

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*

Christ is Risen! **June & July 2016** Truly He is Risen!

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 members to grow in their faith.

Father Stavros' Message

Χριστὸς ἀνέστη! Christ is Risen!

This double issue of the Messenger will reach you in the final days of the Paschal season, so I again greet you with the Paschal greeting, "Christ is Risen!" I want to first express my thanks to everyone for a beautiful and memorable Holy Week journey in 2016:

The choir did a fantastic job throughout Lent and Holy Week. I am thankful for their many hours of practice which made for a flawless celebration of the liturgical services. Thank you to Artie Palios and to our entire choir.

Our chanters, Nick Andreadakis, Archie Roussos and Charlie Hambos, do a great job at ALL of the divine services of the church year. What a beautiful journey through the services of the Great Compline, the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy, the Salutations Services, the Sunday services and all of the Holy Week services. Thank you also to the many people who served as readers at the services.

Our young people played a big role in the Holy Week services:

~Many of them are now singing in the choir

~Many of our young girls served as Bridegroom Maidens at the Bridegroom Services of Palm Sunday night, Holy Monday night and Holy Tuesday night.

~Seven of our 5th, 6th and 7th grade girls took on the role of the myrrh-bearers at the Lamentations service.

~Three of our GOYAns were the "Light-bearers" at the Resurrection Service

~ An "army" of altar boys served during the week and it was especially moving to see them standing guard at the foot of the Cross and at the tomb.

For the fourth year in a row, we kept "vigil" at the Cross of Christ. For many people, this was THE highlight of the week, reading Psalms at the Cross in the early morning hours. We began our Holy Thursday service of the Passion of Christ at 6:30 p.m., immediately followed by the Vigil from 10:00 p.m. until 9:00 a.m. on Good Friday, followed by the Royal Hours from 9:00-11:00 a.m. This means that there was a continuous service in our church for over 16 hours. Thank you to Charlie for organizing this again and for the many people who came at intervals throughout the night to keep vigil at the Cross. If you missed this this year, plan from now to come next year!

Thank you Lisa Alsina for leading the effort to decorate the eggs. Thank you to Dee Liakos for donating all of them. And on Pascha, thanks to Genie Carter for organizing the Easter egg hunt.

Thank you Engie Halkias and all of her helpers for decorating the church, for cleaning it between all the services, and for decorating the Kouvouklion. Thank you to all those who donated

Χριστὸς ἀνέστη!

Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis, Priest
2418 W. Swann Avenue, Tampa, FL 33609
Office: (813) 876-8830 Fax: (813) 443-4899
Email: officestjohnngoctampa@gmail.com
Website: <http://www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com>

Ἀληθῶς ἀνέστη!

flowers during Lent and Holy Week as well.

Thank you to Tom Georgas and the ushers for having everything in good “order”. Thanks to the men who carried the Epitaphios on Good Friday evening.

The Palm Sunday luncheon, sponsored by our Philoptochos Society, was well attended, enabling our Philoptochos to raise funds for its various charities and ministries, and I am thankful to all who attended.

Our annual Sunday School retreat had over 50 participants. In addition, 20 GOYAns helped prepare the eggs, candles, and bay leaves for Good Friday and Holy Saturday. A special thanks to Debbie Nicklow and Amy Kafantaris for organizing the retreat this year, and to the many parents and teachers who lent a hand.

Thank you to all those who took photographs - **if you haven't looked at our website lately, there are many flickr albums from Holy Week.** Thank you to our many photographers for taking some great shots. If you want to re-live any of Holy Week, all the services are uploaded on our web page as well.

Thank you to the Parish Council for hosting the dinner after the Anastasi. Thank you to the GOYAns for hosting the Good Friday reception.

Thank you to Charlie Hambos and Monica Gjerde for all of their behind the scenes work getting us ready for Holy Week.

And thank you most of all to YOU, the faithful, who came to the services. Your presence and your prayers are what make us a church. You can have beautiful music and beautiful flowers but the most important ingredient in Holy Week is beautiful people who come to pray, to worship, to relive, to remember and to renew themselves in the Light of the Resurrected Christ.

One Final Note on Holy Week: Holy Week reflects, in my opinion, the church at its best. The greatest church attendance by the most number of people occurs during Holy Week. Imagine the kind of community we could have if this many people were stewards, if this many people attended on a regular basis. Imagine the kind of witness we could give for our faith. Imagine how many people we could help. Imagine the difference we could make. Let's move from imagining to DOING. Let's strive to be that community that we are during Holy Week all year round.

The Messenger

In this double issue of The Messenger you will find many articles. I hope you'll take the time to read through articles about a historic event taking place in the Orthodox world on the island of Crete this month. I've reprinted my Paschal sermon, since I have had many requests for it. There are also speeches from the Oratorical Festival. We included half of them in the May issue and the rest are contained here.

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 600 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for nearly a year and a half. Over half of our parish receives it daily, as well as many people outside of our parish. Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. The current series of topics is on the Resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost and will end on June 26. On June 27, there will be various topics and each weekend after June 27, Father will continue to write about the Divine Liturgy. If you would like to join the prayer team, please email Charlie at charlie.hambos@gmail.com.

Don't Take a Vacation from God this summer

Services will be held each Sunday and on many weekdays throughout June and July. On a few Sundays, we will have visiting priests. So, please keep worship as part of your weekly schedule. If you are going to be out of town, I encourage you to visit an Orthodox parish in whatever town you are visiting.

Note the early start times on June 5, 12 and 19

On June 5, 12 and 19, Divine Liturgy will begin at 9:30 a.m. On all other Sundays and weekdays (except the evening liturgy on June 7), Liturgy will begin at 10:00 a.m.

Looking ahead to August

With school returning to session earlier this fall—public schools start August 10—we will be beginning our fall programming in August rather than in September. Stay tuned for an earlier start date for our Sunday school classes, most likely August 14.

I wish you all a blessed summer!

With love in the Risen Lord,
+Fr. Stavros

Fr. Stavros to be out of town for parts of June and July

Fr. Stavros will be taking vacation time as follows this summer: May 29 (after liturgy)-June 4, June 9 (after liturgy)-June 16; (Father will celebrate Liturgy on June 12); July 18-30; and August 7 (after liturgy)-10. Fr. Stavros will also be at The Metropolis of Atlanta's St. Stephen's Summer Camp from June 30-July 16. Fr. John Stefero will celebrate the Liturgy on Sunday, July 3. Fr. Gregory Georgiou will be the celebrant on Sunday, July 10. Fr. Dean Gigicos will be the celebrant on Sunday, July 24. Father Stavros will celebrate all other Sundays of June and July.

If you have a pastoral emergency while Father is out of town, please contact the church office. Father will not be answering his cell phone or email while on vacation or at summer camp, so please call the office with any pastoral issues.

Paschal Sermon

By Fr. Stavros

One of my favorite Psalms is Psalm 46. It reads in part “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, therefore we will not fear though the earth should change. The Lord of hosts is with us. . . Come, behold the works of the Lord. . . Be still and know that I am God.”

Each year, I search for a few words to summarize our Holy Week journey and to begin our Paschal celebration. And this year, the words I keep coming back to are these: “Be still and know that I am God!” (Psalm 46:10) Being still and knowing God are two things that are becoming increasingly harder to do in the world today, yet God is found in stillness, and when one is still, this is where he finds God.

There is no doubt we are overstimulated and over-programmed. And many times God gets pushed outside of our consciousness. It seems that we are always running everywhere except to Him. It has felt good to stand still in this church this past week, to set aside the cares of life and stand in the presence of God. It has felt good to let go of emotions and cry at His cross. It has felt good to be vulnerable with people. It has been good to hear honesty as people have shared concerns and pains with me. I’m sad for the pains, but honesty is often hard to find in a world where we somehow worry that truth will hold us captive, rather than set us free, as Christ taught us. It has felt good to share heartfelt laughter and pure joy many times as well.

Many people trumpet their ability to multi-task as a trophy. It’s as if doing one task at a time well is now seen as a sign of weakness. However, if a person is multi-tasking, they are never completely focused on one task, or on one person. We cannot multi-task when it comes to God—we can feel Him best when we step into His presence, and focus solely on Him. And in reality, we cannot multi-task when it comes to one another either. If we’re not all in on relationships, we’ll never know love. If we’re not all in on driving, we’re dangerous to others. If we’re not all in on conversations, we will not be hearing what is being said.

This entire Lent, I’ve been preaching about being present—working when it is time to work, quitting and going home to family when the work day is over. We’ve talked about plans—whether you are following the Daniel Plan or some other plan, a successful life plan is going to have the Lord at its center. It’s going to include good friends, it’s going to include fitness and the right food, and it’s going to include focus. A successful journey, in the eyes of God, is not crazy busy. It is purposefully busy. The successful Christian journey allows time to spend alone with God in prayer each day, together with others in worship each Sunday, and helping others in loving and charitable ways throughout the day.

When the journey with God gets off track, there is a formula to get it back on - our repentance + His mercies = reconciliation. Prayer is a good place to start. Confession helps as well. This same formula can work with our interpersonal relationships as well when they get off track. Repentance + mercy = reconciliation. A willingness to change + forgiveness = harmony.

There are many times that I am so busy I seem to forget about God. How many times He puts His hand right on my shoulder and tells me “trust me, just let me take care of this.” Do I listen? If love is patient and kind and does not insist on its own way, then my relationship with God will go even deeper when I am more patient and kind to others, and when I let go of some of my ideas

and do it His way. Many times, God allows life to throw us curveballs, and seems to tell us “MY will be done, not yours.” Many times we plan things out and God has other plans. And many times, things happen in His time and not ours.

Yet, we know that He is God. His ways are not our ways. He forgives easily. It is us who have a hard time with forgiveness. He is easy to be entreated. It is us who put up walls. He treats ALL of us with kindness—He has shown His kindness and mercy to each of us in a different way, a different gift or talent that can be used to His glory and to the betterment of our fellow man.

At this moment we are still. In the darkness of the church, we await the Light of Christ. Is it with patience? Is it with eager anticipation? Or is it with impatience and distraction? This week, we’ve relived and remembered what God did for us. We learned that He created us, and that when we fell away from Him, that He provided the means of our salvation—The Cross of Jesus Christ. He provided the roadmap—the scriptures. And He provided the means to read the map—the Church.

