

THE MESSENGER

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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

August 2018

VISION:

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

MISSION:

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

CORE VALUES:

Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

Father Stavros' Message Encouragement Matters!

So much has happened since I last wrote a message for *The Messenger*. When I wrote for the June/July *Messenger*, it was back around May 10. That was before a Greek Orthodox student in Texas opened fire on his school, killing ten people. It was before three kids decided to race down Bayshore Boulevard and kill an innocent mother and her child.

As I write the August message, in the middle of July, school seems like a far off reality, but by the time you get this issue, school will be only days away from starting, and it seems like we will start the vigil of waiting for when the next act of school violence will take place.

Lots of us wonder what we can do, if anything, to help stop this epidemic of violence in our schools and in other places. I have given this some critical thought. And while I don't think I have the only answer, there is one word that I keep coming back to as I think on this subject, and that word is "encouragement." I will approach this topic in a couple of ways so please be patient as you read and as I open up this subject.

I recently completed two weeks of summer camp. At camp, emotions run high. Kids have energy and enthusiasm—they need some place to put that. So we have lots of high energy activities that let them get their energy out.

If we take high energy kids and put them directly into a classroom to learn, we are going to fail. We can't meet a high energy need with a low energy solution. We do lots of high energy activities and then as the energy is dissipated, we are able to sit down for low energy discussions. We balance spirituality and fun, high energy and low energy. And it works.

There is also a lot of emotion in people at camp. As we (kids and adults) are there longer, and we don't sleep much at camp because we are so happy to be there, walls come down and emotions rise to the surface. Many people feel a well of tears come to the surface. I have felt that personally. So where can they take these emotions? First, we have caring people there who are willing to listen, hug, whatever is needed. Second, we have an environment that makes it safe to share our emotions. And third, we have the sacrament of confession where people can place these emotions at the feet of the Lord. Lots of campers cried while at camp. That is a good thing. Some of those were tears of joy, others tears of fear, tears of sadness, tears of loneliness.

Camp shows me over and over again, that there is a need for emotional release and it is provided there. A couple of times at camp, I really needed a good cry. I could feel my mind filling with emotion. Emotion clouds reason, and sometimes makes us make bad decisions. Thankfully, I am aware of that and I was able to find a priest or a friend who patiently listened to my crying. I didn't need advice, just affirmation and encouragement. Imagine if we took this opportunity for emotional release away. Where would it come out? What would be the consequence of not having it?

The primary emotion in our society is anger, maybe even rage. I took a poll of our campers about whether the majority of voices in their lives are encouraging or discouraging. Most people over age 14 said that the majority of voices in their lives are discouraging, including their own parents, the voices of encouragement that should be automatic. Now it doesn't matter whether this is actually true or if this is their perception of the

truth. Either way, they feel discouraged. So, when anger and discouragement bottle up in someone, where do they release that? Well, some of them have guns and shoot people. I would venture to say that all the school shooters suffer from a lack of encouragement. Because people who are consistently built up, do not go and destructively tear things down. People who are being torn down are much more likely to be destructive. Again, this is my opinion. Others filled with discouragement go to other destructive means like alcohol, pornography, drugs, sex, and even more go to things like cheating, gossiping, and dishonesty.

I'm not going to place blame on anyone specifically. Not on parents, not on peers, not on teachers. Blame is not a good word anyway. Neither is guilt. However, there is something going on in our society that is not good. We are building a culture of assertiveness, rather than a culture of encouragement. People are "encouraged" to assert themselves and their thoughts, their issues and their agendas. When there are conflicts between different people and different agendas, we go to assertiveness, rather than collaboration, and we assert ourselves by putting down others. It seems that we can't do one without the other. As if to say "I'll assert my rights even if I have to destroy you in order to do it." So now, in this culture of asser-

tiveness, where is encouragement? It is not there. It is missing.

There are so many people I have met at camp, teens who are at the highest risk for emotional instability, based on their level of maturity and lack of life experience, who told me "my parents never say 'I love you' or 'I'm proud of you.'" There were teens who told me they can't remember the last time someone said either of those phrases to them. If people are feeling so torn down by lack of encouragement, and they have emotions like anger and have no place to put them, it is any wonder that people pick up guns and kill others. Look at these killers, after they have killed. They look almost relieved, the way people feel after they've had a good cry. They got their emotion out and then they are relieved. And then they realize that not only they've killed people but they've killed their own hopes and dreams, as they will go to jail for a long time. It's too late for them to learn how to live right. Most of our campers come from two parent homes, they are not in poverty, their parents are educated—these are the best of our kids. And if they have all of this bottled up emotion and frustration, what about the kids who don't have parents, who don't have food, who are stuck in poverty.

Moving from Deadly Habits to Caring Habits

I recently read a book entitled "Getting Together and Staying Together" by William Glasser and Carleen Glasser. While it speaks primarily about building a stronger marriage, its ideas can be superimposed on all relationships. In the book, the authors speak about the "Seven Deadly Habits of Marriage" (and other relationships). These include criticizing, blaming, complaining, nagging, threatening, punishing and bribing or rewarding in order to control. Think about these seven bad habits. How many do we do each week, or even each day?

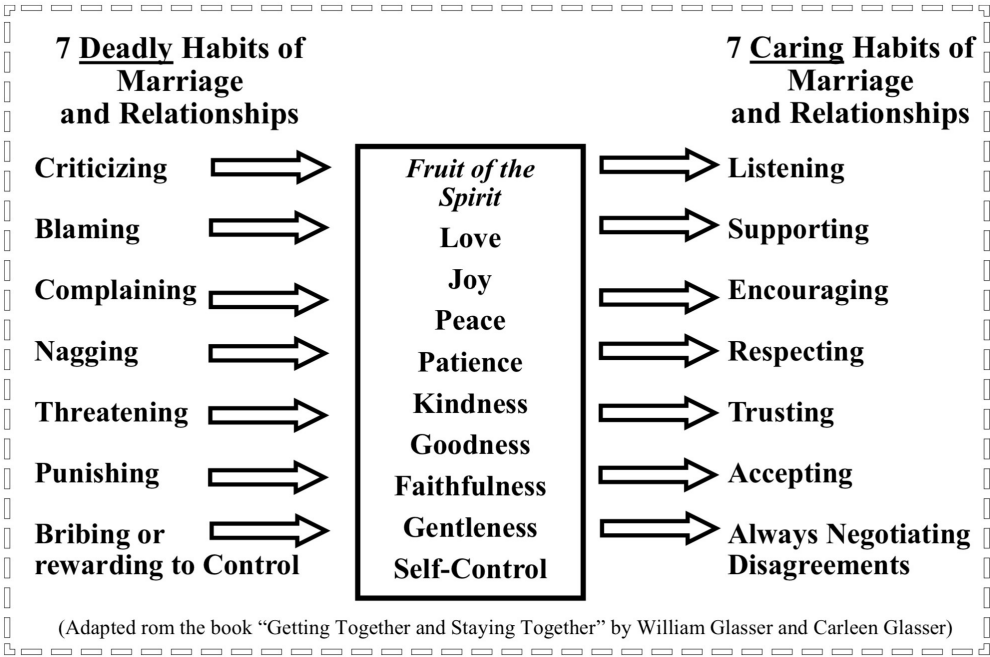
The authors also switch gears and talk about "Seven Caring Habits of Marriage" (and relationships). These include: Listening, supporting, encouraging, respecting, trusting, accepting, and always negotiating disagreements. Think about these good habits. How many do we do each week, or even each day? And do we have more caring habits or more deadly ones in our daily lives, in our marriage, in our friendships?

There are a few articles in this issue of *The Messenger* that address recent acts of violence from a Christian perspective. Many of these call for change. But the change has to be more than just praying about it (certainly prayer is important and people should be praying for all of these things). However, we have to do more than pray. We have to promote a changing of culture which number one encourages and builds people up, rather than tearing them down. And we have to invite everyone into this culture, including the loners, people with learning disabilities, people who are unpopular, people who don't have anyone to sit with at lunch, and people who need some encour-

agement, who need to be told that they matter, that they are special, that they are loved.

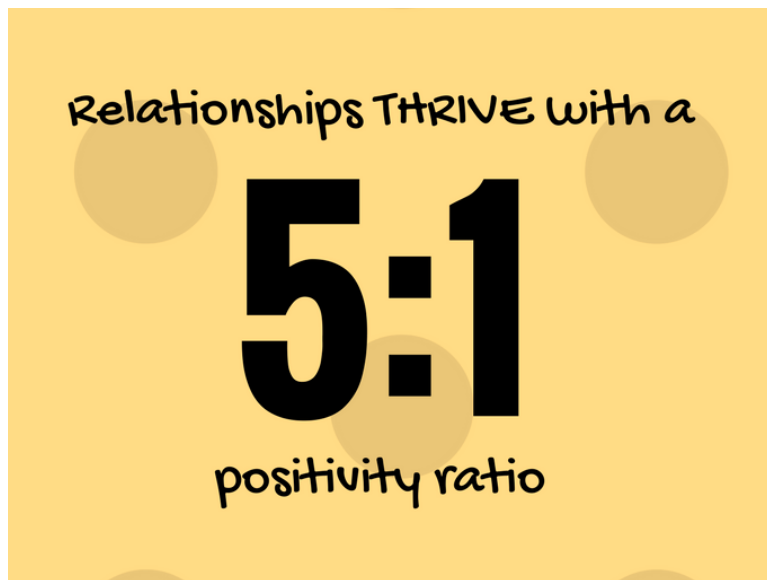
So, how to we create that culture. At camp this year, we studied the Fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We discussed each one in depth and gave examples from life of how to and how not to express each. We told the campers and staff, you don't even have to master all nine of them. If you can master even one, they are all interrelated. If you have one, you will have them all.

And then we set out to create an environment which encourages spiritual growth and encouragement of all. Our activities were fun, wholesome, Christ-centered. Some were educational. We worshipped twice a day. Some were experiential, like the ropes



course with its challenges as well as its life lessons. Camp is a safe place where people are constantly receiving infusions of encouragement. Many of the kids say that camp is their favorite week of the year. I think that is because they not only have fun, but feel safe and get built up and encouraged every day. This is certainly nothing what their life is like when they are not at camp.

The Fruit of the Spirit can successfully be utilized in order to move us from deadly habits to caring habits in our relationships. And I am convinced that if we all adopt more caring habits, we can stem the tide of anger, which breeds the violence that has become our new normal.



5:1

I can't remember where I read this, but I read recently that the optimal amount of encouragement to discouraging input someone should have is 5:1. For every discouraging thing they hear, they need to hear five encouraging things. If we are to help in making this ratio more favorable, that means that we need to be saying five encouraging things for every one discouraging comment that we make. 5:1 builds people up. If the ratio is 1:1, that tears people down. If it is 1:5, which I would venture to say is true for a lot of people, it not only tears them down but buries them. And if it is 0:infinity, this sets people off on missions of destruction, to let out the anger and frustration in whatever way is available to them, with often disastrous consequences.

Set a goal for yourself to be 5:1 in encouraging comments. Encouragement breeds encouragement. If you say to a discouraged person, "You matter," or "you are doing a great job," or "I really appreciate you," you are not going to get a negative response. You might get a confused response at first. But offer encouragement enough, and you will receive encouragement back.

There is a difference between discouragement and discipline. These can be easily confused. If I tell my son "you can't have dessert if you don't eat dinner," that is not discouraging, that is good discipline. Same thing with "you can't play until you finish your homework." That is good discipline. However, it's the way we say these things. Discipline has to be mixed with encouragement—"You did a great job on your homework, thanks for being so focused, let's play." That is encouraging.

