

THE MESSENGER

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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

November 2021

VISION:

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

MISSION:

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

CORE VALUES:

Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

Fr. Stavros' Message

Making Sure We Are Building a Relationship with Christ Everyday

I saw a quote on the internet recently which said:

"A lack of church programs and entertainment is not why our youth are leaving the church. Our youth have no relationship with Jesus and that begins at home. Until we focus on fixing that all the entertainment in the world will not keep them."

After over twenty years as a priest, I now believe this to be true. When I was studying at the Seminary, and for most of my years of ministry, we were taught and I believed that if we just offer enough programs at the church, to youth and adults, that this would draw people to God and keep them in the church. When the pandemic hit in 2020, we had to curtail just about all of our programs. The church was reduced to her basic elements of worship and philanthropy. And many people left the church, not only in Tampa but across the country, across all denominations. Because for many people, Sunday worship was the thread on which their relationship to Christ was hanging. And when Sunday worship was curtailed, for many the thread broke. No programs gave no purpose for being involved with the church.

I recently sat down with a group of young people who are "active" in the church, in the sense that they are present—they come to church, to come to GOYA, they go to summer camp, etc. And almost to a person, all said they were struggling with the faith. When I asked them what made the faith attractive, they had a hard time articulating answers. When I asked what made the faith unattractive, without hesitation, they said "it is boring and there are too many rules." This is not surprising. Lots of people, young and old, feel this way.

We "marry" Christ when we get baptized

When we are baptized, we unite ourselves with Christ, we are in essence, married to Christ. This is why we called Christ the "Bridegroom" and the church, of which each of us is a member, is the "bride." For those who are married, imagine if you only talked to your spouse for only one hour a week. You had a special date or meal and spent an hour with them and then you didn't speak to them again for an entire week. Imagine, for those who live with their parents, if you spent only an hour a week with your parents, a special date or meal, and you received all of your instruction from them at that point, and didn't speak to them, save for that one hour each week.



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We know that one hour a week, even a very special hour, is not enough to sustain a marriage, or a child. We know that while we may have a special date or meal each week, there needs to be a daily check-in. We know that while there isn't time for a special date or meal each day, we know that we need to carve out special time on a weekly basis. And we know that any two people who relate closely to one another, who have a relationship, that that relationship requires time to build and maintain, and also offers joy, as it is built and maintained. Imagine, for those who have children, if you only spent one precious hour a week with them, by the time they are eighteen, they would feel neglected, they would have missed out on a lot of education, and the relationship would be weak, and perhaps by that point, non-existent.

Thus, it should not come as a surprise for us that for those who restrict their relationship to Christ to an hour a week probably don't have much of a relationship. And when that hour was taken away for a few months, for some the relationship fell apart altogether.



The relationship with Christ begins in the home

The relationship with Christ has to begin in the home. It has to begin with simple gestures, like a prayer before a meal, or a prayer together before bedtime. It has to include encouragement to read the Bible with your children, and for your children to see parents reading the Bible. It is easiest if this starts from infancy, so that we are reading and praying before our babies even know how to talk, so that when they begin to talk and read, they will start talking to God and reading the Bible. So for those who have infants or who do not have children yet, please give serious thought to how you can incorporate Christianity into the life of your newborn on a daily basis.

What about those who do not have newborns or babies? What about those whose kids are already gone? What about those who have never prayed outside of Sunday or read the Bible at home? I've read that it takes 30 days to start a new habit, so start a new habit today. Do it for thirty days. And you will see how it will change you. And others will see how it changes you. And others will be attracted to Christ because they will see how He has changed you.

The problem with putting all of our hopes in church programs is that when there are no programs, when Sunday School and

GOYA are over, when Bible study misses a week or is off for the summer, then it's like church is over. The problem with putting in our time with God exclusively on Sundays is that we are bombarded with so much noise during the week, that if we are not hearing His voice on a daily basis, if we are not speaking to Him with our voice on a daily basis, then His voice will quickly be drowned out in the sea of other voices we hear each day.

The Nativity Fast

The Nativity Fast, the forty-day period leading up to Christmas, begins for us on November 15. This is supposed to be a forty-day period of fasting and spiritual preparation for the Nativity. In the world each year, there will be the voices of ads beckoning us to buy all kinds of things for Christmas. There will be arguing and lamenting about supply chain shortages this year. The price of Christmas trees will inevitably go up, along with everything else. It will be very easy for Christ to disappear from Christmas, as happens in many years. In order to counter this, in order to help each of us keep Christ in Christmas, again this year, we will be offering small bags to our parishioners for the Nativity. Each bag will contain a journal and other items, offered with the hope that these will enhance our relationship with Christ and bring more meaning into this Nativity season. Also in this season of the Nativity, there will be many additional services during the week. As we count down the shopping days and do the traditional running around associated with Christmas, it is hoped that each of us will also take time to slow down and prepare. Last year we were still scattered because of the pandemic. This year, most of us are out and about, resuming the frantic pace of pre-pandemic life. It would be really something for us to be able to preserve the one positive aspect of the pandemic which had life slowing down, and focusing on God, in the midst of being able to resume some sense of normalcy that has thankfully returned.

Thanksgiving

However, before we arrive at the Nativity in December, we come to the feast of Thanksgiving. This feast is sadly now overlooked by many, as it falls between the holidays of Halloween and Christmas, and even where Thanksgiving is observed, it is not as much of a day to give thanks as it is a day to eat insatiably and watch TV. One could argue that from a Christian sense, Thanksgiving is the most important of holidays, because it is one we should be celebrating every day of the year. The word "Thanksgiving" in Greek is "Efharistia" which is also the Greek word which is translated as "The Eucharist." Therefore, the Eucharist is the Divine Thanksgiving. And we celebrate it all the time in our church.

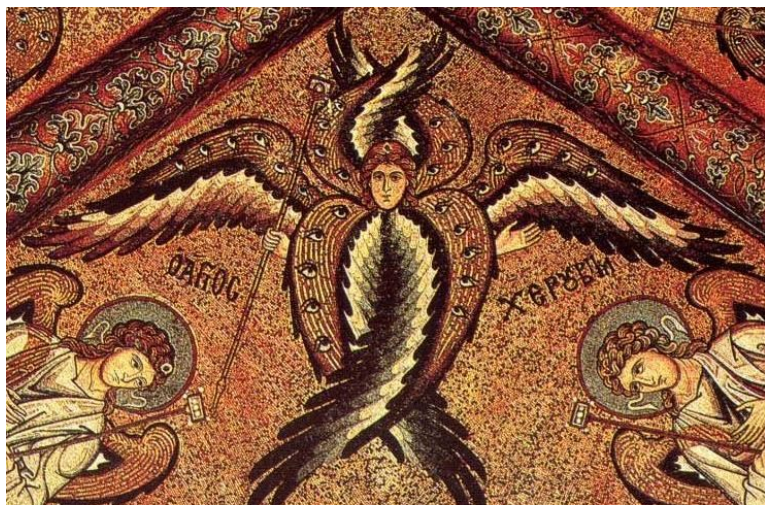
Thanksgiving in the Divine Liturgy

The Divine Liturgy, the service that has evolved around the celebration of the Eucharist, uses the words "thanks" and "thanksgiving" often. After the Creed, we are invited to "Let us lift up our hearts." The response to this request is "we lift them up to the Lord." Why are we lifting up our hearts, and along with them, our hands? Because we are surrendering to God. We are acknowledging that He is our God, and He is also our joy, our hope, our source and our destination. And thus we should surrender our lives to Him. If He is God and Master and Creator, then we must see ourselves as subjects and servants. Except that this is hard, in a world that encourages us to see ourselves as the masters.

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The next line of the Divine Liturgy says “Let us give thanks to the Lord.” In others words, let us properly thank the Lord for all that He has done for us. The response is that “it is proper and right” to thank the Lord. What follows next is a beautiful prayer offered by the priest that offers thanks to God for many things. It describes the majesty and magnitude of God. It takes us back to the story of the creation and acknowledges the Fall of Adam and how Christ raised us up again from our fallen state. It takes us through the entire spectrum of human history, from the Creation, to the Fall, to the kingdom to come. Many blessings from God are unseen. We acknowledge even the blessings that we cannot see, the blessings that we do not know. Here is the prayer:

It is proper and right to sing to You, bless You, praise You, thank You and worship You in all places of Your dominion: for You are God ineffable, beyond comprehension, invisible, beyond understanding, existing forever and always the same; You and Your only begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit. You brought us into being out of nothing, and when we fell, you raised us up again. You did not cease doing everything until You led us to heaven and granted us Your kingdom to come. For all these things we thank You and Your only begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit; for all things that we know and do not know, for blessings seen and unseen that have been bestowed upon us. We also thank You for this Liturgy which You are pleased to accept from our hands, even though You are surrounded by thousands of Archangels and tens of thousands of Angels, by the Cherubim and Seraphim, six-winged, many-eyed, soaring with their wings,



The most profound moment of thanksgiving in the Divine Liturgy is the Eucharist itself, where creation unites with our Creator in a physical and spiritual way. We touch God. And God touch us. There is a union between human and divine. What greater thing do we have to be grateful for than the opportunity to touch God!

After receiving Holy Communion, one of the final petitions of the Divine Liturgy reminds us to “worthily give thanks to the Lord.” In other words, our response to the Eucharist, the Divine Thanksgiving, is giving God worthy thanks, giving thanks that is worthy of God. Our response to the Eucharist can’t be hateful, spiteful behavior. It can’t be indifference. Because God is love and receiving Him in the Eucharist is one of the

most intimate acts of love that can be. Love should not be met with hate, nor should it be met with indifference, but with love that is worthy of God.

Thanksgiving Prayers That Shape our Life Well After the Eucharist

After receiving Holy Communion, there are thanksgiving prayers in the Divine Liturgy book that each communicant is supposed to offer privately. One of the prayers after we receive Holy Communion offers the following thanksgiving to God:

Let these gifts be for healing of my own soul and body, the averting of every evil, the illumination of the eyes of my heart, the peace of my spiritual powers, a faith unshamed, a love unfeigned, the fulfilling of wisdom, the observing of Your commandments, the receiving of Your divine grace, and the inheritance of Your kingdom. Preserved by them in Your holiness, may I always be mindful of Your grace and no longer live for myself, but for You, our Master and Benefactor. May I pass from this life in the hope of eternal life, and attain to the everlasting rest, where the voices of Your Saints who feast are unceasing, and their joy, beholding the ineffable beauty of Your countenance, is unending.

Our thanksgiving to God is manifest in our work and in His continued blessing on us.

*Let these gifts be for healing of my own soul and body—*We pray for God to continue to heal our souls and bodies through the Eucharist.

The averting of every evil is something that is more under our control than God’s. While God can certainly help us steer clear of evil, the choice to seek after good is just that, a choice. And it is a choice we each have to make for ourselves.

The illumination of the eyes of my heart is a gift from God. In the parable of the sower, in Luke 8:10, Jesus tells His disciples, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.” The illumination of the eyes of our hearts is for us to see and comprehend God more clearly.



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The peace of my spiritual powers asks for God to give us peace, even in the midst of conflict, to give us the peace that passes all understanding. (Philippians 4:7)

A faith unashamed means that we should walk around with confidence, joy and zeal for the faith, to share it with others, to live it out with conviction.

A love unfeigned means a love for God and for others that is genuine and sincere. There are those who believe in God and those who really believe. A love unfeigned refers to those who love God so much that they put Him first in everything, in thought and in action, and most especially in hope.

The fulfilling of wisdom is using what we've been given, as far as talent and intellect, to the glory of God, for building up one another and also in gaining our own better understanding of God and His will.

The observing of Your commandments is strength to stay consistent in following after God's expectations of us.

The receiving of Your divine grace is a prayer that God will complete what is lacking in each of us.

And the inheritance of Your kingdom points us to our ultimate destination and prize, the Kingdom of Heaven. In receiving Holy Communion, we ask for and receive all of these things.

Preserved by them in Your holiness, may I always be mindful of Your grace and no longer live for myself, but for You, our Master and Benefactor. This requires work and sacrifice on our part. We must be diligent and consistent if we are to be always mindful of God's grace and no longer live for ourselves but for Him. Christ has provided us the roadmap to salvation. This sentence provides for us the effort that is needed to pass through the journey successfully.

May I pass from this life in the hope of eternal life, and attain to the everlasting rest, where the voices of Your Saints who feast are unceasing, and their joy, beholding the ineffable beauty of Your countenance, is unending. This is a glimpse of eternal life, where there is everlasting rest, where there are only voices of holiness, and where joy never ends.

Conclusion

Going back to where we started. It is important that we receive the Eucharist often. However, it is important that we receive it properly. That we prepare—yes, fasting is part of that, but preparation is not about deprivation. Rather preparation should be about the disposition of our hearts. And we can't get dispo-

sition without repetition. And repetition is not only about what we do on Sunday mornings but what we do the rest of the week.

Preparation. Repetition. Disposition.

Preparation for a special date with Christ each week through the Eucharist. Repetition of prayers, Scripture and acts of charity throughout the week. This builds a God-centered disposition of the heart. This is the foundation of a relationship with Jesus Christ. And this foundation gives people of all ages something to build on spiritually. If there is no foundation, there is nothing to build on. If our children don't have a solid personal spiritual foundation by the time they go to college, they won't come back because there is nothing to build on. That foundation is not built only through Sunday worship (that plays a large role) but it built up through a daily encounter with God that happens in the home.

We are all looking forward to Thanksgiving this year, even more so than last year, when many of us were away from our families. We are all looking forward to Christmas this for the same reason. However, let's remember that Thanksgiving isn't just a holiday one day a year but should be celebrated every day. And let's remember that Christ is the reason we have this season and let's make some spiritual preparation to celebrate this Feastday this year.

I'll close with a quote from an unknown author, again with emphasis on bringing our children, and starting our children from the youngest age on a spiritual journey that teaches them to love God and assures them that God loves them.

"Let the children come to Church, even if they slept there, even if they played and ate, even if they came late, even if they talked and made noise... It is enough that they chose the Church rather than going anywhere else! They shook off sleep and came to Church. They left their play and came to Church."

"Today they play and joke, tomorrow they will pray and chant, and after tomorrow they will serve, and afterwards they will become leaders in the church. Who amongst us didn't behave like them when he was their age?"

"Do not reproach a child or dismiss him. Whatever he does, do not reject his commitment to the Church. Be kind to them, be nice to them, and teach them with patience, compassion and wisdom. Smile to them. Give them gifts. Hug them kindly. Encourage them and make them feel how we rejoice that they are present with us. Today they connect emotionally with the Church, tomorrow they will connect spiritually."

"Of all that we have, children are the most precious. Our Lord Jesus Christ blessed children, hugged them, and had them stand in the midst, in front of everyone, to show that they should get the most attention and care."

- Author Unknown

With love in the Lord,
+Fr. Stavros



The State of Our Parish

Delivered by Fr. Stavros as both sermon/annual report to the Parish Assembly
Sunday, October 17, 2021

This morning, I'm going to combine my sermon with an annual report on the state of our parish. Our parish assembly meeting falls earlier than it usually does and the Scripture readings coincide providentially with connecting the two. The Epistle lesson from St. Paul to Titus tells us to "avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions and quarrels over the law, for they are unprofitable and futile." (Titus 3:9) But instead, "let our people learn to apply themselves to good deeds, so as to help cases of urgent care, and not to be unfruitful." (3:14) In some way, these two verses sum up the life of our parish for the past 19 months. The Covid-19 pandemic hit our church, and the rest of the world in March of 2020. We did not have public worship in church for nearly three months. We might look back and wonder if that was the right thing to do. We are a hierarchical church and that is what we were asked to do. After three months, the church opened, but with restrictions on how many could gather, and what types of activities we were allowed to have in person. The church opened fully in time for Holy Week of 2021, encouraging the wearing of masks, but asking that we not make mask wearing or vaccine status a public debate. And here we are, 19 months later.

