First and foremost, I want to thank our community for all the expressions of love extended to me and my family on the occasion of the passing of my mother, Barbara. Thank you to all those who prayed for her these past several months. May her memory be eternal!

Fr. Stavros’ Message

Basic Goals that Never Change

And make him (her) a reasoning sheep of the holy flock of Your Christ, an honorable member of Your Church, a consecrated vessel, a child of Light, and heir of Your Kingdom. So that, having lived according to Your commandments, and having kept the Seal unbroken, and preserved his (her) garment unstained, he (she) may receive the blessedness of the Saints in Your Kingdom.

~From the Sacrament of Baptism

Because the pandemic seems to change by the day, for this month’s message, I want to focus on a message that is actually timeless. It is not often that we attend baptisms, and if we do, we probably miss out on some of the very powerful words that are offered in the prayers. Just about all of us do not remember our baptisms, as we were infants when we were baptized. So, for this month’s message, I want to focus on a few sentences from one prayer in the baptism service, which remind us of some pretty basic goals that never change, regardless of our age, regardless of a pandemic, regardless of anything. I am fortunate in my ministry as a priest that I offer these prayers often. However, at a recent baptism, as I was offering these words, I realize that even I do not think of them as often as I should.

The aforementioned prayer is offered towards the beginning of the baptism service, when the person being baptized is still in the narthex. At this point of the service, the baptism hasn’t been done, we haven’t even begun to bless the water. The prayers indicate some of the reasons why we are baptized, as a reminder to the person being baptized, as well as to those in attendance, the end goals of the Christian life which they are about to begin through baptism. Because, as I said at a recent baptism, baptism is not an ending, but a beginning. It is the day we enter into the army of God, and we begin a spiritual battle that will last throughout our lives. God will judge us at His Awesome Judgment Seat on how we did in this battle, and He will determine whether we enter into everlasting life or everlasting punishment.

There are four specific things we are to work on during our lives with one specific end goal in mind.

And make him (her) a reasoning sheep of the holy flock of
Your Christ

Christ reveals Himself in John 10:11 as “the good shepherd.” If He is the shepherd, then we are the sheep. Sheep are not the smartest of animals. They go around in herds, and if not kept in line under the watchful eye of the shepherd, it would be very easy for some of them to be lost, or become prey to wolves and other predators. The Church calls the members of the flock “reasoning (or rational) sheep” (logikon provatón in Greek).

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As per both the Florida State government and the Metropolis of Atlanta, there are no covid protocols. We are fully open. If a person wishes to continue to wear a mask, they are certainly welcome to. There should be no judgment. As we have written in the past, vaccine status should also not be discussed as it is divisive and our churches seek unity. Should anything change regarding covid protocols, we will certainly update everyone.

The deadline for The Messenger is the 15th of the month following. So when you get The Messenger around the 1st of each month, my message in it was written at least two weeks earlier. Which means that in this fast-changing world, by the time my message gets to you, it might be old. For my August message, I wrote about being “All In” on our faith, including on worship. And by the first few days of August, there were again fears about the covid-19 pandemic and church attendance reflected that. Some of us don’t feel comfortable worshipping in person right now, and that’s okay. You can still be “all in” on worship—you just have to do it on-line, which is in many respects is even more challenging.

We are not following without our own thoughts, our own will or our own reason. In fact, Christ does not want sheep like that. He does not want us to be robots or puppets on a string. Rather, He wants us to be innocent like children and to love Him because we choose to love Him, not under compulsion or coercion.

A choice to follow Christ is just that, a choice. And like most choices in life, it should be an informed choice. Many people “follow” Christ out of superstition. They aren’t really sure if it’s all real but they come around once in a while, almost as if Christ is an “insurance policy.” Some follow Christ because of their parents. This is most young children. They come to church if their parents bring them. They pray if their parents tell them to. Most of us begin our Christian journey this way. Which is why the role of parents is so important. If you never bring your children to church, or teach them to pray or read the Bible with them, they won’t know who Christ is. And they may never start on their own. The problem with this is that if children only have faith because their parents bring them or tell them, what happens when they go to college or leave home? They fall away from the faith because they didn’t make it their own. There is a critical conversion that has to happen at some point along the way where the faith of parents becomes personal to a child, where that child takes his or her position as a rational sheep in their way, rather than just being an obedient follower to whatever their parents say.

Reasoning, reasonable, and rational are all words that are related. And these three words should be leading concepts when it comes to matters of faith. In a world that seems to be getting irrational and unreasonable on all sides of every issue, the Christian faith is supposed to be a steady rudder that steers us through the sea of irrationality and irritability. Because the faith doesn’t change at all—it should not be affected by politics or a pandemic or anything else. Being a reasoning sheep doesn’t mean that you can’t have a political opinion. However, it does mean that we stay rational and reasonable at all times. Even when we disagree, even when people are acting chaotic. We are called to be calm and conciliatory. Christ had opinions. He certainly wasn’t afraid to let them be known. But His discourse was calm and His desire was to at all times reflect the love of God the Father.

To be a reasonable and rational sheep, we have to spend time studying the Shepherd, so that we know Who we are following, and also where we are going. We are not blind followers. To follow blindly means to follow and not know where you are going. Christ tells us that His way leads to the Father, to heaven. And while we may not be able to conceptualize what heaven looks like, He is not leading us into something negative and destructive but to someplace that is beautiful.

An honorable member of Your Church
Sheep do not exist in isolation. They are part of a flock, a community. That is because an isolated sheep becomes an easy target for a predator, like a wolf. A large flock of sheep, by its sheer numbers, is going to be intimidating to the predators. The large sheep of the flock can also protect the smaller, more vulnerable sheep. And the shepherd of the flock watches over the entire flock to make sure all are protected. Going on its own would deprive a sheep of the protection of the other sheep, the guidance of the shepherd and the sense of community and safety that exists within the flock.

The same principles all work within the church community. For each of us “sheep”, we are supposed to belong to a flock, a church community. Belonging to a community is supposed to help protect us from predators outside the community, things like peer pressure to do things that are unchristian as an example. Within the flock, there is encouragement to follow after Christ. Outside the community, there is plenty of encouragement not to follow. Some sheep are particularly vulnerable. Perhaps they are sad, or anxious or stressed. The community/flock should ideally provide a sense of safety and reassurance. The ultimate Shepherd of the flock is Christ Himself, and participating in the community gives us a chance to experience Christ in the Eucharist and in the sacraments. The “shepherd” of each flock is the priest, the man ordained by God to lead each flock.

Continued...
Hopefuly the priest is kind and compassionate, as a shepherd should be. I certainly strive to be this, and forgive me for the occasions when I am not. Together with Fr. John, Alex and now James, we are available to “shepherd” this flock in the sense of providing spiritual direction and encouragement.

The phrase in the prayer does not just say “members” of the Church but “honorable members.” What is the difference? An honorable member seeks to honor Christ in everything he or she does and seeks to honor others by serving them. An infrequent participant in community life cannot really be considered an “honorable member.” We receive honor from Christ through the Eucharist. We honor Christ by faithfully worshiping Him. We honor others by ministering to them. This is why the church has the Eucharist at its center, so that we can receive honor from Christ. And this is why the activities of the church are called ministries, so that we can minister to others and others can minister to us. And what is ministry? Specific activities designed to encourage us to grow in our faith. The choir does that through singing. The Sunday school does that through education. The Young at Heart does that through fellowship, and so on.

The goal here is not just to be members of the church, or to come infrequently or only on holidays, but to be honorable members of the church, participating frequently in the life of the church, receiving honor from Christ through worship and the sacraments while giving honor to Christ by serving others.

The chalice is handled carefully. We don’t drop it or throw it or deal with it in a reckless manner. Likewise, we should handle ourselves carefully, our bodies, our mouths, our behavior, and how we spend our time.

We see the chalice carried in procession. We see it carried with honor. We should be reminded that we should be honoring ourselves, and honoring others. The chalice is carried triumphantly over the people, not because it is an ornate vessel but because of the special thing it contains. In similar manner, we should carry our Christianity in a joyful way. Others should see Christ within us. Faith, love, hope and joy should be the things we lead with in our lives. And others should be able to see those things in us. Finally, we should not dishonor ourselves, act carelessly or recklessly, or debase ourselves in behavior that contradicts our intended purpose, to be a consecrated vessel that carries Christ within us.

A child of light
Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:22-23, that “the eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness.” While we can lie to others and to ourselves about how we are doing, our eyes do not lie. Our eyes tell who is filled with joy and who is filled with sadness. They tell who is filled with God and who is vacant of hope. Christ wants us to be children of light, whose eyes are filled with joy and with hope, not with sadness and despondency.

Some people have perfect vision. And over time, many people like me, have vision challenges. We need glasses to see. We need an eye doctor to tell us what we need. And over time, many people like me, have vision challenges. We need glasses to see. We need an eye doctor to tell us what we need in order to see well. While I don’t think of my eye doctor frequently, when I actually think about him, he is a very important person in my life, because without him, I couldn’t see to drive, or read, or write or do other things.

Continued...
He prescribes what I need in order to have eyes to see everything. Most of us do not have perfect spiritual vision. In fact, none of us does. This is why we need tools in order to be children of light, to see well. We need better vision, which comes through prayer, fasting, worship, scripture reading and charity—these things help us to see God better, they help us to see one another in a Christian light. We need a spiritual eye doctor to whom we can go for spiritual examination. This is why confession and a spiritual father are important. I faithfully go to the eye doctor every year, because my vision is too important not to. This is why I encourage people to come to confession at least once a year, because your spiritual vision, the eyes of your soul, are too important not to.

Light is used to illuminate things. We turn a light on in a dark room in order to see better. The light is usually a bulb on the ceiling that we turn on and it gives light to the whole room. The world is pretty dark these days. There is a lot of anxiety instead of hope. That is a lot more anger than joy. We are supposed to be children of light, who shine the light of Christ, the light of hope and joy on a darkened world. We can’t shine that light of hope and joy if we are filled with sadness and anger. Part of the spiritual life is the struggle (and it is a struggle) and the journey to become children of light, who can shine the light of Christ, the light of hope and joy on a world that desperately needs it like never before. So our identity as children of light is not just for us to feel like we have light in us but to share that light with others. In Matthew 5:14, Jesus tells us "You are the light of the world." And in Matthew 5:16, He tells us "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see our good works and give glory to your Father Who is in heaven."

An heir of Your Kingdom
My mom passed away this past month. My brother and I are now heirs of her kingdom. No, we did not receive a fortune, but whatever is left of her assets are ours to divide among ourselves. We inherit these things by virtue of her death.

When Jesus died on the cross, He made us heirs to His Kingdom. By virtue of His death, we can inherit the kingdom of heaven. By virtue of our death, when we have lived and have passed in faith, we become the heirs of His Kingdom.

At the baptism service, in this prayer, we mention the end goal for every person who is baptized, for every person that enters the flock of Christ. The end goal is to inherit the kingdom of heaven. Again, to put this in language that is easy to understand. All the years my parents were alive, we enjoyed their house. We lived there, we grew up there, we visited there as adults. By virtue of her death, we now own the house. In a similar way, we can enjoy benefits of being an heir of God’s Kingdom way before we die. We live in the kingdom now—because we can enjoy the hope and the joy of the Kingdom at any moment. In any moment that we are expressing love for God or for someone else, we are “in the kingdom.”
Of course, these moments of love are interspersed with moments of sin and sadness. In the Kingdom, there will be only love, there will be no sin or sadness. Thus we experience the Kingdom now, and later we will be inheritors of the Kingdom which will never end.

Imagine, however, that I was estranged from my parents, that I never spoke to them, that I intentionally dishonored them. At the end of their lives, they might have left their house to someone else, and not to a son who disregarded them. I have to think that God will be like this as well. Because He says the Kingdom will not be granted to everyone. We all have the potential to inherit eternal life, but if we absent ourselves from God, if we never speak to Him, if we intentionally dishonor Him, can we really expect an inheritance from Him?

So that, having lived according to Your commandments, and having kept the Seal unbroken, and preserved his (her) garment unstained, he (she) may receive the blessedness of the Saints in Your Kingdom.

This sentence provides not only the destination but the path to get there. To receive the blessedness of the Saints in God’s Kingdom, this is the ultimate goal. The path to that goal is to live according to the commandments. And there are only two—love God and love one another. If you are loving, you are on the right path. For those who wonder, am I on the right path, if you are loving God (praying, reading Scripture, worshiping, and putting God first) and loving your neighbor (leading with kindness and mercy, being helpful and charitable) you are on the right path.

The “seal unbroken” refers to the first act of the baptism service, when the priest makes the sign of the cross over the person being baptized. We’ve all had the experience of mailing gifts in a box. We tape up the box securely so that it won’t break and its contents won’t be lost en route to their destination. We are like the box containing precious cargo, God within us. Our destination is heaven. The “seal” is God’s protection over our lives so that we can get to our destination safely. Like the package that we hope gets to its destination sealed and unbroken, it is our hope to arrive to our destination, salvation, sealed and unbroken. We, too, are like a fragile package, working to be delivered to our Lord intact, whole and undamaged.

When each of us emerged from the baptismal font, we were wrapped in a white sheet. This garment represented the state of our souls at that moment, pure, unstained by sin. The goal is to have our souls as clean and as white and pure as that garment. We know that as we go through life, we will pick up stains on our souls. Every time we sin, it is like a stain on the pure white of our souls. The sins can add up quickly so that the garment might seem unrecognizable and dirty. The good news is that there are ample opportunities to clean our garments. Holy Communion is one way. Confession is another way. Prayer is yet another way. God doesn’t want our garments stained, permanently or even temporarily, which is why He has provided the means to cleanse them when they get dirty.

