

THE MESSENGER

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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

August 2022

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

Sunday School Begins August 14

St. John the Baptist's Sunday School is back!

We are excited to see all our children & families return to learn.



Fr. Stavros' Message

I Believe, I Think, Actually I'm Not Sure, I Need Help, I'm Still Holding On (And Thoughts on Summer Camp)

Six times in the Divine Liturgy, we heard the phrase, "Let us commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God." That is a very lofty statement. To commit ourselves, to commit one another and to commit our whole life to Christ our God. Many of us, myself included, struggle with being an Orthodox Christian. This is why we aren't all in church each Sunday, why we don't all pray each day, why many of us are not reading the Bible, why we don't keep the commandments and why we are not good stewards of our time, our talents and our resources. We are not committed. And because we are not committed, it seems almost hypocritical to encourage others to commit to something we are not committed to. We then console ourselves with the thought that we are somewhat committed—we'll go to church, we'll throw up a prayer occasionally, we'll make a financial pledge to the church, we'll show up to the festival, etc. And many times we put Christ into a compartment, we take Him out on Sundays, remember Him before a meal, maybe even wear a cross around our necks, but do we actually know Him, is He really at the source and center of everything? So, there is a disconnect somewhere between believing and behaving, and we all have it, including myself. Because the Divine Liturgy sets a pretty high bar, in the phrase "let us commit ourselves and one another and OUR WHOLE LIFE to Christ our God."

Belief Is Personal

I read a great quote from Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, from his book "The Orthodox Way" that I would like to share with you.

What does it mean to be faithful?

In the Creed we do not say, "I believe that there is a God." We say, "I believe in one God." Between belief "that" and belief "in," there is a crucial distinction. It is possible for me to believe that someone or something exists, and yet for this belief to have no practical effect on my life. I can open a telephone directory and scan the names recorded on its pages; and, as I read, I am prepared to believe that some (or even most) of these people exist. But I know none of them personally and so my belief that they exist makes no particular difference to me. When, on the other hand, I say to a much beloved friend, "I believe in you," I am doing far more than expressing a belief that this person exists. "I believe in you" means: I turn to you, I rely upon you, I put my full trust in you and I hope in you.

Most of the things in the Divine Liturgy are offered as a collective group. For instance, we are invited to “let Us pray to the Lord” or “let US bow our heads to the Lord” or “let US lift up our hearts,” or “let US give thanks.” The Creed, on the other hand, is personal. It is not a statement of “We believe” where we can get lost and hide in the crowd. It is a statement of “I believe,” a personal confession of faith.

Going to Ware’s analogy of the phone book, many of our young people don’t remember the white pages, the book of thousands of addresses in our city. Looking at the white pages, if we remember that far back, he has it exactly right. There is no reason not to believe that all those people exist, that what is expressed on the pages of the phone book isn’t correct addresses and phone numbers. However, the names and the numbers make no real difference in life because we don’t know these people personally. As he points out, it is when we get to a place of “I believe in you” with another person that trust and faith and hope in that person comes out. There is no trust, or faith or hope in a list of names on a page that we do not know.

In a similar fashion, we have a relationship with God. Everyone has a relationship. It may be one of love, trust, faith and hope, the personal “I believe in You.” Or it may be that He’s just a name on a page, no reason not to believe but no real personal connection. Or it may be that we really don’t believe that there is a God, because He hasn’t made Himself real, or life has been hard and we are disappointed in Him, or maybe we’ve never really taken time to think about Him.

The Creed-I Believe

Last month, I attended St. Stephen’s Summer Camp, along with over thirty young people from our parish. (And I couldn’t have been more proud of them, our kids and our staff members did great! They have written several reflections which will be found later in this issue of *The Messenger*. The theme of camp this year was “I believe” and was a study of the Creed. We talked about the six parts of the Creed, beginning of the concept of believing in something or someone. There is a difference in



Fr. Stavros teaching at the Ropes Course

believing and knowing, of operating on faith or on knowledge. When we think about it critically, we operate more on faith than we probably realize. Choosing a college is more an act of faith than of knowledge. There are hundreds if not thousands of col-

leges in this country. Yet the average high school senior will visit only a handful before making a decision where to apply. The decision of where to go will be based on some knowledge, but not exhaustive knowledge. It will be more of a decision based on faith. Same thing goes with getting married. There are millions of possibilities when it comes to getting married. Most people who get married have dated only a handful of people before committing to marriage. Again, a decision based more on faith than on exhaustive knowledge.

God the Father

The second section of the Creed focuses on God the Father, the Creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible. In order to have a relationship with God, in order to believe in God, one has to place God above oneself. We don’t believe in things that are less than us. For instance, I’ll believe in a doctor’s word about my health, because the doctor has gone to medical school. I will not take medical advice from a middle school student, who has no educational credentials. I will take medical advice from someone who knows more about medicine than I do. Likewise, how can we believe in a God who is not greater than us? Thus, the first step in believing in God is a belief that God (Who is greater than us), created us.

Jesus Christ

The third section of the Creed is the longest, as it speaks of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, incarnate (made flesh) by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. Pontius Pilate is mentioned because he is a historic figure. He ruled over Judea and Jerusalem at a certain time in history. The crucifixion of Christ was also an historic event. It happened on a specific date (13 of Nisan in the year 29 A.D.) in a certain place (Jerusalem). The crucifixion is a historical fact, not faith. What is a matter of faith is what happened after the crucifixion. Christians believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and opened the doors to Paradise that were closed at the Fall of mankind. Christians believe that Jesus is the promised Christ, the promised Messiah. In the Old Testament, there were between 225 and 425 prophecies about the coming of a Messiah. ALL of these things happened in the person of Jesus. How can He not be the Christ? We did an exercise at camp with this topic, where I asked a group of people to mention everything they had in common—this group was all males, in high school, at camp, in the same cabin, each had a license, was part of a church community, etc. Asking them to identify ten things about themselves was not enough to distinguish one from another. However, after about ten similarities, they couldn’t find anything else that they all had in common. Once we got to fifty things, each was unique and had nothing in common with the others. Put 225 things about a person on paper, and you will see that at that stage, everyone is unique and totally distinguishable from everyone else. In the same fashion, when 225 (at least) things came true in the person of Jesus Christ, things that had been foretold

Continued...

for thousands of years before His appearing, it made Him truly unique and distinguishable from everyone else as the promised Messiah everyone had been waiting for.

The Holy Spirit

The fourth section of the Creed speaks of the Holy Spirit. If God the Father is the Creator (together with the Son and the Spirit), and Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior (still co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit), then it is the Holy Spirit who leads the Church until the promised return of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the one that bestows the Grace of God on us through prayer and the sacraments. It is the Holy Spirit that makes ordinary things like bread and wine into extraordinary substances, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit that makes ordinary people extraordinary, by filling in our gaps and our empty spaces with grace. When we feel alone and empty, and then we pray and suddenly feel full (or at least less empty), that is the power of the Holy Spirit coming down on us.

The Church

The fifth section of the Creed speaks to the belief in “One, holy, catholic and apostolic church.” There are many people who say “I believe in God but have lost faith in the Church.” Or “I believe in God but I can do this on my own, I don’t need the church.” Or the very popular notion of “I’m spiritual, but not religious.”

Experiential learning helps explain most of our Orthodox concepts, in a way that a sermon or article cannot. One of the “experiences” that led to some clarity on this topic was an exercise we did on the basketball court with one cabin of campers. It went like this:

An icon of Jesus was placed in a random place on the basketball court. A couple of people were chosen and asked to remain out of sight of the basketball court, so they wouldn’t see the beginning of the activity. Then a couple of others who were still on the basketball court (at the opposite end of where the icon is) were blindfolded. They were each asked how many sins, on a scale of 1 (few) to 10 (many) they’d committed in the past year. Both said ten. Each spun around ten times and were instructed to walk towards the icon. No one else present was allowed to talk or help. Of course, these people failed miserably. Both ended up farther away from the icon than when they started, and we stopped them as they were about to go off the basketball court and into the woods. It was fairly obvious that this activity cannot be done alone, and to continue in this for any time without help would result surely in failure and likely an injury. It was obvious that having help and encouragement to get to Christ is essential. The spiritual, non-religious argument debunked. Both wanted to get to Christ. Neither could do it all alone.

Now the activity was repeated, with the two people who didn’t see what had happened so far. They did it one at a

time, and the second one did not watch the first one. There is a reason for this, and that is that each person does this differently. Choose two people, and get two different outcomes.



One person was blindfolded before coming to the basketball court. They hadn’t seen the icon or the setup. I asked, “do you trust me?” And the answer was yes. When I asked “why?” the answer was “because you are a priest.” Basically, trust is based on experience. We don’t trust total strangers. We trust people we know. And we trust people we know of. For instance, I went to a new doctor for something and I trusted the doctor, not because I knew him but because I know other doctors and trust them. Trust is based on experience, our own experience, or the experience of others.

The second question I asked was “Is there someone else you trust?” And the person chose someone else from their cabin to help them. Next, I made a statement, “There is an icon of Christ somewhere on the basketball court” followed by a question “Do you believe that?” The answer was yes, again going on the experience that I haven’t lied to this person before. The whole exercise tilts on the question of “Do you believe there is an icon?” Because if the answer is no, then when I tell them to go find the icon, they won’t. The statement “there is an icon on the basketball court” represents all the things that we believe as Christians, from the Holy Trinity, to Creation, to the Resurrection, to salvation. Our belief in these things is based both on our own experience and the experience of others. In fact, our faith comes first through the experience of someone else. Someone else has told us about the faith, like a parent or a Sunday school teacher, or a priest. Even adults who come to the faith, who have no one personally to guide them, read about the Faith in books, someone has written or said something that guides someone to Christ. No one comes alone.

Back to the exercise, I asked the question of how many sins in the past year. The answer is almost always ten, or a high number. The participant was then told “walk toward the icon and when you need help, just say ‘I need help.’” The chosen helper was told quietly, that the help they could provide was to turn the body of the person towards the icon and let go. The exercise began.

The first person wandered all over the basketball court, narrowly avoiding bumping into things and getting hurt. When asked how they were doing, they said they thought they were

Continued...

doing fine. Obviously, they weren't. After a few minutes of this, I asked "why aren't you asking for help?" The answer was "I don't like asking for help, I got this on my own." To which I replied, "Do you have any idea where you are?" To which they replied, "I'm not even sure what the objective is here." So not only did I have to repeat instructions, I had to repeat the objective, which was to find an icon. Eventually, the person started asking for help and the icon was found. Many people are like this person, they have no one to ask for help or they simply won't ask for help. This is like the Christian who tries to find Christ outside the context of community. Not only they can't, they might even lose understanding of what the goal is. This is why the church has to reaffirm the goal constantly, which is that we are on a journey to salvation. There is a destination, heaven. Some of the where, how, and why are misunderstood, for sure. The church is supposed to help answer those questions.

The second person also struggled to ask for help. I also had to repeat the instructions a few times. It's kind of funny that simple directions have to be repeated. Many people tell me "the Liturgy is the same and the same, why does it matter if we don't come often?" Or "the Bible is the same and the same, why do we need to read it constantly?" And the answer is, that we need repeated reinforcement of these basic ideas because the noise of the world makes us forget these instructions, it even distracts us from what the real goal is. The second person at one point said, "Can't you just take me by the hand and take me to the icon?" Great question! The answer, however, is no. We walk by faith, not by force. To take someone by the hand and drag them to Christ would be to take them by force. The choice to follow Christ is just that, a choice. The church exists to share Christ with those who don't know Him and to encourage our journey towards Him for those who do. This world has conditioned us, as I said in my last article, to think that we are our own god, to not rely on others, to not ask for help, or to not trust that when we ask for help we actually will be helped. This exercise is only done successfully in the context of community, with the humility to ask for help and the faith to follow the direction provided.

I asked a counselor who had seen this exercise before to do it "the right way." When asked who she trusted, she said "everyone." The meaning of this is that in our lives, we hopefully have many people to help us on our journey to Christ. She also asked for help with every step she took. And despite being blindfolded and disoriented by spinning around ten times, she actually walked a straight line to Christ. And THAT is how the Christian life should work, a faith in where we are going, a humility to ask for help, a discipline to ask God and others for help consistently, and a community of people who is eager to provide the help and encouragement to get there.

