

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*

May 2019

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

Christ is Risen! (Insert your response!)

Christos Anesti! Christ is Risen!

For the next forty days, we will greet each other with these joyous words proclaiming the Resurrection of our Lord. The response, as we know, is "Alithos Anesti" in Greek and "Truly He is Risen," in English. Notice that the verb is the present tense "is," "Christ IS Risen!" We do not say "Christ has risen" or "Christ rose," as if to mark an event that happened nearly two thousand years ago. Rather, we say it in the present tense, as a reminder that the Resurrection is a PRESENT reality, and should affect our lives in their present state.

While many of us will respond with "Truly He is Risen" when we hear the words "Christ is Risen," will our actions back up our statements? Indeed, there were many reactions to Christ's Resurrection nearly two thousand years ago. And there are many reactions to it to this day. We find at least ten reactions in the Bible. Let's look at some of them.

Christ is Risen! No, He's Not!

In Matthew 28:11-15, we read about the reaction of the guards:

While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sum of money to the soldiers and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So they took the money and did as they were directed; and this story has been spread

among the Jews to this day.

Their reaction to the Resurrection—it simply did not happen. This is also the answer of many skeptics in modern times. Surprisingly, it is also the reaction of many Christians. I read a newspaper article many years ago that said 80% of Christians believe in the Resurrection while 20% do not. I have often wondered what those 20% believe in, or what the foundation is of their Christianity. Christ is Risen! This is truth. Yet the world tries to cover up the truth the same way that the elders and counsel paid to silence the guards. There are probably many people in churches who don't necessarily think that Christ didn't rise from the dead, they just don't think about the Resurrection at all. To some, Christianity is more akin to a moral movement, about being good. The reality of the Resurrection doesn't really affect them. Are you in this camp?

Christ is Risen! I'm afraid!

In Mark 16: 1-8, we read the account of three women who went to the tomb early in morning and found it empty. They were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome. Instead of finding the Body of Jesus which they had come to anoint with burial spices, they encountered an angel who told them plainly that Christ is risen from the dead. Mark 16:8 reads: *And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.* Now, we know that these women eventually went and told the other disciples. They spread the good news of the Resurrection to many. All three are regarded as saints. But their initial reaction was fear—fear of how people would react? Fear of what might happen to them?

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They were in awe (they were trembling and astonished) but they kept their feelings to themselves, afraid of how others would react. Many times, we seem to do the same. We believe in the Resurrection, yet we are unable or lack the courage to spread the message. Has anyone believe in Christ because of something you have said or done?

Christ is Risen! What does that mean?

In Luke 24: 13-35, we read about an encounter that Jesus had with two of His followers on the road to Emmaus. One of them was Cleopas, and the other, unnamed in the Bible, is probably the evangelist Luke. They were not members of the “twelve” but of the “seventy”, another classification of Jesus’ followers. In the account, they are walking on the road talking about the things that had happened in Jerusalem to Jesus over the past few days. Jesus appears and begins walking with them but they do not recognize Him. Jesus pretends not to know anything about what has happened and the two followers give their version of the story. They talked about how Jesus was *“a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered Him up to be condemned to death and crucified Him. But we had hoped that He would be the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find His body; and hey came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that He was alive. Some of these who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see.”* (Luke 24: 19-24) These disciples had witnessed everything that Jesus said was going to happen to Him. And all of it happened, just as He said it would happen. He said He would be crucified and rise from the dead. And both those things happened. And these two disciples were witnesses of what had happened. And yet they couldn’t understand what it all meant. There are many of us who come to church faithfully who probably feel like these two disciples. We come, we see, and we don’t get it. We get older, yet we don’t think about heaven.

We get to the end of our lives and we are scared and confused. In our young lives, we do not understand where it’s all leading and then we lose interest. Yes, this story in the Bible is very relevant to us. Lots of us our on the road to Emmaus, discussing what it all means. Even more concerning are those who are not on the road, not discussing what it all means. Jesus was eventually recognized by the two disciples. How? *“He was made known to them in the breaking of the bread,”* (24:35) in other words, in the Holy Eucharist. The two disciples had conversed with Jesus, they had invited Him to stay with them, and they had partaken of the Eucharist, and this opened their eyes to Him. If you feel like the two disciples on the road, invite Jesus to stay with you, give Him a more significant piece of your heart and your life. Spend time with Him in prayer and Scripture. Continue to receive Holy Communion often. Give your heart and your time to Him, and let Him fill you and reveal Himself to you. Those two disciples would never have had that revelation had they not invited Jesus to walk with them, had they not spent time listening to His words and had they not broken bread with Him.

Christ is Risen! I doubt it!

Most of us are familiar with the story of “Doubting Thomas.” Thomas was one of the twelve disciples. On the evening after the Resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples who were locked behind closed doors. He suddenly appeared to them. They were glad when they saw the Lord. Thomas was not with them when Jesus came. The disciples ran to tell Thomas that they had seen the Risen Lord. His reaction to this good news was skepticism. He told them, *“Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in His side, I will not believe.”* (John 20:25) There are a lot of people in the Thomas camp. They demand tangible proof that the Lord is risen. They set up parameters, as Thomas did: If I win the lottery, I will believe. If my life gets easier, I will believe, etc. Contemporary society doesn’t promote faith in the Resurrection. It promotes materialism, keeping up with the Joneses. Where Christ tells us to serve and not

be served, society tells us it's "kill or be killed." Where Christ tells us to give away one of our coats if we have two, society tells us that "you're a nobody if you don't have three coats." So, do we go with Jesus or with popular culture? A recent study shows that the largest single "religious group" in our country are the "nones," the people who have no religion. There are not more non-religious people than Catholics and that number is growing. There are a lot of doubting Thomases out there. Are you one of them? And if you believe, how does that affect your life? If you are more concerned with materialism or keeping up with the Joneses, if you are not already in the Thomas camp, you'll soon be making your way there.

Christ is Risen! I believe!

Thomas is a very redeeming figure. He is very real, and very refreshing. I love his story. It gives me a lot of hope. Continuing reading in John 20, we read that eight days after Jesus' initial encounter with the disciples, the time when Thomas was not there, that this time Thomas was there, and Jesus again appeared to the disciples. Jesus said to Thomas, *"Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing."* Thomas answered Him, *"My Lord and my God!"* Jesus said to Him, *"Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."* (20:27-28) Many are quick to comment on how Thomas believed only because he saw tangible proof. Many think that Jesus chastised Thomas because He needed to see in order to believe. I see the critical moment of this passage being that fact that Thomas was with the disciples, despite his doubts. Despite his doubts, he still showed up. And eventually it clicked for him. Yes, he needed to see to believe. But don't we all? When we "show up" for God repeatedly, we will understand that He in fact, shows up for us. Someone asked me recently when do I really know there is a God. And my answer was, when I surrender more, I feel God more. When I take leaps of faith and trust in God, then I feel God's presence more. When I hold back in serving and giving, I feel God less. In other words, the more I "show up," the more I experience God. The more I hold back, the less I experience Him. There are times in my life when I have surrendered all the time I had and held nothing back, there are times when I surrendered money I didn't have and held nothing back, there are times when I have surrendered effort and held nothing back. Mind you, these are not things I do on a daily basis. But as I look back at my life, if you asked me, at which points did you feel closest to God, it's always at the points where I have surrendered the most, when I have "shown up" the most. My spiritual father reminds me that "80% of life is just showing up," because showing up makes things possible. Showing up that day made it possible for Thomas to encounter Christ. Showing up for God makes that possible for us as well. Thomas didn't just believe because he saw. He believed because he showed up. The message to us, keep showing up, keep surrendering, because the more you believe, the more your surrender, the closer to God you will be.

Christ is Risen! I'm going fishing!

I remember a seminary professor talking about the post-Resurrection appearance of Jesus as well as how the faithful respond to the Resurrection. In jest, he pointed to John 21:3, when Simon Peter said to the other disciples, *"I am going fishing."* (John 21:3) He mentioned that a lot of the people in the churches have the same reaction. Christ is Risen, I'm going fishing, see you at the end of summer. It's true that across



Christianity, one of the lowest attended Sundays is the Sunday after Pascha. It seems that the Resurrection causes more fatigue than joy. The week after Pascha is called "Renewal Week," not recovery week or fishing week. The Holy Week experience has hopefully led to renewal of faith, added joy, and increased commitment. Yes, I look forward to a little down time after the long journey of Lent and Holy Week, but that's down time from standing, not down time from praying or worshipping. Pascha is a sign that we are closer to summer. However, it should not mean an exodus from the church for the summer, or an exodus from prayer. Remember the lesson of Thomas above, keep showing up!

Christ is Risen! What's in it for me?

In John 21:15-23, we read about an encounter between Jesus and Peter. Peter had denied Jesus when it mattered the most. He had denied Him three times. Jesus asks Peter three times *"Do you love Me?"* He uses the word "agape", does Peter love Jesus as if he would die for Him. Twice Peter answers that He loves Jesus, but as a friend, he answers using the word *"filia."* The third time Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him like a friend. Peter is grieved because now he understands that Jesus was asking him to die for Him, and Peter was professing love for a friend. Peter told Jesus that he loved Him, and would die for Him. And Jesus confirmed that, that would actually be the case. Some say that this encounter is called the restoration of Peter. Peter denied Jesus three times. Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him three times. Peter is now restored as the leader of the Apostles. There is an important lesson here for us. Do we love Christ enough that we would die for Him? Do we love Him *"more than these"* (21:15) "These" include everything in our life—our families, our hobbies, our jobs, food, sports, everything. Do we love Him more than these?

After this "restoration" however, Peter saw John, the beloved disciple, following nearby. Peter said to Jesus, *"Lord, what about this man?"* (20:21) Perhaps Peter hoped to have some kind of bonus. If Peter was eventually going to die for Jesus,

he wanted to know if John would suffer the same fate. Would Peter end up better off than John, or worse? Jesus said to Peter, *"If it is My will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow Me!"* (20:22) Many times in our Christian walk, we are like Peter, wondering if our faith will somehow garner us favor over others. Christianity isn't a competition. We should certainly care about the faith of others, but not whether we have more faith than us, or we more than them. How God chooses to bless others is up to Him. We should be thankful for our blessings, and we should be concerned with our own journey in the faith.

Christ is Risen!

It's going to be easy now.

In Acts 1, the Disciples ask Jesus *"Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"* (Acts 1: 6) In their minds, this is the next logical step. Jesus will now provide political and military freedom from the Roman overlords. Jesus' answer must shock and disappoint them. He responds *"It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority."* (1:7) In other words, political freedom was not going to happen at that moment. The Resurrection does not provide the path to easy living. It provides the path to salvation. And that path could very well be very hard. The Resurrection opens the path for salvation. It is up to us to walk that path, a road that will be very different for each of us. Some of us will live in relative "freedom" our entire lives. Think economic success, fame, fortune. And some of us will live in relative "oppression" our whole lives. Think long term illness, misfortune, economic challenges. Jesus tells us that the times and seasons granted to us are the Father's to know. Why some live to see 20 and others live to see 100 are things that only God know. It is up to us to follow God, wherever life's path leads us. This is what faith is. If we knew the times and seasons, there would be no faith involved. Sometimes things don't go the way we think they should because it is not the time or season. Sometimes things work out in a way we don't expect and we can look back and recognize that it was the time and season where that particular thing should have happened.

Christ is Risen! I will go!