September 1 marks the beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year. I love that we have this day. We don’t have to wait until January 1 to make positive changes in our lives. We have this additional opportunity each year on September 1. We actually have this opportunity every day! So as we mark a new school year, a new Ecclesiastical year, and as we continue a challenging year, remember this prayer that was offered at your baptism. Because it reminds us of who we are, why we are here, where we are going and how to get there.

With love in the Lord,
+Fr. Stavros
Thank You, We love you and We miss you!

By Charlie Hambos

Thank you so much. Elefteria and I are still so very honored and very humbled by the outpouring of love, gifts, hugs, videos, pictures, food, cakes, decorations, donuts, words, cards and all of the other amazing things that were given to us on Sunday, August 1.

As I am writing this, I have been serving at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church of Greater Orlando for about two weeks. Thank God, everyone here has been so welcoming and excited for our arrival and we are very thankful for that. However, there is no place like home. St. John’s in Tampa will always be home and will always have a special place in our heart.

There are already many differences here at Holy Trinity, but my service to St. John’s over the past 7 years has prepared me for almost everything and anything that comes my way.

In the picture featured with this article, there are 2 boxes. The box on the left is filled with cards and notes that were given to me upon my graduation from seminary and my arrival at St. John’s in June 2014. I kept this box in my office the whole time. I would open it every so often and read the notes and cards that were in there. They brought me encouragement and joy. The box on the right is filled with cards and notes that were given to Elefteria and I at our “Sailing Away” Party on August 1. I will be keeping both of these boxes and will open them every so often to read the unbelievable words of encouragement and love. Thank you so very much.

We really still can’t believe what happened on Sunday, August 1. Thank you to all the ministries that helped put things together. Thank you to the decorating committee that decorated and made those amazing sail boats. Thank you to everyone that came on that day. Thank you to everyone who sent videos. Thank you to everyone who sent in pictures. Thank you to those who put the slide show and the videos together. Thank you for setting up a head table for our families.

Fr. Stavros thank you for the 7 gifts that you have been saving for me since the day I started there at St. John’s. I honestly thought I knew most of everything you do but you always surprise me and that certainly surprised me. I am completely honored and humbled by the 2 sets of vestments, the 2 epitrachelia, 2 communion cloths, the set of vessel covers and the epigonation of St. John the Baptist. They are absolutely beautiful. I’m just really sad that I have to wait to actually use them. However, I am truly blessed by them and I will always remember your priest-willing, in my priesthood. I definitely already miss working with you not only in the altar, in the office but also and most especially our ministry together. I’m not very far away. We will continue to talk a lot. Your style and ways of doing ministry is infused within me and I can already see putting it in good use here at Holy Trinity. Continue praying for me and I will continue praying for you.

Alex, you were the mastermind behind the celebration on Sunday, August 1. You did an amazing job. Thank you for rallying all the ministry leaders, individuals and groups that helped. It was just the most amazing day. Elefteria and I will be riding the love and support from that day for a long long time to come. It is so great to know that there is a community that can pull together so much for such an event. It goes to show how much St. John’s values their community.

These next couple months are going to be a challenge for many churches. Most communities have been given this opportunity to rebuild and refocus. St. John’s will need all of your help. Whether it is helping with coffee hour, volunteering in the office or being on the Parish Council. Please help. Not necessarily in the way that you want to help but in the way the community needs your help.

St. John’s as a Greek Orthodox Church is light years ahead of so many other Greek Orthodox Churches. Keep up the good work. We are excited to see what all of you are going to do. We hope to still be able to help from afar.

Keep the Faith! Keep Christ close! Shine His Light to those around.

We miss you! We Love you! Thank you!
In the Old Testament, we read about the practice of burning sacrifices at an altar. These sacrifices ranged from burning something vegan like bread/cake offerings, or could be a bit more costly like a goat or a bull. Pagans offered similar sacrifices, though their sacrifices were dedicated to a pantheon of awful gods, and sometimes their sacrifices were a bit extreme. Back then, there was an idea that burnt offerings were proper methods of sacrifices because what is being burned is “rising” to the heavens, to be received by the deity above. Jews & most pagans believed that which they worshiped dwelled in the heavens, so how else is that deity going to taste/smell that steak they're roasting, am I right?

What we sometimes forget, however, is that just about all sacrifices were not wasted chars of immolation, but meals to be eaten by man. According to Fr. Stephen DeYoung in his Lord of Spirits Podcast, in most cases, the religious leader would eat the burned sacrifice, but there were also cases where a sacrifice was made on an altar during a journey, and the sacrifice was left for a traveler to enjoy. We know in Jewish tradition that hospitality to a foreigner is akin to serving God, exampled by Abraham feeding the three divine visitors in Genesis 18, and the Greeks have continued this practice through “philoxenia” (typically translated as hospitality, but more specifically meaning love for the stranger). Whether the sacrifice is “enjoyed” by a priest or a traveler is irrelevant. What’s important is not merely the act of provision to man—to the priest praying for you or the hungry traveler—but the invitation of God to your dinner table. Jesus affirms this understanding of hospitality when He identifies with the poor, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned in Matthew 25.

Why does any of this matter? Because we as Orthodox still practice sacrifice today (albeit, slightly different sacrifices)!

On August 27, we celebrated the feast of St. Phanourios. St. Phanourios is the patron saint of lost things, our go to guy when we lose our car keys, our cell phone, perhaps even our wits! The tradition is to ask St. Phanourios for help finding the item in question. BUT, there’s a catch. The tradition also holds that we are to pray for his mother’s salvation AND to bake a Phanourpita (a sweet cake). As a parenthetical, we should note St. Phanourios is not the one we are praying to or making this cake for. We are asking for St. Phanourios to pray for us—a noble martyr close to our Lord Jesus Christ—and making a cake unto God.

There’s also a tradition of “Tamas” (sometimes translated as “votives”) in the Orthodox Church, which are typically small metal tokens placed on icons. The tama usually has something engraved upon it, like a body part that is in need of healing, or an image of the person who needs healing or has been healed. Related to this practice, it’s not uncommon to see sometimes rings, necklaces, other precious jewelry given as “votive” to some prayer request. The most interesting tamas I’ve seen are at the monastery in Florida where you can find a whole arsenal of swords lying at the foot of Michael the Archangel’s icon (he himself holds a sword).

Now some of you might be wondering: do we owe something to God?

That’s a great question.

There’s a trap we can easily fall into in treating God as someone who can be bought off or bargained with. This is actually a pagan understanding of how sacrifice worked. Not only would pagans sacrifice to their gods to find favor in important endeavors—in war, for example—but they might even appeal to foreign gods through sacrifice to “buy them off” from others—using the war example, it wasn’t unheard of that a warring nation would sacrifice to their enemy’s god(s) in the hope of “buying off” that god that was supposed to protect the other side. In the ancient world, you had a quid pro quo relationship with your deity, which is rather silly being that they are immaterial and probably a lot stronger than you, so what good is a roasted lamb to them?

We need to understand the difference in our faith, that the God we worship is not a slot machine, a front-end clerk, or genie that god that was supposed to protect the other side. We need to understand the difference in our faith, that the God we worship is not a slot machine, a front-end clerk, or genie that god that was supposed to protect the other side. In the ancient world, you had a quid pro quo relationship with your deity, which is rather silly being that they are immaterial and probably a lot stronger than you, so what good is a roasted lamb to them?

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So, how do we view sacrifice and prayer in a way that doesn’t make us treat God like a pagan deity or some store clerk? Let’s return to the example of St. Phanourios. In our tradition of asking St. Phanourios for our help, we see three things occurring: humility, repentance, and fellowship.

When we are in a panic about our lost car keys and remember to stop and ask for help, a lot of things are happening all at once. The first is accepting our state of helplessness, of pausing and saying, “God I need help, and I can’t rectify this situation on my own”. No longer are we trusting on our own capacity, but instead we’re making a bold leap to invite God into our circumstance and into our attention or presence. We’re not alone looking for our keys, God is there in that dilemma with us, and we ought to pay attention to that reality.

The second thing that happens is praying for the soul of St. Phanourios’ mom; according to tradition, his mother was a harlot and it pained St. Phanourios that she hadn’t converted to Christianity. God primarily desires our repentance, our turning away from sin in order to turn toward God. We see the importance God places on repentance when we listen to St. John the Baptist’s message in the wilderness and St. Peter’s preaching to the crowd after Pentecost of repentance. We also have the 50th Psalm, perhaps the most popular psalm in the Orthodox Church, which concludes stating: “the sacrifice to God is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, God will not despise”. Even though we end up praying for someone else’s salvation when we ask for St. Phanourios’ prayers, this act of praying for a lost soul shows us how important it is that repentance is something we forget not to pray for and work towards.

The third thing that happens is fellowship, a meeting with God through the Phanouropita we eat. Ideally, the Phanouropita is not eaten alone, but shared in some gathering of fellowship, much like how kolyva is distributed and shared. This harkens back to the sacrifices of cakes and animals in the Old Testament, a reminder that God is looking for us to invite Him to the dinner table—to invite Him into our lives—and to have some provision for those around us through the provision of sustenance and fellowship. Our culture unfortunately has slowly forgotten about the importance of “breaking bread” together as a family. It cannot be stressed how cohesion and unity is preserved by eating together, and therefore we cannot underscore the importance of “eating with God” through these smaller “meetings” with God over Phanouropita, Kolyva, or even the ultimate supper: The Divine Liturgy, the banquet God invites us to.

Humility, repentance, fellowship. What is beautiful about this model of prayer and sacrifice is that these three elements all relate to the banquet feast of our Divine Liturgy, of us receiving Communion. We approach the chalice “with fear of God, faith, and love” which simply put is a humble posture that we are to take. This humility is repeated when we kneel at the consecration of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, and bowing our head before we receive Communion. We are then reminded of repentance at the chalice that we receive the Body & Blood of Christ “unto remission of sins”; this should spur some intention to turn away from sinful habits and actions as we receive Jesus Christ into our body, heart, and mind. Lastly, we gather together in fellowship in prayer, not worshiping or receiving our Lord alone, but in a congregation, even if the congregation is merely 2 or 3--again, we eat together as was common in sacrifices of old, and at the head of the table is our Lord and Savior.

The history of sacrifice matters because we sometimes find ourselves wondering if our prayers are heard and if there is any value to piety. What the example of these sacrifices reflects is that all prayer ought to be infused with responsibility, with our asking not merely what God can do for us, but what God is looking for us to do in return. This is not to say that God is looking for a transactional relationship with us, but rather looking to see how our life will include God more, even by including Him in the mundane part of our life. By doing this, we can better direct our attention away from ourselves and the distractions in our lives and direct it to He who is the loving Lord looking to meet us in a relationship with Him.
Hello, good people of God! I’m James, and I am excited to be joining the St. John the Baptist community as your newest pastoral assistant! I originally met Fr. Stavros, my predecessor Charlie, and a number of you while serving at St. Stephen’s Camp as a counselor in 2019. When I saw the open position at St. John’s, I was jumping for joy at the opportunity to potentially be a part of such a vibrant community.

I first received my B.A. in Communication with a focus in Advertising & Public Relations from Rhode Island College. I enjoy design, woodworking, music, photography, adventure, and warm weather. I worked in the creative field for a number of years, between various positions in radio, TV, and concert planning; creative director for a manufacturer of fine backgammon sets; and many freelance jobs throughout the years. After close to a decade of serving as a camp counselor at the Metropolis of Boston Camp, I felt called to go back to school and bring my talents to the Church in a much bigger way. Now, I’ve freshly graduated Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology with a Master of Theological Studies and am ready to start truly offering my talents back to God and to the community as a whole!

In Christ,
James (Iakovos) Demetrios Harritos II

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Liturgical Schedule for September 2021

Wednesday, September 1  **Beginning of Ecclesiastical Year (The Indiction)**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, September 5  **Zacharias and Elizabeth, Parents of St. John the Baptist**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, September 8  **Nativity of the Virgin Mary (Major Feast Day)**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 6:00 p.m.

Saturday, September 11
**20 Year Anniversary of 9/11—Day of Prayer and Remembrance**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, September 12  **Sunday Before the Holy Cross**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

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

Sunday, September 19  **Sunday After the Holy Cross**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
*Procession of the Holy Cross at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy*

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

Sunday, September 26  **St. John the Theologian**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Monday, September 27  **Evening Teaching Divine Liturgy (part of Orthodoxy 101 class)**
Divine Liturgy 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Sunday, October 3  **St. Dionysios the Areopagite**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, October 6 Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 6:00 p.m.
Liturgical Notes for September 2021

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

**Sunday, September 5 – Sts. Zacharias and Elizabeth** – These are the parents of St. John the Baptist, who received their child in old age, through a miracle of God. They were people of faith, who wished their whole lives to have a child and remained steadfast to God. They remain an important piece in the story of salvation.

**Wednesday, September 8 - Nativity of the Virgin Mary** Placed right after the beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year, this feastday commemorates the birth of the Virgin Mary to her parents, Joachim and Anna. It is one of the 12 Major Feast Days of the Church year.

