

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

THE MESSENGER

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

September 2015

Mission Statement:

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is dedicated to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

Vision:

The church shall seek to fulfill its mission by:

1. Embracing the Spiritual Life of the Orthodox Church through regular prayer, worship, and frequent participation in the sacraments.
2. Supporting the Church through stewardship of time and talent and sacrificial giving.
3. Providing a welcoming, caring loving environment
4. Having its members exemplify Orthodox Christian character and morals.
5. Supporting ministries that facilitate the overall mission of the Church.
6. Exemplifying commitment to community service and charitable outreach.
7. Creating an environment which encourages member to grow in their faith.

Father Stavros' Message

Over the summer, I read a book called "It's Not About Me" by Max Lucado. Yes, I like this author, I quote him often. No, he is not Orthodox. Yes, non-Orthodox people have lots of good and appropriate and most importantly, practical things to say about the Christian faith.

The thesis of this book is, as its title suggests, "It's Not About Me." Well, if it's not about me, then who is it about? It's about HIM, our Lord. Our life on this earth is a gift from HIM. Without HIM, there is no life for you and I. Our life is a blessing, a gift. Every day of this life is a gift, a cause for thanksgiving and gratitude. If we see every day as a gift from HIM, as opposed to an entitlement, then we won't be disappointed if those days and years are not as many as we'd hoped for, for ourselves or for a loved one.

What else is not about US? Our jobs for one thing. Our ability to get a job is based on a talent, which we received from the Lord. And we are supposed to use that ability to glorify HIM—therefore our jobs are about Him. Marriage is also a gift, meant to glorify HIM. If our marriage is all about HIM, then how bad can a marriage be? Having children is all about HIM as well. Instead of trying to mold our children into athletes or worrying how much money they'll make when they graduate college, we must first teach them about the Lord. If each child knows God and knows that they are a gift from God, then they will use their life to glorify God in whatever they are

doing. Same thing goes for our bodies, our homes, our talents. They are all about HIM.

So, if our life is about HIM, is God then a ego-centric person who demands all of His subjects give all to Him? Not exactly. See, God is all about US! He blesses us with the very gift of life. He blesses each of us with talents. He blesses us with forgiveness when we repent of our sins. He blesses us with hope when we are down. He blesses us with a path to Paradise by sending Jesus Christ to redeem us from our sins. (On September 13, we will hear John 3:16 in the Gospel Lesson—"For God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.") And He blesses us by opening the gates of heaven to those who believe, repented and prepared. He is all about us!

Allow me to quote one small passage from this book:

You're acquainted with house-sitters. You've possibly used one. Not wanting to leave your house vacant, you ask someone to stay in your home until you return. Let me describe two of your nightmares.

The house-sitter redecorates your house. White paint is changed to pink. Berber carpet to shag. An abstract plastic chair sits in the place of your cozy love seat. His justification? "The house didn't express me accurately. I needed a house that communicated who I am."

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Your response? "It's not yours! My residence does not exist to reflect you! I asked you to take care of this house, not take over the house!" Would you want a sitter like this?

You might choose him over nightmare number two. She didn't redecorate; she neglected. Never washed a dish, made a bed or took out the trash. "My time here was temporary. I knew you wouldn't mind," she explains.

Of course you'd mind! Does she know what this abode cost you? Both house-sitters made the same mistake. They acted as if the dwelling were theirs. (p. 109-110)

Lots of food for thought here. The Lord made the house. We are the temporary tenant. That's why in the church we use the word "steward," because a steward is a temporary caretaker. A tenant is one who occupies. He doesn't necessarily feel like he has a stake in the game, so to speak. He occupies space in the dwelling. Back when I was in college and also newly married, before I owned a home, I took care not to destroy or ruin my college dorm, or seminary apartment. I can't say I actually cherished those places—they were not mine. I paid a fee, I lived in them, I was a tenant. I didn't make them worse than I found them. But I can't really say I left them better either.

A steward is better than the tenant—the steward is a caretaker, he takes care of what he has been given. And that goes for taking care of his family, his work, his talents, his home, and his faith. Are you taking care of your faith? Is God the source and center of your life, or does He merely fit into a neat compartment on Sundays, and for some of us not even that!

How many times a day do you say the word "I"? How many times to you get into a fight about your rights? On balance, how much of life is about you, or me, or us, and not about Him?

This September, as we begin a new Ecclesiastical Year, as we restart our Sunday school, and GOYA and small group Bible studies, as people come back to church after summer vacations, ponder on this thought—"It's not about ME. It's about Him.

I John 4: 18-20 says:

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who hears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us. If anyone says 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen."

And because there is no fear in love, the one who creates fear in other people is not filled with love either.

When I think about the things we do well as a community, we do so well when we make it about Him, and not about us:

1. We fill the church every Sunday with people who are coming to worship Him
2. We bring our children to Sunday school because we want them to learn about Him
3. Many of us go to Bible study so we can talk about Him.

4. We eagerly welcome people to our community because we want people to know about Him.
5. We serve on the Parish Council and in other administrative capacities so that we have a solid foundation from which to spread the good news about Him.

And when I think of the things we still need to improve on as a community, it comes down to the same thing—do we make it about Him or about us?

1. There are still people on our mailing list, people who are reading this article right now, who don't come to church often—they either don't understand Him, or are too busy for Him, or think they know all there is to know about Him.
2. There are still people who only show up for parish meetings or elections or just the festival because they've made their experience of the church not about Him.
3. There are people who hold back on giving because they don't trust Him.
4. There are people who hold back on forgiving and hold grudges because they don't know Him.
5. There are people who don't pray because they don't have time for Him.
6. There are people who won't talk about their faith out loud because they are either embarrassed of Him, or of how little they know of Him.

And there are things we all have to improve on as individuals:

1. We've got to eat better, because our body belongs to Him.
2. We've got to speak better, with words that glorify Him.
3. We've got to manage our time better, so that we give Him from the first fruits and not the leftovers.
4. We've got to listen better, because we see God in our neighbor and if we can't listen to our neighbor, we can't listen to Him either.

I've given a lot of thought to this idea that "It's not about me" and that "it's all about Him." I realize that I have a long way to go in my life and in my ministry to truly be able to say "It's all about Him." I realize that at times my ministry has reflected more of ME than it has of HIM. Same thing with my marriage, my parenting, and everything else I do in my life. I realize that some of these points for improvement are all things I personally need to improve on.

I am thankful to the Lord for the now 11 years I have spent in Tampa as your priest. Every year, my anniversary and the beginning of the Church Year coincide. And so as we begin another church year and I begin another year in ministry, I do so with a desire to do better in all aspects of my life and ministry.

I'm looking forward to sharing another year with you, as God so wills. And I will work hard to make it more about Him, and less about everything else, including me. I pray that you will do the same. And I pray that you will pray for me, as I am praying for you, that God is the source, center and hope of our community, and of our individual lives in it.

May the Lord our God bless, protect and keep you all!
With love in the Lord,
+Fr. Stavros

Highlights on the Calendar 2015-2016

Saturday, September 12
Sunday, September 13
Monday, September 14
Week of September 14

Camp Reunion/GOYA Lock-in
First Day of Sunday School - Ministry Fair –Open House
First Day of Charlie's Bible Study - Every Monday at 6:30 p.m.
Small Group Bible Studies Begin
 Women's group Tuesdays at 10:00 a.m.
 South Tampa Tuesdays at 6:30 p.m.
 East Tampa, Tuesdays at 6:30 p.m.
 Men's Bible Study, Wednesdays at 7:30 a.m.
 North Tampa, Thursdays at 6:30 p.m.
Youth Sunday, Pre-Teen Retreat, GOYA 5:00 p.m.

Sunday, September 27

Thursday, October 8
Sunday, October 11
Sunday, October 18
Thursday, October 22
Sunday, October 25

Adult Greek School Begins
AHEPA/Daughters of Penelope Founder's Day Luncheon, GOYA Meeting
Youth Sunday, JOY/HOPE Fall Festival
Liturgy of St. James in the Evening
Parish Assembly Meeting

Friday, November 6-8
Wednesday, November 25
TBA

Tampa Greek Festival
Evening Liturgy for Thanksgiving
Adult Advent Retreat-TBA

Sunday, December 6
Saturday, December 12
Sunday, December 13
Sunday, December 13
Thursday, December 17
Wednesday, December 24

Stewardship Sunday
Sunday School Christmas Program Rehearsal/Christmas Party
Sunday School Christmas Program
Parish Council Elections
Service of Preparation for the Nativity
Christmas Services

Wednesday, January 6-7
Sunday, January 10
Saturday, January 23
Saturday, January 30

St. John the Baptist Feastday Vespers & Liturgy
Vasilopita Sunday
Gasparilla Children's Parade Fundraiser
Gasparilla Adult Parade Fundraiser

Saturday, February 20
Sunday, February 21
Saturday, February 27

GOYA Lock-in
Youth Sunday
Young at Heart Apokreatiko Dance

Saturday, March 12
Sunday, March 13
Monday, March 14
Sunday, March 21
TBA

Saturday of Souls—Liturgy at Garden of Memories Memorial Park
Sunday School Pre-Lenten Retreat
Beginning of Great Lent
Sunday of Orthodoxy
Greek Independence Day Program

Sunday, March 1
Friday, March 6
Saturday, March 21
Sunday, March 29

Sunday of Orthodoxy
Youth Sunday, GOYA Lenten Retreat
Adult Lenten Retreat
Greek Independence Day Luncheon/Program in Tampa

Saturday, April 2
Friday, April 8
Sunday, April 17
Sunday, April 24
Friday, April 29

Adult Lenten Retreat
GOYA Lenten Retreat Begins
Youth Sunday
Palm Sunday
Sunday School Good Friday Retreat

Sunday, May 1
Sunday, May 15
Sunday, May 22

PASCHA, Easter Egg Hunt
Parish Picnic
Youth Sunday, GOYA Meeting

Sunday, June 5
Friday, June 17-19
Sunday, June 19

End of Sunday School, GOYA Meeting
Junior Olympics
Pentecost

July

Metropolis of Atlanta's St. Stephen's Summer Camp

Liturgical Schedule for September 2015

Tuesday, September 1 **Beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, September 6 **14th Sunday of Matthew**

