

THE MESSENGER

September 2023 Edition

Nativity of
the
Theotokos
September
8th



St. John the Baptist
Greek Orthodox
Church

Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis (Proistamenos)
Fr. Stratton Dorozenski
(Retired Priest In Residence)
Fr. John Stefero (Retired Priest In Residence)



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

St. John's Directory

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.

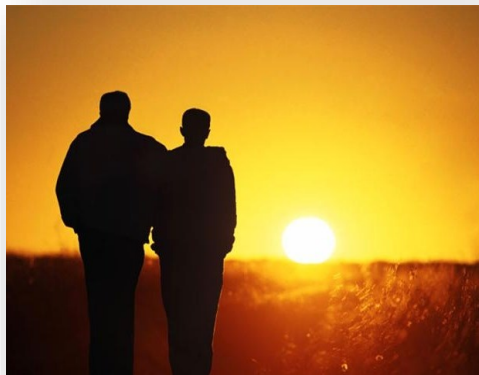
Parish Priest Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-876-8830 (Office) frstav@gmail.com 813-394-1038 (Cell)	Chanter Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134	Men's Fellowship Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038
Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. Stratton Dorozenski 813-876-8830 (Office)	Choir Tara Swartzbaugh, Director Ruth Losovitz, Organist 813-313-0439 727-688-2782	Parish Nursing Ministry Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026
Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830 (Office) jwstefero50@hotmail.com 678-637-4425 (Cell)	College Student Program Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134	Oratorical Festival Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374
Parish Council John Zelatis, President Euripides Panos, Vice President Marilyn Sandborn, Secretary Gary Ward, Treasurer Jim Armstrong Amin Hanhan Nick Katzaras Suzanne Pileggi Alexis Scarfogliero Marcelle Triantafilou Mike Xenick 813-727-2271 813-352-3972 813-760-6289 813-846-3898 954-295-6665 813-846-2957 863-581-2430 813-244-5855 813-892-1599 612-396-5026 813-340-8737	Community Outreach Greg Melton 813-967-2074	Photography Ministry Karina Findlay 813-476-9632
	Connect Through Christ - Special Needs Ministry for Children Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534	Philoptochos Katherine Sakkis 813-309-1073
	Dance Groups H XAPA ΜΑΣ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668 Bessie Palios, 813-523-0347 Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963 ΠΑΡΕΑ, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136 ΠΑΝΗΓΥΡΙ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668	Stewardship Chris Kyrus 757-672-1920 George Mitseas 813-748-1220
Office Staff Kim Rojas Administrative Assistant, Messenger & Bulletin Editor kim@stjohntpa.org Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper debbie@stjohntpa.org 813-876-8830 fax:813-443-4899	Daughters of Penelope Elena Paras Ketchum 813-229-0144	Sunday School Vickie Peckham 813-758-3102
Adopt a College Student Kathy Kaburis 813-240-6513	Festival Mike Xenick 813-340-8737	Usher Pete Trakas 813-505-2193
Adult Greek School Magda Myer 813-523-5771	Finance Committee Gary Ward 813-846-3898	Veterans/1st Responders Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830
AHEPA Thomas Sakaris, President 201-819-2319	Food Pantry Sandra Pappas 813-785-3747	Website / Social Media / APP VOLUNTEER NEEDED!
Altar Angels Kalliope Chagaris 813-789-4134	GriefShare Donna Hambos 813-843-8412	Welcoming Ministry Maria Xenick 813-765-3587
Altar Boys Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038	Gasparilla Parking Alex Limberatos 262-370-0586	Women's Bible Study Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038
Bookstore Presbyteria Denise Stefero 678-464-4833	GOYA Michael & Bessie Palios 813-523-0346	Young Adult Aris Rogers 813-309-5525
Bible Study-Monday Night Fr. John Stefero 678-637-4425	Hope/Joy George & Zackie Ameres 813-245-3813	Young at Heart Bill Manikas 813-716-8185 Dora Morgan 813-613-3738
Buildings & Grounds Euripides Panos 813-352-3972	Joy Tweens Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963	Youth Protection Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855
	Junior Olympics Dwight Forde 561-310-5034	12 Disciples Mathew Balasis 727-421-7376
	MOMS Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862	

Fr. Stavros' Message

There's a Path to Sainthood for Everyone— Will You Embrace Yours?

In sermons and conversations, I frequently reference my “spiritual father,” Fr. Aris Metrakos. In the Orthodox Church, there is the “tradition” of the Spiritual

Father, someone who walks through life with you as a spiritual mentor, who hears your confessions, etc. In



Orthodox countries, where virtually the whole populace is Orthodox, where there are Orthodox Churches on nearly every corner, and monasteries near every town, and where people aren't as mobile as they are in American and in contemporary times, this tradition worked well. In the village, where one would live his or her entire life, there would be several clergy at hand that could function in this role. So people would go to the same person year after year throughout their lives. The Spiritual Father would know all about them, and so when they would go seek spiritual advice, there wouldn't have to be a lot of background information given, they could just get down to the challenge at hand.

This is not the reality in the United States. We are not an Orthodox country, there are very few Orthodox churches, and even fewer places of Orthodox retreat. People move periodically and so do priests. Priests rarely serve the same parish for their whole ministry, but move periodi-

cally to new flocks. People also rarely live in the same city their whole life, so they move to different parishes. And because each parish generally has one priest, it is hard for everyone to feel a close relationship with their priest. Thus, these relationships are not as strong as they used to be, or should be.

That being said, for most of my ministry, there has been no parish priest for me to go to for spiritual advice (thankfully now we have both Fr. Stratton and Fr. John, and I go to both of them for advice), and so years ago, I met Fr. Aris Metrakos, when he served the Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity in Columbia, South Carolina. When I lived in New England, during the four years I was at the Seminary and the two years I served in Connecticut, there was a priest I went to for confession, who still is a dear friend. The problem was, that when I moved down South, I couldn't see him anymore. So, when I needed confession, or a face to face conversation



with someone, I couldn't call on him for that role. Enter Fr. Aris, who I met at summer camp in 2000. It was the year 2002, when we were again at summer camp, and sharing the same apartment for the camp season, that one day I asked him if I could go to confession with him, since I hadn't been in two years, which is a long time not to go.

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I was afraid he was going to lose respect for me because of the things I was going to confess. To the contrary, when we were done, he said he had gained respect for me, and we actually have ended up becoming good friends. He heard my confessions for six years, until he moved to the Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity in San Francisco. In the years he has served Holy Trinity, I have still relied on him as a spiritual guide and when I go visit California, I go to San Francisco, for the express purpose of going to confession. He knows me well. He knows my life well—the good parts and the not so good parts. He is the person I entrust most with the care of my soul. That is a very important and heavy thing for me, and he gives my soul the attention it deserves by being pastoral, loving, patient and non-judgmental. I pray that I give these qualities to the people whose confessions I hear.



One more thing about the term Spiritual Father. It is in appropriate to ascribe this word to someone who doesn't hear your confessions. Several people whose con-

fessions I've never heard, who have actually not ever come to me for any kind of advice, have referred to me as their Spiritual Father. That is not a correct use of the term. I am parish priest to everyone. I offer sermons and sacraments to everyone. The relationship of Spiritual Father—Spiritual Child is designated for those whose confessions I hear. The only person who carries the title "Spiritual Father" for the masses is our Metropolitan—HE is the Spiritual Father to all, and we are his spiritual children. This is why we

pray for him by name in all of our services. He is our shepherd, we are his sheep.

So, after that long introduction—I want to reference one of the many times I went to Fr. Aris for confession. His style, which has become mine, is to listen to everything that the person confessing has to say without interruption, and then to make comments at the end. I try to model this as well, and as I'm hearing a confession, one thing or one theme usually sticks in my head which becomes the subject of our discussion.

Many times people are surprised by what sticks out when I hear a confession, just like many times I'm



surprised by what Fr. Aris will pick up on. I have always felt that the Holy Spirit guides these thoughts and so I just go with the thought He puts in my mind.

As I finished confessing my sins, Fr. Aris said something to me that was very simple, yet very profound. He said "God has laid out a path to sainthood for each person, and you need to do a better job of embracing yours." Now that I'm 51 years old, my life is fairly set. By this I mean, I know my strengths and weaknesses and those aren't likely to change. I have my "pathologies," the things I struggle with, and these things aren't as likely to change, especially the ones I have no control over. So he said, "When you embrace your path to sainthood, others will see that and it will inspire them to embrace their paths to sainthood. Everyone has a chance to be a saint, but a different path to get there."

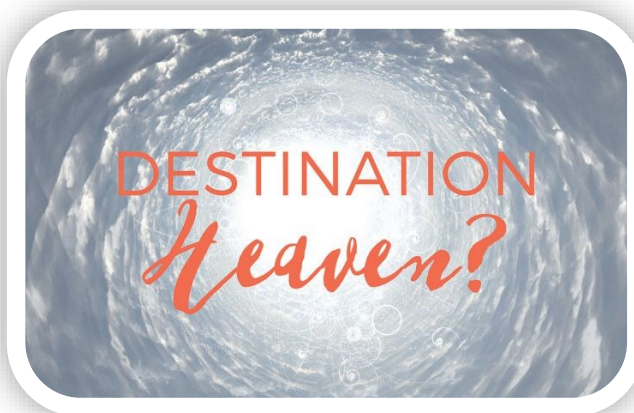
When you embrace yours, it inspires other people to embrace theirs, and in turn, puts YOU closer to salvation. When you don't embrace yours, it discourages other people from embracing theirs and puts YOU farther from your salvation."