**Wednesday, September 8 – Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary** We will offer the Paraklesis service once a month, to pray for all the members of our community, as well as any special prayer requests that you may have. We prayed this service every week for 15 months from March 2020-May 2021. While this service is most associated with the Dormition Fast in August, it can be done at any time of distress. And whether that distress is the pandemic or the usual stresses and anxieties of life, we will continue to offer this service once a month going forward.

**Saturday, September 11 – Day of Remembrance—20 Year Anniversary of 9/11** This year marks 20 years since the terrorist attack on America on 9/11/01. Every year, we have paused to offer some service in remembrance of this day. Many years it is a Paraklesis service. This year, we will celebrate the Divine Liturgy, to call the Holy Spirit down upon not only the Holy Gifts but on all of us, in Tampa and throughout the United States. You are encouraged to pause and pray on 9/11.

**Tuesday, September 14 - Exaltation of the Holy Cross** - This Major Feast Day commemorates the finding of the Precious Cross of Christ by St. Helen in the year 325. This day is equal in solemnity to Good Friday, as it draws our attention to the supreme sacrifice made by the Lord for us. Connected with September 14 is the Tradition of the Vasiliko. St. Helen went in search of the Precious Cross. In Jerusalem, she found the hill of Golgotha. But she did not know where to search for the cross. Vasiliko (Basil), a sweet scented plant, was found growing on the hillside. She looked beneath the Basil and that’s where the cross was found. It is the Tradition of the Church that a Procession is held on September 14, where Basil is placed on a tray along with a cross and it is carried above the heads of the faithful. We will hold this procession on September 14, and also repeat it on Saturday, September 19 and Sunday, September 20.

**Thursday, September 23 – Conception of St. John the Baptist** This is one of several feasts related to St. John the Baptist, the patron saint of our parish. This feast commemorates the miraculous announcement to Zacharias and Elizabeth that they would conceive in old age and have a son who would be the Forerunner of our Lord, the last of the prophets and the first of the saints.

**Sunday, September 26 – St. John the Theologian** – St. John was one of the 12 disciples. He was the “beloved” Disciple we read about. He is the author of the Gospel of St. John, the Epistles of St. John and the Book of Revelation. He is the only one of the original 12 disciples to die naturally, reposing on the island of Patmos, where he had lived in exile, in the year 96 A.D. He was the youngest of the disciples and the last one to pass away.

**Donations Needed for Vasiliko for the Feast of the Holy Cross**
We need Vasiliko (Basil) for the services of the Holy Cross. Please bring Vasiliko for Tuesday, September 14, and Sunday, September 19. Please bring to the welcome table by 10:00 a.m on all the days, so we will have time to make up the tray. The Procession for the Holy Cross will be held on Tuesday, September 14 and repeated on Sunday, September 19.

**Donations Needed for flowers for Feast of the Holy Cross**
We need a donation of $100 for flowers for the tray for the procession of the Holy Cross on September 14, and $300 for flowers for Sunday, September 19. Please call the office if you are interested.
May We Never Forget

On this night... 20 years ago 246 people went to sleep in preparation for their morning flights; 2,606 people went to sleep in preparation for work in the morning; 343 firefighters went to sleep in preparation for their morning shift; 60 police officers went to sleep in preparation for morning patrol. Eight paramedics went to sleep in preparation for the morning shift of saving lives. None of them saw past 10:00am on Sept 11, 2001. In one single moment life would never be the same. As we remember our own Saint Nicholas Church destroyed on that horrific morning, we beseech our Lord to grant eternal rest to both those who perished on that day and to the many rescue workers who have died since trying to help others. Memory Eternal and...May We Never Forget.

Χρόνια Πολλά! Happy Nameday!

ADAMANTIOS, AFRODITE, AKRIVI, ANTIGONI, ASPASIA, ATHINA, CLEO, CLEOPATRA, CORALIA, DIAMANTO, DIONI, DODONI, EFTERPI, ELPINIKI, ERASLSA, ERATO, HAI-DO, HARIKLLIA, ISMENE, JOSHUA, KALLIROI, KALLISTI, KALLISTO, KLEONIKI, MANDO, MARGARET, MARIANTHI, ME-LETIOS, MELPOMENI, MOSHO, OURANIA, PANDORA, PENELIPE, POLIMNIA, POLINI-KI, POLYTIMI, RALLIA, RALLIS, SAPFO, SIMEON, THERPSIHOI, THALIA, THEANO, THEONIMPHI - SEPTEMBER 1
MAMAS - SEPTEMBER 2
ANTHIMOS, ARHONTIA, ARHONTION, ARISTEA, ARISTION, PHEVOS, POLYDOROS - SEPTEMBER 3
HERMIONI, MOSES, OKEANIS, OKEANOS, ROSALIA - SEPTEMBER 4
ZAHARIAS - SEPTEMBER 5
EVDOXIOS, VIVOS - SEPTEMBER 6
CASIANI, SOZON - SEPTEMBER 7

DEスポIΛΑ, GENETHLΙOS, ΝΕΡΑΤΖΙΑ, ΣΚΙ-ADENI, TSAMPIKA - SEPTEMBER 8
JOAHIM, KIARAN - SEPTEMBER 9
ERASTI, ERASTOS, KLIMENTINI, KLIMIS, MINODORA, MITRODORA, NYMFODORA, PΟULCHERIA - SEPTEMBER 10
EFROSYNOS, EVANTHIA, EVANTHIS, THEODORA, VIOLETA - SEPTEMBER 11
ARISTIDIS, CORNELIUS - SEPTEMBER 13
STAVROS, THEOKLIS - SEPTEMBER 14
NIKITAS, VISARION - SEPTEMBER 15

EFIMIA, LOUMNTILLA, MELINA - SEPTEMBER 16
AGAPI, AGATHOKLIS, ELPIDA, OLIVIANOS, PANTOLEON, PILEAS, PISTI, SONIA, SOPHIA - SEPTEMBER 17
ARIADNI, EVMENIS, KASTOR, ROMYLOS - SEPTEMBER 18

SAVATIOS - SEPTEMBER 19

EFSTATHIOS, THEOPISTI - SEPTEMBER 20
JONAS - SEPTEMBER 21
LOIZOS, LOUISE, PHOKAS, ZOGRAFIA - SEPTEMBER 22
IRIS, POLIXENI, RAIS, XANTHIPOS, XANTHIPO - SEPTEMBER 23
KOPROS, MIRSINI, MIRTO, PERSEFONI, PERSIS, THEKLA - SEPTEMBER 24
EFROSINI - SEPTEMBER 25
AKYLINI, EPICHARIS, KALLISTRATOS, ZION - SEPTEMBER 27
HARITON - SEPTEMBER 28
KYRIAKOS - SEPTEMBER 29
STRATONIKOS - SEPTEMBER 30
St. John the Baptist Community News

Community News

GOYA—The GOYA Meeting for September will be Sunday, September 12, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. We will have dinner, a short meeting and then some fun and games on the soccer field with lots of water balloons. So come dressed to get wet. More information will be sent out via constant contact to our GOYAns.

Youth Worker Training—Saturday, September 25 from 8:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m. Every year, Fr. Stavros offers a youth worker training seminar for the Tampa Bay area. This is for GOYA advisors, JOY/HOPE Advisors, Sunday school teachers, older GOYAns (10-12th grade) and anyone who wants to learn how to work with you—how to lead an icebreaker or a discussion. There is no charge for this event. We need at least 12 people to make this event happen. The deadline to sign up is Tuesday, September 21. Please email Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com if you are interested. Lunch will be provided.

Altar Boys—We have resumed altar boy groups. If your son is fourth grade or older and would like to serve in the altar, please contact Fr. Stavros and we will add him to a team.

College student addresses—If you have college students or are a college student, please send your school address, phone number and email to the church office by September 15.

Adopt a college student—We started an adopt a college student program last year. We will be contacting all those who had college students they “adopted” last year and making sure you want to continue, as well as reorganizing which students are still in college, who is new to college, who has graduated college, etc. If you would like to participate and adopt a college student, please send your name to Father Stavros and Alex by September 15. If you were part of this program last year, you don’t have to contact us, we will be contacting you. Only people who are new to the program need to contact us.

Men’s Group—The Men’s Group will meet on Sunday, September 19, at 5:00 p.m. We will walk to a nearby restaurant and have dinner and then come back to church for a discussion, concluding by 7:30 p.m. All men of the community are welcome to participate.

Women’s Bible Study will begin again on Tuesday, September 21. We will have both an in-person and zoom option. Women’s Bible study will meet on Tuesdays (if a liturgical day falls on a Tuesday it will move to a different day for that week) from 10:00-11:30 a.m. Fr. Stavros leads this group.

Monday Night Bible Study will resume on Monday, September 13, from 6:30-8:00 p.m. There will be an in-person and zoom option. Fr. John Stefero will lead this group.

Tuesday Night Book Study will resume in October. We likely will be continuing with Nikolaos of Mesogia and Lavreotiki’s books. If you are interested in joining the next Book Study, please contact Alex.

Youth Worker Registration Continues in September — Attention all youth workers and ministry leaders. July begins the registration period for fall volunteers who wish to work with a children’s ministry or participate in certain leadership positions. Many of you already complied with the new GOA guidelines this past fall and will only have to complete online training and reregister. Others will need to register, undergo a background check and complete the online training. The Youth Protection Committee will e-mail all existing youth workers of their current status and requirements, including the registration form. Within a week or so afterwards, you will receive emails from Praesidium (aka:Armatus Learn to Protect) with links to complete the requirements. Please do so within ten days or the links expire.

12 Disciples Program—In August 2020, we started a program called “The 12 Disciples.” There are twelve pages of names that comprise all the members of our parish. Father Stavros prays for all twelve pages of names at Paraklesis. The idea for this program is for each “disciple” to take one page of names and pray for that group of people every day. For every twelve “disciples” who sign up, every page of people will be prayed for. We currently have 44 “disciples” meaning that each person in this community is being prayed for by at least five people every day. If you’d like to join this program and receive a page of people to pray for, please contact Matthew Balasis (mathewbalasis@verizon.net).

Order for Holy Communion—With Sunday School back in session the order for Holy Communion will be as follows:
1. Choir
2. Altar boys
3. Sunday school teachers (who will line up in middle aisle before Communion)
4. Sunday school students (who will line up in the middle aisle before Communion behind the teachers)
5. Then the rest of the congregation

Special Thank You to John Zelatis who personally organized and cooked all night for our welcome back luncheon August 15! That was the best pulled pork ever, served fresh from John’s smoker! Thank you John!!!

Parish Registry

Baptism—Samuel Joshua Preston, son of Joshua and Marian Preston, was baptized on Sunday, August 8. Kristina Hanhan was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Adult Baptism—Kelsey Ann (Zoe) Stein was baptized on Sunday, August 8. Eva Katsalakis was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Condolences to Fr. Stavros and family on the passing of his mother, Barbara, on August 12. May her memory be eternal!
Orthodoxy 101 Class will Begin in September

Fr. Stavros offers this class two times per year, in the spring and in the fall. This will be a Four-week course of study on Monday nights to make people aware of the basics of being an Orthodox Christian. The classes will be part lecture, part discussion, with lots of time for questions and answers.

Who should attend the Orthodoxy 101 class?

- Interfaith couples. This will help the non-Orthodox person understand more about what is going on in our church.
- Anyone who is considering joining our church. Going forward, this class will be a requirement for those who wish to join our Orthodox faith.
- New converts to Orthodoxy. For those who recently joined our church and who want to know a little bit more.
- Anyone who wants to know more about the basics of our faith, or who wants a refresher course in the basics of Orthodoxy is encouraged to attend.

The four sessions will be done as follows:

Monday, September 13 A Tour of the Orthodox Church: What we see in the Church and what it means

Monday, September 20 Orthodox Spirituality—Introduction to the Sacraments

Monday, September 27 The Divine Liturgy—This will actually be a “teaching” Liturgy on the solea of the church. If you have taken the class, or if you wish to only attend THIS session, please feel free to do so.

Monday, October 4 Orthodox Traditions—fasting, icons, prayer, and separating Theology from “yiayialogy.” Classes will be held on these three Mondays from 6:30-8:30 p.m. and will be held in the CHURCH Sanctuary.

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

Thank you for allowing me to be the President of St. John’s Philoptochos, these past two years. It was challenging but we were able to communicate with each other often. I have been humbled by your kind words and cards the last few months. I could not have done it without the direct leadership of Father Stavros, Charlie, Alex, the great team of ladies that were on the board and all of our Philoptochos members. None of it could have been accomplished in our own community and Tampa Bay area without all of you!!

We were blessed to have our fundraisers this past year from our Fournaipta, Spankoitpia/Tripoetia, Vasilopita to our Tsouraki sales on Palm Sunday. St John honored our Military and First responders in November, with your generous donations we were able to package and sent appx 30 boxes of supplies to our military men and women overseas. December, food was donated to feed 66 children and their families during Christmas Break in the Wimauma area. January, we held our 1st "Feeding Children Project" which was a joint venture with our fellow Christians at Christ the King to package food for the children for our community. Everyone who participated had a great time.

I would like to thank those on the board last year, Katherine Sakkis, Lisa Alsina, Mary Voykin, Kathy Maclaury, Melissa Krinos, CIndy Xenick, Martha Kapetan, Sia Blankenship, Elaine Halkias, Myra Armstrong. It has a roller coaster of a year but we did great things together.