In Mark 16:20, we read *"And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it."* Doubts aside, fear aside, uncertainty aside, the disciple went forth and preached everywhere. And the Lord worked with them, He gave them wisdom and clarity. He sent signs to accompany their message. And a few followers took Christianity to the entire world. They changed the world. Christ meant for Christianity to change the world. He wanted to inaugurate a new kingdom, one based on love and not on fear, one based on service and not on conquest. Our world seems set on gain and fun. The more we gain the more fun we can have. It is not set on love and service. God rewards effort. Will you make an effort to go, to love and to serve Christ? How will this play out against our gain and fun? These two questions are two of the most pivotal questions we need to answer.

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

In Luke 24: 50-52, we read about the Ascension, that Jesus led the disciples *"out as far as Bethany, and lifting up His hands He blessed them. While He blessed hem, He parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. And they returned to Jerusa-*

lem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God." We know that the Ascension happened forty days after the Resurrection. We know that Jesus told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem in order to receive the Holy Spirit. We now know that the Holy Spirit descended upon them on Pentecost, only ten days later. They did not know at the time of the Ascension that the Holy Spirit would come on them in only ten days. They didn't know how exactly the story would play out. But they returned to Jerusalem, following the instructions of Jesus. They were obedient, even without knowing the outcome. They were continually in the temple. This might not have been the safest place in the world, especially since there was still unrest over the crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus, which was still being disputed by both Jews and Romans. However, this did not stop them from going to the temple and proclaiming publicly the Resurrection of Christ. And they were praising God. Even in a time of stress and uncertainty, they were praising God.

We live in a similar way as we celebrate Pascha in 2019. We live in a world which is increasingly critical and intolerant of Christians. It seems that we must change our views on Christianity in order to conform to what society thinks a Christian should be. To stand in the temple and proclaim Christ is an uncomfortable proposition. Praising God is the first and foremost thing we are to be doing as Christians, not only on Pascha, and not only on Sundays, and not only in church. We should be praising Him daily in prayer, throughout our days in how we behave, especially in how we behave towards others. We should be praising Him weekly in worship. And we should be praising Him with our entire lives. Our entire life should be a praise of God. If we are working toward God's heavenly kingdom, and THAT is going to be a continual praising of God, we need to practice that in this life so that we will be ready for eternal life.

Christ came to earth to inaugurate a new kingdom. He came to change the world. Christianity is a movement that is supposed to change the world. The Apostles passed this down to the next generation, and this has been passed down to every generation up to our own. Will you take your place in church history as one who proclaims the Resurrection, or one who ignores it? Will you go fishing for fish, or for disciples? Will you still show up even when you have doubts? Will you share the truth of the Resurrection, be indifferent to it, or say that is never happened?

The Resurrection is the single most important event in the history of the world. It demands a response from every person who has ever lived in the world. For the next forty days we will greet each other with the words "Christ is Risen!" The response traditionally is "Truly He is Risen!" Regardless of whether we are in the Paschal season or not, regardless if anyone greets you with these words or not, every day when we wake up to see a new day, God proclaims to us essentially, "Christ is Risen!" The question is, what is your response TODAY?

Christ is Risen! _____ (Fill in the blank)

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

Christos Anesti! Alithos Anesti!

With love in the Risen Lord,

+Fr. Stavros

Creating Safe Spaces in Our Relationships

by Fr. Stavros

The main “theme” if you will, after having listened to dozens of confessions this Lent, is that many people lack a safe space in which to sort through a problem or a failing. I preached on this a couple of times during Lent because it keeps coming up in conversation. I dare say, based on what I’ve heard, that this is an epidemic in our society. I’ve decided to include some of the thoughts that I shared on Sunday, March 24, in a sermon the second Sunday of Lent. The Gospel that Sunday was from Mark 2:1-12, about the healing of a Paralytic, whose friends brought him to Christ, carrying him on his bed through town. When they got to where Christ was, teaching in a house, they couldn’t get in the house because there were too many people, so they cut a hole in the roof of the house and let the man down on the bed. Christ then healed the man. Here is an excerpt of some of the thoughts I shared:

“He’s not going to change.”

“Once she’s decided something, she isn’t going to budge.”

Many of us feel like this in our marriages, with our kids, with friends, and with co-workers. If you have ever felt this way, know that you are not alone.

There are lots of people who don’t feel that they have safe spaces in which to talk. If they start to talk, they get an eye roll or start an argument. Life would get a whole lot easier if we learned the art of creating safe spaces in which to talk, and be heard. Where we could talk and not yell, where we could be heard and not tuned out. Where we could speak freely, knowing that if we overstep, we can take a step back. Where we could forgive as quickly as we get frustrated.

Today’s Gospel lesson is about the healing of a Paralytic. As I reflected on this Gospel passage, I kept coming back to the “unknown back story” of how four friends brought a paralytic to Christ and because of that, the man was healed. The Bible doesn’t tell us what happened before the story, what events led up to this.

There are five people in the story—one of them paralyzed, four of them able-bodied. We don’t know how the man was paralyzed or how long they had been friends. We don’t know if he was paralyzed from birth, or had had an injury during his life. We also don’t know whose idea it was to go to Christ—was it the paralyzed man who had heard about Him? Or one of the friends suggested they go?

There are four things for sure that were in play in this “back story.”

1. There was a safe space in which to talk—because someone had to have had the idea that Christ could make this man walk. Someone had to have had the idea to scale the walls of the house. If it was the paralyzed man who had the idea, the friends didn’t discourage him and tell him there was no way he was going to be healed. If it was one of the friends, the paralyzed man didn’t discourage the idea, nor did the other friends. No one shot down this idea. Because there was a safe space in which to talk.
2. Trust—imagine being the paralyzed man, being carried through town, hoisted up the walls of the house, how much worse it could have gotten for him had they dropped him. It took an incredible amount of trust for a wounded



man to place whatever was left of his life in the hands of friends who could have made a mistake that would have made his situation much worse.

3. Teamwork—We aren’t told which friend led the charge up the wall, but all the friends had to work together. Imagine trying to hoist a mattress up to the roof of your house, with a 150 man lying on it, with only four people to lift it. It would have taken teamwork, creativity, patience, strength and sheer willpower.
4. Encouragement—Think about how much negativity was in this situation. A paralyzed man, did he think he could be healed? He either encouraged the friends to take him or they encouraged him to go, or one of them led the charge. When they met a road block, like the full house, there had to have been encouragement there.

These four elements are missing from many corners of our society. I see how easily feelings get hurt among teenagers—that doesn’t happen if these four elements are at play. I also see how easily feelings get hurt among adults, in marriages, with our children, with our parents if there isn’t a safe space to talk, if there isn’t trust, if there isn’t teamwork, if there isn’t encouragement.

I want to focus though on the safe space in which to talk—because when there is no teamwork, trust breaks down, and people feel discouraged, and when people are discouraged there

needs to be a safe space in which to talk. There needs to be a safe place in which to talk about how discouraged we feel. If a person brings up a sensitive subject that is bothering them, the answer can't be "we're not going to talk about this." Because that doesn't show love, sensitivity or concern for a spouse, friend, child, etc. Rather than not talking about a subject, figure out a way that the subject can be talked about safely, so that each person's feelings get heard. If communication is totally broken down, (and hopefully before it gets to that point) consider seeing a counselor or a therapist. There are professionals who are experts at opening up paths to communication. I am happy to begin the conversation with you, and if I can't get you anywhere, to refer you to someone who can.

Creating boundaries that can't be crossed is a key in establishing safe spaces in which to talk. When you come to confession, as an example, there is an implied boundary—"I love and respect you before you start, I'll love and respect you when you are finished." This "boundary" creates a safe space in which a person can say anything and not fear being written off or thought less of by their priest. Imagine if there is no boundary. Imagine if I say "say what you want and I'll think what I want," then no one is going to feel safe talking.

So in our relationships, it is essential that we create safe spaces in which communication can happen. We have to create boundaries that let the other person know we aren't going to "write them off" or leave if we are annoyed with the topic. If there are no boundaries, no safe zone, then there isn't going to be honesty, and without honesty, there is not trust, and with no trust there can be no love.

Going back to the Bible story, we all play the role of both the paralyzed man and the four friends.

We need people who will care about us and encourage us. We need people we can trust and count on. We need people we can work with. We need people we can talk safely with.

We are all the paralyzed man in some way. And we all can use help and encouragement from supportive friends we can trust. We've all been wounded in some way in life and need help getting "healing" We all need help and encouragement to get to Christ.

We are all the four friends as well. We all know people who need encouragement. We all know people who need someone

to talk to. We all know people who have been wounded in life and need someone to help them get healing. We all know people who need help getting to Christ.

I read somewhere recently that the appropriate ratio of encouragement to discouragement that we need to stay "in balance" is 5:1. That means we should hear 5 encouraging things for every discouraging thing we hear. On the other side, it also means that we should say 5 encouraging things to people for every one discouraging thing we say. Think about how you talk to your spouse, your children, your friends, your co-workers. Do you keep the 5:1 ratio? Think about how others talk to you. Do you get 5:1 encouragement to discouragement? If we are honest, most of us are on a deficit for getting enough encouragement. And further, most of us contribute to the deficit of saying too many discouraging things. This is something we can all work on.

We all need four friends to carry us.

We all need to carry four people.

Who are you carrying?

Who is carrying you?

Are there people you can safely tell that you are paralyzed and need help?

When someone tells you they are paralyzed, do you give them a safe space in which to talk?

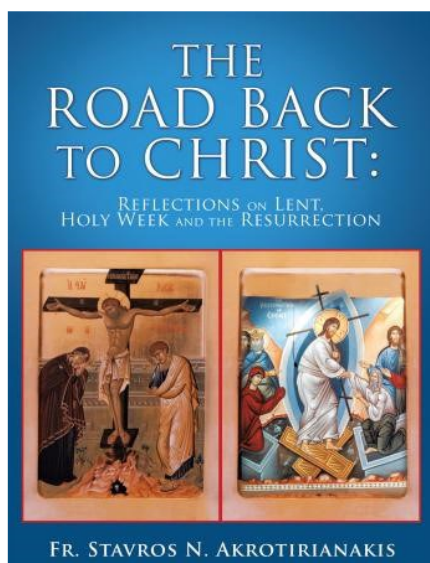
The miracle was granted by Christ, but it was made possible by the four friends.

Getting to Christ requires others, it also requires encouragement. Do you encourage or discourage others to get to Christ? To worship? To Pray?

There is a back story to all of our stories, good or bad. If things are going well, it's probably because there is a safe space, and if they are going badly, it's probably because there isn't one.

So focus on safe spaces this week—purposefully encourage, do you part on the ratio. Be bold, like these four friends. They took a chance and a friend was healed.

Take a chance and see what kinds of relationships can be healed in your life, if you approach them with safety and with encouragement.



The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection is now on sale!

It is a series of daily reflections to be read from the beginning of Triodion through All Saints Day (this year that is June 23). Pick up your copy today so you can begin reading it on February 17. This book costs \$18.99 and all monies taken in at the bookstore go to the church.

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 1750 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 4 years! Over half of our parish receives it daily, as well as many people outside of our parish. Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email Charlie at charlie.hambos@gmail.com and ask to add you.

Fifty-Two Verses in Fifty-Two Weeks: The Bible Project

By Fr. Stavros

In January, we began the “Fifty-Two Verses in Fifty-Two Weeks” Bible Challenge, to memorize one Bible verse per week for fifty two weeks. I will provide a verse per week (four or five per month in *The Messenger* and then repeated weekly in the bulletin). I will choose verses that are meaningful to me. You are welcome to submit verses via email to me as well, as many of you have.

