

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*

January 2023

VISION:

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

MISSION:

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

CORE VALUES:

Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

Fr. Stavros' Message

*And if you be unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell;
BUT AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE, WE WILL SERVE THE LORD.*

Joshua 24:15

For the past several years, we've chosen a word as a parish to define our year, and along with the word a verse of Scripture. (I've also challenged each of you to choose a word to define your year, so if you haven't sent that in to me, just send me a one-word email with your word for the year on it. We'll put all the words on a poster and put it in the hall, and in each issue of *The Messenger* beginning in February.) For 2023, the word for our parish is *SERVE*. And the corresponding Bible verse is Joshua 24:15, specifically the last part of it which says, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

I put the entire verse, Joshua 24:15, on top of this message, because it puts our verse into context. Joshua succeeded Moses as the leader of the Israelites. Moses led them out of Egypt and to the border of the land of Canaan. Joshua led them into the Promised Land of Canaan and led them as they settled there. Now Joshua was about to die. And it was time for the people of Israel to renew their covenant with God and unite behind another leader. As with any group of people, there was division among them. Many didn't want to follow after God. Many

wanted to follow after other gods. There were probably many who made themselves their own gods, we call this narcissism. They followed only the desires of their own hearts. In his final "sermon" to them, Joshua was challenging them to serve the one true God.

Everyone serves someone—that someone might be God, it might be a "god" like money, it might be another person, or it might be we serve ourselves. Even people who are loners serve—they serve themselves. Anything one does from which a benefit is derived by someone, that is what service is. So, if I cook a huge meal but I'm alone and eat it all, then I have served—ME. If I fall prey to an addictive behavior, like gambling, if that addiction takes a hold of me and my soul, then I end up serving the addiction. The point is we all serve something or someone.

Joshua challenged the people that if they were unwilling to serve the Lord, then who were they going to serve? The gods of their fathers? The gods of the Amorites? Themselves? And

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then he boldly dropped a gauntlet on them. He drew a line in the sand, as far as HIS house was concerned. He said, “As for ME and MY HOUSE, we will serve the Lord.” Let’s examine the words of this verse more closely:

AS FOR ME

The New Year bring the tradition of resolutions to change things, many of which we will not do, or perhaps even remember. Did you choose a word for 2022? To you remember what it was? ***I challenge each of you to choose a word to define your 2023.*** The reason to choose a word, instead of making a resolution, (or many) is that we can remember a word. With your word, choose a verse. And with your word and verse, set some goals as it relates to both.

The New Year is a good opportunity to make a new start. Part of that start includes personal and individual choices. We will choose how we will spend our time—how much will we spend—

Working?

Relaxing?

With family?

Exercising?

Praying?

Worshipping?

Reading Scripture?

Each of us will reflect on the “as for me” part of this verse and make some personal choices for this coming year. One thing about each new year that strikes me more each year as I get older, and that is the beginning of each year puts me one year closer to the end of my life and that inevitable standing at the awesome judgment seat of Christ, where I will have to talk to God about the “as for me” portion of my life. When I think of what God has given me—life, years, time, talent, opportunity, family, ministry—I hope that when I stand before Him, I can make a good case regarding the “as for me” and what He gave me. I hope I have used, and am using these things, opportunities, and life wisely.

If you are not in the habit of praying, use this new year to start over. If you are not in the habit of worshipping on Sundays, the VERY FIRST day of the new year is a Sunday. I’m sure there are no youth sports games on January 1, the NFL doesn’t start until 1:00 p.m., and the Christmas returns should have already been completed by then. Unless you are too tired/hungover from the night before, what a great opportunity we have to start the year with the

Lord, worshipping Him and receiving Him in the Eucharist. Part of our reflection on Joshua 24:15 regards “as for me” and what we personally are going to do in this new year, specifically in regards to our spiritual growth.

AND MY HOUSE

None of us exists in isolation. We all know someone. So, as we examine the words “and my house,” think not only of the house you live in, or your family, but the “houses” you share, meaning the “groups/families” you belong to. I belong to several. I have my immediate family. I have my church family. I have a family of people I know from summer camp. I have people in my neighborhood—they aren’t family or even close friends—but we share the same street. I have some close friends. The “as my house” part of this verse refers to all of them.

Let’s look specifically at the families we live with. We make some very important decisions in our homes. We decide how we will spend our time, what things are important to us, how we will divide up labor, how we will spend money, and even how we will live out our Christianity. Christians, by definition, do not exist in isolation, but in community, and our first “community” is our family. So, let’s examine some choices we make in our families:

Praying in our homes. There are so many opportunities to connect with God as a family—whether it is prayers at meals, prayers in the morning, prayers at night, and prayers during crisis. How many of these types of prayers do you say as a family? I would venture to say that not many families do ALL of these. But are you doing any of them? Make it a goal this year to pray at least once a day as a family—it could be at a meal, it could be at tuck-in/bedtime. There is an overused saying “The family that prays together stays together.” And I’m actually coming to agreement on that. It is critical for families to pray together.

How about the Bible? A really important part of our Christian life is the Bible. My parents read the Bible to us in the car when we were younger. We read the Bible every morning now. I confess that I have not been as good about reading the whole Bible as I should be. In 2022, I was encouraged to listen to a podcast called “Bible in a Year” that is read by a Catholic priest named Fr. Mike Schmitz. He reads 2-3 chapters of the Bible each day, and this is followed by a reflection/sermonette which helps the listener understand what they

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have heard. He doesn't read the Bible in order. He read it according to a certain timeline. Most of the year was spent in the Old Testament, which for many of us is unfamiliar and for all of us is tedious. Yet, the Old Testament sets the foundation for the New Testament. As the one who is always writing the articles and preaching the sermons, I found this podcast to be refreshing since it allowed me to be the student instead of the teacher. It helped me not only understand the Scripture but apply it practically to my life. And it helped me deal with some Scripture passages that I hadn't read in a long time. No, I didn't finish the whole thing. And the beautiful thing about this podcast is that there isn't a specific reading the listener is expected to be on. Rather, "day one" can be any day you want to start. And if you fall behind or if it takes 1,000 days to listen to 365 podcasts, the point is to start and make progress.

Next we move to worship. At our recent festival, I met many people who used to come to our church. I heard comments like "my dad was buried from this church years ago" or "I got married here 30 years ago," or "I love the smell of the building" or "I come to church all the time for Easter" which was followed by some excuse like "but my kids play baseball," or "life happened" or "we're busy" followed by "you know how it is." You know. The truth is I don't know what motivates people to come to church and worship or stay away. I try to offer a dignified service and a thoughtful sermon, if these are the things that motivate people to come or cause them to stay away. However, if sports is driving a decision to worship, there is not much I can do to change that. As for the "you know how it is" comment, it doesn't really matter what I know or what I think. Because your entrance into the Kingdom of God is not based on what I think. Imagine standing before the Lord and saying some of the flimsy things one says to a priest: "God, we love you, we love church, but You know, we love sports more, and, well it was just temporary, when the kids were young, well accept that when they went to college, they kind of fell away from the church, and well, the church should have done a better job to keep them connected." People remember their childhood life forever. If they fall away from Christ and the Church during college, when college is over, many of them will come back and remember how Christianity was an important part of their upbringing. However, if they never came to church as a child, never understood what we believe, never bothered to believe for themselves, well there won't

be anything to come back to. Worship is a crucial part of the conversation regarding "and my house."