Congratulations to the 2021-2023 Philoptochos board members:

President: Melissa Krinos
V. President: Katherine Sakkis
Treasurer: Mary Voykin
Cor. Secretary: Myra Armstrong
Rec. Secretary: Pres Denise Dorozenski
Advisor: Jeanie Nenos
Board Member: Lisa Alsina
Board member: Elaine Halkias
Board Member: Vickie Peckham

We are still working on a calendar for next year please stay tuned! If any assistance is needed please feel free to call anyone on the board so we can assist you.
August Highlights!

The Chosen—Over the summer, three small groups (girls, guys and adults) met on Sundays to watch and discuss season one of the series “The Chosen.”

Sunday school (above left)—On August 8, we offered a prayer for our students and teachers as they begin the school year.

Summer Camp Sunday July 25 (below)—Our campers from this summer’s St. Steven’s Camp talked about their experience this year!
Bon Voyage & Smooth Sailing, Charlie!
On August 1, we said farewell to Charlie Hambos, one of our pastoral assistants.
St. Stephen’s Summer Camp Camper Testimonials

This was my second year at St. Stephen’s camp. I ended up enjoying this week at St. Stephen’s camp more than I did 2 years ago for several reasons. One reason why I enjoyed summer camp than 2 years ago was because I conversed and interacted more with my cabin mates and made more new friends. I also feel more spiritually influenced and the end of camp than I was 2 years ago because I was encouraged to become a more committed Christian and I now know what I have to do be all in with Christianity. This year, my favorite evening activity was the bean carnival because I enjoyed playing corn hole against friends to winning beans and throwing other campers and staff in jail. I also liked going to confession on Thursday because I got advice on how to overcome my obstacles. I also want to thank the staff and the cabin counselors and axios to Charlie.

-Nicholas Akrotirianakis (9th Grade)

I had a great time at summer camp, it was a lot of fun. I really enjoyed playing sports, the ropes course, and staying up til 2am with my cabin mates and counselors. My favorite part of summer camp was swimming in the lake because I got to hang out with my friends and on Fridays there was a slip and slide.

-Zachary Carter (7th Grade)

St. Stephens camp is a great experience and a fun place to enjoy. I met a lot of new people and grew closer to other friends as well. There are so many activities planned everyday like the talent show, the Olympics, the ropes course and at night the dance, fireworks show and chanting all the songs was amongst my favorite things. Of course the slip and slide on the last day was by far the most fun and I can’t wait until next summer to go again.

-Nicholas Carter (9th Grade)

This was my second year at St. Stephen's. I was in St. Nicholas and had a blast. I got to meet so many new friends. We could all agree that swimming in the lake and arts and crafts were the best because we could play and talk to each other. I loved confession because after I felt so refreshed and it was a restart for me. My favorite memory was flipping two canoes in one day at camp wide swim and then my counselor, Harry, jumped in to “save” us.

-Leo Lenardos (8th Grade)

I always look forward to summer camp. 2021 was the best year I’ve had by far. My favorite part of it was talking with all my cabin mates and then having discussions with Fr. Stavros. Also I enjoyed getting a lot closer with all of my friends. Camp helped me see the bigger picture and make smarter decisions. Thank you Father and Charlie for everything you did; Week 2 was one of the best weeks yet.

-John Palios (11th Grade)

This year at camp was so amazing. It was so great to be back to my home away from home. I love going there because you are with a bunch of other orthodox people and you make a lot of new friends. My favorite part about camp this year was the encouragement walk that we did in the middle of the night while it was pouring rain. An encouragement walk is when someone is blind folded and everyone takes turns telling that person what they love about them. It was an amazing experience to have with all the amazing girls in my cabin. I love St Stephens and I cannot wait to go back next year!

-Maria Palios (9th Grade)
This was my 4th year at camp and was my favorite year so far. Last year we didn’t get to go, as COVID had everything shut down. So I was really excited we could go this year, but also a little worried. I thought that it might not be as much fun as it was in the past, because everyone was still afraid of getting sick. I thought that everything was going to be done differently and we wouldn’t have as much time together as we normally did. I was very mistaken. Father, Charlie, and everyone else there made the camp experience better than ever before and you could tell they had been planning everything for a while. This was also the first year that I was in the oldest cabin. I felt like there was a little more trust given to me and a lot more adult conversations.

There is time spent in church and various services that happen, but I want to make sure kids that haven't gone before know that there is a lot more to it. There is a ropes course we do, we swim in the lake, we play sports, there are a bunch of different events and we also have time to just hang out and enjoy being with each other. It was an amazing time and I couldn’t have asked for a better week this summer.

- Gennaro Scarfogliero (11th Grade)

This was my 3rd year of camp. It was really great to be back at camp after a year off. I made a lot o new friends and got closer with girls i already knew. My favorite thing this year was the olympics, where the camp is divided into teams for relay races. I was on team 6, and even though we didn’t win anything it was super fun. I also really enjoyed alone with god. Its a great and peaceful way to start off the day. Thank you Father and Charlie for an amazing week and I can’t wait to go back next year!

- Toula Trakas (10th Grade)

I'm Elizabeth Xenick and this was my 5th and last year at St. Stephens. I was in the oldest girls cabin and this was definitely my favorite year yet. I had such amazing counselors and cabin mates, who I grew so close with throughout the week. My favorite part of the week was the ropes course, where we do trust activities. I especially loved that this year the girls got to catch the guys on the trust fall. Even though both groups were a little nervous because it had never been done, it ended up being a really good opportunity for us to work as a team and for the boys to trust us. This week helped me in my spiritual journey to continue to grow closer to God. Thank you to Father Stavros for another amazing week at camp, and I can't wait to go back as a counselor!

- Elizabeth Xenick (12th Grade)

This is my second year going to camp and I really enjoyed it. After being away for a year because of the pandemic, going back this year made it even more special because I realized just how important it is. Being around kids my age that all share the same faith made it easier to express myself because we all had something in common, our faith.

My favorite part of camp was definitely doing an encouragement walk at one in the morning. The encouragement walk wasn’t something that we had planned to do at first but we all had fun ambushing Father and blindfolding him. Hearing all the nice things everyone had to say and being the one saying them really showed me the importance of lifting others up. It really kind of drove home this idea that Father had been telling us for some time now, if you say something nice you make people feel good, if you say something bad you make people feel bad, and if you say nothing at all you leave them wondering if you really cared at all. Even though we all got little sleep that night we all had huge smiles on our faces for the whole day.

- Kaitlin Zelatis (10th Grade)

This is my second year at St. Stephens, and I had a great time learning about my faith and how to be “ALL IN”. In hang time we learned about parables and how people's faith was tested, but because they were all in and didn't turn from God they were rewarded. My favorite past time at St. Stephens was the BBFC, bean bag fighting championship, which was hilarious to watch people fight over a bean bag. At the ropes course my favorite activity was the new obstacle course. After the amazing week at St. Stephens, I know I would love to go again.

- PJ Zelatis (9th Grade)
I expected this experience to be just about medicine but it ended up being way more than that. It was just a week but time has a wonderful way of showing you what really matters. There were mosquito bites, splinter removals and bruised bones which were expected. The real healing came from Father Stavros and his way with dealing with significant teenage issues. Kids come to camp with different background and all benefited from his sage advice and caring ways. Watching Father in action was a great example of Godly love that is the foundation of our religion. It was heartwarming and awe inspiring to see the love returned to father from the children. He was a true celebrity! We could all learn from his, I know I did. Archbishop Alexios was a wonderful addition to the week. His visit was energetic and caused a warm feeling all around. It was wonderful to see my own children benefit from this camp and with forming lasting friendships with all age groups. They even learned their beds the “Harry Koutrounmanis Way”. This is a MUST DO camp for all who are able!

-Dr. Georgia Kane (Camp Doctor)

The experience at St. Stephen’s is truly indescribable. After six years as a camper, this year was finally my first year being on staff as a counselor. The amazing thing about the dynamic at camp is that being bombarded with water balloons and having serious, Christ-centered discussions can happen all in a matter of hours. That’s why it is so fitting to call camp indescribable because I truly believe to the outside observer it doesn’t quite make sense.

Camp does everything: water balloon fights, alone time with God, bean carnivals, confession, sing-alongs, vespers and orthros, the talent show, slushies, spirit sticks, stork, dances (I’m pretty sure I could go on and on.) If you weren’t at camp half of the things listed don’t even make sense, yet this is what makes the camp experience. The combination of fun and God lets all of us know the being surrounded by God is fun.

Especially this year as a counselor, it was sad to hear how dark our world truly is. I pleaded with my campers to take advantage of the community established at this camp. Learned from my own experience, going off to college is hard and you need true friends to lean on in this fallen world. Another counselor led a devotion about having Orthodox friends, and how you really can’t put your finger on it, but something is different about your relationship with them. The reason why I stressed to my campers about the importance of these Orthodox friendships that they are forming is because the common love we all share for Christ bonds us unlike anything else. These friendships give us a sanctuary for when this world is dark and discouraging us from what is right, and we need to lean on those who know the light of this world and keep us on track.

Finally, this is what I will leave you with: truth and honesty. I keep referencing this dark world, but I hope you understand that all campers and staff, including myself, are struggling just like the rest of our parish. We are struggling because this has been a tough year or so. We have been isolated, and now we are just expected to be thrown back into this world like nothing even happened. Our world has lost sight of what truth actually is. The only model we have for absolute truth is the Bible; however, our society is not going to proclaim this as the truth. Being an Orthodox Christian is only getting harder due to the comparison of what society says is truth vs what Christ says is truth.

This year’s theme at camp was “all in” and I think it fits perfectly. Our job right now should be that we have to be those Orthodox friends supporting each other to go to church and encourage each other to have our own individual relationships with God. The only way we can help each other is through proclaiming the absolute truth and having honest relationships to keep each other accountable in our relationship with God. We have to be “all in” on encouraging each other and worshipping Christ.

As I said, St. Stephen’s is indescribable. I might’ve only covered a fraction of what happens at camp, but I hope this encourages us, as a parish, to continue to be “all in”. Water balloons and Christ-centered discussions should always go hand-in-hand, and I don’t think I could ever be convinced otherwise.

-Mia Lenardos (1st Year Counselor)

My experience at camp this year was unique in so many ways. This was the first week back to camp in two years along with it being my first year as a counselor. I got to be one of the councilors for the St. Nick boys with my friend Harry Koutromanis. Both of us were never campers in St. Nick, so we went in not knowing what to expect and with the pressure of that most of our campers were here for the very first time. Balancing all the responsibility was a daunting task and it was scary sometimes but it was one of the best experiences of my life.

I got to know all my campers very well, and still got to do the same activities and spiritual renewal that my campers got. Being a counselor was, in my opinion, better than being a camper. It helped me get out of the rut that was the “Covid Lifestyle”. I was able to see people that I had not seen in years and walk around the beautiful plot of land and not worry about school or Covid. All I had to worry about was making sure that the campers had the best time they could have and I hope they did.

-Dimitri Tsetsekas (1st Year Counselor)
Anyone that’s ever been to St. Stephen’s can attest to the fact that things are just different at camp. Being tucked away from the world and participating in seemingly crazy activities, like doing trust falls with people you’ve only known for three days, doing relay races while being pelted by water balloons, and being able to count your hours of sleep each night on one hand, somehow allows you to experience our God in a way that is fresh and revitalizing. I’ve been to St. Stephen’s six times as a camper, and this was my first year attending as a counselor.

I was a counselor for the youngest girl’s cabin, and it was such a privilege to get to see them grow in faith and friendship throughout the week. It was very gratifying to be able to lead them through challenges and triumphs throughout the week, especially as my co-counselor and I led them through encouragement activities and nightly group prayer. I also got to lead the singing along this week, which was always my favorite activity as a camper. One moment in particular was extra special to me: we were singing one of our slower songs to close out the night, and once we finished, I asked everyone to lift up their hands and close their eyes and sing the chorus again, this time without instruments in the background, and just to think about singing the words of the song to God Himself. I was nervous to make this kind of initiative because it’s not something that we usually do in worship, but the moment that followed afterwards was pure, genuine praise for Jesus and was a truly profound experience.

The theme of camp this year was “All In” and the chance to go “all in” on something as pure and beautiful as camp was a truly incredible experience that we don’t get often. Camp is a safe place, a second home, a place where none of us have to explain ourselves—everyone there just understands us in a way that other people don’t. Camp allows the youth of the church to have a voice and have something beautiful to fall back on when we struggle, which are both things that we sorely need. This is something everyone can learn from camp: the youth and young adults of the church have a lot to say and a lot to add to the church community. Camp gives us a place to be heard and a place to better understand how to worship our God.

Finally, I want to say a huge thank you to Father Stavros. As a camper, I always knew that Father worked incredibly hard as a priest and as a camp director. Getting to be on staff and seeing the other side of camp revealed to me that he does so much more than I ever could have guessed. As I said before, the theme of camp this year was “All In”, and Father Stavros is the embodiment of this phrase; he gives everything he has each day at summer camp, and I am so grateful to get to have him as a leader. Thank you, Father!

I am so grateful for this week at St. Stephen’s; the incredible memories, spiritual reset, and amazing camp family that I got to spend the week with has filled my heart to the brim. God is good!

-Artemis Xenick (1st Year Counselor)

This was Y4 as a counselor. While part of me continues to wonder why I return to put myself through a week straight of no sleep and exposure to partly braindead boys/kids, the other part of me can’t imagine NOT being there. My kids (my 2 & my nephew/nieces) LOVE camp. All the kids (staff & campers) call me “Big Mike” (not “Mike” and absolutely not “Mr. Palios”).