Altar Boys: Anyone attending may serve

Ushers: David Voykin, Ed Gerecke, Pete Trakas

Welcome Committee: Greeters: Julie Palios, Jenny Paloumpis; Ambassador: Lisa Alsina; Caller: Sandra Pappas;

Get Acquainted: Skip Higdon

Coffee Hour: The AHEPA Family

Tuesday, September 8 **Nativity of the Theotokos**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Friday, September 11 **Day of Remembrance of 9/11 - Prayer for Peace in the World**
Paraklesis Service and Memorial Service 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, September 13 **Sunday before Holy Cross**
Orthros: 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Matthew (George Hambos, Nicholas Katzaras, James Katzaras, John Palios, Andrew Patrasciou, Genaro Scargofliero, Makis Crassas, Jonathan Brannan, John Nicholas Krinos)

Ushers: Mike Trimis, George Mitseas, Chris Kavouklis

Welcome Committee: Greeters: Edie Kavouklis, Maria Karounos; Ambassador: Carole Fotopoulos; Caller: Peggy Bradshaw

Coffee Hour: Choir

Monday, September 14 **Universal Exaltation of the Holy Cross**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, September 20 **Sunday after Holy Cross**
Orthros: 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St Mark (John Karamitsanis, Lukas Karamitsanis, Brigham Sibley, Dominic Garcia, Benny Hidermichel, James Kavouklis, William Sotriopoulos, Alexander Sotriopoulos)

Ushers: Florin Patrasciou, Kevin Fentress, Tammy Christou

Welcome Committee: Greeters: Donna Trakas, Kalliope Chagaris; Ambassador: Marenca Patrasciou;

Caller: Betty Katsamakis

Coffee Hour: Joy/HOPE

Wednesday, September 23 **Conception of St. John the Baptist**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, September 27 **1st Sunday of Luke**
Orthros: 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St Luke (Nicholas Alsina, Andrew Mellon-Lynn, Demetri Karounos, Jonah Blankenbaker, Yanni Trimikliniotis, Andrew Thatcher, Alexander Findlay, Demetri Passalaris)

Ushers: Nick Kavouklis, Perry Katsamakis, Peter Theophanous

Welcome Committee: Greeters: Donna Hambos, Katherine Sakkis; Ambassador: Elaine Halkias; Caller: Christine Worley

Coffee Hour: Community Outreach

Liturgical Notes for September

Tuesday, September 1 - New Ecclesiastical Year - Day of the Environment

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

Tuesday, September 8 - Nativity of the Virgin Mary

Major Feast Day-Placed right after the beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year (September 1), 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.

Friday, September 11-Day of Remembrance

This year marks the 14th year anniversary of the terrorist attack on America on 9/11/01. Despite the years that have passed since that awful day, feelings and emotions are still riding high. It is appropriate to stop and reflect not only on a tragic day in the life of our country, but to pray for peace in a world that is beset with hostility, not only overseas but on the streets of cities in our own country. On September 11, we will hold a Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary at 10:00 a.m., with a Trisagion service at the conclusion of the service. If you have time, please stop by our church to worship and pray for peace in the world and for recovery and healing of those who suffered and still suffer because of that terrible day.

Monday, September 14 - Exaltation of the Holy Cross

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 20.

Wednesday, September 23 - Conception of St. John the Baptist

There are four feasts each year that honor the Forerunner of Christ, St. John the Baptist. They are his Synaxis (January 7); Conception (September 23); Nativity (June 24); and Beheading (August 29). Even though we celebrate his feastday in our parish on January 7, because our church is named for St. John the Baptist, we try to celebrate all of his feastdays, including this one. The conception of St. John was miraculous, in the sense that his parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth, were both very elderly and had previously been unable to have children.

Donations Needed

Exaltation of the Holy Cross & Altar Boy Robes

We need Vasiliko (Basil) for the services of the Holy Cross

Please bring Vasiliko for Monday, September 14 and Sunday, September 19. Please bring to the side door of the altar by 10:00 a.m. both days, so we will have time to make up the tray. The Procession for the Holy Cross will be held on Monday, September 14 and repeated on Sunday, September 19.

Donations needed for flowers for Feast of the Holy Cross

We need a donation of \$100 for flowers for the tray for the procession of the Holy Cross on September 14 and \$350 for flowers for the tray for the procession of the Holy Cross on September 19. Please call the office if you are interested.

Donations needed for Altar Boy Robes

This year we are set with a record-breaking 43 young men who will serve in the altar. We need to add a couple of robes of different sizes each year to keep up with their growing number—that is a great problem to have. Each robe set (which includes a white robe, a gold robe and six stoles—red, white, blue, green, gold and purple) costs \$1,000. We'd like to get TWO new robe sets for this year. If you'd like to donate one, please contact Father Stavros.

Happy New Ecclesiastical New Year

By Charlie Hambos

Why do we get so many chances to start over? Why do the calendars of different cultures and societies start a new calendar? The Julian calendar each year starts a new year on January 1. There is the Chinese New Year and each year is named after one of 12 different animals. We are currently in the year of the sheep. The Jews celebrate their New Year on Rosh Hashanah, which usually falls in September or October. These are only a few. In the Orthodox Church, we celebrate the start of the Ecclesiastical Year on September 1, calling it Indiction. Happy Ecclesiastical New Year! Most churches, including here at St. John the Baptist celebrate the Divine Liturgy, to bring in the New Ecclesiastical Year.

We have so many sayings about starting over, starting fresh. For example, “Out with the old, in with the new,” “The sun will come out tomorrow,” “There is always next year,” “Tomorrow is another day.” Perhaps many of us are always on top of our life and everyday is a continuation of the previous day and they only get better and better. But maybe, we have those days, weeks, months and perhaps years where we just want start over. We want to begin fresh. All of these celebrations give us a chance to start fresh.

Humanity in its history had to start fresh so many times. God placed Adam and Eve in the garden. We messed up. We fell and for a while we had to fend for ourselves. Things got so out of control, God hit the “refresh” button and there came water from both the heavens and the earth. Only Noah, his wife, their three boys and their wives got the chance to start it all over again. We were still out of control, so God gave Moses the 10 commandments and 603 other commandments to help us realize that we were out of control. We needed something to gage how messed up we were and that was the law. All of that still didn’t work, so God placed the New Adam in the Garden. That New Adam, was Jesus Christ. St. Paul tells us this, “The first man Adam became a living being.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, had to experience death and life on earth in order to give us the ultimate new life. So really all of these celebrations of something new are just reminders that we have a fresh new start with Jesus Christ.

What is the New Ecclesiastical Year all about? In the Church, there is a beginning and end to everything. Every service starts with “Blessed is our God, always, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.” Every service finishes with “Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord, Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us and save

us.” Each feast of the church has a designated starting point and an ending point. Sometimes, it’s only from sunset the night before to the next sunset. Other times it can be for many days. For example, we start Pascha and then we complete the continuous celebration of Pascha, 40 days later. So it makes sense that we celebrate the Ecclesiastical New Year. It is incredible because the bookends of the Ecclesiastical year, deal specifically with the Theotokos. We celebrate her birth on September 8 (close to start of the Ecclesiastical Year) and her falling-asleep on August 15 (near the end of the Ecclesiastical Year). Most Holy Theotokos, intercede for us!

How did the celebration of the Ecclesiastical New Year begin? Indiction comes from the Latin and it means “to impose.” It was on September 1, in the Roman Empire, when the taxes were imposed on the Empire. It was sort of like the start of their fiscal year. The first worldwide Indiction was in 312 A.D. when Emperor Constantine saw a miraculous vision of the Cross in the sky. Rome began the New Year on September 1, until the Julian calendar was introduced. It was also on September 1, according to Holy Tradition, when Christ entered the synagogue to announce His mission to the world (Luke 4:16-22), quoting the Prophet Isaiah saying, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me; because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to proclaim release to captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” On September 1, we read that exact portion of the Gospel from Luke 4:16-22, celebrating the Ecclesiastical New Year.

The Hymn of the feast is the following, “O Creator of all the universe, who have placed times and seasons under your own authority; Bless, O Lord, the crown of this year of your kindness, keeping in peace your kings and your city; by the intercessions of the Theotokos, O only true friend of man.” So there we have it, we come together to ask God, the Creator and establisher of “the time” to bless us on the occasion of the Ecclesiastical New Year.

So, here we go, just in case we needed something to celebrate in our life, we can now celebrate the Ecclesiastical New Year. Let’s put it on our calendar. Let’s go celebrate the Divine Liturgy or tune in on the live stream of the service.

5 New Ecclesiastical Year Resolutions

1. Spend more time with your faith.

To think that many only spend 2 hours a week with their faith at a church service is rather shocking when there are a total of 168 hours in the week. Spend more time at church. Spend more time thinking about what you believe. Spend more time talking about your faith. Spend more time with people who are Orthodox Christians. Spend more time learning about your faith. Spend more time praying. Spend more time thinking about and thanking Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

2. Join a Bible Study.

This year we have Small Group Bible Studies everywhere. We have one in the North, the South, the East, one for young adults, one for men, one for women and one which is a little more academic (mine). The Early Church met in houses to discuss the scriptures, sing praises to God and have a meal. These Small Group Bible Studies are appendages of the church. The blood eventually has to get back to the heart and that is the Church, itself. It is also like bringing a little bit of the church to your week by keeping you in The Word and connected to Christ.

3. Join the Prayer Team.

Father Stavros' daily inspirational messages about scripture and our Orthodox Faith have gone international with its debut on the Orthodox Christian Network in August. Father writes a prayer each day about the topic of the day. It's a good way to stop and pray. It's good not only for our community but it's also good for your future salva-

tion. E-mail Father Stavros at frstav@gmail.com and tell him you want to be a part of the Prayer Team. Even if you don't read it right away, you can always go back and read it later. I promise, it is totally worth it.

4. Bring Christ Home with You.

After a priest concluded the sacrament of marriage, he spoke to the new couple and told them to bring Christ home with them. Each sacrament is a miracle. It is a miracle that two people walked into the church and left as one. Why keep the miracle a secret? Why leave Him there? Don't leave Christ in the church. He is in there enough. Take Him home with you. Share Him with your neighbors. Share Him with your children. Share Him with your family. Share Him with your colleagues. Share Him with the world. Most of all, make Christ the center of your life.