Most of us don’t spend enough time in the Bible. Sadly, some of us don’t spend any time. If you want a challenge, do the following:

- Memorize the verse of the week.
- For a greater challenge, read the entire chapter of the book that the verse comes from.
- For a greater challenge, read the entire book where the verse comes from.

Another challenge to consider is to keep a journal and contemplate the verse each week. Read it, memorize it, and then contemplate it. Allow the Holy Spirit to move your mind and your thoughts and then write down those thoughts and keep them in a journal. If you do one reflection on Scripture each week, you will have the best book that could be. A book written by you, for you, guided by the Holy Spirit, who will guide your thoughts as you read the Scriptures.

Below are verses for the month of May. There is one verse for each week. I have written a few comments below each verse to get your mind going. Don’t let my thoughts be your interpretation. Contemplate the Scripture each week and let it speak to you. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you through your reflection on Scripture.

May 5 - 11

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1

This verse corresponds to the week we commemorate “doubting Thomas.” Faith is believing in something we cannot fully comprehend. We don’t have what could be called “blind faith,” as we do not know nothing of what we believe. We know many things about the Lord, about salvation, even about heaven. These are revealed in the Bible and in the struggles of saints. Faith is a decision. And it takes conviction to be a person of faith.

May 12-18

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

Matthew 6:33

We are always looking for things—the next conquest, the next paycheck, the next purchase, the next achievement. And when we don’t get the next thing we are looking for, we get frustrated and discouraged. Jesus tells us to seek for Him, His Kingdom and His righteousness. That doesn’t necessarily mean that riches and fame will follow. It does mean that when we seek Him first, we will not be disappointed by whatever other things we achieve, because we will have the most important thing—Christ, His righteousness and ultimately a place in His Kingdom.

May 19 - 25

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Psalms 46:1

As we wind down the school year, this is an appropriate verse. God is supposed to be our refuge and strength, in good times and in difficult ones. As we push through final exams, end of the year projects and overall fatigue from the long school year, this verse is a very helpful one to have at the forefront of our minds. Where is it that we go in times of trouble? Is our refuge in food and drink? Is it in unhealthy hobbies? Or is it in God?

May 26 - June 1

Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong.

Let all that you do be done in love.

1 Corinthians 16:13-14

As we celebrate Memorial Day this week, we remember the soldiers who have been watchful in battle, firm in the fight, faithful to the end, and courageous to put themselves in harm’s way. While we may never shoulder a rifle or march into a military battle, every day we march headlong into the battle for good and evil, the battle to stay firm in our Christian faith. It used to be that we had to only worry about being disciplined in our practice of the faith. Now, we not only have to be disciplined in living out what we believe, we have to be courageous and stand firm against the many who are openly hostile and intolerant of Christians. Verse 14 reminds us that all that we do, even disagreeing, should be done in love.

How did we do last month? If there are any scriptures that mean the world to you, send them to Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com.

Liturgical Schedule for May 2019

Friday, May 3

Life-Giving Fountain of the Virgin Mary (Zoödochos Peghe - Ζωοδόχος Πηγή)

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

Sunday, May 5

Sunday of Thomas

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: Lisa Alsina, Genie Carter; Ambassador: Helen Cauthorn; Caller: Christene Worley

Coffee Hour: Pascha Picnic

Bookstore: Happy Picnic!

Wednesday, May 8

St. John the Theologian/St. Arsenios

Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, May 12

Sunday of the Myrhh-Bearing Women - Mother's Day

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: Axl David, Dwight Forde; Ambassador: Michael Palios; Caller: Maria Karounos

Coffee Hour: E, F, G Families

Bookstore: John and Anetta Alexander

Tuesday, May 14

St. Pachomios (Fr. Stavros Anniversary of Ordination)

Orthros 5:00 p.m.

Divine Liturgy 6:00 p.m. (evening Liturgy)

Sunday, May 19

Sunday of the Paralytic

Orthros 8:45 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. John

Ushers: Tammy Christou, George Mitseas, Florin Patrascoiu

Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Kalliope Chagaris, Elaine Daniels; Ambassador: Ewana Forde; Caller: Julie Palios

Coffee Hour: Altar Angels

Bookstore: David Voykin

Tuesday, May 21

Sts. Constantine & Helen

Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, May 26

Sunday of Thomas

Orthros 8:45 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone Attending May Serve

Ushers: Nick Kavouklis, George Trimikliniotis, Peter Theophanous

Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Carole Fotopoulos, Elaine Halkias; Ambassador: Donna Hambos; Caller: Vickie Peckham

Coffee Hour: AHEPA/DOP **Bookstore:** Zhana Temelkova and Elaine Daniels

Sunday, June 2

Sunday of the Blind Man - Get Acquainted Sunday

Orthros 8:45 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Matthew/St. Mark

Ushers:

Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Skip Higdon, Debbie Kavouklis; Ambassador: Edie Kavouklis; Caller: Christene Worley

Coffee Hour: H, I, J Families

Bookstore: MaryAnn Rose

Tuesday, June 4

Leave-Taking (Apodosis) of Pascha

Orthros 5:15 p.m. Divine Liturgy 6:00 p.m.

Thursday, June 6

Ascension

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

Wakes to be held temporarily at St. John - Many parishioners choose to use Blount Curry Funeral home on MacDill/Swann for their funeral needs. The chapel at that location is being renovated and currently unavailable for use. During this time, anyone utilizing Blount/Curry on MacDill is welcome to hold the wake for their loved ones in our church sanctuary. Once the chapel is completed, the wakes will once again be held in the funeral home chapel. A reminder that it is the policy of the Metropolis of Atlanta that laypersons are not allowed to speak in the church without written permission from the Metropolitan. This policy will remain in effect for wakes held at the church.

Liturgical Notes for May 2019

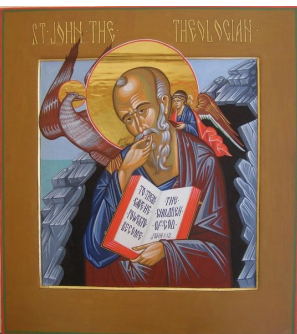
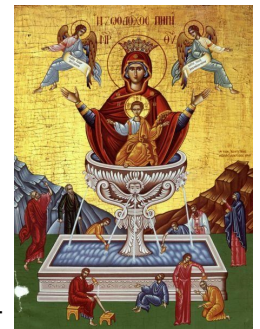
The Pentecostarion - The 50 Days After Pascha The period of 50 days between Pascha & Pentecost is referred to as the “Pentecostarion.” The period of forty days between Pascha Sunday and the day of the Ascension is known as the period of Pascha (or Easter). It is a period set aside by the Church for the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



No Kneeling until Pentecost It is actually the Tradition in the Orthodox Church that we not kneel on Sundays in honor of the Resurrection of Christ. Because we do not worship on a daily basis in our church communities, priests have encouraged people to kneel on Sundays, the thought being that if we do not kneel on Sundays, that we’ll never kneel in church. It is a Tradition, that for 50 days after Pascha, we do not kneel in honor of the Resurrection. The next time we will kneel after April 28 is on the Feast of Pentecost at the Vespers of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, when the priest says “Again and again on bended knees let us pray to the Lord.”

Fast Free the week after Pascha Having kept a fast for almost 8 weeks, including the week before Lent, Lent and Holy Week, the church gives us a “week off” from fasting the week after Pascha. During Bright Week, or Renewal Week, as that week is called each day is like a Sunday. Hence, there is no fasting during this celebratory week. Who, then, may receive Communion? Whoever wishes to, providing that they abstain from food the morning they are receiving. So, the Sunday after Pascha, everyone in the congregation may receive. There is no fasting on Wednesday or Friday of renewal week, or any other day of that week either.

Friday, May 3 - Feast of the Life-Giving Fountain - Friday after Pascha Commemorates the consecration of a Chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary, which was built over a spring in Constantinople, that emits water with healing powers. Hundreds of miracles and healings have occurred at this spring. This feast day of Zoödochos Peghe - Ζωοδόχος Πηγή, the Feast of the Life-Giving Fountain, is always celebrated on the Friday of Bright (Renewal) week, the week after Pascha, May 3, this year.



Sunday, May 5 - Sunday of St. Thomas The Church brings to our mind the unbelief of Thomas followed by his belief after seeing the scars of Christ.

Wednesday, May 8 - Feast of St. John the Theologian and St. Arsenios On May 8, we celebrate the feast days of St. John the Theologian, the author of the fourth Gospel, as well as the Epistles of St. John and the book of Revelation, and also celebrate the feast of St. Arsenios, a monk of the 5th Century.

Sunday, May 12 - Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women They came to anoint Jesus’ body, but found an EMPTY tomb. We also commemorate Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

Tuesday, May 14 - Feast of St. Pachomios—Fr. Stavros’ Anniversary of Ordination (evening Liturgy) - Fr. Stavros was ordained to the Holy Priesthood of the Greek Orthodox Church on May 15, 1998. This will mark his 21st anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. Every year, Fr. Stavros marks this anniversary by celebrating Divine Liturgy in thanksgiving for the gift of priestly ministry. This year, Fr. Stavros will celebrate Liturgy for his anniversary on Tuesday, May 14, an evening liturgy the evening before his anniversary, in thanksgiving for 21 years of priestly ministry. Please come and join him in prayer that day.



Sunday, May 19 - Sunday of the Paralytic The healing of the paralytic who was afflicted for many years. This event bears witness to Christ’s authority over the human body: He who can overcome death in His own body has power over all human flesh.

Tuesday, May 21 - Sts. Constantine and Helen May 21 commemorates the feast of Sts. Constantine and Helen. St. Constantine was the emperor of the Roman Empire who decided to make Christianity the official religion of the empire. For the first time in history, the Christian church would not fall under persecution. St. Constantine also moved the capital of the Empire from Rome to Constantinople (present day Istanbul, Turkey), where he inaugurated the Byzantine Empire which flourished from 325 until 1453. He also convened the first Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in the year 325, which inaugurated what is known as the “golden age of Orthodoxy,” and resulted in the writing of the Ni-



cene Creed (edited to its current version in the year 381). St. Helen, the mother of St. Constantine, is recognized as being the person who found the true cross of Christ in Jerusalem. She went on a pilgrimage to the Holy City and searched diligently for the Cross, finding it under a patch of Basil (Vasiliko) on the Mountain of Golgotha. Sts. Constantine and Helen have the title *Isapostolou*, "Equal to the Apostles" because of the tremendous contributions they made to the Orthodox Christian Church.

Sunday, May 26 - Sunday of the Samaritan Woman Christ talks about the water of eternal life which will never make us thirst again. The woman here is St. Photini.

Sunday, June 2 - Sunday of the Blind Man

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

Tuesday, June 4 - Apodosi (Leave-Taking) of Pascha - This marks the end of the Paschal Season. It is a repeat of the Resurrection Service and Liturgy of Pascha and is the last time of the Liturgical year that we sing Χριστὸς Ανέστη. We will celebrate this feast on Tuesday, June 4, with an evening Liturgy at 6:00 p.m. (Orthros will begin at 5:15 p.m. and is a replication of the Resurrection Service from Pascha).

Thursday, June 6 - Ascension

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



My One Word for 2019 - Courage

By Jennifer Alastanos

As we make our way through 2019, anyone who has chosen a word for this year is welcome to submit a testimonial for the Messenger each month. If you'd like to share your word and how it's shaping your year, please email Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com. This month's testimonial is from Jennifer Alastanos.