Do we every have a negative response when someone tells us

"I love you" or "I'm proud of you"? No, we don't. We all like to hear these words. They build us up, make us feel more confident. If we would like to hear these words, we have to get in the habit of saying them as well.

Summer camp is very revealing, because with the walls coming down and people feeling safe, they start to open up about what is really important to them and what is really missing. Many talked about having doubts about God. And their honesty led to fruitful discussion. Do you have doubts about God? What are you doing about them? Are you talking about them? Or suffering alone with them? Many talked about problems in their homes, parents are too busy. Many talked about the stress of school, and genuine worry about if they will get in to college or just survive high school. Yes, there were some of the usual challenges—some drinking, some drugs, some dating concerns, pornography—all standard teenage stuff. And yet, this was an environment where they could share and get direction. Where do you go when you need direction? Do you have a friend you can talk about these things? Do you need to come and see a priest for confession or guidance? Will you let down your guard and take a chance?

I found myself over and over again thinking, "these are not bad kids, they just need some encouragement." So, I didn't tell the person looking at pornography or drinking "hey you are bad," or even "what you are doing is bad." Instead I would tell them "you can do better, because you are better, because God made you better." And, "Set the bar for your friends. Set it high and make them follow. Don't let others set the moral bar low and play down to it. You set the bar and set it high and make them follow. You are a leader. Lead. Encourage others to follow your lead." This takes a serious sin and puts an encouraging bent to it. So that people walk out of confession feeling like leaders and not like losers, encouraged to do better rather than guilty for failing.

What We Can Do

Having had some time away from Saint John, I realize that there are so many things I want to do here in order to serve you better, so that you are served better, so that you are encouraged. I would love to do a retreat on encouragement. We have a retreat on working with special needs kids in the works. I'd love to offer a seminar on encouragement as we get older, so that we are not afraid of death and can think positively about our heavenly reward. Someone asked me about doing a seminar on how to deal with an "active shooter" and other violence in the workplace and at church so that we can feel safe. These are all things I'd love to see offered at our church. There is so much work to do.

Many articles have criticized Christians (and rightly so) about "just praying" when things go wrong and not digging in and doing any work. Well, we need to pray for sure. That's why it is imperative that we come to church each Sunday, to receive the encouragement and nourishment we need through Holy Communion, to again hear words like "confidence, and without fear of condemnation," to again be gifted "peace," the peace of God which surpasses all understanding. Yes, worship is a form of encouragement. We should all come to confession once a year, to bring our sins and bear our souls, in order to get encouragement, to hear the words "have no further anxiety, depart in peace," that God still loves us. And after receiving God's grace, there is a lot of work for us to do. And that work starts with encouraging those around us, creating environments of

encouragement in the home and in the workplace. It continues by making our church an encouraging environment. I don't know about you but I get discouraged when we have endless meetings about by-laws and budgets, when it takes all year to meet a stewardship goal because we have to cajole people to give, and when people come perpetually late to church because they still don't understand what it means to worship. These are discouraging things. Let's turn the tide here at St. John. Let's not just be a community of friends but a church of encouragement, which looks for each and every opportunity to build someone up, whether it is one of us, or a visitor, or a stranger.

Summer camp further convinced me of what I already believe, that encouragement is the name of the game when it comes to how we are to live. In fact encouragement may be our parish word of the year for 2019.

For the remainder of this year, however, our word is **ENGAGED**. Engaged means involved, participating, going all in, being present, being active, producing and not just consuming. We have lots of people who like consuming what the church has to offer, its worship, its programs, its encouragement. However, to make this church what God wants it to be, we need everyone **ENGAGED** in **ENCOURAGING** others. And this begins with worship, includes being present, includes looking for opportunities to encourage others, being faithful stewards and getting our church set financially so that we don't have to waste time on that and can spend it encouraging and building one another up.

I'll close with the well-known story of the starfish on the beach. A boy was walking on a beach and saw hundreds of thousands of starfish on the beach, who were sure to die as they were out of the water. The boy went up and down the beach throwing starfish after starfish into the water. An old man asked the boy what he was doing. The boy said he was saving the starfish. The old man said "You can't save all these starfish. There are hundreds of thousands of them on this beach. What difference can you make?" The boy threw a starfish in the water and said to the old man, "Well, I made a difference for that one."

The difference for "that one" is often as easy as being encouraging. If each of us commits to 5:1 encouragement and seeks people out each day and encourages them, we aren't going to save the whole world, but we certainly can do our part in our corner of it. Meeting anger with anger is not going to eliminate violence. Meeting anger with punishment is not going to. Softening anger with encouragement can't hurt. And most likely, it's actually going to really help.

So be an encourager. Replace deadly habits with health ones—you'll get a better marriage, better kids and better friends if you



do. Choose one Fruit of the Spirit and develop that. Ask God to send one person into your life who needs encouragement each day. And when you find that person, or they find you, offer encouragement, build someone up. If we all do that, it's going to make a big difference for lots of "starfish."

Let's go to work—there is a lot that needs to be done.

Thank you for encouraging my ministry, as well as my involvement in summer camp. This year we had a record 33 campers and 9 adults representing our parish at summer camp. A few have written some testimonials about camp for your enjoyment. There are also several articles on the Orthodox response to violence. So, please take a few minutes and read some edifying material.

Encouragement matters!

Love,

+Fr. Stavros

Want to be more **ENGAGED** and **ENCOURAGED**? Join the Prayer Team!

Over 1280 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 3 years! Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email Charlie at charlie.hambos@gmail.com and ask him to add you. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email Charlie or follow the link at the bottom of the daily emails to do so. If you want to forward to a friend, please use the "forward to a friend" option. Also, make sure frstav@gmail.com has been added to your contacts so that these emails stay in your Inbox rather than going to the Junk or Spam folders.

Liturgical Schedule for August 2018

Friday, August 3 **Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary** **6:00 p.m.**

Sunday, August 5 **10th Sunday of Matthew**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone attending may serve

Ushers: Ron Myer, Jim Armstorng, John Alexander

Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Debbie Kavouklis, Donna Trakas;

Ambassador: Julie Palios; Caller: Maria Karounos; Getting acquainted: Michael & Bessie Palios

Coffee Hour: AHEPA

Bookstore: Thom and Angie Bougas

Monday, August 6 **Feast of the Transfiguration of our Savior**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Monday, August 6 **Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary** **6:00 p.m.**

Wednesday, August 8 **Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary** **6:00 p.m.**

Friday, August 10 **Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary** **6:00 p.m.**

Sunday, August 12 **11th Sunday of Matthew**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Matthew (New schedule goes into effect)

Ushers: Brett Mourer, Tom Georgas, Amin Hanhan

Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Edie Kavouklis, Maria Koutroumanis;

Ambassador: Julie Palios; Caller: Betty Katsamakis

Coffee Hour: Dance Groups

Bookstore: Pam Irwin

Monday, August 13 **Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary** **6:00 p.m.**

Wednesday, August 15 **Dormition of the Virgin Mary**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, August 19 **12th Sunday of St. Matthew**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Mark

Ushers: David Voykin, Ed Gerecke, Pete Trakas

Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Marenca Patrascoiu, Katherine Sakkis;

Ambassador: Despina Sibley; Caller: Kalliope Chagaris

Coffee Hour: Sunday School

Bookstore: Thom and Angie Bougas

Sunday, August 26 **13th Sunday of St. Matthew**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Luke

Ushers: John Christ, Byron Nenos, Chris Kavouklis

Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Carole Fotopoulos, Genie Carter;

Ambassador: Lisa Alsina; Caller: Helen Cauthorn

Coffee Hour: Philoptochos' Fanouropita Sunday

Bookstore: Brett and Ana Mourer

Wednesday, August 29 Beheading of St. John the Baptist
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Friday, August 31 Evening Liturgy for the Beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year
Orthros 5:00 p.m. Divine Liturgy 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, September 2 14th Sunday of St. Matthew
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

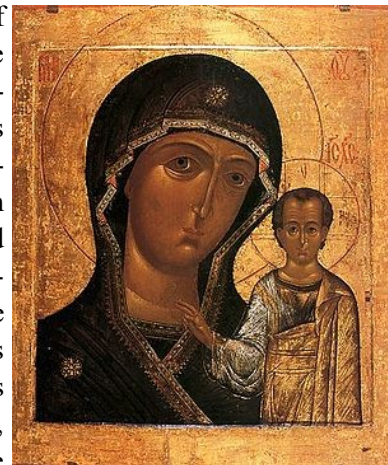
Altar Boys: Captains and St. John
Ushers: Brett Mourer, Tom Georgas, Amin Hanhan
Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: TBD
Ambassador: TBD; Caller: TBD
Coffee Hour: TBD
Bookstore: Brett and Ana Mourer

Friday, September 7 Evening Liturgy for the Nativity of the Virgin Mary
Orthros 5:00 p.m. Divine Liturgy 6:00 p.m.

Liturgical Notes for August 2018

Paraklesis Services of Supplication to the Virgin Mary

The service of Paraklesis or “Intercessory Prayer” to the Most Holy Theotokos, the Mother of God, is chanted during the fasting period of the first fourteen days of August, preceding the Feast of the Koimisis or “Falling Asleep” of the Virgin Mary, which is August 15. In this service we ask the Theotokos to pray for us and to intercede for us with her Son and our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not the Theotokos who saves us. God saves us. Thus we do not pray to the Theotokos, but we pray through the Theotokos, that through her intercession, we may find favor with God. The Paraklesis service is chanted not only for fourteen days in August, but can be chanted in at any time of the year, for those who are in need of prayer in time of sickness, despair, struggle, or any occasion, since any of life’s experiences provide us an opportunity for prayer. The Paraklesis Service consists of soft, melodic chants of supplication to the Virgin Mary, and lasts about an hour. It is also one of few services in the church where we commemorate individuals out loud during the service. You will find a place to write the names of you and your families, loved ones and friends (who are living) to be commemorated at the Paraklesis Services in the August Messenger. The Feast of the Dormition will be celebrated on Wednesday, August 15. We should all attempt to keep the fast, at least from meat, during the first fourteen days of August, and we should each plan to receive Holy Communion on August 5, 12 or 15. These services will be held on August 3, 6, 8, 10 and 13.