Every house needs to decide on stewardship for the coming year. To be a steward means to be a temporary caretaker. Each of us is a stewards of many things—our time, our talents (both of which are blessings from God), and our treasure, what we do with our blessings. We need to decide where we are going to invest our time and our resources, and how much we will put into each thing we do—work, sports, hobbies, household chores, travel, homework, and involvement in our church community. ***If you didn't fill out a stewardship form for 2023, please do so as soon as possible,*** the goal was to have all of these by the end of the year. Again, stewardship is something we will stand before God and answer for. How will we explain to the Lord at His awesome judgment seat how we spent thousands of dollars traveling on family trips, but that we gave little to support His church or gave little to charity? This is an important decision for each household.

As for the "house" of our parish, we need to make some critical decisions about what we are going to be doing in 2023 and beyond. Will we continue to support philanthropic causes to the level we have? Will we continue to support the liturgical services and programs of our church with our presence? Will we take steps to spread the Gospel into the community? And are we serious about expanding our sanctuary potentially, so that we can accommodate (and encourage) parish growth? There are some critical questions, answers and decisions we need to undertake as a parish in 2023.

WE WILL SERVE

To serve means to take something we have and offer it for the benefit of someone else. For instance, to serve a dinner to someone means that we've taken the time to shop and cook, and we are offering what we have done for the good of someone else. This may be a dinner for a family of four that we serve around our kitchen table. On a high school sports team, it may mean taking a cup of water to a teammate. In the workplace, it may mean proofreading a letter for a co-worker. In a home, it may mean doing something for a spouse or child that you'd rather not do because you are tired but doing it anyway. There are literally an infinite number of ways we can serve others, that we can take from ourselves and give to someone else.

The same thing is true in our church. One of our core values is “service” which means looking outward from our parish and serving the greater community. In 2022, that meant taking all of our festival profits and donating them to charity, putting them out in service to the greater community. What will “service” in our parish look like in 2023? Our stewardship is what holds the answer. We are not expected to give anything to the point of imperiling ourselves. But we pray for and work for what is sufficient and then give the rest to those who are in need. Of course, how we define “sufficient” is very subjective. What is sufficient for ourselves? What is sufficient for our parish? What should be given to those in need?

I spoke towards the end of the year about the concept of “church for us” versus “church for others.” And I suppose that could be transferred onto our own personal lives as well. Do we live for others, or live only for ourselves? Our personal stewardship does a lot to answer these questions. I hope that individually we will choose to serve, and to live for others. (We’ve heard that acronym JOY, J-Jesus, O-Others, Y-Yourself. This is how we are called to live. We are not called to be JO—Jesus and others with nothing for ourselves. Nor are we called to be JY—Jesus and ourselves without thought for others. Nor are we called to be OY—others and ourselves, with no thought to Jesus. We are called to be all three—first Jesus, then others, and then ourselves. This is how we find true JOY.)

The Lord

Which bring us to the last words of this verse. As for me and my house, we will serve _____. How do you fill in the blank on this sentence? There are lots of homes who do service. There are plenty of “servants” out there who don’t identify as Christians. There are plenty of philanthropists who give money to things (some who want their names on things in return, so this isn’t really giving, it’s exchanging). There are plenty of volunteer coaches out there who happily coach on Sundays and don’t know Christ. There is nothing wrong with doing good things. However, Christ calls us to more—He calls on us to be GODLY. And this means that our service has to be to the LORD. Otherwise, who are we serving. We can serve the Lord by serving others. We can serve others while we serve the Lord.

The Gospel of John concludes with the words “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the Disciples, which are not written in this book, but

these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” (John 20:30-31) Jesus intends for us to have life, to have fun, to do things, but to do them in His name. And perhaps the best way to look at the Christian life is not as a loss of self but as a gain of Christ. I don’t have to lose myself. I can still laugh, I can still have joy. I can still make money, work, have a family, own a home. However, I do these things under the umbrella of Christ, with a heart that beats in sync with Him, with a life that reflects Him, with a consciousness of serving Him.

Each of us will at least be thinking of some changes to make for 2023. As we do that, I encourage you to choose a word for yourself, and a corresponding Bible verse to be your guide for the year. I encourage you to also reflect on the word—SERVE—that we have chosen to define our church, as well as the verse that will be our guide—As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And then make some decisions how you and your house can serve the Lord. And be part of us and our house—St. John Greek Orthodox Church—and how we will serve the Lord in 2023!

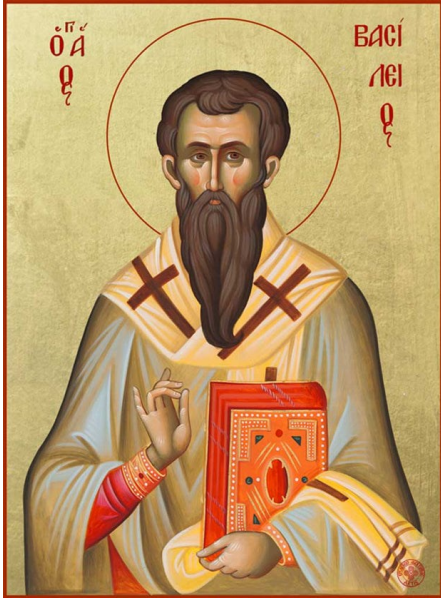
On behalf of Pres. Lisa and Nicholas, I wish each of you a happy, healthy and spiritually renewing 2023!

With love in the Lord,
+Fr. Stavros

When God wanted to create fish, He spoke to the sea.
When God wanted to create trees, He spoke to the earth.
When God wanted to create man, He turned to Himself.
Then God said, “Let us make man in our image and in our likeness.”
Note:
If you take a fish out of water it will die; and when you remove a tree from soil, it also will die.
Likewise, when man is disconnected from God, he dies.
God is our natural environment. We were created to live in His presence. We have to be connected to Him because it is only in Him that life exists.
Let’s stay connected with God. We recall that water without fish is still water but fish without water is nothing.
The soil without tree is still soil, but the tree without soil is nothing.
God without man is still God but man without God is nothing.

~Anonymous

Monthly Message from Vasili Panagopoulos



Brothers and sisters in Christ, on January 1, we commemorate our father among the saints, St. Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesaria in Cappadocia. Because St. Basil reposed on January 1, the same day that the Circumcision of Christ is commemorated, we don't ever read any assigned scripture reading to St. Basil. Nevertheless, I'd

like to focus on a piece of scripture: Matthew, Chapter 19, verse 21: "Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

It is always imperative to understand the context of scripture, not to simply take one piece and apply it to a situation. Doing this can be misleading, and dangerous in many cases. The context here is that a rich man was asking Christ what he should do to enter into eternal life. Christ told him to keep the commandments. And when He said this, the rich man said that he has always followed the commandments of God. Christ replied back, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." The rich man didn't like hearing this, "for he had great possessions," meaning he was very wealthy. When the man departed, Christ turned to His disciples and said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." The reason we know that the cross and passion of the rich man was his wealth, is because when he departed "he went away sorrowful." We all have a cross, and we all have passions. If your cross is your wealth, then this passage speaks directly to you. If your cross is something else, like criticizing others, gambling, getting drunk, or watching pornography, apply the same message with your struggle. The main message of

this passage is to forget about everything, and follow Christ. In the footnotes of the Orthodox Study Bible, "To be perfect, one must willingly sacrifice all and follow Christ. Nothing is gained unless this sacrifice is given freely. The specifics of how one follows Christ will be different for each person. Because wealth had such a grip on this rich man, his only hope was to sell and give away all his possessions. St. John Chrysostom tells us that giving away possessions is the least of Christ's instructions here; following Him in all things is a far greater and more difficult calling."