He also told me to focus more on praying, my diet and exercise habits, the things which I have absolute control over. He offered a prayer, I asked his blessing, and left feeling renewed. By the way, for those who have never done confession, I highly recommend it. Find a priest, it need not be me, but don't go through life without some spiritual guidance.

So simple, yet so profound. God has laid out a path to sainthood for each person. Embrace your path. Encourage others to embrace theirs.

It is easy to remember this advice, and as I have reflected on it, there are so many themes and ideas that come to my mind.



It begins with the destination. The destination

is holiness, heaven, sainthood. The destination

isn't riches, fortune and fame. When we die we can't take those with us. We can take our sense of holiness and sainthood with us. So why then do we obsess over the things that are temporary, and we don't pay mind to the thing that is permanent and eternal—our salvation. Why are we so obsessed with gain of material things that we cannot take with us, and we are not so concerned with gain of spiritual things that will affect us to eternity? And why are we so obsessed with squirreling away as much money as possible for a tomorrow that is not guaranteed to any of us?

The destination is the Kingdom of God. The path, which I will speak more of in a minute, is to become Christ-like. Yet, when we speak of Christ too much, it seems that we are labeled as some kind of fanatic. I've even been told in our parish that it sounds too "Protestant" when I talk

Leading Others to Christ

about Christ. I'm not sure what that means—we are Christians, I'm a priest, what else am I supposed to talk about. The festival is an important event in the life of our parish. So is the budget. But this is not why we have a church. The "business" of the church is not supposed to consistently trump the "BUSINESS" of the Church which is leading people to Christ and saving souls. And those who love Christ are not fanatics or freak shows—they are people who know the Lord and know that talking about Him is an essential element for people who desire to find holiness in their lives and salvation for eternal life.

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The destination can come at any time. Several times a year, someone dies in our parish. And many of these times, the death is a total surprise that no one saw coming. Just goes to show us and teach us that the only thing that is guaranteed in your life is today.

And this is why we should be looking for opportunities to grow in Christ and to serve one another TODAY, because tomorrow is not guaranteed to any of us. Yesterday is over. We can't live in its glory, or its failure. And tomorrow is not guaranteed to any of us. So that leaves us with today. What are we doing today? What are you doing today? Are you doing something on the path to sainthood today, or not? If we knew that today was going to be our last day, we'd certainly do

**TOMORROW
IS NOT
PROMISED**

things a lot different than we are planning to do. We'd certainly live with more purpose. We'd probably run to give our money away to help people, rather than hoarding something that we can't take with us. Right? Who wouldn't run to help someone so that they could tell the Lord that they gave away what they had to help others, rather than hoard it for themselves? I'd like to think we all would if we had this sense of immediacy, knowing life was going to end tomorrow. The challenge is to live our lives like this at all times, as if there is no tomorrow, taking advantage of the opportunities given TODAY to pray, to worship, to serve and to help.

Embrace what makes you
UNIQUE

So, what then is the path? The "path" to sainthood is different for each person. That is because each person that the Lord created is unique. The path for certain people is through the priesthood. The path of others goes through law, or medicine, or education, or architecture. The path for some is to be a garbage collector or the person who empties septic tanks. This path is equally as important as any other path, because without sanitation, we'd all die from toxins. Not every path earns a lot of money or comes with fame, or status or a large house or an expensive car. God didn't create a path to wealth for everyone, He created a path to sainthood. Some people's paths will include wealth. And in blessing someone with wealth, God I'm sure hopes that riches would be used to help those who don't have wealth, in the form of philanthropy. Not everyone is called to philanthropy. But there are far more people who have the means to this calling but just haven't answered it yet.

The path to sainthood is painful. Read the stories of the saints of the church. The road for each of them to sainthood has some pain in it. Many of them were martyred. They were killed for their faith. Many suffered torture and imprisonment. Many lost reputation and were exiled or ostracized.

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The beautiful and dignified icons that depict them depict faces of peace, not faces of pain. But behind the peaceful countenance was pain suffered in order to glorify Christ. Their faces are shown at peace because they maintained peace in their souls even in the midst of their pain. That's why they are saints, because peace in the midst of suffering is hard to do. It's hard to radiate Christ's Light when you are surrounded by darkness.

Most of us are very familiar with the story of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple when He was forty days old. This is where we get the Tradition of bringing our children to the church on their fortieth day of life. When Simeon received the baby Jesus in his arms, he offered a beautiful prayer "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace according to your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light to revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to Your people Israel." (Luke 2: 29-32) Mary and Joseph must have been pleased to see their child blessed in this way. However, Simeon then turned to Mary, and said "Behold this Child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed." (2: 34-35)

We know that when bad things happen, that it feels like a sword pierces through our souls. We've all felt that pain in some way large or

The Role of the Church in the path to Sainthood— Where is the church in all of this? The church plays a critical role on the path to sainthood for everyone

and that role is encouragement. The Liturgy encourages us to pray and offers us an opportunity to commune with Christ through the Eucharist. The sermon gives us words of encouragement to live by. Seeing the saints in the icons of the church building, we are reminded that we are supposed to emulate their lives. By sharing fellowship, we receive encouragement to carry our crosses whatever they may be. I'll tell you in a personal way, there is no way I can carry my crosses without the encouragement and prayers of others.



In building up one another, we build up the whole body of Christ. The church exists for this process of building up one another. It does not exist to have fundraisers or festival. That is why these things cannot be the things that dominate the calendar of events here. Sadly, in many places, even sometimes in Tampa, these are the dominating events on the parish calendar. The most important thing we do as people, as Christians and as members of the church is to worship together and commune together on Sundays, and encouraging one another to grow in faith. When everyone understands the goal of the church and embraces doing their part in its achievement, this is when we will make the greatest strides in building



up the Body of Christ, by living out the Great Commission which commands us to make Disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all of Christ's commandments. We don't have to be like-talented people—we are not, we all have different talents. But we have to be like-minded people with diverse talents, so that in working together, we may grow the body of Christ, which against is not a suggestion from God but a "Commandment of God."

Everybody has a "pathology," something negative in them that they will battle with their whole life. Some people have poor self-esteem, or lack self-confidence. Others seek affirmation and emotion-

al stability. Nobody learned everything as a child so many times our adult lives are spent compensating for things we should have learned but didn't. A church community is supposed to be a safe place where we can bring our pathologies so that we can be encouraged to "outgrow" them. Ultimately the church community is supposed to encourage us to be the best we can be, using the unique and special gifts that God has given to each of us.

Going back to where I began, there is a path to sainthood for everyone. Do you know what yours is? Have you embrace your path? Are you willing to help others embrace theirs?

By the time you receive this message, it will be near September 1. I count it as a blessing to have completed 19 years of service to this parish. I arrived on September 1, 2004. Thank you for 19 (mostly) great years. May we worship and work together for many more.

With love in the Lord,

+Fr. Stavros



Youth Worker Training

What:

Youth Worker Training Seminar

When:

Saturday, September 23 from
9:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Where:

St. John Greek Orthodox Church in Tampa

Who:

GOYA advisors, JOY/HOPE Advisors, Sunday school teachers,
older GOYAns (10-12th grade), anyone who works with youth
Led by: Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis

Cost & Why:

Cost: none

Why: to learn more about how to impart the Gospel of
Jesus Christ to our youth in ways that are safe and
fun and meaningful

Lunch: Included

Agenda: Learn how to lead an icebreaker, discussion, and best
practices of working with youth

RSVP: to Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com by
Tuesday, September 18

Questions: Call Fr. Stavros at 813-394-1038

We Need: 12 people at a minimum to make this work.



I Know Him. I Love Him. I Serve Him.

This sermon was given by Fr. Stavros on Sunday, August 13 and many people have asked for a copy. It is reprinted here in the hopes that you can again reflect on this important message which is going to become more foundational to our work as a parish in the years ahead.

I know Him. I love Him. I serve Him.

I can't serve a God I don't love. I can't love a God that I don't know.



Just like we can't love a person that we don't know. We can't love a God that we don't know.

I think for many people, God and the church are like a magic trick. Many Orthodox Christians go to have the magic formula recited over us, or to check the boxes that let the magic happen—like lighting a candle, or receiving Communion. This is why many people come in late, or many times don't come at all—either they think they don't need the magic formula today, or that it works just by stepping into the building for a few minutes, why spend the whole morning here. Some people come out of fear—if they miss, they will miss the magic. Coming to church in this way doesn't really set us up to know God, or to love God or to serve God. It sets up God as a good luck charm. And this affects what we give to God—we give what we think is enough to keep the magic going, which is why we are content with needing a festival to support our church, or having a tenant,

Going to church doesn't make you a Christian, anymore than standing in your garage makes you a car.

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because when all we are looking for is a magic pill, and we aren't thinking that as a parish we, collectively, are called to serve Him, well it's easy to see why just about every parish, including ours, falls into this trap.

Today is the first day of Sunday school. Attendance, which in our parish, thankfully is very good all year round, gets even better once Sunday school starts. There is some sense that “this is good for the children, to go and learn about God,” and so we bring them.

Here's where the critical change in thinking needs to occur. It is not enough to learn about God. He is not a final exam to be passed. We are supposed to know Him. There is supposed to be a personal relationship with Him. Not just because it's needed for eternal life, but because it is needed in this life. Because only in a personal relationship will there be love. And only after there is love will there be an understanding of service. Or perhaps service can lead to love. But it all starts with a personal relationship. I don't know only about Him. I know HIM!

