount Athos

By: Oliver Filutowski

*Editor's Note: This past Holy Week and Pascha, Oliver Filutowski, one of our parishioners, who often volunteers at the chanter stand and in the altar, had the opportunity to visit Mount Athos. Below is a reflection he wrote about the Holy Mountain.*

***Oliver will be offering a presentation on Mount Athos in the Zaharias Room following Divine Liturgy on Sunday, September 11. While we traditionally have this day "quiet" on our campus, no meetings, ministries or events, this day of contemplation will serve as a good day for a presentation about this holy place of spiritual contemplation.***



As the Mother of God and Saint John the Evangelist sailed the Aegean Sea on their way to Cyprus, strong winds blew their ship off course, taking them to the Grecian peninsula known at that time as Mt. Athos. Landing upon its shore, the Theotokos was awed by its beauty, inspiring her to bless it and ask her Son to make it her garden. She heard a voice from heaven, "Let this place be your inheritance and your garden, a paradise and a haven of salvation for those seeking to be saved." From that moment, Mt. Athos was dedicated to the Theotokos, the sole woman permitted within its boundaries, and indeed, has proven to be a most fertile garden, bearing some of the sweetest fruits of the Orthodox Church: monastics, clergy, hierarchs, theologians, ascetics and, above all, saints.

In Greece, this monastic peninsula is known as the Holy Mountain (*Agion Oros*) and today, worldwide, it is honored as the bastion of Orthodox Christianity. Although dedicated to the Theotokos in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the first few Christian ascetics, individuals willingly engaged in spiritual struggle, likely arrived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century, fleeing distractions and worldly cares in pursuit of a singular goal: union with God. Gradually, Orthodox monastic dwellings were formed, consisting of communities of Orthodox Christian men who have left family, friends, and home to dedicate themselves wholly to God. The words of Christ to the wealthy young man were and are a frequent

*inspiration for such a departure: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Matt. 19:21).*

Naturally, the encountering of like-minded individuals fostered spiritual bonds and offered practical benefits to living near one another; however, it was often the charisma of grace-filled elders that magnetized thirsty souls and ignited the rapid expansion of small communities into spiritual fortresses. These communities have often proved immovable and unyielding in the face of heresy from within and persecution from outside the Church, thus, preserving the fullness of Orthodoxy's Faith and Traditions. Today, the Holy Mountain is home to 20 Orthodox monasteries of various nationalities (Greek, Serbian, Russian, Georgian, Bulgarian, and Romanian) and many smaller communities.

Every aspect of life in Orthodox monasteries is geared towards arriving at "theosis," or union with God. This should be, and truly is, the calling of every Orthodox Christian; however, the monastic environment cultivates a more singular, deliberate pursuit of this virtuous calling. Upon arrival to a monastery, a monk willingly places himself under the guidance of the abbot, a wise and discerning monk experienced in the monastic life, who has been elected by the other monastics of the community to be their spiritual leader. Under this light yet salvific yoke of obedience, each monk is assigned a job based on the skills they bring from their former lives in the world, what would be of practical benefit to the brotherhood, and most importantly, what would bring about their spiritual formation and sanctification in Christ. Their work for the daily needs of the monastery is delicately balanced with the sacramental life in communal worship and personal prayer.



The divine services are of central importance in monastic life, infusing it with the grace of God and enabling monks to frequently participate in the Church's life-giving Sacraments. Monasteries follow a rubric of services that differs

from the order of services we encounter in parishes, which stems from the different lifestyles and responsibilities of monks and laymen. As one might imagine, the monastic services are more frequent, longer, and celebrated at times different than parish services.

Multiple services are celebrated daily, beginning in the early hours of the morning. Yet even then, many monks have been awake several hours beforehand within their “cell,” *their dwelling, following their own personal prayer rule prescribed by the abbot. A pillar of monastic prayer life on the Holy Mountain is the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner.” The Fathers of the Church recognized that our minds have an insatiable appetite, constantly needing to be occupied with something. With this understanding, the Prayer proves to be precisely what the mind needs, not giving it something, but Someone with Whom to be occupied. This simple prayer, which is repeated many times while being carefully attentive to its words, has profound depth and has aptly been described as the fulfillment of all the Gospels. Through its humble practice, our minds become fixed upon Christ, His Incarnation, His loving-kindness and mercy, and our deep need for both.*

The spiritual vibrance, contemporary relevance and authentic and salvific life of the Orthodox Faith is revealed through the ceaseless blossoming of new saints in all times throughout the centuries. Perhaps, no other place in the world has brought forth more saints than the Holy Mountain. In the last century, some of the most well-known and beloved saints are spiritual offspring of the Holy Mountain: Saint Silouan the Athonite, Saint Paisios the Athonite, Saint Porphyrios of Kafsokalivia, Saint Joseph the Hesychast, Saint Sophrony of Essex, Saint Ephraim of Katounakia, and many more. Through their lives and teachings, we witness how man is transfigured by the grace of God and are shown that this is not intend-

ed for a select few, but for *all members of the Orthodox Church. This is our spiritual inheritance, if we so desire!*

Although the Holy Mountain is thousands of miles away, monastic life is not distant from us living in the world. Even here, the monastic life reaches out and embraces us through the ceaseless prayers of monastics for the salvation of all mankind, and it has the potential to become a central part of our own lives by the adoption of the monastic mindset, which places the salvation of man and struggling to lead a life pleasing to God above all else. When



we do have the blessing of visiting monasteries, we encounter the truth of the expression, “light is the greatest disinfectant.” Certainly, through their words, but even more so by their example, monks, those radiant spiritual lights, help us to see ourselves and our spiritual infirmities more clearly, inspire us to amend our lives, and spur us to lead a more committed, humble, and authentic Orthodox life, separating ourselves from the superfluous things in the world that inhibit our divine ascent. Indeed, through this cleansing process, we bring the spirit of monasticism to our everyday lives and even to those around us. It is then, perhaps, that we will realize the words of Saint Seraphim of Sarov, “Acquire the Spirit of Peace and a thousand souls around you will be saved.”



## Reflection on CrossRoad Summer Institute

By Elizabeth Xenick

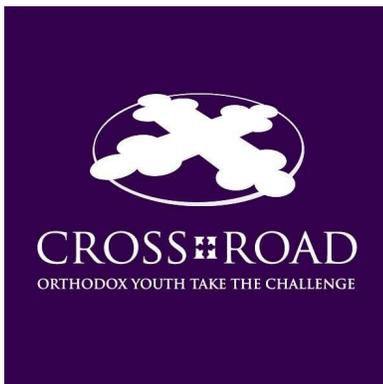


This summer I had the opportunity to spend 10 days at the Hellenic College at the CrossRoad Summer Institute. These 10 days were filled with fun outings, enlightening classes, and fellowship between other Orthodox teens. Not only did I grow closer to Christ in this experience, I also made friends with people who I never would have met otherwise. I am truly grateful to have met these people, and we plan on getting together in the future and continuing to strengthen our bond, especially my friend Anna Catherine from Cincinnati. One of my favorite things we did at CrossRoad was Liturgy on the Streets.

During this activity, we walked around Cambridge and Harvard Square and met some of the homeless in the area. We had amazing conversations with people who we normally wouldn't stop for, and were even able to purchase them the things that they needed. This taught us the lesson in loving our neighbor, no matter who they are. I also had so much fun getting to spend time in the beautiful city of Boston. I am so thankful to have had this experience.



*Elizabeth will be starting her first semester of college this fall at the University of Central Florida in Orlando. She plans to major in Criminal Justice in a pre-law track. May God bless her studies!*



# Liturgical Schedule for September

## Thursday, September 1

### **Beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year/The Indiction**

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

## Sunday, September 4

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

## Wednesday, September 7

Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 6:00 p.m.

## Thursday, September 8

### **Nativity of the Virgin Mary**

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

## Sunday, September 11

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

*Memorial Service in Remembrance of 9/11 at the end of Divine Liturgy*

## Wednesday, September 14

### **Holy Cross**

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

*Procession of the Holy Cross at the end of the Divine Liturgy*

## Sunday, September 18

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Hierarchical Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.

*Procession of the Holy Cross at the end of the Divine Liturgy*

## Sunday, September 25

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

## Monday, September 26

### **St. John the Theologian**

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

## Sunday, October 2

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

## Monday, October 3

Evening Teaching Divine Liturgy 6:30-8:30 p.m.

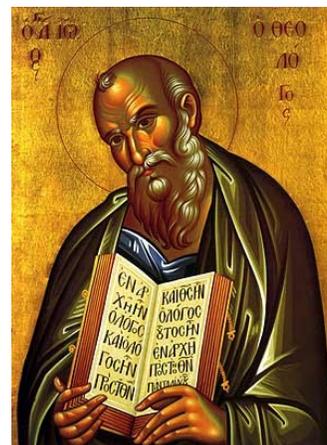
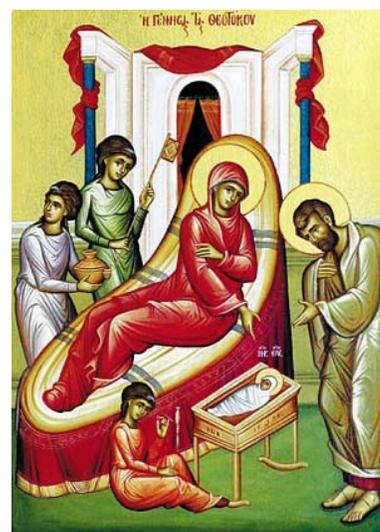
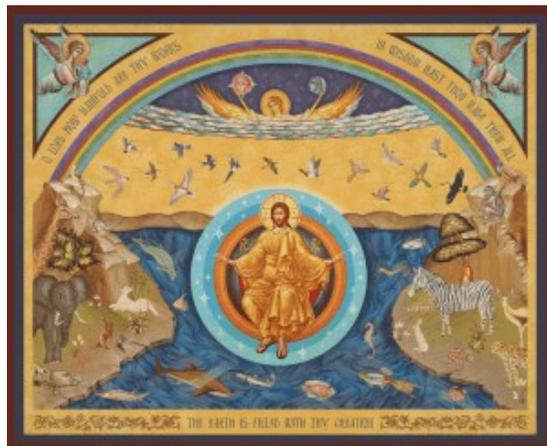
## Wednesday, October 5

Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 6:00 p.m.

## Thursday, October 6

### **St. Thomas the Apostle**

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



## Liturgical Notes for September

**Thursday, 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.

**Wednesday, September 7 – Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary** We will offer the Paraklesis service once a month, to pray for all the members of our community, as well as any special prayer requests that you may have. We will rotate between mornings and evening. The Paraklesis service for September will be Wednesday, September 7 at 6:00 p.m.