In a few moments, when you receive the Light of Christ, remain still and ponder on the light—Fire provides warmth when we are cold, it provides a means to see when it is dark. If the Light of Christ burns in you like a fire, you are never going to be cold, life is never going to get too dark. A forest fire is fanned by wind and dry trees that provide fuel to burn. A heart set afire with Christ is fanned not by strong wind but by stillness. It is fueled humility and integrity, which foster love and faith.

When Moses was exasperated and couldn’t take any more stress, He went to the Lord. And the Lord asked Moses, “What can I do for you?” And Moses answered the Lord with a simple request—“Show me Your glory.” And in the stillness of a cleft in a rock, Moses saw God’s glory, and it changed him. When Elijah was frustrated, He stood before God and there was an earthquake and a fire, but God was present in neither—He was in a still, small voice. When Christ was exasperated and begging God to take the cup of suffering away from Him, in the stillness of His prayer, an angel came and strengthened Him. If we’re not all in on God, we will never hear the “still voice” that Elijah heard, or see that “glory” that Moses saw, or be aware of the presence of angels strengthening us.

As we close out this Lenten journey, I am praying to God that He shows us His glory, in ways large or small, each day, and that in our moments of struggle, that He speaks to us and that our ears are open to His small, still voice; and that He sends His angels to help us, so that we can know that He is God—so that we are renewed tonight, inspired tomorrow, and sustained throughout life.

Receive the Light of Christ with a clean heart, be still and let your spirit be renewed. Lose yourself in this moment, in this Holy Service. And tomorrow, be loving towards one another and you will know that He is God. Be focused and you will know that He is God. Be humble and you will know that He is God. Be charitable and you will know that He is God. Be honest, forgiving and merciful, and you will know that He is God. Kneel in prayer each day and you will know that He is God. Come and worship Him each Sunday, remember what He did for us, and you will know that He is God. And as for this moment, be still, receive His Light once again, allow Him to show us His glory once again. Indeed God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble. So, come, behold the glory of the Lord. Be still, and know that He is God.

The Importance of Receiving Communion Often

By Fr. Stavros

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is My Body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My Blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. I Corinthians 11:23-26

At the Last Supper, the Lord took two very ordinary things, bread and wine, and "consecrated" them to be His Body and Blood. And then He gave these two ordinary things, now "extra-ordinary," to His Disciples, to partake of them.

In our church, we celebrate the Eucharist often. We bring the same "ordinary" gifts, bread and wine, and offer them in the service. There is nothing extraordinary about bread and wine. They can be purchased in any store. They can be made in any home. They are rather ordinary substances. But when they are brought into the church, prayed over and "consecrated," these ordinary substances become "extraordinary." Because they are touched by THE Holy Spirit, they become "extraordinary," they become "holy." Holy means "set apart." So they become "Holy," in the sense that they are no longer mere bread and wine, but they are THE Body and THE Blood of Jesus Christ. When we receive these "extraordinary" Gifts, we become "extraordinary" by association. Just like when you are dirty and take a shower and use a cleaning agent, soap, you become clean. So, when we touch what is extraordinary and Holy, we become extraordinary and holy. The challenge comes after we receive what is "extraordinary." Do we leave church and act "extraordinary" and "holy" or do we revert back to being "ordinary?"

We receive Communion for many reasons. First, it is a commandment—"Take eat." "Drink of this all of you." "Do this in remembrance of Me." Second, it allows God to come into us, and it affords us the opportunity to touch the Divine God.

There is a third reason which we often forget. We receive Communion in order to REMEMBER what Christ did for us. In celebrating the Liturgy, we not only partake of Christ, but we get a refresher course in what it means to be a Christian. We remember that Christ died for our sins. We remember that He was Resurrected from the dead. We remember His teach-

ings. We remember that He came from God and returned to God, and that we can follow the same path.

In bringing ordinary gifts and making them extraordinary, we remember that WE can become extraordinary through partaking of Holy Communion. We remember that we cannot be content being ordinary because we have witnessed and partaken of the extraordinary. In receiving Communion, we remember that the Gifts are Holy, they are set apart, and in receiving the Gifts, we are to become Holy and set apart, set apart for God and His purpose for our lives.

In receiving Communion we are sustained in our lives until we meet the Lord, because we have Him in our minds, our hearts and our lives, with regularity. This is why Saint Paul intentionally chooses the word "often," to encourage us to receive Communion on a frequent basis, so that there isn't sufficient time to forget Christ and what He did for us.

We tell our spouses and our children often that we love them. Is that because if they don't hear it every day that they might doubt that we love them? I suppose if they only heard these words once a year, they might. But we tell people we love them often because hearing that you are loved is a great source of encouragement. It is always a positive thing.

In the Eucharist, we are reminded that God loves us, so much that He died for us. He loves us so much that He is preparing a heavenly kingdom for us. He loves us so much that He has given us a pathway to follow to get us from here to there.

In receiving the Eucharist, we tell God that we love Him. We tell Him that we want to be extraordinary and holy. So the Eucharist is not just some ritual where we bring ordinary gifts and a "show" is performed over them. The Eucharist is an opportunity to partake of the extraordinary to remind us that we are extraordinary. It is the opportunity to stand in the presence of the Divine God in this life in preparation for living with Him in the next. It is an opportunity to partake of what is holy to remind us to be holy. And it is an opportunity to remember all that God did and still does for us, so that we can go forth and live for Him.

Now that Lent and Pascha are over, continue to prepare and receive Communion, and don't take the summer off from church. Because we want to continually remember what Christ did for us, and continually share in the joy that comes from that remembrance. So receive often! And allow the Eucharist to help transform you from ordinary to extraordinary each time you receive!

Anyone interested in being an usher?

Tom Georgas, our head usher, is always looking for people to assist him as ushers of our church on Sundays. Those who serve as ushers are assigned a Sunday to serve every 5-6 weeks and also during Holy Week. The ushers insure that we continue to have good order in our services by directing us to empty seats, answering questions, welcoming new people, and guiding people at Communion and after church. You can email Tom at Georgas@verizon.net.

Is your son interested in serving in the altar?

Is your son entering fourth grade (or older) and interested in serving in the altar for next year? Contact Fr. Stavros in the church office to be added to a team. All returning altar boys will be put on a new schedule to take effect September 1, so current altar boys need not sign up again. **This is for NEW altar boys.** Please contact Fr. Stavros by June 30 to be added to the list for the fall. If for some reason, you do not wish to continue to serve in the altar, please let Father know and he will remove you from the list.

Liturgical Schedule for June/July 2016

Sunday, June 5 Sunday of the Blind Man
Orthros 8:15 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone Attending May Serve

Ushers: Florin Patrasciou, Mike Kavouklis, Tammy Christou

Welcome Committee: Greeters: Debbie Kavouklis, Jeanie Nenos; Ambassador: Edie Kavouklis;

Caller: Jenny Paloumpis; Get Acquainted: Bessie Palios, Michael Palios

Coffee Hour: Provided by the Philoptochos donated by the Karas/Spencer Family in loving memory of Anthony Karas

Friday, June 7 Leave-Taking (Apodosis) of Pascha - Evening Liturgy
Orthros 5:00 p.m. Divine Liturgy 6:00 p.m.

Thursday, June 9 Holy Ascension
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, June 12 Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council
Orthros 8:15 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone Attending May Serve

Ushers: Nick Kavouklis, Marcus Calpakis, Peter Theophanous

Welcome Committee: Greeters: Sandra Pappas, Marenca Patrasciou; Ambassador: Vickie Peckham;

Caller: Megan Rindone

Coffee Hour: Maids of Athena

Sunday, June 19 Holy Pentecost - Happy Father's Day!
Orthros 8:15 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m. Kneeling Vespers 11:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains Only

Ushers: Gregory Tisdale, John Christ, George Trimikliniotis

Welcome Committee: Greeters: Christy Pessemier, Tom Pessemier; Ambassador: Katherine Sakkis;

Caller: Christene Worley

Coffee Hour: Junior Olympics

Sunday, June 26 All Saints
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone Attending May Serve

Ushers: Brett Mourer, Wayne Blankenship, Amin Hanhan

Welcome Committee: Greeters: Helen Cauthorn, Kalliope Chagaris; Ambassador: Lisa Alsina;

Caller: Peggy Bradshaw

Coffee Hour: Young at Heart

Wednesday, June 29 Sts. Peter and Paul
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, July 3 2nd Sunday of Matthew - Fr. John Stefero, Guest Celebrant
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone Attending May Serve

Ushers: David Voykin, Mike Kavouklis, Pete Trakas

Welcome Committee: Greeters: Ewana Forde, Carole Fotopoulos; Ambassador: Elaine Halkias;

Caller: Martha Kapetan; Get Acquainted: Vanessa Aviles, Pablo Aviles

Coffee Hour: TBD

Sunday, July 10 **3rd Sunday of Matthew - Fr. Gregory Georgiou, Guest Celebrant**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone Attending May Serve

Ushers: Ron Myer, George Mitseas, Chris Kavouklis

Welcome Committee: Greeters: Donna Hambos, Skip Higdon; Ambassador: Genie Carter;

Caller: Jeanie Nenos

Coffee Hour: Maids of Athena

Sunday, July 17 **Sunday of the Holy Fathers**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone Attending May Serve

Ushers: Florin Patrasciou, Mike Trimis, Tammy Christou

Welcome Committee: Greeters: Maria Karounos; Debbie Kavouklis; Ambassador: Helen Cauthorn;

Caller: Edie Kavouklis

Coffee Hour: The Paras Family

Sunday, July 24 **5th Sunday of Matthew - Fr. Dean Gigicos, guest celebrant**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone Attending May Serve

Ushers: Nick Kavouklis, Marcus Calpakis, Peter Theophanous

Welcome Committee: Greeters: Vickie Peckham, Julie Palios; Ambassador: Jenny Paloumpis,

Caller: Christy Pessemier

Coffee Hour: Young at Heart

Sunday, July 31 **6th Sunday of Matthew**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone Attending May Serve

Ushers: Ed Gerecke, John Christ, George Trimilkliniotis

Welcome Committee: Greeters: Bessie Palios, Sandra Pappas; Ambassador: Marenca Patrasciou

Caller: Christene Worley

Coffee Hour: Philoptochos



Every year, the Metropolis of Atlanta recognizes two parishioners from each parish for their outstanding contributions to the life of their parish. They are recognized at a banquet and Divine Liturgy each November, which are held in Atlanta and presided over by His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios.