And when we know Him, then the Gospel passage this morning about how faith as small as a mustard seed can move a mountain makes much more sense. This is how we can get to what Saint Paul talks about in the Epistle lesson—to be able to bless when reviled, to endure when persecuted, to conciliate when slandered. Because we know Him, and we know that the purpose of life is to serve Him, we can do this in whatever state we find ourselves.

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How do we come to know Christ? We spend time with Him. This makes sense. How do we come to know anyone? We spend time with them?

Now imagine that we spend time with someone and all we ever say is “hi, how are you?” “Fine, how are you?” “Fine, thanks for asking,” and the conversation always ends there, we won’t know someone at all. And what if

the only thing we ever say to someone when we meet them is to ask for something, so I meet someone I don’t know and say “hey, can I have five bucks?” and

It’s like exercising, or cooking or mowing the lawn—we can do these things filled with joy or filled with boredom, but when we do them, they get done. My lawn gets mowed nicely whether I’m enjoying it or not. If you walk on a treadmill for half an hour, you’ll burn the same number of calories whether you enjoy that half hour or hate it. Now, if you go to the gym and just sit there for half an hour, there is no benefit. And if I stare at the lawn, it won’t cut itself. We actually have to put in some effort. But there is a benefit even if we aren’t enjoying the effort.

Same thing goes with prayer—there is a benefit each time we do it, even if we aren’t totally into it. There is no benefit if we don’t ever pray. Same thing with worship—when we come here to worship, there is an opportunity for an experience with God that is not here if we do not worship. Because there is a unique opportunity at the Divine Liturgy to connect with God in the most intimate way—and that is to touch Him and for Him to touch us. It’s like the difference between a hug and a wave. In the Eucharist, this is where God physically embraces us and we embrace Him.

Sunday school, worship, and the church in general is not about a magic formula, or good karma. It certainly is not just a crutch to lean on when life is hard, or some construct. We are supposed to have a living relationship with God, with Christ. We are supposed to talk to Him. We are supposed to listen to Him. We are supposed to pour into Him, and let Him pour His grace into us.

I’m struggling with this! And if I’m struggling with this, I can only imagine how you must be struggling with this! I’m serving, but am I serving Him, or you, or me?! It’s complicated sometimes. What about the prayer that He won’t answer? I have those. And then it complicates our relationship. Does He really love me? Do I really love Him? But if I expect Him to be a certain way, just because I want Him to be that way, do I really know Him? And like the disciples, who wondered why they couldn’t cure someone that they really wanted to help, I sometimes wonder, do I have the faith of a mustard seed? Or do I have even that?

I had a meeting with our Sunday school teachers yesterday. And we were discussing some of these things.

*Whether it's a friendship
or relationship, all bonds
are built on trust. Without
it, you have nothing.*

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the next day I say “hey, can you buy me lunch,” and the next day “I really could use a ride somewhere,” how’s that relationship going to deepen? It isn’t. It actually will go nowhere at all. A relationship is built on things like “tell me about yourself,” and to spend time doing something that brings mutual joy. Friends receive from friends but they also give to friends. Friends serve friends, because part of love is service. But friends also let friends serve them, because part of friendship is the joy of being blessed by someone else. There are many people who are challenged on either of these fronts, they have a hard time serving, and sometimes they even have a hard time allowing others to serve them.

At summer camp, we scheduled a fifteen minute period of the day called “Alone with God.” It was 15 minutes where nothing else was happening on the schedule. Campers and staff had the opportunity to sit in silence, and hopefully spend it with God. Some, I’m sure, spent the time daydreaming. Some might have fallen asleep. But at least there was the opportunity to spend time with God. Some of us jam pack our schedules so tightly that we don’t leave room for God, outside of worship on Sundays. If you put Him on your schedule, if you actually put some time aside to spend with God, some days you might feel a connection and someday you might not. But if you never spend time, you never will.



We talked about how to pray, as an example. And we had the proverbial discussion about do I pray from a book or from the heart. Sometimes when we pray from the heart, we are so distracted we give up after a few seconds. So praying a Psalm and committing to finish the Psalm at least commits us to some time, even if we are distracted. And there is benefit to spending time. No relationship is going to be meaningful if there isn't some vulnerability. I

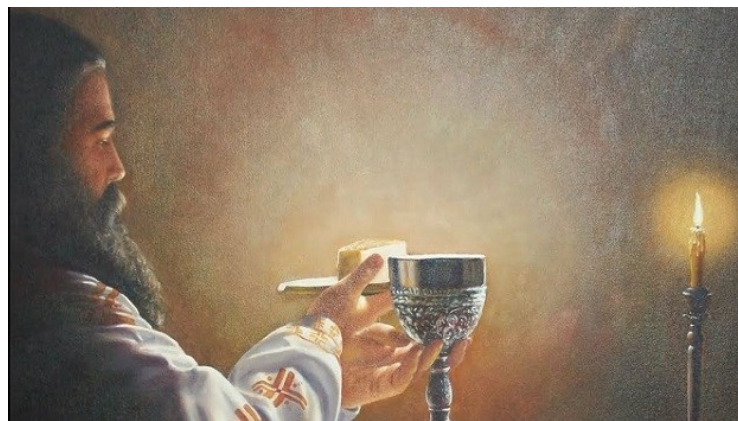


asked a few vulnerable questions yesterday and asked people to write down their answers on cards with no names on them, and then we each drew a card and read an answer that belonged to someone in the room, but we didn't know whose answer it was. One thing it taught us was that most of us are struggling with the same things when it comes to our relationship with God. The honesty

felt good, and also validating, that when we really open up about the things we struggle with in life and in faith, we are more alike than different. Of course, we don't get to that when we only present a perfect version of ourselves to everyone. One of the fears someone said regarding teaching Sunday school, is the fear of not having the right words to say. I can't tell you how often my prayer has been just to have the right words to say in a situation. When I didn't think about health or my future but just drilled it down to "God give me the words to say in this moment, Jesus be with me in this moment, Holy Spirit, send Your grace to my lips at this moment." When it wasn't a request for Him to serve my needs, but a request to strengthen me to serve someone else. Mind you, my prayers are more self-serving most of the time. But the best ones are when I let go of my agenda and ask Him to put His agenda into me.

Church isn't some kind of magic pill. It is an opportunity to be with Him in a way we can't the rest of the week. It's the opportunity to stand with others who are struggling in the same way in a way that we can't the rest of the week. I can't do justice in one sermon to this idea of know Him, love Him, serve Him. This is just an introduction to these things. Much more is coming on them. On how to know Him, how to love Him and how to serve Him. And this needs to be an individual mindset so that we can make it a collective mindset for our community.

That we as a community know Him, that we love Him, and that we serve Him. And then we will realize that having a tenant here and being a landlord does not serve Him. It serves us. And if we really serve Him, we have to not have this as a place of commerce, but a place of service. Yes, we will be talking a lot more about this going forward. But before we have the desire to serve, there has to be a love for God and for others. And before there is love, there has to be knowledge. And that knowledge can't just be knowing about Him. It has to be knowing HIM. And that starts with time, with humility and with vulnerability. It's a two-way street, where we not only talk to Him, we listen to Him. And where we not only come to Him with requests, but where we are content to just BE with Him.



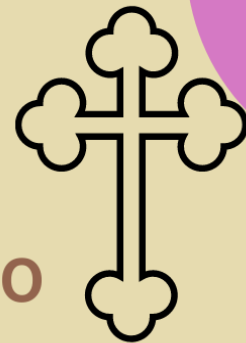
Because so much of the priesthood is about presentation, there is the constant temptation to focus on the presentation, and not who I am presenting, to fall in love with the celebration of the Liturgy rather than the Lord who is at the center of it. And because so many people throughout my ministry have come to the church expecting a magic trick rather than an encounter with the Lord, there are times I have seen it this way, with me as the guru or the shaman and not as one of His priests. When John the Baptist said "I must decrease and He must increase," he hit the nail on the head. And so I need you, not just so Christ can increase in this parish, but so that He can increase in me. Because your struggles to know Him are the same struggles I have. And the solution is found not in individual struggle, but in communal struggle, which is where the one who is strong encourages the one who is struggling because we will all be in each of those roles at some point.

I know Him. I love Him. I serve Him. We know Him. We love Him. We serve Him. THIS is where we need to go, individually and collectively. More to come on all of this. Thank you for coming today to be with Him. Amen.

JOIN US FOR OUR

YOUNG ADULT RETREAT

Saturday, September 30
10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.



Theme: Renewal of Mind and Soul: A Discussion with an
Orthodox Priest and an Orthodox Therapist

Presenters: Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis, priest of
St. John Greek Orthodox Church in Tampa, FL

Mary Ann Konstas, licensed Mental Health Counselor



\$15.00 (lunch included)

Retreat to be held at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox
Church, 2418 Swann Avenue, Tampa, FL

RSVP to kim@stjohntpa.org by Monday, September 25

MAY WE NEVER FORGET

On this night... 21 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.



INTERESTED IN LEARNING ABOUT
ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY?
PLEASE JOIN US FOR A FOUR WEEK COURSE

Orthodoxy 101

BEGINS IN SEPTEMBER & OFFERED BY
FR. STAVROS N. AKROTIRIANAKIS, PARISH PRIEST

WHY SHOULD I ATTEND ORTHODOXY 101?

· 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

WHEN WILL THE CLASSES BE HELD?

· MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 18
A TOUR OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH: WHAT WE SEE AND WHAT IT MEANS

· MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25
INTRODUCTION TO THE SACRAMENTS—BAPTISM, CHRISMATION, CONFESSION, MARRIAGE, UNCTION

· MONDAY, OCTOBER 2
THE DIVINE LITURGY—
A "TEACHING" LITURGY

· MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13
ORTHODOX TRADITIONS—
FASTING, ICONS, PRAYER AND
LIVING AN ORTHODOX
CHRISTIAN LIFE

WHAT FORMAT CAN I EXPECT?