It would be unfair to mention any specific co-staff member because they all were so great. But Karter and Pete were great to work with, even if Karter’s taste in Star Wars is misguided or Pete’s musical selection is different than mine. So, I’ll just THANK ALL OF YOU. A very special week (wish we had a second week) even with the Depends jokes. Don’t forget… I went to bed later than most of you and woke up earlier than all of you! I may not remember your names in 6 months though.

Highlights for me include every morning wake up playlist, my nephew George leading our cabin in my Trust Fall, George “blessing” Alex with “holy” bottled water, Star Wars film ranking debates (I’m right), leaving the dance early, Big Mike’s Water Balloon Revenge, and getting “pelted”.

We had some kids come to camp broken. We were prepared for this. Staff did a great job dealing with any/every incident that came up. [BTW, Fr. Stavros was 10000% ALL IN. He left “it all on the field” and I honestly don’t know how he did it. THANK YOU.] I hope that the kids who arrived at camp broken/confused will be able to take the positive momentum/experience from camp back home to school/home.

Parents, you need to get your kids to church. If you’re a dad, you need to LEAD your family to church. There’s no negotiation here, unless your work doesn’t allow you to do so. The Church is one place where the kids can get refuge from the BS out in the world. You need to take advantage of it and lead!

Camps, if you’re reading this…I hope you had fun. I hope you remember at least TWO things you learned and can apply it to situations when things get tough.

[tl;dr – Camp was great. Some kids are struggling. Go to church.]

-Mike Palios (4th Year Counselor)
Welcome back to Sunday School. We are so glad to have the 2021-2022 Sunday School year off to a great start. Thank you to all the teachers, parents, and children who are committed to our program. We have expanded our program with 22 dedicated teachers.

The first day of Sunday School was on Aug. 15th and on the 14th the teachers had an inspiring retreat with Fr. Stavros and Alex Limberatos. Thank you to the many families who have registered their children in Sunday School. Please register your child online if you have not done so already.

We are very excited about our Weekly Topics that each classroom will include into their program. The topics for the month of August were THE THEOTOKOS, CHURCH ETIQUETTE, and PRAYER.

Our students also wrote messages and decorated cards for Charlie Hambos that we sent to him in Orlando. We can’t thank him enough for all that he has done for our Sunday School. Our students love him and he will truly be missed.

Our Youth Sunday Program will continue this year. Students in 1st - 6th grade will sing the Liturgical Hymns with the choir under the direction of Maria Xenick. Our high school student will read the Epistle on Youth Sundays.

We understand that it is very difficult to attend church every week, but PARENTS, please make an effort. Your children’s understanding of our faith is essential. It is also important to make it a “habit” of going to church on Sunday morning. When students come to church on a regular basis they feel CONNECTED to our church, to their teachers, and especially to their classmates. What better peers to have, than their Orthodox friends! These friendships could also last a lifetime. Students who do not come regularly may feel uncomfortable and miss so much of our valuable instruction.

Our Hall of Faith program will continue again this year! This program is to encourage our children to memorize and understand the Lord’s Prayer and the Creed. Our Pre-K through 3rd Grade will be focusing on the Lord’s Prayer and our 4th graders on up will do the Creed. Look for our Hall of Faith poster on our Sunday School bulletin board. Will your child’s name be on it?

Please feel free to contact us with any questions, suggestions, or comments regarding St. John’s Sunday School Program. Parents: If you do not receive our weekly e-mails about our Sunday School Program, please contact Vickie Peckham at 813-758-3102 or e-mail her at vickiepeckham@gmail.com
Hello and WELCOME!  My name is Greg Melton and on behalf of our Community Outreach Ministry I want to thank you for your interest in participating with our group.  **On the third Saturday of each month**, we volunteer our time to provide for those of our community in need in downtown Tampa. We partner with Matthew 25 local charity, USF Medical School, and Metropolitan Ministries to serve breakfast, provide clothing, and care for the medical needs for our guests.

**To Volunteer:** Go to our Sign Up Genius, see URL below or can the QR CODE and sign up.

**Place:** First Presbyterian Church @ 412 Zack Street East, downtown Tampa. The entrance for volunteers is on the Polk Street side of building.

**Time:** 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

**Volunteer Check-In Process:**
1) Sign in and choose the job you want on the Duty Sheet
2) Prepare and wear your name tag
3) Don’t be shy…if not sure where to go or what to do to get started, ask someone who looks like they know what they’re doing.
4) Set up and Preparation 8-9 a.m., Serving  9-10:15 a.m., Cleanup 10:15-10:30 a.m..

Matthew 25 founders Peggy & Mike Kanter, as well as Bill Stone from Metro Ministries, are Go To people if you have questions or need direction on where you may be needed when you arrive.

**Here is the URL for the Sign Up Genius** for every upcoming 3rd Saturday of Month. Find the dates that work for you and sign up.  https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0f48a5a62da3f49-community

Please don’t hesitate to ask any questions. Thank you and God Bless
Greg Melton       813-967-2074     gmelt12@gmail.com

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

*Proverbs 22:9  Those who give freely will be blessed. That's because they share their food with those who are poor*

*Galatians 6:2  Carry one another's heavy loads. If you do, you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

My name is Sheila Vukmer and I am the new head for St. John’s Food Pantry.

I have never been in a situation where I didn't know where my next meal would come from or how it would come. I have never been hungry to the point of starvation. But a cousin close to me has. Due to severe medical issues, she was unable to eat much of anything for long periods of time. When I visited with her, I was shocked at how emaciated she had become. She was quite stoic and resigned to the situation as it existed at the time, and I'll never forget what she said. She "had the funds, the family and friends, the wherewithal to eat; she just physically couldn't eat much of anything” So she knew what it was like to be hungry. How it felt. The desire. The need. The inability. The weakness both physical and emotional. She vowed that if she survived, she would commit all she had to feeding the hungry. She did survive and has committed to feeding the hungry in her community in PA. I would like to do the same here in Tampa and ask all who are reading this to help in that endeavor.

We are excited to hear your suggestions and ideas on how to invigorate this ministry and to include you in this mission of feeding our local community! Don’t hesitate to reach out to me (412-719-1005) or the church office with your questions and/or suggestions!

God bless you all!
Father Stavros has authored four books that are available both in the bookstore and on-line. They are entitled:

*Let All Creation Rejoice: Reflections on Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany*

*The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection*

*Blessed is the Kingdom, Now and Forever: Reflections on the Divine Liturgy*

*Let us Be Attentive: Reflections on the Sunday and Feastday Scripture Readings of the Orthodox Church*
Our word for our parish for 2021 is “Renew.” Here are the words that our parishioners chose to mark their year.

Verses of the Year—Psalm 50/51:10-12

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.
Fifty-Two Verses in Fifty-Two Weeks: The Bible Project
By Fr. Stavros

Most of us don’t spend enough time in the Bible. Sadly, some of us don’t spend any time. Each week since January 2019, we provide in The Messenger and then repeated weekly in the bulletin, a verse or two. I choose verses that are meaningful to me, or well known or ones that have meaning in contemporary times. You are welcome to submit verses via email to me as well, as many of you have. If you want a challenge, do the following:

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

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

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

September 5-11
Lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are white for harvest. John 4:35

As we celebrate Labor Day this week, we remember an important thing Jesus said about labor in John 4:35. Jesus was talking to His disciples in this passage after an encounter with a Samaritan Woman. She went out and proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, the first “evangelist.” The disciples looked at Jesus and were probably confused about what this all meant. The disciples asked Jesus if He was hungry. He told them “My food is to do the will of Him Who sent Me, and to accomplish His work.” (John 4:34) Metaphorically, He told them to look up and see that the fields were white for harvest. The prophets had sown the seeds that the Messiah was coming. People had been encouraged for generations and not lose hope. The Samaritan woman had been converted almost instantly. Jesus told them that there were many others who were ready to be “harvested” into following after Him. When a crop is harvested successfully, both the one who sowed the crop and the one who did the reaping rejoice. Others (those who came before) had sown the crop. Not it was up to Jesus and the disciples to reap what had been sown. This cycle of sowing and reaping seeds for Christ continues to this day, and involves all of us. Someone had sown seeds in us, that is why we are reading this message. We are supposed to enter this cycle of planting seeds in others that someone else will reap after we are gone.

September 12-18
For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. John 3:17

On the Sunday before the Holy Cross, the Gospel reading at the Divine Liturgy is very short, John 3: 13-17. It contains the well-known verse of John 3:16, which summarizes Christ’s minstry. The next verse is also significant. It speaks of Christ as an optimist, that His desire is for us to be saved and not condemned. And this not only means that we should be saved for eternal life, but that we should feel joy in this life. So much of the world revolves around shame. We are shamed for what we do and what we don’t do. We are shamed for what we think. And we carry the burden of shame for what we have done. Christ doesn’t want us to live like people who are under a sentence of condemnation. He wants us to live freely, as people who have been saved from condemnation and shame. We rid ourselves of shame by being aligned with God. The more we have of God, the less room there is for shameful behavior and shameful feelings about past behavior. Prayer and worship will help keep us away from shameful behavior, while confession, repentance and the grace of God (received through prayer and worship) will take away guilt and shame from past failings.

September 19-25
For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life (soul)? For what can a man give in return for his life (soul)? Mark 8:36-37

The word “soul” appears in parenthesis because the use of the word “life” is a mistranslation from the original Greek. The word translated as “life” is the Greek word “psíhi” which means “soul.” So, properly translated, this verse says “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? What can a man give in return for his soul?” When we think of the worst things that can happen to us in life, we think of financial ruin, or perhaps premature death. The worst thing that can happen in life is to die with a soul that does not know God. Because it is the soul that continues on for eternal life. It either goes to God for eternal joy or it goes to Hades for everlasting sorrow. All the “things” we have in life, whether it is possessions or even the years of life, amount to nothing if the soul is not prepared to meet God. It doesn’t matter how long we live or how much wealth we have amassed if we have to forfeit our souls because we didn’t prepare them. As we work for the earthly things, we have to remember to work for the heavenly things as well.

September 26-October 3
We love, because He first loved us. I John 4:19

Why love others? It is out of obligation? The simple answer for why we are to love is Christ’s example. We love, because He first loved us. We are created out of God’s love. God created the world and God created people out of His overabundance of love. We have His love as our example for how to love. He loved us so much that God sent His Son to die for us. Christ loved us so much that He endured the cross and death for us. We’ve all seen stories of inspiring people that we use to inspire and motivate us. For instance, when we read about someone running with artificial legs, we might be inspired to run with our natural legs. We might think “if he or she can do it, I most certainly can.” We look with inspiration to cancer survivors and others who have overcome adversity. While doing this, we should look at Christ on the cross and reflect on His love. And we should be inspired, that if He can love us to the degree that He was willing to die like that for us, then we should be able to love one another despite mistakes that occur between us.
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; we are 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 attendee. 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. You can serve as a greeter as often as you like in person, or you can make calls from the comfort of your home. We would love to have some new members of our team!

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

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**Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?**

**Over 3,200 people have!** The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 6 years! Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email Alex at alex@stjohntpa.org and ask him to add you. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email Alex or follow the link at the bottom of the daily emails to do so. If you want to forward to a friend, please use the “forward to a friend” option. Also, make sure prayerteam365@gmail.com has been added to your contacts so that these emails stay in your Inbox rather than going to the Junk or Spam folders.

The Prayer Team has a new dedicated website: [PrayerTeam365.com](http://PrayerTeam365.com)

Check it out! Search by topic and grow in your faith today!
We’re Resuming the Pre-Pandemic Kolyva Protocol

1. Memorial Services MUST be scheduled through the church office at least two weeks in advance of when you want the service.
2. Memorial services for 40 days and one year will be done on the Sunday closest to the appropriate date. All other memorials will be done on the designated Memorial Sunday each month.
3. Please let the office know when you call or email whether you will be providing your own kolyva or whether you wish for the Philoptochos to provide. If a family chooses to make their own Kolyva(es), the family will be responsible for scooping the Kolyva(es) in the kitchen after the Memorial Service to share with the entire community.
4. If the Philoptochos does the kolyva, there is a $100 charge for this service-checks may be made payable to “St. John Philoptochos.”
5. Also, please send the church office all of the names you wish to have commemorated at the memorial service, and how many pews, if any, you would like reserved for your family.

Using Amazon Smile to Donate to St. John - If you use Amazon Smiles, make sure to choose our church so a donation will be given to our parish every time a purchase is made. So far, since August 2017, we have made $864.59. Every bit helps!

Prayer List: Lord Jesus Christ, Physician of our Souls and Bodies, visit and heal your servants: Nicholas, Helen, George, & Elina; Lillian Thomas; Scotty; Desi Serreira; Ashley Kladakis; Dora Kallas, Kathy & Andrew Bouzinekis; Anastasia; Amanda, Andrew, Colton, Miranda, Charlotte Elizabeth, Nuha, Nabeel, Michael, Amal, John, Elaine, Olga, Virginia Georgiou, Ron Myer, Toula Tsaros, Fr. Pat Legato, Nellie Pringle, Yolanda Webb, Angela Bougas, Tony Ekonomou, Ron, Jason Vickers, Rex Garrison, Tina Chakonas, Ann Demas, Alex Martinez, Adriana Martinez, Aaron Martinez, Christina Noel Kouzes Houck, Evangeline Xeroteres, Nichole Ross, Daniel Ross, Daniella Ross, Ashley Henderson, Natalie Henderson, Chris, Debbie, James, Avery, Lily, Jacob, Jesse, Ann, Rosario, Antonia Caffentzis, Alissa, John, Angela, Joey, Christine Scourtes, Steven, Matthew & Family, Phyllis, John Zelatis, Reagan, Peter Zahriris, Alexandra Ferrarolis, Leon & Despina Botham, Cindy Xenick, Mary Ellen Evdemon, Marie Sofia Panagopoulos, Maria Hursey, Chris Vamvakias, John Myer, Mike Trimis, Robert and Alice Stoccardo, John Alexander, Michael Romero, George Hambos, Dean Kondilis and Family, Bill and Nancy Manikas, Patricia Costello, Anastasia Smyrnakis, Ekaterina & Anna Shushaalykova, Dora Koudouna, Ana Mourer, Debbie Phelps, Mary Voykin, David Voykin, Anne Sakellaris, Denise Bradane, Sia Blankenship, Don Payne, Zhana Temelkova, Stanislava Terzieva, James, Jude and all victims of war, terrorism, crime, natural disaster, and all of whom we are unaware.