This year our award winners are Carole Fotopoulos and Sandra Pappas.

Liturgical Notes for June & July

The Pentecostarion - The 50 Days After Pascha

The period of 50 days between Pascha & Pentecost is referred to as the “Pentecostarion”. The period of forty days between Pascha Sunday and the day of the Ascension is known as the period of Pascha (or Easter). It is a period set aside by the Church for the specific celebration of Christ’s glorious resurrection. It is a celebration of “rebirth”. . . .The rebirth of God’s creation which surrounds us, and the rebirth of the spirit within each and every one of us! This period is not merely a ritualistic celebration but a celebration which can be seen, felt, heard and talked about. It is a very REAL celebration which CAN make our entire being jump with JOY. It is a celebration which offers us HOPE. It is a celebration which offers us the TRUE FREEDOM found only in Jesus Christ! During the 40 days of Pascha, we are to greet each other with the greeting “Christ is Risen” or “Christos Anesti,” to which the response is “Truly He is Risen” or “Alithos Anesti.”

Some of the remaining feasts of the Pentecostarion include:

Sunday, June 5 - Sunday of the Blind Man

The theme of LIGHT! Commemoration of the healing of the blind man which leads us to the reality of the healing of our own spiritual blindness.

Tuesday, June 7 - Apodosia (Leavetaking) of Pascha

This marks the end of the Paschal Season. It is a repeat of the Resurrection Service and Liturgy of Pascha and is the last time of the Liturgical year that we sing Christos Anesti. We will celebrate this feast on Tuesday, June 7, with an evening Liturgy at 6:00 p.m. (Orthros will begin at 5:00 p.m. and is a replication of the Resurrection Service from Pascha).

Thursday, June 9 - Ascension

This marks the feast where Christ ascended to heaven, 40 days after the Resurrection, thus completing His earthly ministry

Sunday, June 12 - Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council

We pay homage to the collective triumph of the Church over false doctrine. The first Ecumenical Council authored the Creed. It took place in Nicea in the year 325. This is why we call the Creed “The Nicene Creed.” This Council also established the date of Pascha and decided on which books would comprise the Bible.

Saturday, June 18 - Saturday of the Souls

There are four Saturdays set aside during the year for us to honor our loved ones who have fallen asleep. One of them is the Saturday before Pentecost, this year on June 18. We will have Liturgy and a memorial service that day. Please bring Kolyva (boiled wheat) along with a list of names of those whom you would like to have commemorated (separate sheet provided).

Sunday, June 19 - Pentecost

This feast commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles fifty days after Pascha, filling them with power, strength, wisdom and courage to spread the GOOD NEWS of Jesus Christ to the entire world. Pentecost is the celebration of the birth of the Christian Church!!!. A special Vespers Service will be held after Liturgy on Pentecost (June 19), where three prayers will be offered, asking for the Holy Spirit to descend upon us as we mark this feastday. As a reminder, we do NOT kneel in church until AFTER the Liturgy on Pentecost (we do not kneel at the Liturgy on Pentecost) at the Vespers of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, when the priest says “Again and again ON BENDED KNEES let us pray to the Lord.”

There is no fasting the week after Pentecost. However, there is a fast for the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul which lasts from the Monday after All Saints Day (June 27)-June 28. So there is a two-day fast before the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul. When Pascha falls earlier, this fast period is longer.

Friday, June 24 - Nativity of St. John the Baptist

This marks the feastday of the Nativity (birth) of St. John the Baptist, the Forerunner of the Lord and patron saint of our parish.

Sunday, June 26 - Sunday of All Saints

The period of the Pentecostarion is now complete with the commemoration of “All Saints.”

Wednesday, June 29 - Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul

The Paramounts of the Apostles, Sts. Peter and Paul, have their feastday together on June 29. Sts. Peter and Paul are not only two of our greatest saints but they are two of the greatest sinners. St. Peter denied the Lord three times and St. Paul was persecuting Christians in the early church. They show us that through repentance, anyone can become a saint.

O Heavenly King . . . Come and Abide in Us

By Charlie Hambos

*O Heavenly King, the Comforter,
the Spirit of Truth, who art everywhere
and fillest all things, treasury of blessings
and giver of life, come and abide in us
and cleanse us from every impurity
and save our souls, O Thou who art good,
and lovest mankind.*

The Holy Trinity desires our love because of its love for us. Our God is one in three persons. The relationship between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit can be complicated and hard to understand. Try to imagine three people dancing together in harmony, with the same goal which is to love us and for us to love the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

On June 19 this year, we will celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. After Christ resurrected from the dead, He spent 40 days on the earth, appearing to His disciples and promising a Comforter which would come to direct them in their ways. After 40 days, he ascended into heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father. (Celebrated this year on June 9). Ten days later, the disciples were waiting in the upper room and “suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of a violent wind which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and there appeared to them tongues as of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak different languages as the Spirit gave them power to express themselves (Acts 2:2-4).” This was the birth of the Church and from this day forward, the Church has been and continues to be guided by the Holy Spirit, despite our human weaknesses and insecurities.

On the Feast of Pentecost, we celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit. In this issue of The Messenger, let’s explore the most common prayer to the Holy Spirit which begins, “O Heavenly King.” As in the March issue of The Messenger we will have help from Olivier Clement and his commentary on the prayer from his book, “Three Prayers: Our Father, O Heavenly King, the Prayer of St. Ephraim.” As Orthodox Christians, we should never start anything without this prayer as we invite the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, to guide us and protect us. Clement says, “Within the Church it is the prayer that leads into every prayer because every authentic prayer unfolds within the breath of the Spirit.” When God created us, He breathed into us the breath of life. We are a part of His respiratory system. After Christ, resurrected from the dead, he also breathed upon the disciples. We have within us the living breath of God and it is the Spirit of Truth. We however, must acknowledge it and invite the Spirit to come and abide in us.

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth

It was in the Second Ecumenical Council in 381, that the Church, in her wisdom, through the direction of the Holy Spirit, acknowledged the divinity of the third person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit. “Heavenly,” in this case refers to the ‘Ocean of Divinity,’ as the Syriac tradition holds. The king is one who reigns. There is the One, the Father, and the Other, the Son, while surpassing of any opposition is achieved in the

Third.” As mentioned above, there is a unique relationship between the three persons of the Holy Trinity. As in our life, so it is in the life of the Trinity, that the Holy Spirit fills in the gaps and sustains the relationship. “At the same time, this King comes to us to convey all that is heavenly, to comfort us and to bestow upon us the life of the resurrection.” In the Gospel of John 14:15-17, Christ promises the comforter or some translations say the counselor. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you.” Here in the Revised Standard Version, the Greek word *Paraklytos* is translated counselor, however, the better translation is comforter. Christ knew that to become His followers, to pick up our cross and follow Him would be difficult and so this is why He sent us, through the Father, the Comforter.

Now, for the Spirit of Truth Clement says, “we are not referring to a notion or a set of concepts or a system of some sort—there are so many of those!—but to Someone who told us that He was, that he is ‘the Way, the Truth and the Life.’” Living our life in the Holy Spirit will get us closer to the truth and well on the right path towards to salvation.

Who art everywhere and fillest all things...

The Holy Spirit is everywhere. We have to believe this. Concerning this aspect of the Holy Spirit, Clement says, “Grace penetrates all things as they tremble and resonate and awaken in this tremendous Breath of life, like a tree in the wind, with sweeping, invisible strokes, like the ocean with its thousands of smiling ripples, or the impulse that moves man and woman toward one another.” In the Orthodox faith, we believe in both the external grace and the internal grace of God. Grace is a way that the Holy Spirit acts. The external grace moves everywhere and affects everyone. It helps us explain good people doing good things regardless of their relationship with Christ. The internal grace is only bestowed upon those who were baptized and chrismated in the Orthodox Faith. Those of us who have the internal grace have a greater responsibility because it is within us. The grace of God does not show favor and it works externally on everyone.

In Orthodox theology, it is the Holy Spirit that brings life to everything and the symbolism is everywhere. Clement says, “And the Spirit is truly God in all things, enlivening and leading all things to their ultimate fulfillment in beauty. He [The Holy Spirit] is the winged God, so represented through symbols of movement and flight: the wind, a bird, the living water, yet not earth but rather He who makes the earth into a sacrament.” We see the Holy Spirit revealed as a dove at the Baptism of Christ. It is the water that we call the Holy Spirit upon at baptism. It is beautiful that the Holy Spirit makes all parts of our life sacramental if we allow Him.

Treasury of blessings and giver of life...

The Holy Spirit bestows blessings to everyone. What are these blessings? One is grace, which we spoke of before. He also adds the life of resurrection and the “light of life.” Clement quotes St Symeon the New Theologian saying, “The Holy Spirit becomes within us all that the Scriptures say concerning the Kingdom of God: a pearl, a grain of mustard seed, leaven, water, fire, the bread and the draught of life, the wedding chamber...” Each of these things is something which become great. Each is related to the Kingdom of God. We are usually looking forward to the Kingdom of God, but through the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom of God is within us.

The Holy Spirit gives life. Clement explains which life the prayer is talking about by looking at two words in Greek which mean life. “Whenever we speak of the Spirit, ‘life’ seems to be the key word. In Greek, there are two distinct terms, *bios*, in reference to biological life, and *zoe*, in reference to spiritual life, or perhaps, more along the lines of foundation and fulfillment, through the resurrected life in Christ.” Yes, every living thing is moved by the divine breath. God breathed into us. However, our biological life will come to an end but our *zoe* life will continue and this is our focus.

Sometimes our focus can get a little off target because we forget where the Spirit is and we do not allow it to thrive within us. Clement says the Spirit resides in the eye of the heart. “The eye of the heart sees not only the Church within the world—so often a pitiful sociological construct—but the world within the Church; a Church without boundaries where the communion of saints extends to a communion with every great living being, creators of life, of justice and beauty.” So often, when we think of the church, we think of the craziness, the politics and like Clement says, “the pitiful sociological construct.” However, the Church is meant to be so much more. The world and the Church are not two separate entities. The world is the Church. It is us, the human beings, who have separated the Church from the world. This was not God’s intent.