5. Ask Charlie a question about anything (a.k.a. Come have coffee with Charlie).

If you don't like coffee, bring your own drink. Just kidding, I have cold water too. Seriously, since I am not priest yet, I don't have the honor or the blessing to hear confession in the sacramental context. Come ask a question about your faith. Come ask a question about anything. I am here to serve you (some coffee). No, I am here to serve you. Just a warning, I am human. Just e-mail me at charlie.hambos@gmail.com or call at 813-843-8471 and let me know so I can heat the water up and grind some fresh beans.

God be with you this Ecclesiastical New Year!

Leave the Church in Your Will

Part of our life's legacy is the inheritance we leave our children. By leaving an inheritance, a part of us lives on through them. When preparing your will, you should consider leaving money to our church—this is the church of your children and part of their future can be positively impacted by leaving some of your inheritance to the church. The ability of the church to spread the Word of God is facilitated by everyone's stewardship. By leaving a portion of your inheritance to the church in your will, you remain a steward in perpetuity, but more importantly, you help cement a solid financial future for the church for your children and your grandchildren. If you are interested in leaving the church in your will, please contact Russell Sibley (church member) at rsibleylaw@gmail.com. Thank you for your consideration.

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Community News

Parish Registry

Chrismation – Alex Santos was chrismated on Sunday, July 19. Thomas Manos was the Sponsor. Congratulations!

Wedding - Alex Santos and Connie Kontos were married on Saturday, July 25. Barbara Kontos was the Sponsor. Congratulations!

Funeral - Rev. Fr. David Milligan, retired priest of the Russian Patriarchal Church, passed away on July 23. Funeral services were held at St. John on Monday, July 27. May his memory be eternal!

Council of Ministries Open House Sunday, September 13

Each Ministry will have a booth and representative to share information.

Earlier this year the Parish Council formally approved the rollout of a Ministry Based Organization or MBO to include the Council of Ministries. This complements the current 'operational' efforts of our ministries.

We are very excited about this concept as a way to revitalize and energize our community! Our Council of Ministries brings together all levels of church leadership and provides a framework to work together to improve communication, provide testimonials, identify resources, best practices, goals, talents, etc. to serve the mission of our Church and broader vision of our parish.

We have many exciting ministries at St. John the Baptist with something for everyone and no limits on how many ministry groups you may choose for participation. They are all different, with varying objectives, age of members and activities.

Come learn more about the individual Ministries at St. John the Baptist Sunday, September 13 at our Ministry Open House!

Greek Dance Groups - I Hara Mas dancers are the children's dance group; The Glendi Dancers are the teenage dance group; and the Panigyri Dancers are our adult group.

AHEPA/Daughter's of Penelope - Promotes Hellenic culture and education by having fellowship gatherings and offering scholarships.

Greek Festival - Each November, our church sponsors the annual Greek festival, which shares our culture and faith with the Tampa community.

Sunday School - Weekly Sunday school classes teach our children about the Orthodox Faith. We are always looking for volunteers to teach our classes and we encourage those with children to bring them every Sunday

GOYA - This is our teenage group for young people in 7-12th grades. They participate in a monthly spiritual encounter, social events, retreats and sponsor a Lenten retreat each spring.

HOPE/JOY - Youth ages 3 years old through 6th grade come together for spiritual retreats, social events and service projects.

Small Group Ministry - There are at present six small groups that gather each week to discuss the Bible, Orthodoxy and the Christian life. They are led by lay people and meet in various locations throughout Tampa.

Bible Study - A traditional Bible study is offered once a week at the church in the evening.

Community Outreach - St. John is affiliated with an inter-faith coalition to serve food to the homeless in Tampa Bay once a month on Saturdays, with additional opportunities during the year.

Philoptochos - The Annunciation Chapter is a women's organization of the parish dedicated to providing aid for the poor and needy and enriching our parish life.

Choir - Our choir sings on Sundays and at other services throughout the year. They practice on Wednesday evenings and anyone interested is welcome to join.

Welcoming Committee/Stewardship - This a group of people that fall under the stewardship committee who welcome new people to our parish, get people connected and help to grow our parish on a weekly basis. Those who serve get on a list and serve on a rotating basis

MOMS - This is a ministry for mothers to gather together to form a network of mutual spiritual support. Is it for mothers with wisdom to share and mothers who are searching for answers and meaning in the vocation of motherhood.

Young at Heart - With faith, a desire to give back and in appreciation of our many blessings, we will use the experience of our years as a badge of commitment to encourage, to inspire and to set an example to others to ENJOY LIFE while HELPING our church and community.



Get Acquainted Sunday, September 6

In an effort to get to know one another better, we are going to continue our "Get Acquainted Sundays" one Sunday of each month. We will have nametags and markers in the entry way of the Kourmolis Center and will ask that each person put one on during coffee hour and introduce yourself to at least one person that you do not know. This will serve to help us increase our fellowship and sense of community.



Community Outreach

Thank you to everyone who continues to support our Community Outreach ministry to serve the homeless and those in need. For those who don't know, we serve breakfast at First Presbyterian Church on the third Saturday of each month from 8:00-10:30 a.m. Upcoming dates are Saturday, September 19 and October 17. For more information or to sign up to serve one Saturday, please contact Betty Katherine Katsamakakis at bettypalios@gmail.com or 813-468-1596.

GOYA

Lock-In/Camp Reunion on Saturday, September 12

We will be having a lock-in/camp reunion for our GOYAns as well as GOYAns from neighboring parishes who went to summer camp, on Saturday, September 12, beginning at 5:00 p.m. We will have games, sessions, discussions and food. We will be spending the night in the Kourmolis Center and then attending church on Sunday, September 13.

Please RSVP to Elaine Halkias by September 8 if you are interested in attending.

Meeting Sunday, September 27

Our regular GOYA meeting for September will be Sunday, September 21, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided.

Isaiah 30:21

*Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying,
This is the way; walk in it."*

Choices:

How to make Godly decisions - A workshop for pre-teens and their parents

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church invites all **pre-teens in grades 4-7** and their parents to join us for an afternoon of discussion, activities, and prayer.

Sunday, September 27, 2015 1:00 – 3:30 p.m.

**lunch served at 12:30 p.m.*

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church 2418 Swann Ave~Tampa, FL~33609

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.

Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take

For more information or to RSVP, please email or call Maria Xenick – mpxenick@gmail.com, (813)839-9897

Men's Basketball

On Tuesday nights at 8:00 p.m. the Kourmolis Center is open for men's basketball pick up games. If you are interested in joining the games, please contact Perry Katsamakakis at 516-403-3118 or Jimmy Konstas at 813-220-7352 or just come to the gym and join a team! **No skills necessary.**

Ministry of Mothers Sharing (MOMS)

MOMS meet in the Nursery at 11:00 a.m. on Monday, September 14, and September 28. This is a ministry for mothers to gather together to form a network of mutual spiritual support. Is it for mothers with wisdom to share and mothers who are searching for answers and meaning in the vocation of motherhood. Our mission is to provide Biblical encouragement and support to women as they begin their journey of motherhood. Please contact Lindsey Skourellos (813) 503-7845 or Mary Ann Konstas (813) 215-9862 with questions.

Orthodoxy 101 Class to be held in September

Fr. Stavros offers this class two times per year, in spring and in fall. This will be the SAME CLASS so no need to take it again if you already have unless you want to hear and learn again. This will be a three-week course of study on Monday nights to make people aware of the basics of being an Orthodox Christian.

Who should attend the Orthodoxy 101 class?

Interfaith couples - this will help the non-Orthodox person understand more what is going on in our church when they attend.

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 about it.

Anyone who wants to know more about the basics of our faith, or who wants a refresher course in the basics of Orthodoxy is encouraged to attend.

The classes will be part lecture, part discussion, with lots of time for questions and answers. The three sessions will be done as follows:

Monday, September 21 A Tour of the Orthodox Church: What we see in the Church and what it means

Monday, September 28 Orthodox Spirituality—The Seven Sacraments and the Divine Liturgy

Monday, October 4 Orthodox Traditions—fasting, icons, prayer and separating Theology from “yiyalogy”

Classes will be held on these three Mondays from 6:30-8:30 p.m. and will be held in the CHURCH Sanctuary. Please sign up with Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com, so he has enough materials for everyone. There is no charge for this class.

Small Choir Forming


Over the summer, Father and Charlie held four classes about “introduction to chanting.” From these four classes has emerged a small group of people who want to sing the liturgy on Sundays when the regular choir is not singing (like during summer and the festival) and on certain weekdays. Anyone may join this group, whether you are in the choir or not. There are not regular practices—any time the group is singing, come on up and join. We are going to have a short meeting on Sunday, September 13, after the Liturgy, to figure out when we can squeeze in a practice and also a schedule of services where the “Small Choir” will sing. Between our regular choir, our youth choir, this small choir and our chanters, the music ministry continues to expand! For more information on the small choir, contact either Fr. Stavros or Charlie.


Young at Heart

There is a meeting Thursday, September 10 at 11:00 at Carole Fotopoulos’ house and it will be a luncheon. The address is Cory Lake Isles in New Tampa, 10507 Bermuda Isle Drive, Tampa, FL 33647. Carole’s contact number is 813-982-0947 please RSVP by Sept. 5th. New members are welcome. This will be our “kick off” meeting after taking a break for the Summer.

St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

Sermons on Youtube Channel Each Sunday

 Father’s sermons each Sunday are available on our YouTube channel. Just go to YouTube and type in “St John GOC Tampa” and you’ll find them. If you miss a sermon or wish to hear a sermon again, you’ll find it there!

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

Constant Contact Emails - Our parish utilizes Constant Contact as a way of staying in touch with parishioners, particularly on subjects that are time sensitive. This is an effort not to clog your inbox but to keep you informed of the goings on in our parish. If you are not receiving Constant Contact emails and would like to, please email officestjohnngoctampa@gmail.com with the Subject line “Please Add Me to the Constant Contact Emails.”

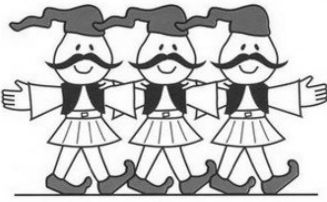
Live Streaming - All of our services are being video recorded and are available on our Livestream page.