The Life of the Age to Come

Which brings us to the final statement of the Creed, the

looking toward the Resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. This is the goal. It's important that this is in the Creed. Because when one has a goal, one works backward from that goal and shapes today's behavior accordingly. For instance, someone who starts college has the goal to graduate. Working backward, as they begin their first semester, they strive to do well in their classes. Why? Not because graduation is around the corner, it is years away. However, not doing well in classes the first semester might result in being removed from college and thus no graduation. If the goal is salvation, eternal life, and heaven, then we work backward from that goal to today, and ask ourselves, what are we doing today to get us towards this goal?

Some Fun Camp Activities

At camp, we do lots of fun activities that have to do with trusting others. Most of these are done on the ropes course, which is one of the favorite activities of the campers. One is called the trust fall, where participants fall backward off a platform, trusting that people down below will catch them. Another is a 12-foot wall that they are lifted up and pulled over, trusting in those lifting and pulling and ceding control to them. Another is a balance beam where everyone in the cabin gets on a big log and tries to balance it. It's on a fulcrum and when one side is up in the air, it's pretty high and actually kind of scary. Another is the "spider web" that the cabin has to get through, with many of the campers needing to be lifted through "holes" in the web. They must plan ahead and work together to accomplish the task.

Another fun activity is the "trust walk" where campers are paired up at random with someone, one is blindfolded and they walk around over obstacles and through the woods. This is a great thing to do co-ed, as it teaches a valuable lesson on how to care for someone else, like when you are dating. In fact, all of these activities have real-life applications. In this activity, the ones who are blindfolded do not know where they are going, they may not even know who they are paired with. But they go (most of them eagerly) and trust that they will reach their destination and that they will be taken care of.

A Profound Thought

What if, in doing the trust walk, the seeing partner let go? The blindfolded person would have no guide, would feel lost, alone, abandoned. That is not good. What if the blindfolded person was the one who decided to let go? Even though this would be their choice, to go without the guide, the result would be the same—lost, alone, abandoned, and if they tried to continue walking, maybe get injured.

What if the walk suddenly stopped? The sighted partner was still holding on to the blindfolded partner, they just weren't moving. The blindfolded partner might have some doubt as to what is going on. They might feel annoyed that they aren't moving. But

Continued...

they wouldn't feel alone. Which brings me to a profound quote again from Metropolitan Kallistos Ware's book, "The Orthodox Way":

Faith is not merely the supposition that something might be true, but the assurance that Someone is there.

Faith is the assurance that someone is there! And sometimes this is all we feel. Sometimes we feel that we are not getting anywhere. Sometimes we feel like God is silent. To have faith means to believe that even if God is silent, He is not absent. Even if we don't feel He is guiding, that He is there, He is present. This is what faith is, the assurance that someone is there, even if the path is not known, even if it feels like we are not moving down the path.

A Personal Confession

I like to think we are a family at St. John. And in a family, it is safe for family members to be honest. Ideally. If it is not safe to be honest in a family, one must wonder whether there is love, trust, or any of the other things that should comprise a stable family. Safety and honesty are probably works in progress for many families, including our church family. So, I'm going to share something honest with you.



There have been times in my life where God has felt silent. I can't say He's ever felt absent. But for sure He has felt silent. There have been times in my life, and even in

my ministry, where I feel like I'm holding God's hand, and He's holding mine, but we are not moving. There are times when I've prayed to God to "move" and there is no movement, only silence. This quote from Metropolitan Kallistos Ware is very profound for me. Faith is the assurance that God is there.

And so, when I feel like I'm not getting anywhere, I keep showing up. I keep hold of God's hand, even when it feels like we are sitting still, like I'm not getting anywhere. And this is what I encourage you to do. Be assured that He is there, even when it feels like He is silent.

There is a saying, "We plan and God laughs." Perhaps the better way to say it is to quote from Isaiah 55:8-9, where he writes, in relation to God:

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.

There are lots of thoughts I have that I would like to talk to God about, lots of unanswered questions that I guess I'll have to save for when I meet Him. Summer camp was an exercise in our plans not working out exactly as we had hoped. My assistant got sick with Covid. It rained EVERY DAY and EVERY NIGHT of the week. Plans constantly had to get changed. Yet, despite each plan that got changed, and each event that got canceled, we all still hung in there, and everyone had a good time. It seems like it rains often on my life plans, and maybe it does on yours too. My advice (which I try to take myself) is to keep plugging away, whether it is a life setback, a spiritual setback, or a rainy day that doesn't materialized the way you hoped it would.

Camp Shows "What is Possible"

One of my favorite things about summer camp is that it is a break from our worldly reality. The campers have to turn in their phones. And while I can't turn in mine (I wish I could), I purposely do not read the news, or check email often as I do when I'm at home. The campers live in cabins (little communities) of 16 campers and 2-3 counselors. There are short services every morning and evening. There is 15 minutes set apart for "alone with God" where all activities stop so we can pray and sit alone with our thoughts. Many of the campers say that "Alone with God" is their favorite part of the day, because they never get to be silent and still.

We do wholesome things, like with the senior cabins, we do "date nights" where guys and randomly paired with girls (their request) and they go out for a walk under the stars, where they just walk and talk. Wholesome. Good. And not what they get at home. Back home, I'm told, there is pressure to have a "body count", which means the number of people they've had sex with. In my middle-aged mind, that is ridiculous. But in their teenage life, it is a reality. How wonderful that we show them that it is possible to go on a "date" and just talk.

Campers and staff have the opportunity to go to confession. In the past couple of years, post covid, the actual confessing of sins takes very little time, a few minutes at most. What these people really want is a conversation, they want a safe place to talk, many of them need a good cry, and many who are outwardly confident are inwardly shattered. This gives them a safe place to put their "stuff." How sad that there isn't a place the other 51 weeks of the year. Camp is great, even if it is an "unreal reality." Or perhaps camp is the reality we are supposed to be living, and everything else is "unreal." Walking and talking sounds a lot more attractive and real than a "body count."

The challenge once camp is over is to keep the experience going somehow in our church. And for the vast majority of people who are reading this mes-

Continued...

Liturgical Schedule for August



Monday, August 1

Beginning of the Dormition Fast-Holy Cross

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

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

Wednesday, August 3

Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 10:00 a.m.

Friday, August 5

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

Saturday, August 6

Transfiguration of our Savior

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

Sunday, August 7

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

Monday, August 8

Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 10:00 a.m.



Wednesday, August 10

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

Friday, August 12

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

Sunday, August 14

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

Great Vespers of the Dormition 6:00 p.m.

Monday, August 15

Dormition of the Virgin Mary

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

Sunday, August 21

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

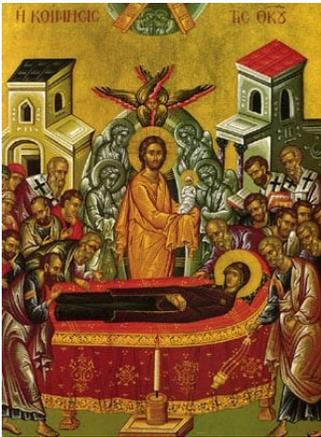
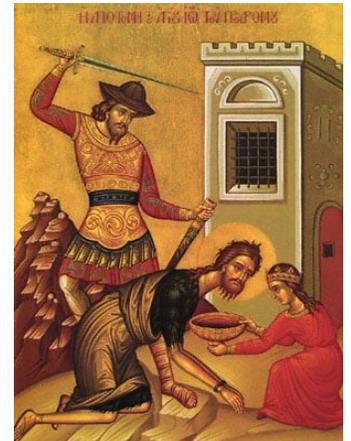
Sunday, August 28

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

Monday, August 29

Beheading of St. John the Baptist

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



Thursday, September 1

Beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year

(The Indiction)

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

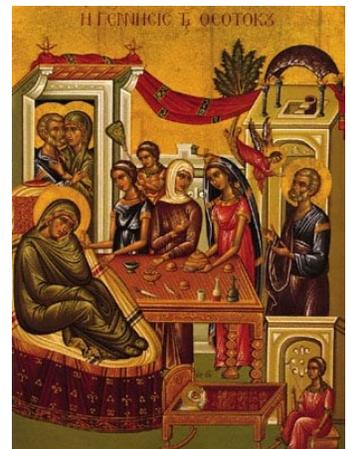
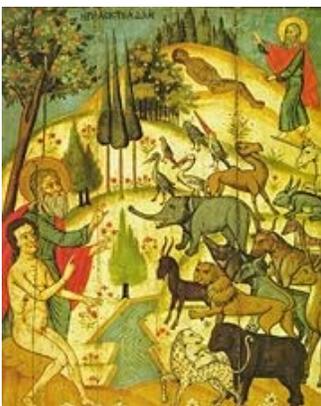
Sunday, September 4

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

Thursday, September 8

Nativity of the Virgin Mary

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



Liturgical Notes for June/July 2022

Monday, August 1 – Procession of the Holy Cross

This feast day was established in the middle ages, to thank God for simultaneous victories that the Greeks have over the Saracens and the Russians had over the Bulgars. In both battles, the soldiers carried crosses. It then became a tradition for the Holy Cross to be carried in procession in Constantinople on August 1, to be placed in Hagia Sophia from August 1-13 and then to be returned to the church of the imperial court where it was kept on August 14. This feastday is also a great way to begin the fast of the Dormition. Each year, we try to do a few different feastday liturgies, and this is one of them. It is one of three feastdays of the Holy Cross (though not often celebrated), along with September 14 and the third Sunday of Great Lent.

Paraklesis Services of Supplication to the Virgin Mary

The service of Paraklesis or “Intercessory Prayer” to the Most Holy Theotokos, the Mother of God, is chanted during the fasting period of the first fourteen days of August, preceding the Feast of the Koimisis or “Falling Asleep” of the Virgin Mary, which is August 15. In this service we ask the Theotokos to pray for us and to intercede for us with her Son and our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not the Theotokos who saves us. God saves us. Thus we do not pray to the Theotokos, but we pray through the Theotokos, that through her intercession, we may find favor with God. We ask her to join us in extending our prayers to the Lord. The Paraklesis service is chanted not only for fourteen days in August, but can be chanted in at any time of the year, for those who are in need of prayer in time of sickness, despair, struggle, or any occasion, since any of life’s experiences provide us an opportunity for prayer. The Paraklesis Service consists of soft, melodic chants of supplication to the Virgin Mary, and lasts about an hour. It is also one of few services in the church where we commemorate individuals out loud during the service. You will find a place to write the names of you and your families, loved ones and friends (who are living) to be commemorated at the Paraklesis Services in the August Messenger. The Feast of the Dormition will be celebrated on Monday, August 15. We should all attempt to keep the fast, at least from meat, during the first fourteen days of August, and we should each plan to receive Holy Communion on August 1, 6, 7, 14 or 15. Paraklesis dates for 2022 are: August 1 (6:00 p.m.), 3 (10:00 a.m.), 5 (6:00 p.m.), 8 (10:00 a.m.), 10 (6:00 p.m.), and 12 (6:00 p.m.) Paraklesis will be held once a month beginning in September.

Saturday, August 6 - Transfiguration of our Savior We read in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke, how Jesus was Transfigured on Mount Tabor in the presence of His Disciples. Matthew 17:2 says, “His face shone like the sun and His clothes became as white as the light.” Jesus was shown in the fullness of His glory as God, and standing beside Him were Moses and Elijah, the two greatest prophets of the Old Testament. This showed the Disciples that the man Jesus was indeed God as well, and pre-figured His glory at the Resurrection and Ascension.

Sunday, August 14 - Great Vespers for the Feast of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary—In the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church, the day begins with the setting of the sun. On August 15, we celebrate the Dormition of the Virgin Mary. But the actual feast begins with the setting of the sun on the evening of August 14. An evening service, called Vespers, announces each new day. In most parishes, Vespers is only offered a few times a year. For instance, in Tampa, we do Vespers on January 6 in the evening, as the prelude of the feast of St. John the Baptist on January 7. There are a few others times of the year we offer this service as well. This year, we will begin a tradition of celebrating Great Vespers on August 14. There is a tradition of an “Epitaphios” of the Virgin Mary. Most of us know the term “Epitaphios” as it relates to Christ in the tomb. In fact, the word “Epi-Taphios” literally means “in the tomb.” On Good Friday, we lay the “Epitaphios” of Christ into the Kouvouklion, the tomb of Christ. There is a tradition of doing the same thing on August 14, laying an “Epitaphios” (icon of the Virgin Mary in the tomb) in a Kouvouklion. I’ve personally thought that the Kouvouklion should be used once a year, only for the Body of Christ, which is why we have not done this service previously. However, because of the pandemic, Felix, our maintenance man, built us a small Kouvouklion because we did not use the regular one this year. So, now we have two Kouvouklia, the regular large one and now a smaller one. We have also acquired a beautiful Epitaphios of the Virgin Mary. On August 14, this year and every year going forward, we will use the Epitaphios of the Virgin Mary and place it in the small Kouvouklion. And on Good Friday, we will utilize the large Kouvouklion for the Epitaphios of Christ. Great Vespers on August 14 will be at 6:00 p.m. We will display the Epitaphios of the Virgin Mary and the Kouvouklion from August 14-23 (which is the leave-taking of the Dormition).