A RELAXED ATMOSPHERE WITH PRESENTATIONS, INTERACTIVE DISCUSSIONS,
AND LOTS OF TIME FOR QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

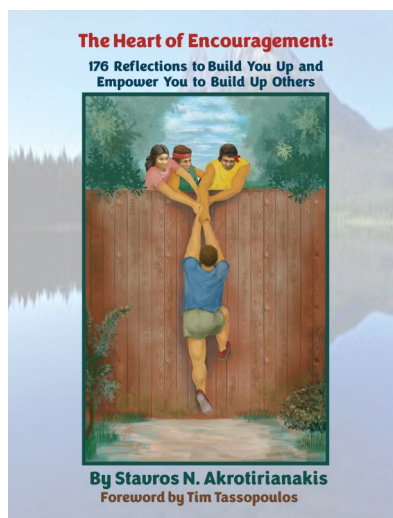
CLASSES WILL BE HELD FROM 6:30-8:30 P.M. IN THE CHURCH SANCTUARY.

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

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH · 2418 W. SWANN AVENUE · TAMPA, FL · 33609

The Heart of Encouragement: 176 Reflections to Build You Up and Empower You to Build Up Others

By Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis



One of God's greatest blessings on my life is the ability to write. I love writing. For the most part it comes easy to me. By God's grace, I have written a daily reflection called "The Prayer Team" since February 2015. This has resulted in the publication of seven books, the latest of which is "The Heart of Encouragement." Each month this year, I'm going to in-

clude one reflection from the 176 reflections of this book, as a way to share a small sampling of the contents with you in the hopes that you will buy this book. This is not about pushing a product. It's about sharing a message, a message we all need to hear. We all need more encouragement. Please read this reflection below, and if you like it, please consider purchasing the book for yourself or for someone else. It can be purchased from our bookstore or from Amazon/Barnes and Noble. Everyone wants to make a difference in the world. This book is my attempt to reach this parish and far beyond it with the hope that by God's grace, this book will help change the world even a little bit for the better.

+Fr. Stavros

Get a Win Today!

*(Love) does not rejoice at wrong,
but rejoices in the right.*

1 Corinthians 13: 6



Sometimes even the best sports teams go on a losing streak. A major league baseball season lasts 162 games. It is not uncommon that even the best teams will have a losing streak of four or five games

during the course of a season. Let's say that a team has lost five games in a row. What do you think their morale is like before their next game? Do you think that they think, We are terrible? Professional athletes will tell you that their mindset before every game is "Get a win today!"

Let's say that a team has lost many games in a row and they win on a particular day. What do you think the mood is like after the game? Do you think the team thinks, Well, we still stink? Professional athletes will tell you that their mindset after every win is, "We won today. Let's go win tomorrow."

In life, sometimes we go on "losing streaks." We go through a bad time at work, in marriage, with our children, even with our faith. We have crises and wonder if our marriage is doomed, our kids will not be successful adults, our jobs will work out, we'll feel overweight forever, or whatever myriad of things causes us to feel discouraged.

*this too
shall
pass*

One of my best friends has a phrase, "Let's get some wins," which he uses to boost morale of his co-workers when he or they perceive there is a losing streak going on. And this is among the best pieces of advice and encouragement I have ever received. I think of this often. If today is the start of a new day, I haven't gotten in an argument, I haven't eaten poorly, I haven't failed to exercise, I haven't made a mistake at work, and so a "win" today is possible. Yesterday, whether I won or lost, is over. Tomorrow is tomorrow, and tomorrow isn't guaranteed. The challenge is to get a win today.

To the couple whose marriage is not what they want it to be, go on a few dates, have some good days, and get some wins.

To the person who hasn't exercised, go exercise today, and tomorrow, and the next day. Get some wins.

To the person who doesn't have a good work ethic, put in a good effort today, tomorrow, and get some wins.

Continued...

To the person who doesn't pray or read the Bible, don't count all the days or years you haven't done these. Pray today. Read the Bible today. Get a spiritual win today! And then go for a repeat tomorrow and the next day.

If you've had a lot of wins but have had a few bad days, don't think of the bad days; get right back into winning form. And if you are on a good streak, get a win today and keep it going.

Today is all we have. The "games" of yesterday have already been played. You either won them or lost them. The "games" of tomorrow will not be played today. So play the "game" of today as best you can. And strive to get a win today.

Remember:
The small wins
count, too.

And if you get a win today, celebrate it. Resist the urge to temper the win by already anticipating a future loss. Many people cannot celebrate a win because they are already contemplating the next loss. So, count the wins, and make the wins count; celebrate all of them. And when you've lost, don't despair. Get up tomorrow and go get a win. As the above Scripture verse reminds us, love (and God) rejoices in the right. So when we've done well, celebrate that! And when we've done wrong, correct it so we can celebrate a right, a win.

Lord, thank You for the gift of a new day. Thank You that each new day brings a new opportunity to succeed at something. Help me to focus on the needs and opportunities of today. Help me to focus today on prayer, reading Scripture, and following Your commandments. Help me to have a good work ethic today. Help me to be kind today. Help me to glorify You today. Amen.



Take Advantage of the Parish Assistance Program

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is excited to share we will continue to offer the Parish Assistance program together with BayCare Behavioral Health. The 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 that are sensitive to the values and beliefs of those they serve and provide compassionate care to children, adults, parents, and seniors. Parishioners can confidentially contact BayCare directly to request up to three free 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. 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-healthservices> Help is available for life issues including:

Help is available for life issues including:

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

This service is completely confidential between parishioner and a BayCare Christian Therapist

St. John Greek Orthodox Church's Young at Heart Ministry



The Feast of the Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Virgin Mary is celebrated on August 15 each year. The Feast commemorates the repose (dormition and in the Greek kinesis) or "falling-asleep" of the Mother of Jesus Christ, our Lord.



At its monthly luncheon on August 19th. The YAH Ministry watched a video on the Dormition of the Theotokos which was followed by a discussion led by Father John.

It was a potluck luncheon where participants bring a food item. If you wish to join our ministry contact Bill Manikas at wmanikas@gmail.com or Presbyteria Denise at Denises54@hotmail.com. We gather at the Kourmolis Hall from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.



Birthdays in September:

Lisa Maltezos----9/7; Michael Halitoutakis----9/5
Presbyteria Stefero----9/9; Bill Manikas----9/24



"Starting Greek dance practice for Y Hara Mas dancers (K- 2nd grades) on Sunday 9/17/23 after church in the hall by the stage. Any questions (Alexandra DeMaio 813 340 9668) Cookies for all the dancers!"

St. John's Dance Groups



Greek dance practices for Y Hara Mas (3rd-6th grades) will be held on Sundays from 12:15 to 12:45pm in the Kourmoulis Center (during coffee hour). Practices will continue until our Greek Festival in November. Please contact Maraquet Edquid (813-422-8963) with any questions.



Sunday School News



WELCOME BACK TO SUNDAY SCHOOL. We are so glad to have the 2023-2024 Sunday School year off to a great start. Thank you to all the teachers, parents, and children who are committed to our program.

The first day of Sunday School was on Aug. 13th and on the 12th the teachers had an inspiring retreat with Fr. Stavros. Thank you to the many families who have registered their children in Sunday School. Please register your child as soon as possible 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, CHURCH ETIQUETTE, and THE LORD'S PRAYER.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO VASILI PANAGOPOULOS for all he has done ^{Thank you!} for our Sunday School these past few years. He will truly be missed. On the 13th the Sunday School children made farewell cards for him and we presented him with a gift. We pray that he have much success at the seminary in Boston and we know that he will be a wonderful priest in the near future.

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 students will also 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

SEPTEMBER CALENDAR:

Sun. Sept. 3rd: NO SUNDAY SCHOOL (LABOR DAY WEEKEND)

Sun. Sept. 10th: TOPIC: Prayer
CLASS PICTURE DAY

Sun. Sept. 17th: TOPIC: Sign of the Cross
(9th -12th Boys will stay in Altar.)

Sun. Sept. 24th: TOPIC: The Creed
YOUTH SUNDAY



Sunday School Pictures

Welcome
Back!!



Pre K-4 Students are busy on a project.

Fifth Graders made cards for each other. "Jesus thinks you are special and so does your classmates."



6th and 7th Grade boys presenting facts about the Old and New Testament.



6th and 7th Grade girls presenting facts about the Old and New Testament.

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.

Parish Registry

Chrismation-Kristin (Haritini) Riggs was Chrismated on Sunday, August 6.

Aikaterinia Mangarides was the sponsor. Congratulations!

Inspiration

When a church changes their values to match current culture they are no longer following the Bible, they are following the lost.

The church was not meant to entertain people. IT exists to train disciples, to glorify God and reach the lost.

When a flashlight grows dim or quits working, you don't throw it away, you change the batteries. When a person messes up and finds themselves in a dark place, do you cast them aside? Of course not, you help them change their batteries! Some need AA—Attention and affection. Some need AAA—Attention, affection and acceptance. Some need C-compassion. Some need D-Direction. And if they still don't seem to shine. . .simply sit with them quietly and share your light.

Did you know? No one can destroy iron, but its own rust can. Likewise no one can destroy a person, but his own mindset can.

In order for a pastor to fulfill the Lord's command to feed God's flock, the sheep must show up during feeding times.