There is good news to share with you. In the year 2020, we had the most services we've ever offered in our parish—245. For one entire year, we offered Divine Liturgy every Saturday so that everyone had an opportunity to worship in smaller numbers. From the beginning of the pandemic through Bright Week of this year, there was a Paraklesis every week, to pray for our community as a whole, until it could gather as a whole. Paraklesis is now held once a month. We never missed a service. We offered Advent bags to our community last year during the Christmas season, and provided journals for the Lenten season this year, in order to help us focus on Christ in our homes on a daily basis. A smaller version of the Advent bag is in production for this year. We said goodbye to Charlie in August and welcomed James Harritos in September. James will be starting a book club next week. We are blessed to have Fr. Stratton Dorozenski with us on and off for nearly two years. Fr. John Stefero joined us at the beginning of this year, and has immediately gotten involved with not only the liturgical ministry, but with Young at Heart, pastoral care, hospital visitation and now has a Bible study on Thursday nights. Alex



has been a rock as our pastoral assistant, helping the transition from Charlie be smooth, while also shining with his own gifts. Alex is doing an Orthodoxy 201 class right now. Together with women's bible study, you can see that there are a lot of opportunities for adult education. One of the interesting things that happened with women's Bible study is that we picked up a bunch of people via zoom from other places like Chicago, Denver, and New Jersey who join us weekly. Our choir has been back for over a year, first in small groups of four or five, eventually expanding to a full choir now. We've got a new head usher in Pete Trakas. We've got a program called 12 disciples, where people commit to praying for the people of this parish—how awesome is that. There are at least three people praying for you each day whether you know it or know them. Mathew Balasis is in charge of that. Presbytera Denise Stefero gave our bookstore a makeover, Vickie Peckham has done an amazing job holding our Sunday school together, Michael and Bessie Palios are in charge of our GOYA which has had 2-3 gatherings each month for the past few months, and George and Zackie Ameres lead our HOPE/JOY which has its fall festival this afternoon. Philoptochos did not miss a beat in helping during the pandemic, Young at Heart is going strong, our photography ministry has documented all of our activities, and thanks to the welcome ministry, we've added over 30 new families this year. We met our budget in 2020 without a Greek festival and we will again in 2021. The best news about our parish is that 2020 was our most philanthropic year ever. We gave away over \$35,000 to charitable causes, a record for our parish. And this year, we will break that record. Gary will show in the budget that we are going to increase our giving yet again in 2022. And why is that? Because going back to the ancient church, to the earliest days of Christianity, in the book of Acts, the two things the church was doing, the only two things the church was doing, was preaching the word of God and serving tables, they were gathering for corporate worship and doing charity work, and we are doing those two things better than we ever have at St. John. More good news, by this time next year we should be debt free.



Now for some things that challenge our parish. Attendance is down from where it was pre-pandemic. So is stewardship. And this is with 30 new families added. Sunday school attendance is markedly down, and so is GOYA. Some have left because they aren't happy that the church closed last year, and didn't like the masks and sign in lists when church resumed. Some have left because they think we are too strict. Others have left because we are not strict enough.

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I know this because I have received extremely strongly worded emails and had many uncomfortable phone calls this past year. There are some who have simply turned the page and switched the channel. A year away from church has gotten them out of the habit of coming. And I'm not sure what to do about this, except, as we read in the Gospel, to keep throwing the seed of God to them and to everyone else. One helpful thing you can do is if you think of someone you haven't seen in church for awhile, give them a call, see how they are doing and invite them back. It saddens me to think that there are many people who filled our church to overflowing each Sunday at the beginning of 2020 may never come here again. One other very helpful thing we can all do is respond in a timely manner to things that our church requests. For example, there are still many people who have not filled out a simple stewardship form for 2021. This should be automatic each year. Get the form, fill out the form, we aren't so much concerned what's on the form, just send in the form, so we know who and what we can count on. We try to be as safe as possible in our ministries, which is why certain people in certain ministries are required to do background checks and youth worker training. Yes, it takes a couple of hours to do the training, but it is something that is necessary, and again there are people who have not done it, and thus someone is charged with following up continually to make sure this gets done.

As time goes on, it's going to become even harder I'm afraid to spread the message of Christ, and to keep the church vibrant. All of these things that happen at the church don't just happen. There is a lot of hard work that goes on behind the scenes. And the pandemic has resulted now in fewer workers to do the work. So, where do we go from here? Each of us should ask ourselves, what can I do, in a positive way, to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Going back to the Gospel, the sower threw seed everywhere. He threw it on the path where he knew it was going to be trodden underfoot. He threw it on hard soil where he knew it wouldn't grow. He threw it on thorns which he knew would choke it. And he threw it on good soil where he knew it would flourish. He threw it everywhere, without discrimination or prejudice, because everywhere the seed falls, there is a chance it can flourish. Your heart might be as hard as a rock, it might be choking on thorns, but we control the soil of our hearts. Christ throws the seed to all, it is up to us to cultivate our own, the soil of our hearts. So the first thing for each of us to do is to tend to the soil of our hearts. To keep it



watered and moist and soft, through prayer, Scripture reading, charity, and repentance. These are things that we do away from church, things we should be doing each day. The seed of Christ cannot grow in us if we only tend to our soil on Sunday mornings. We come to church each week to have more seed thrown to us, in the form of a sermon. We come to church each week, to receive moisture, in the form of Holy Communion. And we come to church each



week to receive fertilizer, in the form of community. Education is important. This is why we need to bring our children to Sunday school and GOYA, and why we should each consider taking advantage of one of our adult education offerings. Most of all, we must each cultivate a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, to embrace Him and let Him grow in us and work through us. What is the first thing we can all do? Tend to the soil of our hearts.

But it doesn't stop there. Because Christ wants more from us. He wants us also to be sowers, He wants us also to throw the seed. At our baptisms, the Gospel passage of the Great Commission was read over each of us—"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20) The job of being a sower does not only belong to the priest or to the Sunday school teacher. It belongs to everyone. So the second question to ask ourselves is "what can I do to throw the seed of Christ to as many people as possible?" If God is love, and God told us to love our neighbor, and if Christ said love is the way that people will know that we are His disciples, then the answer lies in how loving we can be, and how many gestures of love we can make. Some of these gestures may be in our daily lives, when we encourage others instead of knocking them down, when we speak well of others instead of gossiping about them, when we eagerly rush to help, instead of holding back and hoping someone else will, when we are generous with kindness, patience and forgiveness. These are things we can all do, multiple times a day. But it has to go further. This Church is not an organization to which we belong. It is not a club where we are members. It is a Launchpad where we blast the seed of Christ everywhere. Some fly the rocket to places like community outreach, or Bible study, or a Sunday school class. And some maintain the rockets so that they are ready to fly—like the Parish Council, or the stewardship ministry or the welcome ministry. And some don't know how to fly or have time to help maintain rockets, and these contribute financially so that the launch complex is working constantly. These are the stewards who contribute generously of their treasure to the work of the church.

I've been away from the church for most of the past week, I took two trips. The first was to the National Clergy Retreat in Naples. It was renewing to connect with old friends and to also make some new friendships. It was humbling to hear priests talk about their struggles, how sometimes we stand with outward confidence at the altar, yet inside we are like shattered vessels.

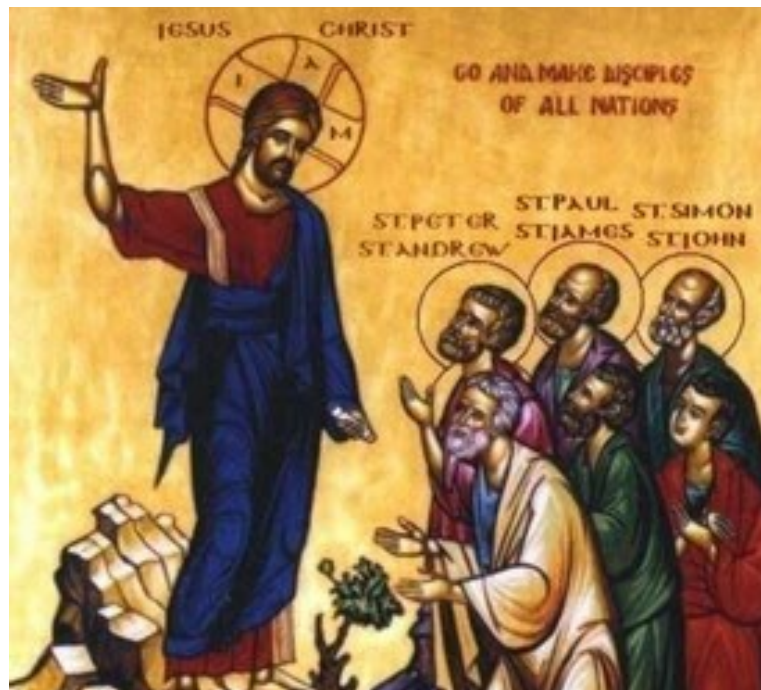
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It was inspiring to hear creative ways that churches have survived the pandemic and humbling to hear about how some churches and some priests have really struggled. There was a collective question of where do we go from here. That question was answered in part by the second trip that I took Chicago Friday and yesterday. I had the great blessing to be invited to lead a men's retreat at the Church of the Ascension in Lincolnshire, Illinois, a church of about 280 steward families, so smaller than ours. There were fifty men in attendance. At the beginning of the retreat, the man who organized it asked each man to stand up and introduce himself, and say why he was there. As I sat in the back, I actually thought this was kind of lame. But as the men opened their mouths, I was in awe of their answers. One talked about how he needed to find some balance. Another said he needed a reset. Another said he came because his friend invited him. And another said he was searching for truth and meaning. People inviting people, people looking for a reset, people being vulnerable—this was very



inspiring. This particular parish had just built a church complex two years ago. They gave sacrificially. They kept their community together throughout the building process. Many people stepped up to set up a temporary church in a local high school gym for two years. This common goal had united the community, so much so that fifty men (that's a lot of people) were eager to talk, share and grow in their faith. We've got a men's group with about ten men in it. Imagine what our group could look like with 50. Our women's group has about 15 women in it. Imagine what that group could look like with 50. Our parish has 353 steward families so far this year. If we can recapture the 90 families who pledged last year but not this year, that's nearly 450 families that comprise our parish. That's a lot of people and a lot of talent that can be used to infuse Christ and positivity into a world that desperately needs it.



Our community has been scattered for nearly two years. We are not divided, in the sense that we are at war with one another. We are not a sinking ship by any means. I think we are fairly united about who we are—we live by a common set of core values in this community—love, worship, community, learning, service. I think where we need to go is to become united in a vision of what we can be and what that looks like. That starts with greater commitment for spiritual growth through worship and education. It continues with stewardship and philanthropy. And it must grow through evangelism and outreach. As we recover from the pandemic and stabilize our membership and our ministries, it is time to make a more concrete vision of where we see ourselves as a Christian community in the years to come.

Thank you for being part of this community. Thank you for coming to faithfully worship today. Thank you for your stewardship, that allows for everything that happens here to occur. And most of all, thank you for the prayers that have sustained me and our community through these past 19 months. We have survived, and in many cases we have thrived. As we come out of this challenging time, it is an opportunity to reassess where we want to go, and begin in earnest a new journey. God bless you!

Falling Asleep of St. John the Evangelist & Theologian -- (1 John 4:12-19)

Sermon by Fr. John Stefero—September 26, 2021

Today our holy Orthodox Church commemorates the Falling Asleep of St. John the Evangelist and Theologian. The Epistle Reading for today is from 1 John, Chapter 4, which contains one of the most beautiful passages of the entire New Testament. One word sums up this epistle reading: that being “Love” (specifically, Unconditional Love).

In fact, the Church Father Jerome, said that when the apostle John was in his extreme old age, he was so weak that he had to be carried into church gatherings and meetings. At the end of these, he would be helped to his feet to give a word of exhortation to the believers. Invariably, he would repeat, “Little children, let us love one another.” The disciples began to grow weary of the same words every time, and they finally asked him why he always said the same thing over and over. He replied, “Because it is the Lord’s commandment, and if, this only is done, it is enough.”

Every one of us needs love. From the day we’re born until the day we die, we have a need (1) to be loved, and (2) to love! This is because we were created in the image and likeness of God, Who Himself is Love. God in His essence is a Relationship – a relationship of Three (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) Who live in perfect unity and perfect love. When we connect with God, we have plugged into Love in its purest form. But it is challenging for us to love others the way we need to love them.

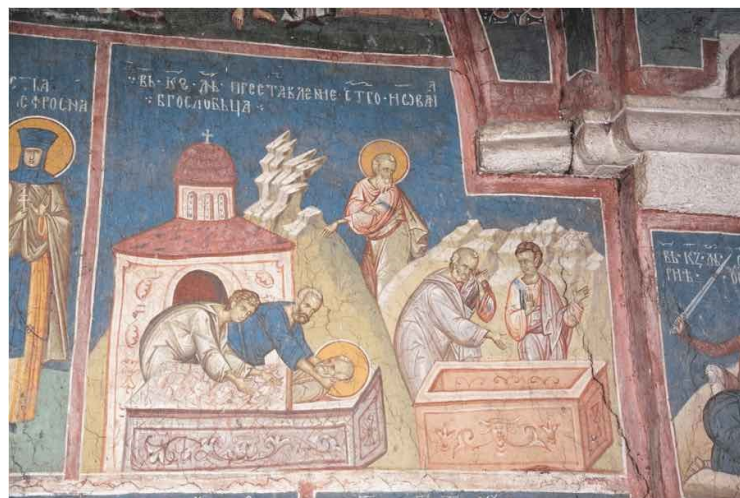


For example, the desire to care for and protect an infant is instinctive and parents naturally have strong feelings of love for their child. But wait a few weeks and those same parents are going to have that love tested when they are walking a crying baby at 3 a.m. after 2 weeks of almost no sleep.

The same holds true for young people who (Quote) “fall in love.” This young love is easy for quite a while and is so incredibly wonderful. The couple

wants to be together all the time until they realize the effort involved in maintaining the relationship. It is similar when a couple becomes engaged and enjoys their first years of marriage. But give it a few years and that love will be tested on more than one occasion.

There is a story about a seminarian who was invited to give a sermon during an internship at a local parish. His topic was “10 Facts on How to Have a Perfect Marriage.” A few years later he got married, ordained, and assigned to a parish. He decided to pull out the old sermon and preach it again. Except this time, he re-titled it “10 Suggestions on How to Have a Good Marriage.” After his 2nd child was born it was time to preach this



sermon again. This time he revised the whole sermon and called it “10 Prayers for Parents.” Several years later, when he and his wife had 3 teenagers, he burned the sermon and wrote a new one that was simply titled “Help me, Lord!!!”

There are so many lessons to be learned from today’s Epistle passage on love that we could spend weeks discussing them. However, today I would like to focus on 3 aspects.

First, Love comes from God. He is the Source. Love is the very essence and character of God. Just like when you have fire, you have heat; when you have the sun, you have light. Love is part of God’s nature – you cannot separate it from Who He is. The love of God is a self-sacrificing, caring commitment that seeks the highest good of the one loved.

At its heart, the love we find in the Scriptures is a caring commitment, a matter of the will, an action (not just an attitude or feeling) that shows itself in deeds.

St. Augustine states: “What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of others. That is what love looks like.” In other words, it is love in action.



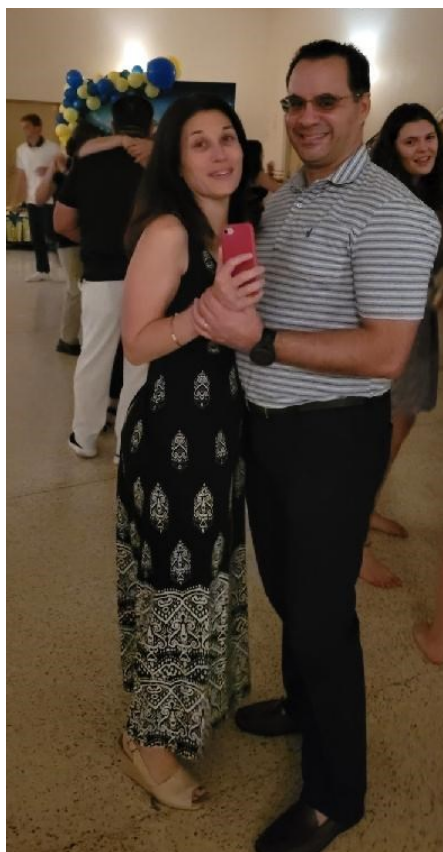
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Second, as believers and followers of Christ, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (Verse 11). Jesus told His disciples, “Freely you have received, freely you shall give” (Matt. 10:8). We, who have received God’s love, have the responsibility to give that same love out to others.