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

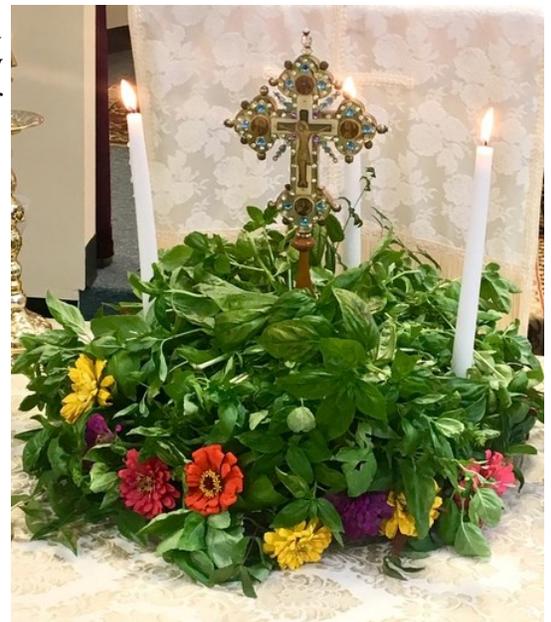
**Sunday, September 11 – Day of Remembrance—21 Year Anniversary of 9/11** This year marks 21 years since the terrorist attack on America on 9/11/01. Every year, we have paused to offer some service in remembrance of this day. On Sunday, September 11, we will celebrate the Divine Liturgy, to call the Holy Spirit down upon not only the Holy Gifts but on all of us, in Tampa and throughout the United States. We will have a memorial service of remembrance at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy. You are encouraged to pause and pray on 9/11.

**Wednesday, September 14 - Exaltation of the Holy Cross** - This Major Feast Day commemorates the finding of the Precious Cross of Christ by St. Helen in the year 325. This day is equal in solemnity to Good Friday, as it draws our attention to the supreme sacrifice made by the Lord for us. Connected with September 14 is the Tradition of the Vasiliko. St. Helen went in search of the Precious Cross. In Jerusalem, she found the hill of Golgotha. But she did not know where to search for the cross. Vasiliko (Basil), a sweet scented plant, was found growing on the hillside. She looked beneath the Basil and that's where the cross was found. It is the Tradition of the Church that a Procession is held on September 14, where Basil is placed on a tray along with a cross and it is carried above the heads of the faithful. We will hold this procession on September 14, and also repeat it on Sunday, September 18.

**Monday, September 26 – St. John the Theologian** – St. John was one of the 12 disciples. He was the “beloved” Disciple we read about. He is the author of the Gospel of St. John, the Epistles of St. John and the Book of Revelation. He is the only one of the original 12 disciples to die naturally, reposing on the island of Patmos, where he had lived in exile, in the year 96 A.D. He was the youngest of the disciples and the last one to pass away.

**Donations Needed for Vasiliko for the Feast of the Holy Cross** We need Vasiliko (Basil) for the services of the Holy Cross. Please bring Vasiliko for Tuesday, September 14, and Sunday, September 18. Please bring to the welcome table by 10:00 a.m on all the days, so we will have time to make up the tray. The Procession for the Holy Cross will be held on Tuesday, September 14 and repeated on Sunday, September 18.

**Donations Needed for flowers for Feast of the Holy Cross** We need a donation of \$150 for flowers for the tray for the procession of the Holy Cross on September 14, and \$400 for flowers for Sunday, September 18. Please call the office if you are interested.



# May We Never Forget

On this night... 19 years ago 246 people went to sleep in preparation for their morning flights; 2,606 people went to sleep in preparation for work in the morning; 343 firefighters went to sleep in preparation for their morning shift; 60 police officers went to sleep in preparation for morning patrol. Eight paramedics went to sleep in preparation for the morning shift of saving lives. None of them saw past 10:00am on Sept 11, 2001. In one single moment life would never be the same. As we remember our own Saint Nicholas Church destroyed on that horrific morning, we beseech our Lord to grant eternal rest to both those who perished on that day and to the many rescue workers who have died since trying to help others.

Memory Eternal and...May We Never Forget.



## St. John the Baptist Community News

**GOYA**—The GOYA Meeting for September will be Sunday, September 18, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. We will have dinner, a short meeting and then some fun and games on the soccer field with lots of water balloons. So come dressed to get wet. More information will be sent out via constant contact to our GOYAns.

**Youth Worker Training-Saturday, September 10 from 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.** Every year, Fr. Stavros offers a youth worker training seminar for the Tampa Bay area. This is for GOYA advisors, JOY/HOPE Advisors, Sunday school teachers, older GOYAns (10-12<sup>th</sup> grade) and anyone who wants to learn how to work with you—how to lead an ice-breaker or a discussion. There is no charge for this event. We need at least 12 people to make this event happen. The deadline to sign up is Tuesday, September 6. Please email Fr. Stavros at [frstav@gmail.com](mailto:frstav@gmail.com) if you are interested. Lunch will be provided.

**Altar Meeting and Training—Sunday, September 11**—The Altar Boy Meeting and training scheduled for August 28 is being rescheduled for Sunday, September 11, 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 21. 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 21.

**Get Together for College Students who are going to college in the Tampa Bay Area—October 2 after Liturgy**—We are exploring a program for college students (primarily those from out of town, but local students as well) who are studying at colleges in Tampa (USF and UT). We have many students from St. John who are studying in other cities and we hope that the churches of those cities are welcoming to them. We want to do our part to welcome out of town college students to our parish. We will be inviting these students to church on Sunday, October 2, and having a discussion with them after Liturgy. And we will see who may need rides, etc. We will reach out to our community afterwards to see who may need rides, or other support, and who may be able to offer that. Stay tuned.

**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 September 15.

**Adopt a college student**—We started an adopt a college student program last year. 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 partici-

pate and adopt a college student, please send your name to Father Stavros and Vasili by September 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.

**Men's Group**—The Men's Group will meet on Sunday, September 25, 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 13. We will have both an in-person and zoom option. Women's Bible study will meet on Tuesdays (if a liturgical day falls on a Tuesday it will move to a different day for that week) from 10:00-11:30 a.m. Fr. Stavros leads this group. We will be doing a Bible Study on the Gospel of John.

**Monday night Bible study with Fr. John**—will continue meeting at 6:30 p.m. on most Monday evenings. Join us in person or via zoom for some very informative, lively and interactive discussions on how we apply Biblical principles in our everyday lives. See the Sunday bulletin for specific topics. For September, the dates are—Tuesday, September 6; Tuesday, September 13; Monday, September 19 and Monday, September 26.

**Meeting of Ministry Heads**—Monday, September 12 at 6:30 p.m. in person—There will be a meeting of ministry heads on Monday, September 12 at 6:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. We get together three times per year in person (and once in August via zoom) to discuss the ministries of our parish, their needs, challenges, and to go over the pertinent events of the coming months. Please have at least one person from each ministry attend. If it is not the lead person, please have someone come and represent each ministry.

**Choir**—In August, Tara Swartzbaugh became our new choir director. Choir practices will be held on most Wednesdays in the Zaharias Room from 7:15-8:30 p.m. New singers are always welcome. If you are interested in joining our choir, please contact Tara at [tswartzbaugh@ut.edu](mailto:tswartzbaugh@ut.edu) or 813-313-0439.

**JOY Tweens Group**—We are forming a new group for our TWEENS. HOPE/JOY is a ministry for all of our children in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and younger. As a subgroup of that group, we are going to be having certain events just for our tweens, in 4-6<sup>th</sup> grades. The first one will be after dance practice on Sunday, September 25, about 12:45 p.m. We will have lunch, play some games and get to know one another. An event will be scheduled each month, either in conjunction with HOPE/JOY or separate for just our JOY Tweens. Maraquet Edquid (email: [Maraquet@gmail.com](mailto:Maraquet@gmail.com)) (cell: 813-422-8963) is the contact person for this ministry. It is open to all 4-6<sup>th</sup> graders. Please let Maraquet know whether you are coming on September 25 so we can plan for appropriate food and games.

**Dance Practices will be starting again in preparation for our Greek Festival**—Alexandra DeMaio (813-340-9668) and Maraquet Edquid (813-422-8963) will lead our youngest dancers, H Hara Mas (3 year old through sixth grade), who will practice after Liturgy on Sundays beginning September 18. There will be a group for very young, and then a 4-6<sup>th</sup> grade group under H Hara Mas. Marina Choundas (813-205-9533) will lead our Parea Dancers—this is our GOYA age group. Those interested please contact Marina. Practice schedule to be determined. The Adult group is called Panigyri Dancers and they are led by Alexandra DeMaio and will practice on Wednesday evenings.

## Parish Registry

**Ordination to the Diaconate**—Charlie Hambos was ordained as a Deacon on Friday, July 29 at the Diakonia Retreat Center in Salem, SC, by His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta. Axios!

**Funeral**—Georgios Lambrou passed away on July 21. Funeral service was held on August 3 at St. John. May his memory be eternal.

**Funeral**—Michael Skourellos passed away on August 2. Funeral service was held on August 8 at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Tarpon Springs, with Fr. Stavros officiating. May his memory be eternal!

**Condolences** to George Mitseas and family on the passing of his mother, Nikoleta Mitseas, on August 6. May her memory be eternal!

# Orthodoxy 101 Class will Begin in September

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

## Who should attend the Orthodoxy 101 class?

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

The four sessions will be done as follows:

**Monday, September 19** A Tour of the Orthodox Church: What we see in the Church and what it means

**Monday, September 26** Orthodox Spirituality—Introduction to the Sacraments

**Monday, October 3** The Divine Liturgy—This will actually be a “teaching” Liturgy on the solea of the church. If you have taken the class, or if you wish to only attend THIS session, please feel free to do so.

**Monday, October 10** Orthodox Traditions—fasting, icons, prayer, and separating Theology from “yiyalogy.” Classes will be held on these three Mondays from 6:30-8:30 p.m. and will be held in the CHURCH Sanctuary.

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

## Reflections on St. Stephen’s Summer Camp

Last month we had reflections offered by several of our GOYAnS who went to summer camp. Here is one more, by Genaro Scarfogliero.

Genaro Scarfogliero-12th grade



I had another amazing week at camp this year. Despite the constant rain, Father Stavros, the counselors and all of the staff did a great job and definitely made the camp experience worthwhile. This is my final year and it was almost a little bit surreal standing there realizing I can never go there again as a camper. I often just looked around while walking to different places, thinking about all the great memories that I had, all of the friends I made, and everything I experienced, wishing that it didn’t all have to end this year. For any parent out there who is on the fence about letting their kids go to camp, please let them. You will not regret it, as it is very safe and your child will have an amazing time and create many amazing memories.

# Pictures from College Student Sunday - August 14



*May the Three Hierarchs guide you all in your studies!*



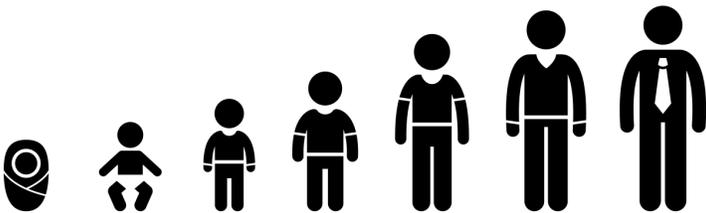
## On the Lighter Side



I can't believe summer is almost over! Oh wait, I live in Florida!