Names to be Commemorated for Paraklesis

Please write the names of all those whom you wish to be commemorated in the Paraklesis Services this August on Friday, August 3; Monday, August 6; Wednesday, August 8, Friday, August 10 and Monday, August 13.
Please mail into the office or bring to church as soon as possible.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
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Concerning the Dormition of the Theotokos When the time drew nigh that our Savior was well-pleased to take His Mother to Himself, He declared unto her through an Angel that three days hence, He would translate her from this temporal life to eternity and bliss. On hearing this, she went up with haste to the Mount of Olives, where she prayed continuously. Giving thanks to God, she returned to her house and prepared whatever was necessary for her burial. While these things were taking place, clouds caught up the Apostles from the ends of the earth, where each one happened to be preaching, and brought them at once to the house of the Mother of God, who informed them of the cause of their sudden gathering. As a mother, she consoled them in their affliction as was meet, and then raised her hands to Heaven and prayed for the peace of the world. She blessed the Apostles, and, reclining upon her bed with seemliness, gave up her all-holy spirit into the hands of her Son and God. With reverence and many lights, and chanting burial hymns, the Apostles took up that God-receiving body and brought it to the sepulchre, while the Angels from Heaven chanted with them, and sent forth her who is higher than the Cherubim. But one Jew, moved by malice, audaciously stretched forth his hand upon the bed and immediately received from divine judgment the wages of his audacity. Those daring hands were severed by an invisible blow. But when he repented and asked forgiveness, his hands were restored. When they had reached the place called Gethsemane, they buried there with honor the all-immaculate body of the Theotokos, which was the source of Life. But on the third day after the burial, when they were eating together, and raised up the artos (bread) in Jesus' Name, as was their custom, the Theotokos appeared in the air, saying "Rejoice" to them. From this they learned concerning the bodily translation of the Theotokos into the Heavens. (From synaxarion of the Archdiocese)



Monday, August 6 - Transfiguration of our Savior We read in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke, how Jesus was Transfigured on Mount Tabor in the presence of His Disciples. Matthew 17:2 says, "His face shone like the sun and His clothes became as white as the light." Jesus was shown in the fullness of His glory as God, and standing beside Him were Moses and Elijah, the two greatest prophets of the Old Testament. This showed the Disciples that the man Jesus was indeed God as well, and pre-figured His glory at the Resurrection and Ascension. Right after the Transfiguration, Jesus began to tell His disciples about His upcoming Passion and Resurrection. The event of the Transfiguration probably happened only a few weeks before Palm Sunday. But since this feastday is so important, so it would not be lost in

Lent, the Church has placed it on August 6, 40 days before the Feast of the Holy Cross (September 14), since the feast is tied to the Passion and Cross of Christ. Also, on August 6, we bless grapes, because it is the season of the harvest, in both material terms—this is the time of the year we harvest grapes. But also in spiritual terms—this was the time Jesus, through His blood, was going to harvest His followers into His kingdom.

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

Friday, August 31 - New Ecclesiastical Year/Day of the Environment - Evening Liturgy His All Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, declared many years ago that September 1, the day on which we begin the New Ecclesiastical (Church) Year, also be set aside to pray for our environment. Not only do we thank God for His blessings of the past church year, and ask for Him to bless us in the new year, but we also offer prayers for our environment, which are needed more and more in the world where our environment is threatened as time passes. We will offer this Divine Liturgy on the evening of Friday, August 31, with Orthros at 5:00 p.m. and Divine Liturgy at 6:00 p.m.

St. John the Baptist Community News

Registry

Baptism - Daniella Marie Ross, daughter of Daniel and Nicole Ross, was baptized on Saturday, May 26. Maria Karounos was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism - Adelyn Evangelia Sapountsis, daughter of Panagiotis and Jennifer Sapountsis, was baptized on Sunday, June 10. Theophany Cruz and James Pullora were the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism - Leah (Christina) Celin, daughter of Edjir and Nadin Celin, was baptized on Sunday, June 10. Niveen Raheb Gomez was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Funeral - Ellen Karaku passed away Wednesday, May 30. Her funeral was held on Friday, June 1. May her memory be eternal!

Funeral - Dorothy Bush passed away on Thursday, June 14. Her funeral was held on Thursday, June 21. May her memory be eternal!

Condolences to Irene Kavouklis and family, on the passing away of her sister, Elizabeth Anagnostopoulos, in Asheville, NC. May her memory be eternal!

Condolences to Jenny Paloumpis, on the passing away of her mother, Diana Abene. May her memory be eternal!

Get Acquainted Sunday, August 5



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.

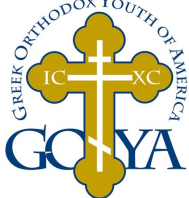


Prayer for School Students - Sunday, August 5 All school students and teachers are invited to participate in a special prayer that will be held at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on August 5, prior to the beginning of the public school year. Fr. Stavros will offer a special prayer for all of our students and teachers as they begin the new school year.



Calendar Meeting - Sunday, August 12 We will have a meeting immediately following the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, August 12 in the Zaharias Room to set up the parish calendar for the upcoming calendar year. All ministry heads will receive a draft of the calendar by email around August 1 to use as a starting point for important dates of the new school year. Please bring your ideas, your schedules and your plans to this meeting.

Prayer for College Students - Sunday, August 12 All college students and professors are invited to celebrate the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, August 13 with us. At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, Fr. Stavros will offer a prayer for all college students as they begin a new school year.



GOYA Meeting - Sunday, August 12

Our first GOYA meeting of the new school year will be held on Sunday, August 12 from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner will be provided. One parent of each GOYAn is asked to attend the meeting. Also, there will be a parents' meeting, while the GOYAns meet with Fr. Stavros, to go over procedures for the year, review the yearly calendar, fill out emergency forms and arrange for parents to sign up to do a meal for one of the meetings.

GOYA Lock-in - Saturday, August 25 Our GOYA will have an end of summer lock-in on Saturday, August 25, beginning at 5:00 p.m. and ending after Divine Liturgy on Sunday, August 26.

Community Outreach - Saturday, August 18

St. John the Baptist's Community Outreach will be serving breakfast to the Homeless at the First Presbyterian Church in Downtown Tampa from 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. 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!**



Young Adult Ministry - Sunday, August 26

The YAL fellowship dinner will be on Sunday, August 26, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Please RSVP to Charlie if you are going to attend. Dates may change. Charlie will send an email.



Festival Kick-Off

Meeting

Monday, August 27

in the Kourmolis Center

Altar Boys Meeting & Training - Sunday, August 26

Any young man entering 4th grade this fall or older is eligible to serve in the altar at St. John the Baptist. If your son is not on a team and wishes to serve, please contact Fr. Stavros. This coming year, there will be four teams. The new schedule will take effect on August 12. There will be a meeting for all altar boys on Sunday, August 26, following the Divine Liturgy. All altar boys are requested to attend to go over procedures for how to serve in the altar. ONE PARENT of each boy is also requested to attend. This meeting will last approximately one hour.



Congratulations to Anna Thomas for Winning the National St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival. Anna was the winner for our entire country! This is an historical first for our parish. The competition was held in Chicago on June 8-10. Congratulations Anna! We are so proud of you!



A big thank you to KARA KATZARAS, who is stepping down from being a GOYA Advisor after two great years of service. Thank you KARA!

How are we doing?

Are we getting information to everyone in a timely manner? Can we do better? More emails? Less emails? More on Facebook? Do we need an Instagram? The office wants to know what you think.

Please send an email to Charlie at Charlie.hambos@gmail.com

Extra Services for Sundays must be Scheduled through the Office

Extra services include Memorial Services, Artoklasies, Forty-Day blessing of babies and blessing of Fanouropita breads. Please do not just bring these things or arrive at church on Sundays or feast-days expecting these services to be done with no notice. Please schedule through the office. Thank you for your cooperation. We are more than willing to do these services. We try to plan each service accordingly so that there is a sense of order to our Liturgical and Sacramental Life.

Featured Book of the St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church Bookstore



“Blessed John the Wonderworker”—The Glory of the First Apostles as Seen in Modern Times. Saint John Maximovich of Shanghai and San Francisco (1896-1966) is beloved by Orthodox Christians all over the world to be the holiest man of the twentieth century. Manifesting many contrasting forms of sanctity, he was at once a God-inspired theologian and a “Fool-for-Christ,” a zealous missionary hierarch and a feeder of the poor, a severe ascetic and loving father to orphans. Like Moses, he delivered his flock from oppression, bringing it from communist China to the free world; like the first apostles, he was given power from God to heal wounded souls and ailing bodies. A man of intense and ceaseless prayer, he was a genuine Holy Elder in the tradition of the great Russian staritz. Piercing the veil of time and space, he would mystically hear and answer people’s thoughts before they would express them. Now in heaven, he continues to visit and pray for those who call upon him as is attested by miracles and healings which are now being chronicled around the world.

“Blessed John the Wonderworker” includes numerous source materials on Saint John’s life, a pictorial biography and one hundred personal testimonies of his sanctity. Through a detailed look at the experience of one man, this book provides a key for those seeking a life of true holiness in our times. This book helped prepare the way for his canonization in 1994.

This book is available in the bookstore. We would love to hear from you, particularly what you think of the book after reading it.

P.S. If there is any Orthodox Christian religious item that you would like the bookstore to order, please contact us.

We are often able to get a discount as a bookstore.

Brett and Ana Mourer

Our Food Pantry is very active helping people near and far in the Tampa Community.

Here are some special requests we have:

- Pasta
- Spaghetti Sauce
- Tomato sauce/chopped tomatoes etc.
- All kinds of white flour
- Canned Tuna
- Canned Chicken
- Canned fruits and vegetables
- Body Wash
- Gluten Free Foods and Flours
- Cereal
- Whole wheat rice and pasta
- Men's and Women's razors and shaving cream (travel size)
- Toothbrushes
- Gift cards in any amount for Publix, Walmart or Save-a-lot



All food items offered are accepted. Thank you for supporting those who need it the most. For more info and questions about our Food Pantry please contact Anetta Alexander at 813-758-2689 or exchange2861@yahoo.com.

Youth Protection Update & Round Up on August 26

Hello St. John Community. I hope you had a wonderful summer. Our Ecclesiastical year is about to start and I wanted to bring you up to date.

1. Our next Youth Protection “Round Up” will be August 26, 2018, 12:30 pm. This is for renewing youth protection workers who were contacted by me this spring and could not make the earlier sign up. I will recontact you this month as well. If you are new to a volunteer-with-children position, please contact me and plan to attend this one-hour meeting.
2. **This summer, the Greek Orthodox Church of America has made Youth Protection compliance MANDATORY for all parishes throughout the United States.** We are lucky to currently have a program in place. However, the GOA has mandated changes that affect everyone who volunteers with children and all parents whose children are involved in our activities.
3. These changes go into effect in 2019; registration periods are set by the Metropolis, and we must report all registrants at the close of each registration period. If an adult who is interested in working with children does not comply within the time periods required, they will not be able to retain their position.
4. Finally, the Youth Protection Ministry currently needs assistance. If you have a military or law enforcement background, I would really appreciate your involvement. However, I am open to all willing and helping hands. These changes coming up make it challenging for one person to handle. You will need to provide proof of a background check or undergo one to participate in this ministry.

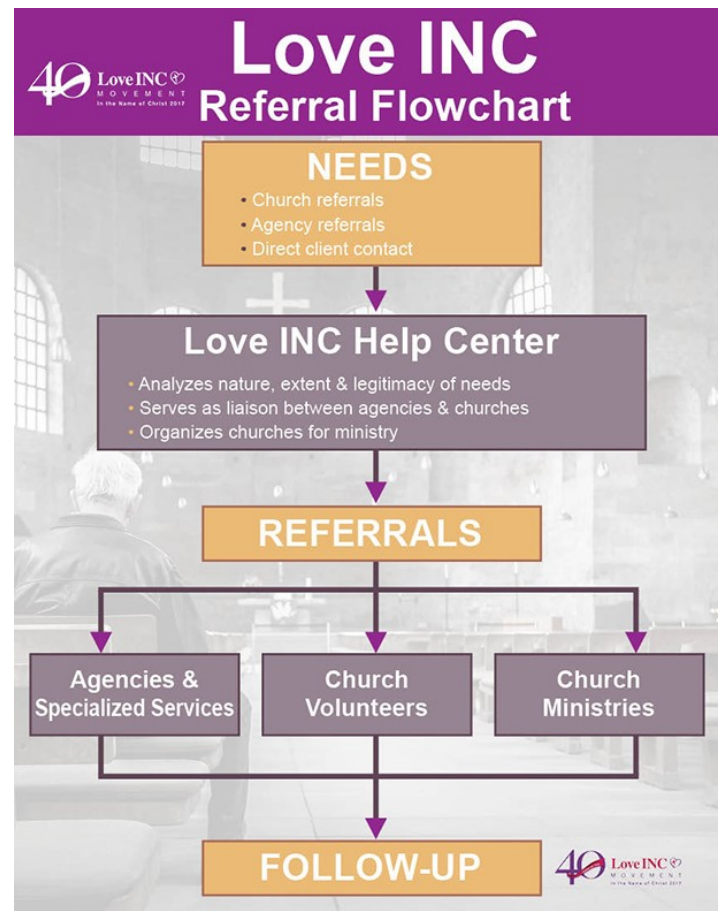


Thank you, Catherine S. Mitseas
813-571-0658/cmitseas@icloud.com

St. John's to Partner with Love INC (in the Name of Christ)

Love INC (in the Name of Christ) networks local churches, church volunteers, and community organizations together to help people in need. Through Love INC, churches and individual Christians are mobilized to work together, across denominational lines, to provide coordinated help to struggling neighbors with basic needs such as food and clothing, to longer-term responses such as life skills training and transitional housing programs. For more information contact lhale@loveinctampa.org or www.loveinctampa.org. Plan to attend an upcoming free Lunch n Learn on 8/15 or 9/19 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. at The Portico 1001 N. Florida Ave Tampa, 33602. Charlie Hambos is our church contact. For more information, please contact Charlie or contact Love INC directly. We look forward to being a strong partner both on an individual and community level.