“Ought” implies an obligation or commandment. That love can be commanded shows that it is not primarily a feeling, but rather an action based on commitment. We must love others or we are being disobedient to God. If everyone were easy to love, we wouldn’t need this powerful example of God’s love or this strong command to love one another. The world loves those that love them. But Christ commands us to love even our enemies (Matt. 5:43-47).

Implicit in what St. John is saying is that we must love those who may not be especially lovable or easy to love. It may be a spouse that is difficult to live with; or a co-worker that we just cannot connect with; or a member of our church community who we feel just rubs us the wrong way. But if we are true followers of Christ, then we must remember that God loves us even when we do not deserve His love and that we must be the channel for His love to those who may not be very lovable.

St. Paul writes in Romans 13:8: “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.” We have an ongoing debt of love. We can never pay it off and be done with it. We can never refinance, consolidate, or retire this debt. We must make installments every time we have the opportunity. In other words, we must be aware of the people God sends into our lives wherever and whenever He does, so that we can share His love with them. If we decide that we do not want to love certain people then St. John says, “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (Verse 8). The failure to love indicates the lack of a personal loving relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.



Third, Verse 18 states, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear.” Fear is the characteristic emotion of someone who expects to be punished. As long as we see God as the Judge, as the Law- Giver, there can be nothing in our heart but fear, for in face of such a God, we can expect nothing but punishment. But once we know God’s true nature, fear is swallowed up in love. That is why St. John states in Verse 17: “Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment.” If we really love someone, there is no need to fear him. In fact, we will not fear him. If we love the person, sacrificially give



Celebrating Dwight & Ewana’s successful kidney transplant on the Feast of the Holy Cross

him our very best, then we have done all we can. Our lives and what we have done are in God’s hands. We can rest assured that we can do no more. A peace, an assurance, will come over our souls. This is the promise of God even if some people react against us and persecute us. This is what St. Peter calls “the Spirit of glory and of God” that rests upon the believer.

The key to overcoming fear is total and complete trust in God. Trusting God is how Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego faced the fiery furnace without fear as we hear in Daniel, chapter 3. Trusting God is how the 1st Deacon, Stephen stood before his killers fearlessly as we hear in Acts 7. To trust God is to refuse to give in to fear. Even in the darkest times, we can trust in God to make things right. This trust comes from knowing God and knowing that He is good. Once we have learned to put our trust in God, we will no longer be afraid of the things that come against us.

Perfect or ‘complete,’ ‘mature’ love drives out fear. The more we know of God’s love and care and the more we love other people, the more fear is conquered in our own lives. God loves us so much that He will take care of us through all the trials and temptations of life, regardless of what they are.

Therefore, let us remember the words in Romans 8:38-39: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Amen.



An Attitude of Gratitude

By Fr. Luke Veronis



“You need an attitude of gratitude!” This was the response that an amazing prisoner gave me, when I asked him how he maintained a positive spirit inside the medium-security prison where he lived. I met this man when I visited a prison weekly during my years as a seminarian. During our friendship that developed, this man shared with me how he was serving a life sentence with no chance of parole. Yet, while in prison he encountered Jesus Christ and had a radical conversion of faith. In fact, he came to understand how repentance means true change, a radical turning away from one’s sinful past and a sincere turning towards our loving and merciful God.

Now, I’m not naïve to believe every so-called conversion that I hear about in prison or anywhere else, but what convinced me of the sincerity of this man’s change was how all the other prisoners in our group viewed this man. They saw something in this person, and even turned to him for encouragement and support. Inside the prison, they witnessed the genuineness of this man’s conversion to God and the authenticity of his life in Christ.

So when I asked Carol what was his secret to living a Christ-centered life in prison, he surprisingly responded, **“An attitude of gratitude. You need to always see things for which you can be grateful, and then consciously thank God for them. Never focus on what you don’t have, or on how unfair life is, but thank God for what you do have, and for the blessings He gives us each and every day. Such an attitude of gratitude changes one’s perspective on life.”**

Now that sounds like good advice for anyone, but it is even more amazing when you think that it comes from someone who will spend the rest of his life in prison! An attitude of gratitude!

Think about the national holiday of Thanksgiving our country celebrates. Do we all realize that Abraham Lincoln declared that last Thursday in November to be celebrated as a Day of Thanksgiving in 1863. That was right in the midst of the Civil War – a time of great calamity

and tragedy, and yet President Lincoln wanted all Americans to pause and thank Almighty God! It’s amazing to think of why he would declare a day of thanksgiving in the midst of civil war! He understood the central importance of always maintaining an attitude of gratitude.

And then there is St. Paul who gave the same piece of advice to the Church in Philippi when he himself languished in a prison and they suffered the threat of persecution. “Rejoice in the Lord always,” he exhorted, “Again I say rejoice.” Here, St. Paul was suffering in prison and the Philippians lived under the fear of persecution, yet he encouraged them to maintain a spirit of joy and gratitude. Later in this same letter, St. Paul reveals his own secret of peace and joy: “For I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty.” In any and all circumstances, St. Paul learned to not only be content, but to actually carry a spirit of gratitude! And how could he do this? He reveals in the same letter that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”



Christ is his source of contentment and the well-spring of his gratitude. In St. Paul’s letter to the Church in Thessalonica he advises **“Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”** In fact, throughout Paul’s letters, he admonishes his readers to thank God more than 50 times. **“Give thanks to God at all times”** he says to the Ephesians. “Devote yourself to prayer, **keeping alert in it with thanksgiving**” he advised the Colossians. **“In whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God”** he admonishes.

Maintaining a spirit of gratitude, and seeing all of life – even with its surprises, struggles, disappointments, and crises – learning to see all of life through this prism of thankfulness is an extremely important spiritual discipline. It doesn’t come naturally or easily to many, but it’s a discipline we cultivate over time.

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I remember how Archbishop Anastasios would say that **one's inability or forgetfulness of expressing gratitude reflects a serious spiritual sickness!** When we don't express this attitude of gratitude, it means pride is lurking nearby. We do not thank others, because by thanking them, we must acknowledge that they have done something special for us. Our pride hinders us from thanking God because we don't

understand life itself as the most special and precious gift which God has given us.

Some sociologists call our present generation the "complaining generation" because we have such high expectations (and demands) while we have so little patience and passion to change things. We want and think we deserve to have everything NOW, and we're perplexed if we don't get it. This demanding and unhealthy attitude causes a self-righteous spirit of indignation that leads to ingratitude – a mind-set totally contrary to the spirit of our Lord. Contrast the demanding spirit of expecting everything here and now with the Christ-centered spirit of "rejoicing always and giving thanks in ALL circumstances."

Remember the story of ten lepers who approached Jesus from a distance, crying out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Our Lord did not heal them immediately, but instead told them to go and show themselves to the priests. Maybe he did this as a test, to see whether their faith was sincere, or maybe to see whether they would return and express their gratitude to their Healer. Whatever the reason, as they began their journey to the priests, suddenly all ten realized that a miracle occurred! Their dreaded disease of leprosy disappeared!

Yet after seeing themselves healed, only ONE out of TEN returned to thank Jesus for the miracle. Only one out of ten!!!! It's quite shocking to think that after such an incredible wonder, only one would make the effort to return and express gratitude to Christ. We can hypothesize that MAYBE the others were grateful. MAYBE they praised God in their hearts. MAYBE they thought about going back to Jesus, but first wanted to go and share their good news with their family. **Whatever their intentions, the fact remains that only one out of ten actually made the effort to return and thank Christ.**

Unfortunately, such ungratefulness appears too often among us? How many people turn to God when they are in trouble, or in need, yet when all goes well, they forget or ignore God. And the longer we dwell in comfort and prosperity, the more we deceive ourselves by thinking that we deserve all that we have! We may even feel that we have earned our blessings through hard work, great effort,

and our brains. We forget, though, who gave us our health, our physical strength, our intelligence, and even the chance to live in this country of great opportunity. How arrogant to think we have succeeded all on our own, without the grace and blessings of God!

Thus, let us beware of several common temptations: 1) forgetting to express our gratitude for our many blessings; 2) being ungrateful for all we have, and even complaining about what we don't have; or worse of all, 3) thinking that we ourselves are the source of all our blessings. We must learn to thank God daily for life itself, and for whatever life brings. Ultimately, if we believe that we have a loving Father in heaven who watches over us, then we must realize that this same loving Father will be with us in the midst of any and all surprises in life – both good or bad. He will walk with us, never abandon us, and help us learn and grow from every and any circumstance, no matter how seemingly difficult or unwanted.

Conscious gratitude is a divine discipline for the human person. We must deliberately make gratitude an integral part of our prayer life to God, as well as a central part of our interactions with others. Don't allow our pride to determine our behavior, but let us continually humble ourselves and thank those all around us – our parents for giving us life, our families for showing us love, our friends who stay near us during our times of need, our teachers and other special people who have inspired us, guided us, and enlightened us. When we pause and reflect on our lives, I am sure that numerous people have touched our lives in positive ways. What is stopping us from thanking them with our words, by writing a letter, and by expressing our gratitude in other ways.

Living with an attitude of gratitude. How different our entire life would be if we could cultivate this spirit within our lives. We've all been blessed in countless ways. Our society too often focuses on complaining and noting the things that we don't have. The Good News of our Lord teaches us the exact opposite – to live with an attitude of gratitude.

Fr. Luke Veronis is the Proistamenos of Sts. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church in Webster, MA, and also teaches classes on missions at Holy Cross School of Theology in Brookline, MA



Behind every great Doctor or Saint is...

(By Alex Limberatos)

In the Orthodox Church, we have a category of saints called “Unmercenaries” who were Christian physicians of strong character that did not receive any pay for their work of healing. If you can imagine the relief of not having to pay your last hospital or doctor’s bill, then you can imagine how appreciative people were to have been treated by the Unmercenaries back during the Roman Empire. It’s a bit unclear how the Unmercenaries survived without receiving money, especially when you look at the story of Sts. Cosmas and Damian who are celebrated on November 1st.

It’s worth mentioning that there was a tragic rift in the story of these two brothers involving their austere vow of not taking ANY payment for their work. A very sick woman once approached Sts Cosmas and Damian after being turned away by multiple physicians because she was deemed to be a hopeless cause for her infirmity. Sts. Cosmas and Damian endeavored to treat her and pray for her, and she was miraculously healed. The woman was so grateful for this but knew how beholden to their vow the two brothers were, and so she went to St. Damian quietly, offering him three eggs, doing so in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. St. Damian could not refuse this offer due to it being made in the name of the Triune God, and so he quietly received this gift. But when St. Cosmas got wind of what his brother received from this woman without knowing the context he became so upset that he asked for his own brother to not be buried next to him when he died. You can read about the happy ending at the link below; it’s a long story, but the two brothers reconciled.

The point in mentioning this low light of their story and practice of receiving no pay is that it seems these two successful physicians lived well below their means. They likely relied upon kindness and provision of others instead of doing so on their own profit. This gives a whole new perspective on the age old question, “what kind of work are you passionate enough to do for free”.

Knowing the background of these two noble brothers I hope stirs up our curiosity to ask a few questions. What inclined these two young gentlemen to such a holy and righteous life? What compelled them to such a difficult study such as medicine, to a vocation of service, and a lifestyle of sainthood?

The answer is not an uncommon one among the saints depicted on our wall: faith-infused parentage. As I was doing an “icon tour” of our saints painted on the walls and depicted in the stain-glass windows, I was amazed how the beginning of most the saints lives began with “raised by pious parents, who instructed the child in matters of faith and scripture.” Such was the case for some of our greatest saints: St. Nicholas, St. George, & St. Nektarios, just to name a few. This is to say nothing of the other “parenting figures” that instructed some of our other saints, such as St. Barbara who was instructed by her Christian nanny, or St. Basil whose grandmother raised he and his siblings and led them in a pious and Christian walk.

Such is also the case for Sts. Cosmas and Damian. The pavement of their future was laid by the example and intentionality of their mother: St. Theodota, also commemorated November 1st. Her husband and their father, a pagan, had died while the saints were young, and the childrearing and discipling of these two children rested on her shoulders alone. St. Theodo-

ta is said to have raised them piously, “through her own example, and by reading holy books to them...and Cosmas and Damian grew up into righteous and virtuous men.”

I know how “outnumbered” my wife and I can sometimes feel with just one daughter, so I can only imagine how St. Theodota felt raising these two young boys on her own, especially in a time when women had a much harder time in society after losing their husband. I have no doubt that St. Theodota’s prayer life, discipline of reading/studying Scripture, and integration of her faith in her life made it possible for her to raise these boys, and more than that to raise them to be righteous and virtuous men.

The story of St. Theodota and her two boys, Sts Cosmas and Damian, I think is an important one for every parent. While the story tells only of a single, righteous mother, I find her example to even be important to me as a father. Any parent can model after St. Theodota, “reading holy books”, leading one’s children by example, and preserving our children “in purity of life according to the command of the Lord”.

While leading by a proper example and preserving children “in purity of life according to the command of the Lord” might sound a bit vague to us, we can all certainly start with the simple task of “reading holy books” to our children. Reading a children’s Bible, or even the day’s Gospel reading, is a simple act, taking very little time at all.

In the end, I believe the most challenging part of doing as St. Theodota had done in parenting is the intentionality of her work. It takes intentionality to carve out time to read to our children, and to read to them “holy books” for that matter. It takes intentionality to pray before meals, before bed, and especially after waking up. It takes intentionality to show them that the Church and the home are not two separate places, but that the home has the Church, and that the Church feels like home. It takes an intentionality to say to oneself, “I’m going to example a proper Christian life to my child(ren)”, thereby watching our language, moderating our words, paying attention to our actions and habits, what we spend our time or attention on, etc. I realize that I say all this as a naive and young father, but I hope that St. Theodota would agree that this intentionality and focus led to the success of raising two such accomplished physicians and saints.

As parents we dream of our children making us proud, of being accomplished, of being something so spectacular and hard-working, like these saints and physicians. As we instruct and model for our children to work hard and reach their full potential, can we wish for them to grow up into saints? Can we dream that one day our children’s faces and names written in icons? That one day future generations will venerate St [insert your child’s name here] of Tampa? It is a high bar to set for ourselves, but endeavoring to aim this high will better assist our children onto that holy path.



Our Father, Who Makes Art in Heaven

James D. Harritos II

On my first Sunday as Pastoral Assistant here at St. John's, I spoke a bit on a prayer we say often – and possibly most often – the Lord's Prayer. In any church, the entire congregation joins in praying it. It's found in many Christians' personal prayers at some point, regardless of how often we may pray. If we've ever been asked to lead a group in prayer, whether before an event, meal, etc., when we can't find the words, it's our go-to prayer. This prayer was given to us by Jesus Christ as He said, "...your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. In this manner, therefore, pray..."

It's a beautiful thing that almost every Christian from a young age can recite the same prayer in their own language, and sometimes multiple. Not just that; it is a prayer we can always pray together in unity. However, it's a prayer that many of us fail to really understand what we're saying.

In my sermon, I shared the story of my Sunday School class in which we went line-by-line to see how each student understood the prayer before learning more about it. In the first line, one student said, "God's our Father, and He makes art in heaven!" Humorously, he wasn't wrong, but it goes to show how the older English and variance in translation can certainly trip us all up in really getting to know the prayer. I will be writing a series of meditations on the Lord's Prayer, breaking down the words and offering my own reflections piece-by-piece on how we are to live and pray the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father...

These are the two words that we commonly use to refer to the Lord's Prayer, and also the inspiration behind this article. When Christ said this prayer and encouraged us to pray this way, He revealed to us a potential for a relationship. We were shown the privilege to be sons and daughters of God by the grace of adoption. What struck me were those first two words – "Our Father." As I was praying one day, it suddenly seemed so...distant.