Come and abide in us...

God created us to be in a relationship with Him. In order for this to happen he had to leave us some space to make the relationship work. Clement says, “When God creates and sustains the world, He removes Himself in a way, so as to give His creatures their own foundation.” This separation is our human freedom. Some of us, in this freedom have pushed the Spirit away and others have opened our hearts and souls, allowing the Spirit to fill every nook and cranny. The good news and the answer to this problem according to Clement is, “The Spirit, though He bears us up and gives us life, surrounding us like an atmosphere that is ready to penetrate the slightest fissure within our souls, cannot do so without our consent, or call. We must pray: Come.” So, since it is us that has separated ourselves, it is also our responsibility to call for the Holy Spirit to “Come and abide within us.”

And cleanse us from every impurity...

We are like a mirror reflecting the light of Christ, the light of life and the love of God, but through sin we become dirty. It is the Holy Spirit which can come and cleanse our heart. Clement says, “The heart is the innermost center where man’s entire

being—his mind, his fervor, and his desire—is called to gather itself up and surpass itself within God. It must be cleansed not only of ‘evil thoughts,’ of reprehensible obsession, but of all thought.” All thought, not just the bad thoughts, but any thoughts that separate us from God. Clement says what Jesus says, which is “what renders a man impure is what comes out of his mouth, proceeding from the heart: *dialogismoi*, the blind play of fear, of hatred, of a narcissistic libido and of greed. We must learn to cast them into the fire of the Spirit, that they either be consumed or transfigured...” We must ask for the for the spirit to have a Pentecost on the inside of our minds.

And save our souls...

Christ became one of us, suffered, was crucified, died and rose on the third day to save our souls. Clement says, “Christ descends into hell and into death, in order to tear from its grasp each of us and all of mankind. By making our wounds His own, Christ turns every wound within us into a source of light—the ‘light of life,’ the light of the Holy Spirit.” This part of the prayer means does not mean save our souls from our bodies here on earth. Instead, with our body and our soul, to be illuminated and become a full human being with the Holy Spirit living and thriving within us, even on this earth.

O Thou who are good and lovest mankind..

Clement does some investigation into the word good. He refers to the days of Creation and how at the end of each day, “God saw that it was good.” In Hebrew it says, “God saw that it was *tob*.” *Tob* means both beautiful and good. Clement says that this good is more than what we usually think of as good. “It refers to the fullness of being that is created and recreated by the Word, animated and fulfilled by the spirit, thus reflecting divine life. Through man who, in Christ, has become once again created creator, that fullness of being is called to unite itself to this divine life.” It is the opportunity, that we have become co-creators with the Creator to be able to reunite the creation with the Creator.

The sacrifice of Christ gives us the opportunity to do more. Athanasius of Alexandria said, “God became *sarkophoros* (flesh-bearer) that man might become *pneumatophoros* (Spirit-bearer).” This is the new intent for our life. We must bear the Holy Spirit.

“The soul of one who is sanctified, suffused with the Breath of God is no longer within the body, it is rather the body that is within the soul, and through it, in the Spirit. The primal clay has become a “spiritual body,” body and Breath.” God created us to have a Spirit.

Clement ends his commentary on the prayer by talking about the *epiclesis* at the Divine Liturgy, which is when we call to the Father, to send the Holy Spirit to make the bread and the wine, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. This *epiclesis* is at the center of every sacramental action. We must offer and *epiclesis* every single day of our life. We must call the Holy Spirit upon every aspect of our life and ask Him to to “Come and abide within us!”

Community News

Parish Registry

Adult Baptism - Brian (Brendan) Kelly, was baptized on Tuesday, May 3. Maria Cantonis served as the Godparent. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism - Demetrios Dean Panopoulos, was baptized on Saturday, May 14. Andrew and Amanda Christoupoulos served as the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

Funeral - Anthony Karas passed away on Saturday, April 30, just as the Resurrection Service was about to begin. His funeral was held at St. John on Wednesday, May 4. May his memory be eternal!

Condolences to Marina Paras on the death of her brother, George Simitse, on April 24, in Atlanta. May his memory be eternal!

Get Acquainted Sunday, June 5 and July 3



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.

Our "Get Acquainted Sunday" will be Sunday, June 5 and Sunday, July 3.



Community Outreach

Saturday, June 21 and July 18 from 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. St. John the Baptist's Community Outreach will be serving breakfast to the Homeless at the First Presbyterian Church in Downtown Tampa. The church is located at 412 Zack Street. The entrance is on Polk Street. Grab a cup of coffee and come help us! We love to see new and old faces!

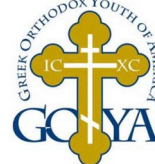


GOYA

The **GOYA meeting** will be on Sunday, June 5, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center.

We will be preparing for the Junior Olympics. Dinner, as always, will be provided. We invite all students who are finishing 6th grade, entering 7th grade this fall, to join GOYA and to join us for both the June 5 meeting and participate in the Junior Olympics.

The GOYA Junior Olympics are Friday, June 17 - Sunday, June 19. Make sure you sign up with Elaine Halkias (629-1843) if you are going to attend.



Junior Olympics - Volunteers Needed!



St. John the Baptist will be hosting our annual Sunshine State Junior Olympics on June 17-19. This event brings over 200 GOYAns (teenagers) from all over Florida to our parish for a weekend of athletics and spirituality. Byron Nenos (813-789-0729, nenoslaw@aol.com) serves as the chairperson for this event. But in order for the event to be a success, we need many other volunteers to assist him in many capacities, including working at various athletic venues, cooking and serving at the church, and some administrative jobs, such as entering data as to who won various contests while the event is going on. This event is a chance to not only showcase our community and to do something meaningful for our young people, it is also a chance for us to work together on something and get to know one another better. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Byron Nenos. Thank you.

St. John the Baptist to Participate in the Metropolis of Atlanta's St. Stephen's Summer Camp



A large contingent of campers and counselors will be taking part in St. Stephen's Summer Camp this summer. Fr. Stavros will be serving as the director for sessions 2 and 3. Charlie Hambos will be at camp during session 5. Several other counselors will be going from our parish, and a large contingent of GOYAns will be attending as well. One Sunday after the campers return, they will give presentations on their experience in church.

Congratulations to Mary Maas!

Mary was awarded the Council for Exceptional Children Tampa Bay Chapter #194 Educational Support Person of the Year. Well deserved!

Thank you Father!

by Alkis Crassas, Parish Council President

***Our Father** who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

I'm so thankful for our Fathers! Starting with our **Heavenly Father**, I'm so grateful for all the ways He keeps revealing Himself in our lives, providing us with a great country to live in, a thriving church community to share in, and the blessing of a priest like Father Stavros who cares for us and our salvation.

In our last PC meeting right after Pascha, **Father** asked each member of the board to share their favorite moment of Holy Week. It was beautiful to see how each of us was moved by our Lenten experience at one point or another. Did Father Stavros make it all happen for us? No, he didn't. What he did do is prepare an environment conducive to miracles, love, and transformation.

It takes hundreds of hours of meticulous and thoughtful planning to create the Lenten journey we all experienced. Father and his office staff were relentless in the preparation of the church, the services, the outreach events, the volunteers, the ushers, the participants, the list goes on. Working closely with Father for the last 2.5 years, I have witnessed firsthand the sacrifices he makes for us all. Just like in Disney World, the magic is no accident. I'm very thankful for our **spiritual Father**, our Father Stavros!

With Father's Day approaching, I have been also reflecting, loving and remembering my late **earthly Father**. My dad never wanted to be called 'baba' (dad in Greek). He insisted on us calling him by his first name or his nickname: Kaimaki. For those of you that don't know Greek ice cream, kaimaki is a traditional vanilla like flavor. He used to love his kaimaki ice cream with cherry sauce and nuts on top. And because it rhymed with his name, Maki – Kaimaki, we grew up calling my dad an ice cream flavor!

My **father** was my biggest fan—he thought my brother and I hung the moon. That partly explains why he gave us grand, ancient Greek names to live up to: Pericles and Alkiviades. Besides making me feel smart and important, he instilled in me from a young age that anything is possible. He did that with his words but more importantly by his actions. What I didn't realize till I became a father myself, is that belief in the goodness of your children indirectly teaches them faith. Thank you Kaimaki for teaching me how to have faith!

Thank you God for your Son, and for all our fathers. Thank you for the love, magic and miracles they help create in the world. Thank you for our sense of faith when we are feeling high, and for helping our unbelief when we are feeling low. Thank you for all that you do for us, known and unknown. Thank you **Father!**

60th Anniversary Celebration

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church will be celebrating its 60th anniversary this year and we need you! We have been collecting historical information on our Parish. Please share information you wish to be considered for presentation in the 60th Anniversary Submit your historical information - photos, text or personal statements to sjgoc60th@gmail.com. Should you have photos or text needing to be scanned please use the email above and you will be contacted to coordinate scanning your items.

We are very excited to collaborate with all the parishioners on the 60th anniversary celebration.



Congratulations

THE UNIVERSITY OF TAMPA

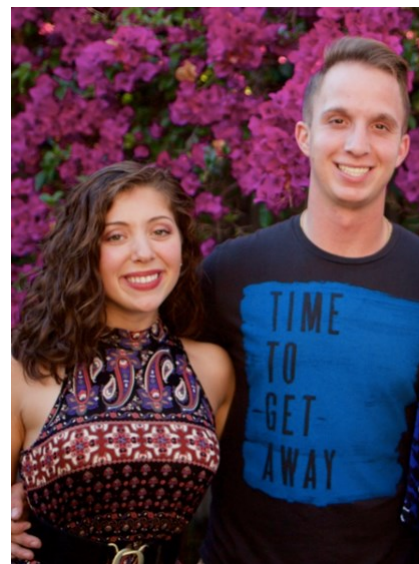


Eleni Pessemier (left) is graduating from the Riverview High School IB program in Sarasota and will be attending the University of Tampa. Her anticipated major is elementary education & minoring in Spanish and Entrepreneurship.