Join us for a Lunch n Learn on
August 15 or September 19 from
11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. @ The
Portico, 1001 N. Florida Avenue,
Tampa, 33602.



August 2018 Stewardship Message

*“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”
Hebrews 13:16*

We are very blessed at St. John the Baptist with loyal stewards, active ministries and a full church on Sundays. Can we do better? Yes! Can we give more? Yes! Are we doing many things well? Yes! Can we continue to grow in the understanding of our Orthodox Faith and love of our Savior Jesus Christ? Always! That journey is gratefully lifelong. The work of the church is never done and this work needs (not takes) the collective efforts of our entire church community. In all areas...Time, Talent and Treasure!

Last month we had the honor of representing our church at the 44th Biennial Clergy Laity conference in Boston, MA. The theme of the Congress was ‘All Things are Possible to the One Who Believes in Christ’. There was a little trepidation attending this conference knowing the Archdiocese finances would be a hot topic (more on that in future communications & the Fall General Assembly) but there is also great value being with 1,400+ other Orthodox Christians to pray, hear and talk with Clergy and Laity from other churches. Discussions that help reinforce the challenges we face are shared by many. And great pride knowing we are thriving and ahead of the curve in so many areas like our GOYA and Youth Protection but also concern with reliance on our Greek Festival & other fund raisers (along with many other churches) to meet our annual budget. There were many discussions about giving (our biblical calling to tithe 10%) and how our churches could look different in that scenario.

From a Stewardship perspective, one key takeaway voiced over and over was appreciation for the parishioners of our Orthodox Churches across America, their financial support, volunteer efforts and engagement to grow and learn in our Orthodox Faith. And a clear understanding without those components the growth of our churches would not be sustainable. We need YOU every one of YOU ...to give, volunteer and most importantly worship! And we are deeply grateful for the gifts you have provided.

Next month we begin a new ecclesiastical Church Year, what a blessing! Ministry activities will pick up and planning will begin for our Annual Greek Festival. God willing, we will continue to grow and deepen in our faith with Fr. Stavros as our spiritual leader. We have challenges but also have faith our community will come together to continue support and the growth of St. John the Baptist and chart a course for generations to come. We see all the children in our church and know the importance of not only maintaining but growing our sacred place of worship.

Much of this begins with thinking differently about Stewardship. As Fr. Stavros wrote about in early July with a multipart series for the Prayer Team. ‘Giving to God what Belongs to God’ and looking at S+ewardship versus \$tewardship. Now posted on our website under Stewardship. Fr. Stavros states “S+ewardship” is actually a holy thing, perhaps the most holy thing we will ever do in our lives, because Stewardship IS our life itself.” To be honest.... Yes, we will still talk about money but that component, although necessary as a foundation, becomes secondary with a true understanding of S+ewardship.

**S+tewardship vs.
\$tewardship**

In 1 Corinthians Chapter 12 - St. Paul writes about the diversity of our spiritual gifts and the diversities of ministries and activities with a reminder we are all one body with many members but part of the same God. The purpose of spiritual gifts is the growth of the whole church! *‘For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.’ 1 Corinthians 12:12*

As a Parish Council, our word of the year is FOCUS – May this be encouragement, as we begin a new church year, to prayerfully consider your spiritual gifts and deepen our FOCUS on the S+ewardship journey and relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Sandra Pappas, Parish Council/Stewardship Co-Chair

August 2018 Stewardship Update

Year to Year Comparison ~	2018*	2017*
Pledged Year to Date	\$427,117	\$397,086
Received Year to Date	\$271,565	\$254,130
Average Pledge	\$1,467	\$1,350
Median Pledge	\$900	\$725
# of Individual/Families Pledged/Giving	322	332
*YTD as of 7/10/18 & 6/27/17		

~ Stewardship Housekeeping & Good to Know ~

- Mid-year Stewardship Summaries were mailed at the end of July providing a recap of your individual/family pledge and dollars received year to date. Please take time to review for your records and contact the church office or a Stewardship Committee member with any questions.
- We remain with over 61 Families that pledged last year but not this year and encourage you to complete a pledge form TODAY!. The work of Christ truly depends on all of us and your pledge is a sign of a growing commitment to Christ.
- A list of Stewards was printed in the April Messenger. We will print a list again in October and as a reminder you must submit a pledge form and be current in payment, according to our bylaws, to be a 'Member in Good Standing' and participate and/or vote at Parish Assembly meetings or run for Parish Council in the fall
- 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 or Pete Trakas at ptrakas@gmail.com
- Our Online Pledge Forms are easy to complete. Hard Copy forms are also available in the Church Narthex or Bookstore. Stewardship Donations and General Donations may also be made online via PayPal as a one time or recurring commitment or setup with auto deductions from your bank account.

Visit <http://greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com/2018-stewardship/> to complete your Stewardship Pledge Form and make your gift today. For any questions, please speak directly with Fr. Stavros, Sandra Pappas or Pete Trakas-Stewardship Co-Chairs. We are here for YOU!

~Save the Date~



The Annual St. John the Baptist Greek Festival is Coming Soon!

November 9, 10 & 11, 2018

Things We Know

- It takes the effort of our entire Church Community to host a successful festival and highlight our Greek Culture/Heritage but more importantly OUR Orthodox Christian Faith!
- Our festival is a lot of fun but only happens as a result of many volunteers dedicating their time and talent!
- Planning meetings will be announced soon with Volunteer Sign-ups coming in September.
- Many opportunities will be available for participation; from planning, advertising, baking, decorating, dancing, raffle sales, donations needed for silent auction to the hundreds of opportunities over the festival weekend!
- This is our opportunity to showcase our faith, culture and beautiful place of worship at St. John the Baptist.
- **Our Kick-Off MEETING is on Monday, August 27 in the Kourmolis Center.**
- **See next page for exciting details about this year's raffle!**

Your Ideas Are Welcome!

Raffles Sales HAVE STARTED!!!!

Save the Date – Our Annual Tampa Greek Festival is set for November 9 -11, 2018



RAFFLE TICKET
Support the church! Win a BMW!

TAMPA GREEK FESTIVAL

BMW
3 Series BMW

Enter for a chance to win a new **BMW** or \$20,000 cash or other prizes!
See back for details.

Tampa Greek Festival Raffle Ticket
Suggested Donation \$100

Sponsored in part by
MORGAN
AUTO GROUP

Planning is underway for our 2018 Tampa Greek Festival and we are excited to get a jump start with Raffle sales beginning THIS MONTH! Tickets will be available online through the Tampa Greek Festival Website and the Church office. Remember, we limit sales to the first 1,000 tickets and really count on our parishioners promoting the Raffle to friends and family.

In fact, if each family sold one ticket and bought one ticket between now and the festival – we would match our post 2017 festival sales – before the festival even starts!

Imagine the relief, if we could start the weekend with a solid start of pre-sales for the Raffle and not be so reliant on good weather or attendance to make the necessary profit our church currently needs. Our Festival is an opportunity to showcase not only our Greek culture but more importantly our Orthodox Faith! It requires a great deal of planning and effort BEFORE the weekend even kicks off.

The raffle is one of the easiest, most profitable methods to make this happen. With your support early in the season, we can make it the best sales year in history!

Lastly, look for our Kick-Off Meeting is scheduled for August 27, 2018 – Where we will discuss our upcoming festival, ideas to make it an even greater success and share ideas for the future to move away from financial reliance on our annual festival!

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS - August 2018

The Sunday School Staff is looking forward to serving the children of St. John's for the 2018-2019 school year. Our first day of Sunday School is August 12. Please make sure to register your children on July 29, August 5 or on August 12, which is the first day of school. We need this information for our records and for communication.

We are thrilled to welcome most of our Sunday School teachers back. We would like welcome two new teachers to our 1st Grade. They are Jenivieve Elly and Maraquet Edquid. The only other change is Mary Ann Konstas is moving from the Toddler Program to teach our high school students. Anastasia Stonestreet will coordinate our Toddler 2's Co-op Program.

WE ARE PROUD TO ANNOUNCE OUR OUTSTANDING STAFF FOR THE 2018-2019 SCHOOL YEAR.

Director of Sunday School: Vickie Peckham

Music/Special Programs: Maria Xenick

Music Assistant: Pam Irwin

Toddler 2's Program: Anastasia Stonestreet - Coordinator

Pre-K (3 and 4 year olds): Alexis Scarfogliero -Teacher and Denise Panos - Assistant

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

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

Grade 2: Oliviana Catrone - Teacher and Georgia Kane - Assistant

Grade 3: Amy Kafantaris

Grade 4: Debbie Ferekides

Grade 5: Vickie Peckham - Teacher and Ana Mourer - Assistant

Grade 6: Stephanie Moran

Grade 7 and 8: Marina Choundas

High School: Mary Ann Konstas and Isidoros Passalaris - Co-Teachers

The teachers will meet with Father Stavros and Charlie Hambos for a Sunday School Teachers' Retreat on Aug. 11. This is a wonderful way to start the new Sunday School year. The teachers feel blessed to have Father Stavros guiding us as teachers. He is such an inspirational teacher and has provided each of us with a collection of lesson plans. We are looking forward to Charlie's continued involvement with the Sunday School. He will provide a children's sermon on Youth Sundays and also visit each of our classrooms twice, throughout the year. We are so thankful that he is able to have such a personal connection to our students and we are appreciative for all the work he does behind the scenes for our Sunday School.

More information will be provided about the first day of Sunday School in the bulletin and through our weekly e-mails to parents. Please feel free to contact Vickie Peckham at vickiepeckham@gmail.com or 813-406-5626 with any questions, suggestions, or comments regarding St. John's Sunday School Program.

Sunday School Registration

Sunday, July 29

Sunday, August 5

Sunday, August 12

First Day of Sunday School

Sunday, August 12

Prayer is Patience

By Fr. Christos Kanakis

“The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.” Lamentations 3:25-26

“**T**hank you for your patience; we will be with you as soon as possible”. We hear this countless times when we are trying to call a business or talk to someone in customer service. We have become accustomed to expect results immediately! With smartphones in hand, we are constantly seeking instant communication, instant answers and instant gratification. Time is precious, but unfortunately we have become a society that is not at peace with waiting. When we obtain peace in our mind, we learn to practice patience, and when we learn to be patient then we are at peace.