To access this page

1. Go to our Church's website: greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com,
2. Scroll the mouse over the “Multimedia” tab on the menu bar
3. Click “View Liturgy,”
4. Then click on the link where it says, “Check out our live stream of the Divine Liturgy here <http://new.livestream.com/accounts/2454446>.

All of the services are available to watch at anytime.





~Save the Date~

The Tampa Greek Festival is November 6,7, & 8, 2015!

The first full weekend in November we will unite as a Parish to support our Festival. Look for communication soon from the individual Festival Chairs as they look to staff their areas. As well as the Chair of Manpower to coordinate the efforts of our hundreds of volunteers!

Just five is all we need! Join us Sunday, September 27, 2015 in the Kourmolis Hall to help stuff envelopes with festival admission tickets. The pre-sale of admission tickets helped raise several thousand last year and promote our wonderful event! We send each family tickets to give or sell to their friends and send back funds to cover the cost.

Stuffing 500 envelopes is quite a big job for a small office, but it is a great fundraiser! All you need to do is stuff five envelopes to prepare our mailing.

If everyone helps a little, we can get it done in no time. If you would like to pick up your tickets that Sunday (and save the church postage) we will gladly help you find your envelope.

Panigyri Dancers

St. John the Baptist Adult Dance Group will be having practice every Wednesday Night in the Kourmolis Center at 7:00 p.m. in preparation for our festival performances. Anyone interested in dancing can contact Vanessa Aviles at 813-417-4364 or Alex De Maio 813-340-9668.

H XAPA ΜΑΣ Dancers

Our children's dance group will be starting practice Sunday, September 13 in the Kourmolis Center immediately following Sunday School. H XAPA ΜΑΣ means Our Joy and this group is for school age children. If your children are interested dancing or if you have any questions please contact Marina Choundas at 813-877-6136 or Alex De Maio at 813-340-9668.

Thank You!



The Ladies of St. John the Baptist Philoptochos would like to thank JoAnn Hartung for her many years of Service as Philoptochos President and Board Member. If you are a member of Philoptochos and are not receiving our communications via email or calling post, please email or call Lisa Alsina aalsina@tampabay.rr.com/ (813) 728-1094. If you are a woman age, 18 to 110 we encourage you to join this vital ministry. A calendar of upcoming meetings and events will be posted shortly.



St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church Adult Greek School

Want to Learn Modern Greek?



Teacher born, raised, and educated in Greece with over 17 years of experience teaching the Greek language. Adult classes for beginners taught at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church 2418 W. Swann Ave, Tampa, FL 33609.
Classes will be Thursday evenings from 6:00 - 8:30 p.m. starting on Thursday, October 8.

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

Price per session is \$100 for church members and \$125 for non-members
Contact Ms. Magdalini Myer: at (813) 909-2327, aspis69@aol.com.



AHEPA FAMILY NEWS September 2015



ARIANNA KRINOS WINS NATIONAL DAUGHTERS OF PENELOPE SCHOLARSHIP

Arianna Krinos was selected for one of the National Daughters of Penelope Scholarships honoring Helen J. Beldecos, Past Grand President. The scholarship is in the amount of \$1,500. Melissa Krinos, her mother said in an email, "We are extremely grateful for all the support that Arianna has received from AHEPA and DOP for her college education! She will leave for Virginia Tech on August 18." Congratulations Arianna, AHEPA and DOP wish you continued success in your college and career. Kai is another!

NEDI FEREKIDES PARTICIPATES IN AHEPAcademy

Nedi Ferekides was a participant in the AHEPAcademy this summer held at George Mason University outside Washington, DC from June 21 – June 27, 2015. AHEPAcademy is a small, select group of Greek-American high school students selected from throughout the country to participate in an interactive leadership and professional development program.



1 AHEPAcademy AT THE CYPRIOT EMBASSY

My Experience at AHEPAcademy by Nedi Ferekidis

At the beautiful George Mason University campus, ten Greek-American students, from around America, were brought together. I was fortunate to be one of those ten students. Unsure of what to expect from a program designed to produce tomorrow's young leaders of the Greek American community, I left the trip with experiences and memories to last a lifetime. The week started off with introductions, orientations, and etiquette classes. Meeting other teenagers, who shared the same culture, values, and home-style, helped to create strong friendships in the span of minutes. On the second day we went to Hemlock Overlook Regional Park and completed team building exercises and a ropes course challenge. We created memories of swinging on a rope over a mud pit, to lifting people over a 15 foot wooden wall without any equipment, and of course, zip lining high above the trees in a beautiful forest park. The following days of the trip had many more enjoyable moments doing everything from a DC monument tour at night, viewing a Shakespeare Theatre Company play, a movie night, visiting several Smithsonian museums, and even attending the World Police and Fire Games opening ceremony. The program also consisted of many instructional classes. Visiting the Greek and Cypriot embassy to discuss problems and situations facing Greeks in the homeland brought points of views and solutions to light. Listening and learning set the stage for us to create a national AHEPAcademy project. Split into teams, ideas ranged from building a school, to a mobile app, a service trip, and a service project. Given two days to perfect a presentation that was presented to a board of Greek-American business men in a "Shark Tank" fashion, a winning idea was chosen... Fleece for Greece! This is a service project designed to provide blankets to the many children in Greece living in orphanages for the winter time. As the program extends for 10 years, this project allows us to continue the AHEPAcademy legacy and maintain the connections we made with the professionals we met and each other. The trip's instructional times also included a networking interactive lesson, a lecture on who we are as Greek-Americans, a lecture regarding our perceptions of millennials in the workplace, and more. Overall the trip was an amazing experience and I would recommend it to any rising Greek-American high school senior. 4-Player Scramble Format

LYCURGUS CHAPTER 12 TAMPA GOLF TOURNAMENT Saturday, OCTOBER 17, 2015



12:30 p.m.....Registration
1:30 p.m.....Shotgun Start

Register at:
<http://www.westchasegc.com/-ahepa-golf-tournament>

BENEFITS THE AHEPA FAMILY SCHOLARSHIP FUND \$100 COST FOR SINGLE PLAYER

We hope that you'll join us for a fun-filled day at The Westchase Golf Club at 11602 Westchase Golf Drive in Tampa. Invite your friends and co-workers and hit the links with AHEPA LYCURGUS TAMPA. The tournament benefits the AHEPA FAMILY scholarship fund. Everyone is welcome to come play!

The cost is \$100 for single players and \$400 for a Foursome which includes 18 holes of golf, 1 bucket of driving range balls, A buffet dinner

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

The Sunday School Staff is looking forward to serving the children of St. John the Baptist for the 2015-2016 school year. **Our first day of Sunday School is Sunday, September 13th.** Please make sure to register your children on September 6th or the first day of school, if you haven't already done so. We need this information for our records and for communication.

We are proud announce our outstanding staff for the 2015-2016 school year!

Director of Sunday School: Vickie Peckham

Music/Special Programs: Maria Xenick

Music Assistant: Pam Irwin

Pre-K (3 and 4 year olds): Alexis Scarfogliero – Teacher and Bessie Palios - Assistant

Kindergarten: Debbie Nicklow

Grade 1: Melissa Krinos and Stella Polycarpou -Co-Teachers

Grade 2: Marina Choundas

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

Grade 4: Debbie Ferekides

Grade 5: Vickie Peckham

Grade 6, 7 and 8: Heidi Borgeas, Kara and Stefan Katzaras - Co-Teachers

High School: Peggy Bradshaw and Isidoros Passalaris – Co-Teachers

The teachers met with Father Stavros for a Sunday School Teachers' Seminar on August 22. This was a wonderful way to start preparing for the new Sunday School year. The teachers feel blessed to have Father Stavros guiding us as teachers. He is such an inspirational teacher and has provided each of us with a collection of lesson plans. We are also looking forward to Charlie's continued involvement with the Sunday School this year. He will provide a children's sermon on Youth Sundays and also visit each of our classrooms throughout the year.

Sunday School Mission Statement

The Sunday School Program at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is dedicated to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

Sunday School Vision:

The Sunday School Program shall seek to fulfill its mission by:

1. Embracing the Spiritual Life and Joy of our Orthodox faith through regular prayer, worship, and frequent participation in the sacraments.
2. Support the Church through stewardship of time, talent, and sacrificial giving.
3. Providing our students with a welcoming, caring, and loving educational environment.
4. Having the Sunday School Staff and Students exemplify Orthodox Christian character and morals.
5. Providing strategies for our children to rely on their faith and values, when confronted with challenging circumstances and temptations, as they travel through their teens and into adulthood.
6. Teaching our students why this vision is important—why it is important to embrace the Spiritual Life by defining and teaching what is the Spiritual and Sacramental Life of the Orthodox Church; what is stewardship and why it is important; and teaching Orthodox Christian character and morals.

Please feel free to contact Vickie Peckham at 813-406-5626 with any questions, suggestions, or comments regarding St. John the Baptist Sunday School Program.

First Youth Sunday - Sunday, September 27

Every month, from September through May (see enclosed calendar), we are going to have one Sunday designated as Youth Sunday. On Youth Sunday each month, all Sunday school students are requested to be in church no later than 9:50 a.m., and to sit near the choir in the small section on the right side of the church (or in the front pews on the right side if there are too many to fit in the small section). We will sing along with the choir and there will be several hymns where the children will sing on their own. This is a great way for them to learn the hymns of our church and to inspire our congregation with their angelic voices.

~Spirit of Stewardship ~

What Stewardship Means to Me...

Written by Sandra Pappas

Getting more involved on the Stewardship Committee has been a joy and learning experience this past year. Finding a balance to inspire God's grace and calling from each of us to give of our Time, Talents and Treasure.

As Orthodox Christians we are called to a new way of seeing things, a new way of life. Our Stewardship is obedience to the greatest commandment to 'love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength'. The cost of Stewardship is very individual. What matters most is that each of us knows in our heart, mind and soul that we have done what we can to keep our parish vibrant and growing to spread the word of Jesus Christ.

We commonly refer to the 3 T's when talking about Stewardship but one that may be missing or taken for granted is Truth. Truth in Stewardship means we have made an honest effort to focus on the call of Christ to commit ourselves to prayer, to work and to giving.

Stewardship is not about calculations or portions of percentages. Yes, we need money to operate our church, pay the bills etc. and reporting is necessary. That is the reality. But in the end we don't want to be reliant on our Festival or outside Lease Income to cover our budget. We should be self-sustaining in our Stewardship to carry the Mission and Vision of our Church. And I believe, with our Parishioners, that can happen one day!