Peter Makrides (right) is graduating from Durant High School and will be attending the University of Tampa in the Fall. Peter will be majoring in business and will also be joining UT's Navy ROTC program.



Amanda Makrides (right) graduated from Galen College of Nursing with an Associated Degree in Nursing. She will be continuing her education and will be attending the University of South Florida to begin working on her Bachelor of Science in Nursing.



Vasili Courialis (left) is graduating from Sunlake High School and will be attending The University of South Florida. His anticipated major will be Mechanical Engineering with a minor in Business.



Christina Elizabeth Stilian (right) will be graduating from Cypress Lake High Center For the Arts. She will be attending The University of Central Florida in Orlando and plans to major in Marketing/Public Relations and minor in dance.



Barbara Schad (left) graduated from Utica College with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

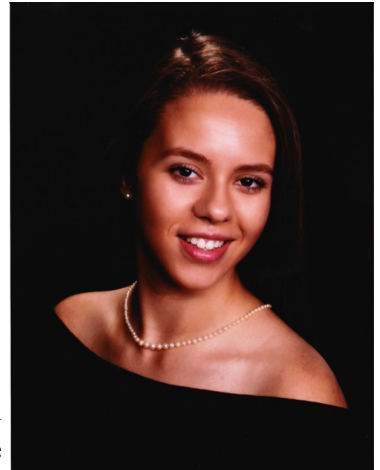
Class of 2016!



UF | UNIVERSITY of
FLORIDA

Maria Lyn Cauthorn (left) graduated from the University of Florida with a major in Industrial and Systems Engineering and with minors in Sales and Business. Post-graduation Maria Lyn will be employed by GE Healthcare and will begin GE's two year Commercial Leadership Program in Milwaukee, WI starting July 2016.

Kyra Frey (not pictured) graduated from the University of Florida with a Bachelor's in Biology with a minor in Spanish. She is working full time at a cardiology practice currently while applying to Physician Assistant master's programs.



Nedi Ferekides (right) is graduating from Hillsborough High School IB Program. She will be attending the University of Florida. She plans to study Neuroscience.



University of
West Florida

Gregory and Alexandra Hartung (left) received their Bachelor's of Arts from University of West Florida, (Pensacola) majoring in Communications.


Florida State
UNIVERSITY

Christina Diniaco (right) is graduating from Plant High School. She will be attending Florida State University. She plans to study Art History.



Savannah College of Art and Design

Katina Georgas (left) will graduate on from the Savannah College of Art and Design with a degree in Bachelor of Fine Arts.

Update on Youth Protection Procedures

Dear Parishioners,

We are blessed to be a flourishing and healthy church. Children are involved in nearly every ministry within our organization, from the choir to the Daughters of Penelope.

We recognize this growth comes with responsibility and, in response the Youth Protection Program Committee, under the guidance of the Parish Council, has begun implementing updated standards that will result in a more uniformed and disciplined approach to the running of our programs. The 2016-2017 manual will reflect these expectations.

Although there may be policy changes as the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (the body of the church which initially enacted the Youth Protection Program) and the Metropolis of Atlanta establishes their own guidelines for youth protection, the following standards apply for the new school year.

- ◆ A sign-in and sign-out sheet (or electronic version) will be used for events where children are dropped off and picked up, with the exception of weekly Sunday School, which currently takes attendance and uses a sign in/sign out sheet for preschool children.
- ◆ We are building a uniform application form for all programs involving children. These applications are kept at the office and will include medical and insurance information. Ideally, these will be available through an electronic device but we are still in the planning/development stages.
- ◆ Establishment of "Volunteer Assistant" network. "Volunteer Assistant" is a term for parents and adults who support children's programs. Volunteer Assistants undergo background checks, driver's license and insurance verification, and are trained in the youth protection program - just like ministry volunteers with direct responsibility for children. However, they are not fully responsible for a program, such as a Sunday School teacher. Instead, they act as support to ministry heads and give structure to outings - for instance when our kids stay at hotels, these Volunteer Assistants would be slotted as drivers or chaperones.
- ◆ Whenever possible, all activities with children and youth shall have a staff member or volunteer adult leader with current certification first aid/CPR training.
- ◆ Two-leader/open-door policy. One-on-one contact between adults and youth members is not permitted. In compliance with St. John's "two deep" leadership policy, two registered adult leaders or one registered leader and a parent of a participant, or other adult, one of whom must be 21 years of age or older, are required on all trips, outings and activities. In situations requiring a personal conference, the meeting is to be conducted in view of other adults and youth. For youth participating in confession, another adult is to stand outside the church sanctuary while Fr. Stavros or the acting priest conducts the sacrament. Each ministry is responsible for ensuring that sufficient leadership is provided for all church activities.
- ◆ All adult drivers of children and youth will be screened through a driving history search. A valid drivers license and proof of insurance will be required.
- ◆ Expanded Youth Protection Committee to include a representative from a children's ministry. This brings the committee to four people: Fr. Stavros, a PC member, a member at large, and a children's ministry member.

In order to help our volunteers fully understand the manual and the expectations outlined within it, we will hold a training session sometime in late August, early September. At this same meeting, new volunteers can undergo background checks, and view the youth protection video. Volunteers are required to undergo training and a background check every three years.

Thank you for your support as we go through this process. We welcome your feedback, ideas, and concerns as we move forward. Please see August Messenger and the Bulletins for date and times.

Yours,

Catherine S. Mitseas, YPP Parish Council Representative

Sunday School News

CHRIST IS RISEN!!!! Our last day of Sunday School was on Sunday, May 22 and we would like to thank everyone for a successful Sunday School Year and Graduation Ceremony. Penny and Lou Christopher hosted our end of the year party and everyone had such a fabulous time. We can't thank them enough for opening up their home to us.

Congratulations to all of our students and especially our High School Graduates for a successful Sunday School year. At the end of the year ceremony each student was given a gift and a certificate from the Sunday School and our graduates received a Holy Week Book.

The following students had **PERFECT ATTENDANCE** for the **ENTIRE YEAR** of Sunday School and were acknowledged at our Graduation Ceremony.

+++Congratulations to Santino Bavaro, Gianni Bavaro, Niko Bavaro, Antonio Bavaro, Emily Nicklow, Maria Nicklow, Dimitri Passalaris, Hannah Passalaris, Yanni Trimikliniotis, George Xenick, Elizabeth Xenick, and Artemis Xenick

FATHER STAVROS and CHARLIE HAMBOS are such an inspiration to all of us and we appreciate everything that they do for the Sunday School. We are very thankful for their leadership, guidance, and teachings throughout this school year. We would like to thank all of our parents for bringing their children to Sunday School and to the children who are always eager to learn more about their faith.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank the SUNDAY SCHOOL STAFF for making this Sunday School year a success. THEY ARE:

Director of Sunday School: Vickie Peckham

Director of 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

Middle School: Kara Katzaras, Stefan Katzaras and Heidi Borgeas - Co-Teachers

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

We are blessed to have most of our teachers returning next year. Although Bessie Palios, Stella Polycarpou (moving to Denver), and Kara and Stefan Katzaras will not be returning. We can't thank them enough for all that they have done for our Sunday School Program this past year.

Sunday School Topics for May were St. Thomas and Talents/Gifts. Our last Youth Sunday of the year took place on Sunday, May 15. Our children have joined the choir in singing our liturgical hymns throughout the year, on a monthly basis, under the leadership of Maria Xenick. Melissa Krinos also conducted lessons on the meaning and making of Prosphora with each class this year. We would like to thank both of them for their

valuable service and all the high school students who read the Epistle throughout the year. Savvas Ferekides read the Epistle on Sunday, May 15. These Youth Sundays have been a blessing and a wonderful opportunity for our children.

We are already planning for next year. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO BECOME A STAFF MEMBER and/or if you have any suggestions on how we can improve our Sunday School Program, please e-mail Vickie Peckham at vickiepeckham@gmail.com or call 813-406-5626.

A Word of Thanks From Father Stavros to our Sunday School Teachers

First, I want to thank the parents of a RECORD 155 SUNDAY SCHOOL STUDENTS who are part of our Sunday School program. We keep getting more and more kids every year, which is great. Secondly, I want to thank our Sunday School students themselves for coming so faithfully each week. It is so wonderful to see them come for Communion each Sunday, and to see them growing up. Kids that I baptized nearly 12 years ago are finishing 5th grade, some of them were maidens during Holy Week, and others are serving in the altar. How the time flies! Third, I want to thank Vickie Peckham for continuing to be our Sunday sSchool director. Her enthusiasm for teaching our children is contagious. She spends so many hours behind the scenes coordinating things.

The music ministry has been inspiring and miraculous in its own right. Every month when we hold Youth Sunday, the entire section of pews next to the choir, and sometimes more than that, are filled with children, singing along with the adult choir and in many instances singing hymns on their own. SEVEN of our Sunday School students already sing on a full time basis with the adult choir! Many churches have choirs that are aging without anyone in the wings being trained. We are doing two beautiful things through the youth choir—secondly, we are preparing a new group of choir members for the future, but first and most important, we are giving our children a love of worship and singing from a young age, so that whether they ever join the adult choir or not, they love and appreciate the liturgical music of our church. They will know it and can participate in singing all their lives.

And now to the Sunday School teachers. The commitment to be a Sunday School teacher is a serious one. It means that every week, you not only have to be at church and teach a lesson, but that you have to be preparing to teach. It means spending time during the week reading and researching and preparing to teach a lesson. It means coming up with meaningful, fun and creative ways to articulate the message of Christianity. In some classes, the age range is diverse. In all classes the levels of learning are diverse. And in all classes, at times, attendance is not predictable. Putting together all of these factors, it is indeed a challenge to teach Sunday School. And I want to sincerely thank our teachers for doing a great job this year. The fact that our numbers are growing and that the average weekly attendance of Sunday School is higher than it's ever been is a good testimony to the efforts of these teachers. So, I thank you again for all of your help this year!



Philoptochos End of the Year Luncheon

Sunday June 26 at 1:00 p.m.