We misuse time when it comes to our faith as well, and expect immediate results on our terms. God wants us to ask Him for what we want but at the same time we must be patient and wait for His time and His will to be done. Prayer is a means of transforming us to allow God to be in control of our lives, which reflects spiritual growth and maturity.

Just as child is not born the day after conception, not all prayers are answered the next day either. The nine months that a child is in the womb gives the mother and father time to adjust, transform and prepare for this new chapter in their lives. Those nine months are transformative through both its challenges and joys.

Even God waited to become flesh and become man and grow as a child. He waited to be crucified not so that our sins are forgiven, as Saint Isaac the Syrian wrote, but to show us how much He loves us. He waited and became incarnate for humanity and its salvation by making the ultimate sacrifice for us – giving Himself up on the Cross.

We all encounter people who frustrate us, but it is important to remember that God is patient. You are His child and so is the person you might strongly dislike. Jesus was patient with His disciples for three years! He was patient with Judas, giv-

ing him many opportunities to change his ways. We cannot change others; we only hope to inspire them by our actions as Christ did. We must not expect others to change for they will create their own consequences. We must be patient for our anger to transform into compassion, and for our hate to transform into love.

It took Moses 40 years to lead the people of Israel out of slavery and out of the desert. His patience was tested by the people he was trying to help. It took the Greeks over 400 years to be freed from the Ottoman Occupation. History gives us many examples where patience brought forth positive results and progress. Being patient should not be interchanged with being careless or procrastinating. Faith and works are important ingredients. Having patience is having the wisdom to know what we can and cannot control.

The Saints in the church endured and prayed for patience. Saint Nectarios was cast out of Egypt out of envy and rumors. Time revealed the truth. Time healed his heart and dried his tears. Time transformed the Saint and those around him. This why we look to the Saints for inspiration, for guidance, for patience. While we pray to the Saints to intercede for us, ultimately we pray to Christ. We are not to fear Him with terror, but to approach Him with a grateful heart, with awe and love. He wants us to come to Him. When we look to the Saints to pray for us, we are looking at people who have also endured struggles just like us, but because their lives centered on Christ, they can inspire us and fortify us in our faith.

Having patience is a challenge for all of us. Waiting is frustrating. Not knowing results can be agonizing. We must pray for peace and patience to endure what we are confronted with, and in time, we will be transformed. God has led us this far and He will continue to lead us on our journey through life and on the road to salvation with patience and faith.

Fr. Christos Kanakis is the Proistamenos of the Assumption Greek Orthodox Church in Long Beach, California.

A Note on Staying Engaged in Worship

One night at summer camp, during the Vespers service, they had lots of people at the chanter's stand. So many people were there that they didn't really need my help. So, I sat in the pews. And I didn't like it. I felt bored. I feel like when I'm engaged in the service, either serving at the altar or chanting at the chanter's stand, that the service are more alive for me. When I got home from camp, I called my Spiritual Father and talked to him about this. I wondered if there is something wrong with me that I felt bored since I was not engaged in the service. He said first that it's a good thing I'm bored when not engaged in the service since I am a priest, I should hopefully love being engaged in the service. Secondly, he said that

my comment was a good advertisement for congregational singing. We are all supposed to be engaged in worship. If we are “just sitting in the pews” we are going to be bored. That's why so many people think Orthodox worship is boring and stay home. When we are engaged in singing, we get much more out of the service. And third, he said that maybe my personal prayer life is lacking, since I have a hard time standing silently in church. Again, he is right. If I have a hard time standing with God alone, it would seem to be reasonable that I would have a hard time standing with God in church. A personal prayer life and a good worship life go hand in hand. Just some food for thought that I wanted to share.

+Fr. Stavros

Sun State Junior Olympics 2018

Thank you to everyone who helped out at the Junior Olympics June 7-9. This year 147 GOYAns plus advisors and priests, representing St. John, St. Nicholas Cathedral (Tarpon Springs), Sts. Nicholas, Rafael and Irene (Palm Harbor), St. Stefanos (St. Pete), Holy Trinity (Clearwater) and St. George (New Port Richey) participated. Special thanks to Dwight Forde, who chaired this event, and to Maria Koutroumanis and Kara Kazaras (our GOYA Advisors), to our chaperones and parents and to all of our volunteers and our GOYAns for a great weekend!



WE NEED TO DO MORE THAN JUST PRAY

Fr. Luke Veronis

The “unthinkable has happened” was how one government official responded to the latest school shooting in Sante Fe, Texas this past week. And yet, is it really “unthinkable?” Unfortunately, as a parent of four school age children, we realize that these horrific, mass killings are NOT so unthinkable anymore. They have become too common, and we all are just waiting for the next one to happen. And we all realize, it may happen closer to home, in our own schools, among our own people, sooner than later.

Think about the perpetrator, Dimitri Pagourtzis, a Greek-American, someone who the local Greek Orthodox priest, Fr. Stelios Sitaras affirmed had danced in a Greek dance group at the annual festival, and whose family was a part of a Greek Orthodox church. That’s pretty close to home for us, and it makes me realize this illness of brokenness and darkness, violence, confusion and anger that is leading some people to commit horrendous crimes, is all around us.

Texas governor Greg Abbott stated, “We need to do more than just pray for the victims and their families.” But what must we do? What can we do?

As a society, we have turned away from God and his ways. We no longer live in a *Christian world*, but in a post-Christian society. Our society no longer offers a strong community foundation, where we know one another, take interest in one another, reach out and care for one another. Our hyper-individualistic society leaves many people feeling alone, lonely, separated from others. How often do I even hear in our own community, how years ago families used to spend time together, visit one another for each other’s namedays and for the major feasts. Families would come together, and people were connected with one another. And yet, now, so often I hear our elderly talk about how they are all alone. Just come to our Living Bread Luncheon any first Saturday of the month, and you will see some people in our local community who come, not because they necessarily need a free meal, but maybe more so because they want some company.

And then our society is so focused on violence – from the violent video games our kids constantly play, to the violent movies whose images fill our minds, to the violent news we read daily. With each school shooting, confused and lonely people just get more and more ideas for what they can do!

“We need to do more than just pray for the victims and their families.” But what must we do? What can we do?

This past week in the church, a day before the shooting in Sante Fe, our Church celebrated our Lord’s Ascension into heaven. Jesus completed His mission of love to the world – He experienced the human condition, with all its darkness and evil, He confronted and conquered death itself, in the process taking the sins of the world upon Himself, and He gathered people who wanted to follow Him, to believe in Him, and not only inspired them with His life and teachings, but empowered them with His Holy Spirit, and then commanded them to continue His mission on earth.

In today’s Gospel reading, we hear Jesus praying for His followers, and in this passage from John, Jesus says to His Father, “As you sent me into the world, so I send them [his followers] into the world.” He doesn’t take His followers out of the world. He doesn’t command His followers to form communities apart

from the rest of the world. He isn’t interested in a cult, seeking out its own salvation. Instead, He says, “You are in the world, but not of the world.”

Christ also emphasizes that His sending of His followers into the world will be difficult and dangerous – “you will be lambs among wolves” – yet He promises to be with His followers each and every day. He promises that “You will receive power from on high, and you will be my witnesses.” And then He commands His disciples to “Go and make disciples of all peoples.” I emphasize this many times in my sermons, but I can’t repeat it often enough.

When we think about the latest mass shooting, and hear the Texas governor say, “We need to do more than just pray for the victims and their families,” we need to turn to our Christian faith and ask God, “What is it that you want ME to do?” Of course, our government officials need to address the issue of gun safety, and school safety, and other such things. But we can’t just wait for others to do something!

Individually, how can each one of us try to reach out to those who are lonely, those who may seem lost, those who may seem overwhelmed with life, those who are broken and confused, and even those who may seem like they are on a dangerous path of destruction – self-destruction or communal destruction. Can we keep an attentive eye out for such people in our midst? Can we reach out in love and befriend them? Can we be the one that fills up some of the lonely space they have in their lives?

To reach out to others takes effort, it takes time, it takes a commitment, it takes a serious understanding that this is a responsibility and calling each of us have as followers of Jesus Christ. He asks us first of all to create communities that care for one another. We are asked to cultivate this Saints Constantine and Helen Church to become truly a family where we know one another, enter in the lives of one another, care for one another, sacrifice for one another, and be there for one another. May our Church Family be a witness of community and love to the world around us!

Yet, we can’t stop only with this goal. As a Church Family, we then are placed in a particular community in Webster, in Central Mass, or wherever else we live. Can all of our members reach out to the larger community, and create the same type of loving spirit where we reach out, care for, and love others?!

And can we do it in a way where we are trying to befriend others, mentor others, become lights in the dark lives of others.

What can we do in the aftermath of another school shooting? Can we make a decision to become a big brother or sister to someone, truly mentoring them and becoming a friendly influence in their lives? Imagine if someone did that to Dimitri Pagourtzis? Imagine if he had a whole community reaching out to him, trying to love him, guide him, care for him, and influence him!

“We need to do more than just pray for the victims and their families. We need to fulfill our calling as followers of Jesus Christ, and truly begin reaching out to a hurting world all around us!”

Fr. Luke Veronis is the Proistamenos of Sts. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church in Webster, MA.

“One of Our Own”

By John Nixon

"As the spirit of division and dissention is affecting all expressions of public life in our society, all of our citizens sooner or later will be affected in one way or another." These are the opening words of a pastoral letter written two days ago, the sad duty that fell to His Eminence Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver in writing words of consolation to his flock, which includes the Greek Orthodox Churches of Texas, one of which was attended to some extent by a family whose 17-year-old son, a member of the folk dance group and a football player, is the admitted murderer in a high school shooting this past Friday. From some of his belongings and social media accounts he is also one who has a fascination with Nazi, Communist, and satanic symbols—these are not the interests of someone who wants to love God and his neighbor. Up until now, we perhaps have rested in the comfort of thinking that those who commit mass shootings were always one of "them," and not one of "us." Now the perpetrators of such horrific acts include, to some extent, one of our own.

How do we make sense of this? How could people, presumably Christian, to some degree involved in the Church, fall into such dark, evil places? Some of us are old enough to remember the tragedy of Guyana in 1978. One of the followers of cult leader Jim Jones was the daughter of a Greek Orthodox priest. She, along with all the others at the Jonestown compound, committed mass suicide. Today's readings offer some clues. In the Book of Acts, we heard St. Paul say to the bishops assembled, "Fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." What happened in Jonestown is clearly answered here, but what about the young man in Texas?

We are bombarded every day with ideas and things that are foreign to Orthodox Christianity—foreign to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We participate in them as consumers of modern culture, not realizing how fierce demonic wolves distance us in imperceptible ways away from the saving knowledge of God, and of having Christ and our salvation in our hearts and minds. While the things of God have always been at odds with the things of the world since the fall of Adam and Eve, there has been an incrementally widening division over the past few decades. Songs with innocent lyrics such as, "I wanna hold your hand," have given way to songs with lyrics that are filled with images of dehumanization and violence. One writer notes, "The inhabitants of this world, the children of this age, are like wheat in a sieve. They are being sifted by restless thoughts of this world. They are constantly tossed to and fro by earthly care, desire and absorption in a variety of material concerns. Satan tosses such souls as a sifter sifts wheat." [1] These words certainly speak to what is happening to people today, particularly to that young

Greek man now in the world spotlight, but these words were written in the 4th century by St. Makarios of Egypt. The Evil One has attacked the people of God from the beginning.