If a parish has no awareness and consciousness of being sent by God, to speak His words, to do His work, and to accomplish His will in this world, it is not an Orthodox parish. ~FR. Thomas Hopko

Being a lukewarm Christian is so dangerous, because you blend in with everybody, and impact nobody.

Worry is a conversation you have with yourself about things you cannot change. Prayer is a conversation you have with God about things He can change.

As church attendance numbers fade across the nation and online services become very convenient it's important to remember why church attendance matters so much. You can't serve from your sofa. You can't have a community of faith on your sofa. You can't experience the power of a room full of believers worshipping together on your sofa. Christians aren't consumers. We are contributors. We don't watch. We engage. We give. We sacrifice. We encourage. The church needs you. And you need the church.

It's hard to hear God's voice when you've already decided what you want Him to say.

Liturgical Schedule for September

Sunday, September 3 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Transfiguration of our Savior

Friday, September 8 **Nativity of the Virgin Mary**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, September 10 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Monday, September 11 **Day of Remembrance for 9/11**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Trisagion at the end of the Divine Liturgy to remember 9/11

Wednesday, September 13 Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.

Thursday, September 14 **Exaltation of the 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 17 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Procession of the Holy Cross at the end of the Divine Liturgy

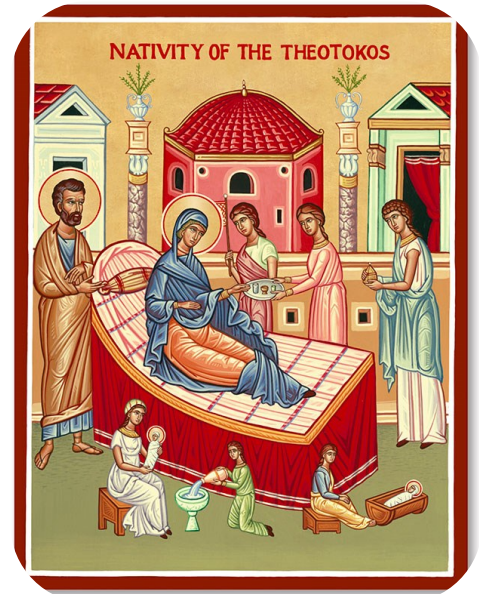
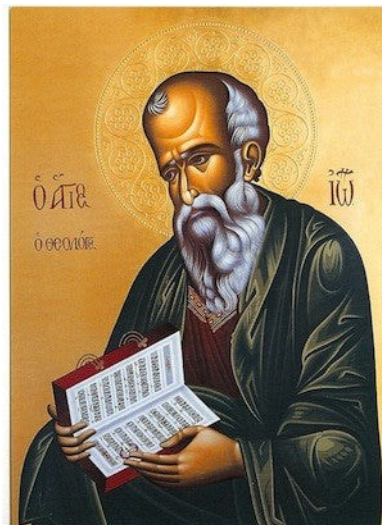
Sunday, September 24 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Tuesday, September 26 **St. John the Theologian**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

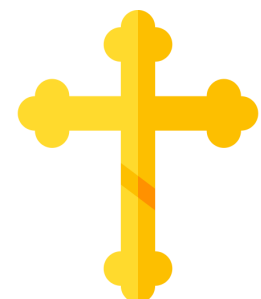
Sunday, October 1 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Monday, October 2 Evening Teaching Divine Liturgy
for Orthodoxy 101 6:30-8:30 p.m.

St. John the Theologian



Exaltation of the Holy Cross



Liturgical Notes for September

Friday, 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.



Monday, September 11 – Day of Remembrance—21 Year Anniversary of 9/11

This year marks 22 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 Monday, 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 13 – 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 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 17.

Tuesday, 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 17. 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 17.

Please call the office if you are interested.

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 4,018 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 and ask him to add you. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email Vasili or follow the link at the bottom of the daily emails to do so. If you want to forward to a friend, please use the “forward to a friend” option.

Also, make sure prayerteam365@gmail.com has been added to your contacts so that these emails stay in your Inbox rather than going to the Junk or Spam folders.

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

Father Stavros has authored NINE 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

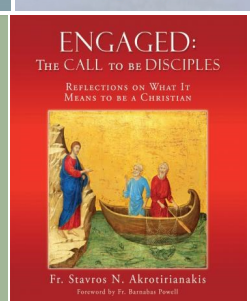
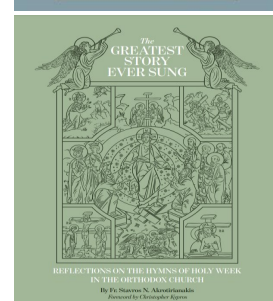
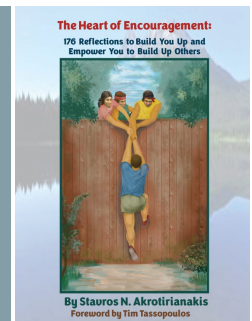
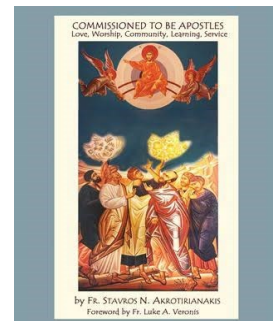
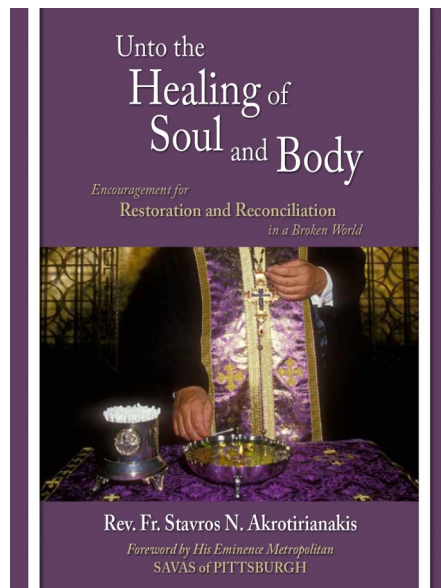
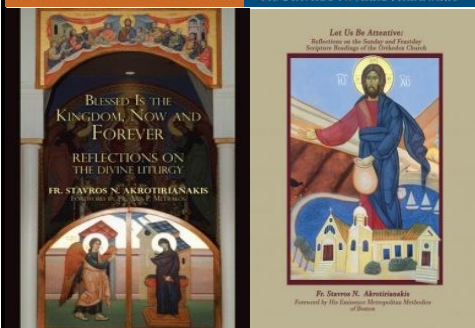
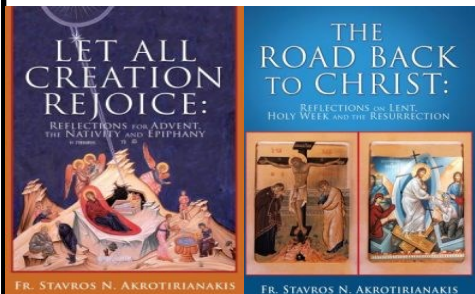
Engaged: The Call To Be Disciples, Reflections on What it Means to be a Christian

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

The Heart of Encouragement: 176 Reflections to Build You Up and Empower You to Build Up Others

The Greatest Story Ever Sung: Reflections on the Hymns of Holy Week In the Orthodox Church

NEW: Unto the Healing of Soul and Body: Encouragement for Restoration and Reconciliation in a Broken World



Unto the Healing of Soul and Body

*Encouragement for
Restoration and Reconciliation
in a Broken World*



Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis

*Foreword by His Eminence Metropolitan
SAVAS of PITTSBURGH*

**Introducing the Newest Book by Fr.
Stavros**

**Unto the Healing of Soul and Body:
Encouragement for Restoration and
Reconciliation in a Broken World**

There has never been a greater need for healing in the world than there is today. The Orthodox Sacrament of Holy Unction is intended for the healing of soul and body. What makes this sacrament so powerful is not just the anointing that occurs at the end of the service, but the journey there—through seven Epistle readings, seven Gospel passages and seven powerful prayers. *Unto the Healing of Soul and Body* will serve as an aid on this journey, helping us understand our need for healing, as well as God's role and our own participation in spiritual healing.

The Sacrament of Holy Unction, celebrated on Holy Wednesday and at other times throughout the year, lasts about 90 minutes. Yet, that time is packed with such spiritual richness that it deserves to be reflected upon more deeply. This book contains 46 reflections on the hymns, Scripture readings and prayers of the service.

The human body is comprised of mind, body and spirit, all of which are interrelated. When one part of the body suffers, so do the other part. For every physical wound, there is also a spiritual consequence. This book not only reflects on God's ability to heal our physical infirmities, but especially how our souls can be healed along with our bodies. In the times when our bodies are beyond physical healing—at some point we will all suffer a physical death—Holy Unction serves as a reconciliation with God and a preparation for eternal life. This service includes many prayers offering forgiveness, many which speak of the mercy of God, and many which speak of the ultimate destination, eternal life. The sacraments of the church provides us a means to prepare for eternal life, by offering us the spiritual stamina to get through this life.

This book is dedicated to the memory of Fr. George Livanos, an exemplary priest for over thirty years, who won the battle for his soul, even as he lost his battle with cancer. Father George's bishop, His Eminence Metropolitan Savas of Pittsburgh, has written the foreword for this book, paying tribute to one of his long-time faithful priests.

YOUTH PROTECTION PROGRAM REMINDER:

It's that time again . . . time to register with the Youth Protection Program! Our child and youth ministries will be starting up soon and the ministry heads will need your assistance with meetings and events. Would you like to help out? Great! But first you must register with the new Youth Protection Program, get screened, and do a training module before you can help your favorite child/youth ministry. To get started, please contact Suzanne Pileggi at smpileggi1@gmail.com or (813) 244-5855. Thank you!