The Columbia Restaurant

Ybor City

Buffet Menu: 1905 SALAD, CHICKEN ROPA VIEJA AND YELLOW RICE, BLACK BEANS, FRESH BROCCOLI ALIOLI, CUBAN BREAD AND BUTTER, CHOICE OF: FLAN OR KEY LIME PIE, COFFEE OR ICED TEA

RSVP to Lisa Alsina by June 22 (813) 871-1094

Thank You St. John the Baptist for your Support!



These days there is an extra spring in the steps of the students at Chester W. Taylor Elementary School. Each year, the St John the Baptist's Philoptochos Annunciation Chapter host a luncheon to raise money to buy shoes for the students at the school, located in Zephyrhills, Florida. Chester W. Taylor Elementary School is a Title 1 school, where over 84% of the children received free or reduced lunch. Many of the students and their families have been greatly affected by the economic downturn. Some have even lost their homes and are living with other family members, just to make ends meet. Imagine the child who comes to school with blisters from shoes that are too small, or is the third child in the family to wear a pair of tattered sneakers. Many of the students are unable to participate in physical education because they do not own a pair of closed toed shoes.



Each year the luncheon raises hundreds of dollars to purchase Payless gift cards for the school. "The looks on the faces of these children is one of pride and success. They feel like they are the most important person on earth", said Kathy Kaburis, Assistant Principal and longtime Philoptochos member. This is the fourth year the Philoptochos has held the Shoe Luncheon and we wish to thank the St John the Baptist community for their support in helping the students of Chester W. Taylor Elementary School.

Notice of Parish Assembly - June 5, 2016

Come hear about YOUR Church at our General Assembly to include a 'State of the Community' and update on the 60th Anniversary immediately following the Divine Liturgy in the Kourmolis Center. Please note our Divine Services will start at 9:30 a.m. on this day. Your voice is needed and all members in good standing* are invited to attend, sign in, and participate, since a quorum is required at this meeting.

If a quorum is not present, we will call a second meeting on Monday June 6 at 7:00 p.m., at which time a quorum will not be required.

*According to the Parish By-laws, Article I, Section 5, "All members in good standing shall have the right to participate and vote at meetings of the membership and elections," (Subsection A) and "any person who has not submitted a properly completed pledge form shall not have the right to vote until such qualified person has submitted a properly completed pledge form and paid the amount of the pledge owed at least thirty (30) days prior to the date of a meeting of membership or election." If you have any questions regarding your membership status please call the church office.

~Stewardship Update~

Christ is Risen! What a blessed Lenten Journey with our church filled to capacity with many new faces. God has provided a warm and welcoming community with loyal parishioners sharing HIS Love and a Spiritual Leader in Fr. Stavros that not only teaches but also inspires true Christian Stewardship!

Glory to God for the opportunity to worship often through our Divine Liturgy and share our faith, talents and the gifts HE has provided. We are very blessed this year with many faithful Stewards and over 42 new Stewards!

Please take the time to complete a Pledge Form if you haven't done so for 2016 – We are called as Christians to give back and our beautiful church in Tampa would not sustain without our cheerful givers and faithful servants of Christ. When you give to God, you discover what God gives to you!

Stewardship Summary	2016
<i>Pledged for Year*</i>	<i>\$418,806.⁰⁰</i>
<i># Parishioners/Families Pledged</i>	<i>309</i>

*Based YTD as of 5/12/16

Little of This & That ...

Online Pledge Forms and Donations (via Pay Pal) are now up and running on our website. Many of our Stewards have taken advantage of submitting their pledge form online and setting up systematic payments for Stewardship. The General Donations Tab is also available for other needs such as Memorials, Dome Repairs, Easter Appeal, Christmas Appeal, Building & Ground, Festival or a Specific Ministry. And don't forget online banking as an easy and convenient option for automatic payments if you chose not to use Paypal.

Thank You to Brett and Ana Mourer for sharing their personal calling in a deeply moving article for our occasional series 'What Stewardship Means to Me' that was printed over a 4 part series in the Jan-April Messenger. The article is now available on our church website under the Stewardship Tab if you would like to read the whole thing.

We love hearing from our parishioners. If you would like to share something regarding your calling to Stewardship, please contact Sandra Pappas at spappas11@gmail.com.

Stewardship Summary Statements will be mailed in July, however, please call the church office with any questions prior to this mailing.

**We require a completed Pledge Form to be considered a Steward of St. John the Baptist*

Leaving a Legacy - Estelle Kavakos

A founding member of our parish passed away this February and bequeathed \$25,000 to our church. Estelle Kavakos, sister of Christine Scourtes, helped found St. John's and for many years was a fixture in the choir, for a while serving as choir director. In her last years, she did not attend church often because of declining health, but up until her final days, watched services from her bed on our live stream. A few months after her death, the church received an unexpected surprise. She left \$25,000 of her estate to our community. This bequest is given as a gift and has no restrictions in its use. Estelle's generous gift will sustain the work of the church on earth, even as she transitions to the church of heaven. Her family feels blessed with the beautiful memories of a lifetime created here and would like our community to know just how much worshiping and sharing in God's love within our sanctuary meant to Estelle. We would like to remember and thank Estelle for her good work, her love of our church, and for the beautiful example she sets in her passing. Leaving part of one's estate to the church is a beautiful gesture indeed, and one that allows the church to continue its work on earth long after its members have transitioned to the church of heaven. May her example encourage others to do the same.

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 Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com. Thank you for your consideration.

A Historic Event is Taking Place on the Island of Crete This Month: The Great and Holy Synod and Why It is Important for Orthodoxy

By Fr. Stavros

From June 16-27, the Great and Holy Synod will convene on the Island of Crete, the first meeting of its kind in over 1,200 years

Background Information - The Ecumenical Councils

In the year 325, the Emperor Constantine convened the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea. Why? To put order where there was chaos. In the first three centuries of Christianity, the church was underground and persecuted. When Christianity became the legal religion of the Roman Empire in the early 4th century and as the churches of the various cities began communicating openly, there was disagreement, even scandal and heresy, because there was not agreement on basic tenets of the faith.

The First Ecumenical Council gathered all the bishops of all the churches together, and after deliberation and prayer, the result of this Council was the Nicene Creed (our confession of faith) and the Canon of Scripture. Between 325 and 787, seven such Councils were held, which have given us the backbone of our Orthodox theology and praxis. For a Council to be truly “Ecumenical,” it means that all the churches are involved. Following the Great Schism in 1054, and now the further fracturing of Christianity into thousands of denominations, it is not possible to have a Council that is truly “Ecumenical.”

The Autocephalous Churches

In the Ancient Church, there were five “Patriarchates”—Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria. It is not the Orthodox “tradition” to have one “pope” who speaks infallibly for the whole church. Rather, our system of governance is “collegial” or “synodical.” There were, in the beginning, five autocephalous, or self-governing churches, each being led by a “Patriarch.” The Patriarch of Constantinople is recognized as the “Ecumenical Patriarch.” While he does not have administrative authority over the “Autocephalous” Churches, when all the churches gather together, he sits as the “first among equals.” The Seven Ecumenical Councils, or Synods, were convened under the “synodical” system that was the “tradition” among the ancient Patriarchates.

There are now 14 Autocephalous, or self-governing churches in Orthodoxy. Rome is no longer one of them. And the overwhelming majority of them came into existence after the time of the Ecumenical Council.

The Four Remaining Ancient Patriarchates (with where they have jurisdiction)

1. Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (Turkey, Mt. Athos, Northern and Western Europe, North and South America, Australia and New Zealand, Southeast Asia and the Diaspora)
2. Patriarchate of Alexandria (all Africa)
3. Patriarchate of Antioch (Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Iran)
4. Patriarchate of Jerusalem (Palestine [Israel], Jordan, Arabia and Mount Sinai)

Ten Additional Autocephalous Churches (date of Auto-

cephaly, jurisdiction)

6. Patriarchate of Russia (Autocephalous in 1448, Patriarchate in 1589, jurisdiction over the former Soviet Union)
7. Patriarchate of Serbia (Autocephalous in 1879, Patriarchate in 1920, jurisdiction over former Yugoslavia)
8. Patriarchate of Romania (Autocephalous in 1885, Patriarchate in 1925, jurisdiction over Romania)
9. Patriarchate of Bulgaria (Has changed between autocephalous and under patriarchate between 917 and 1945, Autocephalous again as of 1945, Patriarchate in 1961)
10. Patriarchate of Georgia (Like Bulgaria, has changed between under a patriarchate and autocephalous between 325 and 1917, Autocephalous again as of 1917, Patriarchate in 1990, jurisdiction over Republic of Georgia)
11. Church of Cyprus (431, all of Cyprus)
12. Church of Greece (1850, all of Greece)
13. Church of Poland (1924, all of Poland)
14. Church of Albania (1937, all of Albania)
15. Church of Czech Lands and Slovakia (1998, Czech Republic and Slovakia)

The Preparatory Work

Since 1965, with an initial meeting on the island of Rhodes, convened with encouragement and work by the late Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, there has been preparation for a “Great and Holy Council.” There hasn’t been an event like this in over 1,000 years. There have been many meetings held amongst representatives from all fourteen churches over the past 50 years in order to come to some agreement as to how such a council could take place—what issues would be discussed, what protocols would be followed, how decisions would be reached, the timing of the council and its location, among many other challenges.

Why is this so challenging? Because nothing like this has been done in the “Church” for over 1,000 years. And for the Autocephalous Churches that are less than 1,000 years old, which is most of them, this has NEVER happened.

In January 2016, the Ecumenical Patriarch met with representatives of all the 14 Autocephalous Churches in Switzerland. And during the course of their meetings, it was decided that the “Great and Holy Council” will be held from June 16-27 on the Island of Crete.

The Great and Holy Council - June 2016

There are significant logistics associated with a meeting like this. First, each “Autocephalous” Church will be allowed to be represented by up to 24 Bishops. So, that means 24 Bishops under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch will participate, and 24 (out of more than 800) bishops under the Patriarchate of Moscow will participate, etc. Thus, there can be equal representation from all the churches. His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios will be one of the 24 Bishops under the Patriarchate of Constantinople who will participate. Also from the United States will be His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America, His Eminence Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver, and His

Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas of Detroit and His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco. (Oriental Orthodox Churches will not be participating in this Synod because they are not in communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate). There will also be observers from the Roman Catholic and some Protestant Churches. With the potential of hundreds of hierarchs and their delegations, with translators, researchers, writers, etc., and with the need to record these events for posterity, there is a lot of infrastructure issues to be worked through.