When we live in the world, and become products of the world, when to us the Church is a social club, as something we "do" on Sundays or less frequently, when we "participate" in worship without undergoing live-giving purification...then we are not really living within the Church," writes Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpakos. [2] "The Church is not a courtroom where your vices and virtues are scrutinized before a judge who decides your fate. The Church, established by Christ Himself, is a spiritual hospital where the sick come to get well," [3] writes Fr. Alexis Trader.

Are we using the Church as a spiritual hospital? Do we come to Church for healing of the soul? Metropolitan Hierotheos notes that having the right faith is the first thing, that when beliefs are distorted, the spiritual cure is distorted. On this Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council, the emphasis on correct faith is clear, and is summarized in the creed we recite at every service. The second thing is to recognize that we ourselves are spiritually ill and in need of healing. The sacraments and disciplines of the Church are the medicines for spiritual healing; the guidance of a spiritual father is therapy for the soul. Merely being a "member" of the Church and participating without being stirred in some way in love for God and neighbor means nothing—or rather, is a detriment to the disposition of the soul, in a hardening of the heart. Such casual and peripheral involvement in the Faith can give us knowledge of God, but not of knowing God in relationship with Him, which is what brings salvation. [4]

In the wake of a horrific act of evil, and in this week before Pentecost, may we find renewed determination to belong to Christ over the things of this world. May we seek healing for our souls, and become instruments to help the lost find their way to the Lord. Amen.

[1] Quoted in Father Alexis, "The Church as a Spiritual Hospital" at <http://ancientchristianwisdom.com/the-church-as-a-.../>

[2] Orthodox Psychotherapy: The Science of the Fathers, 1994, Birth of the Theotokos Monastery press, p. 26.

[3] Father Alexis, op. cit.

[4] from today's Gospel reading: John 17:3

John Nixon, Mdiv, EdD is a member of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Las Vegas, Nevada.

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

Dear Lord,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Join the St. John Legacy Society Today!

Make a Plan to Amplify Your Impact

Please consider including St. John Greek Orthodox Church estate plans.

Please consider becoming a founding member of the St. John Legacy Society by leaving what might be left over in your estate to St. John once you've provided for your family. For more information about this dimension to stewardship, please contact Fr. Stavros at 813-876-8830 ext. 103 or email at frstav@gmail.com to learn how you can have an impact on our church. Whatever you do, please be sure to consult your financial and legal advisors and let your family members know of your intentions.

Arrival of Miraculous Icon at the Diakonia Retreat Center

On September 29, 2018, the Metropolis of Atlanta will be blessed with a special event in our spiritual lives as we receive the miraculous Panagia Vimatarissa icon from the Monastery of Vatopaidi on Mount Athos.

Beginning at 11:00 a.m., this rare and joyous occasion will take the form of a procession with the icon of the Theotokos into our new Panagia Chapel, led by His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta, along with the Monks of Vatopaidi, the clergy of the Metropolis of Atlanta, and a parade group created especially for the event!

Together, we will all have the opportunity to venerate the miraculous icon of our Lady, offer glory to our God and Creator, thanking those who made this day possible, and enjoying the fellowship of our Metropolis of Atlanta family.

His Eminence hopes to see as many parishioners there as possible, and to that end, asks that you please follow the link that will be sent out via email to RSVP. You will not want to miss out on what will surely be a momentous and spiritually joyous event! For questions and additional information, please call Ethel Gjerde, 404-634-9345.



Please Join Us, Saturday Sept. 29th 2018

For The Arrival Of The Miraculous Panagia Vimatarissa Icon



Services begin 11:00 am / 455 Quail Ridge Rd, Salem, SC 29676

St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

Do you Like our Facebook page?

Like our page and suggest it to your friends. Announcements are posted frequently so you are up to date with everything going on at St. John the Baptist. You can find our page at [StJohnGOCTampa](https://www.facebook.com/StJohnGOCTampa).

Live Streaming

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

To access this page

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

All of the services are available to watch at anytime.

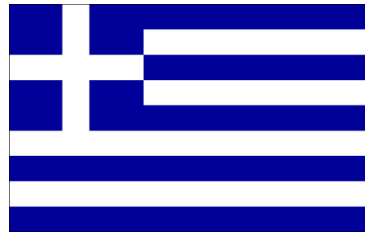
Pictures

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



Want to Learn Modern Greek?

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church Adult Greek School



Teacher born, raised, and educated in Greece with over 20 years of experience teaching the Greek language. Adult classes for beginners taught @ St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church 2418 W. Swann Ave, Tampa, FL 33609. Classes are held at 6:00 - 8:30 p.m. on Thursday evenings, starting on September 27, 2018. This will be the first of three sessions, with each session lasting three months.

- Speak Greek
- Read Greek
- Write Greek
- Basic Grammar & More.
- Some Greek History
- Book Included in Price!!

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

Contact Ms. Magdalini Myer: at (813) 909-2327, aspis69@aol.com or the church office at (813) 876-8830.

Thank You to all of Our Friends!

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

Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

Friend of St. John the Baptist:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

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

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

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

Reflecting on a Great Summer @ St. Stephen's

Alex Findlay – 7th Grade

This was my first year at St Stephens Summer Camp and it was a lot of fun. I made new friends, grew closer to God, and played a lot of fun activities. We sang a lot of cheesy songs, had a church service in the morning and Vespers at night, we had the Camp Olympics where we would cover ourselves in paint and play a lot of fun and competitive games, we had a dance on Friday night, and a lot more fun things. We also had Confession on Thursday. We had a schedule every day that consisted of a swimming block, an arts and crafts block, and a sports block. On Monday and Tuesday we would also have a music block and Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday we would have a double block of ropes which is where we would do a lot of team and trust building activities. Overall, I had a lot of fun at camp and can't wait to go next year.

Elena Gonatos

I just wanted to take some time to reflect on my experiences at camp. It was my first time going this year and I enjoyed it greatly. At camp, I had many good experiences and some not so good experiences. Luckily, the pros outweighed the cons heavily. This year at camp was so amazing, exciting, and exhilarating that I cannot even put it into words. But I will try.

First off, there were the amazing friends that I had made. During the week at camp, I made so many life long friends that I cannot wait to see next year. We were either talking at an activity, or all 16 of us were crammed into my room, sitting on the floor or the bottom bunks. We were extremely talkative especially at night when we were all shouting and eating candy. The way I knew if we were having a good time or not was if I got in my bed and found crumbs everywhere. Literally everywhere. Another one of my many memories with my friends was hanging out during sports. We were either sitting in the St Nicks common room talking or sleeping in our bunks. These times were especially fun because our whole cabin could agree that the boys cabin was super rowdy and crazy but it was fun to watch their antics. Making friends was a great time but seeing old friends that I hadn't seen in years was also super fun. I got to recount the "old days" with some friends I hadn't hung out with since I was 5 or 6! It was super fun seeing them.

Another amazing memory was doing all of the camp activities. Between swimming, ropes course, crafts, and "sports", I had the best time. Swimming was one of my favorite camp activities because I had never swam in a lake before. I also went canoeing for the first time. It was really awesome going canoeing because you could really appreciate the scenery while being on the lake. The ropes course was also really fun because it was all about trust. You had to trust people to lead you through a maze or fall from a platform. It was really great having all of these team building exercises that brought me closer to my friends. It was also really fun being in the woods doing ropes courses. Crafts were another fun activity where we all got together and made bracelets and talked and just had fun. I still wear the bracelets we made at camp and I always will so I can be reminded of my first year of camp.

Two of my favorite memories were the dance and the talent show. The talent show was super fun. There was singing, dancing, impersonating, skits, and handshaking. It was an amazing show and it was worth losing my voice for. My other favorite memory was the dance. It was fun just dancing with my friends

at the end of the week and not having to get dirty or soaked. It was awesome having music because we were completely shut off from music (except for that one time we got ahold of the computer in the common room). The dance was definitely something I really enjoyed.

I had no clue what Camp Olympics would be like but it ended up being fun. It was awesome to get splashed with water and do super weird challenges all at night. Even though we had sand in our shorts by the end of the night, it was one of the best memories I have of camp. It was also amazing being on Team 4!! By the end of the night, it was 1 am and all we kept hearing was, "It wasn't supposed to go on this late." That didn't change the fact that we still had to wake up at 7:15 a.m. to start our day!! Still, I would not change a thing about that night, even the 4 hours of sleep we got.

The 4th of July fireworks and carnival were really awesome, too. The carnival was fun because we got to hang out and run around. We had so much fun putting all of our friends in Jail, too. The fireworks were great because they were so pretty and it really made it feel like the 4th of July.

My favorite and best memory I have is hang time, Orthodox Life, and Alone with God. I have grown so much closer to God in that one week than I ever had in my whole life. It was great attending two services a day because you come to appreciate the service and participate. Hang time and Orthodox Life were amazing because we could ask so many questions about our faith and learn about the Fruit of the Spirit. Alone with God was another personal favorite because we had time to be absolutely quiet while praying and clearing our minds.

The part I really enjoyed about camp was not having electronics. It sounds crazy coming from a teen living in 2018 but it was a relief not having to keep up with everyone and having people just talk without being focused on something else. It was nice to connect to friends in person and not over text.

I also got sick during camp. I felt great until after dinner and that's when I started feeling sick. I missed the Divine Liturgy!!! I really wanted to see the church and have liturgy with everyone. Apparently I was "lucky" to miss Liturgy because - there was no AC!! I still felt bad that I missed Liturgy but there is always next year!!

Overall, this camp experience has been one of the best memories in my life. I made lifelong friends, amazing memories, and I had the time of my life! I cannot wait to go next year and see all of my best friends again.

Niko Gonatos

This summer, I attended the St. Stephen's Summer Camp at the Diakonia Retreat Center in Salem, SC. This year was my 2nd year at the camp. At first, I was very sad to leave my Mom and Dad as they went on vacation in Asheville, NC and Nashville, TN. But after the first day, the fun activities and worship made the sadness I felt flee away very fast. At camp, we did various activities, such as a ropes course, swimming in the lake, making cool crafts, and singing for our Lord. From a spiritual perspective, I enjoyed attending the daily Orthros and Vespers services, listening to the priests talking about our religion—which was in a session called Orthodox Life—and receiving Holy Communion during Friday's Divine Liturgy. The best part was

meeting new people from the southeast area and socializing during the activities and the Friday night dance. I have made so many new Orthodox friends that share the same beliefs as I do. I was very sad to leave the camp on Saturday, but at the same time, I was very happy to see my parents again. I totally recommend this camp to all kids in middle and high school that want to experience true fun and to dig deep into the Orthodox faith! This camp has truly served as a gateway to spiritual peace. I hope and pray that God grants me another week at this wonderful camp next year.

Nicholas Katzaras - 12th Grade

The first time I went to camp, over three years ago, you could say I was a little skeptical. Leaving home with no contact with the outside world for a week sounded a little frightening. However, after my first week of camp I had made so many memories, lifelong friends and gotten so close to Christ. It was an experience I will never forget. Fast forward two years later, which this was my last year of camp, I had decided to go to camp week 1 with a couple other guys instead of going week 2 like we always had. Granted, we knew hardly anyone else going week 1; the plan was to go and meet new people. The week started off slow as we tried to get to know everyone, but as the week went on it just kept getting better and better. One of my highlights was definitely getting to play this game called "Underground Church" which, in its most condensed definition, was basically a big game of tag in the woods. However, what separates St. Stephen's from every other camp isn't the fun camp games. What separates camp is the spiritual aspect. St. Stephen's is a week where we lay aside all earthly distractions and can focus more clearly on the bigger picture of life and getting closer to Christ. Personally, camp is a spiritual renewal and something that I look back on when I am faced with challenges. It has made me a stronger Greek Orthodox Christian and helped shape me into the person I am today. Going week 1 was definitely a great experience, and I made memories that I will never forget, but the one thing that was missed was not having Father Stavros there. It is sad that I can no longer go to St. Stevens as a camper, however I definitely plan on going back as a counselor to help influence the lives of teens the way my counselors influenced my life. So, until next time St. Stephen's, I can definitely say you have a special place in my heart. Thanks for all the friends and memories.