Do we read this scripture passage and take it seriously? Do we adjust or convince ourselves that it means something else? Do we read it and think about doing it partially? Or do we read this passage and follow exactly what Christ said? St. Basil the Great grew up in an extremely educated, wealthy, and holy home. If you want a role model household to follow, St. Basil's family did everything right. His grandmother, St. Macrina is commemorated on May 30; St. Emilia his mother on May 30; his brother St. Gregory of Nyssa (January 10); his brother St. Peter of Sebastia (January 9); and his older sister, St. Macrina on July 19. With that being said, St. Basil took this passage of scripture extremely seriously, not only in his own life and actions, but he also taught nothing less. In his book on "Social Justice," St. Basil writes, "For if we all took only what was necessary to satisfy our own needs, giving the rest to those who lack, no one would be rich, no one would be poor, and no one would be in need." What high expectations he has for humanity, but he "set the bar" in his own life.

St. Basil is known for many things: being holy, a hierarch, creating monasticism in the context we know it to be today, creating the hospital, creating the orphanage, and many more. One thing, I would argue, that St. Basil is known for more than anything is his giving. We've all heard the term from Church and it's leaders, that to be a steward of the Church is to give your time, talent, and treasure. We are all familiar with the stewardship pledge card, and there it lists many ways that we can give our time, talent, and treasure. For St. Basil, his time would simply be 'always availa-

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ble,' for his talent, he would check each box, ready to volunteer at every opportunity, and his treasure would be much more than tithing... it would be everything he had. And St. Basil did exactly that. He was known for giving away his treasure to any one who needed it, leaving nothing left. St. Basil taught that if you had more than one of anything, to give the rest to those who need it. He set this bar so high, he expected so much because he took the Lord's words seriously and to heart.

St. Basil the Great died when he was just 49 years old. Some historians believe his exact cause of death was liver failure. But the Church knows that he died so young, because of his immense ascetical lifestyle. St. Basil was a monk, and observed the fasts very strictly. He fasted to the point that he was not supplying his body with the nutrients needed to sustain himself. Today, we would call this crazy and insane. If we knew someone who did this, we would probably tell them they need help or are ill-mentally. St. Basil supplemented physical nutrition with spiritual, thus sustaining himself for the time he was on the earth. Another quote from Social Justice, speaking on this exact matter, "After all, what is the use of

wealth? Do you wish to wrap yourself in fine apparel? Surely two lengths of cloth are sufficient for a coat, while the covering of a single garment fulfills every need with regard to clothing. Or would you spend your wealth on food? A loaf of bread is enough to fill your stomach. Why then do you grieve? Of what have you been deprived? Of the glory that derives from wealth? Had you not sought glory from the dirt, you would have discovered the true glory like a shining beacon leading you to the Kingdom of Heaven." St. Basil sought the true glory, and he saw it like a shining beacon leading him to the Kingdom of Heaven. He detached himself from all worldly desires, and that is what brought him to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, St. Basil sets the example for us as Orthodox Christians on how we are to live our lives. Of course, this nearly unattainable, but see what YOU can take away from his life and apply it to yours. Perhaps it is to raise a Godly family, give more time to volunteering at the Church or a soup kitchen, give more of your talent whatever that may be, give more of your treasure to those who need it, or follow the fast more strictly.

Thy sound hath gone forth into all the earth, which hath received thy word. Thereby thou hast divinely taught the Faith; thou hast made manifest the nature of all things that be; thou has adorned the ways of man. O namesake of the royal priesthood, our righteous Father Basil, intercede with Christ God that our souls be saved. Apolytikion of St. Basil the Great

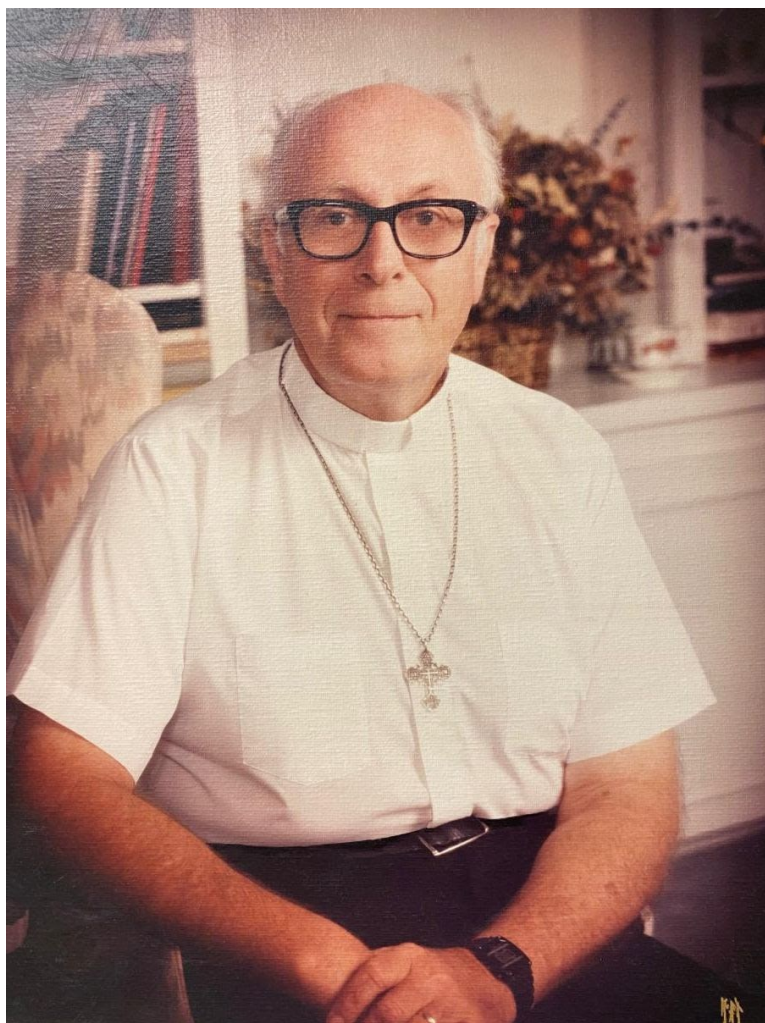
Through the intercessions of our righteous Father Basil, and of all the saints.

On behalf of Moriah and Andoni, I pray that your new year is filled with every blessing from above.