Adopt A College Student Program *Thank you!*

I'd like to thank those of you that adopted our college students last school year. I know how much the students appreciated the notes, cards and small gifts of encouragement. If you would like to continue this school year, please reach out to me at kkaburis2000@yahoo.com or 8132406513. If you would like to adopt a student and have not done so, we would love your support.

We are excited for the new year!

Current college students and upcoming college students, please send the church office or me your current email, cell phone number, college and year in school. We are here to support and encourage you. God bless you and good luck!

**Kathy Kaburis
Adopt A College Student Ministry
kkaburis2000@yahoo.com**

8132406413



St. John the Baptist Community News

GOYA—

The GOYA Meeting for September will be Sunday, September 17, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. Dinner, as always, will be provided.



GOYA St. Pete Volleyball Tournament-

Our GOYAns will be participating in the volleyball tournament sponsored by St. Stefanos Greek Orthodox Church in St. Pete on September 9-10.

Youth Worker Training-Saturday, September 23 from 9:00 a.m.-3:30 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 (10-12th grade) and anyone who wants to learn how to work with you—how to lead an icebreaker 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 18. Please email Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com if you are interested. Lunch will be provided.

Get Together for College Students who are going to college in the Tampa Bay Area—September 17 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, September 17, 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.

Men's Group—

The Men's Group will meet on Sunday, September 24, 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.

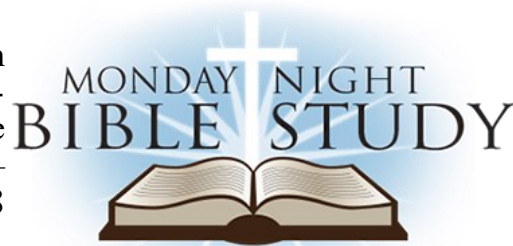


Women's Bible Study will begin again on Tuesday, September 12. We will have both an in-person and zoom option.

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. in the back room of the administration building. Fr. Stavros leads this group.

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 5; Monday, September 11; Monday, September 18 and Monday, September 25.



Young Adult Dinner/Discussion-Thursday, September 14-

Our young adult group meets once a month for dinner/discussion (and other times for fellowship and service). The meeting for September will be on Thursday, September 14, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. All young adults, ages 18-40, are invited to participate. We will be having a monthly discussion based on some set topics. Group Members use What's App for communication. Please contact Aris Rogers to be added to our what's app for young adults at 813-309-5525.

Choir-

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 tswatzbaugh@ut.edu or 813-313-0439.



JOY Tweens Group-

Our first JOY Tweens meeting will be on Sunday, September 24, from 12:15-2:00 p.m. We will have lunch, play some games, and have a discussion with Fr. Stavros. Maraquet Edquid is in charge of this ministry and her number is 813-422-8963. This group is open to all 4-6th graders.

Dance Practices will be starting again in preparation for our Greek Festival—

Alexandra DeMaio will lead our youngest dancers, H Hara Mas (3 year old through sixth grade), who will practice after Liturgy on Sundays. There will be a group for very young, and then a 4-6th grade group under H Hara Mas. Marina Choundas and Genie Carter will lead our Parea Dancers—this is our GOYA age group. Those interested please contact Marina or Genie. 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.



FIFTY- TWO VERSES IN FIFTY- TWO WEEKS



THE BIBLE PROJECT
BY FR. STAVROS

May God bring good things into your life everyday.



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.

September 3-9

It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.

2 Timothy 2:6

This week we celebrate Labor Day. For most of us, it's a day off. We will take it as a well-deserved break from work. Yet, we should reflect for a few moments on our labors. We should be thankful for the skills we have that enable us to get a job which enable us to put bread on the table. It is interesting that the Bible teaches us to have sufficiency and to spare, meaning we are supposed to share what we have. In the world today, the concept of sufficiency is very subjective. In fact, the more we get, the more we seem to want. There is, however, a growing segment of society that thinks we should all have the same, or that the one who doesn't work at all should receive the same as the one who is working hard. That is not scriptural. To the contrary, St. Paul recognizes in his letter to Timothy that the one who works hard should have the first share in the reward. As a society, the ideal of a strong work ethic is being diminished, if not criticized. And yet, Saint Paul, in this instance, and also in many other instances in the Bible, we are taught that working hard is a virtue. It signifies that one is using his or her talents to the BEST of their ability. Matthew 25:14-30, the parable of the talents, reminds us that when we have been blessed with a talent, we have the responsibility to use that talent. And that if we bury the talent we've been given, if we don't work with it and serve others with it, there is going to be a reckoning with God as to why we didn't do anything with what He gave us. Labor Day should be not only a day that is free from labor, but a reminder of the value and importance of labor, based on not only what it brings to ourselves,

Continued...

but what it contributes to the world and ultimately how our labor serves the Lord.

September 10-16

They will put you out of the synagogues; indeed the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.

John 16:2

On September 11, we mark another somber anniversary of the terrorist attack on America. For 22 years, we've marked this day. However, it is not always seen as a day of solemn remembrance. Some have used the day to criticize our country, to blame our society for this day of destruction. Christ warned that there would be times of destruction in the world, whether inflicted on a large number of people (like 9/11) or even on an individual (such as an individual martyr). Jesus warned that a day would come when people would kill other people as an act of worship to God. And even though we don't talk about it much anymore, 9/11 was caused by a group of extremists who killed in the name of their god. In our world, Christianity is increasingly being seen by some as a form of extremism. Christ told us that people will know we are Christians by "our love," that's how we will be known. There is no teaching advocating religious extremism in Christianity. If one is extreme, he or she is not Christian. Christ called upon us to be meek (that doesn't mean weak but rather to have power under control). That's what meek is, power under control. Christ would never encourage us to hurt anyone else. Our service to God is to love one another and serve one another. The terrorist attack on America does not mean that everyone who shares the same culture or religion with the terrorists is dangerous. To the contrary, the hijackers of the planes attempted to hijack their religion and culture. If we want to offer service to God, it is done with love, with kindness, and with generosity. If something is not good, it can't be from our God. Violence is not good, thus it doesn't not come from God. Let us reflect on this day, to remember the souls of all who died, those who still have physical and emotional wounds because of what happened that day, and let us pray for all of us, as Americans, for peace in the world, that we will never have another attack like the one was had 22 years ago, and as Christians, that we will always lead with love.

September 17-23

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

I Corinthians 1:17

We celebrate the Holy Cross day from September 14-21. In thinking about the cross and its relevance for our lives today, the cross was a symbol of humiliation, a form of execution reserved for the worst of criminals. The cross now is a symbol of Christianity, for in dying on the cross, Jesus was able to rise from the dead, and through His death and resurrection the gates of Para-

dise have once again been opened. We can know a lot about Christ without knowing Him. Just like we can preach eloquently or be able to talk about Christ with great eloquence. The power of Christianity emanates from the Cross though. It doesn't emanate just from the human beings but from the cross itself. Christ has "unleashed" this power through the Resurrection, and by extension everyone who is baptized into Christ has put on Christ, is imbued with this power. It's not OUR power though, but rather His power working through us. A worthy prayer is to ask Christ to allow His light and His power to shine through us, and to give us the power to serve, to forgive others, and most especially to know Christ.

September 24-30

And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Matthew 4:19

Jesus, in one of the first acts of His ministry, called some men to be His disciples. It was not common for a Rabbi (a Jewish priest/teacher) to have disciples (students) that would follow him and study under him. In most instances, people would ask the Rabbi if they could follow. In this instance, Jesus called His own disciples to follow after Him. The men He chose were fishermen by trade, and in many instances, we see that they weren't even very good fishermen. He told them that He was going to make them "fishers of men." Instead of catching fish, they would catch people. The net would not be one made of rope and twine, but it would be a "net" of Christianity. Ultimately, this net is the church. We, today, all of us, are disciples. We are students. Jesus is the Rabbi, the teacher, but He is also our Lord and Savior. He calls us to be "fishers of men," to catch people for Christ. This is the call of each disciple, each student, to one day be an apostle, one who catches people for Christ. One must be a disciple before one can be an apostle, but the call is not just to be disciples, but to be Apostles, and when we stand in front of Christ at His awesome judgment seat, He will ask us not only if we were good students and what did we learn about Him, but were we good apostles, did we recruit people for Him, did we spread the word to them. The disciples, when initially called by Jesus, expressed feelings of inadequacy to do this awesome task. They didn't say they were lazy or disinterested, but they didn't think they could do it. And Jesus reassured them constantly that He was calling them, He believed that they could do this awesome task and that He was going to send the Holy Spirit down on them to help them. He does the same for us—He has called US. He believes in US, and our ability to spread the Gospel, and when we put faith in Him, He will in turn send down the Holy Spirit on us to help us in this most important work.

FOOD PANTRY UPDATE

St. John's Food Pantry is being reorganized and revitalized! Our mission is to properly collect, maintain, and distribute food items in a timely manner to those in need. We will support four main quarterly Food Drives throughout the year. These will include St. John's HOPE/JOY Food Drive around Thanksgiving time and three other drives to benefit Metropolitan Ministries, Feeding Tampa Bay, and families at the Bridgeprep Academy located on our campus. We will receive these items (a partial specific list is shown below) on an ongoing basis throughout the year. Please donate items from the list below being careful not to donate items that are expired or near expiration. If you are interested in being a part of this Ministry, please contact **Sandra Pappas at (813)785-3747** and she will contact you. Have an enjoyable summer and we thank you in advance for your support and cooperation!