Sunday, August 15 - Dormition of the Virgin Mary—This is one of the Twelve Major Feastdays of the Church Year, and commemorates the Falling Asleep of the Virgin Mary. When the Virgin Mary died, all the disciples were present, save for Thomas, who could not get there in time for the funeral. When Thomas arrived, they opened the tomb for him to pay his respects to the Virgin Mary. The tomb was found empty, save for the belt of the Virgin Mary. Her body, along with her soul, had been assumed into heaven. This shows us that those who are righteous will

be taken to heaven. It is not just Christ who went to heaven, but all of us can go. The Virgin Mary was not God—she was one of us, and shows to us, in the most excellent example, of what it means to live a life of obedience to God. We honor her above every person, even every angel, as we chant, “Greater in honor than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim (Cherubim and Seraphim are two order of angels, the ones who stand closest to God), you without corruption gave birth to God the Word, and are truly Theotokos, you do we magnify.”

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

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

Donations Needed

We are looking for donations for the following:

1. Artoklasia—five loaves of sweet bread (which can be baked or bought at the bakery in Tarpon Springs) for August 14 (Vespers in the evening) and for Monday, August 15 (for Divine Liturgy in the morning)
2. Flowers for the Icon of the Dormition--\$100—this icon will be displayed August 14 and 15.

If interested in donating either of these, please contact Fr. Stavros.

Names to be Commemorated for Paraklesis

Please write the names of all those whom you wish to be commemorated in the Paraklesis Services this August.
Please mail into the office or bring to church as soon as possible.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

St. John the Baptist Community News

Meeting of Ministry Heads—There will be a meeting of our ministry heads on Tuesday, August 16, from 6:30-9:00 p.m. to discuss the calendar and reinvigorating our ministries after 18 months of the pandemic. This meeting will be held via zoom, so that we can look at the calendar on a shared screen. Each ministry is asked to have at least one representative present. Also, if you know that you have specific calendar dates, please send those ahead of time to Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com

Prayer for School Students - Sunday, August 7 All school students and teachers (high school and below) are invited to participate in a special prayer that will be held at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on August 7, prior to the beginning of the public school year. Fr. Stavros will offer a special prayer for all of our students and teachers as they begin the new school year.

Prayer for College Students - Sunday, August 14 All college students and professors are invited to celebrate the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, August 15 with us. At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, Fr. Stavros will offer a prayer for all college students as they begin a new school year.

GOYA Meeting - Sunday, August 21 Our first GOYA meeting of the new school year will be held on Sunday, August 21 from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner will be provided. One parent of each GOYAn is asked to attend the meeting. Also, there will be a parents' meeting, while the GOYAns meet with Fr. Stavros, to go over procedures for the year, review the yearly calendar, fill out emergency forms and arrange for parents to sign up to do a meal for one of the meetings.

GOYA Lock-in - Saturday, August 27 Our GOYA will have an end of summer lock-in on Saturday, August 27, beginning at 4:00 p.m. and ending after Divine Liturgy on Sunday, August 28.

College Student Get together—We will have one final get together for college students this summer on Monday, August 8, at 6:00 p.m. All college students are invited to attend. A free dinner will be provided. Please RSVP to Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com.

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

Adopt a college student—We started an adopt a college student program two year ago. We will be contacting all those who had college students they “adopted” last year and making sure you want to continue, as well as reorganizing which students are still in college, who is new to college, who has graduated college, etc. If you would like to participate and adopt a college student, please send your name to Father Stavros and Vasili by August 14. If you were part of this program last year, you don't have to contact us, we will be contacting you. Only people who are new to the program need to contact us.

Parish Assembly Meeting-Sunday, August 21-We will be having our first (of two) Parish Assembly Meetings for the year on Sunday, August 21. The main topics of conversation will be the Greek Festival, the retiring of our mortgage, and some issues pertaining to updating our church sanctuary. Please plan to attend. Some exciting news is going to be shared.

Repairs to the Church Ceiling-For years we have been looking up at a ceiling of the church that has been badly in need of repair and updating. This past month, the ceiling that is forward of the dome, meaning between the dome and the altar, was cleaned, re-plastered, repaired and repainted. The difference is stunning. A special thank you to Rip Panos, our PC Vice President who is also in charge of buildings and grounds, for seeing this project through to completion.

In the course of the repairs and clean-up, it is obvious that some of the black on the ceiling is the result of soot being drawn up by the AC vents from the 7 day candles. The Parish Council will discuss what to do about the 7-day candles going forward, as we do not want to be in the same position again in a few years with a black ceiling. Until the Parish Council can come to a decision, we are going to temporarily suspend the use of the 7-day candles in the church. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

Men's Group—The Men's Group will meet on Sunday, August 28, at 5:00 p.m. We will walk to a nearby restaurant and have dinner and then come back to church for a discussion, concluding by 7:30 p.m. All men of the community

are welcome to participate.

Women's Bible Study will begin again on Tuesday, September 13.

Thursday night Book study with Vasili - will continue meeting at 6:30 p.m. every Thursday through the month of August, both in-person at the Church, and virtually on Zoom, continuing to read "*The Divine Liturgy: A Commentary in the Light of the Fathers*" by Hieromonk Gregorios. For August, the dates are: Thursday, August 4; Thursday, August 11, Thursday, August 18; and Thursday, August 25. Our final class will be Thursday, September 1.

Monday night Bible study with Fr. John—will continue meeting at 6:30 p.m. on most Monday evenings. Join us in person or via zoom for some very informative, lively and interactive discussions on how we apply Biblical principles in our everyday lives. See the Sunday bulletin for specific topics. For August, the dates are; Monday, August 1 (at 7:00 p.m., after Paraklesis); Tuesday, August 9; Monday, August 15; Monday, August 22; and Monday, August 29.

Mandatory Altar Boy Meeting & Training Sunday, August 28

All altar boys are requested to attend a meeting on Sunday, August 28, following the Divine Liturgy. We will go over procedures on how the altar boys serve, updating and making a few small changes. This meeting is important for new altar boys but also older ones, as we seek to continue to improve our service. The meeting will last approximately 1 hour. Each boy is asked to have at least one parent present. New Schedule to take effect on August 21. As of publication time, the new altar boy schedule is still being finalized. All altar boys will receive a copy of the new schedule prior to August 21.

Parish Registry

Baptism-Chloe Catherine Bilthouse, daughter of Kevin and Corena Bilthouse, was baptized on Sunday, May 29. Monique Nikolov was the Godparent. Na Sas Zisi!

Double Baptism—Ava (Mary) and Collin (Michael) Snyder were baptized on Tuesday, June 21. Godparents were Petros Skourellos, Dante Skourellos and Michele Skourellos. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism-Lukas James Papadakis, son of Frangikos and Katerina Papadakis, was baptized on Sunday, June 26. Athanasia Boelher was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism-Pano Gruer Sullivan, son of Henry Sullivan and Tina Sarantos, was baptized on Sunday, June 26. Sara Sarantos was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Funeral-John Anthonis passed away on Wednesday, May 25. Funeral was on Tuesday, May 31. May his memory be eternal!

Junior Olympics

A big thank you to everyone who participated in the Junior Olympics June 10-12. For the first time in three years, we had the full three-day event. Thanks for Dwight Forde, who chaired this event. Thanks also to Michael and Bessie Palios for all of their help in organizing. Thanks to all of our parents and our parish volunteers for their help. And thanks to our GOYAnS for representing our parish so well. St. John brought home the gold in Junior Boys Basketball. Girls volleyball got a silver medal. Tampa A boys volleyball brought home the bronze. Tampa B dodgeball got the gold medal. Several individual awards were won in track and games of skill.

Pictures from Junior Olympics



Our large St. John Olympics Team



Our Gold Medal winning Junior Boys Basketball Team



Welcome back, Charlie!



Strike!



1-2-3 Tampa!

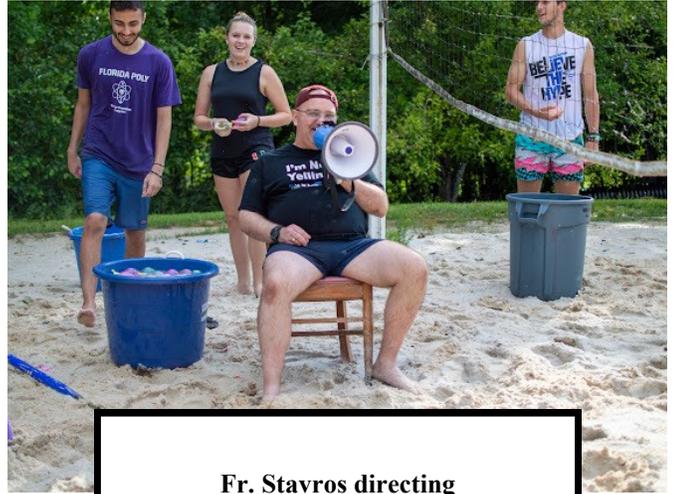


Our Silver Medal winning Girls Volleyball Team

Pictures from Summer Camp



Our large St. John group



Fr. Stavros directing



Making New Friends



Artemis Xenick leading Music

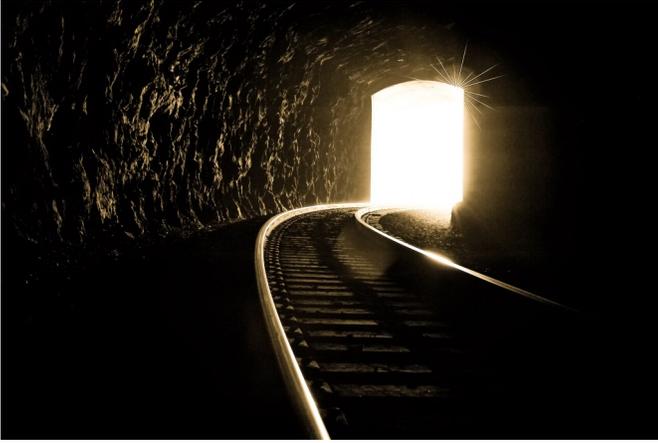


Mike Palios was the victim in our Murder Mystery



Our awesome Camp Staff

On the Lighter side



A pessimist sees a dark tunnel.
An optimist sees light at the end of the tunnel.
A realist sees a freight train.
The train driver sees 3 idiots standing on the tracks.



One great thing about Florida heat is that you can guarantee that no one is waiting in your back seat to kill you.

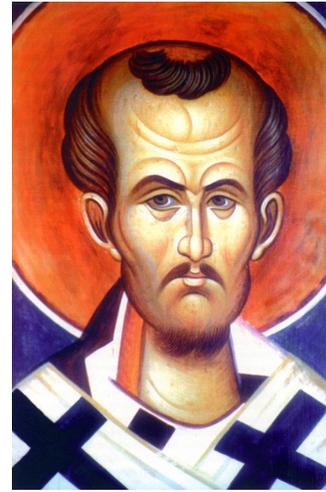
One day you're in your 20s, staying up until 3 am eating pizza and dancing like no one's watching. Then suddenly you're in your mid-40s, eating kale, going to bed at 8 pm, and you can't dance because you pulled a muscle putting on your socks.

Substitutes for a healthy diet

Pasta—Zucchini
Chips—Carrots
Milk—Almond milk
Rice—Cauliflower
Butter—Sadness
Cheese—Nope
Tacos—This is stupid...
I'm not doing it.

On the Serious side

Jesus didn't eat with sinners and tax collectors because He wanted to appear inclusive, tolerant and accepting. He ate with them to call them to repentance.