Maria Xenick - Staff Member

As this year's camp week approached, I was having some serious doubts about attending and serving at St. Stephen's. I am so thankful that I did not allow those voices of doubt to keep me from being a part of the camp team. I am so privileged to be a part of this incredible ministry. The goal of the camp is to create an atmosphere for spiritual renewal and growth, both in personal relationship with Christ and with others. It was awesome to see so many of our St. John kids in that environment, and to meet many new kids as well. I worked this year with arts and crafts, music, and teaching. I made it a personal goal to offer words of encouragement to every camper and staff member I came across. They are so desperate for kind and encouraging words! Each day was filled with highlights and special moments where the campers were unplugged from regular life. They participated fully in worship, deep and meaningful discussions, wholesome fun, and challenging activities. Working with such a dedicated group of staff members was such an honor – to watch these young adults lead is inspiring and gives me so much hope for our Orthodox faith! I am so grateful to Mike

and George for allowing me to be away from home for a week. Thank you to Father Stavros for giving me the opportunity to serve and for all of your hard work and dedication he gives to this program.

Elizabeth Xenick - 9th Grade

This was my third year at St. Stephen's. My favorite part this year was the spiritual atmosphere that surrounded everyone the whole week. It was so cool getting to meet Greek Orthodox kids from around the country and get to share our faith. I also really liked the Olympics because we got to do more activities with the other cabins and get to know them better as well. Overall I had an amazing week filled with laughter, fun, faith, and Christ. I want to thank Fr. Stav for all of the hard work he puts in to making this week possible, and I can't wait to go next year!

Artemis Xenick - 11th Grade

This was my fifth year at St. Stephen's camp and my third year going week 2. One of my favorite things this year was the ropes course where we do trust activities like the trust fall and the trust walk with our cabin. That was really the point in the week that the girls in my cabin really started to form friendships with each other. Knowing that we could trust each other on any of the exercises that we did gave us that solid foundation for friendships and helped us build fun memories together. The best part about St. Stephen's every year is the people that are there. Getting to experience an entire week being submerged in Orthodoxy and fun with amazing people who have the same foundational beliefs as you is so special. Everyone is so focused on their spiritual journey and is so encouraging of others to grow in their relationships with God. Every year when I come back from camp, I am on a spiritual high and am more connected to Jesus than any other time of the year. The Diaconia Center is truly one of my favorite places on earth and I cannot wait to go back and experience another amazing year of camp. Thank you to Father Stavros for all of your hard work to make this place so special!

Gennaro Nikos Scarfogliero - 8th Grade

This year was my first time going to camp and it really was a lot of fun. I got to experience a lot of new and great things while at camp. Like; there are hills in South Carolina, who knew? You also get to meet a lot of new people and can hang-out with some of the people you already know. I went Week two and that is when most of the people from Saint John's went, so I knew most of the people there. You become even greater friends with people you already know and you can kick start some amazing new friendships too. I have to give a lot of credit to all of the staff and especially to Father Stavros and Charlie. They really planned all of this out well for everyone and they don't really get any time or rest for themselves. Overall this is a really great camp and the people work hard to keep it that way. I can't wait to go next year!

Toula Trakas - 7th Grade

This was my first year going to St. Stephens. My favorite thing we did was the ropes course because it was a fun way to build trust with my cabin mates. I also loved alone time with God because it was really peaceful. It was nice to take some time to just sit and pray and it was a great way to start my day. Thank you Fr. Stavros and Charlie for working so hard to make camp an amazing experience. I had a lot of fun and I can't wait to go back next year!

St. Stephen's Summer Camp 2018

Photos courtesy of Jonathan Pajak



3 Cruel Christian Clichés for Graduates

By Eric Geiger

It's graduation season and your mailbox is likely filled with graduation invitations and pictures. Your church has likely asked graduates to stand and be recognized or marched them across the stage as proud family members took photos and celebrated/mourned the ending of an important season in their lives. It is an exciting time for graduates.

College or work plans are coming together, and more responsibility is being enjoyed. In the midst of all the celebrations, graduates hear some untrue and worthless advice. The clichés tossed around are inaccurate at best and often cruel because of where they can lead. Here are three clichés we should not be giving to the graduates in our lives.

1. Follow your heart. Because our hearts are wicked, deceitful, and beyond our own understanding, the advice to “follow your heart” is extremely cruel. Foolish and harmful decisions are made every single day because of that advice. Careers have been derailed, relationships have been destroyed, and much has been lost as people follow their hearts to their own demise. Graduates, follow your heart only if your heart is delighting in the Lord. Unless our hearts are fully devoted to the Lord, encouragement to follow our hearts is horrible counsel.

2. God won't give you more than you can handle. “Don't worry as you face new pressures; God won't give you more than you can handle,” has been told to countless graduates. And it is not true at all. At times, God most certainly gives us more than we can handle so we will be overwhelmed and seek Him. The moments of being overwhelmed and stripped of our self-reliance are often the most significant moments in our spiritual maturation. Graduates, you will have moments that are more than you can handle. In those moments, cry out to Him.

3. You can do anything through Christ. “You can do anything! In fact, you can do *all* things through Christ.” Oh, how I have wished this were true as I have wanted to dunk a basketball in a game for such a long time. And I can't do it. But more importantly, the verse that speaks to “doing all things in Christ” is about being content in difficult situations because Christ is enough. We can persevere because of Christ. Graduates, you can't do all things. You will have times of struggle. There will be some things you try that are not for you. Some college classes will come easier than others. But you can persevere in that moment because of Christ. *Eric Geiger serves as a Senior Vice President at LifeWay Christian Resources.*

The Best “Going Off to College” Counsel I Have Heard

By Eric Geiger

The summer before going off to college was, for me, filled with great hope and expectation. A fresh start, an opportunity to prove I could handle the responsibility, the chance to choose courses I wanted to study, make new friends, and look to have an impact on the world around me.

All of that was very exciting. I have seen the same excitement in graduating high school seniors as they prepare to go to college. I graduated high school a long time ago (in 1994), but as a former youth pastor, I celebrated with graduates every year. Through the graduation parties and the long (too long) graduation ceremonies, I heard lots of great counsel to those going off to college. Here are the five best:

1. Learning to learn is as important as what you learn. You will likely change your major. You may not end up working in the field you study. Even if you do, the field you study will likely deeply change in the next decade. All of this means that in terms of your college classes, learning to learn is as important as what you learn. Learn how to study, how to read well, and how to learn from others.

2. Be proactive, not reactive. Engage the class, the professors, the college, and the community where the college is. Don't passively attend class but actively engage and take notes. Meet your professors. Don't just eat in the food court; check out the local restaurants and explore the city or town where your college is.

3. Choose your relationships wisely. They will impact your future. The friends I made in college deeply impacted my spiritual growth, and I am forever grateful for them. I met Kaye, my wife, my sophomore year. Even twenty years after graduating college, a funny memory of LB or Schaff—two of my best friends in college—will come to my mind. But so will one of the formational talks we had late at night in our apartment. In many ways I am still being impacted by the relationships I formed in college.

4. Build habits for your holiness now. Developing spiritual disciplines will develop your character and put you in a posture for the Lord to do His gracious work. The Lord uses spiritual disciplines to grow and mature us. If you build a rhythm of holy habits such as reading the Bible, memorizing Scripture, praying, and fasting, the discipline will equip you for your whole life.

5. Serve in a local church now. Right before I went off to college, someone told me to get plugged into serving at a local church right away—the very first semester. It was great counsel. I learned a ton and made an impact while doing so. College student: Don't just consume from a church in your college town. Pour yourself into one. Don't hop from church to church every semester. Find one and invest your college years there. You will make a significant impact in that time. *Eric Geiger serves as a Senior Vice President at LifeWay Christian Resources.*

To Know God - That's Life!

By Fr. Richard Demetrius Andrews

Today we will honor our Sunday School teachers and students as well as our high school and college graduates. One of their main endeavors has been the pursuit of knowledge. It has been said that all of the knowledge of mankind from our early origins until 1845 equaled one inch. From 1845-1945 equaled two inches. From 1945 until now the knowledge acquired by human civilization equals the height of the Washington Monument in D.C. (555 feet). In other words, there has literally been an explosion of knowledge.

The true marvel however is not that we are coming to know more and more about our universe, but that we can come to know Him Who stands above and behind the universe—that is God.

In today's Gospel, the Apostle John writes: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent" (John 17:3). The supreme blessing of the human soul is that it can know God. The supreme tragedy is that often it does not want to know Him, being distracted by the things of this world. In other words, we pay more attention to the huge height of information we've gathered about the creation, than we pay to the simple knowledge of the Creator.

To know God is not just another kind of knowledge: it is a matter of life or death, heaven or hell. This tragedy of choice became glaringly apparent once again in the Sante Fe, Texas school shooting this past Friday morning. And it hit very close to home since the shooter is a teenager of Greek descent who was in the local dance troupe. I will not say his name because this plays into Satan's influence to implant a sociopathic desire for recognition.

St. Anthony the Great (+356), one of founders of desert monasticism, said "The most grievous loss and the greatest disaster is for a person not to know God." Tragically, the Greek teenage shooter identified himself as an atheist on his Facebook page and perpetrated a unspeakable disaster for the eight school-mates and two teachers he killed, the 13 he injured, the hundreds he traumatized, as well as their families, the whole community and our society at large. Let us remember the victims, and I will name them: Cynthia Tisdale, Anne Perkins (teachers), Sabika Sheikh, Chris Stone, Jared Black, Shana Fisher, Glenda Kimberly Vaughan, Angelique Ramirez, Christian Riley Garcia, Aaron Kyle McLeod

Nearly everyone has heard of Harvard University. But not many know that it was started when a man named John Harvard, when he bequeathed his personal library and half of his estate in 1636. And virtually no one knows what he wrote in his will: "Every student in this college shall be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider the main ends of life and to know God and Jesus Christ, whom to know is eternal life." Sadly, Harvard University, like many institutions of higher learning, have abandoned their religious founders and spiritual mission to become ever more secular, if not explicitly atheist schools.

The Prophet Jeremiah, some 600 years before Christ, wrote: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his strength, let not the rich man glory in his

wealth; but let him who glories, glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who practices kindness, justice and righteousness in the earth; for in these I delight, says the Lord" (Jer.9:23-24).

The purpose of all Christian preaching and teaching is to help us to get to know God. This is not knowledge about God—that would be information. To know God personally—that is to have an intimate relationship with Him. Think about the various relationships with people in our own life and we understand that there is a world of difference between knowing about someone, and really knowing him or her. Knowing about God and His Son Jesus Christ does not save us, nor bestow eternal life.

St. Athanasios the Great (+373) one of the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council (325) that we commemorate today, the Seventh Sunday of Pascha, said this: "For what use is existence to the creature if he cannot know his Maker? How could men be reasonable beings if they had no knowledge of the Word and Reason of the Father through Whom they had received their being? They would be no better than the beasts had they no knowledge except of earthly things; and why should God have made them at all, if He had not intended them to know Him?"

We may remember that God made us in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26) but we may forget that the only way to become like God is to know Him.