In Greek, the word *patér*, or "father," goes beyond that. Not only is God the giver of our lives, but from the root "pa-" the word also means literally, nourisher, protector, upholder.

In Jesus' own words, He likely used the term *Abbá*. Not the disco band, but the Aramaic word for father. Specifically a term of endearment used by a loving and obedient child.

In today's language, if a you heard a son or daughter refer to their parents as "Mother" or "Father," they are likely not happy with them. Some parents certainly wouldn't even take too kindly to being called anything but Mom, Dad, Mama, Baba, Pops, Mum, etc. Outside of that instance, the only others we directly refer to as "Father" are our priests. We often treat God with the reverence and properness we may also use with our priests. If our priest is coming to dinner, we clean up the house and put the nicest of everything out. When we go to church, we make sure we're cleaned and dressed in our Sunday best.

However, we need to strive for a relationship past that. We need to feel as if we can call God our Dad and have an even more intimate relationship with Him. He's a parent that never complains if we never call anymore, yet He is always ready to answer our call and hear our humble prayers, as we seek a loving

relationship with Him. We need to strive to feel as if God is our Dad, *and much more than that*.

...who art in heaven...

The Greek word here, *ouranois*, is refers to the skies, and by extension, the heavens. The root *oros*, meant mountain. We know heaven isn't a physical place, yet people associated God's domain not just with the air that flows through our lungs and provides us with life, but the highest points, hardest to reach by man.

According to Stong's, *ouranois* also implies "happiness, power, eternity; specially, the Gospel." These truly lie in heaven. And though our Father is in heaven, a "place" far from our Earth, our relationship cannot be equally as distant. He is our Father, constantly calling us back home, giving us pieces of heaven on Earth through His blessings.

...hallowed be Thy name.

My Sunday School students were scratching their heads at this section of the prayer, trying to figure out why God's name would be hollow. The term "hallowed," might not be a word many of us are familiar with outside the Lord's Prayer, but the concept might be.

The Greek root word *agiazō* means, "to make holy, consecrate, sanctify; to dedicate, separate." Not only do we treat God with the reverence we give a priest, but we make His name holy and special to us; just like we also set aside a day for the Lord and keep it holy. We strive to do all things in His name.

In the Old Testament, God is called *Yahweh*, or *YHWH* in writing. This proper name for God was held so holy by the Jewish people, that it would only be said once per year by the rabbi on the Day of Atonement, otherwise substitutes like *Adonai* would be used verbally. This name *YHWH* is written as four aspirated consonants, believed to be the sound of breath.

Breathing is imperative to our life. From dust, God breathed life into us. When we die, our breath is taken away, and we return to dust. When things seem like they're too much, a series of deep breaths can help us feel in control.

In our hymns from Orthros, we chant, "Let every breath praise the Lord." If every breath was given to us by Him, we should strive to let everything that leaves our mouth, and everything we put any effort into, praise the Lord. If every time we breathe, we are reminded of the name of God, surely we would be much more careful with our words. Instead, we should set ourselves aside from others, filling our lives with that which is holy and sanctified.

TO BE CONTINUED



Liturgical Schedule for November 2021

Monday, November 1 **Sts. Cosmas and Damian**

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

Wednesday, November 3 **Translation of the Relics of St. George**

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

Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, November 7 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Monday, November 8 **Archangels**

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

Tuesday, November 9 **St. Nektarios**

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

Saturday, November 13 **St. John Chrysostom**

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

Sunday, November 14 **St. Philip (Hierarchal Divine Liturgy)**

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 09:45 a.m.

Tuesday, November 16 **St. Matthew**

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

Wednesday, November 17 Holy Unction for the Beginning of the Nativity Fast
6:00 p.m.

Sunday, November 21 **Entrance of the Virgin Mary into the Temple (Ta Eisodia)**

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

Wednesday, November 24 **Evening Liturgy for Thanksgiving/St. Katherine**

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

Sunday, November 28 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Tuesday, November 30 **St. Andrew**

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

Thursday, December 2 **St. Porphyrios**

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

Saturday, December 4 **St. Barbara**

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

Sunday, December 5 **St. Savas**

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

Monday, December 6 **St. Nicholas**

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

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

Thursday, December 9 **St. Anna**

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



Icon of Christ blessing Sts. Cosmas & Damian - Nov 1



Picture of St. Nektarios - Nov 9



Icon of St. Katherine - Nov 24



St. Andrew Depicted in "The Chosen" w/ St. Peter - Nov 30

Liturgical Notes for November 2021

Monday, November 1 - Sts. Cosmas and Damian, the Unmercenary Healers Sts. Cosmas and Damian are the Patron Saints of the Philoptochos, as they went from place to place healing people and not taking any money for their services. Sts. Cosmas and Damian (called the Agii Anargyri) are also saints we pray to for intercession when we are sick, and are also patron saints of doctors (in addition to St. Luke).

Wednesday, November 3 – Translation of Relics of St. George- The consecration of the Church of St. George in Lydda took place during the reign of St. Constantine the Great. We have relics of St. George in our altar table, from the consecration of our church, and even though this is a secondary feast of St. George, we will honor it with a Divine Liturgy this year.

Wednesday, November 3 – Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary – We will continue to offer Paraklesis once a month, so that we can pray for all the members of our community by name, out loud. We will alternate some in the evening and some in the morning. For November, the Paraklesis will be offered on Wednesday evening, November 3, from 6:00-7:00 p.m.

Monday, November 8 - The Archangels This feast commemorates the Archangels Michael and Gabriel and all of the “bodiless powers” of heaven, all of the angels. There are nine orders of angels—Angels, Archangels, Virtues, Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, Authorities, Cherubim and Seraphim.

Tuesday, November 9 - St. Nectarios St. Nectarios is a “modern day” saint, a saint of the 20th Century, (Died in 1920, Canonized as a Saint in 1960), who was a bishop in Greece. St. Nectarios is the patron saint of cancer patients and is considered one of our “healing” saints, meaning that we invoke his intercessions when we are praying for those who are sick. Cancer sufferers and survivors are urged to attend this Divine Liturgy in order to pray for continued healing through the Intercessions of St. Nectarios. Father Stavros has oil from the tomb of St. Nectarios in Aegina, Greece, with which he will anoint the faithful in attendance at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on November 9.

Saturday, November 13 - St. John Chrysostom St. John Chrysostom lived in the 4th Century. He was a Bishop of the Church and is recognized as one of the Three Hierarchs (together with St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory the Theologian). He received the title “Chrysostomos,” meaning “the Golden Mouth,” for his great ability to speak. St. John Chrysostom authored the Divine Liturgy that we celebrate on most Sundays. Therefore, we offer the Divine Liturgy on this day in honor of St. John Chrysostom.

Sunday, November 14 –St. Philip the Apostle Each of the Twelve Disciples has their own feastday. They are celebrated collectively on June 30. With Saturday Liturgies being offered during this period of the pandemic, we are celebrating some extra feast days this year, which include the feast of St. Philip, one of the 12 disciples, who is commemorated on November 14.

Sunday, November 14, Visit of His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios will be with us on Sunday, November 14. Orthros will begin @ 8:30 a.m. followed by Hierarchal Divine Liturgy at 9:45 a.m.

Tuesday, November 16 –St. Matthew the Apostle and Evangelist Saint Matthew was one of the 12 Disciples and one of four Evangelists, the authors of the Gospels. St. Matthew did not spend his early life as a holy man. Rather, he was a dishonest tax collector. Once he encountered Christ, his life changed. He became a faithful follower. St. Matthew is one of many examples of prominent saints who turned their life around after an inauspicious beginning. He is a role model for any of us to do the same.

Wednesday, November 17- Holy Unction for the beginning of Advent at 6:00 p.m. The forty-day period of Advent begins on November 15. It is a period of fasting and reflective preparation. In America, Advent is marked by a period of shopping, decorating and parties, none of which really help us prepare spiritually to celebrate the great feast of the Nativity. As we have done in past years, we will hold a Holy Unction Service as we begin the period of Advent—it will be on Wednesday, November 17, at 6:00 p.m. Please bring your Holy Week book as the service will follow the service of Holy Wednesday evening.

Sunday, November 21 - Entrance of the Virgin Mary into the Temple The Entrance of the Virgin Mary (Ta Eisodia) Commemorates when the Virgin Mary entered into the Temple at age two to begin a life of service to God, in preparation for the awesome role she would play in the history of humanity as the Theotokos. This is one of the 12 Major Feastdays of the Orthodox Liturgical Year.

Wednesday, November 24 - St. Katherine the Great Martyr (Evening Liturgy) St. Katherine was born in Alexandria, Egypt in the third century. She was very wise and eloquent, successfully arguing for Christianity in the face of tyrannical rulers and philosophers. She was martyred in the year 305 and her relics were taken by Angels to Mount Sinai where they were discovered many years later. St. Katherine has the title “Pansophou” the “All-Wise.”

Wednesday, November 24 - Evening Liturgy for Thanksgiving In Greek the word for Thanksgiving is “Eucharistia,” so the Holy Eucharist is the “Holy Thanksgiving.” As we celebrate Thanksgiving with turkey and the Dallas Cowboys on Thursday, set aside Wednesday to receive the Holy Thanksgiving. As is our custom at St. John, we will celebrate Divine Liturgy for Thanksgiving on Wednesday, November 24 at 6:00 p.m.

Tuesday, November 30 - St. Andrew the Apostle St. Andrew is the first-called of the Apostles. He is also the patron saint of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Thursday, December 2 – St. Porphyrios of Kafsokalivia St. Porphyrios was a monk on Mount Athos known for his gifts of spiritual discernment. He lived from 1906-1991, and was canonized in 2013. He was alive in most of our lifetimes. There have been several saints that have been canonized in recent years. As a new practice at St. John, we will celebrate one of these modern saints each year on his or her feastday, and for this year, it will be St. Porphyrios.

Saturday, December 4 - St. Barbara and St. John of Damascus We celebrate the feastday of St. Barbara, a martyr for Christ who was martyred by her own father. On the same day, we celebrate the feastday of St. John of Damascus, a hymnographer of the church who also was a strong defender of iconography.

Sunday, December 5 – St. Savas the Sanctified Saint Savas lived from 439-532 and was one of the leading monastics of his era. He founded monasteries, worked miracles, had great discernment, and did extensive writing on monastic rules of life.

Monday, December 6 - St. Nicholas We celebrate the feast of St. Nicholas, the patron saint of travelers. The tradition of Santa Claus is derived from St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, who was giving gifts to those less fortunate.

Χρόνια Πολλά! Happy Nameday!

November 1

ANARGYROS, COSMAS, DAMIANOS, DAVID, DIONYSOS

November 2

AKINDINOS, AFTHONIOS, ANEMPODISTOS, ELPIDIFOROS, PIGASOS

November 4

ERMAIOS, IOANIKIOS,

November 5

EPISTIMI, GALAKTION, LINOS, SILVANOS

November 6

LEONARDO

November 7

ATHINODOROS, ERNEST, THEAGENIS, THEMELIOS

November 8

ANGELOS, EFSTRATIA, GABRIEL, GABRIELA, MATINA, METAXIA, MICHAEL, MICHELLE, RAPHAEL, STAMATIA, STAMATIS, STRATIGOS, TAXIARHIS

November 9

THEOKTISTI, ELLADIOS, MAVRA, NEKTARIOS, ARSENIOS

November 10

ARSINOE, ERASTI, ERASTOS, IRODION, MILON, ORESTIS, ORION, RODIOS, SOSIPATROS

November 11

DRAKON, MINAS, MINOS, VICTOR, VINCENT

November 13

DAMASKINOS, HRYSTOMOS

November 14

GREGORY, PHILIP, PHIPIA

November 16

IFIGENIA, MATHAIOS

November 17

GENADIOS, HILDA

November 18

PLATO

November 20

DENAHIS

November 21

DESPOINA, LEMONIA, MARY, SOULTANA, VIRGINIA

November 22

CECILIA, PHILIMON, VALERIOS

November 23

AMFILOHIOS, ELENOS

November 25

CATHRINE, MERCURIOS

November 26

KYPARISIA, NIKON, STERGIOS, STILIANOS

November 28

IRINARHOS

November 29

FEDRA, FEDROS, FILOUMENI, FILOUMENOS

November 30

ANDREW

Parish Registry

Wedding-Christos Nicholas Stephanides and Kelsey Ann Stein were married on Saturday, September 25. Mihalis Stephanides was the Koumbaro. Congratulations!

Wedding-Christopher Nicholas Kavouklis and Megan Katherine Economides were married on Sunday, September 26. Charles Stamitoles was the Koumbaro. Congratulations!

Wedding-James Michael Eldridge and Arista Georgiou were married on Saturday, October 16. Speros Georgiou was the Koumbaro. Congratulations!

Funeral-Maria Triantafyllopoulos passed away on Saturday, September 25. Her funeral was held on Wednesday, October 6. May her memory be eternal!

Funeral-Constantine Laliotis passed away on Thursday, October 7. His funeral was held on Tuesday, October 12. May his memory be eternal!



A Thrill of Hope!



We are so excited to once again offer a parish wide gift to enhance your family's Nativity Fast and help prepare you for the upcoming celebration of the Birth of Christ! Included are some resources to help guide your spiritual path during this season – a guidebook of prayers and daily scripture readings and journaling space. There are seasonal items for you to use in your home – an ornament, a votive candle, a special letter to read on Christmas morning. And there are some useful, fun promotional items for you to proudly show off and use year-round, too – a magnet, pen, post it notes - all with our St. John logo! And don't forget to download the St. John App to access the choir playlist of Christmas hymns and carols.

Our Welcome Ministry is so thankful for the many volunteers and efforts of all our ministry heads to offer this gift from our parish family.

The bags will be available after the Divine Liturgy on Saturday November 13th and Sunday November 14th. You may pick one up as you leave liturgy, or if you are watching online and would like to drive thru, we can bring one straight to your car! The gift bags will also be available in the office during the week if you'd like an extra one to share with a family member, friend neighbor, coworker!

During this season of the Nativity Fast, may we grow in Christ's love, both individually and as a community and experience A Thrill of Hope!

Young At Heart Is Spearheading a trip to both of the Ocala Greek Orthodox Monasteries

- Panagia Vlahernon Greek Orthodox Ladies Monastery
- Annunciation of The Theotokos Greek Men's Orthodox Monastery

THIS IS NOT LIMITED TO THE YAH MEMBERS. ALL ARE WELCOMED PROVIDED YOU GIVE NOTICE.

Location: We will arranged for a bus to pick us up from St John Greek Orthodox Church

Time: Depart 10:00 AM Tentative Return 7:00PM on **Saturday November 13**

Lunch If possible, we will lunch at Panagia Vlahernon Greek Orthodox Monastery or we will make another arrangement.

Cost: The cost depends on how much can be allocated from our budget **and how many people will be going. We must have a headcount.**

HEADCOUNT: In order to get the right size bus and with enough room, we need to know who is coming.

PLEASE EMAIL Mike Trimis your first and last name and phone number if you are interested.

Special Consideration & Respect: Men are asked to wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts.

Women are asked to wear skirts below the knees, long-sleeved shirts, and are to have their heads covered with a veil or scarf at all times. (Please: No hats, shear scarves, pants, shorts, pant-skirts, mini-skirts, sleeveless blouses, short-sleeved shirts, etc.). Everyone is asked to wear socks. (Especially when wearing sandals) A limited supply of scarves, skirts, blouses, pants and shirts are available for use while visiting the Monastery.

**** Be sure to visit their gift shop to help with their fundraising.**

Please respond with any questions.