Operator: 911, what's your emergency?  
Man: A guy just got hit by a car, I need an ambulance.  
Operator: What's your location?  
Man: I'm on Eucalyptus Street.  
Operator: Can you spell that for me?  
Man: (long awkward pause)  
Operator: Sir? Are you still there?  
Man: I'm gonna drag him over to Pine Street and call you right back.



Don't worry about getting older. You're still gonna do dumb stuff, only slower.

## On the Serious Side

Everyone you meet always asks if you have a career, are married, or own a house as if life was some kind of grocery list. But no one ever asks you if you are happy.

Wanna be happy for an hour, eat a steak. Wanna be happy for a day, play golf. Wanna be happy for a week, go on a cruise. Wanna be happy for a lifetime, put your faith in Jesus Christ. ~Lou Holtz

We must picture Hell as a state where everyone is perpetually concerned about his own dignity and advancement, where everyone has a grievance, and where everyone lives the deadly serious passions of envy, self-importance and resentment. ~C.S. Lewis

Stop looking for the perfect church. Go worship a perfect God today with a congregation of flawed people who need grace as much as you do.

A 24-year-old man seeing out from the train's window shouted: "Dad, look the trees are going behind." Suddenly he again exclaimed, "Dad, look the clouds are running with us." A young couple sitting nearby looked at the man's childish behavior with pity and said to his father, "Why don't you take your son to a good doctor?" The old father replied, "I did, and we are just coming from the hospital. My son was blind from birth, he just got his eyes today." Don't judge anyone in life. Every single person on earth has a story.

### Prayer

Lord, Jesus, Let me see the person before me as You see them.

Show me how I can respond to their needs.

And let Your name be glorified in everything I do. Amen.

(Author: Rachel Adams)

When someone is pregnant, she is not "expecting a child"—she already has one. She is not "going to be a mother"—she already is a mother. The baby is not "on the way," the baby has already arrived. If we are going to change the way society treats unborn children, we have to change the way we talk about them. ~Frank Pavone

Me yelling at a squirrel to move out of the road so it's not crushed by tires, is probably the same feeling God has watching me live my life.

Some days you'll move mountains. Other days you'll move from the bed to the couch. Both are okay and necessary.

## 12 Reasons Why I as a Pastor Have Decided to Quit Attending Sports Events

1. The coach never came to visit me.
2. Every time I went, they asked for money.
3. The seats were very hard.
4. The referees made a decision I didn't agree with.
5. I was sitting with hypocrites—they only came to see what others were wearing!
6. The people sitting in my row didn't seem very friendly.
7. Some games went into overtime and I was late getting home.
8. The band played some songs I had never heard before.
9. The games are scheduled on my only day to sleep in and run errands.
10. My parents took me to too many games when I was growing up.
11. Since I read a book on sports, I feel that I know more than the coaches, anyway.
12. I don't want to take my children because I want them to choose for themselves what sport they like best.

### Holy Communion



Is it appropriate to receive often or rarely? There is no doubt that Christ invites to His table all who have purified their hearts and earnestly desire to receive the Bread of Life. It is also true that the Church instructs

the faithful to receive the Holy Mysteries as often as possible. It would be quite wrong to consider Holy Communion as a reward for the righteous, or good behavior. Rather, it is a remedy of salvation to sinners, and often the greatest strength we have to endure our struggles and temptations. Nonetheless, Communion should never become a habit or routine. We must faithfully prepare to be united to the life-giving sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Fasting, confession, and church services are important parts of preparing to receive Communion, but equally important are the inner conditions of prayer, forgiveness and love of neighbor. We must not abstain from Communion for a long time. We must also not receive it unprepared.

*O Lord, I know that I am unworthy to receive Your Holy Body and Precious Blood. . .But trusting in Your loving-kindness I come unto You who said: He that eats my Body and drinks my Blood shall dwell in Me and I in him. Grant, O Lord, that these Holy Gifts may be for me unto the healing, purification, enlightenment, protection, salvation and sanctification of my soul and body. Amen.*

### What God Can do with 57 Cents

A little girl stood near a small church from which she had been turned away because it was "too crowded."

"I can't go to Sunday School," she sobbed to the pastor as he walked by.



Seeing her shabby, unkempt appearance, the pastor guessed the reason and, taking her by the hand, took her inside and found a place for her in the Sunday school class. The child was so happy that they found room for her, and she went to bed that night thinking of the children who have no place to worship Jesus.

Some two years later, this child lay dead in one of the poor tenement buildings. Her parents called for the kindhearted pastor who had befriended their daughter to handle the final arrangements.

As her poor little body was being moved, a worn and crumpled red purse was found which seemed to have been rummaged from some trash dump.

Inside was found 57 cents and a note, scribbled in childish handwriting, which read: "This is to help build the little church bigger so more children can go to Sunday School."

For two years she had saved for this offering of love.

When the pastor tearfully read that note, he knew instantly what he would do. Carrying this note and the cracked, red pocketbook to the pulpit, he told the story of her unselfish love and devotion.

He challenged his deacons to get busy and raise enough money for the larger building. But the story does not end there...

A newspaper learned of the story and published It. It was read by a wealthy realtor who offered them a parcel of land worth many thousands.

When told that the church could not pay so much, he offered to sell it to the little church for 57 cents.

Church members made large donations. Checks came from far and wide.

Within five years the little girl's gift had increased to \$250,000.00--a huge sum for that time (near the turn of the century). Her unselfish love had paid large dividends.

When you are in the city of Philadelphia, look up Temple Baptist Church, with a seating capacity of 3,300. And be sure to visit Temple University, where thousands of students are educated.

Have a look, too, at the Good Samaritan Hospital and at a Sunday School building which houses hundreds of beautiful children, built so that no child in the area will ever need to be left outside during Sunday school time.

In one of the rooms of this building may be seen the picture of the sweet face of the little girl whose 57 cents, so sacrificially saved, made such remarkable history. Alongside of it is a portrait of her kind pastor, Dr. Russell H. Conwell, author of the book, "Acres of Diamonds".

This is a true story, which goes to show WHAT GOD CAN DO WITH 57 CENTS.

### Don't Give Up

One day, a farmer's donkey fell into a well.

The animal cried and grieved for hours while the farmer tried to do something to save him.

Eventually, the farmer decided the donkey was too old and the well had been dry for a long time, so getting the donkey out of the well wasn't worth it.

He called his neighbors, and each of them took a shovel and began throwing dirt into the well.

The donkey, realizing what was happening, started crying and growling even louder.

At one point, to everyone's surprise, the donkey stopped complaining after a few plates of dirt.

The farmer looked to the bottom of the well and was amazed at what he saw...

With every palate of dirt, the donkey was doing something incredible: it was hitting the ground with its hooves and taking a step above the ground.

Very soon, everyone saw in surprise the donkey coming to the mouth of the well, stepping over the edge and trotting out.

**MORAL.** Life will knock you down, but we can get out of the deepest pits if we don't give up. Use the ground they throw you, use all those difficulties to move forward, to rise above all bad circumstances!

**Sometimes,  
you have to  
get knocked  
down lower  
than you have  
ever been to  
stand back up  
taller than you  
ever were.**

## WHEN TO KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT

Don't Open Your Mouth:

1. In the heat of anger. Proverbs 14:17
2. When you don't have all the facts. Proverbs 18:13
3. When you haven't verified the story. Deuteronomy 17:6
4. If your words will offend a weaker brother. I Corinthians 8:11
5. If your words will be a poor reflection of the Lord or of your friends and family. Peter 2:22-23
6. When you are tempted to joke about sin. Proverbs 14:9
7. When you would be ashamed of your words later. Proverbs 8:8
8. When you are tempted to make light of holy things. Ecclesiastes 5:2
9. If your word would convey a wrong impression. Proverbs 17:27
10. If the issue is none of your business. Proverbs 14:10
11. When you are tempted to tell an outright lie. Proverbs 4:24
12. If your words will damage someone's reputation. Proverbs 16:27
13. If your words will destroy a friendship. Proverbs 25:28
14. When you are feeling critical. James 3:9
15. If you can't speak without yelling. Proverbs 18:21
16. When it is time to listen. Proverbs 13:1
17. If you may have to eat your words later. Proverbs 18:21
18. If you have already more than one time (then it becomes nagging). Proverbs 19:13
19. When you are tempted to flatter a wicked person. Proverbs 24:24
20. When you are supposed to be working instead. Proverbs 14:23

Proverbs 21:23—Whoever keeps his mouth and tongue, keeps his soul from trouble.



# St. John The Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

## Community Outreach

Hello and WELCOME! **On the 3rd Saturday of each month**, we volunteer 2 1/2 hrs of our time to provide for the needy and homeless of our community in East Tampa. We partner with local charity Matthew 25, Metropolitan Ministries and USF Medical School to serve breakfast, provide clothing and medical needs for our guests.

**To Volunteer:** Click on our Sign Up Genius below. If you forget to sign up, you can still come!

**Place:** Tampa Hope @ 3704 E. 3rd Ave. Tampa East

**Time:** 8:00 AM to 10:30AM

**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 8-9AM, Serving 9-10:15AM, Cleanup 10:15-10:30AM.

**Matthew 25 founders Peggy & Mike Kanter**, as well as Greg & Victoria Melton, are Go To people if you have questions or need direction on where you may be needed when you arrive.

**Below find 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-community1>

(Or use QR code)

Greg Melton 813-967-2074 [gmelt12@gmail.com](mailto:gmelt12@gmail.com)



## Memorial & 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.

**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).



# GREEK AFTERNOON SCHOOL AT ST. JOHN'S

**OPEN REGISTRATION TO  
ALL CHILDREN BETWEEN  
5-12 YEARS OLD**

**LEARN GREEK, HISTORY, MYTHOLOGY  
AND DANCE**

**SATURDAYS BEGINNING THE LAST WEEK  
OF AUGUST FROM 12:30 P.M. - 2:30 P.M.**

ΜΙΛΑΤΕ  
ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΑ;

## JOIN US

## CONTACT OUR TEACHERS TO JOIN

**IOANNIS GIAVARAS | 718-419-4413 | IGIAVARAS@GMAIL.COM**

**CHRISA GIAVARAS | 727-612-7049 | CKAPNOGIANNIS@GMAIL.COM**

**MR. & MRS. MICHAEL HALYKOYTAKIS ARE GRACIOUSLY DONATING FUNDS TO  
COVER ALL COSTS FOR THE ENTIRE PROGRAM FOR THE FIRST YEAR WHICH  
INCLUDES TUITION, SUPPLIES, ETC. FOR ALL STUDENTS ATTENDING.**

# St. John Greek Orthodox Church Adult Greek School

## **Want to Learn Modern Greek?**



Teacher born, raised, and educated in Greece with 23 years of experience teaching the Greek language. Adult classes for beginners taught @ St. John Greek Orthodox Church (2418 W. Swann Ave, Tampa, FL 33609). Classes are held at 6-8:30pm on Thursday evenings, starting on September 29, 2022. This will be the first of three sessions, with each session lasting three months.