In Christ,
Vasili

In Memory of Fr. George Burchill, 1927-2022

These remarks were offered at a memorial service for Fr. George on Sunday, December 18 by Fr. Stavros



If you ask one of Father George Burchill's former students to describe him as their Headmaster, the first word would not be "nice." He was the no nonsense Headmaster of St. John Episcopal School for over forty years. He was a disciplinarian. He demanded honesty and obedience to rules and order, and when you didn't do that, watch out. Many times Fr. George would announce over the loudspeaker "George is on his way to the office to get caned." Or "Johnny won't be at school the rest of the week because I suspended him for cheating." Or "say goodbye to Joey, he's been expelled." There was a line he had painted in the parking lot, it was called the Burchill line, and no parent was allowed to cross it unless Fr. George, from his upstairs office, shouted down that it was okay to cross, and only then would a parent dare approach. Fr. George told me that he's glad he retired when he did, because, by his own admission, he probably couldn't use his methods today. But there are many men and women in our world, thousands of them, who went through St. John Episcopal and learned the values of honesty, hard work, obedience and ultimately integri-

ty. He got his students ready for high school, for college and for life. And those values, maybe not the way he imparted them, but those values of honesty, hard work, obedience and integrity are largely absent from the world today. I've spoken to several former students of his who said "we didn't appreciate him until we were in our 20s, but he formed the backbone of who we are today."

Fr. George had an amazing life. Born in New Brunswick, he met his wife Nancy while working in Nova Scotia in a parish there. Her father was a priest, and when he got transferred to the Bahamas, Fr. George, already ordained, arranged to be transferred as well, a package deal, so he could continue dating Nancy. He married Nancy in the Bahamas and after a few months, answered a call to be the headmaster at St. John Episcopal School in Tampa, a position he served from 1952 to 1992. He served faithfully not only as Headmaster but as priest of the school, holding services every day for the students. Because, God went first in his life and he wanted God first in theirs as well. He faithfully assisted in the life of St. John Episcopal Church, many times serving as interim rector when the church was in between priests. Forty years in one place, that's pretty amazing. Fr. George was instrumental in the establishment of St. John Greek Orthodox Day School in the 1960s. With more students than St. John Episcopal could accommodate, he eagerly diverted everyone on the waiting list to our church. He was our head recruiter.

He had an amazing marriage to Nancy for 70 years. He was devoted to her and in their last years, was not only her partner but her caregiver. Their first born child, Eveleigh, died on the delivery table. That's why Fr. George had a eye for people in trouble, even though he went first for the matter of fact, before the warm and fuzzy. But he had an incredible empathy for people who had lost children and ministered to many of them during his nearly 70 years of ordained ministry. He and Nancy raised four other children—Stuart, Susie, Sandy and Sarah. I guess they liked named that started with S. Fr. George was Father at school, but dad at home. He loved his children, took care to spend lots of time with them, took them on trips and made sure they are people of integrity, just like him. He had a sailboat and loved sailing in Tampa Bay. He also had a workshop and enjoyed building and making things. He loved bagpipes, he played them all his life.

I know from personal experience that the life of a priest is a constant struggle of balancing ministry and family. Most of us never get it quite right, and even if we do, there are lots of times we will get it wrong. So, as a priest, I wanted to thank Fr. George's family, Nancy and his children, for sharing your husband and your dad with so many other people.

Fr. George retired in 1992 but was asked to stay on and that he did for a few more years. In retirement, he spent lots of time at his Bayshore condo reading and studying. He enjoyed his grandchildren and even great-grandchildren. He also spent many months of many years traveling, pulling a camper with his car, going all over the country, as well as back to Canada with Nancy, and going on cruises. He enjoyed his golden years. He would still fill in as a priest when needed and up to his last years was still officiating weddings and sacraments when asked.

It was in his mid-retirement that I met him, when I became the priest of St. John Greek Orthodox Church in 2004. I was told that Fr. George was an Episcopalian priest who fell in love with Orthodoxy. He would go to church twice on Sundays—first to the early service at the Episcopal church with Nancy, and then head over to St. John for the 10 a.m. service. He would come to all the weekday services here. He was a devoted student of the Bible. He was a man of prayer. As I mentioned, his former students feared him when they were students, some of them even disliked him, but many of them said they learned to appreciate him in their 20s and they turned to him for advice. His golden years were spend dispensing lots of advice to students who would return to their teacher. I also saw Fr. George as a mentor. Around here, we used to call him “Yoda” the wise old sage from the Star Wars Movies. Fr. George would visit my office almost weekly, to hand deliver a note of encouragement, written in barely legible calligraphy. We would often talk, have lunch together and pray together. He gave really sound advice. The turning point of my ministry here was a decision to make an administrative change at our day school. I knew it would not be a popular decision. I knew it would bring grief to my life and more work to my ministry and start an avalanche of bitterness towards me and others. I remember distinctly sitting with Fr. George in my vestry, it was the first day of Lent, and we sat in these two chairs and I was crying because I didn't know what to do. And Fr. George listened, prayed for me, and told me to go and do what I knew was the right thing, even though it wouldn't be popular. I spoke to several people, looking to elicit some support before the decision was implemented. Several older members of our community knew Fr. George and called on him for ad-

vice. His advice was to support the decision, and if they couldn't do that, at least not oppose it. Fr. George unknowingly played a pivotal role in the life of our church and in my ministry here.

You always knew when Fr. George was around—no one who has ever belonged to St. John has ever driven a yellow “smart car.” When Fr. George got sick in recent years, he stopped shaving, and took on a new look, he went from being Yoda from Star Wars to looking like Gandalf from Lord of the Rings.

Fr. George was a good steward of our church. He filled out a stewardship form each year, even though he wasn't Orthodox and paid it in full, because in his words, “I might not make it through the next year.” In true Fr. George fashion, he filled out his form for 2023, and paid it in full. When he made some extra money because of a wedding or some other fill-in work, he always signed the check over to my discretionary fund. He told me to do whatever I thought was best with the money—and so because of Fr. George, dozens of children went to summer camp who otherwise would not be able to afford it; we bought some furnishings for the altar that will still be here even though Father George is gone.

Fr. George was at our festival only a few weeks ago, to support the church, and to take a lot of food especially pastries home for him and Nancy to enjoy. He stopped coming to church on Sundays, but was faithfully here for every weekday service until a few weeks ago. I came home the other day, after Father George had passed away, to find a Christmas card had been mailed to my home on December 7. I knew he sent it because it was written in calligraphy, and signed as he always signed his letters to me, simply “George.”

Fr. George was a devout Christian. His faith was amazing. He never wavered in faith, not as his wife developed a debilitating disease that robbed them of the ability to travel, not as he went through his own health crises, several of them, most recently brain cancer which was painful. He recently sent me a letter instructing me that if he died during the Divine Liturgy in church, that I was to finish the service and contact his children later. He didn't want to disrupt anyone's worship experience. There are people who believe, and then there are people who really believe. Fr. George was in that latter category, he really believed in Jesus Christ. He really is looking forward to meeting him in person. He really is eager to see the Kingdom of Heaven.

One of the people Fr. George helped to mentor was Charlie Hambos, a young man from our community

who was recently ordained as a priest, now with the name Fr. Kyriakos. In the many years he served as our pastoral assistant, and even in the years before, Fr. George was a mentor, an encourager and sometimes even got on Charlie's case about things. Because he loved Charlie like he loved me—like we were two additional students who he treated like sons. About two weeks ago, I visited Fr. George in the hospital. And in typical Fr. George fashion, he said "How's Charlie doing?" We had watched a video from Father Kyriakos' ordination a few months and that made Fr. George very happy. I said, "we should call him." And he answered "no, I don't want to bother anyone." I said "how about we watch a video of Fr. Kyriakos celebrating the Liturgy?" This made him very happy, so we turned on a video from the church in Orlando where Father Kyriakos serves and we watched some of the Liturgy.