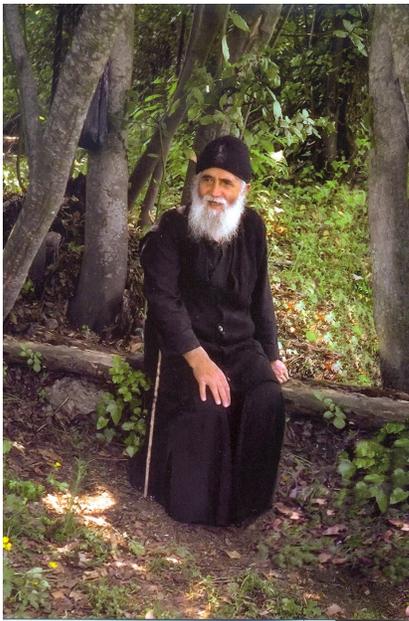
We baptize even infants, though they are not defiled by sins, so they too may be given holiness, righteousness, adoption, inheritance, brotherhood with Christ and membership in Him. ~St. John Chrysostom, ca. 390

If we don't teach our children who God is, someone else will teach them everything He isn't.

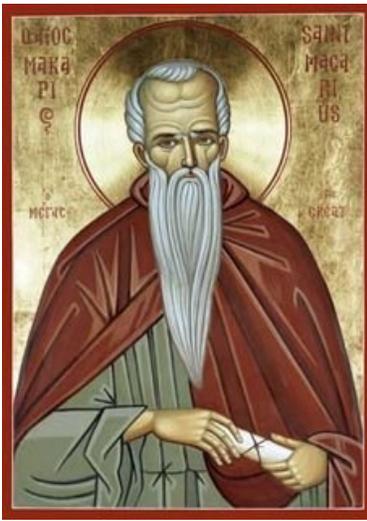
If anyone thinks that Christians regard unchastity as THE great vice, he is quite wrong. The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual: the pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of bossing and patronizing and spoiling sport, and backbiting; the pleasures of power, of hatred. C.S. Lewis, "Christian Behavior"

A Texas minister said it best: "We have created a culture that does not value life, that does not honor God, that does not respect authority. We are reaping the consequences of those actions, and that's not going to be reversed by a security guard or a metal detector. The long-term goal is to change hearts. We're allowing the culture to raise our kids."

The danger is that Satan is dimming our light so slowly that darkness seems normal.



Evil walks with small steps. If it were to come all at once, we would not be deceived. ~St. Paisios of Mount Athos



It is not necessary to say a lot of words, just stretch your hands up to God and say, “Lord, as You will and as You desire, lead me.” ~St. Macarius the Great

If you see someone falling behind, walk beside them.

If you see someone being ignored, find a way to include them.

Always remind people of their worth. One small act could mean the world to them.

Happiness is not about getting all you want, it is about enjoying all you have.

Living a life in pursuit of happiness leads to misery, as happiness is a transitory state, and living under the belief that one should never suffer is delusion. But, if one lives with a purpose (And it is God who made us this way), then we can experience long-lasting joy as a result of making right decisions, AND we have the fortitude to endure suffering. I don't want to get too heavy in terms of theology, but a good point is made when sacrifice is defined as “making a deal with God to trade your present for your future.” We don't hope for Heaven as just reward for all of the points we've earned doing things in this life; it is the hope that we will indeed experience the full presence of God, along with His people, and that the scars we picked up along the way will be healed.

The purpose of worship is not to obtain an emotional high, to placate the flesh, or be entertained. It's not a theater stage for dramatics or performance. The purpose of worship is to honor, glorify and praise our Holy God. John 4:23-24; Mark 7: 6-13

“I'm spiritual, not religious.” This anti-creed of American culture is as close as it gets to a universal doctrine of our age. No doubt you've heard someone say it, or you've seen it on a bumper sticker. Everyone, apparently, wants to be spiritual, but no one wants to be religious. What is the difference? To be “spiritual, not religious” is to have a god that doesn't talk. As soon as God opens His mouth, there is religion, doctrine and assertions. As soon as God talks, there is truth, and the truth is always distinguished from error. The desire for spirituality without religion is the idolatrous longing of the sinful heart for a god that is mute. ~C. Bryan Wolfmueller, from “Has American Christianity Failed?”

Everyone you meet always asks if you have a career, are married, or own a house as if life was some kind of grocery list. But no one ever asks you if you are happy.





GREEK AFTERNOON SCHOOL AT ST. JOHN'S

**OPEN REGISTRATION TO
ALL CHILDREN BETWEEN
5-12 YEARS OLD**

**LEARN GREEK, HISTORY, MYTHOLOGY
AND DANCE**

**SATURDAYS BEGINNING THE LAST WEEK
OF AUGUST FROM 12:30 P.M. - 2:30 P.M.**

ΜΙΛΑΤΕ
ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΑ;

JOIN US

CONTACT OUR TEACHERS TO JOIN

IOANNIS GIAVARAS | 718-419-4413 | IGIAVARAS@GMAIL.COM

CHRISA GIAVARAS | 727-612-7049 | CKAPNOGIANNIS@GMAIL.COM

**MR. & MRS. MICHAEL HALYKOYTAKIS ARE GRACIOUSLY DONATING FUNDS TO
COVER ALL COSTS FOR THE ENTIRE PROGRAM FOR THE FIRST YEAR WHICH
INCLUDES TUITION, SUPPLIES, ETC. FOR ALL STUDENTS ATTENDING.**

St. John The Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Community Outreach

Hello and WELCOME! **On the 3rd Saturday of each month**, we volunteer 2 1/2 hrs of our time to provide for the needy and homeless of our community in East Tampa. We partner with local charity Matthew 25, Metropolitan Ministries and USF Medical School to serve breakfast, provide clothing and medical needs for our guests.

To Volunteer: Click on our Sign Up Genius below. If you forget to sign up, you can still come!

Place: Tampa Hope @ 3704 E. 3rd Ave. Tampa East

Time: 8:00 AM to 10:30AM

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

Matthew 25 founders Peggy & Mike Kanter, as well as Greg & Victoria Melton, are Go To people if you have questions or need direction on where you may be needed when you arrive.

Below find the Sign Up Genius for every upcoming 3rd Saturday of Month. Find the dates that work for you and sign up.

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0f48a5a62da3f49-community1>
(Or use QR code)

Greg Melton 813-967-2074 gmelt12@gmail.com



Memorial & 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.

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).



Veterans / 1st Responders Ministry Update!

Will be held in the Church Hall (Choir Room) on Tuesday, August 23rd at 6:30 pm. All members who volunteered to research specific topics of interest will give a report on their findings. We will then vote to move forward with the recommendations from these members. Several excellent recommendations have already been received and we look forward to discussing each of them. Join us for this very important meeting!

Youth Protection Program Reminder:

At this time, many of our Youth Workers' background checks are coming up for renewal, which is done every two years. On or about your two-year mark, Praesidium will automatically send an email to you from backgroundcheck@praesidiuminc.com when a new background check is needed. Please be on the lookout for these emails, as the link for a background check expires after two weeks. Also, the Youth Protection Program administrator will notify you via email when it's time to renew your online training by completing the 2-part/2-quiz Youth Safety module and the 1-part/1-quiz Youth Worker Regulations module.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Suzanne Pileggi at smpileggi@gmail.com or (813) 244-5855.



St. John Stewardship Report 2020-2022

Year to Year Comparison ~	2022*	2021*	2020*
Pledged Year to Date	\$438,153	\$492,978	\$513,416
Received Year to Date	\$385,157	\$338,154	\$362,348
Average Pledge	\$1,981	\$1,300	\$1,400
Median Pledge	\$1,290	\$1,090	\$880
# of Individual/Families Pledged/Giving	335	386	389
*YTD as of 7/19/2022, 7/19/2021, 7/19/2020			

Thank you Pauline Karas



For over three years, since the sudden passing of Artie Palios in spring 2019, Pauline Karas has served as our choir director. She helped get us through the pain of losing Artie, our long-time director. She helped get us through a pandemic. She kept our choir together at a time when many choirs across the country were falling apart. And she did it all as a volunteer. We thank you Pauline for your three-plus years of service as our choir director. Pauline

has been a valued member of our choir for decades. She has a beautiful and strong soprano voice. She is going to stay in the choir and resume singing, and for this we are also grateful. Thank you Pauline! Well done, good and faithful servant!

Introducing Tara Swartzbaugh, our new Choir Director



Tara Richards Swartzbaugh was raised in the Presbyterian church in suburban Detroit, and attended college in Tampa and Texas. Since returning to Tampa in 1989 she has served as Choir Director/Pianist/Organist at First Presbyterian Church of Brandon, United Community Church in Sun City Center, and St. Catherine's Episcopal in Temple Terrace. She was briefly the Organist at St. John in 1989-90, and has retained a close relationship with many St. John parishioners.

Tara is a faculty member at the University of Tampa where she is a Piano and Theory instructor. She holds a Bachelor of Music Degree from The University of Tampa, and a Master of Arts in Piano Performance and Pedagogy from Texas Woman's University. She serves as Musical Director and accompanist for The University of Tampa Department of Theater and Dance, and is Staff Accompanist in the Music Department. She is the director of UT's OPUS Broadway/Pop group, and is the accompanist for the H. B. Plant High School Choral Department. She lives in South Tampa with her husband Bill, and their five cats.

TWELVE DISCIPLES PROGRAM

I had rather speak five words with my understanding... than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. (1 Cor. 14:19)

St. John the Baptist's **Twelve Disciples Project** continues, as dozens of your fellow Orthodox Christians, Prayer Warriors, set aside a few minutes each day to pray for "mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, protection and pardon and remission of the sins for the servants of God", all members of the St. John's congregation. Should you be interested in participating, please contact Mathew Balasis, 727-345-4855 (mathewbalasis@verizon.net).

We are approaching a most glorious time in our Holy Orthodox Church's calendar: the fall or harvest season. This season in our Orthodox Church is always highlighted by the commemoration and Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos on August 15th. This Feast day marks the "falling asleep" or kimisis of our beloved Panagia, the Mother of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

During His crucifixion Christ entrusted the care of his beloved Mother to His disciple, St. John the Evangelist. John cared for her the remainder of her life in his home in Jerusalem until her repose. All the Disciples, with the exception of Thomas, who was three days journey from Jerusalem when she fell asleep, were present at her side and are represented in the Icon to the right. The Apostles present bore witness that her Son came down and carried her soul to heaven; the Panagia is depicted in the Icon in her Son's arms as an infant.



"At your Dormition that transcended death, O Theotokos and Mother of Life, clouds caught the Apostles up into the air; and, from being dispersed throughout the world, they were reunited before your immaculate body. And when they had buried you with dignity, they lifted up their voices and sang the words of Gabriel, 'Rejoice, O unwedded and virgin Mother who are full of grace; the Lord is with you.'

Along with them, 'entreat your Son and our God, for the salvation of our souls.'

(Doxastikon, Matins August 15 *Trans. By Fr. Seraphim Dedes*)



After her repose, she was laid in a tomb near the Garden of Gethsemane. Three days later, the Apostle Thomas arrived finding that he arrived too late and the Panagia had already fallen asleep and been placed in her tomb. Thomas asked and was given permission to visit her tomb. He encountered an empty tomb along with an angel who confirmed that her body was no longer there but had been assumed under the protection of her Son and carried to be close to Him in Heaven.

Who are the Twelve Disciples Group?

The opportunity for you to share the joy of praying for others is available to you as a participating member of the Twelve Disciples Group. Participating in the Twelve Disciples group requires no special talent, no physical ability, no financial investment but only a desire to offer up prayerful love for your fellow members of the St. John the Baptist congregation (Just as fellow parishioners are also offering daily prayers for you and your family.) There are no restrictions. You choose the time during the day when you can spend a quiet moment with God.

One of the results of this meditative prayer is that you will develop a personal relationship with the members on your prayer list.

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

Participation will warm your spiritual heart.