- Speak Greek
- Read Greek
- Write Greek
- Basic Grammar & more.
- Some Greek History
- BOOK INCLUDED IN PRICE

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

Contact Ms. Magdalini Myer: at (813) 523-5771, [aspis69@aol.com](mailto:aspis69@aol.com) or the church office at (813) 876-8830



**Veterans / 1st Responders Ministry Update!**

If you would like to join us, please contact Father John. Our next meeting will be held October 13 at 6:30 p.m.

**Youth Protection Program Reminder:**

At this time, many of our Youth Workers' background checks are coming up for renewal, which is done every two years. On or about your two-year mark, Praesidium will automatically send an email to you from [backgroundcheck@praesidiuminc.com](mailto:backgroundcheck@praesidiuminc.com) when a new background check is needed. Please be on the lookout for these emails, as the link for a background check expires after two weeks. Also, the Youth Protection Program administrator will notify you via email when it's time to renew your online training by completing the 2-part/2-quiz Youth Safety module and the 1-part/1-quiz Youth Worker Regulations module.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Suzanne Pileggi at [smpileggi@gmail.com](mailto:smpileggi@gmail.com) or (813) 244-5855.



**St. John Stewardship Report 2020-2022**

Year to Year Comparison ~	2022*	2021*	2020*
Pledged Year to Date	\$441,653	\$493,873	\$513,416
Received Year to Date	\$417,718	\$345,775	\$396,411
Average Pledge	\$2,000	\$1,300	\$1,400
Median Pledge	\$1,300	\$1,100	\$880
# of Individual/Families Pledged/Giving	343	390	397
*YTD as of 8/22/2022, 8/22/2021, 8/22/2020			

**YOUNG ADULT RETREAT**  
 SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1 | 10AM-4PM  
 LED BY: FR. STAVROS AKROTIRIANAKIS

**STRENGTHENING OUR CONNECTION WITH CHRIST**

A DISCUSSION ON WHERE THE POINTS OF DISCONNECT ARE WITH KNOWLEDGE, FAITH, PRACTICE AND ORTHODOXY

PRESENTATIONS. DISCUSSIONS. WORSHIP. FELLOWSHIP. FOOD  
 OPEN TO ALL YOUNG ADULTS AGE 18-40

RSVP TO [FRSTAV@GMAIL.COM](mailto:FRSTAV@GMAIL.COM) BY SEPT. 26  
 2418 W. SWANN AVE. TAMPA, FL 33609



# TWELVE DISCIPLES PROGRAM

*I had rather speak five words with my understanding... than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. (I Cor. 14:19)*

St. John the Baptist's **Twelve Disciples Project** continues, as dozens of your fellow Orthodox Christians, Prayer Warriors, set aside a few minutes each day to pray for "mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, protection and pardon and remission of the sins for the servants of God", all members of the St. John's congregation. Should you be interested in participating, please contact Mathew Balasis, 727-345-4855 ([mathewbalasis@verizon.net](mailto:mathewbalasis@verizon.net)).

Have you ever wondered why it is the Tradition of the Orthodox Church to celebrate the "New Year" on September 1<sup>st</sup>? This was the custom celebrated in Constantinople from before the days of St. Constantine the Great until the fall of the city in 1453 c.e.

During the fourth century, the Roman government, by imperial decree, and before winter, would collect taxes to fund their army.

September 1<sup>st</sup> marked the end of summer and the peak of the harvest season. The government therefore chose to tax their citizens when they were most able to pay, which was after the fall harvest. This was referred to as the Indiction: a fiscal period of fifteen years, established by St. Constantine the Great after his reorganization of the Roman Empire.

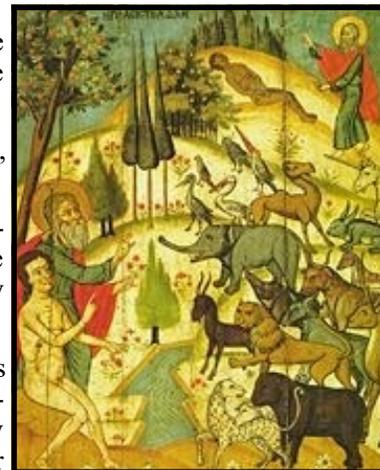
The Indiction was the term used for collecting the annual tax on real property that was paid on the basis of a valuation made, proclaimed, and collected at the beginning of each fifteen-year period. September 1<sup>st</sup>, as a result, has been observed with special ceremony since the early days of our Orthodox Church. September 1<sup>st</sup> commemorates the event beseeching God for fair weather, seasonable rains, and an abundance of the fruits of the earth. This commemoration also indicates our heritage to Hebraic traditions as noted in Leviticus 23:39-41.

<sup>39</sup> So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the Lord for seven days; the first day is a day of Sabbath rest, and the eighth day also is a day of Sabbath rest. <sup>40</sup> On the first day you are to take branches from luxuriant trees—from palms, willows, and other leafy trees—and rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. <sup>41</sup> Celebrate this as a festival to the Lord for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month.

January 1<sup>st</sup>, traditionally celebrated in today's society as new year's day, is commemorated in today's Orthodox calendar as our Lord's Circumcision together with the commemoration of the memory of St. Basil the Great.

*"Creator of the universe, setting times and seasons by Your sole authority, bless the cycle of the year of Your grace, O Lord, guarding our rulers and Your nation in peace, at the intercession of the Theotokos, and save us."*

*Apolytikion of Beginning of the Indiction*



## Who are the Twelve Disciples Group?

The opportunity for you to share the joy of praying for others is available to you as a participating member of the Twelve Disciples Group. Participating in the Twelve Disciples group requires no special talent, no physical ability, no financial investment but only a desire to offer up prayerful love for your fellow members of the St. John the Baptist congregation (Just as fellow parishioners are also offering daily prayers for you and your family.) There are no restrictions. You choose the time during the day when you can spend a quiet moment with God.

One of the results of this meditative prayer is that you will develop a personal relationship with the members on your prayer list.

If you'd like to participate (to enjoy the presence of God as you develop your prayer rule) and receive the prayer along with at least one page of names to pray for, please contact Mathew Balasis, 727-345-4855 ([mathewbalasis@verizon.net](mailto:mathewbalasis@verizon.net)).



Participation will warm your spiritual heart.

- Prayer List: Lord Jesus Christ, Physician of our Souls and Bodies, visit and heal your servants: Stavroula; Felix; Sylvia Michos; Eva Coppalla; Christopher; Christopher; Peter Nenos; Tony Ekonomou; Keith Lynn & Patrick Carroll; Ourania Tziotis; Irina, Marina, Yuri, and Christophoros; Ashley Snyder; Evangelos & Caroline Critkas; Constantinos & Kalotina Klimis; Christine Alex, June, Lillian Thomas; Scotty; Desi Serriera; Ashley Kladakis; Dora Kallas, Kathy & Andrew Bouzinekis; Anastasia; Virginia Georgiou, Toulia Tsaros, Fr. Pat Legato, Nellie Pringle, Yolanda Webb, Angela Bougas, Tony Ekonomou, Ron, Jason Vickers, Rex Garrison, Tina Chakonas, Ann Demas, Christina Noel Kouzes Houck, Evangeline Xeroteris, Ashley Henderson, Natalie Henderson, Chris, Debbie, James, Avery, Lily, Jacob, Jesse, Ann, Rosario, Antonia Caffentzis, Alissa, John, Angela, Joey, Christine Scourtes, Steven, 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, Alice Stoccardo, John Alexander, Michael Romero, George Hambos, Dean Kondilis and Family, Bill and Nancy Manikas, Patricia Costello
- , Ekaterina & Anna Shushaalykova, Dora Koudouna, Debbie Phelps, Mary Voykin, David Voykin, Denise Badrane, Don Payne, 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](http://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 are available to watch at anytime.**



Like



**Pictures** Go to Flickr.com and search "St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church" or go to [www.flickr.com/photos/stjohngoctampa](http://www.flickr.com/photos/stjohngoctampa)

## Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

**Over 3,666 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 Vasili at [Vasili@stjohntpa.org](mailto:Vasili@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 prayer-team365@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](http://PrayerTeam365.com)  
Check it out! Search by topic and grow in your faith today!**

**Father Stavros has authored SIX books that are available both in the bookstore and online. They are entitled:**

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

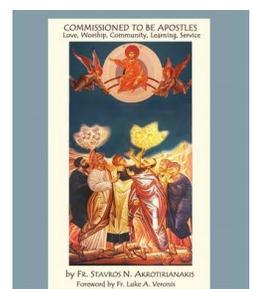
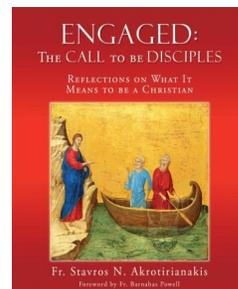
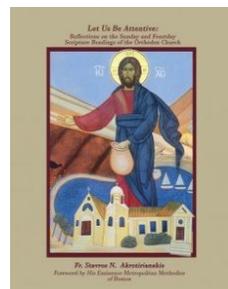
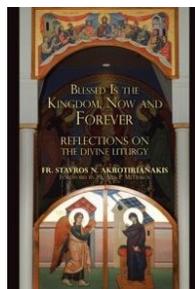
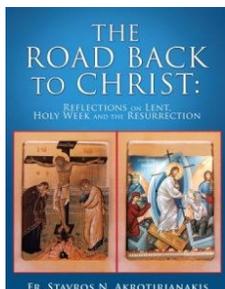
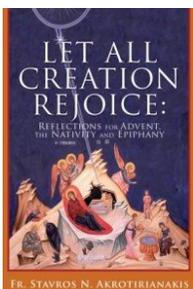
*The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection*

*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*

*ENGAGED: The Call To Be Disciples, Reflections on What it Means to be a Christian*

*Commissioned to be Apostles: Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service*





## Did you know when you lose sleep, you lose your health and your mind?

Did you know getting less than the needed amount of sleep, which, for adults, ranges from seven to nine hours per night is associated with some of the most serious potential health problems? Sleep deprivation can be associated with **high blood pressure, diabetes, heart attack, heart failure or stroke** and **Immunodeficiency**. Other potential problems include **obesity, depression**, and association to **Alzheimer's disease**.

Chronic sleep deprivation can even affect your youthful appearance. Over time, it can lead to premature wrinkling and dark circles under your eyes. There's also a link between lack of sleep and an increase in the amount of the stress hormone cortisol in your body. Cortisol can break down collagen, the protein that keeps skin smooth. In other words, a lack of sleep could mean more wrinkles!

- Cardiovascular disease: Studies have found strong associations between sleep deficiency and cardiovascular problems including high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.
- Diabetes: Insufficient sleep appears to affect the body's ability to regulate blood sugar, increasing the risk of metabolic conditions like diabetes.
- Obesity: Research has found that people tend to consume more calories and carbohydrates when they don't get enough sleep, which is just one of several ways that poor sleep may be tied to obesity and problems maintaining a healthy weight.
- Immunodeficiency: Sleep deficiency has been shown to lead to worsened immune function, including a poorer response to vaccines.