We are blessed to have an inspiring spiritual Father, church full of Parishioners and a warm welcoming environment. Giving of our individual Time, Talents and Treasure will go in ebbs and flows as life changes. But it's the giving that must continue. And our parish has been blessed with great sacrifice and giving over the past 59 years!

I need to give. Without giving I never grow. A priest once said, 'Few give until it hurts. Even fewer give until it feels good.' Giving is the attitude that brings growth.

God promises to multiply our gifts and I hope, together, we continue to grow and build upon the beautiful foundation of our Church!

~Stewardship....little of this and that~

We have nearly 300 families as Faithful Stewards of St. John the Baptist! We are grateful for the continued support of our Church Mission and Ministries.

If you haven't pledged to St. John the Baptist this year it is not too late. We are making progress toward our projected goal!

Stewardship Pledge Forms really are critical. They help keep us current on how much income the Church can expect to support our ministries and expenses. They also provide details on your family information and areas of interest so we can tap into your Talents and Interests! **And lastly, pledge forms and current contributions meet the Uniform Parish Regulations (UPR) of our Archdiocese as well as our local by-laws to enable participation at Parish Assembly Meetings, Voting and Nominations for Parish Council or other leadership positions.**

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

	2015
<i>Stewardship Goal</i>	<i>\$470,000.00</i>
Pledged	\$393,336.00
Received	\$265,603.00
Pledge Shortfall/Gain (from Goal)	\$76,664.00
Average Pledge	\$1,333
Median Pledge**	\$745
# of Parishioners (Families) Pledged	295
# of Unpledge Families	35

*Dollars received based on YTD as of 8/14/2015

** Pledge amount in the Middle – ½ of Stewards pledge higher & ½ lower

+Per our Bylaws, to be considered a Voting Member of St. John the Baptist you must have a completed Pledge Form.

The WIFM station: What's in it for me?

by Alkis Crassas, Parish Council President

Where did the summer go? It seems like yesterday when we held the Junior Olympics here at St. John's; usually the last of the major events during our academic calendar. I hope and pray it has been a time of joy and rejuvenation for you and your family. As schools ready to begin, we are also coming up to a new Ecclesiastical year. It's a good time for personal spiritual renewal and an opportunity to re-discover the many ministries we have to offer. In fact, by the time you read this, Sunday School, Greek School, Choir, GOYA, Festival, Outreach and all of our many organizations will be in full swing. Perhaps this is the year you are inspired to connect and commit to a ministry at St. John's!

Volunteering represents 2 of the 3 aspects of stewardship: **Time, Talent & Treasure**. It is normal for most of us to tune in to our favorite radio station when the conversation about stewardship and volunteering comes up: WIFM. Yup, the What's In-it For Me station often plays loudly in our heads as we contemplate our involvement to extracurricular activities. But take a listen to this: research demonstrates that volunteering leads to better health and that volunteers are the most likely to receive physical and mental health benefits from their volunteer activities. A growing body of evidence suggests that people who give their time to others might be rewarded with lower blood pressure and a longer lifespan, a Carnegie Mellon University study reported.

One key for deriving health benefits from volunteering is to do it for the right reasons. A 2012 study in the journal *Health Psychology* found that participants who volunteered with some regularity lived longer, but only if their intentions were truly altruistic. In other words, they had to be volunteering to help others—not to make themselves feel better. Volunteer activities can strengthen the social ties that protect individuals from isolation during difficult times, while the experience of helping others leads to a sense of greater self-worth and trust.

I have discovered in my years of volunteering and lately with serving on the PC that the more you put in, the more you get out. Everyone can relate to the intense experience of volunteering for the festival and what a high that can be. Imagine serving in a more sustainable but committed fashion. Again, research suggests that individuals must meet a "volunteering threshold" in order to receive the positive health outcomes from volunteering. That is, they need to commit a considerable amount of time—or at least one or two hours a week—to volunteer activities.

"The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" we read at 2 Corinthians 9:6-7. St. Paul teaches that we are entrusted with a call to stewardship (1 Cor 9). The Greek philosopher Aristotle once surmised that the essence of life is "to serve others and do good." If recent research is any indication, serving others might also be the essence of good health. That's what's in it for you! May God bless us all!

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 as 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 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.* If you are interested in being a "Friend of St. John the Baptist", please fill out and return the form below. Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

Thank You to all of Our Friends!

Barbara Akrotirianakis - Whittier, CA
William J Camarinos - Alexandria, VA
Richard & Mickie Bass - Asheville, NC
Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL
Jerry & Debbie Galovic - Tampa, FL

Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI
Perry & Fay Stamatiades - Asheville, NC
Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI

Friend of St. John the Baptist

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

I wish to be a "Friend of St. John". 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 Swann Avenue, Tampa, FL 33609

Small Group Ministry Kicks off in September

For a third year, we will be having our small group Bible study ministry. For those who participated, it was a great experience. These groups gather once a week to study the Bible, discuss how to apply scripture to daily life, pray together and become small spiritual support groups. These sessions are discussion based, not lecture based. This is an opportunity to work side by side with each other to learn more about the faith. As group members get to know one another on a deeper level and as groups become more committed, you'll see that the groups will not only become a resource to help learn and live the faith, but through these groups, we'll eventually help "carry one another's burdens and so build up the body of Christ", as we are told to do in Galatians 6:2. And this is what the church is all about—helping one another through this life, on the journey to everlasting life.

NEW PEOPLE ARE WELCOME TO JOIN A GROUP AT ANY TIME!

With the groups starting again after summer break, it's a great time to join one!

Some FAQ's about the small group ministry:

1. **Who leads these groups?** The groups will be led by people of the community, with guidance from Fr. Stavros. Fr. Stavros and Charlie are providing the curriculum as well as training the leaders of each group. Fr. Stavros and Charlie will also visit each group periodically and be available as a resource to each group.
2. **How often do the groups meet?** The groups will meet once a week, running the same schedule as the school year. That means there will be a week off at Thanksgiving, a few weeks off at Christmas, a week off for spring break and one for Holy Week, and the groups will be in recess for summer.
3. **Are we on "Greek time" or "American time" for these group meetings?** The answer is AMERICAN time—the groups will start and end on time. The morning meetings will last an hour—they will start ON TIME. Of course, if group members wish for the meeting to go longer, that will be up to each group, but they will end at the time advertised. The evening groups may last longer because they will involve eating—probably a pot luck each week, with each member bringing a small dish to share, again, this will be up to the group how this works.
4. **I don't know the group leader or host. Am I just supposed to show up at the house of someone I don't know, is that okay?** YES, the group leaders are expecting to have people they don't know come to their homes. You probably want to call or email the group leader if you need information or directions but YES, you are welcome to join any of the groups.
5. **Can I bring a non-Orthodox spouse or friend to these groups?** ABSOLUTELY. One of the reasons we are starting these groups is because several members of our parish are attending Protestant Bible studies, because they have been invited by co-workers or friends. If you have a friend or co-worker you think would benefit from small group ministry, please invite them.
6. **I don't know the Bible very well, is that a problem?** NO, not at all. In the small group, you are going to study the Bible together, by reading short passages and answering questions about how the passage relates to life in general and your life specifically.
7. **What are the requirements to be in a group?** There are some expectations of group members:
 - a. Commit to participating every week (or nearly every week, obviously, we know people travel, kids get sick, etc., but the idea is that you will attend on a regular basis)
 - b. Respect what other people have to say. In a discussion where people are sharing experiences, they need support and validation, not judgment.
 - c. Everybody participates—when you go to small groups, it is expected that you are going to participate in the discussion. Again, this is not a lecture, or a traditional Bible study where the priest or professor gives a lecture. A group leader leads a discussion in which all group members participate.
 - d. Everybody commits to praying for the group members. The best way to bear one another's burdens is to do so through prayer. Group members will pray for one another.
8. **Which group should I join?** The one that is easiest for you to attend. There are groups in different parts of town. If you'd rather drive farther and go to a different group, by all means do so. Just pick ONE group and stick with it.
9. **Do I RSVP or just show up?** Please RSVP to the group leader (in the case of the South Tampa group, RSVP with the host as well since there are two different people) so they know how many to expect.

Monday Night Bible Study (for everyone)

We will be studying the book of I Corinthians.

Location: St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in the Administration Building meeting room

Group Leader: Charlie Hambos

Charlie.hambos@gmail.com, 813-843-8471

Meeting time: Monday evenings from 6:30– 8:00 p.m.

September Meeting Dates: September 14, 21, 28

Women's Group (for adult women of any age)

Location: Meets at the home of Debbie Kavouklis, Debbie lives in South Tampa, a mile or so from the church. 3315 Jean Circle, Tampa, FL 33629

Group Leader: Debbie Kavouklis

dkavouklis1@verizon.net, (813) 690-0155

Meeting time: Tuesday mornings from 10:00-11:30 a.m. (9:30 a.m. for coffee and refreshments)

September Meeting Dates: September 15, 22, 29

Men's Group (for adult men of any age)

Location: St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in the Administration Building in the meeting room

Group Leader: Father Stavros for the first one but we are going to rotate this among group members. Please email Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com or contact him at 813-394-1038

Meeting time: Wednesday mornings from 7:30-8:30 a.m.

For this early morning group, bring your own coffee or breakfast food if you wish—we will not be providing these things.

September Meeting Dates: September 16, 23, 30

South Tampa Mixed Group (for any adults)

Anyone can attend this group but obviously this will be most convenient for those who live in South Tampa

Location: Home of Helen and Ken Cauthorn,

3922 W. Palmira Avenue, Tampa, FL 33629

Helen's Number is 813-505-1059 and her email is

hcauthorn@chubb.com

Group Leader: Bessie Palios

bmp1126@yahoo.com, 813-523-0347

Meeting time: Tuesday evenings from 7:00-8:30 p.m.

September Meeting Dates: September 15, 22, 29

North Tampa Mixed Group (for any adults)

Anyone can attend this group but obviously this will be most convenient for those who live on the north side of town.

Location: Home of George and Cindy Xenick

614 Downs Ave. Temple Terrace, FL 33617

Group Leader: Cindy Xenick

gatormomx@aol.com, 813-505-7657

Meeting Time: Thursday evenings from 7:00–8:15 p.m.