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.

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: stjohntpa.org.
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 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/stjohngoctampa
MEETING DATE AND TIME:
We normally meet on the first Thursday of every month unless otherwise noted.

NEXT MEETING DATE: Sat. Sept 4 at 11:45 a.m.
LOCATION:
Byblos Restaurant - Lebanese, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern
2832 S MacDill Ave, Tampa, FL

- We want to thank Tony Fotopoulos for the wonderful time we had on July 5th at ABC Pizza. We had 13 in attendance. Even though Tony was in Greece, several members of his staff visited our table to make sure we were happy.
- Happy Birthday to Presbytera Loretta, Martha Kapetan and Kathy MacLaury
- We continue to reach out to those who are homebound during the pandemic as part of our Church’s LOVE, COMMUNITY & SERVICE core values.
- We were happy to see Mary Nenos at the Celebration Party for Charlie Hambos. Pete Nenos was still in the rehab center.

We reported the total number of homebound people contacted:

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PASSED ACTIVITIES
July 1, 2021 – We played a game of Bingo and many prizes were given out. It was catered by Acropolis Restaurant
June 4, 2021 - We attended a dinner social at the AHEPA House in Tarpon Springs.
We traveled to Tarpon Springs to St Michael Shrine, lunch and Easter Specialty Food Shopping on April 22nd
April 7, 2021 - Pre-Sanctified Liturgy as a group.
April 22, 2021 - We visited Tarpon Springs for our Easter Specialty Food Shopping at Greek Boys Inc.
We held socially distant IN PERSON and Zoom meeting in the Kourmolis Center
Our discussions were on the CHURCHES THAT TOUCHED OUR LIVES were on.
Feb 6th, Jan. 9th, Aug. 5th, Sept. 3rd & Oct 1st.
July 2nd, 2020 – Revisited 60 years ago in the years 1960 to 1969
March 5th, 2020 - Visited St Michael Greek Orthodox Shrine in Tarpon Springs
January 2, 2020 – Lunch at the new Psomi Bakery and Restaurant
December 7, 2019 - Trip to the Show Palace Dinner Theatre featuring Elf the Musical
October 5, 2019 - Ybor City Museum State Park and lunch at the Soup Stone Grill

St John Young-At-Heart sends our sincere condolences to Father Stavros, Presbytera Lisa and Nicholas for the passing of Fr. Stavros’ mother.
Want to Learn Modern Greek?

Teacher born, raised, and educated in Greece with 22 years of experience teaching the Greek language. Adult classes for beginners taught @ St. John Greek Orthodox Church (2418 W. Swann Ave, Tampa, FL 33609). Classes are held at 6-8:30pm on Thursday evenings, starting on September 30, 2021. This will be the first of three sessions, with each session lasting three months.

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<th>Speak Greek</th>
<th>Basic Grammar &amp; more.</th>
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<td>Some Greek History</td>
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<tr>
<td>Write Greek</td>
<td>BOOK INCLUDED IN PRICE</td>
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Price per session is $100 for church members and $125 for non-members

Contact Ms. Magdalini Myer: at (813) 523-5771, aspis69@aol.com or the church office at (813) 876-8830
The Importance of Annual Mammograms
By Lisa Alsina, BSN, RN - Nursing Ministry

According to the American Cancer Society, about 1 in 8 women in the U.S. will develop invasive breast cancer during their lifetime. Screening mammography is the only method proven to reduce deaths due to breast cancer by detecting breast cancer early. Since mammograms were introduced in the U.S. in the 1980’s, there have been 30 percent fewer deaths from breast cancer among women.

A mammogram is an x-ray picture of the breasts that makes it possible to detect lumps or abnormal growths that may not be felt during self-examination. Some Centers offer a 3-D mammography (Tomosynthesis), the latest technology available in breast imaging. Tomosynthesis is a more effective tool for detecting breast cancer compared to conventional 2-D mammography since the breast can be viewed in a cross sectional manner instead of the single projection that traditional 2-D mammography provides.

Annual mammograms save lives. Experts recommend that women age 40 and over have annual mammograms. In the past controversy existed about whether or not women should get mammograms between the ages of 40 and 50. However, studies have shown that breast cancer tends to be more aggressive in women in this age group so it is especially important for women to get their annual mammograms starting at age 40.

Major risk factors of breast cancer include age, genetics, and breast density. The risk of developing breast cancer increases with age. After age 50, the probability of developing breast cancer within 10 years is 1 in 43. Women who have a close relative who has had breast cancer are also at increased risk; about 5 to 10 percent of breast cancer cases result from gene mutations that are inherited. Women with dense breast tissue as seen by mammography, have a significantly increased risk compared to those without dense breasts.

However, women without any risk factors for breast cancer still should get annual mammograms because the great majority of breast cancer patients have no risk factors at all. Approximately 75 percent of patients who are diagnosed with breast cancer have no risk factors, making it that much more important that every woman have a screening mammogram each year.

Getting a high-quality screening mammogram and having a clinical breast exam on a regular basis are the most effective ways to detect breast cancer early. Early detection of breast cancer means that treatment can be less extensive and prognosis is better. Without regular mammograms, tumors can go undetected allowing a breast cancer to grow and possibly spread to other parts of the body. Since not all breast cancers are visible by mammography, it is very important to have annual clinical breast exams by a health care provider and to notify him/her of any changes detected between exams.

Screening mammography saves lives, and it’s one of the easiest steps women can take to be as healthy as possible and catch a possible breast cancer early.
Take Advantage of the Parish Assistance Program

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is excited to share that, beginning May 1st, we will be offering a Parish Assistance Program, PAP, with BayCare Behavioral Health. The PAP program will provide our parishioners access to free and confidential counseling services - offering additional support when life’s challenges become overwhelming. The PAP utilizes a network of faith-based providers and are sensitive to the values and beliefs of those they serve and provide compassionate care to children, adults, parents, and seniors.

Parishioners can contact BayCare to request up to three free and confidential counseling sessions from a licensed mental health professional. The BayCare helpline, 800-878-5470, is answered 24/7 by mental health professionals. Many BayCare therapists are also offering telephonic and virtual counseling sessions to help parishioners maintain their emotional wellbeing during these trying times.

Through BayCare Behavioral Health, parishes enrolled in this program allow access to services for their parishioners who are suffering from emotional turmoil that results from the challenges of everyday life which span a lifetime. The BayCare network of providers understand the importance of compassionate care and are sensitive to the values and beliefs of those they serve.

You can get more information on the BayCare Behavioral Health Community Services Program on their website at: https://baycare.org/services/behavioral-health/our-specialties/community-health-services

**Help is available for life issues including:**

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Family discord
- Marital problems
- Substance abuse issues
- Behavioral issues
Prayers of Protection from the Coronavirus

A Prayer To Be Offered in the Morning

Lord our God, You who are rich in mercy, and with careful wisdom direct our lives, listen to our prayer, receive our repentance for our sins, bring an end to this new infectious disease, this new epidemic, just as you averted the punishment of your people in the time of David the King. You who are the Physician of our souls and bodies, grant restored health to those who have been seized by this illness, raising them from their bed of suffering, so that they might glorify You, O merciful Savior, and preserve in health those who have not been infected. By your grace, Lord, bless, strengthen, and preserve, all those who out of love and sacrifice care for the sick, either in their homes or in the hospitals. Remove all sickness and suffering from your people, and teach us to value life and health as gifts from You. Give us Your peace, O God, and fill our hearts with unflinching faith in Your protection, hope in Your help, and love for You and our neighbor. For Yours it is to have mercy on us and save us, O our God, and to You we ascribe glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever, to the ages of ages. Amen.

A Prayer To Be Offered in the Evening

Lord Jesus Christ our God, You traveled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.” At Your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of this virus, that we may experience Your healing love. Heal those O Lord who are suffering with this pandemic’s illness. May they regain their strength and health through medical care. Heal us from our fears, which prevent nations from working together and neighbors from helping one another. Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to a disease that knows no borders. Lord Jesus Christ, healer of all and physician of our souls and bodies, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow. Be with those who have died from the virus. May they be at rest with You in Your eternal peace. Be with the families of those who are sick or have died. As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair. May they know Your peace. Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process. May they know Your protection and peace. Be with the leaders of all nations. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve. Give them the wisdom to choose long-term solutions that will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks. May they know Your peace, as they work together to achieve it on earth. Whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness or only a few, Lord Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare. In place of our anxiety, give us your peace. For You are the Physician of our souls and bodies Christ our God and to You do we offer glory, thanksgiving and worship together with Your eternal Father and Your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Another Prayer, To Be Offered At Any Time

O Holy Father, God of unknown, uncreated depth, You are beyond all description and expectation. You are the Creator of all worlds, physical and metaphysical. As You are only love, in love You created everything that truly is. Through Your Son, everything has form and purpose, and through Your Spirit, everything lives and moves back toward You. O Father, we are troubled by this scourge that is infecting Your people around the world. From the ancient Fall away from You, there are many consequences that we cannot begin to understand. As traces of this pestilence are being studied in labs, we shiver at its demonic malevolence for destruction, especially of the frail and the elderly. Our hearts are open to You, loving Father; we come to You as children, meek and lowly. We beg You to help the doctors who work to find a cure. We beg You to help our leaders to put away childish things, to forget political advantage, and to be good stewards of their people. We beg You to help us to be wise ourselves and to care for human life in the least of those around us. We cry out to You as One Who did not send this plague. We cry out to You as One Who only heals and redeems. You did not send this, but we know You can destroy it. So Father, cease this plague, and turn it back to the abyss from which it came. Heal Your people, the humanity of this earth, cleanse us and strengthen us toward You. We are weak, but You are strong, and in our weakness Your strength is revealed. Help us, we beg You, in the Name of Your Son, the Great Physician, Who, together with You and our Comforter, the Holy Spirit, Are due all glory and honor, to the ages of ages. Amen.
**Opt-in on The Messenger** - In an effort to be more environmentally conscious, we will be mailing *The Messenger* ONLY to those who ask. If you wish to receive *The Messenger* by mail, you certainly may. We just ask that you indicate on your stewardship form, or let the office know, that you wish to receive *The Messenger* by mail. We will no longer be mailing *The Messenger* unless you ask us to.

**Beware of Emails or Text Messages Asking for Gift Cards**

This is a common and very scary thing that is happening. People who are impersonating as Fr. Stavros have been emailing people and asking them to buy gift cards, scratch off the back to reveal the code, take pictures of the code and email them the pictures. Fr. Stavros would never under any circumstances ask for a gift card via email. If you receive an email like this, please call Fr. Stavros or Alex immediately. Many people these days are falling victim to scams like these. Please double check and even triple check any emails or phone calls that ask for money even if it looks real. Any questions? Please contact the office.

**Have questions?**

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

- **Fr. Stavros**
  - 813-394-1038

- **Fr. John**
  - 678-637-4425

- **Alex**
  - 262-370-0586

- **James**
  - 401-527-8203

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**Happy Birthday!**

- Thomas Karoutsos - Sep 1
- James Katsaras - Sep 1
- Sophia Diniaco - Sep 2
- Jacob Rodriguez - Sep 2
- Andrew Demas - Sep 3
- Demetrios Panopoulos - Sep 3
- Nicky Abramis - Sep 4
- Karina Findlay - Sep 4
- JoAnn Hartung - Sep 4
- Mary Renaud - Sep 4
- Gennaro Scarfogliero - Sep 4
- Peter Spanos - Sep 4
- Luke Stonestreet - Sep 4
- Abigaile Tsongrakis - Sep 4
- Michael Halikoytakis - Sep 5
- Larissa Krinos - Sep 6
- Konstantos Orfanakis - Sep 6
- William Rindone - Sep 6
- Artemis Xenick - Sep 7
- Mary Maas - Sep 8
- Paulina Katsoulis - Sep 11
- Nicolas Perry - Sep 11
- Nicholas Alsin - Sep 12
- Demetrios Konstant - Sep 12
- Sophia Lindiakos - Sep 14
- Joshua Pyszkowski - Sep 14
- Ryan Rindone - Sep 14
- Chyanne Clements - Sep 15
- Nicholas Matassini - Sep 16
- Katerina Zabetakis - Sep 16
- Mihail Kaburis - Sep 17
- Sophia Smith - Sep 17
- Selena Soteriou - Sep 17
- Andrew Thatcher - Sep 18
- Alexandra Gerecke - Sep 18
- Christina Gerecke - Sep 18
- George Fellios - Sep 20
- Elizabeth Kavouklis - Sep 20
- Aidan Tsongrakis - Sep 20
- Robert Mason - Sep 21
- Evelyn Patsavos - Sep 21
- Sofia Stonestreet - Sep 22
- Kelly Westmoreland - Sep 22
- Luke Depasquale - Sep 23
- Ava Spirides - Sep 30
- Sofia Boomgarden - Sep 26
- Spero Renaud - Sep 26
- Addison Schad - Sep 26
- Foti Kwasny - Sep 27
- Nicolette Tsitropeou - Sep 27
- Nicholas Freeman - Sep 28
- Demetrios Kolovos - Sep 28
- Vasili Sotiropoulos - Sep 29
- Katerina Papaefstathiou - Sep 30
- Janet Georgia - Sep 24
- Deborah Papaconomou - Sep 24
- Nicholas Alsina - Sep 12
- Demetrios Konstas - Sep 12
- Sophia Lindiakos - Sep 14
- Joshua Pyszkowski - Sep 14
- Ryan Rindone - Sep 14
- Chyanne Clements - Sep 15
- Nicholas Matassini - Sep 16
- Katerina Zabetakis - Sep 16
- Mihail Kaburis - Sep 17
- Sophia Smith - Sep 17
- Selena Soteriou - Sep 17
- Andrew Thatcher - Sep 18
- Alexandra Gerecke - Sep 18
- Christina Gerecke - Sep 18
- George Fellios - Sep 20
- Elizabeth Kavouklis - Sep 20
- Aidan Tsongrakis - Sep 20
- Robert Mason - Sep 21
- Evelyn Patsavos - Sep 21
- Sofia Stonestreet - Sep 22
- Kelly Westmoreland - Sep 22
- Luke Depasquale - Sep 23
- Ava Spirides - Sep 30

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**God Grant You Many Years!**
Thank You to all of Our Friends!

Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL  
Demet & Eleni Anagnostiadis - Bethesda, MD  
Nicholas & Maria Andreadakis - Lititz, PA  
George & Maria Andros - Birmingham, AL  
Nicholas Anton - Dunedin, FL  
Gaby & Alicia Atik - Treasure Island, FL  
Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL  
Richard & Mickie Bass  
Katherine Beasley - Vero Beach, FL  
Christopher & Jaime Brewer - Tampa, FL  
Pete & Carol Caldwell - Ringgold, GA  
William Camarinos - Alexandria, VA  
William & Kanella Jane Chapman - Ellenton, FL  
Nicholas & Sondra Chronis - Mt. Pleasant, SC  
Emmanuel Chrysakis - Palm Harbor, FL  
Victor & Cynthia Cucuz - Tampa, FL  
Fr Stratton & Pres. Denise Dorozenski - Sterling Heights, MI  
Eric & Artemis Mellen - Longwood, FL  
Elefteria Garos - Palm Harbor, FL  
Peter George - Tampa, FL  
Ron & Maria Gregory - St. Petersburg, FL  
Gabriel Hurst - Largo, FL  
Michael Ibrahim - E. Brunswick, NJ  
Judith Jogerst  
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI  
Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL  
Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL  
Demetrius & Katherine Klimis - Boardman, OH  
John & Cathie Koch - New Port Richey, FL  
Tommy Kolouris - Tampa, FL  
Sharon Kush - Tallahassee, FL  
Evengelos & Helen Liras - Tampa, FL  
Fr Michael & Pres Virginia Massouh - Seminole, FL  
Kathleen Spanos Mendez - Ponte Verda, FL  
Charles Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA  
Kay Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA  
Basil & Dorothy Nosal - Fredericksburg, VA  
John & Deanna Palmer - Greenville, SC  
Theodora Pappas Poletis - Nottingham, MD  
Luke & Arianna Quinn - Arlington, MA  
Nadine Raheb  
Pericles & Fotini Stamatiades - Asheville, NC  
Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI  
Lillian Thomas - Dyer, IN  
Wesley & Melisa Thompson - Clearwater, FL  
Christopher & Georgette Tsavoussis - Dunedin, FL  
William Yotis - La Grange, IL

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.
On the Lighter Side

If you feel useless today, remember that someone had to work as a lifeguard at the Olympics.

When a kid says “daddy, I want mommy,” that’s the kid version of “I’d like to speak to your supervisor.”

Literature
English Literature: I will die for honor
French Literature: I will die for love
American Literature: I will die for freedom
Russian Literature: I will die

Traffic Stop
Cop: You were going fast.
Me: I was just trying to keep up with traffic.
Cop: There isn’t any traffic.
Me: I know! That’s how far behind I am.

On the Serious Side

Everyday I say to myself, today I will begin. St. Anthony of the Desert

How do people start attending church?
86% A friend invited me
6% Organized visitation
6% Invited by the pastor
2% advertising

I’ve given God a million reasons not to love me. None of them changed His mind.

Every night… Forgive those who hurt you. Pray for those who need it. Thank God for everything you have.

The saddest thing about betrayal is that it never comes from your enemies.

Do not let anyone rent a space in your head, unless they’re a good tenant.

Be Kind
Author Unknown

You came in naked,
You will go out naked.
You arrived weak,
You will leave weak.
You came without money and things,
You will leave even without money and things.
Your first bath? Someone washed you,
Your last bath? Someone will wash you.

This is life!!!

So why so much malice, so much envy, so much hate, so much resentment, so much selfishness and so much pride? Why, when we have to go empty handed?

BE KIND… We have limited time on Earth don’t waste it in uselessness.

The man doesn’t know that there is a snake underneath. The woman doesn’t know that there is a stone crushing the man. The woman thinks: “I am going to fall! And I can’t climb because the snake is going to bite me! Why can’t the man use a little more strength and pull me up!” The man thinks: “I am in so much pain! Yet I’m still pulling you as much as I can! Why don’t you try and climb a little harder!?"

The moral is— you can’t see the pressure the other person is under, and the other person can’t see the pain you’re in. This is life, whether it’s with work, family, feelings or friends, we should try to understand each other. Learn to think differently, perhaps more clearly and communicate better. A little thought and patience goes a long way.

~ Author Unknown
Technology Is Not Life—
Spend Time with People, Not Devices
Author Unknown

"I spent an hour in the bank with my dad, as he had to transfer some money. I couldn't resist myself and asked..."

"Dad, why don't we activate your internet banking?"

"Why would I do that?" He asked...

"Well, then you wont have to spend an hour here for things like transfer. You can even do your shopping online. Everything will be so easy!"

I was so excited about initiating him into the world of Net banking.

He asked "If I do that, I wont have to step out of the house?"

"Yes, yes"! I said. I told him how even grocery can be delivered at door now and how amazon delivers everything!

His answer left me tongue-tied.

He said "Since I entered this bank today, I have met four of my friends, I have chatted a while with the staff who know me very well by now.

You know I am alone...this is the company that I need. I like to get ready and come to the bank. I have enough time, it is the physical touch that I crave.

Two years back I got sick, The store owner from whom I buy fruits, came to see me and sat by my bedside and cried.

When your Mom fell down few days back while on her morning walk. Our local grocer saw her and immediately got his car to rush her home as he knows where I live.

Would I have that 'human' touch if everything became online?

Why would I want everything delivered to me and force me to interact with just my computer?

I like to know the person that I'm dealing with and not just the 'seller'. It creates bonds of Relationships.

Does Amazon deliver all this as well?"

Technology isn't life...
Spend time with people .. Not with devices."
3-2-1 Thursday by JAMES CLEAR

“The most wisdom per word of any newsletter on the web.”

3-2-1: How to excel, the health benefits of friendship, and the importance of bad days

Here are 3 ideas, 2 quotes, and 1 question to consider this week...

3 Ideas From Me

I. "The Cardinal Rule of Behavior Change:
What gets rewarded, gets repeated. What gets punished, gets avoided.
Don't reward behavior you don't want to see repeated."

II. "The bad days are more important than the good days.
If you write or exercise or meditate or cook when you don't feel like it, then you maintain the habit.
And if you maintain the habit, then all you need is time."

III. "You can usually accomplish more by giving something your full effort for a few years rather than giving it a lukewarm effort for fifty years.
Pick a priority for this season of your life and do it to the best of your ability."

2 Quotes From Others

I.

Longevity researcher Dan Buettner on the health benefits of friendship:
"I argue that the most powerful thing you can do to add healthy years is to curate your immediate social network. In general, you want friends with whom you can have a meaningful conversation. You can call them on a bad day and they will care. Your group of friends are better than any drug or anti-aging supplement, and will do more for you than just about anything."

Source: The Power of Positive People

II.

Investor Graham Duncan on how to excel:
"[Tennis champion] Novak Djokovic said in an interview with the Financial Times that "I can carry on playing at this level because I like hitting the tennis ball." The interviewer replied in surprise: "Are there really players who don't like hitting the ball?" Djokovic answered, "Oh yes. There are people out there who don't have the right motivation. You don't need to talk to them. I can see it."

...If you can find the thing you do for its own sake, the compulsive piece of your process, and dial that up and up, beyond the imaginary ceiling for that activity you may be creating, my experience is the world comes to you for that thing and you massively outperform the others who don't actually like hitting that particular ball. I think the rest of career advice is commentary on this essential truth."

Source: Letter to a Friend Who May Start a New Investment Platform

1 Question For You

Faster. If I had to go from start to finish in half the time, what would I do?
Slower. If I could afford to spend double the time on it, what would I do?

James Clear
Author of the multi-million-copy bestseller, Atomic Habits
Creator of the Habit Journal

RULES TO TEACH YOUR DAUGHTER

[Author Unknown]

1. Never shake a man's hand sitting down.
2. Learn how to cook a signature dish.
3. Spend 30 min a day reading up on current events.
4. In a negotiation, never make the first offer.
5. Request the late check-out.
6. When entrusted with a secret, keep it.
7. Hold your heroes to a higher standard.
8. Return a borrowed car with a full tank of gas.
9. Play with passion or don't play at all...
10. When shaking hands, grip firmly and look them in the eye.
11. Don't let a wishbone grow where a backbone should be
12. Who ever you choose to marry....you marry his/her family/children
13. Be like a duck. Remain calm on the surface and paddle like crazy underneath.
14. Experience the serenity of traveling alone.
15. Never be afraid to talk to the best looking person in the room.
17. A classic outfit is worth 1000 words.
19. Thank a veteran.
20. After writing an angry email, read it carefully. Then delete it.
21. Ask your mom to play. She won't let you win.
22. Manners make the woman.
23. Give credit. Take the blame.
24. Stand up to Bullies. Protect those bullied.
25. Write down your dreams.
26. Add value everywhere you go.
27. Be confident and humble at the same time.
28. If ever in doubt, REMEMBER WHOSE DAUGHTER YOU ARE and REFUSE to just be ordinary!
29. Change the world, don't let it change you.
30. Always be you! Hold your head up high. Be confident whenever you walk into a room and stay strong.
31. Don't ever let anyone make you feel like you are less of a person. They have the problem, not you.
32. As your mother, I will ALWAYS have your back.
Encourage Like Barnabas
By Arlene Pellicane

“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means ‘son of encouragement’), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.”
Acts 4:36-37 (NIV)

Going from elementary school to middle school was a time of radical change in my life.

I shed my big blue eyeglasses, braces and knee-highs (which I sadly wore regularly with dresses). I cut my hair short and changed my image altogether as many teenagers have done through the decades.

But my appearance wasn’t the only thing transforming. I was getting to know Jesus in a personal, intimate way as a result of God touching my heart at summer church camp.

As a child, I was shy and too afraid to go to kids’ church and be separated from my parents, so I was always attached to one of them. But after summer church camp, filled with passion for God, I ventured into youth group … alone.

God instantly sent encouragers my way: my youth pastor, Dale, and his wife, Linda. Not only did they befriend me, but they believed in me. They invited me to join the youth leadership team. I remember packing into Dale’s old VW Bug with other teenagers to visit the church’s newcomers. That early, encouraging experience at church gave me a love for the body of Christ, a love that still lives in me today.

When Dale invested in my life, his encouragement gave me confidence to get involved. I wasn’t going to sit on the sidelines anymore; I was going to play!

Being encouraged made all the difference.

In the New Testament, a man named Barnabas was all about encouragement — so much so that it was his nickname, and it stuck. His given name was Joseph, but not many know him by that name. Today’s truth says, “Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means ‘son of encouragement’), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:36-37).

Encouragement can be simple and natural. For instance, when you introduce someone, you might highlight some key facts about them, like, “This is my friend Bella. She has four children and is an amazing artist.” We see Luke “highlight” Barnabas when he introduces him in the book of Acts, and we learn that Barnabas is generous, compassionate and an encourager through and through. There were no needy people in the early church because, from time to time, landowners or homeowners would sell what they had and share it with their fellow believers. We see Barnabas doing just that!

When the violent Saul met Jesus on the road to Damascus and had a radical transformation, Christians at that time struggled to believe this murderer was now a brother. In fact, they were terrified of him. But watch how our encourager Barnabas introduces Saul. Barnabas “… took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:27, NIV).

How did Barnabas know all that about Saul? He must have taken time to listen to Saul’s story, and then God used Barnabas to encourage Saul to become a leader in the early church. What if Barnabas had not been the “son of encouragement” but a “son of discouragement”? Maybe Saul, turned Paul, would have failed to connect to the apostles. Barnabas’ encouragement helped move Paul from the sidelines of Christianity and put him into play.

Barnabas didn’t care about who got the glory. He cared about building God’s Kingdom and encouraging God’s people. Never underestimate the power of encouragement. It can help a shy kid like me get involved in youth group. It can stand next to a world changer like Paul and exclaim, “You can do it!”