I've never been one to make a lot of new years resolutions, but there is something special about the opportunity for a new year and a fresh start. This year, I decided to take the challenge from Father Stavros and pick one word to define my 2019. I considered several words, but there is one in particular that stuck out to me, courage. I looked up the definition according to Webster's dictionary "mental or moral strength to venture, preserve, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty." I wrote it down on a piece of paper and started thinking about a lot of different areas of my life: work, faith, health/fitness, friends/family, hobbies, personal development, and relationships. While I didn't feel I was necessarily in danger with any of these categories, I certainly had some fears and difficulties.

I have lived in Tampa for a little over 2.5 years now, and when I moved here, I knew one person. At the time, I thought I might stay for a year and then I was hoping to go back home to West Virginia. As usual, God had different plans for me, and now I get to live every day in a city I fell in love with. I look back and think about how much I've grown as a person and all of the people I have met in such a short amount of time. Some of my friends can't believe I would show up at an event by myself, but every time I explain, how else am I going to meet people? That took courage. As I reflected on a word for the year, I thought about how much more growth 2019 could hold if I just had a little more courage every day to try new things, to challenge myself, and to push myself out of my comfort zone.

So how is it going? After taking a break in January and doing a lot of self-reflection, I've been right back out there pushing myself out of my comfort zone. I joined a new group to network with other young professionals much like myself. I sought out additional recommendations and referrals for a pain in my knee that I knew wasn't just in my head. I finally received a definitive diagnosis and will be starting treatment to heal it soon. I've transitioned to a new job that I have already found to be professionally and personally rewarding even though it holds new challenges and I was very comfortable at my previous job.

Finally, how does this all fit into my faith? I wrote down a couple Bible verses that resonated with me as I was reflecting on my word at the beginning of the year.

"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong." 1 Corinthians 16:13

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." Proverbs 3:5-6

For me, the word courage fits into my faith by having the courage to be a better Christian on a daily basis. The courage not to give up on my goals even when I have a setback. The courage to say no to my friends when they want to go to brunch or out on the boat Sunday morning, when I know the time would be better spent at church. The courage to share my faith with new people I meet. Finally, having the courage to let go of things and know that God has a better plan than I could ever imagine. These are all things I have to work on, but I know with time I will get there.

Jennifer Alastanos works as a pharmacist and is active with our young adult ministry.

St. John the Baptist Community News

Parish Registry

Chrismation - Kalie (Kalliopi) Pagonis was Chrismated on March 27. Michael Pagonis was her sponsor. Congratulations!

Baptism - Mark Bobby Christo, son of Bobby and Roxanne (Agelatos) Christo, was baptized on Sunday, April 7. Faye and Chris Tury were the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism - Niko Alexander Koulianos, son of Mike and Stephanie Koulianos, was baptized on Sunday, April 14. Godparents were George and Stephanie Koulianos and Robert and Alexandra Santana. Na Sas Zisi!

Funeral - Eugenia Ioannides passed away on April 3. Her funeral was held on April 8. May her memory be eternal!

Funeral - Vasile Calintaru passed away on April 7. His funeral was held on April 10, with Fr. Stavros and Fr. John Bociu officiating. May his memory be eternal!

New Policy—no passing of trays —As of January 1, 2019, there will no longer be a tray passed at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy. It is our hope that everyone will increase their stewardship in order to bridge this gap. Increased stewardship and less nickel-and-diming (trays) are the mark of a strong parish. This new policy is in line with our desire to be a strong parish. There will be a tray in the narthex. You can deposit your stewardship checks in that tray, give additional donations in that tray or ignore the tray. There is no charge for the small candles. The large candles (the red 7-day ones) will still cost \$5.

NEW PROCEDURE FOR UNCLAIMED COFFEE HOURS - We are excited to present a NEW procedure for hosting our weekly parish coffee hour for the weeks where no ministry has signed up for coffee hour. Certain letters of the alphabet according to last name, have been assigned to each open date. We will be emailing a link to a Sign-Up Genius. Please sign up for those Sundays which correspond to your last name. You may sign up for one or more items which include, set-up, serving, bringing items or clean up on any particular date. Please see the dates and suggested items below. We would like to see as many different people as possible sign up, so that the burden will not fall on anyone repeatedly. It is also important that our worship experience not be compromised by putting on the coffee hour. Finally, if a family would like to pool together to go a coffee hour, to honor a loved one who has passed, or mark another occasion, please let us know and we'll reserve that date for your family. If there are any questions, don't hesitate to call the church office at 813-876-8830. Thank you for helping us to create an environment that encourages fellowship and community. On Sunday, May 12, E, F, G Families will host. On June 2, H, I, J Families will host. On June 16, K, L, M Families will host.

Meeting of Ministry Heads Monday, May 6 at 6:30 p.m.

We will have our quarterly meeting of ministry heads on Monday, May 6 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. We will provide dinner. At least one member from each ministry is requested to attend. More may attend as well. Please RSVP to the church office by May 1 to let us know who is coming.

Young Adult Ministry - Sunday, May 12 - The YAL will have our dinner and discussion.

We'll meet at 5:00 p.m. in the Kourmolis Community Center, walk somewhere close by to have dinner, then walk back for some discussion. Please RSVP to Charlie if you are going to attend. Dates may change. Charlie will send an email.



Community Outreach - Saturday, May 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. located at 412 Zack Street. The entrance is on Polk Street. Grab a cup of coffee and come help us! **We love to see new and old faces!**

GOYA Meeting – May 19 The May GOYA Meeting will be Sunday, May 19, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be served. We invite our 6th graders (who will be in 7th grade in the fall) to join us for this meeting. Father Stavros will also be doing a special session with seniors toward the conclusion of this meeting. Our June GOYA meeting will be Sunday, June 2, from 5:00-7:30 p.m.

Sun State Eastern Orthodox Junior Olympics will be on June 7-9. Planning is already underway. If you would like to help in any way please contact Dwight Forde at 727-685-9028 or Maria Koutroumanis at 813-245-3854.



Congratulations to our Graduates!

If you have a student who is graduating, please email all information to the church office by Friday, May 10 so we can include graduates in the June/July issue of *The Messenger*! **Please provide:** Name and Picture of the graduate, the institution graduating from, any degree, in the case of a college graduate, and what college the person plans to attend, in the case of the high school graduate.

CLASS OF 2019



Congratulations to Dr. Vasilios Nenos, who recently graduated from the Palmer College of Chiropractic Florida in Daytona Beach. Vasilios is now working at Valrico Spine and Rehab.

St. John's is proud to offer a new ministry for families with special needs:

Connect Through Christ

According to the US Census, 18.5% of American Children under age 18 are Special Needs Children. That doesn't mean that they aren't smart, talented or capable. Just that they have specific challenges that a "typical" student would not face.

There are four major types of special needs children:

- Physical – muscular dystrophy, chronic asthma, epilepsy, etc.
- Developmental – down syndrome, autism, dyslexia, speech delays, processing disorders
- Behavioral/Emotional – ADD, bi-polar, oppositional defiance disorder, etc.
- Sensory Impaired – Blind, visually impaired, deaf, limited hearing

Our mission is to break down barriers that keep children with disabilities and their families from being able to participate in the Church community. By discretely identifying families that Connect Through Christ can serve we hope to assist in providing a life long relationship with Christ. For more information please contact Lindsey Skourellos at 813-503-7845 and lskourellos@yahoo.com or Dante Skourellos 813-765-9534 and andd_skourellos@yahoo.com

Youth Protection Update

Dear Parishioners,

As many of you are aware, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America passed a resolution last summer mandating Youth Worker screening, training, and background checks for all Greek Orthodox churches in North America. Luckily, we've already implemented a youth protection program and many of us are familiar with the processes.

Please be aware that the youth protection enrollment for ecclesiastical year 2019–2020 will occur between June 1 and August 31. Prior to this starting date, you will receive email communication regarding what steps to take if you are volunteer who works with children or leads our Church. We ask that you keep an eye out for these emails and read the Messenger for updates as our methodology may change due to the new requirements. Thank you for serving so faithfully at St. John's.

Yours in Christ,

Catherine S. Mitseas, ministry head
Nick Kataras, Parish Council Liaison





Archangel Michael Winners

And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. -2 Corinthians 8:5

The Archangel Michael Feast was prayerfully conceived by His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios upon arriving in Atlanta, as the annual double feast of the Metropolis family. Since 1998, the Metropolis family comes together in Atlanta on the weekend of, prior to or following the November 8 Feast day of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

It is to honor and celebrate the Patron Saint of our Metropolis and the lives of two people from each parish, who are living examples of the Orthodox Christian life and journey to Theosis. By extension, this special Metropolis feast also serves as the annual Metropolis celebration and thanksgiving for all devout stewards of the faith, giving their time and talent.

This year's award winners are Chris Kavouklis and Lisa Alsina.

Congratulations Chris and Lisa!

Bags of Love Testimony

Our Philoptochos has done a "bags of love" drive on a few occasions this past year. Bags are prepared that have basic hygiene items and snacks that can be given to homeless people we encounter on the side of the road. Bags are then taken by parishioners who distribute them. Following is a letter that Father Stavros received from a parishioner, with a testimony about her experience. If you'd like to share your story, please email Father Stavros.

Dear Father, I want you to know how happy I am about the Bags of Love project. I was impressed that the Sunday School children participated in preparing them. Christos and I helped make sure all the bags were taken to give out to people in need. I took five and every person was happy with the gift and expressed appreciation. One went to a man I passed on my way home from church. Another to a woman I see on a regular basis and I will continue to help her. As near as I can tell she has only one shirt. Since I can guess her size I will stop by her corner with some clothing.

Thank you so much for encouraging me to reach out to help others.

Kathy MacLaury

Small Group Study of Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis

Will meet in the Administration Building Meeting Room

On Sundays after Pascha - Stay Tuned

1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Please purchase the book soon.

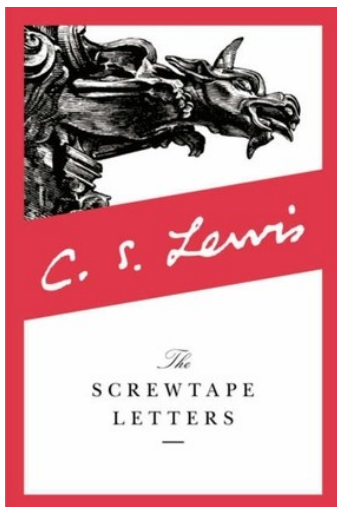
Contact Mary Maas at 813-215-7688

Here are the required readings for each session:

First third of the book pages 1-61

Second third of the book pages 63-127

Last third of the book pages 129-209.



In this humorous exchange, C. S. Lewis delves into moral questions about good v. evil, temptation, repentance, and grace. Through this wonderful tale, the reader emerges with a better knowledge of what it means to live a good, honest life.

Melanoma May - Protect Yourself Against Skin Cancer

Early detection of skin cancer is important and can be lifesaving, especially for certain types of skin cancer such as melanoma. Melanoma can be cured if it is caught early. As the cancer advances to late stage cancer, the survival rate for more than a few years is less than 15%.

Given that timing is so crucial to diagnosing and treating skin cancer, you should follow a few simple steps to learn how to detect skin cancer on your skin. The best way is to check yourself for skin cancer by doing a self-examination. Choose a day during the month and note it on the calendar.