September Meeting Dates: September 17 and 24

East Tampa Mixed Group (for any adults)

Anyone can attend this group but obviously this will be most convenient to those who live on the East side of town

Riverview, Brandon, Valrico, Seffner, Lakeland

Location: Home of George and Donna Hambos

2604 Herndon Street, Valrico, FL 33596

Group Leader: Donna Hambos

dhambos@msn.com, 813-843-8412

Meeting Time: Tuesday evenings from 6:30-8:00 p.m.

September Meeting Dates: September 9, 16, 23, 30

Young Adult Group (for adults ages 18-40)

Location: TBA

Group Leader: Mary Ann Konstas

mapkonstas@gmail.com, 813-215-9862

Meeting Time: Sundays following the Divine Liturgy

September Meeting Dates: September 20

DID YOU KNOW...?

There is an Anniversary Prayer

You know that we Orthodox have prayers for just about anything and everything you can imagine. At some point in the 2,000 year history of the church, holy people have authored beautiful prayers that speak to every occasion. One such prayer is a prayer for a Wedding Anniversary. It is done in church, I usually do them after Liturgy on Sunday, asking God to bless a couple on the occasion of their anniversary and to grant them many more years of health and happiness. We don't have anything in our church like "renewing wedding vows." We don't have vows to begin with, and our marriages should be renewed on a daily basis through prayer, forgiveness, patience and joy. But if you would like to have a prayer on your wedding anniversary (or any other occasion), just let me know and I'm happy to arrange for that. +Fr. Stavros

Experiences of St. Stephen's Summer Camp

Below are reflections by the teenage campers and adult counselors of our parish who attended St. Stephen's Summer Camp this past July. They are funny, insightful and inspiring. Please take time to enjoy these testimonials. Read them with an open mind and heart. Jesus says that we are to be like children if we are to enter into the kingdom of Heaven. So as you read them, reflect on your own heart—does your heart reflect the innocence and joy of childhood?! Whatever age we may be, the joy expressed by these articles below is a joy we should all strive for, whether we ever go to camp or not. Enjoy!

Eleni Pessemier, 12th Grade Camper

I didn't really know what to expect when I arrived for my first time at the Diakonia Center in rural South Carolina. I had heard from friends at church how amazing camp was, but I was nervous about meeting new people and facing a week away from my family and the comforts of home. Yet as I became familiar with my fellow campers, the amazing counselors, the beautiful camp grounds, and the incredibly fun and spiritually enriching camp activities that kept us busy from 7 am to well after midnight each day, St. Stephen's Summer Camp quickly won me over and became one of my favorite places on earth.

I firmly believe that it is possible for every kid to feel the same way, because I didn't even like camp at first! Even though no one had been anything but friendly and welcoming to me, being with so many unfamiliar people and constantly having to push myself out of my comfort zone drained me. I looked forward to bedtime, when I could snatch some time to pretend I was alone and quickly journal about the day, and then I would pray that God would help me to meet friends and learn to love camp.

Before the week was half over, God had answered that prayer and I had gone from longing for the car ride home to dreading the day I'd have to leave! Instead, I looked forward to everything – from making crafts in the art barn to playing volleyball and group games with the other campers my age. I loved attending Orthros every morning and Compline every night, swimming and canoeing with my friends, and swaying arm in arm with everyone while singing camp songs. It was so much fun being blindfolded and led around the ropes course, eating with my new best friends three times a day, and learning more about our faith and applying it to our lives in Hang Time and Orthodox Life.

We were doing something every minute of every day, and there was certainly no time to be bored. If I hadn't before, I grew to love and trust everyone at camp, and now feel closer to many of them than people I have known much longer at school. At camp, we bonded over much more than complaining about homework. We prayed out loud together, cried together after the most moving confession I, for one, had ever had; we trusted each other enough to be led around obstacles and along paths blindfolded, to fall backwards from several feet high and be caught by waiting arms. I felt safe to speak, pray, sing, and participate in every camp activity, receiving only positive reassurance and encouragement.

The dance at the end of the week represented for me how much I had grown as a person, and fell in love with St. Stephen's and everyone in it. I had been nervous for the dance more than anything, but I was surprised by how much I enjoyed myself! No one made it awkward or pressuring by asking each other to the dance, and it was such a fun end to the week. After taking a million pictures together in the common room of our cabin, we older girls in St. Euphemia were escorted, arm in arm, down to the pavilion by our "little brothers" in the St. Nicholas cabin. Dancing to pop songs with my friends and Greek dancing with everyone, I felt excit-

ed and yet much more at ease than I thought I would have.

The senior cabins had a campfire afterward, and it was a perfect end to the night. We made s'mores and watched our written confessions burn in the fire, representing our sins absolved by God. The stars were all out and I felt so happy, as exhausted as I was, to be with my new best friends just talking and spending some time together before we'd leave the next day and only be able to talk over text. I thank God with all my heart for the opportunity to meet such amazing people and for the unforgettable experiences I never would have had if I hadn't come to camp.

Camp not only brought me close to so many other Orthodox Christians, but it brought me closer to God. My faith has never been strengthened so much in so little time, and it has never felt so easy for me to pray and make Christ the number one priority in my life. I was expecting to be depressed after camp, but I didn't feel lonely because my strengthened faith followed me home and I knew that God was still by my side even though I'd left St. Stephen's. Although I was sad to leave, I was blessed with a greater feeling of joy to have been able to go to camp than sadness at having to leave.

Since I am a rising senior, this was my one and only year as a camper at St. Stephen's. I will always treasure that week in July as one of the best in my entire life, and I hope to return as a counselor to help other kids have the times of their lives at camp.

Natalia Pessemier, 9th Grade Camper

This year I went to camp for the first time. Knowing I was going to be in a cabin with girls my age and a little older made me a bit nervous, especially because all of my friends from our church were in a different cabin. Being nervous was probably a completely natural reaction, but it was definitely not necessary. The minute I walked into St Catherine's cabin, I got a huge welcome from the sweet counselors and all the campers who had arrived before me. I chose my room while girls started to introduce themselves to me and find out what things we had in common. I barely had time to unpack! Every minute was occupied and I loved it.

A week later, the girls I had barely met were now like sisters to me. It's very often that I will get a text or some form of communication out of the blue from someone at camp that makes me feel like they care about staying in touch and keeping conversation. One of my favorite parts of camp was probably the ropes course and trust exercises because it helped me to realize how I barely knew these people a week and yet I trust them with my life. For example; when I would be blindfolded and someone would have to guide me and hold my hand, I could feel their thoughts almost telling me, I got you. Don't worry. You can trust me. When it came my turn to guide someone while they were blindfolded, I cared so much about helping them feel as secure and wanted them to trust me as much as I had trusted them. Not only had I completed activities that were amazingly fun, they also worked my body strength and helped me to feel like I was fit and taking action.

Knowing that in the future I will hopefully become a counselor and help kids experience what I have experienced adds to the adventure of it all. It seems like a miracle that I was able to be strengthened in my faith, my friendships, and my body in one week all at the same time. Thank you St. Stephen's!

Sophia Crassas - 8th Grade Camper

This is my first year attending Saint Stephens summer camp. I can hands-down say it was one of the best weeks of my life. Everybody was so welcoming and kind. The girls in the cabin were amazing too. We had so much fun staying up and talking about the day and all the fun activities we did. My favorite things that that we did were the ropes course and alone time with God. Where after the morning prayer everyone would go to the dock and pray. We did this every day and it was so beautiful and peaceful. It was the perfect way to start my day. Saint Stephens was such an amazing experience for me and I hope to go every year.

Artemis Xenick - 8th Grade Camper

This was my second year going to St. Stephens's camp and I was really excited to go back. It was really cool to see some of my old friends from last year and also to make new ones. One of my favorite things about camp is how nice everyone is and how easy it is to make friends. Over the course of only a week, I became really close with most of the girls in my cabin and I loved getting to make such good friends through our faith. I also liked the ropes course a lot this year because first of all I actually knew what to expect from it and secondly because of how much trust it built between my cabin mates and me. Another thing I really liked was how everyone sang along during church. It was fun to be involved in the service and sing all together. St. Stephen's was a really amazing experience and I can honestly say that it was one of the best weeks of my life.

Nicholas Katzaras - 9th Grade Campers

This year was my first time attending St. Steven's summer camp in South Carolina. When I first arrived there, it was nothing like I expected. I was a little nervous at the start, but as the days went on, I got more and more comfortable. I met many new kids my age from all around our Metropolis. Our cabin was lucky to have a fun but strict adviser named Ryan. He almost made Carter, Harry and I sleep in the hallway the first night, but he turned out to be alright. Ryan helped us prank the younger cabin and helped us win the scavenger hunt. The funniest prank of the whole camp was when Ryan took the prize bear from the oldest girl's cabin. He helped us unstuff it then fill it back up with rocks. You had to be there to see how funny it really was! My favorite activity that we did there was canoeing. Even though we flipped the canoe about every time we went on them, it was still loads of fun. However, this camp was not all about fun and games. We had Orthros every morning and a Vigil service at night. We had a period of the day called "Orthodox Life," and Charlie was the person who ran that for our cabin. We had confession on Thursday, and every night we had a time period called "Hang Time" which started at 10:15 pm and went until 11:15 pm. You have to bet that after a long day, we were ready to hit the sack at about that time. A funny thing would happen though, right after "Hang Time" ended, we all got this burst of energy and usually stayed up a little while longer. Overall, this was an extremely fun and spiritual experience that I would definitely return to every year.

Hannah Passalaris - 7th Grade Camper

My experience at St. Stephen's is one I will never forget. When I arrived at camp I had no idea what to expect. This was my first time at camp and my first time away from home on my own. I was nervous to make friends even though I already had two people from my church in my cabin. As I opened the door to my cabin I was greeted with overjoyed counselors and other girls that had arrived before me. I have no idea why I was so nervous in the first place. Everyone there made me feel at ease.

There was no point in the week where we complained that we were bored. From early church services to late night hang time and every thing in between we were always doing something to keep busy. My favorite parts were the Junk Yard Wars. The Junk Yard War was a race between each cabin. You had an hour to build a car out of only the provided junk once your car was built all you had to do was race your cars. The main reason why I liked this so much was because it was the first thing my cabin won. Winning this one race brought us together as a team.