- Hormonal abnormalities: Sleep helps the body properly produce and regulate levels of various hormones, potentially increasing susceptibility to hormonal problems in people with sleep deprivation.
- Pain: Sleep-deprived people are at a higher risk of developing pain or feeling that their pain is getting worse. Pain may cause further sleep interruptions, creating a negative cycle of worsening pain and sleep.
- Mental health disorders: Sleep and mental health are closely intertwined, and poor sleep has strong associations with conditions like depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder.
- Alzheimer's disease: Impaired sleep has been associated with Alzheimer's disease. Studies suggest that sleep plays a role in clearing beta-amyloid out of the brain. A build-up of beta amyloid is linked to impaired brain function and Alzheimer's disease.

## Is sleep deprivation different from insomnia?

While both insomnia and sleep deprivation involve failing to get enough sleep, many experts in sleep science make a distinction between them. People with insomnia have trouble sleeping even when they have plenty of time to sleep. On the other hand, people with sleep deprivation don't have enough time allocated for sleep because of behavior choices or everyday obligations.

An illustration of this difference is that people who are sleep deprived because of a busy work schedule usually have no problems sleeping longer on weekends to try to "catch up" on sleep. Someone with insomnia, struggles to sleep despite having the opportunity to do so.

## Make Sleep a Priority

Chronic insufficient sleep often occurs when people choose to sacrifice sleep in favor of work, leisure, or other obligations. To counteract this, it's critical to take steps to make sleep a priority:



- Have a consistent sleep schedule: You should strive to go to bed and wake up at the same times every day. In planning those times, make sure to budget time to get enough sleep. Once you've settled on your schedule, follow it closely, even on weekends. Stability in your sleep routine helps avoid fluctuations in your nightly sleep.

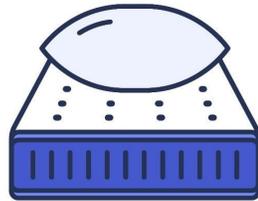


- **Set boundaries in your work and social life:** It's easy for the demands of your personal or professional life to chip away at your dedicated time for sleep, so it's helpful to set boundaries so that you preserve the full time you need for rest each night.



- **Have a bedtime routine:** Get yourself ready each night with the same steps such as quietly reading or stretching, putting on pajamas, and brushing your teeth. A steady bedtime routine can put you in the right frame of mind to sleep well each night.

Design your bedroom environment to be ideal for your relaxation. You're less likely to avoid going to bed if your sleep setting is inviting and suits your comfort preferences.



The best mattress and pillow for your needs and preferences should offer plenty of support, and your bedding should help you feel cozy while maintaining a moderate temperature.

To minimize potential sleep disruptions, try to make sure your bedroom is as quiet and dark as possible.

### Avoid Things That Can Interfere with Sleep



A useful step in addressing sleep deprivation is to avoid things that can negatively affect your sleep:

- **Electronic devices:** TVs, cell phones, tablets, and computers can keep your mind stimulated, leaving you still wired when you want to go to bed. The light emitted by these devices can

also interfere with your circadian rhythm. As a result, it's best to avoid using electronic devices for an hour or more before bed.

- **Alcohol:** Drinking, especially at night, can disrupt your normal sleep cycle, reducing overall sleep quality and consistency.

- **Caffeine:** As a stimulant, caffeine makes you alert, and because it can stick around in your system for several hours, it's best to avoid it in the afternoon and evening.

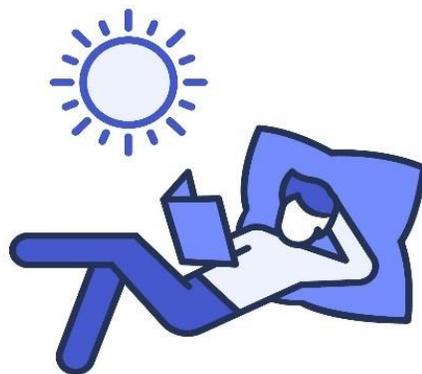
- **Naps:** To keep naps from interfering with sleep at night, keep them short (30 minutes or less) and never take them in the late afternoon or later. If you are struggling with insomnia, it's best to avoid naps altogether.



### Make the Most of the Day

Getting frequent sunlight exposure during the day supports a healthy circadian rhythm that helps you be alert during the day and sleepy at night. Regular physical activity can also contribute to a normal sleep schedule, so try to engage in at least moderate exercise every day. Please reach out to your nursing ministry if you need more information or if you have questions.

Marcelle Triantafilou, Nursing Ministry



# 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**

# Thank You to all of Our Friends!

Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL  
Demet & Eleni Anagnostiadis - Bethesda, MD  
Nicholas & Doris Andreadakis - Lititz, PA  
Andy Apostolopoulos—Asheville, NC  
George & Maria Andros - Birmingham, AL  
Nicholas Anton - Dunedin, FL  
Gaby & Alicia Atik - Treasure Island, FL  
Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL  
Richard & Mickie Bass - Asheville, NC  
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  
Peter George - Tampa, FL  
Ron & Maria Gregory - St. Petersburg, FL  
Charlie & Eleftheria Hambos - Orlando, FL  
Gabriel Hurst - Largo, FL  
Michael Ibrahim - E. Brunswick, NJ

Judith Jogerst  
Constantine Kallenekos - Tampa, FL  
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  
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# 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 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.

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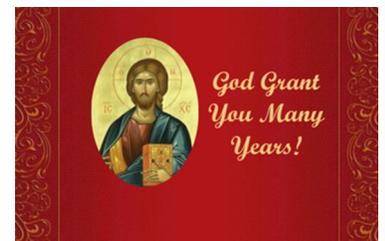
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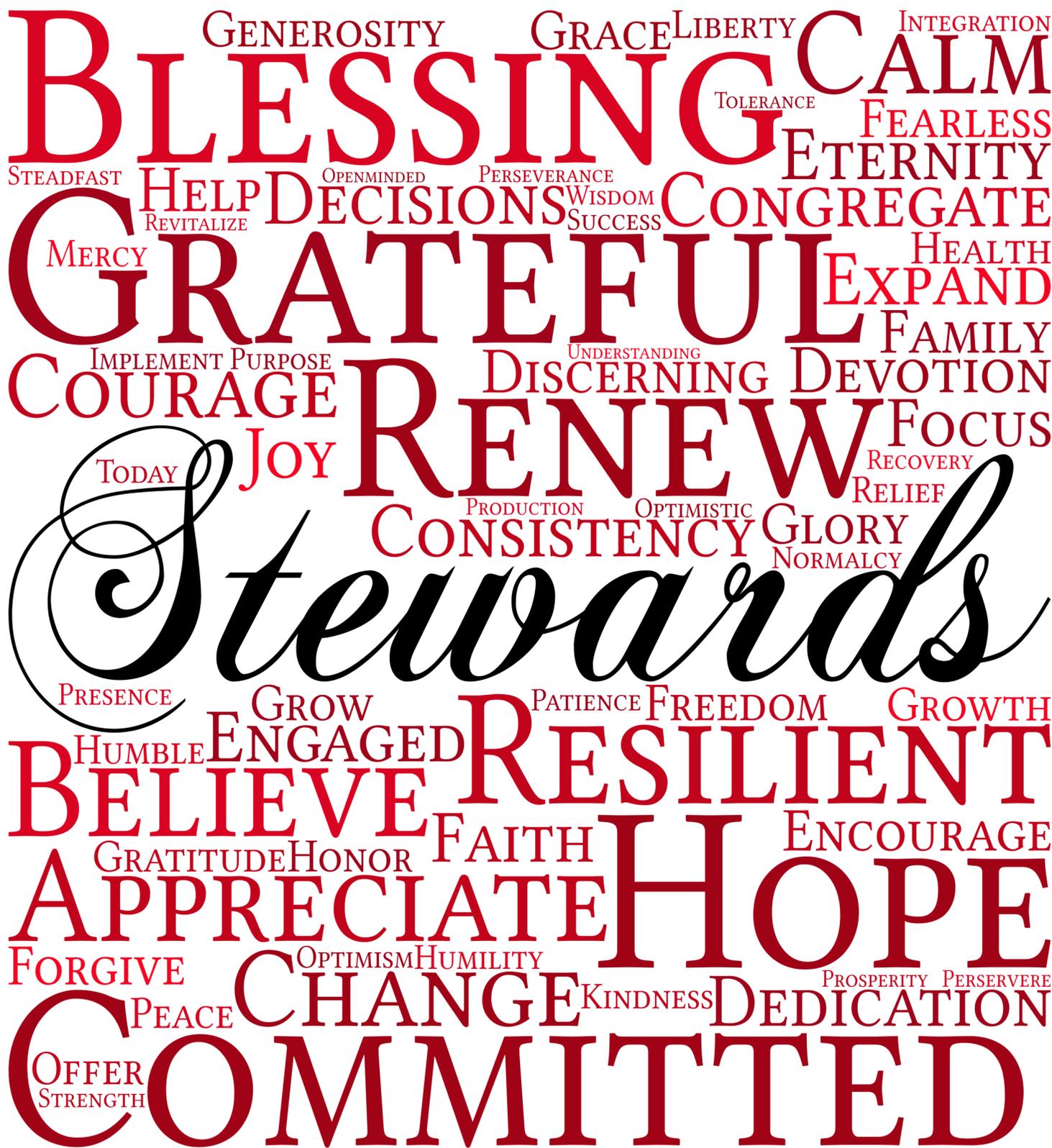
## Opt-in on *The Messenger* -

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.

# Happy Birthday!

- |                               |                                    |                                 |                                   |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Thomas Karoutsos - Sep. 1     | Mary Maas - Sep. 8                 | Christina Gerecke - Sep. 18     | Nicolette Tsiabasis - Sep. 27     |
| James Katzaras - Sep. 1       | Tina Sarantos - Sep. 9             | Christina Makris - Sep. 18      | Nicholas Freeman - Sep. 28        |
| Sophia Diniaco - Sep. 2       | Presvytera Denise Stefero - Sep. 9 | Dr. Paul Matsiras - Sep. 19     | Nolan Gregory - Sep. 28           |
| Moriah Panagopoulos - Sep. 2  | Quinn Hadaway - Sep. 10            | Vasiliki Siciaridis - Sep. 19   | Konstantinos Tsambis - Sep. 28    |
| Jacob Rodriguez - Sep. 2      | Vasilios Nenos - Sep. 10           | George Fellios - Sep. 20        | Vasili Sotiropoulos - Sep. 29     |
| Theodora Clipp - Sep. 3       | Paulina Katsouli - Sep. 11         | Elizabeth Kavouklis - Sep. 20   | Katerina Papaefstathiou - Sep. 30 |
| Andrew Demas - Sep. 3         | Nicolas Perry - Sep. 11            | Aidan Tsongranis - Sep. 20      | Ava Spirides - Sep. 30            |
| Demetrios Panopoulos - Sep. 3 | Nicholas Alsina - Sep. 12          | Robert Garrison Mason - Sep. 21 |                                   |
| Nicky Abramis - Sep. 4        | Dr. Demetrios Konstas - Sep. 12    | Evelyn Patsavos - Sep. 21       |                                   |
| Madeline Ciotti - Sep. 4      | Constance Demetriou - Sep. 14      | Panagiotis Sarantos - Sep. 22   |                                   |
| Dr. Karina Findlay - Sep. 4   | Sophia Lindiakos - Sep. 14         | Sofia Stonestreet - Sep. 22     |                                   |
| JoAnn Hartung - Sep. 4        | Ryan Rindone - Sep. 14             | Kelly Westmoreland - Sep. 22    |                                   |
| Mary Renaud - Sep. 4          | Chyanne Clements - Sep. 15         | Luke Depasquale - Sep. 23       |                                   |
| Gennaro Scarfogliero - Sep. 4 | Nicholas Matassini - Sep. 16       | Janet Georgas - Sep. 24         |                                   |
| Peter Spanos - Sep. 4         | Rosemary Straba - Sep. 16          | Maria Horton - Sep. 24          |                                   |
| Luke Stonestreet - Sep. 4     | Katerina Zabetakis - Sep. 16       | Deborah Papaconomou - Sep. 24   |                                   |
| Abigaile Tsongranis - Sep. 4  | Kyle Austin - Sep. 17              | Sofia Boomgarden - Sep. 26      |                                   |
| Michael Halikoytakis - Sep. 5 | Mihail Kaburis - Sep. 17           | Stavroula Liras - Sep. 26       |                                   |
| Larissa Krinos - Sep. 6       | Sophia Smith - Sep. 17             | Spero Renaud - Sep. 26          |                                   |
| Konstantos Orfanakis - Sep. 6 | Selena Soteriou - Sep. 17          | Addison Schad - Sep. 26         |                                   |
| William Rindone - Sep. 6      | Andrew Choundas-Thatcher - Sep. 18 | Foti Kwasny - Sep. 27           |                                   |
| Lisa Maltezos - Sep. 7        | Alexandra Gerecke - Sep. 18        | Andoni Panagopoulos - Sep. 27   |                                   |
| Artemis Xenick - Sep. 7       |                                    |                                 |                                   |