Prayer List: Lord Jesus Christ, Physician of our Souls and Bodies, visit and heal your servants: Stavroula; Felix; Sylvia Michos; Eva Coppalla; Christopher; Christopher; Peter Nenos; Tony Ekonomou; Keith Lynn & Patrick Carroll; Ourania Tziotis, Irina, Marina, Yuri, and Christophoros; Ashley Snyder; Evangelos & Caroline Critkas; Constantinos & Kallotina Klimis; Christine Alex, June, Lillian Thomas; Scotty; Desi Serriera; Ashley Kladakis; Dora Kallas, Kathy & Andrew Bouzinekis; Anastasia; Virginia Georgiou, Toulou 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, 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, Alice Stoccardo, John Alexander, Michael Romero, George Hambos, Dean Kondilis and Family, Bill and Nancy Manikas, Patricia Costello, 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 are available to watch at anytime.**



Like



Pictures Go to Flickr.com and search "St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church" or go to www.flickr.com/photos/stjohngoctampa

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 3,678 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 prayer-team365@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 SIX books that are available both in the bookstore and online. They are entitled:

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

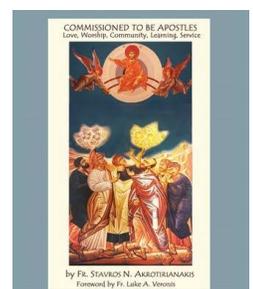
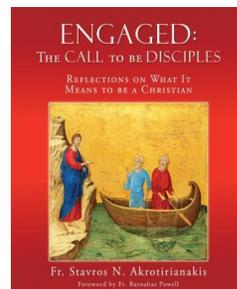
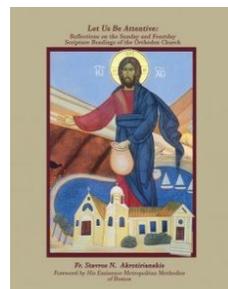
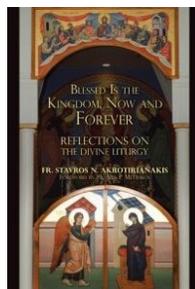
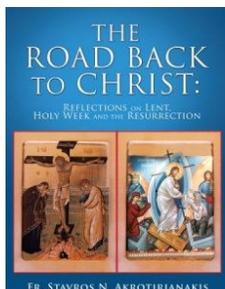
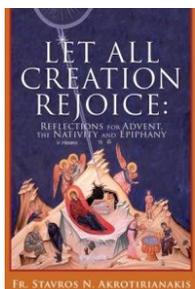
The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection

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, Reflections on What it Means to be a Christian

Commissioned to be Apostles: Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service



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 the YAH.

MEETING DATE AND TIME:

Our meetings are held once a month from 11:30 to 1 p.m., usually at the Kourmolis Hall or at a restaurant in place of meetings at the hall. From time to time we may go on fieldtrips.

Birthdays

Nancy Manikas—7/13,
Presbytera Loretta Karpelena—8/10
Martha Kapetan—8/25



We lost a special friend in Mary Nenos in early June.

**May Her Memory Be Eternal!
A strong supporter of Young At Heart**



Core Values: Love, Worship, Community, Learning, & Service

We continue to reach out to those who are homebound due to illness or are in assisted living facilities as part of our Church's fulfillment of the core values of love and community. Several of our members and parishioners visited Mary and Peter Nenos after they moved to an assisted living facility in Ocala, Fla. Those who went included Sandra Pappas, Kathy Mitseas, Bill and Nancy Manikas, Michael and Diane Trimis, Lisa Alsina, the Nenos Family, and others. In addition, the Nunns and Father Vionnikios of the monasteries in Ocala and friends in the greater Ocala area visited them occasionally.

Planned Activities

In **May** we held our luncheon/meeting at the Acropolis Restaurant on West Kennedy Blvd. and there was a large turn-out (18 members). We talked about continuing our meetings through the summer and visiting the Tampa Art Museum in June or July. The significance of these meetings is to **enjoy the fellowship of our friends.**

In **June** we visited the Tampa Art Museum where we had a private tour, by Branko Van Oppen of the Classical Greek Art collection. It is one of the largest collection of its kind in Florida. Afterwards we had a pleasant dinner at Miquels' restaurant.

In **July** we met for a potluck luncheon at the Kourmolis Center and Bill Manikas lead is in a game of Trivia Pursuit on religious topics.

For more information and to get on our email list, contact: Bill Manikas at wmanikas@gmail.com or (813) 716-8185

Or:

Dora Morgan at 813-613-3738

Hemochromatosis

Hemochromatosis is a disorder in which extra iron builds up in the body to harmful levels. Your body needs iron to stay healthy, make red blood cells, build muscle and hearts cells, and do the daily tasks that your body and internal organs need to do. However, too much iron is harmful.

The human body typically controls the amount of iron that is absorbed from the diet, increasing the amount when iron is needed and decreasing the amount when iron levels in the body are too high. In hemochromatosis, the body absorbs too much iron from the diet each day.

Without treatment, hemochromatosis can cause iron overload, a buildup of iron that can damage many parts of the body, including the liver, heart, pancreas, endocrine glands, and joints.

The buildup of harmful levels of iron, hemochromatosis can cause symptoms including:

- feeling tired or weak
- pain in the joints, particularly in the knees and hands
- loss of interest in sex or erectile dysfunction
- pain in the abdomen over the liver
- darkening of skin color, which may appear gray, metallic, or bronze
-

With more severe iron overload, people may develop signs and symptoms of complications, such as cirrhosis, diabetes, or heart failure.



Not everyone with hemochromatosis has symptoms, and hemochromatosis may not cause symptoms for many years. Symptoms typically begin after age 40, and, on average, women develop symptoms about 10 years later than men do. Gene mutations cause the most common type of hemochromatosis.



Doctors may first suspect hemochromatosis based on a medical and family history, a physical exam and lab tests. Doctors diagnose hemochromatosis based on blood tests to check levels of iron and certain proteins in the blood and to check for gene mutations that commonly cause hemochromatosis. In some cases, doctors may also use a liver biopsy to confirm iron overload is present.

Treatment of hemochromatosis can improve symptoms and prevent complications. In most cases, doctors treat hemochromatosis with phlebotomy, or drawing about a pint of blood at a time, on a regular schedule. This is the most direct and safe way to lower body stores of iron. If you have hemochromatosis, you should eat a healthy, well-balanced diet. Your doctor may recommend avoiding raw shellfish, avoiding iron and vitamin C supplements, and limiting alcohol. If you have cirrhosis, you should completely stop drinking alcohol.

You can't prevent inheriting the gene mutations NI that cause primary hemochromatosis. However, early diagnosis is important since early treatment with phlebotomy can prevent complications of iron overload caused by these gene mutations.

If you have a close relative—a parent, brother or sister, or child—with hemochromatosis, you should be checked for hemochromatosis. Talk with your doctor about testing you and your family members.

Secondary hemochromatosis due to blood transfusion cannot be prevented easily. However, doctors can check iron levels and start treatment with chelating agents early, before iron overload causes damage to the liver, joints, and other organs.

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

Thank You to all of Our Friends!

Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL
Demet & Eleni Anagnostiadis - Bethesda, MD
Nicholas & Doris Andreadakis - Lititz, PA
Andy Apostolopoulos—Asheville, NC
George & Maria Andros - Birmingham, AL
Nicholas Anton - Dunedin, FL
Gaby & Alicia Atik - Treasure Island, FL
Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL
Richard & Mickie Bass - Asheville, NC
Katherine Beasley - Vero Beach, FL
Christopher & Jaime Brewer - Tampa, FL
Pete & Carol Caldwell - Ringgold, GA
William Camarinos - Alexandria, VA
William & Kanella Jane Chapman - Ellenton, FL
Nicholas & Sondra Chronis - Mt. Pleasant, SC
Emmanuel Chrysakis - Palm Harbor, FL
Victor & Cynthia Cucuz - Tampa, FL
Fr Stratton & Pres. Denise Dorozenski - Sterling Heights, MI
Eric & Artemis Mellen - Longwood, FL
Peter George - Tampa, FL
Ron & Maria Gregory - St. Petersburg, FL
Charlie & Eleftheria Hambos - Orlando, FL
Gabriel Hurst - Largo, FL
Michael Ibrahim - E. Brunswick, NJ

Judith Jogerst
Constantine Kallenekos - Tampa, FL
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI
Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL
Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL
Demetrius & Katherine Klimis - Boardman, OH
John & Cathie Koch - New Port Richey, FL
Tommy Kolouris - Tampa, FL
Sharon Kush - Tallahassee, FL
Evangelos & Helen Liras - Tampa, FL
Fr Michael & Pres Virginia Massouh - Seminole, FL
Kathleen Spanos Mendez - Ponte Verda, FL
Charles Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA
Kay Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA
Basil & Dorothy Nosal - Fredericksburg, VA
John & Deanna Palmer - Greenville, SC
Theodora Pappas Poletis - Nottingham, MD
Luke & Arianna Quinn - Arlington, MA
Nadine Raheb
Pericles & Fotini Stamatiades - Asheville, NC
Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI
Lillian Thomas - Dyer, IN
Wesley & Melisa Thompson - Clearwater, FL
Christopher & Georgette Tsavoussis - Dunedin, FL
William Yotis - La Grange, IL

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

Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

Friend of St. John the Baptist:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

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

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

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

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.

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



Fr. Stavros
<813-394-1038



Fr. John
678-637-4425 >



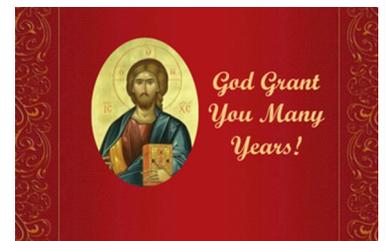
Vasili
414-254-5134>

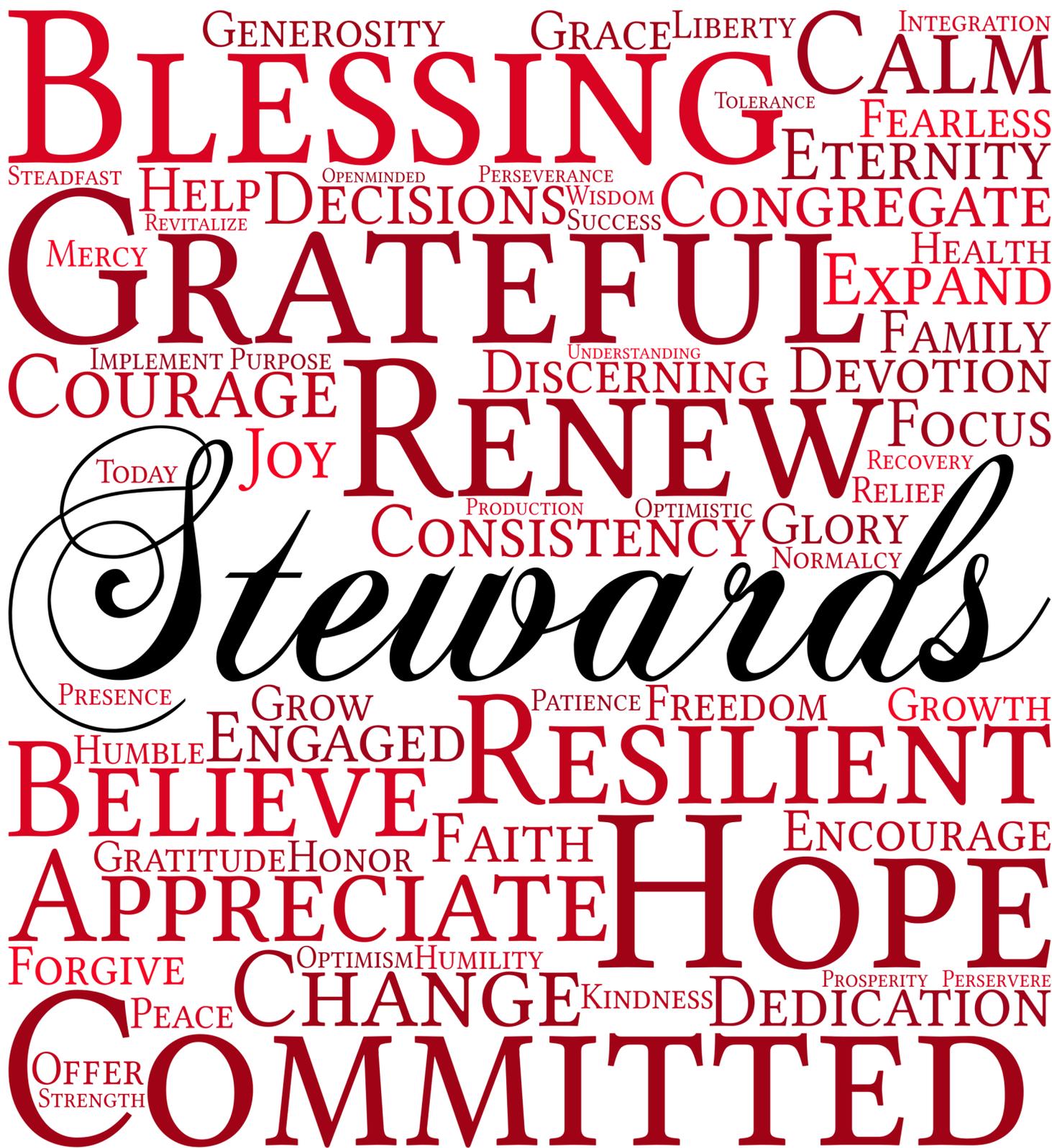
Opt-in on *The Messenger* -

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.