There were initially ten agenda items to be discussed, with sub-items under each topic. These topics had been discussed in gatherings of Orthodox Bishops beginning in 1977. The initial ten items included:

- a. Orthodox Diaspora
- b. Autocephaly and its manner of proclamation
- c. Autonomy and its manner of proclamation
- d. The Diptychs
- e. The matter of a common calendar
- f. Impediments of marriage
- g. Adaptation of church regulations on fasting
- h. Relations of the Orthodox Churches with the rest of the Christian world
- i. Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement
- j. Contribution of the local Orthodox Church to the prevalence of the Christian ideals of peace, liberty, brotherhood and love among people, and the lifting of racial and other discrimination.

At the meetings in January 2016 in Chambes, Switzerland, the ten initial topics were amended to six that will be addressed at the upcoming Great Council. The Official List of Topics approved for discussion at the Great and Holy Council are as follows:

1. The Mission of the Orthodox Church in the Contemporary World

2. The Orthodox Diaspora
3. Autonomy and its Manner of Proclamation
4. The Sacrament of Marriage and Its Impediments
5. The Significance of Fasting and its Application today
6. Relations of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian World.

The Great and Holy Council is needed because it demonstrates that we are a “synodical” church. As with any good thing, there is always something or someone that stands in opposition. There are people in various Orthodox countries that are against the holding of a Great and Holy Council. Just for the Council to convene is an achievement in itself, because no gathering like this has been done in over 1,000 years. And beyond that, there are needed discussions to be had as the church negotiates its way through an ever changing world landscape.

What Can I Do?

The biggest and most important thing that ALL Orthodox Christians should be doing is praying—this is a great undertaking. In order to make any changes, it will require unanimity of all the churches. So, prayers are needed for wisdom and understanding, patience and love for all who are involved, especially during the period of June 16-27 when the Council will occur.

Concluding Thoughts

If we proclaim on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, that our faith “upholds the Oikoumeni,” then this is a call for our Orthodox Church to speak with one voice and one heart. To bring together all fourteen churches for dialogue is a magnificent undertaking with the potential to have far reaching consequences for our Orthodox Faith. This is a time indeed, to pray to God to guide and bless our church, most especially its leaders, as they prepare for and participate in the upcoming Holy and Great Council. To Him be the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Friends of St. John the Baptist - Some of you who receive *The Messenger* do not live in the Tampa Bay area or are members of other Greek Orthodox parishes. We would like to ask for your support of our parish by being a “Friend of St. John the Baptist”. Your contribution as a “Friend” will help offset the cost of mailing *The Messenger*, among other things. *Being a “friend” does not make one a steward of St. John 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
Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI
Perry & Fay Stamatiades - Asheville, NC
Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI

Wesley & Melissa Thompson - Clearwater, FL
Demitrius & Katherine Klimis - Boardman, OH
Mary Spanos - St. Augustine, FL
Bessie Bliziotes - Palm Cost, FL
Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL
Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL
William & Kane Chapman - Palmetto, FL
Lillan Thomas - Highland, IN

St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival

On Sunday, March 27, we had the parish level competition for the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival. In the Junior Division, we heard speeches from Dimitri Karounos, Angelina Krinos, Antonio Bavaro, Hannah Passalaris, Dominic Garcia and Sophia Krinos. In the Senior Division, we heard speeches from Christos Nenos, Karter Lenardos, Savvas Ferekides, Larissa Krinos, George Hambos, Alexis Linsinbigler and Nedi Ferekides. Hannah Passalaris and Sophia Krinos moved on and represented our church at the District Finals for the Junior Division, with George Hambos and Savvas Ferekides competing in the senior division at the District Finals in Sarasota on April 2. A **BIG THANK YOU** to Peggy Bradshaw, who is the chairperson of the Oratorical Festival for eight years now. Thank you also to our judges - Dr. John Chris, Dante Skourellos, Stavroula Crafa, Dr. Bill Manikas, Lisa Prodomitis, and Irene Hoffman. Brett Mourer served as our supervising head judge and Vickie Peckham was the timekeeper.

Congratulations to all of our Oratorical Participants!

Some of the speeches will appear in this issue of *The Messenger* and the rest will appear in the June/July issue.

Junior Division

Discuss how icons play a helpful role in the prayer life of an Orthodox Christian. By Dominic Garcia

Icons are things that some of us may take for granted. They are seen but never really understood. I am here today to tell you what they are used for and how they are helpful in the prayer life of an Orthodox Christian. We may not realise it but they do play very important roles in our church. For example, during a service, do you sometimes just look around at the walls that are covered in icons and paintings? They show some of the most important events in the life of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Not only does it show that but it also reminds us of the many saints and great people in the Bible. Overall, icons are pretty important.

Ever since I was a toddler, I always had an icon in the room where I slept. My mother would always tell me that Saint Michael would protect me if I was scared and she would protect me if I was scared and she would show me an icon of him. I still use the icon of him every day. I have the icon in my room. I also have used the icon of St. Michael to guide me through big tests. In 2015, I applied for Jesuit High School. I studied since June and I worked really hard to get in. When testing day came around, my mother told me to carry the small icon of St. Michael in my pocket. After the test, I felt confident because I knew I had studied and God was going to get me through this. When February rolled around this year, I received the letter and I was accepted. No summer school or anything. Icons are not used for things to go your way but they are there to guide you on the correct path.

“Be imitators of me as I am of Christ.” 1 Corinthians 11:1. In this verse, it explains how the saints on icons are imitators of Christ. God is in every icon because the saints are reminding you that God has a deep love for all of his children and the saints in this icon taught about his love back when many didn’t believe. Having knowledge of this helps Orthodox Christians truly understand the importance of icons. These sacred pictures of beloved saints are an inspiration to me and to many others who constantly look at icons for help. Back then, many people were uneducated. Icons were used to teach people about Christ back when they could not read, write, speak, etc. This would

help them truly understand about Christ. This helps us overall get a sense of knowing that God loves us and this gives us hope and confidence in our lives.

The fact that we are even able to venerate icons, was decreed in 843 AD after nearly a century of controversy regarding the place of icons in the Orthodox Christian Church. This is evidenced on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, which is always celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent. On this day, also referred to as the Triumph of Orthodoxy, we commemorate the return of icons to the Orthodox Church and into our spiritual lives. From the prayers of the Sunday of Orthodoxy, our priest proclaims, “Christ our true God, and honor his saints in words, writings, thoughts, sacrifices, Churches, and Holy Icons; on the one hand, worshipping and reverencing Christ as God and Lord, and on the other, honoring the saints as true servants of the same Lord of all, offering the proper veneration.”

Dominic Garcia is the son of Stamie and Rick Garcia and is in the 8th Grade.

Senior Division

In light of Genesis 1:24-27, the sixth day of creation, discuss how all living beings are connected and its impact on our responsibility for the planet. By Larissa Krinos

On an average drive to any given place in a city, how many trees do you see? It is clear that the buildings and structures put in place by humans are priority. We live in a world where the interdependence between various living beings is challenged, and where humans are constantly vying to be on top- evident in the deforestation so prominent in urban society. “Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of heaven, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that moves on the earth.” (Genesis 1: 26) We read quotes like that of Genesis and we can assume that we are the almighty, that we can do whatever we want with what God has granted us. However, “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” (Psalm 24) Humanity may have dominion on earth, but we are all ultimately under God’s dominion. We, as a society, struggle to comprehend the magnitude of Biblical references such as these,

we struggle to acknowledge our temporary residence on God's creation, we struggle to coexist.

"Possessing the earth in such a selfish way deprives it of its life-giving properties and poses a great threat to the rest of creation." Quoted from the address of the Ecumenical Patriarch on Earth Day 2015, he acknowledged the threat of continuous expansion, and its effect on the overall relationship between pollution and religion. Dubbed the Green Patriarch, Patriarch Bartholomew has made tremendous strides in ameliorating the link between the church and the earth. Regardless of the need to improve your own personal connection to God, the Ecumenical Patriarch believes that religion and the environment share an unbreakable bond. Justified by excerpts such as Leviticus 25:23 "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine; for in my sight you are resident aliens and sojourners." We are all just temporary inhabitants of the land of God, and in order to receive eternal life we need to be conscious of this tentative relationship, and work towards utilizing its resources selflessly. It may be difficult to maintain a dedicated relationship with God, but we cannot forget our role as guardians to his physical creations.

"But now ask the four-footed animals if they may speak to you, And the birds of the air if they may report it to you. Tell the earth if it may interpret it to you. And the fish of the sea will explain it to you." (Job 12: 7-9) God has provided us with what we need to survive, a habitat and sustenance, but we need to do more than survive, we need to understand what has been given to us. How can we understand something we destroy? The natural environment shrinks every day, replaced by skyscrapers and subdivisions, we have to remember the interdependence which God emphasized in his creation. Humans are created in God's likeness, but we are not Gods.

Like all of humanity, I struggle to create a strong link with the environment. I've done cleanups, I've signed petitions, and I'm even a vegetarian, but it will never really ever feel like enough to me. With so much technology and urbanization, how can one just simply enjoy the nature around them? We try to take time to bond with God, we pray and we go to church, we should have a similar appreciation for what he has created. There are so many things about the earth which we never notice, things that would be so obvious if we slowed down, if we could try to treat the preservation of nature as reverently as we try to treat our dedication to religion. The first step doesn't have to be a revolution, it just has to be that little bit of extra effort from every individual. We can have dominion over the world's creations without annihilating what the earth has to offer us, God never intended for us to destroy, we were given the job of preservation. Imagine the limitless potential of a world which we not only live in, but a world which we live with.

Larissa Krinos is the daughter of Demetri and Melissa Krinos and is in the 11th Grade.