Fr. George hated the hospital. He said he knew that he was going to die soon. He really wanted to die at home. We had a very deep conversation about life and death and ministry. He had been hallucinating because of the meds he was on but during the time I was there, he was very lucid. We said our goodbyes that day. He asked me to bless him, and I offered a prayer over him. He told me that he hoped that I would be next to him praying at the moment he passed. I asked him for his blessing, knelt at his bedside and he put his hand on my head and offered a blessing.

I saw him 9 days ago at his home. He was in a lot of pain. He asked me to convince everyone that he wanted to stop the treatments and just go to the Lord. He kept saying "Fr. Stavros, you're my only hope." To which I replied "I'm not Obi-Wan Kenobi in Star Wars which made him laugh. He asked me to give him ice chips, so I dipped a spoon in a glass of ice chips and put one in his mouth several times. The irony was not lost on me. I never had the chance to offer him Holy Communion in our church, but I did have a chance to give him something that would provide strength for him that day.

Last Sunday, I prayed for him during our service, for a Christian end to his life, painless, blameless and peaceful and for a good accounting at the awesome judgment seat of Christ. Monday, I went to go visit him. I timed it out so that I would go at a time that was convenient for me, really just a random time. When I got to his house, he was breathing with great labor. We gathered around his bed. I made a comment like "it can't be long now" and in my mind I was thinking maybe he would pass in a few hours. All of a sudden, he opened his eyes and looked right at me, the only time he had opened his eyes that day. I

said that I thought this was the time to offer the Orthodox prayer known as "the prayer of separation of the soul and body." I offered the prayer, asking for the forgiveness of Father's sins, and asking for God to take his soul to His everlasting kingdom. I said "Amen." He took one more labored breath and then stopped breathing. He passed, just as he wanted to, hearing the words of prayer in his last breath.

Father George and I had only one argument in the 18+ year that I knew him. It was about doing a memorial service. He didn't want anything, just to die and have no fanfare. I argued with him many times that people love you and want to come out and pay their respect to you. He finally relented and that's why we have this service here today. I'm going to stop my remarks here, because I can hear Fr. George's voice in my head, "enough already, you're boring the people, they have other things to do than listen to you go on and on about me."

Fr. George lived an amazing life. He was mean but firm, demanding but dignified, feared but admired. Most of all he was faithful to God, his family, his ministry and his students. I'm so blessed that our lives crossed paths. There will never be another Fr. George in my life or in our lives. He was truly one-of-a-kind. He will be missed and he will be remembered, by his thousands of students, by his family and by this Tampa community. He is the pillar on which St. John Episcopal School still stands. He is part of the foundation of so many successful lives. Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord!

I never got to co-celebrate a Divine Liturgy with Fr. George. But I will close these remarks quoting part of a prayer that is read over Orthodox Priests when they pass away:

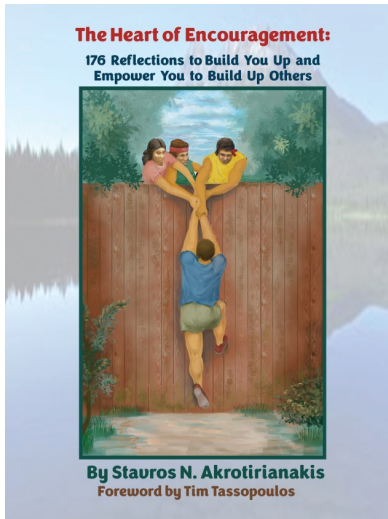
Lord, as you appointed Fr. George to celebrate before the holy altar on this earth, make He likewise be made worthy to do the same before the altar of heaven; as You honored him with spiritual dignity among men, likewise accept him uncondemned among the angels in Your glory. Amen.

Orthodox priests greet each other with a phrase that Fr. George and I never were able to say to one another. However, as we bid him farewell today, I will offer this greeting, and I know he will hear it from above—*May the Lord our God remember your priesthood in His Kingdom, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.*

A 40-day Memorial Service will be offered for Fr. George on Sunday, January 22.

The Heart of Encouragement: 176 Reflections to Build You Up and Empower You to Build Up Others

By Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis



One of God's greatest blessings on my life is the ability to write. I love writing. For the most part it comes easy to me. By God's grace, I have written a daily reflection called "The Prayer Team" since February 2015. This has resulted in the publication of seven books, the latest of which is "The Heart of Encourage-

ment." Each month this year, I'm going to include one reflection from the 176 reflections of this book, as a way to share a small sampling of the contents with you in the hopes that you will buy this book. This is not about pushing a product. It's about sharing a message, a message we all need to hear. We all need more encouragement. Please read this reflection below, and if you like it, please consider purchasing the book for yourself or for someone else. Everyone wants to make a difference in the world. This book is my attempt to reach this parish and far beyond it with the hope that by God's grace, this book will help change the world even a little bit for the better. +Fr. Stavros

Filling the Gap Between the Life We Want and the Life We Have— The Rick Ankiel Story

Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for He is gracious, and a song of praise is seemly. The Lord builds up Jerusalem; He gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars, He gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; His understanding is beyond measure. The Lord lifts up the downtrodden, He casts the wicked to the ground.
Psalm 147:1-6

On a crisp October afternoon in 2000, twenty-one-year-old pitcher Rick Ankiel of the St. Louis Cardinals stood on the pitcher's mound against the Atlanta

Braves in game one of the League Championship Series. He had not allowed a run in the first two innings of the game. He had debuted the year before at age 20, the second youngest pitcher in Major League Baseball. And before that, he had shined at every level of baseball he'd ever played. Major League scouts said that he was a once-in-a-generation talent, had a Hall of Fame caliber pitching arm. He was a phenom. A couldn't miss star.

Except in the third inning of that game in October 2000, the "couldn't miss" star unexplainably couldn't throw a strike, something he had done successfully hundreds of thousands of times, something he did better than almost anyone else on the planet.

The meteoric rise of Rick Ankiel was followed by a swift and precipitous fall. He only pitched in a handful of games before sent to the minor leagues and didn't ever recover his pitching form. Someone who had never had trouble throwing strikes could suddenly no longer throw them.

Thankfully, the story of Rick Ankiel didn't end in failure. He switched positions. He stopped pitching and started playing the outfield. He stopped throwing and started hitting. And he worked his way all the way back to the Major Leagues as a home run hitting outfielder. He eventually hit 76 major league home runs and played 11 seasons in the major leagues. Only a small percentage of baseball players will ever make it to the major leagues. And only a fraction of players will ever make it at more than one position.

Rick Ankiel authored a book entitled "The Phenomenon." (co-authored with Tim Brown, published by PublicAffairs, NY, 2017) It tells the story of his life as an abused child, chronicles his career as a phenomenal pitcher, describes in painful detail his meteoric fall, and gives an account of his impressive return, and his now very solid life. Currently married with two children, Rick Ankiel presently works as a sport analyst.

There are three sentences in his book that really stand out:

See, there is the life you want.
There is the life you get
There is what you do with that.
(Phenomenon, p. 4)

Most of us won't succeed to the degree Rick Ankiel did. Most of us won't be sports stars, or famous, or wealthy. And most of us won't fail on national TV, or have our fall documented and dissected publicly. However, all of us will have successes and failures, and gaps between the two.