Happy Birthday!

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--------------------------------|
| James Apockotos - August 1 | Michael Mantzanas - August 8 | Marian Preston - August 19 | Kathryn MacLaury - August 30 |
| Sierra Fulkerson - August 1 | Presvytera Loretta Karpelenia - August 10 | Nicholas Gavalas - August 20 | Stepahnie Sandborn - August 30 |
| Brittany Hadaway - August 1 | Lindsey Skourellos - August 10 | Demetri Roussos - August 20 | Chase Wernke - August 30 |
| Zinnia Letobarone - August 1 | Nikolas Massey - August 11 | Jeannie Spirides - August 20 | Luke Santana - August 31 |
| Ilianna Matassini - August 1 | Scott Olsen - August 11 | Elias Tziotis - August 20 | Zacharias Sarantos - August 31 |
| Zachary Chandler - August 2 | Jimmy Reader - August 11 | Emma Melton - August 21 | |
| Susan Fallieras - August 2 | Judith Zeban - August 11 | Dimitrios Papaconomou - August 21 | |
| Nicholas Kalojiannis - August 2 | Ava Snyder - August 12 | Dante Skourellos - August 21 | |
| Olga Papaconomou - August 2 | Dr. George Fallieras - August 13 | Dr. Angelo Scopelianos - August 22 | |
| Vasiliki Gallos - August 3 | Laura Paloumpis - August 13 | Richard Voisey - August 22 | |
| Evangelos Laliotis - August 3 | Conner Price - August 13 | Demosthenes Mekras - August 23 | |
| Christian Perry - August 3 | Yianni Lambrou - August 15 | Abigail Moran - August 23 | |
| Penelope Calamunci - August 4 | Matthew Peckham - August 15 | Caroline Anton - August 24 | |
| Nickollet Henderson - August 4 | Nicholas Apostoleres - August 16 | Christina Stilian - August 24 | |
| Maggie Kavouklis - August 4 | Louis Papaefstathiou - August 16 | Martha Kapetan - August 25 | |
| Jacqueline Renaud - August 4 | Natasha Stroud - August 16 | Markissa Findlay - August 26 | |
| Megan Rindone - August 4 | Jason Williams - August 16 | Carmen Robinson - August 26 | |
| Andreas Thompson - August 4 | Ekaterini-Petranellis Mangarides - August 17 | Eleni Anagnos - August 27 | |
| John Gialamas - August 5 | Michael Meadows - August 17 | Dr. John Christ - August 27 | |
| Aleks Lakic - August 5 | Dean Naum - August 17 | Stephen Dimitrijeovich-Jones - August 27 | |
| Catherine Eggleston - August 6 | Cathryn Sandborn - August 17 | Olivia Skourellos - August 27 | |
| Terry Charalabakis - August 7 | Will Apostolos - August 18 | Robbie Gabel - August 28 | |
| Alina Morros - August 7 | John Kavouklis - August 18 | Thomas Georgas - August 28 | |
| Lucas Elly - August 8 | Isabella Kokkas - August 18 | Panos Zelatis - August 28 | |
| Gabriela Fotopoulos - August 8 | | Alex Delashaw - August 30 | |





Our word for our parish for 2022 is “Stewards”. Here are the words that our parishioners chose to mark their year.

Verse of the Year—I Peter 4:10

As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.

Stewards of God's Grace - Stewards of Our Talents/Gifts

By: Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis

Our word for our parish for 2022 is "stewards." Every month this year, Fr. Stavros will write a short article on one aspect of this word, to keep it at the forefront of our minds as we journey through 2022.

As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. 1 Peter 4:10



With school about to start, and with it, the plethora of activities (sports, theater, music) that take the summer off, this is a good month to talk about being stewards of our talents and gifts. I had a conversation recently with someone who has struggled in college and is taking a break from

school. He is not from our community so I'm not betraying confidence. He said that he really struggles academically, has a hard time reading, comprehending, writing, etc. He also feels like he has to go to college, because "everyone goes to college." And that is simply not true. Not everyone goes to college. Not everyone should go to college. Just like not everyone is good at chemistry (that would be me), and thankfully not everyone needs to be good at chemistry (again, me). There are plenty of successful people—welders, plumbers, electricians, landscapers, and many others—who do important work without a college degree. That doesn't mean we don't set goals or make efforts. It means that we recognize that we don't all have the same gifts and talents. We are all different and unique. That's what makes each of us special, we are a unique package all unto ourselves.

I've heard it said that God rewards effort and not success. Because we can't always control success but we can always control effort. Case in point, summer camp. We were not successful in executing all the activities we planned because it rained constantly. But we were successful in making the camp safe, edifying and fun for the campers, because of our efforts, especially in executing "plan b" which we did constantly throughout the week.



We should push our children, just as we should push ourselves, to do the best we can with what we have. If the best someone can do in chemistry is a "B" because they don't have aptitude, we shouldn't condemn them. How-

ever, if someone is capable of an "A" and doesn't get one because of lack of effort, that is another story. Not every student is going to be a star athlete. That doesn't mean they shouldn't go out and compete. Not every application for a job or a college will be accepted—that doesn't mean we shouldn't try.

When I think of being a steward of talents and gifts, I think of effort, doing the best I can with what I've been given. There are some priests who have masterful command of Scripture and theology. They are vociferous readers with encyclopedic knowledge. I am not one of those priests. For me, reading comes hard, but writing is easy. Thus, I don't cry that I can't read. I celebrate that I can write. If someone wants to talk deep theology with a



priest, that's probably not going to be me, and that's okay. Each priest, just like each person, has talents and gifts that are unique to them, and we should celebrate these.

If each of us does our part in our corner of the world, if each of us makes the best effort with what we've been given, this is what God is looking for. I encourage you to read Matthew 25:14-30, the parable of the talents. So you can read how God rewarded a man with two talents who had made four, the SAME as a man who had five talents and made ten, because they both doubled what they had been given. The man who had received one talent hid his talent in the ground and did nothing with it. He said he was afraid that he might fail. Maybe he was afraid that if he made only two talents, God wouldn't be pleased. Maybe he was embarrassed that he only had one talent. The truth is God expected him to do something, perhaps make the one talent into two. He didn't expect him to make ten. God rewards effort, not success. So if you are really working hard and doing your best with what you have been given, this is all that God wants from you. Do the best with what you have, as far as talents and gifts, and you are well on your way to being a good steward.

Χρόνια Πολλά! Happy Nameday!

EFKLEOS, ELESA, MARKELOS, SO-
LO-MONI - AUGUST 1

JUSTINIANOS - AUGUST 2

OLIMPIOS, SALOMI - AUGUST 3

EKSAKOUSTODIANOS, MAXIMILI-
AN, VIOLETA - AUGUST 4

NONA - AUGUST 5

EVMORFIA, MORFOULA, SOTIRIS -
AU-GUST 6

ASTERIOS, ASTERO, ASTRINI, NI-
KANOR - AUGUST 7

MYRON, TRIANTAFILIA, TRIANTA-
FILI-OS - AUGUST 8

IPPOLYTOS, IRO, IRON, LAURA, LA-
VRENTIOS - AUGUST 10

EFPLOUS - AUGUST 11

PHOTIS - AUGUST 12

PANAGIOTIS, DESPOINA, ELONA,

GESTHIMANI, HELIOSTALAKTI,
KATHOLIKI, KRISTALO, MARIETA,
MA-RINIKI, MARY, MARIA, MARI-
OS, MARCY, PRESVEIA, THE-
OTOKIS, JOSEPH, TARZIZIOS

- AUGUST 15

ALKIVIADIS, APOSTOLOS, DIOMID-
IS, GERASIMOS, SARANTIS, SERA-
PHIM, STAMATIA, STAMATIS - AU-
GUST 16

LEFKOTHEA, MIRON, STRATON -
AU-GUST 17

ARSENIOS, FLOROS, LAVROS - AU-
GUST 18

ILIODOROS, SAMUEL, THEOHARIS -
AUGUST 20

AGATHONIKOS, THEOPREPIOS - AU-
GUST 22

EIRINAIOS, MALAMATI, POTHE-
INOS - AUGUST 23

AITOLIA, EFTIHIS - AUGUST 24

BARTHOLOMEOS, TITOS - AUGUST
25

ADRIANI, ADRIANOS, NATALIA -
AU-GUST 26

ARCADIA, ARCADIO, FANOURIOS,
LIBERIOS, OSIOS - AUGUST 27

DAMON - AUGUST 28

ARKADIOS - AUGUST 29

ALEXANDER, EVLALIOS, FILAKAS -
AUGUST 30

THE WELCOME MINISTRY

invites you to

COME SERVE WITH US AS A
GREETER!

A warm heart and smile are all you need to be a
part of this energetic and vital ministry

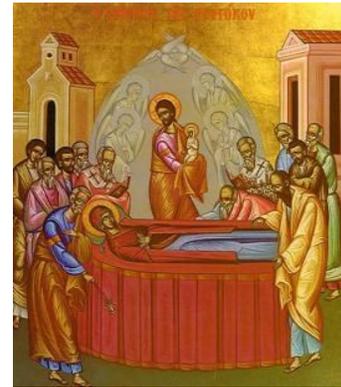
Please contact Maria Xenick at mpxenick@gmail.com or

(813) 765-3587

Tampa, Florida

DO NOT NEGLECT TO SHOW *hospitality* TO STRANGERS,
FOR THEREBY SOME HAVE ENTERTAINED *angels* UNAWARES.
HEBREWS 13:2

St. John's Bookstore



The Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary is eternally present at the throne of God interceding for mankind. Knowing this, we pray for her love, guidance, and protection. Every year the Orthodox Church sets aside the first fourteen days of August for the Dormition Fast in her honor. The fast period is culminated on August 15th when the Church gathers to celebrate the Feast of the Dormition (Falling Asleep of the Theotokos). In commemoration of this Great Feast, our bookstore will focus a table completely dedicated to items honoring the Theotokos – icons, service and prayer books, jewelry etc. Stop in. We are open every Sunday following Divine Liturgy.

St. Stephen's Camp Reflections - 2022

We had over 30 campers and staff participate from our parish at St. Stephen's Summer Camp this past July. A few of them have submitted reflections about their camp experience that I hope you will enjoy reading.



Nicholas Akrotirianakis - 10th Grade
This year was my 3rd year St. Stephens Camp. I was in the St. Mark cabin this year. I had a lot of fun and I interacted well with my cabin mates. My favorite part of camp was making new friends. I also enjoyed the ropes course. One thing I learned is that the Orthodox faith is not once saved always saved. I had a meaningful and fun experience and I will go back next year if I am able to.

Artemis Xenick-Counselor

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



Ariana Thatcher-10th Grade

I had the best week at St. Stephens Summer Camp. During the sing-a-longs, I felt so happy and close to God. My favorite time was when we did the ropes course and I was trying so hard not to fall off the beam! I will always treasure the relationships I built during my camp week. Although it was only one week, it felt life-changing for me. I thought everyone was lying when they said they didn't miss having their phones, but after a week without my phone I can tell you it is definitely true! The life lessons I learned at camp have forever changed my outlook on life. I am beyond grateful that I was able to spend time with the most amazing group of people and deepen my relationship with God. I hope everyone gets to experience the magical feelings you have at camp. I am counting down to the next camp already!

I was a counselor for the oldest girl's cabin, and it was such a privilege to get to see them grow and encourage each other throughout the week. My co-counselors and I would say to each other every night how lucky we were to have a group of girls that were genuinely kind to each other, vulnerable and honest in conversation, and not tucked away in their own cliques whatsoever. Beyond our amazing campers, the staff for this week of camp was truly incredible. A lot of us worked together at camp last year, but even as we integrated those that weren't there a year ago, there was a quick bond of trust and genuine love for each other. This week ended up bringing a lot of challenges and changed plans, but I felt supported and loved by the staff members that made up the most amazing team.

I want to say a huge thank you to Father Stavros. He does so much for this camp, the staff, and the campers and makes each of us feel heard, valued, and supported. He is not only a great leader but is someone who we can all trust to guide us. Thank you, Father!