I think this camp is a great way to get closer to God. Through this camp I have gotten more comfortable praying out loud in front of people.

This camp was a great experience and I can't wait to come back.

Mia Lenardos - 8th Grade Camper

This year at camp was so much fun! It was my second year going but was still a little nervous because I didn't know any girls in my age group who was coming from my church. Once I got there I saw some of my old friends from last year and I felt a lot better. I made a lot of new friends, too. Some that lived close by and some that lived all the way in North Carolina. My favorite part was either swimming in the lake or the ropes course. My favorite part in the ropes course was the trust fall. You get little nervous before it but after you did it you are so glad you did. The wall is one of my favorites too. Two people lift up your legs at the bottom and two other people pull you up over the wall. It is really fun! It was also cool to meet other Priests and a Monk. The Priest -Monk came and I had a lot of fun when he would tell us stories about Saints that I have never heard about. I love going to St. Stephen's and want to go again next year!

Harry Koutroumanis - 9th Grade Camper

This was my second year at St. Stephen's camp and it has truly been the greatest experience of my life. I never realized I would be able to make so many great friends. I can honestly say that the friends I have made at camp will be everlasting. At St. Stephens, not only do you get closer to God, you are able to build great relationships with many other youth Orthodox Christians. It is very special being able to go to different states and know fellow Orthodox Christians there. If in two years I went from knowing only one camper to knowing all of the week two campers and counselors, then who knows where I will be by my senior year. I can't wait to create great memories again next summer at St. Stephen's and I look forward to being a counselor in the future.

Karter Lenardos - 9th Grade Camper

St. Stephens Camp was very fun and exciting. From hanging out in the cabin to going on the ropes course. The ropes course was a team exercise, like trust falls and a 10 foot wall with no ladders. The objective is to try to get over the wall as a team.

My personal favorite was swimming. Mainly because it was hot outside and the cool water felt good. But the "hot" up there is different than the hot we know in Florida. There was no humidity and the temperature was about 75 to 85.

Meeting people was another favorite. You meet people from not just Florida. I met people from as west as Alabama and as north as Tennessee and North Carolina. But this year was my second year. When I arrived I saw all of my friends from last year. And this year there was a lot of people from the Tampa Bay area. All the people I've met from our GOYA events were there.

Gregory Koutroumanis - 11th Grade Camper

St. Stephen's camp is a truly unique and special place. It is a place where one can separate themselves from the outside world and all the stress that comes with it; a place where one can meet people from all around the country, and most importantly it is a place where one can strengthen their faith in God. All of these things were true during my visit to camp earlier this summer. Throughout my week at camp I learned countless lessons about our Orthodox faith and how to live my life by them. Camp was also filled with fun activities. I will forever have memories of the ropes course, Camp Olympics, and dance that turned people that I had never met before into my close friends. St. Stephen's camp was the best week of my summer and I am already counting the days until I go back next year.

Antonio Bavaro - 7th Grade Camper

My retreat at St. Stephen's camp in Walhalla, South Carolina was exquisite. I made new friends who came from different states. There were many activities around the camp grounds. My favorite two activities were the sports and ropes course. The camp grounds were beautiful. "Yiayia's" (Ritsa Niery, one of the cooks) food was the most delicious food I ever tasted in my life. Her fasolada (bean soup) was delicious and nutritious. Yiayia should make her own recipe book. I also enjoyed the Orthros Hymns. To me, it was a soft soothing sound. I thank you Father Stavros for putting this camp together. It was a wonderful experience. I hope to do this again for many years.

Alexa Alsina - Counselor

As a camper, St. Stephen's was a place where I made life long friends and a place where I grew in my faith. Not only did it help build the foundation for my faith but it has shaped me into the person I am today. The memories I have there I will carry with me for years to come and the people I met will be my friends for the rest of my life. Now as a counselor I have a deeper appreciation for St. Stephen's summer camp. Yes, I got to see teenagers sing silly songs, play sports and doing team building activities but more importantly I saw kids do things they wouldn't do the other fifty one weeks of the year. At camp kids go outside of their comfort zone. At camp kids befriend kids they wouldn't normally otherwise. At camp kids grow in their faith with the help of other kids just like them. It changed my life and I hope to see it do the same for other orthodox teens.

Maria Xenick - Counselor

What a privilege for me to return to St. Stephen's camp! For the second year, I was a counselor for the senior girls' cabin. I was so happy to return with a year of experience under my belt! St. Stephen's is just awesome with its beautiful natural setting as a backdrop. The environment is filled with wholesome fun, many games and challenging activities, time for quiet prayer and learning, and

a tremendous opportunity for spiritual growth. It was so inspiring to watch all of the kids engage with each other and the activities that were planned so thoroughly. The theme this year was the Ten Commandments, and I had the joy, in addition to being a counselor, to also teach two classes while there. I can honestly say that I learned as much or more from these kids as they probably did from me. I am so thankful to my husband Mike and to my extended family for supporting me while I was away. I am also thankful to Father Stavros for giving me the opportunity to serve our greater Church in this unique and remarkable setting. It is a most exceptional atmosphere for building relationships with other Orthodox Christians and most especially with Jesus Christ Himself. I encourage all of our youth to take advantage of this gift we have!

Angelina Bartucci - Counselor

I was blessed this year to attend St. Stephen's, not as a camper, but as a counselor. Every minute at St. Stephen's was a blessing, but it was also a challenge. Camp challenged me both in my spiritual life and as a role model for so many of our youth. I am so grateful that I took part in that challenge, and I am a better Christian because of it. Without GOYA and St. Stephen's I would not be the person I am today. St. Stephen's is a place where we put aside our worldly cares to focus on loving God and those around us, and that means the world to me. I want to thank Fr. Stavros and everyone who is apart of making St. Stephen's such a wonderful place.

Father Stavros - Director

Safe - Everyone goes home in one piece.

Edifying - Create an environment where people can grow in their faith.

Fun.

For the many years I have had the privilege to direct summer camp, these have been the three goals I have wished for our program to achieve. Anyone who has been on my staff can state these three goals without even thinking. Allow me a moment to explain how these three things work in a camp context, and how they CAN and SHOULD work in a life outside of camp context.

Safe - Safety is first in everything at camp. We spend a week out in nature, where we share the environment with native animals (including snakes, bears, coyote, who also inhabit the South Carolina foothills) and plants (poison ivy). Many of the exciting and challenging activities we do have an element of "risk" to them—that's what makes them challenging. And we're also many miles from the nearest town, so there isn't a doctor's office or Walmart right around the corner. So, we strive to be safe in everything we are doing. Other than a few bee stings, we had a great and safe summer. Our camp has an impeccable record for safety, and I'm really proud of that. The number one goal of camp is for everyone to go home in one piece and after another summer, we just keep building on that record.

Create an environment - The second goal of camp is to create an environment which encourages people to grow in their faith. "People"? Not campers? Well, the goal is for ALL people involved to grow in their faith—priests, counselors, campers. Create an environment? It isn't "to get people to grow in their faith?" Well, you can't force someone to grow in their faith, any more than a teacher can force a student to learn, or a parent can force a child to treat others with respect, or a doctor can make his patient live a healthy lifestyle. At camp, we don't force anything. We create an environment that ENCOURAGES people to grow in their faith. We do it by integrating the following concepts into a

well-balanced program:

Worship - We worship together at camp two times a day. We SING all the responses together. So, it is not a priest and a choir putting on a service for us—Everyone partakes in the celebration of the service.

Alone with God - a 15 minute period is set aside every day for everyone at camp to sit alone with God, to pray, to reflect, and to prepare for the day. The best thing about Alone with God, other than you get to sit and enjoy nature while you are doing it, is that it is provided for us on the schedule. We don't have to carve out time—it has already been carved out for us.

Prayer throughout the day - Prayer occurs throughout the day - before and after meals, before most activities. Prayer occurs spontaneously, in cabins, between counselors and counselors, campers and counselors, and campers among themselves. Among my favorite photographs of camp this summer was a group of counselors standing in a circle and praying together AFTER they left at a restaurant they stopped at for lunch.

Religious Education - Each cabin and the staff as a group participated in two classes each day—Orthodox Life in the morning and Hangtime in the evening. The theme this year was “Challenge Accepted” and was about the Ten Commandments. Hopefully our campers learned more about having an Orthodox moral center and how “Thou Shalt not Commit Murder” means more than not committing senseless killings. It includes senseless and hurtful things like gossip as well.

Sports and Swimming - Camp isn't all learning and worship. Every cabin got two hours per day of sports and swimming, casual time to play, to swim in the beautiful lake, go canoeing or just hang out.

Great food - let's not forget the cooks in the kitchen who provided tasty food, a balanced diet and food APLENTY. No one goes hungry at camp, that's for sure.

Art - Making incense and incense burners were on the craft curriculum this year, as well as the traditional decorating and painting shirts, bead bracelets and other fun things.

Music - A combination of church etiquette, church music, contemporary Christian music and just fun camp songs make this a fun part of the camp experience.

Ropes Course - one of the favorite activities of the campers, the ropes course (as you read in the camper testimonials) includes activities that encourage an environment of teamwork and trust in the cabins. Elements are challenging but also have a lesson that relates to the Christian life or life in general. So campers have fun and learn at the same time—educators say that experiential learning is one of the best ways to learn and retain what you learn. And the ropes course is a great way to learn through experience.

Evening programs - As if they don't have enough fun during the day, the evening programs are great! Things like the Camp Olympics where over 2,000 water balloons were broken each week. Even the Metropolitan threw some, including at yours truly! It's hard to imagine without actually being there what it is like to see 100 teenagers jumping up and down singing Christian songs. Even the “cool” seniors aren't too cool for this. The talent show provides surprises and laughs each year. Icebreakers, scavenger hunt and junkyard wars were great opportunities for cabins to compete against each other. And the dance is a great way to cap

off a fun week.

Confession - Just about every camper and staff member participated in the sacrament of confession. This is not required or forced, but something that over the years, has been cultivated to the point that just about everyone makes it part of their camp experience. I experienced confession in two ways this year. As a confessor, I heard the pains of our young people. I also heard their joys, their fears, and answered their questions. Many encounters left me in tears—sometimes tears of sadness for how hard it is to be a teenager or young adult in 2015. And sometimes in tears for the courage of the young people, and for the spiritual maturity of many of them. I also experienced confession in their shoes—I went for this sacrament at camp. Every one of my confessions is different and this year was no exception. My confession was more of a very long prayer to the Lord, thanking Him for His many blessings on my life and pouring out to Him sorrow over my sins and failings, asking fervently for His help to carry the crosses I am carrying in my life.