Our word for our parish for 2022 is “Stewards”. Here are the words that our parishioners chose to mark their year.

**Verse of the Year—I Peter 4:10**

*As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.*

# Stewards of God's Grace - Stewards of Our Talents/Gifts

By: Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis

*Our word for our parish for 2022 is "stewards." Every month this year, Fr. Stavros will write a short article on one aspect of this word, to keep it at the forefront of our minds as we journey through 2022.*

*As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. 1 Peter 4:10*



We can only know God when we come into a relationship with Him. And we can only fulfill God's commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves

when we come into some kind of relationship with our neighbor. The first relationship is that of the Holy Trinity—Before anything was created, there existed a relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus, an important part of every life is the relationships in it.

We are stewards of every aspect of our lives, including our relationships. Some relationships last only seconds—an encounter with a stranger on a sidewalk hopefully elicits a smile or a good morning. It probably won't produce anything more. An encounter with a teller or a waitress or a cashier will hopefully include a "thank you."

After our relationship with God, our families are our most important relationships, since they are relatively permanent. I say relatively because even family members pass away and we don't have those relationships forever. In addition to family members, relationships with friend are important. First of all, some people have small families, and others do not live near family. Even in the largest and most close-knit of families, people need friends, because they need peers. Parents and grandparents aren't peers to their children or grandchildren. Nieces and nephews aren't peers with their aunts and uncles (at least not usually). Thus, people need peer relationships and these come in the form of friendships. For me, there are no priests in my family. It is, therefore, critically important that I make friendships with some priests, peers who will be able to understand, help and support me in the priestly ministry in a way that no family member can, because they get it, because they are doing it.

The most important thing, I would think, in attracting friends, is common interest. Common careers are not needed to have a friend. I have plenty of friends who are not priests, in fact, most of my friends are not priests. But there has to be a common interest, or common bond.

We are stewards of these relationships. We look to others for understanding, help and support, and others look to us for the same things. Among the most important things friends can do for one another is to keep a confidence. Everyone has insecurities that they don't want shared with the entire world. And everyone needs the

help of friends to work through them. Thus, in addition to being a steward of a friendship, one should be a steward of the confidences shared within that friendship. And that goes for even when someone may no longer be a friend—the confidences share in the context of a friendship should respectfully be left there. If two friends decide they aren't friends any more, they should trash the reputation of one another by betraying confidences that were shared while they were friends.

There is a saying, that some people are friends for a reason, a season or a lifetime. It always amazes me that at every stage of life—at summer camp, in high school, in college, etc.—people say THIS stage is where you'll make the friends you'll have for the rest of your life. The truth is that we may end up with one friend from childhood that is a lifelong friend. We probably won't have 30 of them. Maybe there will be a few from college. Friends come and go, many times based on our circumstances. I had friends in my former parish in Asheville that I now haven't seen in 18 years. I was good friends with some of them. But space and circumstance doesn't allow us to be the close friends we once were. I am thankful that I have spoken with some of them years later, and there is still a love and respect and even a kinship that has survived the years and the distance. Some friends are friends for a reason or a season, and it is important that we be able to appreciate what we had with a friend, even when we aren't friends any more. I have people over the years that I didn't see eye to eye with and it cost us a friendship. With time and space, the frustration with the loss of a friendship has subsided and I can appreciate that they were a good friend for a specific reason or season of my life.

As we continue our focus on being "Stewards" this year, it is important to remember that we are stewards of our friendships. In order to be a friend, one has to be checked in and spend time with friends. In order to be a good friend, one has to keep a confidence. Friendships are good things, among other reasons, they give us an opportunity to follow the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. And what better opportunity do we have than to love and serve the friends we see all the time. Be good stewards of your friendships.



# Χρόνια Πολλά! Happy Nameday!

ADAMANTIOS, AFRODITE, AKRIVI, ANTIGONI, ASPASIA, ATHINA, CLEO, CLEOPATRA, CORALIA, DIAMANTO, DIONI, DODONI, EFTERPI, ELPINIKI, ERASMA, ERATO, HAIDO, HARIKLIA, ISMENE, JOSHUA, KALLIROI, KALLISTI, KALLISTO, KLEONIKI, MANDO, MARGARET, MARIANTHI, MELETIOS, MELPOMENI, MOSHO, OURANIA, PANDORA, PENELOPE, POLIMNIA, POLINIKI, POLYTIMI, RALLIA, RALLIS, SAPFO, SIMEON, THERPSIHORI, THALIA, THEANO, THEONIMPHI - SEPTEMBER 1

MAMAS - SEPTEMBER 2

ANTHIMOS, ARHONTIA, ARHONTION, ARISTEA, ARISTION, PHEVOS, POLYDOROS - SEPTEMBER 3

HERMIONI, MOSES, OKEANIS, OKEANOS, ROSALIA - SEPTEMBER 4

ZAHARIAS - SEPTEMBER 5

EVDOXIOS, VIVOS - SEPTEMBER 6

CASIANI, SOZON - SEPTEMBER 7

DESPOINA, GENETHLIOS, NERATZIA, SKIADENI, TSAMPIKA - SEPTEMBER 8

JOAHIM, KIARAN - SEPTEMBER 9

ERASTI, ERASTOS, KLIMENTINI, KLIMIS, MINODORA, MITRODORA, NYMFODORA, POULCHERIA - SEPTEMBER 10

EFROSYNOS, EVANTHIA, EVANTHIS, THEODORA, VIOLETA - SEPTEMBER 11

ARISTIDIS, CORNELIUS - SEPTEMBER 13

STAVROS, THEOKLIS - SEPTEMBER 14

NIKITAS, VISARION - SEPTEMBER 15

EFIMIA, LOUNTMILLA, MELINA - SEPTEMBER 16

AGAPI, AGATHOKLIS, ELPIDA, OLIVIANOS, PANTOLEON, PILEAS, PISTI, SONIA, SOPHIA - SEPTEMBER 17

ARIADNI, EVMENIS, KASTOR, ROMYLOS - SEPTEMBER 18

SAVATIOS - SEPTEMBER 19

EFSTATHIOS, THEOPISTI - SEPTEMBER 20

JONAS - SEPTEMBER 21

LOIZOS, LOUISE, PHOKAS, ZOGRAFIA - SEPTEMBER 22

IRIS, POLIXENI, RAIS, XANTHIPOS, XANTHIPPI - SEPTEMBER 23

KOPROS, MIRSINI, MIRTO, PERSEFONI, PERSIS, THEKLA - SEPTEMBER 24

EFROSINI - SEPTEMBER 25

AKYLINI, EPICHARIS, KALLISTRATOS, ZINON - SEPTEMBER 27

HARITON - SEPTEMBER 28

KYRIAKOS - SEPTEMBER 29

STRATONIKOS - SEPTEMBER 30

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DO NOT NEGLECT TO SHOW *hospitality* TO STRANGERS,  
FOR THEREBY SOME HAVE ENTERTAINED *angels* UNAWARES.  
HEBREWS 13:2

## St. John's Bookstore



*Back to School and Back to Sunday School  
Young or old, we never stop learning.*

*Stop into our bookstore and browse books on all aspects  
of our faith.*

*Orthodox Study Bibles and Scripture Commentaries  
Books on the Orthodox Faith  
Books on and by the Saints  
Books on Marriage and Family Issues  
Prayer Books and Books on "How to Pray"  
Children's Books*

*Special orders are welcomed. See Presvytera Denise for  
more information.  
Shop our store this Sunday!*

## Sunday School News



**WELCOME BACK TO SUNDAY SCHOOL.** We are so glad to have the 2022-2023 Sunday School year off to a great start. Thank you to all the teachers, parents, and children who are committed to our program.

We would like to introduce and thank our dedicated staff for their commitment to the children of St. John's. Together, with the help of the parents, we will strive to strengthen the faith of our students in Sunday School.

**Director of Sunday School: Vickie Peckham**  
**Music: Maria Xenick**  
**Toddler 2's: Jenny Paloumpis**  
**Pre-K3: Alexis Scarfogliero and Zackie Ameres**  
**Pre-K4: Denise Panos and Rachel Zaharis**  
**Kindergarten: Debbie Nicklow and Donna Trakas**  
**Grade 1: Maraquet Edquid and Doukissa Moshos**  
**Grade 2: Nicole Mantzanas and Jaime Brewer**  
**Grade 3: Amy Kafantaris and Stamie Garcia**  
**Grade 4: Georgia Kane and Vivian Samuel**  
**Grade 5: Vickie Peckham**  
**Grade 6: Sarah Sengsouvanha and Stefanie Moran**  
**Grade 7 and 8: Betty Katherine Katsamakis and Marina Choundas**  
**High School Girls: Mary Ann Konstas**  
**High School Boys: Vasili Panagopoulos**

The first day of Sunday School was on Aug. 14th and on the 13th the teachers had an inspiring retreat with Fr. Stavros and Vasili Panagopoulos. Thank you to the many families who have registered their children in Sunday School. Please register your child if you have not done so already.

We are very excited about our Weekly Topics that each classroom will include into their program. The topics for the month of AUGUST were THE THEOTOKOS, and THE LORD'S PRAYER.

It was so wonderful to see so many families attend Fr. Kyriakos Hambos Ordination on Sun. Aug. 21st. We presented him with all the cards and letters made by the Sunday School students the previous week. He was so honored and happy to receive them. We pray for Fr. Kyriakos to serve the church with love, patience, and wisdom. We know he will be a wonderful priest and spiritual father to many.