Eleni Katzaras - 11th Grade

I really enjoyed getting close with everyone from St. John's and the churches near by. One of my favorite parts of camp was the ropes course and the trust exercises with the boys. Thursday was the most impactful day for me having confession and Fr. Stav talking to St. Effie. After that talk, I felt the closest I ever have with the girls my age. Then we went to confession and while waiting, I had deep conversations with my friends and we really bonded. Camp was one of the best experiences I've had, and it wouldn't have been the same without Fr. Stav.

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



Kaitlin Zelatis-11th Grade

Camp is probably the highlight of my summer. It's really amazing to meet people who couldn't be more different from you and bonding with them over a common faith. At camp we are all able to learn not only about our faith but about ourselves. Camp is somewhere that we can express ourselves without all the pressure that society puts on us to act a certain way.

It's truly amazing to have a group of people from all different backgrounds and of different genders come together and have an intelligent conversation about issues that we never get to speak about outside of camp. The trust that we build in each other and the lessons we learn carry with us throughout the year. My favorite part of camp was doing co ed with the Saint Luke cabin. It was so much fun to hang out with the boys and just be kids. There was no judgement or expectations because we were a mixed group, it was just a group of teenagers bonding over our faith and watching as kids rolled fell down the hill at 1 am. All jokes aside we all grow so much at camp and it really is something that you'll never forget.



PJ Zelatis - 10th grade

This is my third year at St. Stephens and I had a blast. I enjoyed learning how to believe in others and God on the ropes course. The Flu came back and wiped everyone in my room out but I survived. The food was amazing and my favorite was the mac and cheese. The ropes course was a guided lesson about how life is walking

around blindfolded and that to stay on the right path you have to trust others. We also learned on the wall that for every discouraging thing we say it takes 5 people encouraging us to undo that bad comment. We also did an impossible task in which we fit all 16 of us on a 4x4 deck under the direction of our glorious leader Sunshine.

Alex Findlay-12th Grade

This was my third time going to St. Stephen's and I had such an amazing time this year. I made a lot of new friends and I feel much closer to God. Camp is a way to disconnect from everything for a week and have fun with your friends and grow closer to God.



Zachary Carter-8th Grade

I really enjoyed going to the lake to swim and play sports with my friends. I also had a lot of fun at the dance, doing Greek dances and the singalong.

Nick Carter- 10th Grade
Going to camp this year was amazing. It was especially this year that reminded me all the work that is put into the camp and what it takes to keep it running.



Going to the lake or the Olympics are my two favorite activities, but there was nothing we did at camp that I wouldn't like to do again.



Maria Palios-10th Grade

My name is Maria Palios and this was my third year going to St. Stephens. This year I was in St. Katherine, the middle girls cabin, and we all had such a great time! I always look forward to going to camp every summer. It's become like a second home to me.

Everyone there makes it so special. On Thursday all of the campers are given the opportunity to go to confession and this year I went. After coming out of it, I felt nothing but love and support from everyone there. I am forever grateful for the DRC. Thank you so much Father Stavros for all that you do not just for me but for all of the campers. I can't wait to go back next year!

John Palios-12th Grade

Camp has been a wonderful experience for me. I've looked forward to it every summer for the past five years! This was my last year as a camper. One of my favorite things about camp was the people that I have met. I met people from different areas and people that I didn't think I had anything in common with became my friends. You make friends that will last a lifetime. I want to thank Father Stavros and all my counselors who have worked so hard each year to make camp so great! I hope I can go back one day as a counselor.



Toula Trakas-11th Grade

My name is Toula Trakas, this was my 4th year of camp. I was in St. Euphemia, the oldest girls cabin. The DRC has become like a second home to me over the years, and it's always a highlight of my summer. This year, I had a really great time with my cabin, building new friendships



and strengthening old ones. It's really fun to just be with everyone, and become closer to my friends and God. My favorite activity was junkyard wars, when each cabin builds a cart and races. We did this on 4th of July, and everyone was dressed up, dancing and just having fun together. St Stephens has had such a huge impact on my life, and I'm so grateful for all of the work that the staff and Father Stavros puts into making camp what it is. I had an amazing week and I can't wait for next year!!

Dear Mom and Dad

By Helene Wingens

Dear Mom and Dad,

Please stick with me.

I can't think clearly right now because there is a rather substantial section of my prefrontal cortex missing. It's a fairly important chunk, something having to do with rational thought.

You see, it won't be fully developed until I'm about 25. And from where I sit, 25 seems a long way off.

But here's what I want my parents to know..

My brain is not yet fully developed
It doesn't matter that I'm smart; even a perfect score on my math test doesn't insulate me from the normal developmental stages that we all go through.

Judgement and intelligence are two completely distinct things.
And, the same thing that makes my brain wonderfully flexible, creative and sponge-like also makes me impulsive. Not necessarily reckless or negligent but more impulsive than I will be later in life.

Please stick with me.

So when you look at me like I have ten heads after I've done something "stupid" or failed to do something "smart," you're not really helping.

You adults respond to situations with your prefrontal cortex (rationally) but I am more inclined to respond with my amygdala (emotionally). And when you ask, "What were you thinking?" the answer is I wasn't, at least not in the way you are.

You can blame me, or you can blame mother nature, but either way, it is what it is.
At this point in my life, I get that you love me, but my friends are my everything.

Please understand that. Right now I choose my friends, but, don't be fooled, I am watching you. Carefully.

Please stick with me.

Here's what you can do for me

1. Model adulting.
I see all the behaviors that you are modeling and I hear all of the words you say. I may not listen but I do hear you. I seem impervious to your advice, like I'm wearing a Kevlar vest but your actions and words are penetrating. I promise. If you keep showing me the way, I will follow even if I

detour many, many times before we reach our destination.

2. Let me figure things out for myself.
If you allow me to experience the consequences of my own actions I will learn from them. Please give me a little bit of leash and let me know that I can figure things out for myself. The more I do, the more confidence and resilience I will develop.

3. Tell me about you.
I want you to tell me all the stories of the crazy things you did as a teen, and what you learned from them. Then give me the space to do the same.

4. Help me with perspective.
Keep reminding me of the big picture. I will roll my eyes at you and make all kinds of grunt-like sounds. I will let you know in no uncertain terms that you can't possibly understand any of what I'm going through. But I'm listening. I really am. It's hard for me to see anything beyond the weeds that I am currently mired in. Help me scan out and focus on the long view. Remind me that this moment will pass.

5. Keep me safe.
Please remind me that drugs and driving don't mix. Keep telling me that you will bail me out of any dangerous situation, no anger, no lectures, no questions asked. But also let me know over and over and over that you are there to listen, when I need you.

6. Be kind.
I will learn kindness from you and if you are relentless in your kindness to me, someday I will imitate that behavior. Don't ever mock me, please and don't be cruel. Humor me -I think I know everything. You probably did as well at my age. Let it go.

7. Show interest in the things I enjoy.
Some days I will choose to share my interests with you, and it will make me feel good if you validate those interests, by at least acting interested.

One day when the haze of adolescence lifts, you will find a confident, strong, competent, kind adult where a surly teenager once stood. In the meantime, buckle in for the ride.

and..

Please stick with me.

Love,
Your Teenager

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. If you have any favorite verse you'd like me to comment on, please forward it to frstav@gmail.com

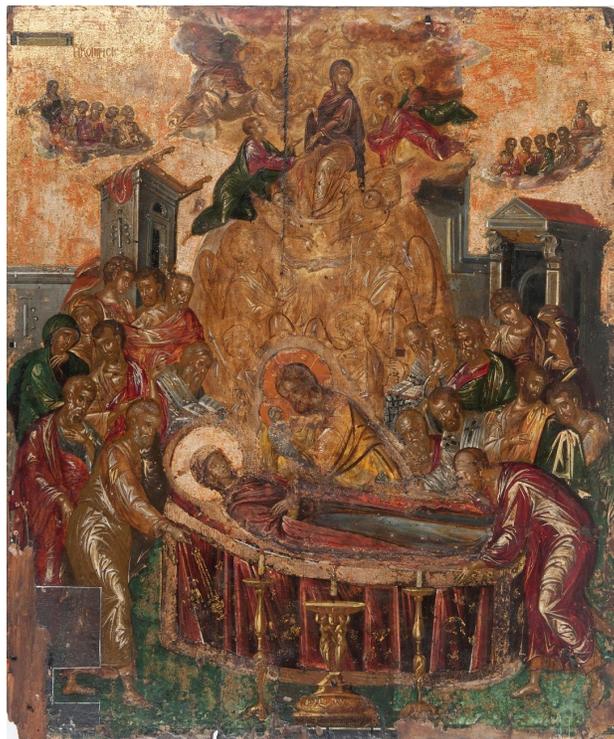
August 7-13

And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for You and one for Moses and one for Elijah."

Matthew 17:4

On August 6, we celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration of our Savior. At the Transfiguration, Jesus was with Peter, James and John and was lifted off of the earth, up into the sky. He shone brightly like the sun. On either side of Him appeared Moses and Elijah, the two most prominent figures of the Old Testament. This quote, from Matthew 17:4, has always made me think that Peter misunderstood the meaning of the Transfiguration. Hearing his idea of making three booths, one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah, makes me think that Peter had a thought about making this a booth like at a festival. For people to come and gawk at Jesus, Moses and Elijah, or maybe come and ask them questions. He didn't particularly understand the magnitude of what had just happened. Jesus had been elevated off the ground, He had

been endorsed by the two major figures of the Old Testament, and the voice of God the Father was heard, endorsing Jesus as His Son. We know that Jesus walked the earth as a man. The Transfiguration showed His divinity. We believe that Jesus is both perfect God and perfect man. The Transfiguration is important because it shows both.



August 14-20

When Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing near, He said to His mother, "Women, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

John 19: 26-27

From August 15-23, we commemorate the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, or her falling asleep. This event is important because her tomb was later found empty, with only her belt left behind. This assures us the Resurrection of our soul and body. One important event in the life of the Virgin Mary occurred during the Crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus saw her standing at the foot of the cross, with John, the Beloved Disciple. He entrusted John with the care of His mother. This is further proof that Joseph, His earthly father, was passed away by the time of the crucifixion. Otherwise, He would have entrusted her care to him. Some people say that this was the moment that the church was established. As Jesus told John to look at Mary as his mother, in essence He is telling all of us to look at her as our mother. In telling Mary to look at John

as her son, in essence He was telling her to look at all the disciples, us included, as her children. This is why we still call her our mother, this is why we go to her for intercession, because she is like a mother to all of us. When we were children and got hurt or got sick, the first person we ran to was our mother for help and comfort. This is what we should be doing in regards to the Virgin Mary, running to her first for help and comfort. This is why we offer the Paraklesis services and pray through her for intercession. Because she is mother to Christ and mother to us also.



August 21-27

And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

Exodus 3:2

The scene described in this week's Bible verse involves Moses approaching a bush that was on fire, the story of the burning bush. The Lord spoke to Moses through the bush, revealing Himself as "Yahweh" or "I Am that I Am," making "I AM" the name of God. Which is profound in itself. If I use the phrase "I am" and then start writing things after it, I would eventually run out of things to say. I might be able to write a couple hundred things that describe who I am, i.e. I am a resident of Tampa, I am a homeowner, I am a father, etc., but eventually I would run out of things to say about myself. God reveals Himself differently—He is the I AM, the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega, there are no limits to Him. Back to the burning bush, what is significant here is that fire touches the bush but does not burn it. This prefigures two things—first it prefigures the Incarnation, where Mary held God (Jesus Christ) in her womb and was not burned and remained a Virgin through childbirth. It also prefigures Holy Communion, where God touches us and yet we are not destroyed. We touch the fire of God and are not consumed or harmed.



August 28-September 3

But above all, my brethren, do now swear, either by heaven or by earth, or with any other oath, but let your yes be yes and your no be no, that you may not fall under condemnation.

James 5:12

With school starting, our kids especially will have many opportunities to do things. Some will be academic, some social, some athletic, etc. One of the things we all struggle with, especially our teens, is commitment. I remember back when I was a teen, that if you asked someone what they are doing Friday night, the answer would be "check with me Friday afternoon." They would evaluate all possibilities, invites and opportunities and commit at the last second. If they committed to you and something else came along, they'd ditch friends for opportunities with better friends. This is how feelings get hurt, people get upset, etc. The Epistle of James contains some very important advice, let your yes be yes and your no be no. Don't make everything a maybe. Imagine if everything was a maybe, no commitment from anyone, life would be frustrating as well as dull. We all need to have more conviction about choices we make, drawing lines in the sand of yes being yes and no being no.