The famous America writer, Mark Twain (1835-1910) shared this story. When Mr. Twain had been bragging about how many great and famous people he knew in the world, his daughter said to him: "Gee, dad, you know everybody except God."

Now, getting to know someone personally can be difficult, if not impossible, unless the other person chooses to open up and reveal him/herself to us. But God has already done this in through His Son Jesus Christ. John the Evangelist writes, "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known" (John 1:18). The Apostle Paul said, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1Corinthians 2:2).

When Christ ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of God the Father, this completed the offering--the opening-up--the invitation from God to us to know Him personally. For not only did the Logos assume our humanity in His Incarnation, but now He has brought it with Him into heaven, into the Godhead of the Trinity.

The question is: How do we come to know God? In the various sciences, different tools are used to investigate and discover knowledge: microscopes, telescopes, computer modeling, etc. To know God, we need a different set of tools—spiritual tools. First, (and these are not in any order of priority or importance), we need purity of heart for Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" (Mt.5:8). The first step in the spiritual life is catharsis, cleansing and purification. Through repentance and the Sacrament of Confession, we can empty our heart of bitterness, jealousy, anger and resentment.

Second, we need *phōtisis* or illumination by the Holy Spirit. Again, the Apostle Paul says, "No one can say that Jesus is

Lord without the Holy Spirit” (1Cor.12:3). St. Silouan of Mt. Athos also wrote about this: “We may study as much as we will, but we shall not come to know the Lord unless we live according to His commandments, for the Lord is not made know through learning, but by the Holy Spirit. Many philosophers and scholars have arrived at a belief in the existence of God, but they have not come to know Him. To believe in God is one thing, to know God is another. Both in heaven and on earth, the Lord is made known only by the Holy Spirit, and not through ordinary learning.”

Thirdly, we need the Scriptures, especially the Holy Gospels, to know God. Fr. Georges Florovsky (1893-1979) wrote: “God created mankind so that he could hear His words, receive them, grow in them, and through them become a participant of eternal life.” The Bible is the record of God’s revelation to humankind. And reading the Bible with an earnest desire, God reveals Himself directly to us through this record. This is why it is imperative for us to be on time for Divine Liturgy, so that we can hear directly and mystically the Word of God in beginning of our common worship.

Fourth, we need to practice love in order to know God. John the Evangelist said: “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1John 4:16).

Fifth, in order to know God, we need to pray. Prayer is the way we talk to God and if we practice the Prayer of the Heart in silence, we can begin to hear God talking to us. What does it say about our value system, when we spend twenty years learning a vocation to pursue a career but can barely spend five minutes a day dedicated to know God through prayer?

Sixthly, in order to know God, we must live in communion with Him. This is theosis or deification. St. Gregory of Nyssa (+394) wrote: “The Lord does not say that is blessed to know something about God but to have God present within oneself.” What more concrete tangible way is there to have God within us than to receive His very body and blood in the Holy Eucharist? And if this is true, how can we directly know God if rarely, if ever, receive Him in the Mystery of Holy Communion?

The seventh and last way to know God is through obedience (Greek = hypakouē). St. Matthew the Poor (1919-2006) wrote that the Gospel is spiritual and “must be obeyed and lived through the Holy Spirit before it can be understood. If anyone living outside the Gospel tries to understand it he will stumble and fall...But if anyone has...total obedience to God...that person enters into the mystery of the Gospel without being aware

of it.”

“Not knowing God, we cannot truly know ourselves—who we are. Likewise, we cannot know the meaning of our life. Thus, we also lack a goal or direction, much less how to get there. We are on a journey with neither a map nor the rules of the road” (From *Theology and Sanity* by F.J. Sheed, 1946). This summarizes the existential crisis of our time, and it is affecting not only us but our children as well. We see the symptoms of this illness, not getting better but rather becoming worse, especially in the horrible school shootings that are on the rise in the last twenty years.

If you are an atheist or you know an atheist, ask yourself or them, “Please, tell me about the God you don’t believe in.” The answer you will not often hear is: “I can’t tell you about this God because I don’t believe that God even exists.” The answer you will more often hear is about a god that faithful Christians themselves do not know because the god of an atheist is a twisted, distorted, false image of God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, encourage your atheist friend to read the Gospels and let Jesus Christ speak for Himself to them. Then follow up with them to say this is the God that I know and believe in. This of course implies that you yourself are doing all of the above.

A slightly different scenario you may encounter is when people say, “It doesn’t matter which god you believe in as long as you believe in a god.” Fr. Anthony Coniaris reminds us of Jesus’ words we heard in today’s Gospel: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

My brothers and sisters, if the Divine Liturgy seems stale and boring, if the sacraments seem like empty rituals, if the Orthodox Church seems like a hollow institution, and if the Bible seems more like bad news than the Good News, here is the solution: get to know Jesus. If we truly come to know the true God, then everything else comes alive. If we want our life to be filled with color and life then we need to fill ourselves with Him who is the author of life. Please seek Jesus in the Scriptures, become obedient to His commandments, pray to receive the Holy Spirit, gain purity of heart in Confession, and above all love one another with the sacrificial love of God. Amen!

Fr. Richard Demetrios Andrews is the Proistamenos of St. George Greek Orthodox Church in St. Paul, Minnesota.

[Many of the quotations above appear in Fr. Anthony Coniaris’ “Meet Jesus in Sunday Gospels” vol.1, pp.103-111]

Summer Small Group Bible Study

Our Monday Night Bible Study will continue throughout August.

New people are welcome at any time!

The remainder of our Small Group Bible Studies will reconvene sometime in September.

Stay tuned for locations and starting dates

Monday Night Bible Study (for everyone)

We are studying the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans
Location: St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in the Administration Building meeting room

Group Leader: Charlie Hambos
Charlie.hambos@gmail.com, 813-843-8471

Meeting time: Monday evenings

Meeting Dates: August 6, 13 (7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.),
August 27 (6:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.)

*For whatever was written in former days
was written for our instruction, that by
steadfastness and by the encouragement of
the scriptures we might have hope.*

-Romans 15:4



AHEPA FAMILY NEWS – AUGUST 2018

TAMPA AHEPA, DAUGHTERS OF PENELOPE AND SONS OF PERICLES ELECTED TO LEADERSHIP ROLES AT DISTRICT CONVENTIONS

This year members of Ahepa Lyncurgus Chapter 12, Daughters of Penelope Alcmaeon Chapter 167 and Sons of Pericles Menelaos Chapter 134 were honored by being elected to leadership positions at the District Conventions held in Stuart Florida. The following members from Tampa were elected to their respective lodges:

Michael Trimis was elected to Ahepa Citrus District 2 Lodge as Lt. Governor. Michael who has served the local Ahepa Lyncurgus Chapter 12 in many capacities including President for several terms, has been honored for his exemplary service to Ahepa and the local Tampa Ahepa Chapter. Congratulations Mike!

Ourania Stephanides was elected and continues serve to Daughters of Penelope Citrus District 2 Lodge as Governor for a second term. Ourania has served the Daughters of Penelope in Tampa in numerous leadership positions and follows in the footsteps of her mother who served the Daughters in Tampa during the 1960's. Congratulations to Ourania!

Debbie Ferekides was elected to Daughters of Penelope Citrus District 2 Lodge as Maids of Athena Advisor. Debbie has served as the Advisor to the Maids of Athena for the Tampa chapter for the past several years and now will serve that position at the District level. Congratulations Debbie.

Marina Paras continues as Daughters of Penelope Citrus District 2 Lodge District Advisor. Marina has served as President of the local Daughters Chapter and as Secretary, Lt. Governor and Governor of the District Lodge. She follows in the footsteps of her cousin Janet Gout Daniels, who served as District Governor in the 1950's. Congratulations to Marina!

Savvas Ferekides was elected to Sons of Pericles Citrus District 2 Lodge as Governor. Savvas was chapter president of the newly organized Sons of Pericles Menelaos Chapter 134 and now becomes District Governor after having served as District Secretary. Congratulations to Savvas.

Gregory Koutroumanis was elected to Sons of Pericles Citrus District 2 Lodge as Lt. Governor. Gregory has served as an officer of the Sons of Pericles Menelaos Chapter 134 and now becomes District Lt. Governor. Congratulations to Gregory!

Installation of Ahepa Family of Tampa Officers June 22 at Ava Restaurant

There was an installation of officers gathering at Ava Restaurant in Tampa for the Daughters of Penelope, Sons of Pericles, and AHEPA Chapters. Savas Ferekedis, Governor and Gregory Koutroumanis, Lt. Governor for the District 2 Sons of Pericles served as installing officers for the Sons of Pericles Chapter. Ourania Stephanides, District Governor of the Daughters of Penelope, Marina Paras, District Advisor and Debbie Ferekides, Maids Advisor served as installing officers for the Daughters and Mike Trimis, District Lt. Governor served as the installing officer for the Ahepans.

Chapter Officers elected include:

AHEPA

President – Gus Paras
Vice President Membership – Aris Rogers Sr.
Vice President Veterans Affairs – Ron Myer
Treasurer – Tom Georgas
Secretary – Tom Sakaris
Warden – Greg Tisdale
Marshal – Peter Theophanous
Sons of Pericles Advisor – Chris Ferekides
Event Planning Chair – Jim Armstrong
Finance Advisor– George Chagaris
Membership Advisor – Marios Stephanides

DAUGHTERS OF PENELOPE

President - Nicole Leontsinis
Vice President - Katherine Sakkis
Treasurer - Kalliope Chagaris
Secretary Recording - Debbie Ferekides
Secretary Corresponding - Marina Paras
Warden - Magda Myer
Marshal - Jenny Paloumpis
Priestess - Mary Ann Saravanos
Maids Advisor - Debbie Ferekides

SONS OF PERICLES

Karter F. Lenardos – President
Frankie Giallourakis -Vice President
Athan Owens -Secretary
Anthony Koutroumanis-Treasurer

Ahepa Family of Tampa Members Receive District Scholarships

This year members of Sons of Pericles and the Maids of Athena were honored by being awarded a District Scholarship at the District Convention. The recipients were Savvas Ferekides, who will be attending the University of Florida in the fall and Katherine Chase Sibley, who is currently attending the University of Florida. Congratulations to both of these deserving students.

**Join today – Become a member of Ahepa or the Daughters of Penelope
Or if you are 14- 18 years old become a member of the
Sons of Pericles or the Maids of Athena**

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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

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Alkis Crassas, President 813-690-3867
Mike Xenick, VP 813-340-8737
Gary Ward, Treasurer 813-846-3898
Sandra Pappas, Secretary 813-785-3747
George Chagaris 727-420-1920
Amin Hanhan 813-846-2957
Edie Kavouklis 813-758-0305
Jimmy Konstas 813-220-7352
Ryan Rindone 704-564-2046
Aris Rogers, II 813-309-5525
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Sia Blankenship 813-968-8855

Basketball

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

Bible Study

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Bookstore

Brett Mourer 813-376-9315

Chanter

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

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 MΑΣ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668
Bessie Palios, 813-523-0347
Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963
Parea, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136
Anna Maria Bavaro 732-239-9085
Panigyri, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668

Daughters of Penelope

Nicole Leontsinis, President 703-585-7490

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Anetta Alexander 813-758-2689

Gasparilla Parking

John Kokkas 727-992-4615

GOYA

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Hope/Joy

Debbie Nicklow 813-690-0671

Junior Olympics

Dwight Forde 727-685-9028

MOMS

Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862
Lindsey Skourellos 813-503-7845

OCF

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

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Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

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Philoptochos

Lisa Alsina 813-728-1094

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Tom Georgas 813-985-0236

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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.