Our **YOUTH SUNDAY PROGRAM** will continue this year. Students in 1st -6th grade will sing the Liturgical Hymns with the choir under the direction of Maria Xenick. Our high school student will serve as Ushers and read the Epistle on Youth Sundays.

We understand that it is very difficult to attend church every week, but **PARENTS**, please make an effort. Your children's understanding of our faith is essential. It is also important to make it a "habit" of going to church **EVERY** Sunday morning. When students come to church on a regular basis they feel **CONNECTED** to our church, to their teachers, and especially to their classmates. What better peers to have, than their Orthodox friends! These friendships could also last a lifetime. Students who do not come regularly may feel uncomfortable and miss so much of our valuable instruction.

Our HALL of FAITH program will continue again this year! This program is to encourage our children to memorize and understand the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. Our Pre-K through 3rd Grade will be focusing on the Lord's Prayer and our 4th graders on up will do the Creed. Look for our HALL of FAITH poster on our Sunday School bulletin board. Will your child's name be on it?

Please feel free to contact us with any questions, suggestions, or comments regarding St. John's Sunday School Program. Parents: If you do not receive our weekly e-mails about our Sunday School Program, please contact Vickie Peckham at 813-758-3102 or e-mail her at [vickiepeckham@gmail.com](mailto:vickiepeckham@gmail.com)

### SEPTEMBER CALENDAR:

Sun. Sept. 4th: No Sunday School (Labor Day Weekend)

Sun. Sept. 11th: Topic: The Lord's Prayer  
Class Picture Day

Sun. Sept. 18th: Topic: Sign of the Cross

Sun. Sept. 25th: Topic: The Creed (Youth Sunday)

# 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 September. 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. If you have any favorite verse you'd like me to comment on, please forward it to [frstav@gmail.com](mailto:frstav@gmail.com).



## September 4-10

*Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work."*

*John 4:34*

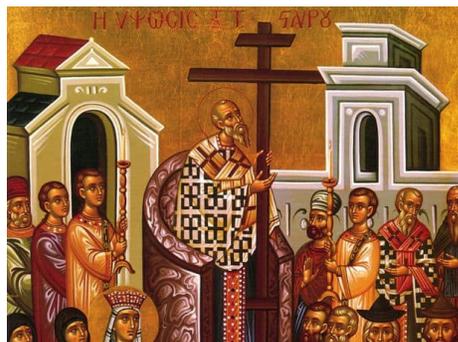
The new Ecclesiastical Year began on September 1. The tradition of starting the year on January 1 is only an invention of the past several centuries. Before that, the new year always began September 1. Why? Because the year was set according to the calendar for farming. The end of the year, August, was a time to bring in the harvest of the year's crop. September and October were spent plowing the fields and preparing them for the next season. Some planting was done in the fall, some in the spring and again the harvest was made the next summer. Jesus often spoke in terms that farmers would understand. In this particular verse, He was speaking to His Disciples, who questioned why He was talking to a Samaritan woman. They asked Him if He was hungry, since He had been speaking with her for a while. And this was His answer, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work." What does that mean? We know that food is essential in order for us to live. We all think about it every few hours at least. One take away from this short quote from Jesus is that we should see doing His will as essential to our life as our food. We don't go for more than a few hours without eating or at least thinking of food. We should be thinking of God and working to do His will as often and as foundationally as we eat.



## September 11-17

*Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed.*

*Exodus 17:11*



On September 14, we celebrate the Feastday of the Holy Cross. This day has the solemnity of Good Friday. In fact, we read from the Gospel account of the Crucifixion during the Divine Liturgy. The Old

Testament is filled with prophecies and foreshadowings of the New Testament. One such thing happens in Exodus 17:11. The context here is that the Israelites were fighting the Amalekites after their exodus from Egypt. They were vastly outnumbered, untrained and lacked confi-

dence. Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and when he did not hold up his hand, then Amalek prevailed. God had Aaron and Hur hold up the hands of Moses whenever he would grow tired to make sure that his hands never fell and that Israel was not defeated. Moses, with arms outstretched, prefigures the crucifixion of Christ, that through the sign of His cross (Moses, with arms outstretched, look like a cross), we His followers prevail against death, the devil and all the powers of darkness.



**September 18-24**

*It is well with the man who deals generously and lends,  
who conducts his affairs with justice.*

*Psalm 112:5*

The theme for my message this month was about radical generosity. This short verse from Psalm 112 reminds us that it goes well (and God is pleased) with the person who deals generously and lends, who conducts his affairs with justice. This seems pretty straightforward. Let's look at this from the opposite and negative side. Can you imagine if it was written "it is NOT well with the man who deals generously and lends, and it is a BAD THING if he conducts his affairs with justice." That sounds preposterous, because this verse embodies everything that God's people should be. God is so generous with His blessings towards us. We should be generous with one another. God is a God of truth and justice, not deceit and injustice. We should conduct ourselves in the same way also.



**September 25-October 1**

*Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying, give without pay.*

*Matthew 10:8*

Jesus gave these instructions to His Disciples as He sent them out. They had very specific instructions both for what to do and how to act. He wanted them to be healers, healing various ailments in a world filled with them. He wanted them to be generous in serving others. They received life, breath, time, and talent. They should be willing to give from God's bounty to them and to do so without expecting anything in return. This is the ideal for us as well. The world is filled with hurt—not only diseases of the body, but insecurities, doubts, lack of confidence and other afflictions of the mind. We are supposed to be healers, not people who hurt others. We are supposed to support, encourage and give confidence to others, not tear them down. We receive so much from God, from our talents to our very life and breath, how much are we willing to offer back to

Him through service to others? It is probably not practice to give and never be paid anything. Most of us need to work to put food on our tables. However, we should not always



be working only for pay. It is important, necessary, and actually fulfilling to give without expectation of pay. Doing some volunteer service, small things like cutting the lawn of a senior citizen, or taking an extra turn driving carpool, these things are helpful and essential to being generous, as Christ describes generosity in this verse.



## Forgive Me By: Fr. Andreas Houpos



As a priest, one of the things I look forward to most in my liturgical office is the act of asking forgiveness at the Divine Liturgy. And by the wisdom of God's Church, this is a rubrical formality—in other words, the priest is ordered by the script of the service itself to ask forgiveness of his fellow celebrants and of the congregation at large. The Body and Blood of Christ cannot be approached

without it. No matter what has preceded, the priest knows that he will face this moment. It haunts him all week. It is as if he faces the second coming of Christ. "Christ is in our midst," he and his concelebrants say to one another while exchanging the kiss of peace. Here he is. What excuse can we give, what truth can we dodge in that moment? All petty grievances, but even substantial differences, in that moment melt away. They must. For in the face of the fire of God they are nothing. The priest turns to his congregation, seeking their forgiveness as well—there they are in all their sinful and saintly glory. There are critics, there are confidants. There is his spouse and family, there are complete strangers. There is the leftist and there is the right-winger. There is the family with which he has laughed, and there is the family with which he has grieved. And to each of them he offers a collective bow and words uttered with a sigh: "My brothers and sisters, forgive me." Forgive me that I don't know you better. Forgive me that my sermon fell short. Forgive me that I haven't yet replied to your e-mail. Forgive me that we had a testy exchange. Forgive me that I misunderstood your message. Forgive me for this vain post. Forgive me for not living up to my high calling. Forgive me. All of us in the Church are called to do this, but it is the priest in particular, in that setting and moment, who at once feels the immense burden of his sins and the needs of his people, and the immense relief and assurance of Christ, when he must humble himself and utter the words, with fear of God, with faith, and with love: "Forgive me". Glory to God, who provides for our salvation. Glory to God, who gives us new beginnings.

*Fr. Andreas Houpos is the Proistamenos of St. Nektarios Greek Orthodox Church in Charlotte, NC.*

## Who/What are the Apostolic Fathers?

The Apostolic Fathers were Christian theologians who lived in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, who are believed to have personally known some of the Twelve Apostles, or to have been significantly influenced by them. Their writings, though popular in Early Christianity, were ultimately not included in the canon of the New Testament once it reached its final form. Many of the writings derive from the same time period and geographical location as other works of early Christian literature that did come to be part of the New Testament, and some of the writings found among the Apostolic Fathers' seem to have been just as highly regarded as some of the writings that became the New Testament. The first three, Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp, are considered the chief ones.

Most importantly, they were all Orthodox! Use graphic from my phone from June 30.

### A Little Encouragement Goes A Long Way

"Barely three weeks after my son's wedding and honeymoon, I noticed a rather unusual pattern of him "stopping by" my place on his way home in the evenings. I thought he was just missing his original home. I asked him why but he gave no reasonable answer. He always asked for dinner when he came around, which was rather odd for a newly married man.

On his fourth visit, he came with one of his friends who was well known to me. I confided in his friend, who simply told me that his new wife "cannot cook". In fact, on the days he doesn't stop by, he eats at that friend's house or he eats out.

This was fire on the mountain, the choice was between me encouraging him to eat outside at another household and risk ending his marriage or save the day. I opted for the latter.

When he showed up again on Friday evening, I told him to tell his wife to see me on Saturday morning, we needed to go somewhere together, it was a woman's thing. She came as I requested and I told her I was entertaining my Church Society members and needed to cook for them. She was to assist me with shopping for the cooking. I noticed the fright on her face.

After returning home from the shopping, I told her she wasn't cooking because the people involved had very peculiar tastes, she was however to pay attention to all that I did in the kitchen. We finished (or I finished) all the cooking in about four hours. I made four different soups that I knew my son loved, made different stews with chicken, fish and beef and steaming jolls of rice.

After finishing, I told her to divide everything we cooked

into two equal portions. She was surprised when I told her to take one portion with her when she was going home. I knew the food would last about six weeks, and as predicted, my son did not show up at my door until week seven. I knew the food had finished. So I repeated the same process again, telling him to tell his wife to see me when he got home.

By the third time we did this, I let her do the cooking whilst I supervised her. I never mentioned anything to her. By the fifth time, she had gotten a hang of things, even better than I imagined. On her way home, she hugged me passionately and said “Thank you Mum, you saved my marriage and you never even scolded me.”

I am told that with my son’s encouragement, she is now contemplating on opening a restaurant.

Rather than being the catalyst to scatter my son’s marriage, I opted for encouraging them in love for them to attain a better and deeper understanding.”

Encourage someone in love today, you just might be saving something very fundamental.