Evaluate each area of your skin, leaving no part unchecked. After you look at all the easily seen areas, use a mirror to evaluate your back, and any other hard to see area. It may be helpful to have an image of a body chart and check off areas as well as make note of any moles or markings you find.

Follow a few simple steps to learn how to detect skin cancer on your skin.

ABCDE scheme.

A stands for the typical asymmetry within the skin region, where one half does not match the other half.

You should also look for a **B**order, which will be irregular, ragged or notched, jagged, and



not sharp or crisp.

The **C**olor will also change across the skin area with a kind of tie-dye effect with blacks, browns, and blues.

You must also look for the **D**iameter of the lesion. It will likely be a bit over a 1/4 an inch in size.

You will also notice the mole or lesion **E**volve, or change, its appearance over time.

Protect yourself against skin cancer. Sunscreen is the most effective, protective agent against damage from the **sun's** powerful rays for all ages, genders.

Marcelle Triantafilou



Join the IOCC Emergency Action Team

Are you interested in helping your neighbors get back on their feet after a disaster? When a disaster strikes, families often need help removing debris, tearing down water soaked walls, or ripping out buckled floors. In the event of a disaster in your greater community, IOCC will reach out to you to join one of our Emergency Action Teams. If you are willing to travel to a disaster affected area that is not in your greater community, please let us know that as well. **Go to <https://www.iocc.org/take-action/join-action-team/emergency-action-team>.**

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



Week #1 June 23 - June 29

Week #2 June 30 - July 6

Week #3 July 7 - July 13

Week #4 July 14 - July 20

Week #5 July 21 - July 27

Registration was on March 20. A few spots may still be open. In the meantime, visit <http://atlmopolis.org/st-stephens-summer-camp> to help with the Camp Wish List!



METROPOLIS OF ATLANTA PHILOPTOCHOS Christ the Good Shepherd SUMMER CAMP

Created for Families with Children on the Autism Spectrum

- A faith based camp offered by the Metropolis of Atlanta Philoptochos to help children with Autism grow in their relationship with God.
- There is a 1:1 ratio of trained counselors for each special needs child.
- Limited to 10 families.
- Families will stay in cabins and experience all that our beautiful retreat center has to offer: recreational activities, art programs, special parent seminars, bonding with other families, spiritual nourishment.

When: May 24-26, 2019

Where: Diakonia Retreat Center, 455 Quail Ridge Rd., Salem, SC 29676

Who: Families with children on the Autism Spectrum (ages 9-15) parents and siblings included.

Cost: \$100/family. Remaining cost is donated by Philoptochos.

Contact Despina Koulianos: dkoulianos@gmail.com, 251-454-5657.

HOLY UNMERCENARIES MEDICAL SOCIETY



**3RD ANNUAL RETREAT
May 17 - 19, 2019**

**"HEALING THE HEALER:
REFLECTIONS ON THE HEALING
PARTNERSHIP and the
SPIRITUAL LIFE
OF THE PHYSICIAN "**

Panagia Chapel Conference Center
Diakonia Retreat Center
Retreat Leader: Dn. Dr. Stephen
Muse

For more information or to register, contact
Dn. Paul Tsahakis at ptsahakis@gmail.com
Registration: \$200/single or \$225/couple in-
cludes meals and accommodations. Due by
April 16, 2019.

Oratorical Festival Speeches



The Parish Level Competition of the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival was held on March 31. On March 31, the parish level of competition for the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival was held at St. John. Our participants in the senior division were Hannah Passalaris, Dimitrios (DI) Tsetsekas and Angelina Krinos, with Hannah and DI moving on to the district competition in Sarasota. In the junior division, the participants were Demetri Passalaris, Madeline Moran, Jason Owens, Lola Bavaro and Andrew Thatcher, with Demetri and Madeline moving on to the district competition. Special thanks goes to Peggy Bradshaw for again organizing our Oratorical Festival, to our judges—Helen Cauthorn, Brett Mourer and Dante Skourellos—and to our timekeeper, Charlie Hambos. The district competition was on April 13 at St. Barbara in Sarasota. Great job by everyone! Some of the oratorical speeches will be placed in The Messenger this month and others will be placed in next month's edition.

In 1 Timothy 6:10, St. Paul writes, “For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.” How should Orthodox Christians relate to money and wealth?

By Jason Owens

A young man once said that “Greed does not empower a man; a man empowers his greed”. In fact, he just said it again. Although, this is an intriguing phenomenon. Money is an attractive element; thus, it serves as a basis for many wrongdoings. Thankfully, every individual in the world can spread the words of God to cleanse this world free of sins. Crimes are not based on the policies of our government. Rather, they are based on morality. We have been warned against theft, harm, and several other acts of misconduct through the Ten Commandments, through our faith, but not everyone is as lucky as us. Consequently, if our ultimate goal is to diminish crime rates, our focus should be on spreading our faith and educating our neighbors.

To prove that the Christian faith does in fact lower crime rates, I researched statistics from various states in the US. However, our gun laws differ immensely throughout this country, and I didn't want there to be any other factors as to why crime rates drop. Therefore, I came up with two countries that share a lot of qualities. Both are in Europe, both are of relatively equal economic status, both have strict gun laws, both are characterized as Christian, and the two have similar forms of government. These countries are the United Kingdom and Poland. What separates the two is how religious they are. Three separate Gallup International polls asked respondents whether they felt religious, and the results show that 86% of Polish respondents answered yes. Meanwhile, only 30% of respondents answered yes in the United Kingdom. To no surprise, Poland is ranked as a much safer country than the UK by various sources. This can be reasonably attributed, since “God is love, and the places with the least amount of God have the least amount of love”.

As mentioned earlier, greed, especially for money, can be a motivation to commit a crime. As a straight A student, even I have been tempted to do other people's homework due to the concept of making quick money. However, in my instance, my faith and guidance helped me against it. Although, at times, even with stable faith, people will commit crimes regardless, due to severe circumstances. This shouldn't discourage us, however. There is still plenty that we can do as Christians. Criminals convicted of more serious crimes are very likely to

be sentenced to jail. That is where we can step in. No, we aren't going to help them escape, but what we can do, and should do, is visit them in jail to remind them that when there's no hope left, there's still hope left in God. As Jesus said, He came here to cure the sick. Therefore, while hospitals for physical setbacks will treat or even cure diseases, jails won't necessarily cure a mindset; a way of thinking. Thus, it is in the community's best interest that we visit jails to help people, to bring them closer to God. When visiting, we can teach them important biblical lessons. For instance, in Peter 2:16, we are advised to “Live as free people, but do not use [...] freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves”. This is merely one of the numerous examples of great guidance that can be given to people that may feel hopeless, as this particular quote reassures them that they can make up for their mistakes. Russian philosopher and Orthodox Christian, Dostoevsky, said “Everybody wants to change the world, but nobody thinks about changing himself”.

Lastly, it is often said that money is the root of all evil. Evil involves crime, violence, and so much more. Nonetheless, it is my belief that with patience and education of Christ's beliefs, despite the lure of fast money from crime, God's love will prevail and cure any ailment from the lust of monetary gain.

Jason Owens is in the 9th Grade and is the son of Charles Owens and Mary Florou-Owens.

On January 30, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Three Hierarchs: St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, and St. John Chrysostom. Select one of these Church Fathers and discuss his contribution to the Church.

By Andrew Choundas Thatcher

St. Basil . . . When I say that, what do you think of? It shouldn't just be the Vasilopita bread that may bring us good fortune if we find the lucky coin. He was a tremendously special man who is remembered today, 1700 years after he lived. Why do we remember him so many years later? There is a reason he is known as “St. Basil the Great.”

St. Basil was one of ten siblings born into an honorable and wealthy family. With such a large family, you would think he would be the only achiever, but five of his ten siblings also became Saints, showing what an amazing family St. Basil had. After St. Basil finished university in Athens, he decided to make a huge change in his life. He sold everything he owned, gave it to the poor, and became a monastic. That means that he

gave up every luxury he had and started living with nothing. He founded a monastery where he shared meals and prayer with other religious men. St. Basil thought it was important for monks to live together in a community. After living as a monastic, St. Basil left the monastery and was ordained as a priest so that he could live among society and help others.

St. Basil was a very generous and giving person, often giving his property to others knowing that it would serve them better than it would serve him. A few years after becoming a priest, a famine struck the area where St. Basil was serving. The poverty and desperation that resulted from the food shortage inspired him to write two famous sermons, "To the Rich, I Will Tear Down My Barns" and "In Time of Famine and Drought." His point in these sermons was that a simple life that was shared with others was more important than material goods.

Think about how today's culture and social media presence put a great emphasis on material goods. But is that what is important? St. Basil stressed that what was rewarding in life was the feeling of giving and not greed. St. Basil believed that having an abundance of wealth while others lacked necessities was a violation of what he called the "mother of all commandments": "Love your neighbor as yourself.

St. Basil was one of the first champions of social justice, and he was the one to focus the church's efforts towards the unfortunate members of society. In his sermons, St. Basil wanted to make people understand the difficult plight of the poor and abandoned. He practiced what he preached, creating the first orphanages, hospitals, and nursing homes to take care of those who were helpless. In today's world, where problems are still unsolved such as homelessness, poverty, addiction, and hunger, we need to follow St. Basil's example and work to relieve suffering.

St. Basil tells us to view our wealth as a resource that can help the world's suffering. Philanthropy was a big part of St. Basil's contributions to our society and church. Known for wanting a more generous and giving society, he set examples by giving his possessions to others, knowing they needed it more. I notice that in today's society, people can be selfish and self-centered, even though other people are going through hard times. When we remember St. Basil and how he showed us how to "love one another," we can actually make someone's day and make the world a better place. That would be the ultimate way to follow the greatest commandment to love God and love one another – that is why he is called "St. Basil the Great."

Andrew Choundas Thatcher is in the 8th Grade and is the son of Greg Thatcher and Marina Choundas.

In 1 Timothy 6:10, St. Paul writes, "For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil." How should Orthodox Christians relate to money and wealth?

By Demetri Passalaris

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God": In this famous passage, from Matthew 19, Jesus states with great visual clarity, how difficult it is for the rich to make it to heaven. For as long as I can remember I have wanted to become a wealthy,

successful man. However, with this image in mind how can I reconcile my earthly desires with my deeper desire to enter the kingdom heaven? The Gospel is also filled with references to the dangers of wealth and the evil it creates. When I read about billionaire football owners doing unspeakable acts in Florida strip malls and Hollywood movie stars trying to buy their children's way into elite schools it is clear the moral pitfalls of the wealthy are not just stories in the bible. Saint Paul's warning in 1 Timothy 6:10 "For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" seems especially applicable to our modern day obsession with material wealth. However is wealth alone the root of evil or can it be the root to a greater good? Does wealth have to be an obstacle to spiritual salvation or can we as Orthodox Christians use our talents and treasures to honor God and make it into heaven?

Throughout the bible there is evidence that wealth makes it difficult for people to lead good lives. From the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus admonishes us against amassing great treasures on earth instead to focus on treasures in heaven. He states "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money," Matthew 6: 24. Again it is clear that the pursuit of wealth can interfere with our pursuit of heavenly treasures. Jesus also pointed out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, the wealthy elite who prided themselves on their self-righteousness and strict adherence to the Law.