Family Calendar for the Nativity Fast 2021

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
November 14 Luke 10:27 St. Philip Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Light your red candle on your family wreath LOVE	15 Luke 1:30 First Day of Nativity Fast Pray for your friends Matthew 1:18	16 Luke 1:31 St. Matthew Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Purchase items or a gift card to donate for a Box of Hope	17 Luke 1:32 Holy Unction 6:00 pm Smile at everyone you see today	18 Luke 1:35 Send a card to a friend who lives in another state	19 Luke 1:37 Send a thanksgiving card to an elderly person	20 Luke 1:38 Make and send a get well card
21 I Timothy 4:4 Entrance of the Virgin Mary Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Light your white candle on your family wreath GRATITUDE	22 Matthew 1:18 Pray for your teachers Matthew 1:20	23 Matthew 1:20 Volunteer with a local charity	24 Matthew 1:21 St. Katherine Thanksgiving Divine Liturgy 6:00 pm Donate to a local food pantry	25 Psalm 92:1 Thanksgiving List five things you are thankful for	26 Matthew 1:24-25 Send a care package to a loved one	27 Luke 2:4 Make a Christmas ornament for your tree
28 Romans 12:12 Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Light your gold candle on your family wreath HOPE	29 Luke 2:7 Pray for your teachers Luke 2:8	30 Luke 2:8 St. Andrew Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Buy a gift off of an angel tree for someone in need	December 1 Luke 2:9 Paraklesis 6:00 pm Make a donation to a charity you love	2 Luke 2:10 St. Porphyrios Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Cut paper snowflakes and hang them in your front windows	3 Luke 2:11 Drive around and look at Christmas lights in your PJ's	4 Luke 2:12 St. Barbara Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Bake and share some Christmas cookies
5 II Corinthians 9:7 St. Savas Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Light your green candle on your family wreath GENEROSITY	6 Luke 2:13 St. Nicholas Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Pray for a loved one who has passed away	7 Luke 2:14 Take a photo with your Nativity set	8 Luke 2:15 Paraklesis 6:00 pm Leave a poinsettia on a neighbor's porch secretly	9 Luke 2:16 St. Anna Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Learn the words to a new Christmas Carol	10 Luke 2:17 Make a list of three things you love about each person in your family and put it in their stocking	11 Luke 2:18 Joy/Hope Christmas Celebration
12 Psalm 32:11 St. Spyridon Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Light your blue candle on your family wreath JOY	13 Luke 2:19 Pray for people who are alone Matthew 2:11	14 Luke 2:20 Nativity set Send a secret Santa note to a friend	15 Matthew 2:1 St. Eleftherios Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Decorate your driveway or sidewalk with Christmas messages with sidewalk chalk	16 Matthew 2:2 Watch a classic Christmas movie or TV special	17 Matthew 2:9 Have a slumber party by your Christmas Tree	18 Matthew 2:10 St. Sebastian Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Decorate a gingerbread house
19 II Corinthians 5:7 Sunday Before Nativity Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Light your purple candle on your family wreath FAITH	20 Matthew 2:11 St. Ignatios Divine Liturgy 7:30 am Day of Quiet Prayer 8:30 am-6:00 pm Christmas Candlelight Service 6:00 pm Pray for your priest	21 Isaiah 7:14 Take a selfie in front of your Christmas Tree	22 Isaiah 9:6 St. Anastasia Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Call your Godparents to wish them a Merry Christmas	23 John 1:1 Royal Hours of the Nativity 9:30 am Light your center candle on your family wreath	24 John 1:14 The Nativity of Christ Vespers Liturgy 9:30 am Divine Liturgy 7:00 pm Write a letter to your parents	25 Luke 2:1-20, Matthew 2:1-12 Christ is Born! Glorify Him! Open your letter and read the Christmas Gospel
26 John 14:27 Sunday After Nativity Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Think about your word for 2022 PEACE	27 John 3:16 Pray for healthcare workers II Timothy 4:7	28 Matthew 2:13 Mail thank you letters for your Christmas gifts	29 Matthew 2:23 Do a chore in your yard	30 John 1:5 St. Anyasia Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Write down three goals for 2022	31 Matthew 5:16 Choose a Bible verse on kindness and put it on your refrigerator	January 1 Luke 2:52 St. Basil Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Cut a vasilopita with your family
2 I Peter 4:10 Sunday Before Theophany Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Visit someone who lives alone STEWARDS	3 II Timothy 4:7 Pray for good things for someone who has been unkind to you	4 Luke 3:4 Royal Hours of Theophany 9:30 am Clean your room without being asked	5 Matthew 3:16 Eve of Theophany Vespers Liturgy 9:00 am Blessing of the Waters 10:15 am Send an old-fashioned post card to your grandparents	6 Matthew 3:17 Theophany Great Vespers for St. John the Baptist 6:30 pm Offer a prayer of thanks for clean and fresh water	7 John 3:30 St. John the Baptist Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Draw a picture wishing our parish a Blessed Feast day!	8 Matthew 4:16

St. John the Baptist Community News

Men's Group—The Men's Group will meet on Sunday, November 7, 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 has begun. We 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. In November, our meetings will be Tuesday, November 2; Wednesday, November 10; Monday, November 15 and Monday, November 29. We are studying St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

Thursday Night Bible Study — **Fr. John** will continue to lead a study focused on "**The Beatitudes**" (**Matthew 5:1-16**) **Thursday evenings at 6:30 pm**. The sessions will focus on how and why Jesus gave us these beautiful verses, the background meaning of each verse, and how they relate to our everyday lives. A **handout in a question-and-answer** format will be provided to each participant as the study unfolds. Join us **in person or on zoom!** For November, Fr. John's Bible study will meet on November 4, 11 and 18.

Tuesday Night Book Study —James Harritos is leading a book study on *The Mountain of Silence: A Search for Orthodox Spirituality* by Kyriacos Markides, in which an acclaimed expert in Christian mysticism travels to a monastery high in the Mountains of Cyprus and offers a fascinating look at the Greek Orthodox approach to spirituality. Join us weekly for a guided group reading! For the month of November, the Tuesday night book study will meet on November 2, 16, 23, and 30.

Fr. Stavros on OCN—Father Stavros will be interviewed on the Orthodox Christian Network (OCN) several times in the next few months. He will be speaking on the topic of "Called to Be Disciples: What it Means to be a Christian." In November, he will be featured on programs scheduled for Thursday, November 4, from 7:00-8:00 p.m.

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 38 "disciples" meaning that each person in this community is being prayed for by at least three 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).

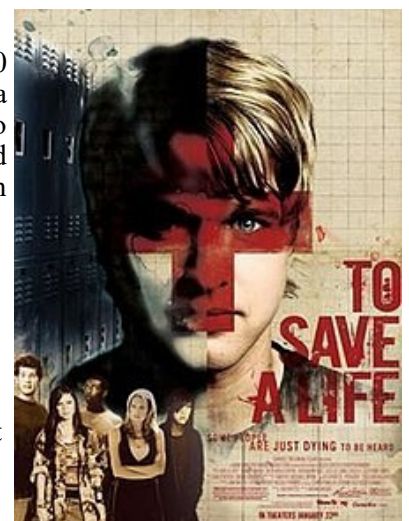
Order for Holy Communion—With Sunday School back in session the order for Holy Communion will be as follows:

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

Monastery Trip, Sat Nov 13—Mike Trimis & the YAH are leading a parish wide trip to the monasteries in Ocala. This is not limited to YAH members, all are welcome provided you give notice. Departure time will be 10:00 a.m. with a tentative return of 7:00 p.m. A cost will be forthcoming but Mike Trimis requires a headcount first. Please e-mail Mike Trimis if you are interested (trimism@gmail.com)!

GOYA—The GOYA Meeting for November will be on Sunday, November 21, from 4:30-8:30 p.m. (notice the different hours). We are going to be watching a movie entitled "To Save a Life." The movie is about two hours. This will allow us a time to eat and have fellowship, to watch the movie and to have discussion afterwards. Parents are strongly encouraged to attend the screening of this movie. With it being Thanksgiving Week, this is the perfect day to watch a movie and go a little longer with GOYA.

JOY/HOPE Fall Festival JOY/HOPE held a successful fall festival on Sunday, October 17. 30 children came with a total attendance of 57. We made crafts, played lots of games, enjoyed pizza and a whole lot of fun. We asked families to bring an item for our St Johns food pantry and collected many items. Several Goyans came to help: James and Nick Magos, Michael Galin and McKayden Krajacic. The younger kids really enjoyed working with the older kids on the crafts. Everyone had a great time!



TWELVE DISCIPLES PROGRAM

*"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

Brief History

In August 2020 the community of St. John the Baptist began a program to strengthen our personal prayer discipline.

The names of all member families of our congregation were compiled into a 12-page document with each page listing a group of families. The participants in the "Program" were asked to pray for the entire page of names, once daily. This was best accomplished during our daily private prayer discipline.

Prayer Warriors

Father Stavros prays for all twelve pages of compiled names representing the entire St John the Baptist membership at each service and specifically at each Paraklesis.

Thinking that praying for members of our community should not be the responsibility of the Priest alone, in August 2020, we started a program called "The 12 Disciples." The names of all St. John members are sorted onto 12 pages. The individual pages are divided and distributed between interested individuals that are referred to as Prayer Warriors (disciples). The idea is for each "disciple" or "warrior" to take one or more page of names and pray for the entire group of people every day.

Each page, along with a page that includes the Trisagion prayer, is distributed to each Disciple monthly.

We currently have 38 "disciples", meaning that each person in this community is being prayed for by at least three people every day.

Participating requires no special talent, no physical ability, no financial investment but only a desire to offer up prayerful love for your fellow parishioners. As Father Stavros admonished us in a recent *Prayer Team* message, "We (all) need time to be in the presence of the Son of God."

If you'd like to participate (to enjoy the presence of God!) and receive at least one page of names to pray for, please contact Mathew Balasis, 727-345-4855 (mathewbalasis@verizon.net).



"O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."
The Jesus Prayer

St. John's Bookstore Special Sale



On November 8th, the Orthodox Church commemorates the Synaxis of the Archangels and we remember, in particular, Archangel Michael and Archangel Gabriel. We come together at this feast to honor these divine ministers, our protectors and guardians, and to chant their praises. Throughout the month of November, our bookstore is offering 20% off ANY items pertaining to or depicting angels. Our bookstore is open every Sunday following Divine Liturgy. Stop in and browse our selection.

Epiphany Divers Applications Due December 10

Dear Gentlemen,

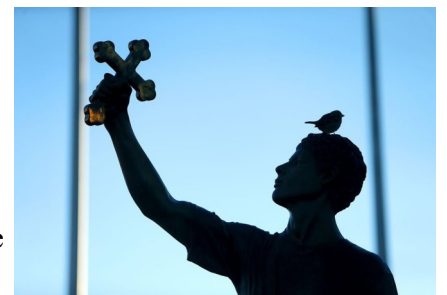
If you are between the age of 16-18 (on January 6), you are eligible to dive for the cross on January 6, 2022 at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Tarpon Springs.

If you are an eligible diver, please go to the following link to register:

stnicholastarpon.org/diverapp

The application must be submitted by December 10 at 4:00 p.m., no exceptions. There are papers that need to be signed by Fr. Stavros, so plan accordingly to have these items signed and delivered on time.

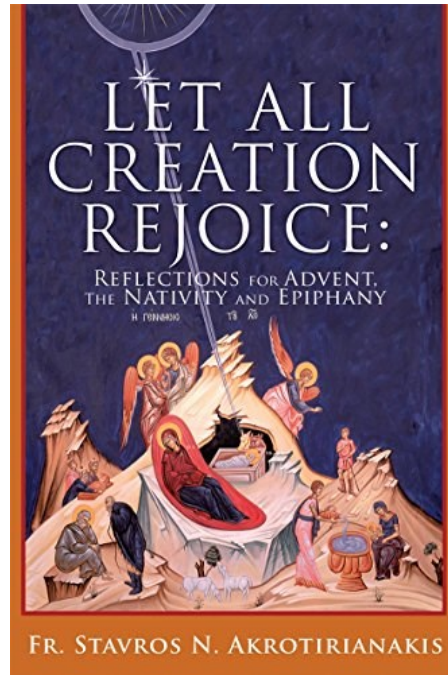
This is a wonderful opportunity that young men have three years to do this.



Start Your 2021 Advent Journey with “Let All Creation Rejoice”

Advent every year begins on November 15 and goes until January 7

As we approach the season of Advent, I wanted to share with you a book I have written called, *Let All Creation Rejoice: Reflections for Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany*. The book is approximately 230 pages long. It contains a reflection to be read daily during the period of the Nativity Fast (November 15) through January 7. From November 15 through December 24, one verse of the Gospel accounts of the Nativity is examined in detail each day. It is practical inspiration written to be understood by the average Greek Orthodox Christian. +Fr. Stavros



Although this book is written in an easy to read style - the concepts and application are very thought provoking! My husband and I have been reading it at meal time, as our Advent meditation. Each day's readings help me turn my mind to what's really going on and important this time of year - helping me refocus, and reflect on the events surrounding the Nativity, and what they mean for me! Today's reading, for example, reflected on the angel telling the shepherds, "Don't be afraid," and following reflections on fear in my own life. Excellent book, and now that I am enjoying this one so much, I will be ordering the Lenten reflections, too. -Amazon Customer

A must read for any Christian wishing to renew their spiritual life during the Christmas season. -Amazon Customer

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 3,270 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
Check it out! Search by topic and grow in your faith today!**

Father Stavros has authored FIVE books that are available both in the bookstore and on-line. They are entitled:

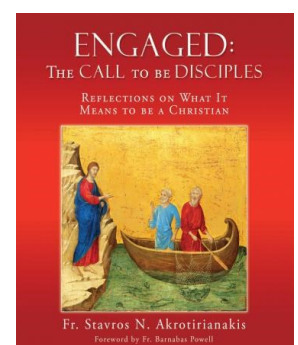
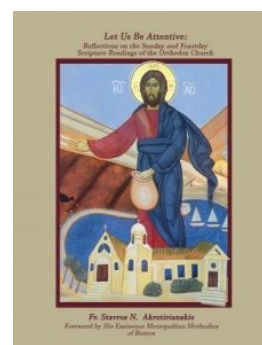
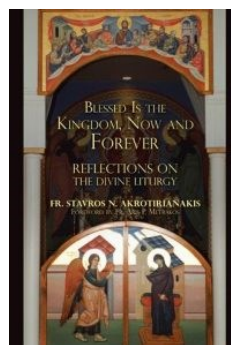
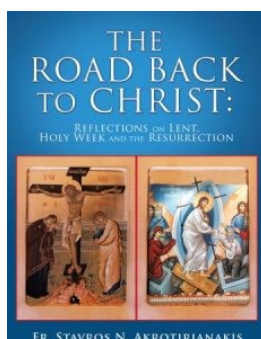
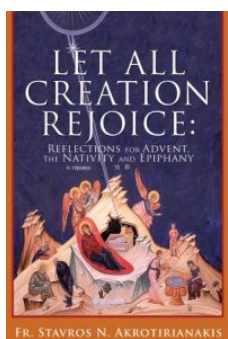
Let All Creation Rejoice: Reflections on Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany

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

ENGAGED: The Call To Be Disciples



Fr. Stavros' New Book, Available Now!