Senior Division

Discuss how "the arts" (music, painting, sculpture, architecture, and others) can inspire a greater connection between God and an individual or community. By George Hambos

Music. Painting. Sculpting. Architecture. All of these fall into one unique category, "the arts". Isn't it amazing how these substantive qualities have the ability to both connect and disconnect people, places, and things with an intriguing force that is unlike any other? Whether you're observing the incredible statues and displays of art in a European city, or listening to the soft melodies while shopping at your local grocery store, "the arts." is all around us all the time! Many of these attributes have, and still are inspiring and creating certain aspects of the world we live in today.

The Orthodox Church in itself displays most forms of "the arts". As we listen to the serene sounds of the choir, and assertive tone of the chanter in the Divine Liturgy, we worship in solitude and humility, in the midst of heaven-like portrayals which are meant to represent our future life in the kingdom of God. One might ask why these holy reflections encompass our Orthodox lives and what effect they have on us as Orthodox Christians. The answer to this question can only be found in the soul of the perceiver, for there is no exact answer on why or how these elements alter our emotions in certain directions. Simply stated, they just "do." As I continue, look around and examine the pieces of art you might have never noticed before.

In 987, Russian ambassadors had recently visited the site of Aghia Sofia in Constantinople, and afterwards, wrote about their experience in a letter to Prince Vladimir of Kiev. Not only were they completely astonished by the works and movements of the service, but they were found speechless as to recall their experience. At one point, one of them quotes, "We did not know where we were, on heaven or on earth." Though we may never know what might have caused the outcome for their inexplicable reaction, we are certain that some form of "the arts" must have enveloped these emotions.

Even as a young child during the Divine Liturgy, observing the faces of angels and these "windows into heaven," was a great way to stay concentrated and in tune with the happenings of the service. Over the summer, I had the opportunity to really experience one of these "heaven on earth" feelings at a choir conference at St. Stefanos in St. Petersburg, as we sang the Liturgy of Peace by Christopher Kypros. Between the vast harmonies, and multiple crescendos, the service was breath-taking and life changing even at the age of sixteen. Take a look at David. This young and devout fearless leader, had an interesting take on how music may affect the way we worship and even live our lives with his soul-touching book of the Psalms in which he states in Psalms 101:1, "I will sing of you love and justice; to you Lord, I will sing praise."

Now, take any icon of Jesus for example, and hear how St. John of Damascus, the great defender of icons, speaks about the image and how it relates to those who gaze upon the Creator of all. "Now, however, when God is seen clothed in the flesh, and conversing with men, I make an image of the God

whom I see. I do not worship matter, I worship the God of matter, who became matter for my sake, and deigned to inhabit matter, who worked out my salvation through matter. I will not cease from honoring that matter which works my salvation."

Even the structure of our churches resemble so many things. In most instances, if one was to view an Orthodox Church from the air, they would notice, that it is shaped in the form of a cross, which is the most important symbol of Christianity. Where we worship as Orthodox Christians, inside the structure is called the "nave" which literally means a boat. The church is the boat which gives us safe passage through the storms of this life; only if we choose to keep on rowing.

In the Orthodox Church, "the arts" not only have the ability to connect us to one another, but as a part of creation itself, help us unite ourselves, those around us and all of the creation to God, which is salvation and the sole purpose of our time here on earth.

George Hambos is the son of George and Donna Hambos and is in the 11th Grade.

Senior Division

How does gathering as a community of Orthodox Christians to participate in the Divine Liturgy influence your daily life? By Savvas Ferekides

As a young boy my dream was to serve in the altar. No, I didn't want to be the super bowl winning quarterback or an international soccer player, I wanted to hold a cross, fan, or even candle in the Great Entrance procession. The Divine Liturgy was an opportunity to act out my faith in the most intimate way that I knew. Of course as a young 4th grader with a very shallow understanding of my faith, serving in the altar was the only part of the Divine Liturgy that I paid attention to. My spiritual life was selfish and I didn't realize how the Divine Liturgy was a service of community. Fast forward 6 years and now the Divine Liturgy is not only a way to act out my faith in the most personal way possible or to celebrate my faith with my community, but is also my solace, the only guaranteed moment of refuge in my daily life.

The apostle Paul in 1st Corinthians 12:7-8 states "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all." Paul here is describing the nature of the church and how we all have a role in the church ordained by the Spirit. The Divine Liturgy is an avenue for many Christians to be able to be active in the body of Christ and to act out their role in the church. Whether it is singing in the choir, serving in the altar, becoming a priest, or even just sitting in the pews and listening to the will of God so that His light will shine in all the things that they do, every person has a role in the church.

I have found my role as serving in the altar. Being an altar boy gives me the opportunity to witness the miracle of communion closer than many people ever get the chance to. Throughout the week I often have school, extra-curricular activities like soccer and music lessons, and in addition to that the homework that my teachers assigned. The week is hectic and often leaves me rushing from one activity to the next and worrying about school

and the next big test and a project due the following week. But when I serve in the altar and participate in the Divine Liturgy, I no longer have to worry about the hectic nature of daily life. I am able to listen to the beautiful voices of the parish choir, and the melodic chanting of the deacon. I can hold the cross and lead the Great Entrance and see many people young and old enjoying the wonderful service of the Divine Liturgy. And most of all I can watch as Holy Communion is prepared and can partake in the Sacrament of receiving the body and blood of Christ. All the while my worries about school and the soccer tournament the following week will all disappear and the only thing that I am able to worry about is Christ and my faith.

In Proverbs Chapter 3 verses 6 and 7, Solomon says "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." Every Sunday when I come to church to hear and partake in the Divine Liturgy, God straightens my path from all the hooks and turns it has suffered throughout the week. When I acknowledge that I should not go to the wild party on Saturday night and so that I can wake up and go to church the following morning instead, the Divine Liturgy proves that it not only is a vehicle for me to act out my faith but also a tool to prevent me from making the bad decisions that would make me a bad Christian. And when I worry that I have too much homework to do over the weekend, through the Divine Liturgy God ensures me that when I give my time to him to come and worship, that he will help me make sure that all of my homework gets done. When I acknowledge God, as Solomon says, God will make my path straight, not just in homework, but in my journey as a Christian. The Divine Liturgy week by week allows me to know that I am consistent and steadfast in my faith and that I am on the right and straight path towards righteousness.

In the Bible Matthew 6:9-13 is the only place where Jesus teaches Christians how to pray. This prayer that Jesus says is of course known as the Lord's Prayer and is said during every Divine Liturgy service. When looked at closely it lays the groundwork for the necessity of the Divine Liturgy as a tool of unity. It begins with the words "Our Father" and uses other words like "our daily bread" and "our trespasses". This use of the word "our" illustrates how Jesus wanted us to pray as a community instead of selfishly saying my father or my daily bread. Through the working parts of the priest, altar boys, choir members, and parishioners the Divine Liturgy is Christianity's unifying tool that brings together fellow Christians as Jesus Christ intended.

Savvas is the son of Christos and Debbie Ferekides and is in the 10th Grade.

~ June & July 2016 ~						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Fast Day			1	2 Young at Heart 11:30 a.m.	3**	4
5 Orthros 8:15 a.m. Liturgy 9:30 a.m. Get Acquainted Sunday GOYA 5:00 p.m.	6	7 Leave-Taking of Pascha Orthros 5:00 p.m. Liturgy 6:00 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	8** MBS 7:30 a.m.	9 Ascension Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. AHEPA Convention	10** AHEPA Convention Fr. Stavros on Vacation 6/10-6/18	11 AHEPA Convention
12 Orthros 8:15 a.m. Liturgy 9:30 a.m. Fr. Stavros, Celebrant	13	14 Basketball 8:00 p.m.	15**	16	17** Junior Olympics	18 Community Outreach Junior Olympics Saturday of the Souls Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
19Pentecost Orthros 8:15 a.m. Liturgy 9:30 a.m. Kneeling Vespers 11:00 a.m. Junior Olympics	20 (no fasting this week)	21 Basketball 8:00 p.m.	22	23	24 Nativity of St. John the Baptist Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	25
26 All Saints Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Philoptochos' End of the Year Lunch	27** Holy Apostles Fast Begins	28** Basketball 8:00 p.m.	29** Sts. Peter & Paul Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	30 Fr. Stavros at St. Stephen's Summer camp 6/30-7/16	1**	2
3 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Fr. John Stefero, guest celebrant Get Acquainted Sunday	4 Office Closed	5 Basketball 8:00 p.m.	6**	7	8**	9
10 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Fr. Gregory Georgiou, guest Celebrant	11	12 Basketball 8:00 p.m.	13**	14	15**	16 Community Outreach
17 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Fr. Stavros, celebrant	18 Fr Stavros on vacation from 7/18-7/29	19 Basketball 8:00 p.m.	20**	21	22**	23
24 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Fr. Dean Gigicos, guest celebrant	25	26 Basketball 8:00 p.m.	27**	28	29**	30
31 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Fr. Stavros, celebrant						

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

2418 W. Swann Avenue

Tampa, FL 33609-4712

Office: (813) 876-8830 Fax: (813) 443-4899

officestjohnngoctampa@gmail.com

www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com

NONPROFIT ORG.

U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

TAMPA, FL

PERMIT NO. 461

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Timetable of Services

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

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

Parish Priest Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis

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

Pastoral Assistant Charlie Hambos

813-876-8830 (Office) 813-843-8471 (Cell)
Charlie.hambos@gmail.com

Parish Council

Alkis Crassas, President 813-690-3867
Mike Xenick, Vice President 813-340-8737
Sandra Pappas, Secretary 813-785-3747
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
Dante Skourellos 813-765-9534

Office Staff

Monica Gjerde, Office Manager 813-876-8830
officestjohnngoctampa@gmail.com
Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper
debstjohnnpa@gmail.com fax: 813-443-4899

Adult Greek School

Magda Myer 813-909-2327

AHEPA

Gus Paras, President 813-254-6980

Altar Angels

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

Basketball

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

Bible Study

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Bookstore

Bill Manikas 813-960-3679

Chanter

Nick Andreadakis 813-516-6081

Choir

Artie Palios, Director 813-831-1294
Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782

Community Outreach

Betty Katherine Katsamakias 813-468-1596

Dance Group

H XAPA MAE, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668
Bessie Palios, 813-523-0347
Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963
Kefi, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136
Anna Maria Bavaro 732-239-9085
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

Elaine 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

OCF

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Oratorical Festival

Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

Philoptochos

Lisa Alsina 813-728-1094

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

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

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.