There will be the marriage we want and the marriage we get; or the job we want and the job we get; or the health, success of our children, income, travel and any number of other goals that we want, and the actual things we get. We will all have successes, failures and gaps.

Our character, and our overall success in life will depend in large part on how we react and respond to the gap between our successes and failures, between the life we want and the life we get.

The story of Rick Ankiel is inspiring and encouraging, which is why it is included in this study. It's inspiring because he didn't let his failure define him. His dream of playing major league baseball took a major detour but he made it back and fulfilled his dream. It's inspiring because at a moment when he could have just stopped and faded away, he didn't. He kept fighting. He kept trying.

Encouragement certainly plays a role in this story. Because the day that Rick Ankiel decided to change his focus from being a pitcher to being a hitter, the St. Louis Cardinals organization didn't tell him "no". They encouraged him, stayed patient with him, and stuck with him, until he worked his way all the way back to contribute to the team as an outfielder.

There will be many times when we will have to refine or redefine our goals and dreams. Especially at these times, it will be important that we stay focused and positive. And it will be necessary that we have people around us to encourage us as we work to fill our gaps between what we hoped for and what end up with, so that we define our gaps, rather than letting our gaps define us.

We will meet countless people like Rick Ankiel in our lives, people who have a gap between what they wanted and what they have. We will have opportunities to make those gaps wider or narrower. Our choice to encourage can and will certainly make a difference.

Lord, thank You for what I have. There are many things that I want and don't have. However, help me to be thankful for what I have, and to use what I have to the best of my ability. Fill my gaps with patience and reassurance, with focus and with the encouragement of others. Help me to see others who are struggling between what they hoped for and what they have and allow me to be an encourager especially to those who are struggling to fill their gaps. Amen.

There is the life you want. There is the life you get. There is what you do with that. May we each have the strength to do good with that, and to encourage others to do the same.

Inspiration

Always pray to have eyes that see the best in people, a heart that forgives the worst, a mind that forgets the bad, and a soul that never loses faith in God.

A perfect marriage is just two imperfect people who refuse to give up on each other.

Life is short. Death is sure. Sin the cause. Christ the cure.

Seven Reasons Why You Should Trust God Always:

He leads me. Isaiah 48:17-Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go.

He restores me. Psalm 23:3-He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

He is with me. Hebrews 13:5-Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never fail you nor forsake you."

He guides me. John 16:13-When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come.

He has chosen me. Isaiah 41:9-You whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off."

He comforts me. Psalm 23:4-Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.

He forgives me. Psalm 130:3-4-If Thou, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you.

Liturgical Schedule for January

Sunday, January 1, 2023 **St. Basil/New Year's Day**

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, January 4 **Royal Hours of Theophany**

9:30-11:00 a.m.

Thursday, January 5 **Eve of Theophany**

Vespers Divine Liturgy 9:00 a.m.

Blessing of the Waters 10:15 a.m.

Friday, January 6 Theophany

Liturgy at St. Nicholas Cathedral
(Tarpon Springs) 9:30 a.m.

Great Vespers for St. John the Baptist 6:30 p.m.

Saturday, January 7 **St. John the Baptist**

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

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

Sunday, January 15 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Tuesday, January 17 **St. Anthony**

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

Wednesday, January 18 **Sts. Athanasios and Cyril**

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

Paraklesis Service of Supplication 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, January 22 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, January 25 **St. Gregory the Theologian**

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

Sunday, January 29 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Monday, January 30 **Three Hierarchs**

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

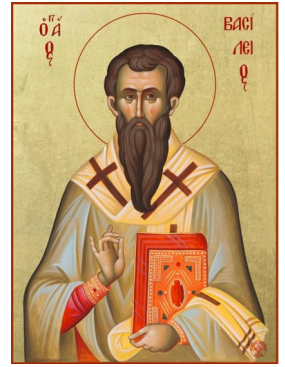
Thursday, February 2 **Presentation of Christ**

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

Sunday, February 5 **Beginning of the Triodion-Publican and Pharisee**

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

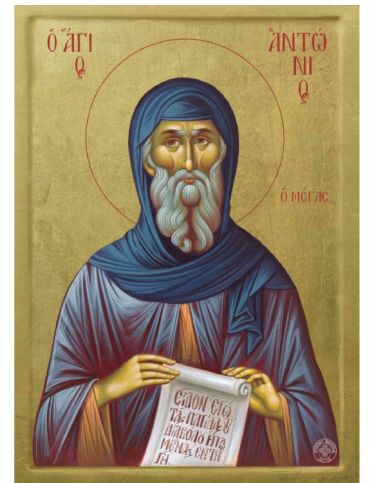
St. Basil the Great



Theophany



St. Anthony the Great



Three Hierarchs



Liturgical Notes for January

Sunday, January 1 - The Circumcision of Christ/St. Basil - New Year's Day Three things are commemorated on the first day of each year. First, the circumcision of Christ, which occurred historically 8 days after His Nativity. He was circumcised according to the rites of the Jewish law and given the name Jesus. Secondly, we commemorate the feast of St. Basil the Great, one of the Great Hierarchs of our church. St. Basil authored one of the Divine Liturgies used in our church, which is celebrated on his feastday. He also helped found monasticism. St. Basil was a friend to the poor, often baking bread with money in it and throwing it through the windows of widows and the poor. Hence the tradition of the Vasilopita, the bread with the coin baked inside, which we cut at the New Year. Finally, we are supposed to pray every day and commemorate all of life's milestones with prayer. So, we open a new year, 2023, with prayer and the Divine Liturgy.

Wednesday, January 4 - Royal Hours of Theophany 9:30 - 11:00 a.m. Like Nativity and Pascha, there is a service of the Royal Hours which is celebrated in anticipation of Theophany. This service consists of prayers, Psalms, hymns and Gospel readings which both foretell and recount this Great Feast of the church year.

Thursday, January 5 - The Feast of Theophany The Feast of Theophany commemorates several things: First, and most well-known, it commemorates the Baptism of Christ. Christ was baptized in the Jordan River by St. John the Baptist. Second, at the moment of His descent into the River, the Jordan River reversed its course, and all of Creation changed its course with the presence of the Christ. Third, the Holy Trinity was made manifest for the first time in human history, as the Son of God was in the water, the Holy Spirit hovered over as a dove, and the voice of God was heard. The feast of the Theophany is the manifestation of God, as well as the Baptism of Christ. The name "Epiphany" refers to the enlightenment of the world. After the Divine Liturgy, there is a service called the Blessing of Waters during which water is blessed and sprinkled over the church and over the people as a way to renew and reconsecrate ourselves on this feastday. There is a beautiful and powerful prayer that is offered only on January 5 and 6, asking God to reconsecrate the world.

Friday, January 6 - Great Vespers of St. John the Baptist - 6:30 p.m. The Vespers Service is the service that begins the liturgical day. In our church, the day begins at sundown. Thus the feast of St. John the Baptist, celebrated on January 7, begins with the sunset of January 6. Properly celebrated, all feastdays should begin with the celebration of Great Vespers, including every Sunday which should begin with Great Vespers on Saturday evenings. Because this is not practical in most parishes, Great Vespers is celebrated in most parishes on a limited basis. We will, of course, celebrate the complete cycle of services related to our feastday of St. John, which will begin with Great Vespers.