Requested Food Pantry Items

- Canned fruits and vegetables
- Canned beans (Pinto, etc.)
- Canned Meat (including Vienna sausage, spam, chicken, and tuna)
- Cans of soup
- Cereal
- Instant mashed potatoes
- Jell-O/Pudding
- Macaroni & cheese
- Oatmeal
- Pasta
- Peanut Butter & Jelly (in plastic jars)
- Ramen noodles
- Rice
- Spaghetti sauce
- Dry goods
- Paper towels
- Toilet paper



Twelve Disciples Project

*I had rather speak five words with my understanding...
than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.*

(1 Cor. 14:19)



September the fifth, we shall commemorate Saint Zacharias, the father of the Forerunner, St. John the Baptist, who is the patron saint of our community. We know quite a bit about the ancestors of the Holy Theotokos, and Her earthly husband, St. Joseph. But remember, our Holy Theotokos was very close to her cousin Elizabeth and in fact spent several months with Elizabeth

prior to the birth to Elizabeth of The Forerunner, Saint John the Baptist, after the Theotokos had been visited and told the good news by The Archangel Gabriel that she would bear a son.

The Theotokos' parents, Joachim and Anna were elderly and when she was introduced to the Temple, Saint Zacharias acted as the guardian for Saint Mary during her service in the Temple.

According to the opinion of many Fathers of the Church, based on an ancient tradition, this is the same Zacharias who, as our Lord said, "the Jews slew between the temple and the altar" (Matthew 23:35), because even after the Virgin Mary gave birth, he continued to refer to her as virgin; also, because Zacharias' son John was not found during the slaughter of the Innocents because the elderly Elizabeth had taken him and carefully hid him in the wilderness while the Forerunner was yet an infant. Elizabeth had found an unnamed place somewhere in the desert wilderness, where, according to the Evangelist Saint Luke, "the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel" (Luke 1:80). When Herod and his soldiers failed to find the child, Zacharias was slain by Herod's command, "we believe in the Temple!"

"Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berehiah, whom you murdered

between the temple and the altar. Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation." Matthew 23:36

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' c" Matthew 23:37-39

THE TWELVE DISCIPLES PROJECT

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 servants of God" all members of the St. John's congregation. Are you interested?

You too may join us in this endeavor that, not only broadens your community awareness with others in our congregation, but also sharpens each of our personal prayer disciplines.

"Pray for others by name and ask people to pray for you, too. The Church is a praying Body. When we pray for others, we lift them up and embrace them. It connects us in Christ, no matter how far away our loved ones may be from us. Prayer is even more intimate when we offer up specific people, by name, (and their specific needs) to the Lord." (Sam Williams, blogs.goarch.org, Sept. 24, 2015)

Participating 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. There are no restrictions. You may choose a time during the day when you can spend a quiet moment with God.

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).

Participation will warm your spiritual heart.





Welcome to the 2023-2024 school year! Our Holy Orthodox Primary Education (HOPE) & Junior Orthodox Youth (JOY) ministries have lots of fun activities planned for this year!

In addition to the HOPE/JOY combined events, we will have meetings and fun activities for our JOY Tweens (4th- 6th grades) at least once per month. Our first welcome meeting is Sunday, September 24, 2023, at 12:15pm, following the Divine Liturgy.

JOY *Tweens*



We pray that the JOY Tweens Ministry will give our children, at this pivotal age, an opportunity to develop their lives, faith and morals through age-appropriate activities centered around worship, fellowship, and service. Please mark your calendars and join us. We can't wait to see you!

SAVE THE DATE!

**HOPE/JOY (Grades 3rd and below)
& JOY Tweens (Grades 4th - 6th)
Calendar 2023-2024**



Sunday, September 24

Sunday, October 15

Friday, October 27

Saturday, November 4

Sunday, November 12 - Dec 17

Saturday, December 17

Sunday, January 21

Saturday, February 10

Sunday, February 11

Sunday, March 31

Friday, April 26

Friday, May 3

Sunday, May 19

JOY Tweens -

First Welcome Meeting (12:15pm)

HOPE/JOY Fall Festival (4:30pm)

JOY Tweens - Movie Night (6:30pm)

JOY Tweens - Volunteer at Greek Festival

HOPE/JOY - Boxes of Hope

(Food drive to provide meals to families in need)

All Youth - Christmas Party

JOY Tweens - Meeting (12:30pm)

JOY Tweens - Offsite Activity

HOPE/JOY - Superbowl of Caring

(Donation drive to benefit Hope Children's Home)

JOY Tweens - Meeting (12:30pm)

JOY Tweens - Movie Night (6:30pm)

HOPE/JOY Good Friday Retreat

All Youth - End of Year Party



We Will Serve the Lord

On my last Sunday as an altar boy, before I left for the seminary, my parish priest paid me a comment that on the surface might have sounded like a criticism. He said “I never noticed that he (meaning me) was here.” It was actually the highest compliment. Because as the priest went on to explain, he said I was so good as an altar boy, things went so smoothly, he never had to look up and wonder if I was going to get everything done, or wonder where I was, or even wonder if I was going to come to serve, because I was always there, I was always close to him and I was very efficient at getting everything done.

I feel the same way about the altar boys in Tampa. For the most part, I don’t notice them, and that’s because they are serious and reverent about their jobs, they are conscientious and know the service, and they just about always have everything working efficiently and correctly. This is important because how they do their role affects how I do mine. For instance, on a weekday when there is no one serving in the altar, I have to leave the front of the table often—to get the censer, or the hot water, or put in a new charcoal, cut bread, light candles, put out the bread, and the myriad of other things the altar boys do. This makes the flow of the service kind of choppy at times. If the altar boys are not doing their role correctly, again I would have to leave the table to correct something. And the truth is, I rarely have to leave the front of the altar table to do something, and on the times which I do, it never has anything to do with them.

The tradition of men serving in the altar goes back to the early church. It was usually adult men who would enter into the service of the church as altar servers, readers and chanters. Before entering this service, they would be tonsured, i.e. have their hair cut in a cross shape by a bishop who would pray over them. These three roles were actually minor orders of the clergy, and those who entered into them were not “ordained” per se as are the deacons, priest and bishops (the major orders of the clergy), but they were prayed over with the intention that they would enter into a lifetime of service in the church.

Times have changed now. Young men, sometimes even boys, serve in the altar for a finite amount of time. At St. John, we call all young men, ages 9-18 (4th grade through high school) to serve in the altar. This service is invaluable—to the church, to the priest and to the altar boys themselves. For the priest, the altar boys provide needed assistance. For the worshipping community, they help to enhance the service. And for the altar boys themselves, they have the blessing of standing in close proximity to the Holy Altar, only feet away from the Holy Gifts, as the Holy Spirit comes down on them to consecrate them. Indeed one of the most meaningful ways someone can serve is as an altar boy. In fact, most priests were once altar boys and it was in this service that they felt their calling. I know for me personally that is true. I first felt my calling to the priesthood at age 7, the first time I went in the altar to serve. I knew that day that I would never leave. And I never have.



If you have a son that is in 4th-12th grade and would like to serve in the altar, please contact me directly.



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 - Lynchburg, VA
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
Demitrius & 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
Sharon Colonis- Vero Beach, FL

Friends of St. John the Baptist - Some of you who receive *The Messenger* do not live in the Tampa Bay area or are members of other Greek Orthodox parishes. We would like to ask for your support of our parish by being a “Friend of St. John the Baptist.” Your contribution as a “Friend” will help offset the cost of mailing *The Messenger*, among other things. Being a “friend” does not make one a steward of St. John the Baptist or afford membership rights and responsibilities, but gives one who is a member elsewhere, an opportunity to make a gesture of financial support to our parish.

Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

Friend of St. John the Baptist:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ **Email:** _____

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

_____ \$50 _____ \$100 _____ \$200 _____ Other

**Please mail this form and check to: St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
2418 W. Swann Ave Tampa, FL 33609.**



*St. John is responsible to
have 6 volunteers sign up
each month.*

SIGN UP!

*Have a heart, lend a hand,
and make a difference.*

COMMUNITY OUTREACH 2023

**OUR SCHEDULE FOR THE REMAINING MONTHS OF 2023 IS
AS FOLLOWS:**

**SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 16,
OCTOBER 21, NOVEMBER 18, DECEMBER 16.**

TIME: 8:00 AM - 10 AM

**PLACE: TAMPA HOPE
3704 E. 3RD AVENUE
TAMPA, FL. 33605**



Sign up via SIGNUP GENIUS

Nursing Ministry– STRESS

What is stress?



Stress is a physical and emotional reaction that people experience as they encounter challenges in life. When you're under stress, your body reacts by releasing hormones that produce the "fight-or-flight" response. Your heart rate, breathing rate, and blood pressure go up, your muscles tense, and you sweat more. Occasional stress is a normal coping mechanism. However, long-term stress or chronic stress may contribute to or worsen a range of health problems.

Effects of chronic stress

The Effects of Chronic Stress on the Body Chronic stress negatively impacts every organ system of the body, down to our cells and molecules: "fight or flight" response overdrive, elevated stress hormones, disrupted sleep, muscle tension, metabolic dysfunction, immune dysregulation, and inflammation. Chronic stress has been linked to the development of some diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, autoimmune diseases, and mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety disorders. Using alcohol or drugs to dull the effects of stress can make the problem worse and interfere with sleep.

Acute Stress, Chronic Stress, and Anxiety. What's the Difference?

Acute stress is a response to an external event, such as taking a big test or arguing with a friend. Acute stress goes away once the situation is resolved.