### **Jellyfish** **By Fr. Andreas Houpos**

«Εἶπεν ἄφρων ἐν καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ· οὐκ ἔστιν θεός.» “A fool said in his heart, ‘There is no God’.” (Psalm 13:1) I saw these jellyfish today—seemingly aimless creatures, beholden to the whims of a current and their own simple impulses. I also recently heard someone going on about their astrological sign and how, despite their best intentions, they were seemingly beholden to the whims of the alignment of the stars and their own simple impulses. Ἄφρων! Fool! The stars dictate your fate? “He made the moon to mark the seasons,” not to determine your love life and job prospects. The fullness of our life is determined by the state of our repentance, not of retrograde planets. Ἄφρων! Fool! You say “there is no God”, and that all that exists is randomly generated and chaotic, that there is no purpose to life or a higher power at work. Do you not see how great a gift the physical creation of the universe is? Orbits and heartbeats and breaths and seasons all coddle us at a primal level, giving us a sense of regularity and familiarity and stability. “The heavens declare the glory of God!” Chaos? True chaos? That would mean instability in everything at every moment at every level—we would liquefy and transmogrify and disintegrate and dematerialize and flip between dimensions and states of being at a limitless rate, and, assuming we could even have consciousness, we would exist in an unfathomable state of soul-crushing fear and anguish. It is truly a fool who says “there is no God,” because the very physiological processes that make this foolishness possible are a gift to us, so that we can experience life with the possibility of contemplation and joy and love and hope. Everyone will readily call “fool” someone who owes everything they have and are to someone else,

and then disparages that person or tries to take credit for their own success. How can we not strive for humility and gratitude?

Jellyfish might seem simple and aimless, but everything that has gone into their existence is a miracle and a gift beyond understanding. If we are willing to see, they can lead us to God. “O Lord, how manifold are your works! You have made everything in wisdom!”

*Fr. Andreas Houpos is the Proistamenos of St. Nektarios Greek Orthodox Church in Charlotte, NC.*

### **TAKING UP OF THE CROSS IN MARRIAGE**



According to Croatian tradition, when a couple gets married, the priest doesn’t tell them that they have found the perfect person. On the contrary! Instead, he says to them: “You have found your cross. It is a cross to love, to carry it with you, a cross that is not to throw away but to treasure.”

In Herzegovina, the Cross represents the greatest love and the crucifix is the treasure of the house.

When the bride and groom enter the church on their wedding day, they carry a crucifix with them. The priest blesses the crucifix. When the time comes to exchange their vows, the bride puts her right hand on the crucifix and the groom puts his hand on hers, so that both hands are joined together on the crucifix.

The priest covers their hands with his stole as they exchange their vows, according to the rite of the Church, to be faithful to each other, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, till death do them part.

Then, instead of kissing each other, the bride and groom kiss the crucifix. Those who witness the ceremony understand from it that if one of them leaves the other, he or she leaves Christ on the Cross.

After the ceremony, the newlyweds bring the crucifix to their home and put it in a place of honor. It will forever be the point of reference and the place of family prayer. In times of difficulty, the family do not go to the lawyer or the psychiatrist, but kneel down together before the crucifix in search of help from Jesus Christ. They kneel down and maybe even cry and open their hearts asking the Lord and each other for forgiveness. They go to sleep with peace in their hearts because they have received forgiveness from the only one who has the power to save.

Husband and wife will teach their children to kiss the crucifix every day and not to go to sleep like pagans, without first giving thanks to Jesus. They know that Jesus is holding them in His arms and there is nothing to fear.

## The Tiger, the Lion and the Donkey

The donkey told the tiger, "The grass is blue."

The tiger replied, "No, the grass is green ."

The discussion became heated, and the two decided to submit the issue to arbitration, so they approached the lion.

As they approached the lion on his throne, the donkey started screaming: "Your Highness, isn't it true that the grass is blue?"

The lion replied: "If you believe it is true, the grass is blue."

The donkey rushed forward and continued: "The tiger disagrees with me, contradicts me and annoys me. Please punish him."

The king then declared: "The tiger will be punished with 3 days of silence."

The donkey jumped with joy and went on his way, content and repeating "The grass is blue, the grass is blue..."

The tiger asked the lion, "Your Majesty, why have you punished me, after all, the grass is green?"

The lion replied, "You've known and seen the grass is green."

The tiger asked, "So why do you punish me?"

The lion replied, "That has nothing to do with the question of whether the grass is blue or green. The punishment is because it is degrading for a brave, intelligent creature like you to waste time arguing with an ass, and on top of that, you came and bothered me with that question just to validate something you already knew was true!"

The biggest waste of time is arguing with the fool and fanatic who doesn't care about truth or reality, but only the victory of his beliefs and illusions. Never waste time on discussions that make no sense. There are people who, for all the evidence presented to them, do not have the ability to understand. Others are blinded by ego, hatred and resentment, and the only thing that they want is to be right even if they aren't.

When IGNORANCE SCREAMS, intelligence moves on.

Think this may resonate with many right now

## A mature (over 40) lady gets pulled over for speeding

Older Woman: Is there a problem, Officer?

Officer: Ma'am, you were speeding.

Older Woman: Oh, I see.

Officer: Can I see your license please?

Older Woman: I'd give it to you but I don't have one.

Officer: Don't have one?

Older Woman: Lost it, 4 years ago for drunk driving.

Officer: I see...Can I see your vehicle registration papers please.

Older Woman: I can't do that.

Officer: Why not?

Older Woman: I stole this car.

Officer: Stole it?

Older Woman: Yes, and I killed and hacked up the owner.

Officer: You what?

Older Woman: His body parts are in plastic bags in the trunk if you want to see.

The Officer looks at the woman and slowly backs away to his car and calls for back up. Within minutes 5 police cars circle the car. A senior officer slowly approaches the car, clasp his half-drawn gun.

Officer 2: Ma'am, could you step out of your vehicle, please! The woman steps out of her vehicle.

Older woman: Is there a problem sir?

Officer 2: One of my officers told me that you have stolen this car and murdered the owner.

Older Woman: Murdered the owner?

Officer 2: Yes, could you please open the trunk of your car, please.

The woman opens the trunk, revealing nothing but an empty trunk.

Officer 2: Is this your car, ma'am?

Older Woman: Yes, here are the registration papers. The officer is quite stunned.

Officer 2: One of my officers claims that you do not have a driving license.

The woman digs into her handbag and pulls out a clutch purse and hands it to the officer.

The officer examines the license. He looks quite puzzled.

Officer 2: Thank you, ma'am, one of my officers told me you didn't have a license, that you stole this car, and that you murdered and hacked up the owner.

Older Woman: Bet the liar told you I was speeding, too.



# September 2022

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<b>**Fast Day</b>				<b>1</b> Beginning of Ecclesiastical Year Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	<b>2 **</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4</b> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. No Sunday School	<b>5</b> Labor Day—Office Closed	<b>6</b> Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	<b>7 **</b> Paraklisis 6:00 p.m. Choir Practice	<b>8</b> Nativity of Virgin Mary Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	<b>9 **</b>	<b>10</b> Young at Heart GOYA Youth Worker Training
<b>11</b> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Altar Boy Meeting Presentation on Mount Athos in the Zaharias Room	<b>12</b> Meeting of Ministry Heads 6:30 p.m.	<b>13</b> Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Philoptochos Board Meeting (zoom) Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	<b>14 **</b> Holy Cross Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Choir Practice	<b>15</b>	<b>16 **</b>	<b>17</b> Community Outreach
<b>18</b> Orthros 8:30 a.m. Hierarchical Liturgy 9:45 a.m. Bishop Sevastianos Celebrating Philoptochos General Meeting H xara mas dance GOYA 5:00 p.m.	<b>19</b> Orthodoxy 101 6:30-8:30 p.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	<b>20</b> Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.	<b>21 **</b> Fr. Stavros out of office September 21-23 Choir Practice	<b>22</b>	<b>23 **</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>25</b> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. AHEPA/Daughter's H xara mas dance JOY Tween's after church Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	<b>26</b> St. John the Theologian Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	<b>27</b> Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.	<b>28 **</b> Choir Practice	<b>29</b> Adult Greek School	<b>30 **</b>	

# St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

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## St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

### Timetable of Services

**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.

#### **Parish Priest** Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis

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

**Retired Priest in Residence** Rev. Fr. Stratton Dorozenski  
813-876-8830 (Office)

**Retired Priest in Residence** Rev. Fr. John Stefero  
813-876-8830 (Office) 678-637-4425 (Cell)

**Pastoral Assistant**  
Vasili Panagopoulos  
vasili@stjohntpa.org 414-254-5134 (Cell)

#### **Parish Council**

John Zelatis, President 813-727-2271  
Euripides Panos, Vice President 813-352-3972  
Marilyn Sandborn, Secretary 813-855-8678  
Gary Ward, Treasurer 813-846-3898  
Jim Armstrong 954-295-6665  
Joanne Dalaklis 813-385-8205  
Amin Hanhan 813-846-2957  
Nick Katzaras 863-581-2430  
Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855  
Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026  
Mike Xenick 813-340-8737

#### **Office Staff**

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

**Adopt a College Student**  
VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

#### **Adult Greek School**

Magda Myer 813-523-5771

#### **AHEPA**

Thomas Sakaris, President 201-819-2319

#### **Altar Angels**

Kalliope Chagaris 813-789-4134

#### **Altar Boys**

Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

#### **Bookstore**

Presbytera Denise Stefero 678-464-4833

#### **Bible Study-Monday Night**

Fr. John Stefero 678-637-4425

#### **Bible Study-Tuesday Morning**

Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

#### **Buildings & Grounds**

Euripides Panos 813-352-3972

#### **Chantor**

Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134

#### **Choir**

Tara Swartzbaugh, Director 813-313-0439  
Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782

#### **Community Outreach**

Greg Melton 813-967-2074

#### **Connect Through Christ - Special Needs Ministry for Children**

Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534

#### **Dance Groups**

H XAPA ΜΑΣ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668  
Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963  
ΠΑΡΕΑ, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136  
ΠΑΝΗΓΥΡΙ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668

#### **Daughters of Penelope**

Elena Paras Ketchum 813-229-0144

#### **Festival**

Mike Xenick 813-340-8737

#### **Finance Committee**

Gary Ward 813-846-3898

#### **Food Pantry**

Sheila Vukmer 412-719-1005

#### **GriefShare**

Donna Hambos 813-843-8412

#### **Gasparilla Parking**

VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

#### **GOYA**

Michael & Bessie Palios 813-523-0346

#### **Hope/Joy**

George & Zackie Ameres 813-245-3813

#### **Joy Tweens**

Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963

#### **Junior Olympics**

Dwight Forde 727-685-9028

#### **MOMS**

Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862

#### **Men's Fellowship**

Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

#### **Parish Nursing Ministry**

Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026

#### **Oratorical Festival**

Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

#### **Photography Ministry**

Karina Findlay 813-476-9632

#### **Philoptochos**

Melissa Krinos 813-716-9975

#### **Stewardship**

Chris Kyrus 757-672-1920  
George Mitseas 813-748-1220

#### **Sunday School**

Vickie Peckham 813-758-3102

#### **Usher**

Pete Trakas 813-505-2193

#### **Website / Social Media / APP**

VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

#### **Welcoming Ministry**

Maria Xenick 813-765-3587

#### **Young Adult/OCF**

Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134

#### **Young at Heart**

Bill Manikas 813-716-8185  
Dora Morgan 813-613-3738

#### **Youth Protection**

Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855

#### **12 Disciples**

Mathew Balasis 727-421-7376

*The Messenger of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is published on a monthly basis. Publication is the first of each month. Deadline for notices and announcements for The Messenger is the 10<sup>th</sup> of each month.*

“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.