Saturday, January 7 - St. John the Baptist The day after a major feastday often commemorates the secondary figure of the Feast. On January 6, we celebrate the Baptism/Epiphany of Christ, who is obviously the major figure. The secondary figure of that feast is St. John the Baptist, whose feastday we commemorate the next day, January 7. St. John is the LAST of the Prophets before Christ and the first of the Saints, those who believed in Christ. Righteous figures who came before Christ are called either "Righteous" or "Prophet." Holy People who came after Christ are called Saints. St. John the Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist, as both titles.

Tuesday, January 17 - St. Anthony St. Anthony is recognized as one of the fathers of monasticism. He lived in the late 3rd and early 4th centuries. He founded a monastery in Egypt which still exists to this day. He authored many of the monastic rules that are still in practice today. He also was a major contributor to the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea in 325, where the Nicene Creed was first authored. He was one of the leaders against the heresies of Arianism.

Liturgical Notes for January

Wednesday, January 18 - St. Athanasios and Cyril St. Athanasios was born in 297 and was ordained a priest in 319. At the tender age of 28, he was one of the leaders of the First Ecumenical Council in 325 in Nicea, and defended the Faith against the heresies of Arius. He contributed to the development of the Nicene Creed which was authored in 325 and edited in 381 at the second Ecumenical Council. St. Athanasios became a bishop and later Patriarch of Alexandria. St. Cyril was actually born after the death of St. Athanasios, so even though they are depicted together and celebrated together, they never met one another. Saint Cyril was also the Patriarch of Alexandria and presided over the Third Ecumenical Council in 431.

Thursday, January 20 – Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary - We will continue to offer Paraklesis once a month, so that we can pray for all the members of our community by name, out loud. We will alternate some in the evening and some in the morning. For January, the Paraklesis will be offered on Wednesday evening, January 18, from 6:00-7:00 p.m.

Wednesday, January 25 - St. Gregory the Theologian One of the Three Hierarchs, also lived in the 4th century. He was a friend and contemporary of St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom. He was an accomplished speaker and writer, was the Bishop of Nazianzos and was one of the Bishops who presided at the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381, which finalized the Nicene Creed that we recite to this day.

Monday, January 30 - The Three Hierarchs The Three Hierarchs are St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom. Each had his own feastday and all are honored together on January 30, ironically because of a controversy over which was the greatest. (Imagine a church meeting where we debated which saints were the most important!) Each of them lived in the 4th Century, each was an accomplished writer and speaker, each was a Bishop, each authored a Liturgy and each is remembered prominently in the history of our church to this day. The Three Hierarchs are Patron Saints of Teachers and Education.

Thursday, February 2 - The Presentation of Our Lord into the Temple

The Presentation of Christ is a major feastday of the church and commemorates the day, 40 days after the Nativity, when Christ was brought to the temple when He was 40 days old. According to the Law of Moses, every male child was brought to the temple on its 40th day, together with a sacrifice of pigeons or turtle doves by the parents, and the child was “consecrated Holy to the Lord.” Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the temple on His 40th day, because it was the law to do so. In the temple was a priest named Simeon, who was an older man, who had been promised by God that he would not die until he saw the Christ. When Simeon saw the baby Jesus, he knew in his heart that this was the Lord’s Messiah. He took the child in his arms and prayed “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light to enlighten the Gentiles and for glory to Your people Israel.” (Luke 2:29-32) This prayer is recited over every child in the Orthodox Church when they are brought to church for the first time when they are 40 days old. That’s where this beautiful tradition comes from.

Parish Registry

Baptism-Demetri Panayioti Limberakis, son of Stefan Limberakis and Natalia Zapata, was baptized on Sunday, November 20. George Limberakis was the Godfather. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism-Iliana Aikaterini Shah, daughter of Hadi and Kelly Shah, was baptized on Saturday, December 3. Marianne Psilos, Stamatia Fulton and Anastasia Psilos were the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

Wedding-Daniel Rash and Gabrielle Engleman were married on Sunday, December 4. Vasilios and Moriah Panagopoulos were the sponsors. Congratulations!

Funeral-Steven Oster passed away on November 20. His funeral was held on Friday, December 9. May his memory be eternal!

Trisagion-Fr. George Burchill passed away on December 12. A Trisagion was held for him on Sunday, December 18. May his memory be eternal!

Parish Registry Totals

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Weddings	11	11	8	7	8	9
Baptisms	20	19	13	20	27	20
Funerals	11	9	12	10	9	9
Chrismations	4	4	5	5	6	7

St. John the Baptist Community News

Meeting of Ministry Heads, Tuesday, January 10- On Tuesday, January 10, there will be a meeting of ministry heads from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Each ministry head is requested to attend and other members of each ministry are invited to attend. If the ministry head cannot attend, please ask someone else in your ministry to attend, so that all ministries are represented.

Sunday School Teachers' Seminar, January 14- On Saturday, January 14, from 9:00-12:00, there will be a seminar for all Sunday school teachers.

Prayer for Teachers on Sunday, January 29 - On January 29, we celebrate the feast of the Three Hierarchs, who are also the patron saints of teachers. At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, we will offer a prayer for all teachers and anyone who works in education in our community.

Philoptochos - The Annunciation Chapter of Philoptochos wishes you and your family a very blessed and happy 2023! In January we will have several events:

January 6 - St. John's Vespers - meal after Vespers sponsored by Philoptochos

January 22 - General meeting immediately after Divine Liturgy in the Zaharias Room - everyone is welcome to attend, please join us!

Philoptochos Vasilopita Sunday January 8 – We will again resume our tradition of Vasilopita Sunday for 2023. We will cut the Vasilopita for our various ministries at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, January 8. The Philoptochos will also be offering pieces of Vasilopita as part of coffee hour. Any proceeds from this day will be going to St. Basil's Academy in New York.

Parish Council Elections—On Sunday, December 11, we held our elections for the Parish Council. Congratulations to Amin Hanhan, Rip Panos, Marilyn Sandborn, Alexis Scarfogliero and John Zelatis who were elected to the Parish Council. Also, special thanks to our election committee of George Mitseas and Mathew Balasis. We also want to thank Joanne Dalaklis for serving on the Parish Council for the past two years.

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 January, the dates are Mondays, January 9, 16, 23 and 30.

Women's Bible Study-Women's Bible Study meets on most Tuesday mornings with Fr. Stavros from 10:00 -11:30 a.m. either in person or on zoom. We are studying the Gospel of John. For January, the dates are Tuesday, January 10; Tuesday, January 24 and Tuesday, January 31.

GOYA—

Meeting with GOYAns from St. Claire Shores, Michigan—On January 5, our GOYA is going to meet up with a GOYA from Assumption Greek Orthodox Church in St. Claire Shores, Michigan, who are visiting the Tampa Bay area for Epiphany. We will meet from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center.

Our January GOYA Meeting will be Sunday, January 8, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided.

Parea Dancers—Our Parea Dance Group (GOYAns) will be having a monthly practice one Sunday each month after the Divine Liturgy. Our January practice is on Sunday, January 15.

GOYA Clearwater Event—The GOYA Clearwater Winter Event will be held January 20-22 at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Clearwater. Those in GOYA will be receiving details for how to sign up to attend.