Chronic stress, however, lasts for weeks, months, or longer.

As you go about your life, your body acts as if you're being threatened. Causes of chronic stress include routine stress from the demands of work or school; family or money problems; stress from sudden, difficult changes in your life, such as divorce or illness; and traumatic stress, which may happen when you're in danger of serious harm or death.

Anxiety is a common mental reaction to stress and can occur even if there is no current threat. Both stress and anxiety can affect your mind and body, and some of the symptoms are the same.

How Do I Press Reset on Stress? There is no drug to cure stress. But we do have access to a built-in "stress reset button" that acts as an antidote to stress. It's called the relaxation response. In contrast to the stress response, the relaxation response slows the heart rate, lowers blood pressure, and decreases oxygen consumption and levels of stress hormones.

Pressing reset on stress for just a few minutes several times a day can prevent stress from building up and can lead to better sleep, giving you more energy the next day. Pressing reset on stress can be done anywhere, anytime. At your desk, in your bed, or doing dishes, simple tools such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and mindfulness can produce the relaxation response.

There is no medication available to cure stress. But we do have access to a built-in "stress reset button" that acts as an antidote to stress. It's called the relaxation response. In

contrast to the stress response, the relaxation response slows the heart rate, lowers blood pressure, and decreases oxygen consumption and levels of stress hormones.

Chronic Stress increases Heart rate, muscle tension, breathing, glucose in bloodstream, blood pressure, buildup of plaque in arteries, oxygen consumption risk of diabetes, peptic ulcers, viral infection, stress hormones.



What you can do to address stress

Try these 10 stress-busting suggestions:

Be active

Exercise won't make your stress disappear, but it can reduce some of the emotional intensity that you're feeling, clearing your thoughts, and letting you deal with your problems more calmly.

Take control!

If you think you cannot do anything about your problem, your stress can get worse.

That feeling of loss of control is one of the main causes of stress and lack of wellbeing.

The act of taking control is empowering, and it's a crucial part of finding a solution that satisfies you and not someone else.

Connect with people!

A good support network of colleagues, friends and family can ease your work troubles and help you see things in a different way.

The activities we do with friends can help us relax and relieve stress.

Talking things through with a friend may also help you find solutions to your problems.



Have some "me time."

Many of us work long hours, meaning we often don't spend enough time doing things we really enjoy.

It's important to take some time for socializing, relaxation or exercise.

You could try setting aside a couple of nights a week for some quality "me time" away from work.

Challenge yourself!

Setting yourself goals and challenges, whether at work or outside, such as learning a new language or a new sport, can help build confidence. This may help you deal with stress.

It can also make you want to do things and be active.



Avoid unhealthy habits!

Don't rely on alcohol, smoking and caffeine as your ways of coping.

They might provide temporary relief, but in the long term, these crutches won't solve your problems. They'll just create new ones.

It's best to tackle the cause of your stress.

Help other people!

Evidence shows that people who help others, through activities such as volunteering or community work, often become more resilient.

If you don't have time to volunteer, try to do someone a favour every day. It can be something as small as helping someone cross the road or going on a coffee run for colleagues.

Work smarter, not harder!

Working smarter means prioritizing your work, concentrating on the tasks that'll make a real difference.

Leave the least important tasks to last. Accept that you will not have time for everything.



Try to be positive!

Look for the positives in life, and things for which you're grateful.

Try writing down 3 things that went well, or for which you're grateful, at the end of every day.

Marcelle Triantafilou, BSN, RN

Nursing Ministry

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ASPIS69@AOL.COM OR (813) 523-5771



St. John's Bookstore

Submitting something a little different this month. Going through some recipes recently, I came across a Prayer When Making Prosphora given to me when Fr. John was first ordained. It can be adapted when baking Vasilopeta or Fanouropita – anything that is offered in the church and thus requires solemnity and respect.

Presvytera Denise

Prayer when Making Prosphora



Make the sign of the cross, pray:

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy upon me. Amen.

Glory to Thee our God, glory to Thee

O God, whose only-begotten Son hast said, “without Me you can do nothing”, my Lord and my God, in faith I bend the knees of my soul to bow before Thy fatherly goodness and raise my hands to Thee.

Help me, a sinner to do this work in conformity with Thy will. Send down Thy Holy Spirit to guide me in the making of these prosphora that they may be worthy of the use for which they are intended.

(Then, blessing the assembled ingredients with the sign of the Cross, pray:)

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

Lord Have Mercy (3)

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, through the prayers of Thy Most Pure Mother, by the power of the precious and life-giving Cross, by the intercessions of the Holy Prophet, Forerunner, and Baptist John, of (your patron saint), of the patron saint of the church in which the prosphora will be offered, of my Holy Guardian Angel, and of all the saints, have mercy upon me and save me, Amen.

Beware of Emails or Text Messages Asking for Gift Cards

This is a common and very scary thing that is happening. People who are impersonating as Fr. Stavros have been emailing people and asking them to buy gift cards, scratch off the back to reveal the code, take pictures of the code and email them the pictures. Fr. Stavros would never under any circumstances ask for a gift card via email. If you receive an email like this, please call Fr. Stavros 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.

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



Fr. John
678-637-4425 >

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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.

WELCOME TO OUR PARISH

If you are new to the Tampa Bay area or just visiting, we would love to get to know you better.

PLEASE TEXT THE WORD

"WELCOME" TO 813-790-5950

FOLLOW THE PROMPTS TO GIVE US
YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION AND FROM THERE
YOU WILL BE DIRECTED TO OUR ONLINE CONNECTION CARD

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

September is a Great time to JOIN THE CHOIR!

We sing Sunday Liturgy and
Special Services
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For more info Call or Text:

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TSwartzbaugh@ut.edu

PHILOPTOCHOS SEPTEMBER NEWS

**‘ASSUREDLY, I SAY TO YOU, AS
MUCH AS YOU DID IT TO ONE OF
THE LEAST OF THESE, MY
BRETHREN, YOU DID IT TO ME’
MATT 25:40**

Dear St. John's Community,

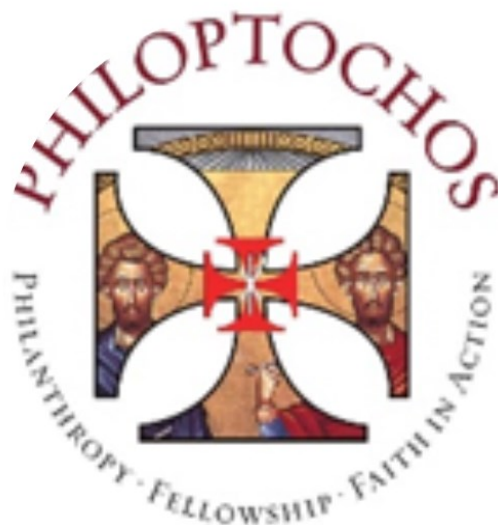
Through the strength of combining energy and funds from across the nation, Philoptochos is able to donate over \$2 million dollars a year to various charities, cancer and other major illnesses, children's medical funds, autism and more.

We also serve as the right arm of the church, both locally and nationally and on a national level support St. Basil's Academy, OCMC and Social Services, to name a few.

Our chapter is committed this year to collaborating with other ministries such as the Parish Council, Sunday School, Daughters of Penelope, and Joy & Hope. We will be doing joint philanthropy, fellowship, and community outreach programs.

We also support several local charities and work with Father Stravros on individual and collective community needs.

This Ecclesiastical year is committed to creative and inclusive programs, and we look forward to your participation and help.



A few upcoming projects are:
October - Making Strides with Breast Cancer Walk – in collaboration with the Nursing Ministry. All are welcome to join us in supporting the fight against breast cancer.

November - Bags of Love – in collaboration with Daughters of Penelope. We will collect items and distribute them to the homeless.
December – Metropolitan Ministries Boxes of Hope – in collaboration with Joy & Hope. We will collect grocery gift cards for the boxes.

We welcome the ladies (men can join too) of our community to come participate in our meetings and projects. Come and see what it is all about.

Our next General Membership meeting is October 15; 12:15 PM – 1 PM, in the Zaharias Room.

Try it! You'll like it!

In His Service,

Katherine Sakkis

St. John Philoptochos President



*Prayers for College
Students*

2023





St. John
the
Baptist

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Tampa, FL 33609

(813)876-8830

◀ Aug 2023	September 2023					Oct 2023 ▶
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
**Fast Day					1 **	2 Children's Greek School
3 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. No Sunday School	4 Labor Day	5 Parish Council 6:30 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	6 ** Choir Practice	7 Philoptochos Board Meeting 7 (zoom)	8 ** Nativity of the Virgin Mary Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	9 Children's Greek School Young at Heart GOYA St. Pete Volleyball
10 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Dance Practice CPR/AED training 12:30pm-	11 In Remembrance of 9/11 Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	12 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.	13 ** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m. Choir Practice	14 ** Holy Cross Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Young Adult Discussion 6:30pm	15 **	16 Community Outreach team building w/ Philoptochos Children's Greek School
17 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Blood Drive 11am-2:30pm Dance Practice College student day GOYA 5:00 p.m.	18 Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	19 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Veteran's/First Responder 6:30 p.m.	20 ** Choir Practice	21	22 **	23 Youth Worker Training 9:00am-3:30pm Children's Greek School
24 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. JOY Tweens 12:15 p.m. Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	25 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	26 St. John the Theologian Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	27 ** Choir Practice	28 Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	29 **	30 Young Adult Retreat 10:00 am- 4:00pm Children's Greek School

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As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before Thy face, who shall prepare thy way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight -- " Mark 2:3