ENGAGED: The Call To Be Disciples

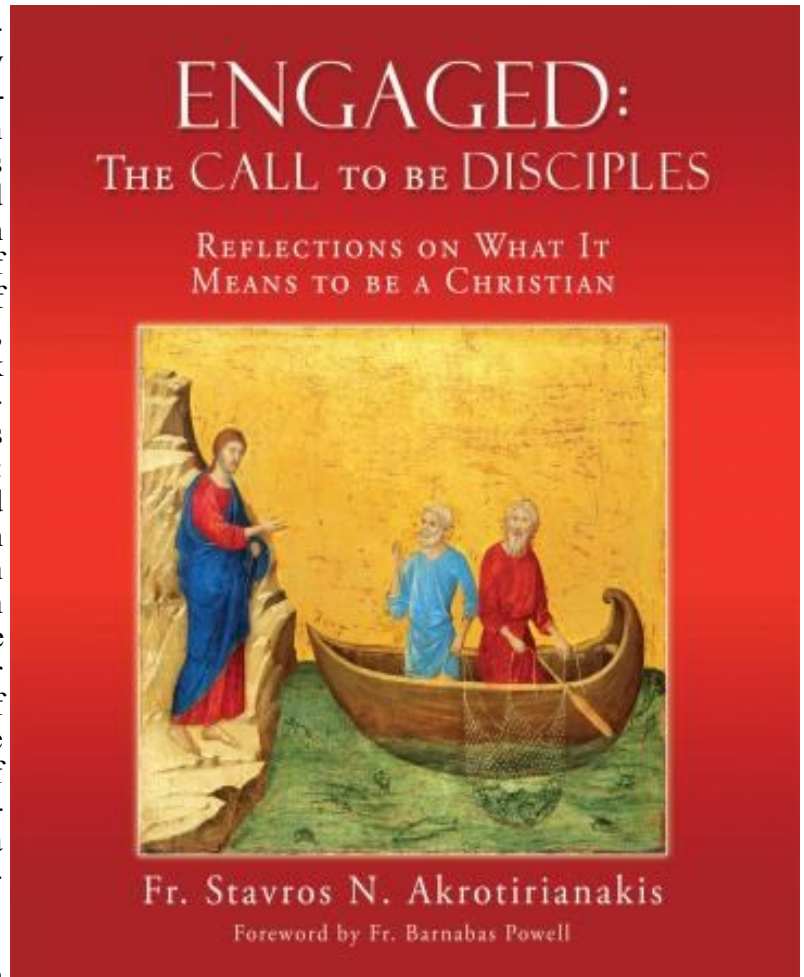
As most of you know, I've been writing a daily reflection called "The Prayer Team" since February 2015. Many parishioners receive these daily messages. If you'd like to be added to the list, visit the church website and subscribe. By God's grace, these writings have resulted in five books. This new book is called "Engaged: The Call to Be Disciples: Reflections on What it Means to be a Christian." It contains a lot of the basics of Christianity. If you've forgotten some of them, or want to feel renewed in your Christian walk, this is definitely a book you'd benefit from. The book contains 130 short reflections offering practical instruction on what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. It begins by reflecting on the simple question: Who is Jesus Christ? Other topics include the costs and benefits of being a disciple. There are reflections on prayer and stewardship which build to the final section on rallying and sustaining confidence in our Christian walk. Every Orthodox Christian, at baptism, has the Gospel passage of the Great Commission read over them. This "commission" calls us to make disciples of all nations, to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Before we can be an Apostle (one who spreads the Word of God), we need to be a "Disciple," a student of the Gospel. This book will help us understand how to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, to be more committed disciples and to be more prepared to be apostles.

One drawback of the Orthodox faith is that there isn't a

required class one has to take, or one required declaration of faith one has to make in order to belong. Consequently, many people go through life never learning what it is we believe and never dedicating our lives to Jesus Christ. This lack of understanding and commitment leads many to drop out of Orthodoxy, either going to another Christian denomination or more likely, dropping out all together. This book seeks to help us understand what we believe as Christians, so that we will be more committed to our own personal spirituality as well as more involved in the life of the Church.

"There is no better way to live than as a disciple of the Lord Jesus. But how do I actually do that? Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis offers a simple but not simplistic path for those who desire to embark on the greatest adventure of this life."

— Fr. John Riccardo, Executive Director of ACTS XXIX



Matthew 25 Temporarily On Hiatus

Our Community Outreach Ministry, Matthew 25, is temporarily on hiatus until further notice. Matthew 25 is waiting for approval to change its base of operations and hopefully will resume in 2022.

We appreciate your patience and will disseminate details once this ministry reorganizes and relocates.

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.

November 7-13

Then said Jesus, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

Luke 17:17-18

This month all of our Bible verses will focus on thanksgiving. These two verses are from the story of the healing of ten lepers. Leprosy was a terrible disease on two fronts. First, it was painful. Second, it was isolating. Lepers lived in colonies and were not allowed to be among people. They were thought to be cursed, even by God. The lepers approached Jesus and asked Him to have mercy on them. Jesus told them to go and show themselves to the priests. He didn't heal them immediately. It was the priests who would deem someone fit to join society if they had previously been determined to be "unclean." The lepers went their way, to go to the priests. This did show some trust in Jesus to heal them. And as they made their way, their leprosy was cured, they realized that they were healed, and certainly they must have realized that Jesus was the cause of their healing. Only one of the ten returned to Jesus to say thank you, and that one was a Samaritan, a sworn enemy of the Jews. The lesson here is that we can't forget to thank Jesus, for His blessings. Many times we ask God quickly to bless us, and then when we are blessed, we forget to thank the One who is the source of our blessings. Even when the blessings aren't big, we forget to thank God for even the small blessings, like our breath and our life.

November 14-20

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

I Thessalonians 5:18

One word in this verse changes the entire meaning of it, and that is the word "in." Many people misread this verse and think it says "Give thanks FOR all circumstances." And then people become frustrated, angry and despondent, to think they have to thank God for illness or misfortune. We are not expected to thank God FOR illness or misfortune, but we can still thank God IN all circumstances, even in bad ones. For instance, a person who is ill can thank God for doctors, or a supportive family, or an understanding employer. A person who suffers any kind of misfortune can thank God for life, breath, food and basic needs. When life is difficult, I try to remember to thank God for the little things, the little blessings, and the small positive things that happen even in tough times. It is not possible (or fair) to think we will thank God for all circumstances, but it is possible (though still a challenge) to thank God in all circumstances.

November 21-27

I give thanks to Thee, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify Thy name forever.

Psalms 86:12

This beautiful verse presents us with a challenge, how we can thank God with our whole heart. It's amazing how one could choose a verse of Scripture and have that verse be life-defining. This is one example. To live our life as one big thanksgiving to God is perhaps the ultimate expression of faith and love. Imagine if you woke up every day and said "thank You God" for 20 different things, or 50 different things. This attitude of gratitude would be life changing and life defining. If I'm so thankful to God for my car and for air conditioning, for music and for conversation, I would never get angry driving again. You can see how an attitude of gratitude in all things can keep us focused on God and on goodness.

November 28-December 4

Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

Psalms 111:1

This verse is very similar to last week's verse, in terms of giving thanks to the Lord with our whole heart. The difference here is that thanks is given as a witness, in the company of the upright, in the congregation. Not only do we thank God privately and personally, this verse encourages us to make our thanksgiving to God public. In this way, we give glory to God and inspire others to also adopt a posture of gratitude, and to thank God for the good things that happen in life. The phrase "in the company of the upright" is also important. It is easier to have a consciousness of gratitude towards God among other people who think the same way. We are certainly encouraged and affected by our environment. If we want to live a more thankful life, we should also get around people who are thankful, so that our joy at feeling grateful can be strengthened and increased by sharing thankfulness with those around us.

Ministry Highlights!



St. Stephanos GOYA Volleyball Tournament - October 9



Hope/Joy Fall Food Drive

Sun, Nov 7th - Sat, Dec 11th.

"HOPE starts with a MEAL. HOPE starts with YOU!"

Metropolitan Ministries' Holiday Tent helps 50,000+ families in need for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Let's help them meet this years goal of 1,763,000 pounds of food.

Please join St. John's Hope & Joy children's ministry in providing a meal to families in need through Metropolitan Ministries. Make this your family project and help us put together Boxes of Hope filled with the items needed for a Christmas holiday dinner. There are many ways you can help provide a Box of Hope:

Shop for any of the items below and bring to church Sun, Nov 7th - Sat, Dec 11th.

Donate \$25 or more (cash/ check/ gift card) for a Box of Hope-

Checks payable to Metropolitan Ministries

BOX OF HOPE contains:

Gift certificate for a turkey or ham	2 cans of black beans
1 box of cereal (hot or cold)	2 cans of cranberry sauce
2 cans of fruit	1 bag of dried beans
1 jar of peanut butter	1 box or bag of rice
2 cans of vegetables	1 can or packet of gravy
2 cans of yams	1 box dessert mix
1 bag or box of stuffing	1 package cookies or pastries
1 box of potatoes	1 family box of Jell-O/Pudding

Only non-perishable food donations please. Call Zackie Ameres at 813-245-3813 or email at zackiec@yahoo.com with any questions. Thank you!

"He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and He will reward him for what he has done."

Proverbs 19:17



November 2021 Sunday School Update

We are very grateful for our 2021-2022 Sunday School year. We would like to thank Fr. Stavros for supporting our Sunday School. Alex Limberatos for teaching our High School Boys and all our teachers for dedicating their time to our students. All our Sunday School Teachers are committed to providing great lessons about our faith to your children.

The Sunday School Topics for the month of October were: READING THE BIBLE, THE CHURCH BUILDING, THE SACRED VESSELS, THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, HOLY COMMUNION-DIVINE LITURGY-WORSHIP and SAINTS COSMAS & DAMIAN - SERVING WITH LOVE. James Harritos, our new Pastoral Assistant, will visit the High School Students in the media center this Sunday. He will visit each classroom twice this school year and provide a lesson. The Sunday School students are looking forward to learning from James and getting to know him. This past month he conducted lessons for our High School, 7th and 8th Graders and our 5th and 6th Graders.

Please stop by our updated SUNDAY SCHOOL BULLETIN BOARD. Our new class photos are up along with our Sunday School group picture.

Last month we also made a VIDEO for Charlie Hambos. CHARLIE LOVED IT!! He was surprised, humbled by it, and so appreciative to receive it. He is also very thankful for the many cards he received from our Sunday School students a few weeks ago. He truly misses us and we miss him.

Our FIRST YOUTH SUNDAY of the year took place on October 24th. We would like to thank our Sunday School students for singing our church hymns so beautifully and our high school students for reading The Epistle for our Youth Sundays. Our music program would not be possible without the guidance and leadership of Maria Xenick. We can't thank her enough.

Our Sunday School is back to making PROSPHORA under the direction of Melissa Krinos. This past month she taught our High School girls how to make it and why it is so important. Melissa will continue this program with all of our students and provide Prospophora for our church at the same time. Thank you Melissa for all that you do.

SUNDAY SCHOOL CALENDAR: NOVEMBER:

Sunday, November 7th:
Topic: Sacramental Life of
the Orthodox Church
Veteran Day Cards
James Teaches: Grades 3-4

Sunday, November 14th:
Topic: Talents & Giving
Prospophora: 5th and 6th Grade
James Teaches: Grades 1-2

Sunday, November 21st:
Youth Sunday - (7th-12th
Grade Music at 11:40 a.m.)
Topic: Charity/Thankfulness
James Teaches: Kindergarten
– 1st Grade

Sunday, November 28th:
No Sunday School Classes
(Thanksgiving)



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.



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: Daniel Hoss; Ourania Tziotis, Irina, Marina, Yuri, and Christophoros; Ashley Snyder; Evangelos & Caroline Critkas; Constantinos & Kalotina Klimis; Christine Alex, June, Lillian Thomas; Scotty; Desi Serriera; Ashley Kladakis; Dora Kallas, Kathy & Andrew Bouzinekis; Anastasia; Virginia Georgiou, Ron Myer, Toulia Tsaros, Fr. Pat Legato, Nellie Pringle, Yolanda Webb, Angela Bougas, Tony Ekonomou, Ron, Jason Vickers, Rex Garrison, Tina Chakonas, Ann Demas, Christina Noel Kouzes Houck, Evangeline Xeroteris, 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 Zaharis, 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, Debbie Phelps, Mary Voykin, David Voykin, Denise Badrane, Don Payne, 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



CORE VALUE: LEARNING

The rise in Depression with COVID-19 pandemic

Nursing Ministry



During this COVID-19 pandemic, many of us have experienced, and continue to experience, additional stress, anxiety, fear, sadness, isolation and loneliness. Surveys show a major increase in the number of U.S adults and teens who report symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression during the pandemic, compared with surveys before the pandemic.

The intent of this article is to bring awareness and help to identify the different signs and symptoms to look for to help a loved one who might be suffering from depression.

Not everyone experiences depression in the same way, **but DEPRESSION can affect anyone at any time**. So, it is important to take that next step and seek out professional help and be screened if you or someone you care about feels they may be depressed. Depression is a highly treatable condition with many options available, but a professional should be sought out to help determine the best course of action for every individual that is suffering from depression.

Parent's Guide to Teen Depression

Unlike adults, who could seek assistance on their own, teenagers rely on parents, teachers, or other caregivers to recognize their suffering and get them the help they need. But that isn't always easy. For one, **teens with depression don't necessarily appear sad**. Instead, irritability, anger, and agitation may be the most prominent symptoms.

Depression in teens vs. adults

Depression in teens looks very different from depression in adults. The following symptoms are more common in teenagers than in their adult counterparts:

Irritable or angry mood. As noted, irritability, rather than sadness, is often the predominant mood in depressed teens. A depressed teenager may be grumpy, hostile, easily frustrated, or prone to angry outbursts.

Unexplained aches and pains. Depressed teens frequently complain about physical ailments such as headaches or stomachaches. If a thorough physical exam does not reveal a medical cause, these aches and pains may indicate depression.

Extreme sensitivity to criticism. Depressed teens are plagued by feelings of worthlessness, making them extremely vulnerable to criticism, rejection, and failure. This is a particular problem for "over-achievers."

Withdrawing from some people, but not all. While adults tend to isolate themselves when depressed, teenagers usually keep up at least some friendships. However, teens with depression may socialize less than before, pull away from their parents, or start hanging out with a different crowd.

Depression in Adults

Depression can affect anyone—even a person who appears to live in relatively ideal circumstances.

Depression symptoms can vary from mild to severe and can include.

Feelings of sadness, tearfulness, emptiness or hopelessness

Angry outbursts, irritability or frustration, even over small matters

Loss of interest or pleasure in **most or all normal activities**

Sleep disturbances, including insomnia or sleeping too much

Tiredness and lack of energy

What should you do if you think you are depressed or need a confidential professional to talk with....? Sometimes it is difficult to initiate this conversation with your doctor or your family, so you avoid it. However, Depression is highly treatable and early diagnosis is important. Take Advantage of the Parish Assistance Program offered to our church community in collaborations with BayCare Behavioral Health.

St. John Continues to Offer Parish Assistance Program for Behavioral Health

Continue reading onto the next page to learn more how you can get help!

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



BayCare

Behavioral Health

Prayers of Protection from the Coronavirus

www.goarch.org

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.

Honoring All Active, Retired Military & First Responders On November 7



Philoptochos is calling all Active, Retired Military and First Responders to be honored Nov 7 in church. If your family member is currently serving away from home, please let us know as you will represent them. Please feel free to wear your uniform. There will be a special prayer at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy. Please join us in thanking them during coffee hour. This is our way of saying thank you!

We will be collecting the following items and sending to our troops that need our thoughts and prayers . We will provide cards in the hall, please feel free to write them a note.

Please contact Jeanie Nenos @ 813 451-9116 or Jeaniertt@aol.com to add you to our list.

Be sure to include your full name, mode of service, rank, and years of service so we can properly recognize you!

Food Items

Slim Jims and Beef Jerky
Single serving powdered drink mix
Canned tuna/chicken with crackers.
Individual bags of trail mix
Granola Bars, cookies or Rice Krispy treats
Instant Oatmeal (packets)
Fruit Snacks
Protein Bars
Pop Tarts or mini boxes of cereal
Cup-o-Noodles or Ramen in cups
(NO BLOCKS OF RAMEN)

MISCELLANEOUS

Colored Pencils + Pencil Sharpeners or Mechanical Pencils;
Pens
Puzzle Books, any kind
Decks of cards or travel games
Small pads of paper
Fun things like ear buds, small rubber balls or footballs

HYGIENE ITEMS

Travel size or full size Body Wash
Travel size or full size Shampoo and Conditioner
Deodorant, men's and women's or unscented: - either travel sized or full sized.
Lip Balm
Feminine Hygiene items
Razors & Shave Cream **NO AEROSOL CANS!**
Wet wipes
Travel Size Hand Sanitizer

PROHIBITED ITEMS

Pork or pork by-products (Slim Jims are OK)
Tobacco or alcohol products
Bars of Soap
Anything packed in glass
Pornography or other culturally sensitive material
Bagged potato chips: they are too easily crushed.
Unwrapped candies
No aerosol or sprays in cans
Nail polish
Perfume or Cologne...it is flammable and usually in glass containers.

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

Here are some special requests we have:

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



All food items offered are accepted. Thank you for supporting those who need it the most. Please contact our new volunteer, Sheila Vukmer, for any questions (412-719-1005).

St John Greek Orthodox Church's Young-At-Heart Ministry

We welcome people of all ages to join us as a member or as a friend of YAH.