A Prayer from Parents for their Children as They Begin a New School Year

Dear Lord,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RULES TO TEACH YOUR SON

1. Never shake a man's hand sitting down.

2. If you are set to meet at 3:30, be there at 3:25.

3. The man at the BBQ Grill is the closest thing to a king.

4. In a negotiation, never take the first offer.

5. Go out of your way to open the door for others, especially your elders and women.

6. When entrusted with a secret, keep it.

7. Write down your dreams.

8. Return a borrowed car with a full tank of gas.

9. Play with passion or don't play at all.

10. Always protect your siblings.

11. Don't let a wishbone grow where a backbone should be.

12. If you need music on the beach, you're missing the point.

13. Carry two handkerchiefs. The one in your back pocket is for you. The one in your breast pocket is for her.

14. You marry the girl, you marry her family.

15. Be like a duck. Remain calm on the surface and paddle like crazy underneath.

16. Experience the serenity of traveling alone.

17. Never be afraid to ask out the best looking girl in the room.

18. Never turn down a breath mint.

19. A sport coat is worth 1000 words.

20. Try writing your own eulogy. Never stop revising.

21. Stand on principle.

22. Eat lunch with the new kid.



23. After writing an angry email, read it carefully. Then delete it.

24. Ask your mom to play. She won't let you win.

25. Manners maketh the man.

26. Give credit. Take the blame.

27. Stand up to Bullies. Protect those bullied.

28. Hold your heroes to a higher standard.

29. Remember at times the rain must fall for us to appreciate the sun.

30. Be confident and humble at the same time.

31. Be the bridge builder

32. If ever in doubt, remember whose SON you are and REFUSE to just be ordinary! #legacy

33. Protect her heart.

34. Guard her body.

35. Honor her reputation.

36. Never raise your hand to her.

37. Smile often.

38. Mom will always be your first love.

39. Above it all, follow Jesus



The Lonely Crowd: Churches Dying due to Friendlessness

By Michael Frost—July 22, 2022

I've lost count of the number of Christians who've told me they either stopped attending church or left their church to join another one because they couldn't make any friends there.

They report that the church people were friendly enough. They were hospitable and welcoming.

As one person told me, "They're nice to you, but no one becomes your friend."

And it hurts when all that friendliness leads only to friendlessness.

In the 1950s, sociologist David Riesman coined the term "the lonely crowd", in part to describe collectives of people who live according to common traditions and conforming values, but who barely know or like each other. I fear the church is in danger of becoming just such a lonely crowd.

I know pastors think long and hard about how to be better preachers and leaders, how to calibrate the church's ministries to meet needs and serve others, how to be more missional, more adaptive, more innovative. These are all good things. But is it possible that all that leadership development, visioning, and ministry planning might be wasted if people can't find friends and just drift away?

Before hosting any more conferences or seminars on vision-casting, living your best life, or finding your spiritual gift, how about we start equipping people in friendship-making?

Becoming and being a friend isn't easy. It takes intentionality and training. It might be your church's next major challenge.

IT'S NOT JUST THE CHURCH

Before we start beating ourselves up about how friendless churches can be, we should note that this is a society-wide problem. In his book, *Social*, by Matthew Lieberman reports on a survey of people's social connections that was done in 1985 and again in 2004.

People were asked to list their friends in response to the question "Over the last six months, who are the people with whom you discussed matters important to you?" In 1985, the most common number of friends listed was three; 59 percent of respondents listed three or more

friends fitting this description.

But by 2004, the most common number of friends with whom you would discuss important matters was zero. And only 37 percent of respondents listed three or more friends. Back in 1985, only 10 percent indicated that they had zero confidants. In 2004, this number had skyrocketed to 25 percent.

As Lieberman says, "One out of every four of us is walking around with no one to share our lives with."

CHURCH PEOPLE AREN'T GOOD LISTENERS

Like my first point, it might be fairer to say *most people aren't good listeners. The inability or disinterest in asking meaningful questions that indicate an interest in another person is a huge impediment to making friends. I wrote about this last year [here](#).*

Listening is key. When someone is a good listener they are able to seek similarity with someone else. It's impossible to show empathy or celebrate the positive in a person without first hearing from them. And without an awareness of similarity, empathy and celebration, friendships just don't get started.

Listening is not the same as hearing or waiting. Therapists refer to *active listening to distinguish between giving someone your full concentration and just passively 'hearing' them.*

Frankly, I think church people can be so bad at it they need training. Churches should run regular workshops in active listening. Good listeners know how to harness all the non-verbal cues that show they are listening, such as making non-threatening eye contact, smiling, maintaining an open posture, mirroring (reflecting facial expressions), and eliminating distractions.

They also need to know how to utilize verbal skills like remembering things that were said, gently questioning someone for greater clarification, and using reflection techniques (closely repeating or paraphrasing what the speaker has said in order to show comprehension).

These things don't come naturally for most people. Train your congregation to be active listeners.

CHURCH PEOPLE STRUGGLE TO BE VULNERABLE

Friendship is more than just listening, although that's an essential start. Getting close to people, becoming their friends, involves something more. It involves vulnerability.

Face it, people don't become besties by only discussing the weather.

Allowing yourself to be vulnerable helps the other person to trust you, precisely *because you are putting yourself at emotional, psychological, or physical risk. Other people tend to react by being more open and vulnerable themselves. The fact that both of you are letting down your guard helps to lay the groundwork for a faster, closer personal connection.*

The great enemy here is shame. Nothing silences us more effectively than shame.

Sadly, church people are often the most shamed people. This could have come from old church patterns about needing to appear clean and tidy and always winning. Our church might have taught us to never show the parts of our lives that are messy, dirty or embarrassing. I think that might be because a lot of church unwittingly promote perfectionism, which is a condition in which people constantly ask, "What will they think?"

But as Brene Brown says, "The irony is that we attempt to disown our difficult stories to appear more whole or more acceptable, but our wholeness — even our wholeheartedness — actually depends on the integration of all of our experiences, including the falls."

Brown also writes, "If we can share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding, shame can't survive."

It's in the courage of vulnerability we find connection with another and then, potentially, friendship with them.

CHURCH PEOPLE NEED TO BE LESS BUSY

Friendships take time. It's the thing spouses and friends fight about the most — unavailability.

In his book on friendship (helpfully titled *Friendship*), Daniel Hruschka reviewed studies on the causes of conflict in friendship and found that the most common arguments boil down to time commitments. *Spending time with someone is a sure indicator that you value them, and feel-*

ing undervalued is a sure-fire friendship killer.

A New York Times report concluded "the leading cause of persistent relationships is reciprocity — returning a friend's call." The report cited research that said enduring friendships require friends to touch base at least once every 15 days. If we want our churches to be more friendly places we need to encourage people to create *time for friends*.

Churches are good at running programs and promoting faith. As a result, a lot of church conversations are either about serious matters of faith (Bible studies, workshops, etc) or focused on the practicalities of volunteering for a ministry or committee.

But many of us know that our really good friendships emerged not by being on a committee with someone, or even attending a Bible study group with them. Friendships are often forged in the conversations that occur when we're 'playing' together. Hanging out, attending parties, camping, hiking, picnicking, goofing off — these are the occasions where people let their guards down and share more deeply.

If a person's church schedule is crammed with attending stuff, no matter how good that stuff might be, there might be a problem. Validating the importance of play and encouraging people to share in good, fun, non-religious experiences is really important.

THE ONUS SHOULDN'T BE ON THE NEWCOMER

A lot of people have shared with me how tough it is to break into a new church. It's the newcomer who has to break into conversations. The newcomer has to find common interests and angle for invitations. It's often the newcomer who does all the hosting of people for a meal. I can relate to this. Since leaving the church we planted, my wife and I have attended two great churches, but in both cases we had to work so hard to make relational connections.

It really shouldn't be the newcomer's responsibility. Churches should be learning to embody the grace and hospitality of the gospel and striving to be more like Christ, the friend of sinners. Teresa of Avila wrote, "If Christ Jesus dwells in a person as his friend that person can endure all things, for Christ helps and strengthens us and never abandons us. He is a true friend."

We can't sing, "What a friend we have in Jesus" without his friendship affecting how we befriend others

August 2022							Sep 2022 ▶
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	
**Fast Day Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	1 ** Holy Cross—Beginning of Dormition Fast Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis 6:00 p.m. Bible Study 7:00 p.m.	2 **	3 ** Paraklesis 10:00 a.m.	4 ** Book Study 6:30-8:00 p.m.	5 ** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	6 ** Transfiguration of our Savior Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Young at Heart	
7 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	8 ** Paraklesis 10:00 a.m. College Student Night Discussion 6:00 p.m.	9 ** Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	10 ** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	11 ** Book Study 6:30-8:00 p.m.	12 ** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m..	13 ** Sunday School Teacher Seminar 9am – 12 p.m.	
14 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Sunday School Starts Great Vespers 6:00 p.m.	15 Dormition of the Virgin Mary Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	16 Meeting of Ministry Heads—via zoom—to go over the calendar 6:00 p.m.	17 **	18 Book Study 6:30-8:00 p.m.	19 **	20	
21 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Parish Assembly after Liturgy GOYA 5:00 p.m.	22 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	23 Veterans/1 st Responders Meeting at 6:30 p.m.	24 **	25 Book Study 6:30-8:00 p.m.	26 **	27 GOYA Lock-In	
28 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Altar Boy Meeting after Liturgy Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	29 ** Beheading of St. John the Baptist Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	30	31				

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

2418 W. Swann Avenue

Tampa, FL 33609-4712

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

office@stjohntpa.org

www.stjohntpa.org

NONPROFIT ORG.

U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

TAMPA, FL
PERMIT NO. 461

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) fstav@gmail.com	Buildings & Grounds Euripides Panos 813-352-3972	Men's Fellowship Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038
Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. Stratton Dorozenski 813-876-8830 (Office)	Chantor Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134	Parish Nursing Ministry Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026
Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830 (Office) 678-637-4425 (Cell)	Choir Tara Swartzbaugh, Director 813-313-0439 Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782	Oratorical Festival Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374
Pastoral Assistant Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134 (Cell) vasili@stjohntpa.org	Community Outreach Greg Melton 813-967-2074	Photography Ministry Karina Findlay 813-476-9632
Parish Council John Zelatis, President 813-727-2271 Euripides Panos, Vice President 813-352-3972 Marilyn Sandborn, Secretary 813-855-8678 Gary Ward, Treasurer 813-846-3898 Jim Armstrong 954-295-6665 Joanne Dalaklis 813-385-8205 Amin Hanhan 813-846-2957 Nick Katzaras 863-581-2430 Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855 Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026 Mike Xenick 813-340-8737	Connect Through Christ - Special Needs Ministry for Children Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534	Philoptochos Melissa Krinos 813-716-9975
Office Staff Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper debbie@stjohntpa.org fax:813-443-4899	Dance Groups H XAPA ΜΑΣ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668 Bessie Palios, 813-523-0347 Marquet Edquid 813-422-8963 ΠΑΡΕΑ, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136 ΠΑΝΗΓΥΡΙ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668	Stewardship Chris Kyrus 757-672-1920 George Mitseas 813-748-1220
Adopt a College Student VOLUNTEER NEEDED!	Daughters of Penelope Elena Paras Ketchum 813-229-0144	Sunday School Vickie Peckham 813-758-3102
Adult Greek School Magda Myer 813-523-5771	Festival Mike Xenick 813-340-8737	Usher Pete Trakas 813-505-2193
AHEPA Thomas Sakaris, President 201-819-2319	Finance Committee Gary Ward 813-846-3898	Website / Social Media / APP VOLUNTEER NEEDED!
Altar Angels Kalliope Chagaris 813-789-4134	Food Pantry Sheila Vukmer 412-719-1005	Welcoming Ministry Maria Xenick 813-765-3587
Altar Boys Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038	GriefShare Donna Hambos 813-843-8412	Young Adult/OCF Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134
Bookstore Presbyteria Denise Stefero 678-464-4833	Gasparilla Parking VOLUNTEER NEEDED!	Young at Heart Bill Manikas 813-716-8185 Dora Morgan 813-613-3738
Bible Study-Monday Night Fr. John Stefero 678-637-4425	GOYA Michael & Bessie Palios 813-523-0346	Youth Protection Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855
Bible Study-Tuesday Morning Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038	Hope/Joy George & Zackie Ameres 813-245-3813	12 Disciples Mathew Balasis 727-421-7376
	Junior Olympics Dwight Forde 727-685-9028	
	MOMS Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862	

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.