You put all of these activities together, campers and staff (and priests) come away from camp with a renewed sense of spirituality and commitment to the Orthodox faith.

FUN!! - Fun is an understatement when describing St. Stephen's Summer Camp. We are serious about spirituality, but we are also serious about having fun. Nowhere else do I laugh as much as I laugh at St. Stephen's—people say the funniest things, there are lots of inside jokes. But here is the thing about the fun we have at St. Stephen's—it is Christian and wholesome. We don't need to be drunk or rude or crude in order to have fun.

OK, we get it Father, camp is great. How does this apply in any way to life outside of camp?

Here is the simple answer—the elements that make camp so successful—safety, creating an edifying environment and fun are things that can be applied to ANY environment we are in—our homes, our jobs, our parish.

After camp, I received an email from a staff member who thanked me for creating an environment where she felt safe, safe to express things she didn't feel safe expressing somewhere else. Do you know how many people don't feel safe? Do you know how many people walk on egg-shells every day, because they are nervous and scared—of making a mistake, of what other people think, of showing any vulnerability. I mean, where can people feel comfortable being vulnerable—most jobs don't allow for this, many families don't make time for this, many friends don't know how to keep a confidence. So you have many people who go through life not feeling safe. We can each do something to make people around us feel safe, safe to express themselves, safe in the knowledge that we can keep a secret and not judge them, safe in friendships, even safe to fail and have it be okay. MOST CERTAINLY, a church community should be a place of safety. The only way one can grow spiritually is by having a place where their spiritual failures will not be held against them. Where one can feel safe to fail and to repent. But if one doesn't feel safe enough to be honest, how can one feel safe to express failure?! Safety first in all things, with all people—everyone should go home in one piece, not only in body but in spirit. We should make it a goal not to hurt people, to make them feel safe.

Creating an environment which promotes spiritual growth—The whole reason we have our parish is to do this very thing. Yes, we

have social events, cultural events, and fundraisers, but the reason we have this parish is to create an environment which promotes spiritual growth. And just like at camp, every member of the community is involved in that. Yes, there are the obvious roles like singing in the choir or teaching Sunday school. But just WELCOMING the new person, saying hello to the person in the pews next to you, and sitting with the person who has no one to sit with at coffee hour these are JUST AS IMPORTANT. You don't have to be able to sing or teach in order to be welcoming. You don't have to be wealthy in order to care about someone. There are some people whose contribution is primarily a financial one—this is absolutely needed! Without facilities we can't do the work of the church. So EVERYONE has something to offer in this area of creating an environment which promotes spiritual growth.

Fun - No one likes to do things that are not fun. Who enjoys paying taxes, or getting a blood test? And so our parish has to be a place where we have fun. It has to be a place where we can laugh, where we can relax. And we have to integrate our programs in a way that promotes safety, edification and fun. There are people who come to church only for fun—they come for social, or cultural things, and they miss out on the full experience. There are people who come to church for worship and never integrate into the community, and they miss out on the fun. The most successful church community, like the successful summer camp, integrates all three aspects into its program.

The success of summer camp, based on safety, edification and fun, is not something that should be limited to summer camp, but should be brought to our parish. This template provides not only success at camp, but I believe can bring success to our parish, to our marriages, to our children, to our friendships and to just about any aspect of life.

Allow me to share one more memory of camp this summer. One night we had a bad storm go through camp. Campers were having dinner and were safely inside as heavy rains fell outside and strong wind gusts went through the camp. Thankfully, the storm was short in duration. By the time dinner was over, campers could safely go back to their cabins. Shortly after campers were dismissed from dinner, two senior staff members radioed me that there was significant damage in our outdoor chapel. We radio for all "non-essential staff" (this is an emergency code agreed upon before camp with all the staff to be used in any emergency or con-

tingency situation) to come to the outdoor chapel. Within minutes, half of the staff was present (the other half stayed with the camper—it is essential to have two counselors with each group of campers and so non-essential refers to any staff beyond the required two who could be available to assist in an emergency). I presented the problem to the staff—we had 30 minutes to assess and clean up the damage in the chapel, as well as clean out the dining hall of all tables and chairs so it could be used for our music sing along—we needed also to bring audio-visual equipment to the dining hall and set it up and sound check it. All of this was done in less than 30 minutes. In fact all the campers knew was that we were singing in the dining hall and not in the outdoor chapel. The staff came together and performed flawlessly. There was no arguments, no meetings, no debates, everyone got on the same page quickly and got the job done.

I wish our church could work like this—it seems for every decision we make, we need a meeting, a discussion, an argument, a vote. I don't mean just our church in Tampa, but just about all churches work like this. The reason is that we don't all agree on what the main goals are—some people say we need more Christ and no fun, others say we are here primarily for culture and not Christ, or argue that we need Greek even if no one understands it. Some show up only for the festival, or for holidays. Camp works because the people running the camp ALL agree on the goals—safety, edification and fun. It's not about the means, it's about the end. It's not about US, it's about Christ! And that's why we can quickly come together in normal times and in times of crisis and keep dissention to a minimum, because we are focused on Him!

If you have kids who are camping age and haven't gone to camp, please consider sending them.

If you have kids who will soon be of camping age, get them excited!

If you'd like to serve as a counselor or staff member and experience camp for yourself, let me know.

I thank God blessing me with this gift, I thank Metropolitan Alexios for blessing me with this opportunity, and I thank you—starting with my family as well as our parish—for your support and your prayers during the many weeks I have been away from our parish at summer camp these past many years!



Do you have the Messengers from the last year and not know what to do with them? Do you read the Messenger and just throw it away? Do you know you can be emailed the Messenger?

Do you want to Go Paperless?

You can read it on your computer, tablet, phone everywhere you go! All you have to do is email the office at **officestjohnngoctampa@gmail.com** and let us know you want to be emailed the Messenger!

In the Subject Line just type: **Please Email Me the Messenger** and you will be emailed and not mailed the October Messenger!

~ September 2015 ~						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 Beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	2** Panigyri Dance 7:00 p.m.	3	4**	5
6 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Get Acquainted Sunday Sunday School Registration	7 Labor Day Office Closed	8 Nativity of Virgin Mary Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	9** MBS 7:30 a.m. Panigyri Dance 7:00 p.m.	10 Young at Heart Meeting 11:00 a.m.	11** Paraklesis 10:00 a.m.	12 GOYA Lock-In
13 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Sunday School Begins Ministry Fair H XAPA MAΣ	14** Holy Cross Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. MOMS 11:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	15 WBS 9:30 a.m. EBS 6:30 p.m. SBS 7:00 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	16** MBS 7:30 a.m. Panigyri Dance 7:00 p.m.	17 NBS 6:30 p.m.	18**	19 Community Outreach Youth Worker Training Seminar
20 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. AHEPA Mtg. & table HCHC tray H XAPA MAΣ YABS	21 Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m.	22 WBS 9:30 a.m. EBS 6:30 p.m. SBS 7:00 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m. Parish Council 7:00 p.m.	23** MBS 7:30 a.m. Conception of St. John the Baptist Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Panigyri Dance 7:00 p.m.	24 NBS 6:30 p.m.	25**	26
27 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Youth Sunday Philoptochos Meeting Pre-teen retreat GOYA 5:00 p.m. H XAPA MAΣ	28 MOMS 11:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m.	29 WBS 9:30 a.m. EBS 6:30 p.m. SBS 7:00 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	30** MBS 7:30 a.m. Panigyri Dance 7:00 p.m.	MBS-Men's Bible Study WBS-Women's Bible Study EBS-East Bible Study SBS-South Bible Study NBS-North Bible Study YABS-Young Adult Bible Study		

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

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St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Timetable of Services

Sundays: Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.
Weekdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.

Parish Priest Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis

813-876-8830 (Office) 813-394-1038 (Cell)
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Pastoral Assistant Charlie Hambos

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Charlie.hambos@gmail.com

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Ed Gerecke, Treasurer 813-229-4306
George Chagaris 727-420-1920
Carole Fotopoulos 813-982-0947
Skip Higdon 813-831-9021
Catherine Mitseas 813-571-0658
Byron Nenos 813-789-0729
Despina Sibley 813-758-0520
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Adult Greek School

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AHEPA

Gus Paras, President 813-254-6980

Altar Angels

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

Basketball

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

Bible Study

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Bookstore

Bill Manikas 813-960-3679

Chanter

Nick Andreadaksi 813-516-6081

Choir

Artie Palios, Director 813-831-1294

Community Outreach

Betty Katherine Katsamakis 813-468-1596

Dance Group

H XAPA MAΣ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668
Marina Choundas 813-877-6136
Panigyri, Vanessa Aviles 813-221-2194

Daughters of Penelope

Edie Kavouklis, President 813-758-0305

Finance Committee

Gary Ward 813-846-3898

Food Pantry

Mick Scharbach 813-458-1620

Gasparilla Parking

John Kokkas 727-992-4615

GOYA

Elane Halkias 813-629-1843

Hope/Joy

Amy Kafantaris 727-743-1297
Debbie Nicklow 813-690-0671

Junior Olympics

Bryon Nenos 813-789-0729

MOMS

Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862

Lindsey Skourellos 813-503-7845

Oratorical Festival

Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

Philoptochos

Lisa Alsina 813-728-1094

REAL

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Small Group Bible Study

East, Donna Hambos 813-843-8412
Men, Fr. Stavros 813-394-1038
South, Bessie Palios 813-523-0347
Women, Debbie Kavouklis 813-258-5571
Young Adult, Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862

Stewardship

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

Sunday School

Vickie Peckham 813-406-5626

Usher

Tom Georgas 813-985-0236

Visitation Committee

Nancy Manikas 813-716-8185

Welcome Committee

Maria Xenick 813-765-3587

Young at Heart

Carole Fotopoulos 813-982-0947
Mary Nenos 813-935-2096

The Messenger of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is published on a monthly basis. Publication is the first of each month. Deadline for notices and announcements for The Messenger is the 10th of each month. You may send announcements to the church office through email.

“May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father and the Communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” From the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.