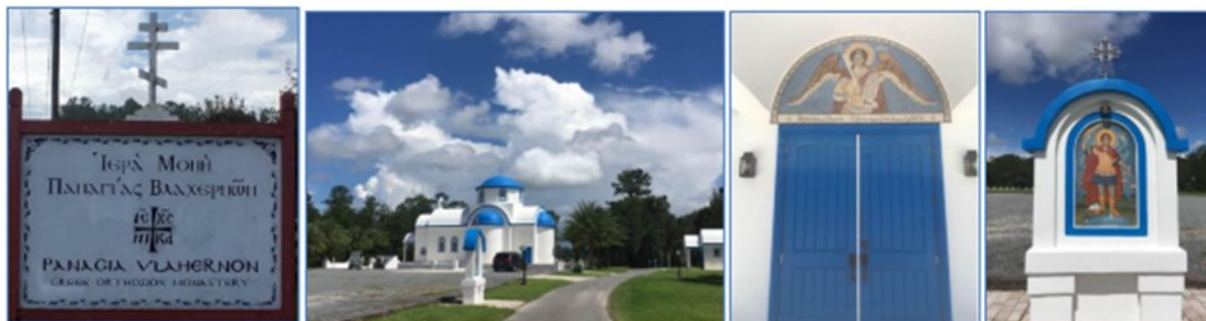
MEETING DATE AND TIME:

- Our meetings will mostly be on Saturdays and NOT be on the 1st Thursday of the month going forward.
- Our October meeting was held in the Kourmolis Center at St John. It was a potluck meal with everyone bringing something. Fr. John and Pres. Denise held a Bible Trivia game. We had 17 in attendance.
- We wished birthday to Carole, Christine, Denise B, Diane, Jane, Margaret and Vangie.
- We continue to reach out to those who are homebound during the pandemic as part of our Church's Core Values: Love, Worship, Community, Learning, & Service

	Apr	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept
Phoned	15	27	20	40	20	32	38 88	37
Left Messages	8	5	1	3	1	6	9	2
Visited	1	4	1	3	1	7	1	3
Sent Cards	2	1	4	2	4	2	0	6
Left Text Messages	3	3	1	3	1	4	2	8

PLANNED ACTIVITIES

Bus Trip to Ocala's Greek Orthodox Monasteries on Nov. 13. An early count shows there will be at least 30 people going. Call Mike Trimis at (813) 784-4872 or TrimisM@gmail.com



PASSED ACTIVITIES

- Aug Oct. 2, 2021 – We enjoyed a game of Bible Trivia lead by Fr. John and Pres. Denise
- Sept. 4, 2021 – We had a social luncheon at Byblos Mediterranean Restaurant
- Aug 7, 2021 – We had a wonderful time at ABC Pizza.
- July 1, 2021 – We played a game of Bingo and it was catered by Acropolis Restaurant
- June 4, 2021 - We attended a dinner social at the AHEPA House in Tarpon Springs.
- April 22, 2021 – Visited St Michael Shrine in Tarpon Springs, lunch and Easter Specialty Food Shopping.
- April 7, 2021 - We attended 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
May 8th 2021, April 3rd 2020, Mar. 6th 2021, Dec. 5th 2020, Nov. 7th 2020
- 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

For more information,
contact Michael Trimis, President,
813-784-4872 (vm/t)
TrimisM@gmail.com

Mary Nenos, Vice President
813-508-5553
MaryNenos@gmail.com

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 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.

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.

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



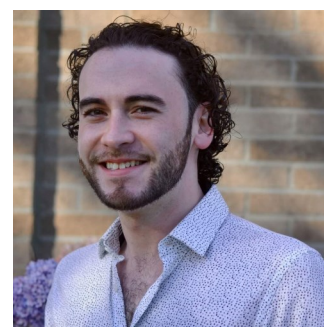
Fr. Stavros
813-394-1038



Fr. John
678-637-4425



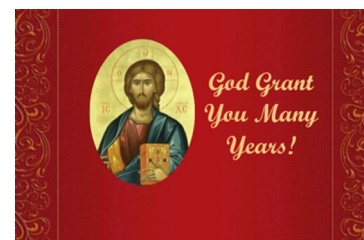
Alex
262-370-0586



James
401-527-8203

Happy Birthday!

Steve Reisyn - 11/01	Dee Nicolaou - 11/09	Alicia Kalojiannis - 11/18	Eleni Katzaras - 11/26
Gregory Hartung - 11/02	Penelope Aranoutakis - 11/10	Shea Larino - 11/18	Nicholas Magos - 11/27
Amy Voykin - 11/03	Anna Demas - 11/11	Lukas Nicolaou - 11/18	Alex Bakirdgi - 11/28
Elena Gonatos - 11/04	Daphne Kane - 11/11	Demetrios Camene - 11/19	Frank Berdos - 11/28
Brian Kelly - 11/04	Brigham Sibley - 11/11	John Mitchell - 11/19	Stephanie Liakopoulos - 11/28
David Clipp - 11/05	Eliana Edquid - 11/12	Katina Georgas - 11/22	Daniyt Berar - 11/29
John Abramis - 11/06	Maria Cantonis - 11/13	Alexandra Hartung - 11/22	Demetri Passalaris - 11/29
Sophia Meadows - 11/06	Sandra Pappas - 11/13	Nikos Tziotis - 11/22	Sofia Camene - 11/30
Maria Zabetakis - 11/06	Collin Snyder - 11/13	Savvas Ferekides - 11/23	Skip Higdon - 11/30
Angelina Krinos - 11/07	Daniela Cara - 11/14	George Hambos - 11/23	Kathy Kaburis - 11/30
James Michael Strahan - 11/07	Catherine DeYoung - 11/14	Demetrios Valaes - 11/23	Joanna Papaefstathiou - 11/30
Lola Bavaro - 11/08	Dimitri Karounos - 11/14	Jim Westmoreland - 11/23	
Tammy Christou - 11/08	Calliope Kafantaris - 11/15	Katherine Freeman - 11/24	
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2418 W. Swann Ave Tampa, FL 33609.**

Eastern Orthodox Christianity in America

By Ashley Campbell

Ashley is a first year student at the University of South Florida (USF). She is not Orthodox (yet) but has been attending our church regularly for the past couple of months. She wrote this paper for her Introduction to Cultural Anthropology Class and since it is about Eastern Orthodox Christianity in America, written from the perspective of someone who is new to Orthodoxy, we've asked her for permission to reprint this in The Messenger.

Despite the separation of church and state in law in America, Christianity has always had a major influence on American law, culture, and general society. According to the Pew Research Center, 70.6% of Americans identify as Christians (*Religion in America*, 2020). With such a clear majority in one faith, it's no wonder Christianity has such a strong influence in America. Only 0.5% of Americans identify as Eastern Orthodox Christians (*Religion in America*, 2020). In the structure of orthodoxy, each country is under a Patriarchate (Meyendorff, J.). For example, all of Africa is under the Patriarchate of Alexandria (Meyendorff, J.). Where America fits into this structure is still a widely contested issue, with the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Russia, and Jerusalem, all setting up churches in and laying claim to parts of America (Meyendorff, J.) That's why I chose this topic; with the diversity in America and the strong ethnic ties of each Orthodox church, problems are bound to arise. And with Orthodoxy as a whole being a minority in America, that can also create problems with the secular world and other Christian spheres in America. For this assignment, I attended Divine Liturgy at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Tampa FL on September 26th. I took part in the service and observed the diversity of the people and in their individual worship practices to see how the Greek Orthodox aspect interacts with people's own background and individual worship choices.

Upon entrance to the church, I noticed that there were not a lot of cars in the lot. However, the church itself was very full of people inside. This means that most people rode together and thus the church is made up mostly of families. I also saw evidence of families in the pews, with almost each one having at least 1 older man and woman with either young children or teenagers and sometimes elderly adults with them as well. This was later confirmed when during communion the priest invited all the children and their parents to receive it first so that way the children could be escorted to Sunday School and the service could continue faster. Almost all the church promptly got in line with their children when the priest announced this, there were very few single adults. Of the single adults, I noticed that only about half of them chose to receive communion. This could be for a variety of reasons, in the bulletin for the day's service there was a note that said only Orthodox Christians who had prepared with fasting and prayer are able to receive communion. This means that of the single adults, not all of them are official

Orthodox members or they are not observant of the traditions of fasting and prayer.

It did not seem like this was perceived as a bad thing by the other members of the church, everyone who did receive communion was focused on their own taking of the sacrament and paid no mind to those who chose to stay in the pews. Even the older people were non-judgemental (at least outwardly). This laissez-faire attitude towards outsiders and non-observant members was a surprise to me because taking communion is a major part of Christian worship (Meyendorff, J.) so I thought it would be seen as a problem that people weren't taking part in it.



Another example of individual worship choices being respected was women covering their hair. In my prior research, I learned that headcovering is a common tradition in the Orthodox Church, with the Greek branch being the most lenient and tolerant of this policy (Saint John Church). This was reflected in the church with only a handful of women choosing to cover. Only 2 young women and 2 older women chose to cover. Once again, the women who did not cover were not judged or chastised by anyone for not following tradition. In addition, some women chose to pray and touch the priest's vestments when he walked down the center aisle of the church carrying the communion wine chalice. I had never heard of this before so I was intrigued by this practice. I did not get a chance to ask these women why they did so but from my knowledge of Christianity it may have something to do with the fact that in the Bible there is a story about someone being healed by touching Jesus' clothes. These women did not receive any weird looks or comments either. Overall, the Greek Orthodox church seems to be very tolerant of how people choose to worship during the service, people are allowed to incorporate their own elements or follow traditions to whichever degree they see fit. This tolerant attitude was shown to myself as well, people greeted me and were very nice to me. I felt very welcome.

Despite the differences in individual worship, I did notice some common values shared by everyone. Family seemed to be very important, especially raising children in

the faith. All the children were enrolled in Sunday school and before they left after communion, the children paid attention to the best of their ability and did not seem lost or confused. This suggests that parents are very invested in their children's education of the faith and thus family is very important to Greek Orthodox Christians. I also noticed that after the service was over and I went inside the accompanying building for the food, there was a mother reading a book about Adam and Eve to her toddler son. Inside this building, families were all spending time together enjoying the food and socializing. Another common value I noticed was modesty in both men and women. Both sexes were dressed nicely and modestly, with men in suits and women wearing dresses or shirts that were at least at knee level. This shows that Greek Orthodox Christians place the church and religion in high reverence and thus show respect to it by wearing their "Sunday best". This was new to me because I was raised Episcopalian and the dresscode is much more relaxed there. This is not to imply that Episcopalians do not show respect for the church and religion, but that they do so in different ways, with Greek Orthodox Christians choosing modesty as one of those ways. Lastly, another value I noticed was love for others. The priest gave a sermon about how it's important for Christians to show love for everyone and be kind, and this was well received by the attendees. I noticed many people nodding in agreement throughout the sermon. The core values of the church are also listed in the bulletin with love being the first one listed. They are: love, worship, community, learning, and service. I saw all of these values being represented. Love through the kind treatment of others, worship through everyone participating (in their own ways), community through emphasis on family, learning through a full Sunday school program, and service through calls for volunteers in the bulletin for various charity projects.

As for diversity, the church seemed mostly white with only one Asian family and 2-3 black people. Of course, I can't guess everyone's race just by looking at them, this is just what I saw and how I interpreted people under the social categories of race I am familiar with. I also noticed many languages being spoken, Greek, Russian, and English were all present. I did see one mixed-race family, one white woman had two children with much darker skin than her own, the father was not present so I can't make an estimate as to what the other half of the children's race is. This diversity implies that people from all backgrounds are welcome and accepted into Greek Orthodox communities, even being allowed to marry in. I would also like to acknowledge the fact that I am white (like the majority of the church) so my reflections on the treatment of minority groups in the church can only be formed from observance, I didn't experience being a minority in the church so it is possible I missed somethings. All in all, I am still inclined to say that diversity is welcome in the church given the way the minorities were treated just the same as everyone else and the core value is love, which was enforced by the priest in the sermon. As stated previously by observance of families, every age

group was present so there is also strong diversity in age. This diversity was also accommodated by the service itself, being in both Greek and English. The Nicene Creed and the Lord's prayer were said in both Greek and English. I also heard the Greek edition of each prayer was said first. The choir sang almost entirely in Greek. I did notice however, that Russian was not spoken at all during the service. Upon further research, I learned that the Russian Orthodox Church and the Greek Orthodox Church are in schism (Fallas, A.). This means that the Russian church has cut ties and communication with Greece (Fallas, A.). This is because the Greek church is under the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which gave Ukraine independence from the Russian patriarchate in 2018, and Ukraine was formerly under the Russian patriarchate so this caused conflict (Fallas, A.). The reason for this split is because Ukraine has a lengthy history with fighting for independence from Russia, and many Ukrainians did not like the fact that Russia kept influence in Ukraine after independence through the church, and so Constantinople granted Ukraine freedom from the Russian patriarchate (Fallas, A.). I do not know if this conflict is why Russian was absent from the service, but it's possible. This conflict shows that ethnic diversity among Orthodox Christianity combined with each group having strong ethnic ties can lead to conflict even at the local level. I will dive more deeply into this issue in my GEA #2 assignment where diversity is the main focus.

As for my own understating, I understood about half of what was going on because I don't know Greek. My upbringing as Episcopalian and the fact that I am a Christian did help me understand some traditions. For example, both denominations use imagery to teach, with Orthodoxy using icons (*Byzantine icons*) and Episcopalians using statues (Armentrout et al., 2000). I am also curious as to how language is used in the church since it seems to be used for both aid of understanding for the attendees yet also seemingly affected by higher-up conflict.

After careful analysis, the findings of my observation show that the Greek Orthodox Church seems to be accepting of all people. They are also very relaxed about church policy and tradition, allowing people to worship freely and follow church policy and tradition in any way they see fit. The core values are also shared among everyone and reinforced by authority, this shows that the community as a whole is very tight-knit but welcomes differences.



ALREADY DISTURBED PROCEED WITH CAUTION

On the Lighter Side

Instead of a sign that says "do not disturb" I need one that says "Already disturbed proceed with caution."

Be grateful that no matter how much chocolate you eat, your earrings will still fit.

There is no such thing as a grouchy old person. The truth is, once you get old, you stop being polite and start being honest.

Things I'm Super Good At

1. Forgetting someone's name 10 seconds after they tell me.
2. Buying produce. . .and throwing it away two weeks later.
3. Digging through the trash for the food box I just tossed, because I already forgot the directions.
4. Making plans. And then immediately regretting making plans.
5. Leaving laundry in the dryer until it wrinkles. Then turning on the dryer to dewrinkle. Then forgetting it again.
6. Calculating how much sleep I'll get if I can just "fall asleep right now."

An older, tired-looking dog wandered into my yard. I could tell from his collar and well fed belly that he had a home and was well taken care of. He calmly came over to me, I gave him a few pats on his head; he then followed me into my house, slowly walked down the hall, curled up in the corner and fell asleep.

An hour later, he went to the door, and I let him out.

The next day he was back, greeted me in my yard, walked inside and resumed his spot in the hall and again slept for about an hour. This continued off and on for several weeks.

Curious I pinned a note on his collar: "I would like to find out who the owner of this wonderful sweet dog is and ask if you are aware that almost every afternoon your dog comes to my house for a nap."

The next day he arrived for his nap, with a different note pinned to his collar: "He lives in a home with 6 children, 2 under the ages of 3. He's trying to catch up on his sleep. Can I come with him tomorrow?"



On the Serious Side

Wanna be happy for an hour, eat a steak. Wanna be happy for a day, play golf. Wanna be happy for a week, do on a cruise. Wanna be happy for a lifetime, put your faith in Jesus Christ. ~Lou Holtz

You either get bitter or you get better. It's that simple. You either take what has been dealt to you and allow it to make you a better person, or you allow it to tear you down. The choice does not belong to fate, it belongs to you.

Sometime you must hurt in order to know, fall in order to grow, lose in order to gain, because most of life's greatest lessons are learned through pain.



It's hard to hear God's voice when you've already decided what you want Him to say.