Lord Jesus, thank You for believing in me. Help me to be more like Barnabas, an encourager. Give me compassion for others, and show me who I can encourage today. Speak through me to lift others up, especially in my family and workplace. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.
Sometimes It’s Not Worth It to Push Too Hard

[Author Unknown]

This realization I had about Simone Biles is gonna make some people mad, but oh well.

Yesterday I was excited to show my daughters Kerri Strug's famous one-leg vault. It was a defining Olympic moment that I watched live as a kid, and my girls watched raptly as Strug fell, and then limped back to leap again.

But for some reason I wasn't as inspired watching it this time. In fact, I felt a little sick. Maybe being a father and teacher has made me soft, but all I could see was how Kerri Strug looked at her coach, Bela Karolyi, with pleading, terrified eyes, while he shouted back "You can do it!" over and over again.

My daughters didn't cheer when Strug landed her second vault. Instead they frowned in concern as she collapsed in agony and frantic tears.

"Why did she jump again if she was hurt?" one of my girls asked. I made some inane reply about the heart of a champion or Olympic spirit, but in the back of my mind a thought was festering:

*She shouldn't have jumped again*

The more the thought echoed, the stronger my realization became. Coach Karolyi should have gotten his visibly injured athlete medical help immediately! Now that I have two young daughters in gymnastics, I expect their safety to be the coach's number one priority. Instead, Bela Karolyi told Strug to vault again. And he got what he wanted; a gold medal that was more important to him than his athlete's health.

I'm sure people will say "Kerri Strug was a competitor--she WANTED to push through the injury." That's probably true. But since the last Olympics we've also learned these athletes were put into positions where they could be systematically abused both emotionally and physically, all while being inundated with "win at all costs" messaging. A teenager under those conditions should have been protected, and told "No medal is worth the risk of permanent injury." In fact, we now know that Strug's vault wasn't even necessary to clinch the gold; the U.S. already had an insurmountable lead. Nevertheless, Bela Karolyi told her to vault again according to his own recounting of their conversation:

"I can't feel my leg," Strug told Karolyi.

"We got to go one more time," Karolyi said. "Shake it out."

"Do I have to do this again?" Strug asked.

"Can you, can you?" Karolyi wanted to know.

"I don't know yet," said Strug. "I will do it. I will, I will."

The injury forced Strug's retirement at 18 years old. Dominique Moceanu, a generational talent, also retired from injuries shortly after. They were top gymnasts literally pushed to the breaking point, and then put out to pasture. Coach Karolyi and Larry Nassar (the serial sexual abuser) continued their long careers, while the athletes were treated as a disposable resource.

Today Simone Biles--the greatest gymnast of all time--chose to step back from the competition, citing concerns for mental and physical health. I've already seen comments and posts about how Biles "failed her country", "quit on us", or "can't be the greatest if she can't handle the pressure." Those statements are no different than Coach Karolyi telling an injured teen with wide, frightened eyes: "We got to go one more time. Shake it out."

The subtext here is: "Our gold medal is more important than your well-being."

Our athletes shouldn't have to destroy themselves to meet our standards. If giving empathetic, authentic support to our Olympians means we'll earn less gold medals, I'm happy to make that trade.

Here's the message I hope we can send to Simone Biles: You are an outstanding athlete, a true role model, and a powerful woman. Nothing will change that. Please don't sacrifice your emotional or physical well-being for our entertainment or national pride. We are proud of you for being brave enough to compete, and proud of you for having the wisdom to know when to step back. Your choice makes you an even better example to our daughters than you were before. WE'RE STILL ROOTING FOR YOU!
I’m not going to the Olympic Games.

On September 21st, 2020, about 2 months after the 2020 Tokyo Olympics were supposed to start, I had my first training session of the new season. I had one main objective – qualify for and compete in the Tokyo Olympics. Every race, repetition and run were with Tokyo in mind. I had decided this was going to be my year. I turned 27 this season, a prime age to run fast races as a female sprinter. I’m 3 years removed from an Achilles injury that could have but didn’t derail my career. I’m fitter, faster, stronger, and smarter than I ever had been. Plus, I’ve done it before. I won an Olympic gold medal at just 22 years old. There’s no reason why this shouldn’t be my year. But I failed. I’ll be watching the Olympic Games from home this year. My failure to qualify does not mean that I am a failure. Not being in Tokyo does not invalidate what I have already achieved.

Your personal goals probably do not include qualifying for the Olympic Games, but that doesn’t mean they are any less important or significant to you than mine are.

In the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, the author starts off by saying “Everything is meaningless, completely meaningless.” If you keep reading, you’ll discover that the author really means all our work is meaningless. Nothing we do or don’t do; achieve, or do not achieve, changes anything. The sun will still rise. The wind will still blow. The earth will keep turning. We’ll all be born, and we will all die. A few verses later, the author says “There is nothing new under the sun” everything that we see has been seen before. Everything that we hear has been heard before. Everything that we experience, has been experienced before, that includes disappointment, failure and falling short. We are not the first ones to experience it and we will surely not be the last.

To qualify to run the 100m dash at the Olympic Games, you must finish 1st, 2nd, or 3rd in the 100m dash at the Olympic Trials. To be included in the 4x100m relay pool, you must finish 4th, 5th, or 6th in the 100m dash at the Olympic Trials.

Making the Olympic team was not a goal for me, it was the standard I established for myself. In 2016, at just 22 years old and fresh off my last NCAA Championship meet and season, I competed in my first Olympic Trials. I got 4th, made the team, ran the 4x100 at the Rio Olympic Games and won a gold medal. Not making the team was never an option for me, I never considered it as a possibility.

A lot had changed since 2016. I was no longer considered “young” in the sport. Most athletes, coaches, commentators and even officials knew who I was. I was considered a “vet”. I had made 4 global teams and competed at 4 major championships – 2015 Pan American Games, 2016 Olympic Games, 2017 World Championships and 2019 World Championships – winning a medal at each one. I had suffered and recovered from an Achilles rupture. Even if I wasn’t coming into the competition with the fastest qualifying time, I was considered a threat because I know how to compete at these meets. I understand the pressure and what it takes to perform well here.

Continued...
I arrived in Eugene, Oregon aka Tracktown USA, the site of the Olympic Trials 3 days before the first round of the 100m dash. From the moment I arrived, something was “off” about me. I didn’t feel like myself. The closer it got to race day, the less I slept and the more my appetite decreased. I didn’t and couldn’t identify it then, but I was feeling an enormous amount of stress, anxiety, pressure, and expectation to be great. I wasn’t excited to compete or to make the team. I was scared of disappointing myself, my family who had flown to watch me compete, my friends gathered around TVs supporting me. I was terrified of failing.

I stood at the starting line behind my blocks waiting for the “Runners, on your mark” command that I have heard hundreds of times in my life. I noticed my hand was shaking, I literally couldn’t get it to be still. I quickly concluded it was due to the caffeinated energy drink I had in the warmup area, not nerves.

There was some commotion.

Then there was complete silence.

The gun went off.

We raced.

Everyone crossed the finish line.

I looked up at the scoreboard to see that I did not make the final.

I didn’t give myself a chance to compete for a spot on the 100m team because I wouldn’t be in the race.

I cannot remember those 11 seconds. I don’t recall what I was thinking, what I was feeling. If I thought I could pull out an epic comeback. I have nothing.

What I do remember is feeling shocked, confused, sad and surprisingly…relieved.

Shocked because this had never happened to me before, I always made the final. I was confused because what do you do after you fail to make the final? Relieved because all that pressure I had been feeling fell off, there was no more expectation to be great. I cried a lot of tears, I’m still not sure why I was crying – but it felt like the appropriate response, like what I needed to do in the moment.

I pulled myself together, or at least I thought I did, and found my family sitting in the stands. I sat next to my dad and he hugged while I cried the last of my tears. He told me that this would be the last time I’d cry about it – it was. He told me “the worst thing that could possibly happen, had already happened.” It was far from the worst thing that could actually happen, but I understood what he was saying. I was facing everything that I had been terrified of. Sitting there with my dad, mom, sisters and two of my best friends in the entire world – all there for me – I realized it didn’t matter. The “it” was everything. The failure didn’t change anything. Success wouldn’t have changed anything either. Just like the author of Ecclesiastes said, “everything is meaningless.” No amount of hard work, success or failure would change anything. The sun was still going to go down that night. My friends and family were there because they love me. Their love for me wasn’t going to change in success or in failure.

I didn’t sleep much that night – I saw the sun come up before my mind finally let my body rest.

The next day I felt relief. I didn’t have to live up to the huge expectation to be great and to achieve. I felt free. I didn’t have to live in a state of worry anymore. I felt like myself. I could eat again. I could sleep again. I could laugh again.

But the Olympic Trials were not over.

A few days later, I stood at the starting line behind my blocks, again. This time for the 200m dash. The goal was the same: finish in 1st, 2nd, or 3rd place to qualify for the Olympic Games. It had been several years since I focused on the 200m dash, but I had decided not to let that matter.

This time I was running from a place of freedom. I was having fun. I didn’t care what
the outcome was because I realized that it didn’t matter. In the first round of the 200, I ran a personal best time – for the first time in over 5 years. In the semi-final of the 200, I ran another personal best time and qualified for the final. I had never qualified for the final of the 200m at a USA Championship or Olympic Trials meet before. The 200m final was one of the fastest 200m races in history, (it might actually be the fastest ever). I got 8th place. I didn’t run a 3rd personal best, but my time in the final was faster than my personal best coming into the meet.

I saw the joy in the face of the 3 women who made the 200m team – including my training partner and friend, Gabby, who became the 2nd best performer, only after Flo Jo, in the history of the race – and I gave her a joyful hug, because I know that feeling so well. I saw the disappointment in the faces of the other women who failed to qualify, and I gave them a hug, because I know that feeling so well.

I learned that while I cannot rid myself of failure, I can get rid of the fear of failure. You can too. When I competed free of failure, I excelled in ways that were unimaginable. What will you achieve when you rid yourself of the fear of failure?

The most quoted book of the bible, Romans, says in chapter 8 “All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” I’m not exactly sure what the good in this will be, yet. But I know there will be good because it says ALL things. So the pain is just as important as the joy. The tears are just as important as the laughter. The disappointment is just as important as the triumph. The failure is just as important as the success.

No matter what you’ve “failed” at today, this week, this month, this year or this decade – it will work out for good, as long as you’re walking in His purpose.

Morolake Akinosun
Morolake competed in the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where she took home a Gold medal in the 4 x 100-meter relay. In the 2017 IAAF World Championships in London, Morolake and her teammates secured another gold medal in the 4×100 meter relay. In 2018, Morolake ruptured her right achilles causing her to miss the entirety of the 2018 season. After strenuous rehab, she and her teammates earned a bronze medal in the 4×100 relay at the 2019 IAAF World Championships. Morolake also finished 10th in the 100m dash at the 2019 World Championships. Off the track, Morolake is an Emmy nominated producer for her work on “Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man”.

I know that my job on this earth is to spread the gospel of Jesus. I know that my gift of speed and running is from Jesus. I know that I’m supposed to use my gift to spread His gospel. Somewhere along the way, that got lost for me. Running became more about me and less about Him. Your gift in life is probably not Olympic speed, but you for sure have a gift. As my friend Jamie Ivey said in her book, “your talents were never meant for you. They were given to you so that you could serve others.” Whatever gifts and talents you’re holding on tight too, let go of them. They were never yours in the first place.
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<td>Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
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<td>20 Year Commemoration of 9/11 Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
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<td>23 Conception of St. John the Baptist Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. OCN—Fr. Stavros</td>
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**Indicated Fasting Days
St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
2418 W. Swann Avenue
Tampa, FL 33609-4712
Office: (813) 876-8830  Fax: (813) 443-4899
office@stjohtampa.org
www.stjohtampa.org

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Timetable of Services

Saturdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Weekdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sundays: Orthros 8:45 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Parish Priest
Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis
813-876-8830 (Office)  813-394-1038 (Cell)
frstav@gmail.com

Retired Priest in Residence
Rev. Fr. Stratton Dorozenski
813-876-8830 (Office)

Retired Priest in Residence
Rev. Fr. John Stefero
813-876-8830 (Office)
768-637-4425 (Cell)

Pastoral Assistant
Alex Limberatos
813-876-8830 (Office)  262-370-0586 (Cell)
alex@stjohtampa.org

Pastoral Assistant
James Harritos II
813-876-8830 (Office)  401-527-8203 (Cell)

Parish Council
Jim Armstrong, President  954-295-6665
Euripides Panos, Vice President  813-352-3972
John Zelatis, Secretary  813-727-2271
Gary Ward, Treasurer  813-846-3898
George Chagaris  727-420-1920
Amin Hanhan  813-846-2957
Nick Katsaras  863-581-2430
Jimmy Konstas  813-220-7352
Marlany Sunborn  813-855-8678
Mike Xenick  813-340-8737

Office Staff
Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper  debbie@stjohtampa.org
fax:813-443-4899

Adopt a College Student
Volunteer needed!

Adult Greek School
Magda Myer  813-909-2327

AHEPA
Thomas Sakaris, President  201-819-2319

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

Altar Boys
Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis  813-394-1038

Bookstore
Presbyteriana Denise Stefero  678-464-4833

Bible Study
Fr John Stefero  678-637-4425

Parish Nurse
Janet Harritos  813-876-9028

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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.