The Pharisees were more concerned with their public image than what was truly important. We are reminded of this on the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee. The wealthy Pharisee shows great pride and no humility as he stands and prays boasting of all that he does while the Publican quietly prays in the back humbly asking for God's forgiveness. Jesus concludes that "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted" Luke 18:14. Does this mean if I'm wealthy I cannot also show humility like the Publican? If our God-given talents make us wealthy on earth, why can't we also be poor in spirit and receive God's forgiveness. If I am blessed to become a professional athlete would I be wrong to accept a lucrative contract because what it may mean for my eternal soul?

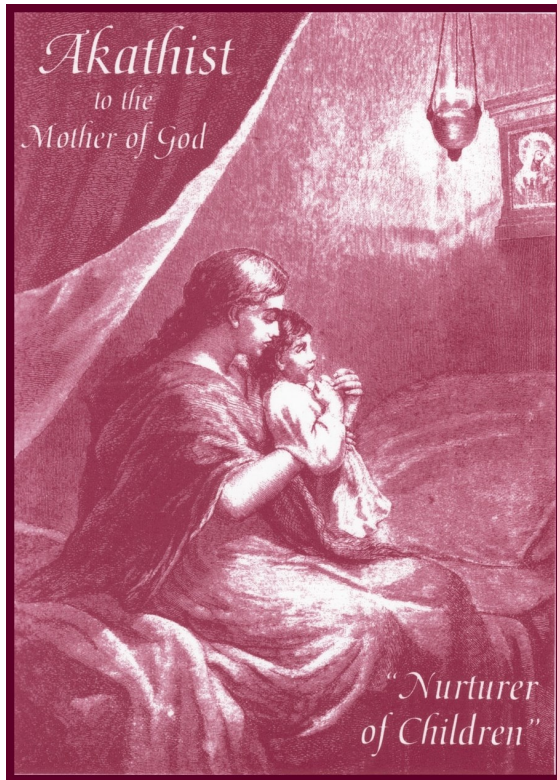
Despite the improbability of the camel passing through the eye of the needle, Jesus does not say it is impossible. In fact he states "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. "Matthew 19:26. Difficult but not impossible. Jesus tells the rich man that if he sells what he has and gives it to the poor and follow Him he will have treasure in heaven. Similarly, in 1 Timothy, St. Paul commands the rich to do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come." Chapter 6 verse 17-21. Keeping God central in our lives and not making wealth our ultimate goal and obsession is the key. If we do not love money but love our neighbor and use our wealth to help the poor, to benefit others, to be stewards of the Church and lead a truly Christian life then salvation is possible.

Demetri Passalaris is in the 7th Grade and is the son of Isidoros and Jolie Passalaris.

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

We are currently need all items except Pasta.

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



“Akathist to the Mother of God— “Nurturer of Children”

This book is a prayer from mothers/grandmothers/godmothers to the Mother of God on behalf of their children/grandchildren/godchildren. The Akathist begins by stating: “Raise my children, O Lady, to be made worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven and make them heirs of eternal blessing!” This theme continues throughout the prayer.

This hymn is dedicated to the Mother of God, the Most Holy Theotokos. This Akathist implores the Holy Virgin to intercede on behalf of the children/grandchildren/godchildren being prayed for in a powerful and moving way.

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

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

Small Group Bible Study

Monday Night Bible Study (for everyone)

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

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

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

Meeting Dates: May 7 (Tuesday), 13, 20, 28(Tuesday)

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

Group Leader: Debbie Kavouklis
dkavouklis1@verizon.net, 813-690-0155.

Meeting time: Tuesday mornings from 10:00-11:30 a.m.

Dates: May 7, 14 and 21 (May 7 and 14 will be at the church at 10:00 a.m., May 21 will be Divine Liturgy)

South Tampa Mixed Group (for any adults)

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

Group Leader: Bessie Palios
bmp1126@yahoo.com 813-523-0347

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

Meeting dates: May 7, 14 and 21

PHILOPTOCHOS SPRING LUNCHEON AND ELECTIONS

Maggiano's Little Italy
Sunday, May 19, 2019 1:00 p.m.
203 Westshore Plaza
Tampa, FL

Please RSVP to Lisa Alsina by May 15
813 728-1094 lisaalsina@gmail.com

*Cost of the luncheon is \$30. Please mail your check payable Philoptochos to 812 S. Poinsettia Dr. Tampa 33609 or to the church office –
“attention Philoptochos”*

Thank You to all of Our Friends!

Barbara Akrotirianakis - Whittier, CA	Bessie Bliziotes - Palm Cost, FL
William J Camarinos - Alexandria, VA	Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL
Richard & Mickie Bass - Asheville, NC	Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL
Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL	William & Kane Chapman - Palmetto, FL
Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL	Lillian Thomas - Highland, IN
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI	Kathleen Mendez - Ponte Vedra, FL
Perry & Fay Stamatiades - Asheville, NC	Theodora Poletis - Baltimore, MD
Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI	Basil & Dorothy Nosal - Fredericksburg, VA
Wesley & Melissa Thompson - Clearwater, FL	Nicholas & Vaso Anton - Dunedin, FL
Demitrius & Katherine Klimis - Boardman, OH	Gerald & Deborah Galovic - Tampa, FL
Mary Spanos - St. Augustine, FL	Kay Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA

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.

7 Reasons Why “Just OK is not OK” in God’s Work

By Chuck Lawless

Editor’s Note: Every Month I read several inspirational articles that I try to integrate into both my personal and professional life. Many come from non-Orthodox sources but are very good. I try to include 1-2 of the best articles I read each month in the hopes that they will have a positive impact on your personal and professional lives. Fr. Stavros

Maybe you’ve seen the AT&T commercials that point out why “just ok is not ok.” The point is that there are some situations where “just ok” is not sufficient. These commercials don’t speak about the church, but the principle’s the same: “just ok” is not adequate in God’s work – even though too many churches tolerate less than their best in much of what they do. Here’s why:

1. **God deserves our best.** That’s simply because He’s God. Nobody’s greater than He is – and to give “just ok” to Him is to diminish His magnificence.

2. **We give more than “just ok” in other areas of our lives.** Athletes give their best. People who want to succeed in their business give their best. For some reason, we tolerate “ok” for God when we wouldn’t tolerate it in other arenas.

3. **“Just ok” presumes upon God’s grace.** That is, we assume that because God is a gracious God, He’ll be happy with

our “just ok.” After all, God never expects us to work our way to salvation.

4. **“Just ok” is seldom a good witness to the world.** Mediocrity doesn’t catch the attention of non-believers, especially when “just ok” is also sloppy, disorganized, and poorly done.

5. **We can do “just ok” without prayer and the power of God.** Most of us can meet the standards of “just ok” in our own ability; that is to say, we can do “just ok” church without God’s help. It’s the work beyond our capabilities that requires prayer.

6. **“Just ok” misses the point of taking up one’s cross and dying to self.** Nothing about giving our entire life to God—including literally dying as martyrs if that’s God’s call—allows “just ok” to be acceptable. “Just ok” doesn’t place our lives on the altar.

7. **Giving our “just ok” doesn’t cost us anything.** When we give God that which costs us nothing (2 Sam. 24:24), our gifts to God are hardly gifts at all. We can give “just ok” out of the excess of our lives.

“Just ok is not ok” in God’s work – so let’s not settle for that standard.

Philoptochos 2019 Membership Drive

We are on the MOVE for a Great New Year!

We invite all women ages 18 to 118 to join the St. John the Baptist Philoptochos Annunciation Chapter!

Membership Drive: January thru April, Suggested Stewardship is \$35.00.

However, we accept whatever you have in your heart to give.

Your donation makes you a member of the National, The Metropolis and our Local Chapters of Philoptochos.

Members 80 years of age or older are honorary members- NO DUES NECESSARY.

THANK YOU SO MUCH AND HAVE A HAPPY AND HEALTHY NEW YEAR 2019

Name _____ Date _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Cell _____

Please circle which number is the preferred contact: **HOME/ CELL**

E-mail address _____

Greek Independence Day Luncheon 2019

Thank You to the generous donation of the Kalojiannis Family, who again donated all the food for our Greek Independence Day Luncheon (March 24), we raised over \$1,000 for our church, had some great food, and honored our ethnic holiday. Thank you also to the H Xara Mas Dancers and their instructors: Alex Demaio and Maraquet Edquid, for working hard with the dancers for the performance. Congratulations to the Greek School students for reciting and singing songs dedicated to the Independence of Greece. Congratulations also to Magda Myer for sharing her passion of the Greek Language with her students.



St. John's PASCHA PICNIC

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

12th Annual Parish Picnic

When: Sunday, May 5, 2019

Following the Divine Liturgy

Where: Ballast Point Park*

5300 Interbay Boulevard

Tampa, Florida 33611

Admission is FREE!

We will have sports, games, and activities on the field for all ages.

Plus hamburgers, cheeseburgers, and hot dogs for all!

*Please carpool since parking is limited. Bus transportation may be available. Stay tuned for more information.



A Timely Reminder from the Welcome Ministry

*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Hebrews 13:2*

The Welcome Ministry has been busy at work, updating our welcome packets, greeting visitors and guests as they come to our church. Our mission is to practice hospitality to all who enter our doors. We are not just about welcoming people, but about developing relationships – with each other and with Christ. The most important person for a visitor to talk to in order to feel at home in a new church is you. It is not the priest, or the greeter, but a regular attender. One of the most impressive gestures we can extend to first time visitors is for people with no official position to take the initiative and welcome them.

How can you do this?

- Treat first time visitors as guests of God, not strangers.
- Offer a smile or a handshake with a simple “Good Morning!”
- Rather than saying, “Are you new here?” ask “Have we met before?” and offer your name.
- Take the initiative; don’t wait for visitors to initiate conversation.
- Learn people’s names and remember them.
- Invite visitors to join you at something, anything!
- Never let new people sit alone and introduce them to others.
- Invite people to fill out our church’s connection card.
- Tell people you’re glad they are here.
- As visitors are leaving, make sure to smile and thank them for coming.
- Pray for them throughout your week.

You don’t have to travel to a foreign country, to another state, or even get in your car to do the work of a missionary. The Great Commission of Christ can be fulfilled simply by picking up the phone, speaking to a new person you don’t recognize, sitting with someone who is alone. Can you call a parish member you haven’t seen in a while? A personal invitation to attend church is a great way to reintroduce them to the wonderful things we have going on at St. John.

If you are interested in joining the exciting and rewarding work of the Welcome Ministry, please contact Maria Xenick at mpxenick@gmail.com.

We will see many new faces during the busy weeks ahead. Please make all feel welcome as they join us for worship services!

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).



Like

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 and search “St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church” or go to www.flickr.com/photos/stjohngoc Tampa



We Venerate Your Cross, O Lord

Sunday of the Holy Cross 2019



~ Thank You for your gifts of Stewardship ~

Christos Anesti! We hope your Lenten journey brought peace and a sense of renewal in the days leading up to and during our beautiful Holy Week. It was a joy to not only worship together but also learn and grow together through the Beatitude Series that Fr. Stavros led every Wednesday eve after the pre-sanctified Liturgy.

We appreciate the gifts of our loyal parishioners and which to acknowledge each and every one! Our pledges for the 2019 Stewardship year are \$465,741 with \$195,798 collected from 308 loyal stewards at St. John. We lovingly remind you to recommit to our church if your name is missing from this list. Please don't wait! Contact our church office or a member of the Stewardship committee with any questions on your commitment or renewal. Pledge forms are also available on line at <http://greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com/2019-stewardship/>

According to the St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, Tampa, FL By-Laws, one must have completed a form AND be 'current' in their pledge (for this year and last year) to participate and vote at the Spring General Assembly Meeting and Fall General Assembly, Parish Council Elections and any Special Assembly Meetings – Dates TBD. If you have sent in a Stewardship Check and are not on the list, please contact the office so we can forward you a 2019 Stewardship Pledge Form.