Tradition is not to preserve the ashes, but to pass on the fire. ~Gustav Mahler

As you get older, you'll realize that a \$300 watch and a \$30 watch both tell the same time.

A Michael Kors wallet and a Forever 21 wallet hold the same amount of money.

A \$300,000 house and a \$100,000 house host the same loneliness.

A Ford will also drive you as far as a Bentley.

True happiness is not found in materialistic things. It comes from the love and laughter found with each other.

Stay humble. . .The holes dug for us in the ground are all the same size.

A Saint was asked, "What is anger?" He gave a beautiful answer - "It is the punishment we give to ourselves, for somebody else's mistake." Unknown

EVERY PARENT SHOULD READ THIS:

A TRUE STORY

A stranger approached an 8-year-old girl and asked her to come with him. He told her that something had happened and that her mom had sent him to pick her up. The girls asked the stranger for the Password! The man got confused and the girl ran away. She and her mom had agreed on a password in case she ever had to send someone to pick her up. Maybe this saved the girl's life.

YOUR KIDS SHOULD NOT BE THE MOST IMPORTANT

Written By John Rosemond in Naples Daily News

I recently asked a married couple who have three kids, none of whom are yet teens, *"Who are the most important people in your family?"*

Like all good moms and dads of this brave new millennium, they answered, *"Our kids!"*

"Why?" I then asked. "What is it about your kids that gives them that status?" And like all good moms and dads of this brave new millennium, they couldn't answer the question other than to fumble with appeals to emotion.

So, I answered the question for them? *"There is no reasonable thing that gives our children that status."*

I went on to point out that many if not most of the problems they're having with their kids – typical stuff, these days – are the result of treating their children as if they, their marriage, and their family exist because of the kids when it is, in fact, the other way around. Their kids exist because of them and their marriage and thrive because they have created a stable family.

Furthermore, without them, their kids wouldn't eat well, have the nice clothing they wear, live in the nice home in which they live, enjoy the great vacations they enjoy, and so on. Instead of lives that are relatively carefree (despite the drama to the contrary that they occasionally manufacture), their children would be living lives full of worry and want.

This issue is really the heart of the matter. People my age know it's the heart of the matter because when we were kids it was clear to us that our parents were the most important people in our families. And that, right there, is why we respected our parents and that, right there is why we looked up to adults in general. Yes, Virginia, once upon a time the United States of America, children were second class citizens, to their advantage.

It was also clear to us – I speak, of course, in general terms, albeit accurate – that our parents' marriages were more important to them than the relationships with us. Therefore, we did not sleep in their beds or interrupt their conversations. The family meal, at home, was regarded as more important than after-school activities. Mom and Dad talked more – a lot more – with one another than they talk with you. For lack of pedestals, we emancipated earlier and much more successfully than have children since.

The most important person in an army is the general. The most important person in a corporation is the CEO. The most important person in a classroom is the teacher. And the most important person in a family are the parents.

The most important thing about children is the need to prepare them properly for responsible citizenship. The primary objective should not be raising a straight-A student who excels at three sports, earns a spot on the Olympic swim team, goes to an a-list university and becomes a prominent brain surgeon. The primary objective is to raise a child such that community and culture are strengthened.

"Our child is the most important person in our family" is the first step toward raising a child who feels entitled.

You don't want that. Unbeknownst to your child, he doesn't need that. And neither does America.

The Donkey and the Tiger

You can only meet people where they are.

The donkey told the tiger, "The grass is blue."

The tiger replied, "No, the grass is green."



The discussion became heated, and the two decided to submit the issue to arbitration, so they approached the lion.

As they approached the lion on his throne, the donkey started screaming: "Your Highness, isn't it true that the grass is blue?"

The lion replied: "If you believe it is true, the grass is blue."

The donkey rushed forward and continued: "The tiger disagrees with me, contradicts me and annoys me. Please punish him."

The king then declared: "The tiger will be punished with 3 days of silence."

The donkey jumped with joy and went on his way, content and repeating "The grass is blue, the grass is blue..."

The tiger asked the lion, "Your Majesty, why have you punished me, after all, the grass is green?"

The lion replied, "You've known and seen the grass is green."

The tiger asked, "So why do you punish me?"

The lion replied, "That has nothing to do with the question of whether the grass is blue or green. The punishment is because it is degrading for a brave, intelligent creature like you to waste time arguing with an ass, and on top of that, you came and bothered me with that question just to validate something you already knew was true!"

The biggest waste of time is arguing with the fool and fanatic who doesn't care about truth or reality, but only the victory of his beliefs and illusions. Never waste time on discussions that make no sense. There are people who, for all the evidence presented to them, do not have the ability to understand. Others who are blinded by ego, hatred and resentment, and the only thing that they want is to be right even if they aren't.

When IGNORANCE SCREAMS, intelligence moves on.

CAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS BE CREMATED?

July 27, 2021

From the Website of St. John the Evangelist Antiochian Orthodox Church, Beaver Falls, PA

Cremation – the burning of a body after death – has become quite popular over the last few decades. In 2015, the rate of cremation in the United States (48%) actually surpassed that of burial (45%). And by the year 2030, the [National Funeral Directors Association](#) predicts the cremation rate will reach 71%, with only 23% of Americans choosing traditional burial. Unlike most other Christian confessions, the Orthodox Church rejects cremation. Ultimately, Orthodox Christians can still exercise their free will and choose to be cremated; however, the Church's official position on the matter is firm.

WHY IS CREMATION SO POPULAR?

Today we live in a society that promotes disposal. Whatever we buy or purchase we can easily replace when it breaks or has served its purpose. The human body is just another one of those things we can easily dispose of once it has “served its purpose”. Our society no longer treats material creation – most importantly, the human body – with respect, even by those who call themselves Christian.

Cost is the number one reason why most people choose cremation over traditional burial, with [cremation being about \\$2,000 cheaper on average](#). However, it's important to note that these numbers are reported *on average*. Depending on the services you select and/or forgo, you could end up paying less money for a traditional burial than you would a cremation.

Regardless, cost should never be the main thing on one's mind after the death of a loved one.

Another reason cremation is so popular is because of its **supposed eco-friendliness**.

Unfortunately, the process of cremation itself is anything but. Every cremation burns a significant amount of fossil fuels (diesel fuel, propane, and natural gas) in order to make the furnace hot enough to burn up most of the body. These fossil fuels release harmful chemicals like nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, hydrofluoric acid, and mercury into the atmosphere.

THE PAGAN AND GNOSTIC ORIGINS OF CREMATION

Byzantine Canon Law, which the Orthodox Church firmly upholds, forbids cremation. Historical sources hint to the original ban on cremation arising due to its common practice in pagan and gnostic societies. God commanded the Old Testament Israelites not to adopt the values, beliefs, and practices of the pagan societies around them, which included cremation of the dead. Thus, the Israelites buried their dead after preparing the body. They closed the eyes ([Gen. 46:4](#)); washed the body ([Acts 9:37](#)); draped a cloth over the face ([Jn. 11:44](#)); anointed the body with spices ([Lk. 23:56](#); [24:1](#); [Jn. 19:40](#)) and wrapped it with linens ([Mt. 27:59](#); [Mk. 15:45](#); [Lk. 23:53](#); [Jn. 19:39-40](#)).

Historically within Judaism, cremation was only for punishment and humiliation ([Joshua 7:15](#); [Lev. 21:9](#); [20:14](#)) and was considered an instrument of God's wrath and destruction. Perhaps the most well-known example of this is the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah ([Gen. 19:24](#)).

During the 1st century, early Christianity saw the birth of an heretical movement known as [Gnosticism](#). This movement denied the value of physical creation and its involvement in our salvation. They (and many other heretical groups like them) viewed the body as evil by design; they believed that our souls were held prisoner within our bodies until we depart this life. In their view, the body is basically useless after death and effectively disposed of. Early Christians distinguished themselves from this heresy by burying the bodies of the early martyrs in the same manner as the Lord Himself, treating their bodies with the utmost respect. Modern Orthodox Christians continue to reject cremation because it distinguishes us from the hedonistic, secular society that has made cremation trendy and acceptable.

ORTHODOX TEACHING: THE BODY AS A TEMPLE

The Orthodox Church believes that the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20) and is therefore holy. Our bodies are gifts from God that we must always treat with dignity, reverence, and care. Any act that deliberately defiles the body (e.g. [tattoos](#), [sexual reassignment surgery](#), cremation, [suicide](#)) is not acceptable to the Church.

Not only do the Orthodox revere the body, but we also acknowledge the part our physical bodies play in our sal-

vation. Our bodies are just as valuable as our souls. According to Holy Tradition and Scripture, [we will be resurrected](#) in our physical bodies at the Second Coming of Our Lord. We must take care of our bodies, feeding them properly, getting adequate rest, and healing them with the Holy Mysteries.

Today, many Western Christians now allow cremation, in light of the fact that its association with paganism or Gnosticism is no longer a reality. However, the Orthodox Church asserts that voluntary cremation, regardless of its detachment from pagan thought or ritual, in every instance denies the value of the human body and of material creation in general. Hence, we as Orthodox Christians are to avoid it.

CAN AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHOOSE CREMATION?

Put simply, yes Orthodox Christians *can choose to be cremated*. Because we all have the free will to make whatever choices we want to make. However, that does not mean the Church sanctions or approves of those choices. Should an Orthodox Christian willingly choose cremation, that person would not receive an Orthodox funeral service. In some cases, the Church may even permanently exclude them from [liturgical prayers for the departed](#). Because the Orthodox Church’s rejection of cremation ties in so intimately with our understanding of salvation and the sanctity of the body, cremation renders the funeral service and prayers for the departed meaningless.

Naturally, the Church recognizes that there are certain circumstances that may necessitate cremation. And in those situations, she will not condemn those who must be cremated against their will. For example, the civil author-

ities may require cremation for the dead; in that case, the Orthodox Christian would have no choice but to obey those authorities, and the Church understands this. Compulsory cremation in the case of an epidemic is also an acceptable circumstance.

CONCLUSION

Orthodox Christians should reject cremation, in accordance with the Church’s teachings about the sanctity of the human body and its role in our salvation. Cremation treats the body violently, without the respect due to it as the temple of the Holy Spirit. Those who voluntarily request cremation upon death will not receive an Orthodox funeral or burial. However, the Church recognizes extenuating circumstances and will not condemn or deny funeral rites to any who *must be cremated in these situations*.

Even if cremation might seem cheaper and more popular than traditional burial, this should not be our primary concerns. Rather, our salvation and the state of our souls and bodies should always be at the forefront of our minds.

	2021*	2020*
Pledged Year to Date	\$472,793	\$515,880
Received Year to Date	\$420,388	\$435,627
Average Pledge	\$1,339	\$1,437
Median Pledge	\$600	\$700
#of Individual/Families Pledged/Giving	353	384
*YTD as of 10/20/21 & 10/13/20		

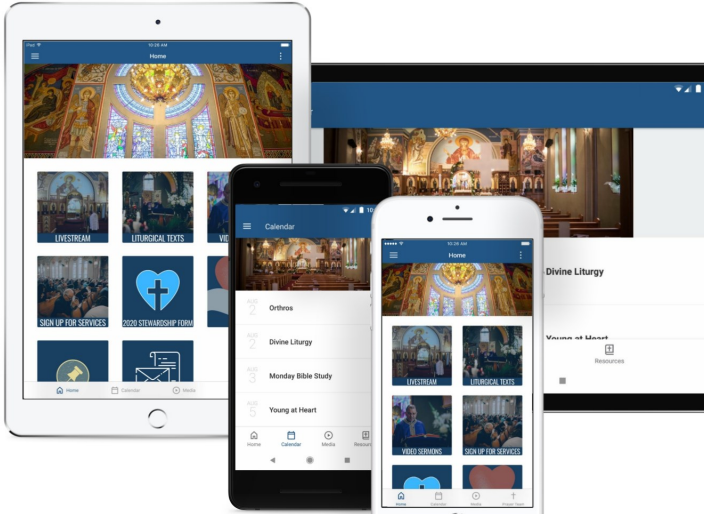
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November 2021							Dec 2021 ►
◄ Oct 2021	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
**Fast Day	1 Sts. Cosmas and Damian Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	2 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m Book Study – 6:30 p.m.	3 ** Translation of Relics of St. George Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	4 Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m. Bible Study-Fr. John 6:30 p.m.	5 **		6
7 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Honoring Veterans and First Responders— Philoptochos—coffee hour Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	8 Archangels Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Orthodoxy 201 6:00 p.m.	9 St. Nektarios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Book Study – 6:30 p.m.	10 ** Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m	11 Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m. Bible Study-Fr. John 6:30 p.m.	12 **		13 St. John Chrysostom Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Young at Heart Monastery Trip
14 St. Philip Orthros 8:30 a.m. Hierarchal Liturgy 09:45 a.m.	15 ** Beginning of Nativity Fast Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.	16 **St. Matthew Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Book Study – 6:30 p.m.	17 ** Holy Unction 6:00 p.m.	18 ** Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m. Bible Study—Fr. John 6:30 p.m.	19 **		20 **
21 ** Entrance of Virgin Mary into the Temple Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. GOYA 4:30-8:30 p.m.-- MOVIE NIGHT	22	23 **	24 ** St. Katherine Orthros 5:00 p.m. Liturgy 6:00 p.m.	25 **	26 **		27 **
28 **Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	29 ** Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m	30 **St. Andrew Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Book Study – 6:30 p.m.	**Indicates Fasting Days				

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

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St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Timetable of Services

Saturdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sundays: Orthros 8:45 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Weekdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.

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

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

Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. John Stefero
813-876-8830 (Office) 678-637-4425 (Cell)

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

Pastoral Assistant James Harritos II
813-876-8830 (Office) 401-527-8203 (Cell)
james@stjohntpa.org

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 Katzaras 863-581-2430
Jimmy Konstas 813-220-7352
Marilyn Sandborn 813-855-8678
Mike Xenick 813-340-8737

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

Adopt a College Student
Volunteer needed!

Adult Greek School
Magda Myer 813-523-5771

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
Presbyteria Denise Stefero 678-464-4833

Bible Study
Fr. John Stefero 678-637-4425

Book Study
James Harritos II 401-527-8203

Buildings & Grounds
Euripides Panos 813-352-3972

Chanter
Alex Limberatos 262-370-0586
James Harritos II 401-527-8203

Choir
Pauline Spencer, Director 813-390-1782
Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782

Community Outreach
Greg Melton 813-967-2074

**Connect Through Christ -
Special Needs Ministry for Children**
Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534

Dance Groups
H XAPA MAE, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668
Bessie Palios, 813-523-0347
Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963
Marina Choundas 813-877-6136
IIAPEA, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668
IIANHITYPI,

Daughters of Penelope
Diane Trimis 813-220-3389

Festival
Mike Xenick 813-340-8737

Finance Committee
Gary Ward 813-846-3898

Food Pantry
Sheila Vukmer 412-719-1005

GriefShare
Donna Hambos 813-843-8412

Gasparilla Parking
John Kokkas 727-992-4165

GOYA
Michael & Bessie Palios 813-523-0346
goya@stjohntpa.org

Hope/Joy
George & Zackie Ameres 813-245-3813

Junior Olympics
Dwight Forde 727-685-9028

MOMS
Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862

Men's Fellowship
Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Parish Nursing Ministry
Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026

Oratorical Festival
Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

Photography Ministry
Karina Findlay 813-476-9632

Philoptochos
Jeanie Nenos 813-451-9116

Stewardship
Chris Kyrus 757-672-1920
George Mitseas 813-748-1220

Sunday School
Vickie Peckham 813-758-3102

Usher
Pete Trakas 813-505-2193

Website / Social Media / APP
Volunteer needed!

Welcoming Ministry
Maria Xenick 813-765-3587

Women's Bible Study
Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Young Adult/OCF
Alex Limberatos 262-370-0586
James Harritos II 401-527-8203

Young at Heart
Mike Trimis, President 813-784-4872
Mary Nenos, Vice President 813-935-2096

Youth Protection
Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855

12 Disciples
Mathew Balasis 727-421-7376

The Messenger of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is published on a monthly basis. Publication is the first of each month. Deadline for notices and announcements for The Messenger is the 10th of each month.

"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.