* Indicates receipt of a Stewardship Check without a completed pledge form. Our office will be happy to forward a pledge package and the form can also be completed on-line. Keep in mind pledges in writing help us adequately plan financially for our church and also bring voting privileges, which are critical to support the mission of our church.

It is our hope the EVERYONE on our mailing list provides gifts of stewardship OR becomes a Friend of St. John the Baptist, for those who do not live in Tampa.

Afloarei, Michael & Mariana, Mr. & Mrs.
Akrotirianakis, Stavros & Lisa, Fr. & Pres.
Alastanos, Jennifer, Ms.
Alexander, John & Anetta, Mr. & Mrs.
Alithinos, Ekaterini, Mrs.
Alsina, Alexa, Ms.
Alsina, Angel & Lisa, Dr. & Mrs.
Ameres, George & Zackie, Mr. & Mrs.
Apostoleres, Nicholas S. & Rosalie C, Mr. & Mrs.
Argyros, Harry & Linda, Mr. & Mrs.
Armstrong, Jim & Myra, Mr. & Mrs.
Artzibushev, Dimitri & Sonya, Mr. & Mrs.
Assimiadis, Paul, Mr.
Aviles, Pablo J. & Vanessa, Mr. & Mrs.
Axelrod, Scott & Christine, Mr. & Mrs.*
Badrane, Denise, Ms.
Bakirdgi, Joan, Mrs.
Balis, Mathew & Suzy, Mr. & Mrs.
Bavaro, Daniel & Anna Maria, Mr. & Mrs.
Beach, Kevin Dr. & Ms. Heidi Borgeas *
Beauparlant, Vanessa
Bedan, Matt & Christi, Mr. & Mrs.
Bedran, Rita, Ms.
Blackburn, Robert T. & Kathryn, Mr. & Dr.
Blankenship, Wayne & Athanasia, Mr. & Mrs.
Blankenship, Alexander, Mr.
Bougas, Constantine & Angela, Mr. & Mrs.
Bradshaw, Harold & Pelagia, Mr. & Mrs.
Brown, Chrysanthi, Ms.
Burchill, George, Fr.
Calamunci, Chris & Crystal, Mr & Mrs.
Calamunci, Alex & Sara, Mr. & Mrs.
Calamunci, Catherine, Mrs.
Cantonis, George & Maria, Mr. & Mrs.
Cardy, Thomas & Gina, Mr. & Mrs.
Carter, John & Genie, Dr. & Mrs.
Cauthorn, Ken & Helen, Mr. & Mrs.
Celin, Edjir & Nadine, Mr. & Mrs.
Chagaris, George & Kalliope, Mr. & Mrs.
Chakonas, Ethel Athena, Mrs.
Cherpelis, Basil & Alyssa, Dr. & Dr.
Choundas, Marina & Mr. Greg Thatcher, Ms.
Choundas, Peter & Adis, Mr. & Mrs.
Christ, John E., Dr.
Christodoulou Mary Ann, Mrs.

Christopher, Louis, Mr. & Dr. Penny Plakas
Christou, Tammy, Ms.
Colado, David & Alexandria, Mr. & Mrs.
Conner, Michael & Artemis, Mr. & Mrs.
Constantaras, Carena Ms. & Mr. Kevin
Bilthouse
Corcoran, Joseph & Patti, Mr. & Mrs.
Costas, Maria, Ms.
Costello, Patricia, Ms.
Cotterman, Sandra, Ms.
Crafa, Paul & Stavroula, Mr. & Mrs.
Crassas, Alkis & Aime, Mr. & Mrs.
Cyhan, Dawn, Ms.
Dalaklis, Joanne, Ms.
Damian, Gabriela & Mihnea Anghelescu
Daniels, Elaine, Ms.
De La Cruz, Marilyn Ms. & Ms. Ariel Guy
De Maio, Alexandra, Ms.
Demas, John, Mr.
Demas, Anna K., Ms.
Demetriou, Nektarios & Peggy, Dr. & Mrs.
DeYoung, John & Jenna, Mr. & Mrs.
Diamantakes, Georgia, Ms.
Dimas, Gregory, Mr. & Ms. Evelyn Patsavos
Doucas, Deborah, Ms.
Douglas, Dean, Mr.
Doxas, Joan, Ms.
Edquid, Marc & Maraquet, Mr. & Mrs.
Edwards, Jeffery, Dr. & Mrs. Christina Cardy
Ekonomou, Anthony & Diana C., Mr. & Mrs.*
Elly, Jonathan & Jenivieve, Mr. & Mrs.
Evdemon, Stanley & Mary Ellen, Mr. & Mrs.
Fallieras, Nicholas & Susan, Dr. & Mrs.
Fallieras, George, Dr.
Fallieras, Lauren, Ms.
Fellios, George & Zeina, Mr. & Mrs.
Fellios, Alexander, Mr.*
Fentress, Kevin & Maria, Mr. & Mrs.*
Ferekides, Christos & Debbie, Dr. & Mrs.
Findlay, Karina & Andrew, Dr. & Mr.
Forde, Dwight & Ewana, Mr. & Mrs.
Fotopoulos, Anthony & Carole, Mr. & Mrs.
Frantsvog, Eric & Maria, Mr. & Mrs.
Frazier, Chris, Ms.
Freeman, Eugene & Jacqueline, Mr. & Mrs.

Freeman, Nicholas, Mr.
Galin, Mary Ms.
Gallo, Vasiliki, Mrs.
Garcia, Rick & Stamie, Mr. & Mrs.
Gavalas, Debbie, Ms. & Mr. Robert Ritchie
Geis, Jeffrey & Maria, Mr. & Mrs.
Georgas, Thomas & Janet, Mr. & Mrs.
Georgiou, Speros & Eleanor, Mr. & Mrs.
Gerecke, Ed & Terri, Mr. & Mrs.
Giallourakis, Michael & Artemise, Mr. & Mrs.
Gombos, Harriet, Mrs.
Gorter, Maria, Ms.
Grapsas, Constantine & Irene, Mr. & Mrs.
Gregory, Daniel & Alicia, Mr. & Mrs.
Guarino, Paul & Harriet, Mr. & Mrs.
Halikoytak, Michael & Edith, Mr. & Mrs.
Halikoytak, Alex, Mr.
Halkias, Athanasios, Mr.
Halkias, Chris, Mr.
Halkias, Demetrios & Camille, Mr. & Mrs.
Halkias, Evangeline, Mrs.
Halkias, George & Elaine, Mr. & Mrs.
Hambos, Charlie, Mr.
Hambos, George & Donna, Mr. & Mrs.
Hanhan, Amin & Gloria, Mr. & Mrs.
Hanhan, Marian, Mrs. & Preston, Joshua, Mr.
Hartsfield-Molina, Christie, Dr.
& Mr. David Molina
Hartung, Mark & JoAnn, Mr. & Mrs.
Henderson, Kenny & Nickollet, Mr. & Mrs.
Higdon, Skip, Mrs.
Hoff, Eleni, Mrs.
Hoppenstand, Anna Evelyn, Ms.
Horack, Scott & Rena, Mr. & Mrs.
Ioannidis, Theodore & Sharon, Mr. & Mrs.
Iraklianos, Mike, Mr.
Irwin, Jon & Pam, Mr. & Mrs.
James, Arthur M & Abby, Mr. & Mrs.
Jewtushenko, Raissa, Ms.*
Johnson, Aphrodit, Mrs.*
Johnston, Angela, Ms.
Jolly, Jim & Jean, Mr. & Mrs.
Kaburis, George & Kathy, Mr. & Mrs.
Kafantaris, Michael & Amy, Mr. & Mrs.
Kane, C. Lance & Georgia, Dr. & Dr.

Kapetan, Martha, Ms.
 Kappiris, Stanley & Erin, Mr. & Mrs.
 Karpelenia, Loretta, Presbyteria
 Kastis, Constantino, Mr.
 Katsadourous,
 Konstantin & Katherine, Mr. & Mrs.
 Katsamakias,
 Perry & Betty Katherine, Mr. & Mrs.
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 Help make your annual steward-
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20 Honest Insights on Making It To 25 Years in Marriage

By Carey Nieuwhof

Editor's Note: Every Month I read several inspirational articles that I try to integrate into both my personal and professional life. Many come from non-Orthodox sources but are very good. I try to include 1-2 of the best articles I read each month in the hopes that they will have a positive impact on your personal and professional lives. Fr. Stavros

This month, my wife Toni and I celebrated 25 years of marriage.

I love her more than I ever dreamed of.

And it's also been a totally different experience than either of us thought it would be.

I love this picture of us leaving our wedding reception, because in many ways it show us stepping out into the world when we honestly had NO IDEA what life would bring us. We just had hopes and dreams.

I have no data on this, but I think leaders perhaps struggle in their marriages more than others do.

Anecdotally, at least, I hear from leader after leader who says it's been tougher at home than they thought it would be. And Toni and I have had our share of struggles for sure.

If you're looking for a post on marriage that outlines how couples should do 5 things that will make their marriage perfect, you need to read someone else's blog.

The truth is, marriage is work. Hard work. But it's wonderfully hard work.

Both of us have felt more pain than we ever knew was possible, and more deep joy than we ever realized existed.

I love her more than I have ever loved anyone or anything (except Christ, of course).

Our love has grown richer and better over time, but we've also had a few seasons where we wondered whether love had vaporized. There were seasons where the only reason it wasn't over is because Jesus said it wasn't over.

So we stayed. And our emotions eventually caught up with our obedience.

Through it all, Christ has kept us together and brought us a more wonderfully fulfilling relationship than either of us knew was possible.

On the other side of deep pain is deep joy. You've just got to make it there.

So what's the key?

Well, there's no one key, but here are 20 honest insights about making it to 25 years in marriage.

Some are observations. Some are directives. Either way, I hope they help WHEREVER you are in your marriage.

1. Love is a decision, not an emotion

My dad always told me that love is an act of the will. He was right.

Culture says that love is an emotion. It's something you feel, not something you do.



Culture couldn't be more wrong.

True love is a decision...a decision to place someone else's well being above yours. To stick through the tough times. To love when you don't feel love.

God isn't thrilled with you all the time, yet he loves you. It's a decision, not an emotion.

2. Your emotions eventually catch up to your obedience

There have been a few seasons in our 25 years where we stayed together simple because we were being obedient. (I'd say Toni had to exercise her obedience more than I did.)

So you stay when you feel like leaving. You stay when you feel like doing something irresponsible.

You just obey what you believe God has called you to do in the situation. I believe God has called me to stay married to one woman for life, and Toni believes God has called her to stay married to one man for life.

And in the process of being obedient, we both discovered something incredible: your emotions eventually catch up to your obedience.

Though the joy may have left for a few days, a few weeks, and once or twice, for a season, it came back. Deeper, richer and more abundant than we ever expected.

3. Don't make tomorrow's decisions based on today's emotions

So you can see I've learned not to trust my feelings, because like the rest of creation, my feelings were victims of the fall.

A quick lesson: don't make tomorrow's decisions based on today's emotions.

Sometimes we defied stereotypical Christian advice and went

to bed angry. But at least we went to bed together. And reason usually returned with the dawn.

Thank goodness on those days when emotion clouded judgment we just decided not to decide.

There's wisdom in that for life, not just for marriage.

4. Live your story...not someone else's

You will be tempted to compare yourself to other couples and other 'leadership' couples you admire. That can be healthy. It can also be horrible.

Live *your* story.

I've heard famous preachers say they've never had a fight about money. I promise you we have.

You can feel terrible about that and think "what's wrong with me?", or you can bring that before God and work it out together.

5. Instagram lies

Nobody's life is as great as they make it out to be on Instagram.

If you're comparing your real life to someone else's posted life, you will implode.

Not much more to say about that. You know what I mean.

6. Don't put pressure on your spouse that only God can bear

I heard this from Tim Keller a few years ago (do not have a source...sorry).

With the disappearance of God from more and more of our culture, people have lost a sense of the divine and the majestic.

Consequently, our desire to worship—no longer directed toward God—gets directed at our spouses and children. It places pressure on them they were not designed to bear, and many marriages and families collapse from the pressure.

Pinterest has placed a ridiculous amount of pressure on wedding receptions and even home decor that the average family can't live up to. The kind of majesty that used to go into a cathedral now goes into a two year old's birthday party.

There is something fundamentally flawed with this, and the sooner you take that pressure off your spouse, off your kids and off yourself, the healthier you become.

7. You probably married your opposite

All those things you loved about your spouse when you were dating are the some of the things that will drive you crazy when you're married.

We just get attracted to our opposites.

Knowing that is progress in itself, and will help you delight in your spouse (when he or she isn't driving you crazy over said opposites).

8. Counsellors are worth it

Toni and I first started seeing a counsellor when we were in our mid thirties. I should have gone when I was in my twenties.

I don't know where I'd be as a person, husband, father and leader without the help I've had from some incredible Christian counsellors who have helped me see where I need grace and redemption.

I resisted going to counselling. If you're resisting, stop. There's freedom on the other side.

9. Progress starts when you see that you're the problem

We had a great couple of first years, but when tension arose I thought none of it was my fault.

After all, I had little conflict as a single guy, so who had to be bringing all this tension in my marriage? Couldn't have been me.

I could not have been more wrong.

Now I just assume I'm probably the problem. And I usually am. It's simpler that way...in life and leadership.

10. Your unspoken assumptions can sink you

There's a right way and a wrong way to do everything...or so we think.

In the kitchen, I take an ingredient out, and then I put it back.

And wipe the counter. Then I take the next step in cooking whatever I'm cooking.

Toni takes everything out, makes a glorious meal, and cleans up later when the food is cooking.

I *assumed* my way was the right way. But there's no right and wrong here, just different.

Yet we didn't know what was driving our kitchen tension until we named it. Now we can laugh at it (most days).

When you surface the assumptions...you mitigate the conflict.

11. When you agree on values, you'll agree a lot more

Because it's often the little things you fight about, it's important to understand where you agree on the big things.

Big things would include your faith, your approach to parenting, your philosophy of life, your priorities, your finances and more.

When you agree on your values, you'll agree on a lot more.

12. Remember that if you leave, you take all your unresolved problems to your next relationship

This is simply true, and you've seen it 1000 times in others.

And you think you'll be the exception to the rule.

You won't be.

13. Pray together

Pray together. Out loud.

Yes it's hard. Yes it's awkward.

Yes, men resist it. And yes, pastors resist it.

Do it.

14. If you're a guy, lead your marriage spiritually.

My wife and I met in law school. A progressive, left-leaning law school.

Had I even suggested in any way that I was the spiritual head of a home, I would have been laughed out of the school. Or maybe arrested.

But 25 years in, there's no question I need to lead my wife spiritually. My leadership needs to reflect Christ's leadership (a servant's attitude motivated by love), but it's still leadership.

Most men resist taking spiritual leadership at home. Most male leaders resist taking authentic, Christ-motivated loving leadership at home.

Start leading in love.

15. Go on weekly date nights

In the early days we had no money for date nights. We went anyway.

When your kids are young, it's especially important because most of your conversation is 'transactional' (you cook...I'll drive the kids to soccer).

In the rough seasons, sometimes we'd spend the first half of date night resolving arguments we couldn't finish in the hum of every day life. Not fun, but probably healthy.

But we had some awesome date nights too.

Don't have time? Don't have money?

Well, if you broke up, you'd date your new girlfriend.

So instead, date your wife. Your kids will thank you for it.

You'll thank yourself for it one day too.

16. Don't make your kids the centre of your family

In today's culture, kids have become the centre of many homes.

Parents have stopped living for Christ and for each other and started basing all their decisions around their kids.

There are two problems with that.

First, your kids eventually leave...leaving you with a gaping hole.

Second, putting your kids at the centre of your home communicates to them that they're more important than they are. And they know it. As [Tim Elmore has suggested](#), this approach produces kids with high arrogance and low self-esteem.

Child-centered parenting produces self-centred kids.

The best gift you can give your kids is a Christ-centered, healthy marriage.

17. Take personal vacations WITHOUT the kids

We were one of the few couples among our friends who did this, but every year Toni and I would get away even for a night or two WITHOUT the kids.

Our friends would tell us it had been 3, 5 even 10 years since they'd done it.

I'm so glad we took the time to do that. It renewed and remade us. We made significant progress on our relationships so many times we did that. Plus...so much of it was fun.

18. Take family vacations every year

We also took family vacations every year. Often they weren't

glorious. We did what we could afford.

But our kids (now 23 and 19) tell us it was one of their favourite things growing up and something that really bonded our family.

I wrote more about why and how we took those vacations in [this Parent Cue post](#).

Bottom line? You don't have to go to Disney...you just have to go.

19. Figure out how to be a couple again BEFORE your kids grow up

When our then 16 year old drove off in the car with his brother on the day he got his driver's licence, Toni and I were left standing in the living room waving good bye.

Then we looked at each other and said "Oh my goodness... before we know it, they're going to be gone."

We realized we had WAY more life ahead of us where it would just be *us*.

So we started new hobbies we could enjoy together (snowshoeing, hiking, cycling) and really worked on our *friendship*.

My favourite thing to do on my days off is to hang out with my best friend.

20. Open the gift of sex...it's from God

There's so much funk about sex. For the record, I believe marriage is the context God designed for sex.

The irony of course is that too many married couples lose interest in sex. I've met way too many people who tell me (because I'm a pastor I guess) that they live in a sexless marriage.

Significantly, our culture *only* glamorizes sex *outside* of marriage.

When was the last time you saw a married couple on TV or in a movie in a love scene? Right...you can't remember.

You're probably even thinking *gross*, *I wouldn't want to see that*. (Not that any of us should be watching steamy scenes, but you get the point).

And now you see the problem.

Why, in our culture, is it *not* weird when a couple at a bar in a movie hooks up or a wife whose husband is out of town gets it on with her boss, but it *is* weird when two people who have committed to each other for life have sex?

Why?

Married people: sex is a gift. Open it.

The more emotionally, relationally and spiritually close you get to your spouse, the better it gets.

Okay, that's about all I'm comfortable saying about sex.

Cary Nieuwhof is a pastor, business coach and inspirational writer on improving oneself in Christianity and business.

May 2019 SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS:

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

We hope your Holy Week and Pascha experience reaffirmed and will continue to strengthen your faith in Christianity. Approximately 60 students actively participated in the many services of Holy Week and Pascha, which made the week even more special. As always our Altar Boys did a fabulous job throughout the many services. Our many Maidens for the Bridegroom Services on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday evening were adorable. Having the Bishop here on Tuesday night was an honor for the girls who served. Our beautiful Myrrh Bearers did a wonderful job during the Good Friday Lamentation Service. We are so proud of all of our students' devotion to our Lord.

It was fabulous to see all of our Sunday School Students participate in the PROCESSION OF THE PALMS on April 21 and had a lesson about Palm Sunday and Holy Week using The Resurrections Eggs. Our other Sunday School topics for the month of April were St. John the Ladder and Faith. Charlie Hambos also visited our 6th Graders and our Pre- K and Kindergarten students made Prosphora this past month..

We would like to thank the families who attended the Saturday of Lazarus Service on April 20. We had a beautiful service, nice breakfast, and afterwards our children and parents helped to make over 700 crosses for Palm Sunday.

Our Holy Friday Retreat on April 26 was the best ever. The day was filled with Pascha crafts, learning activities and worship. We must acknowledge Debbie Nicklow for coordinating this event and her many years leading the Ministry of HOPE and JOY. Her service to our youth is noteworthy. She is stepping down from Hope and Joy, but will continue to teach our Kindergarten Sunday School class. We would like to welcome Zackie Ameres who will fill Debbie's shoes next year. We would also like to thank the many people who helped out with the lessons, crafts, and the luncheon. Of course our children always make this retreat a huge success. We would also like to thank our older students for assisting our younger ones with the crafts and stations. Our teens also wrapped over 500 red eggs for Pascha. Truly we are raising such wonderful STEWARDS of St. John's Greek Orthodox Church.

On April 14th our children did a fantastic job singing our church hymns during our YOUTH SUNDAY under the direction of Maria Xenick. Father Stavros also heard the CONFESSIONS of our 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Graders on that same day. All of our 1st Graders through High Schoolers had an opportunity to have their confessions heard by Fr. Stavros this year. We would like to thank him for making time with our youth and for this important Sacrament.. It is a wonderful thing to see our children going to Confession year after year.

THE ORATORICAL FESTIVAL at St. John's took place ON MARCH 31 and what an amazing job our teens did. We are so proud of all the participants for presenting such polished and inspirational speeches. Congratulations to all. Finalists moved on to the District Festival in Sarasota on April 13. Here are the results of our church competition:

Senior Finalists:

Ioanna Passalaris

DI Demetrios Tsetsekas

Alternate: Angelina Krinos

Junior Finalists:

Demitri Passalaris

Madeline Moran

Alternate: Jason Owens

Honorable Mentions:

Lola Bavaro

Andrew Thatcher

Our last day of Sunday School, Graduation, and end of the year party is on May 19th. We are already starting to plan for the next Sunday School year. Sunday School will start in AUGUST to compliment the public school calendar. We will let you know when these dates are finalized and when registration will take place. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO TEACH OR ASSIST IN OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM and/or if you have any suggestions on how we can improve our Sunday School Program, please e-mail Vickie Peckham at vickiepeckham@gmail.com or call her at 406-5626.

May 2019 SUNDAY SCHOOL CALENDAR

Sunday, May 5:

Topic: St. Thomas/Holy Week Highlights
Parish Picnic
Charlie: High School

Sunday, May 12

Youth Sunday - (6th-8th Grade Music at 11:50ish)
Topic: Saints of the Orthodox Church
Charlie: 7th & 8th Grade

Sunday, May 19

Last Day of Sunday School
Sunday School Graduation Ceremony for all Students
Sunday School End of the Year Party

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

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

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Sia Blankenship 813-968-8855

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

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Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Bookstore

Brett Mourer 813-376-9315

Chanter

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Choir

Ruth Losovitz , Organist 727-688-2782

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Greg Melton 813-967-2074

Connect Through Christ -

Special Needs Ministry for Children
Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534

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	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

Finance Committee

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Food Pantry

Anetta Alexander 813-758-2689

Gasparilla Parking

John Kokkas 727-992-4615

GOYA

Maria Koutroumanis 813-245-3854

Hope/Joy

Debbie Nicklow 813-690-0671

Junior Olympics

Dwight Forde 727-685-9028

MOMS

Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862
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Oratorical Festival

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“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.