St. John the Baptist Community News

Young Adults—Our Young Adult Group will meet for dinner/discussion on Thursday, January 12, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. The group also meets informally for social events. If you are interested in getting notices via What's App, contact Aris Rogers at 813-309-5525.

Men's Group—Our men's group will meet on Sunday, January 29, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Any men of our community are welcome to join us for dinner, discussion. Please bring \$20—we will order in for dinner. Please mark down our dates for men's group for this academic year—Sunday, January 29; Sunday, March 26; Sunday, April 30 and Sunday, May 21.

SAVE THE DATE—Men's Retreat hosted by St. John in Tampa on Saturday, February 18, from 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Theme: "How Can I Be a Spiritual Leader If I'm Not Even a Follower: Getting Back to the Basics of Christianity." This retreat is open to any Orthodox men of the Tampa Bay area and any of your friends.

SAVE THE DATE—Women's Retreat hosted by St. John in Tampa on Saturday, March 25, from 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Theme: "Behold, I am the handmaiden of the Lord: Letting life be according to His Word." This retreat is open to any Orthodox women of the Tampa Bay area and any of your friends.

Results from Boxes of Hope - Our JOY/HOPE ministry collected 47 large boxes worth of donated food and goods to Metropolitan Ministries, as well as over \$400 in donations. These boxes will surely supply hope and joy to many this Christmas season.

College Student Ministry - Our college student group will be meet on Sunday, January 29, following Divine Liturgy in the office building. Any college student who moved to the Tampa area to study at one of the many local colleges are welcome to join us for lunch and a discussion. Please RSVP to Vasili Panagopoulos so we know how many are coming at vasili@stjohntpa.org.

Adopt a college student - Καλή Χρόνια 2023! Happy New Year! This is a very meaningful and worthwhile ministry! Students go off to college and the support systems are not what they used to be. All the students have been very grateful for our support! They have said that a card, note, email or text came at just the right time. We **NEED** people to Adopt College Students! If you are interested in helping, all you need to do is try to connect with your student a few times a semester. We ask you to add them to your prayer list. You may send a card, note, email or text with encouraging words and thoughts. Some people send care packages or gift cards. It's all up to what works for you.

College Students: I have attempted to reach out to all of our students with 2-3 emails and 2 text messages. If you have not heard from me, please email me at kkaburis2000@yahoo.com or text me at: 813-240-6413. Have blessed New Year 2023!

JOY Tweens - In January, we are planning an offsite activity such as an escape room or ropes course. We will also have a meeting after church on January 29. Stay tuned for more details to come.

Love to take photos? Come join our Photo Ministry! It's a fun and creative way to serve and to show the community all the beautiful services and wonderful activities we have here at St. John. All abilities are welcome. Please call or text Karina Findlay at (813) 476-9632.

St John needs all hands on deck for Gasparilla on January 28!

Ahoy! Tampa's Gasparilla approacheth fast, and we need Ye Holy Krewe of the SS. St. John the Baptist to reconvene! We are looking for volunteers to help out on Saturday, January 28, to assist with parking. This endeavor has been a tremendous support to our parish in the past only make possible by you, our faithful Krewe! We need your help once more! If you are available on Saturday, January 28, please email or text Captain Alex Limberatos as soon as you can (262-370-0586/chaplainalexl@gmail.com). Thanks for your support Mateys!

INTERESTED IN LEARNING ABOUT
ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY?
PLEASE JOIN US FOR A FOUR WEEK COURSE

Orthodoxy 101

OFFERED BY
FR. STAVROS N. AKROTIRIANAKIS, PARISH PRIEST

WHY SHOULD I ATTEND ORTHODOXY 101?

- TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE
BASICS OF THE ORTHODOX
CHRISTIAN FAITH
- IF YOU ARE MARRIED TO (OR
DATING) AN ORTHODOX
CHRISTIAN AND WOULD LIKE TO
BETTER UNDERSTAND THE FAITH
OF YOUR ORTHODOX SPOUSE
- AS A PRE-REQUISITE FOR
JOINING THE ORTHODOX
CHRISTIAN FAITH
- AS A REFRESHER COURSE IN THE
BASICS OF THE ORTHODOX
CHRISTIAN FAITH

WHEN WILL THE CLASSES BE HELD?

- MONDAY, JANUARY 23
A TOUR OF THE ORTHODOX
CHURCH: WHAT WE SEE AND
WHAT IT MEANS
- MONDAY, JANUARY 30
INTRODUCTION TO THE
SACRAMENTS-BAPTISM,
CHRISMATION, CONFESSION,
MARRIAGE, UNCTION
- MONDAY, FEBRUARY 6
THE DIVINE LITURGY-
A "TEACHING" LITURGY
- MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13
ORTHODOX TRADITIONS-
FASTING, ICONS, PRAYER AND
LIVING AN ORTHODOX
CHRISTIAN LIFE

WHAT FORMAT CAN I EXPECT?

A RELAXED ATMOSPHERE WITH PRESENTATIONS, INTERACTIVE DISCUSSIONS,
AND LOTS OF TIME FOR QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.
CLASSES WILL BE HELD FROM 6:30-8:30 P.M. IN THE CHURCH SANCTUARY.

Please call the church office at 813-876-8830 for further information or if you have any questions.

Please sign up by emailing Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com.

There is no charge for this class.

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH - 2418 W. SWANN AVENUE - TAMPA, FL - 33609

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.

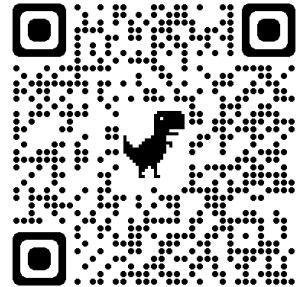
Matthew 25 founders Peggy & Mike Kanter, as well as Greg & Victoria Melton, are Go To people if you have questions or need direction on where you may be needed when you arrive.

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.

On the lighter side

- 1.) Going to bed early
- 2.) Not leaving my house
- 3.) Not going to a party

My childhood punishments have become my adult goals.

Youth Protection Program Reminder:



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

At this time, the Youth Protection Program is currently under revision and changes from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

Please be on the lookout in weekly bulletins and future Messengers with the updated Youth Protection Program.



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

CARE PACKAGES FOR DEPLOYED MILITARY PERSONNEL

Our Ladies Philoptochos Society and our Veterans/First Responders Ministries teamed up to collect items for US military personnel deployed throughout the world.

Over 100 boxes were filled locally in support of “Operation Boodle Brigade” (see attached picture). This organization was started in 2012 by a mother whose son graduated from the West Point Academy. When he was deployed, he informed his mother that the enlisted men under his command were not receiving ‘care packages’ for the holidays. Thus, she began the “Boodle Brigade.”

This year’s packages will be sent to troops in Kuwait, Qatar, Korea, Europe and other undisclosed locations.

In addition to supporting the “Boodle Brigade,” care packages were also sent to our three parishioners currently serving in our Armed Forces – Chris Attanasio, Christopher Kavouklis, and Christopher Scarfogliero. We thank Lou Christopher and Jeanie Nenos for spearheading this fine effort.

Thank you to everyone who donated items to support these two noteworthy projects. May our Lord bless each of you for your kindness with a blessed Nativity and healthy New Year!



St. John Stewardship Report 2020-2022

Final Reports from 2022

Year to Year Comparison ~	2022*	2021*	2020*
Pledged Year to Date	\$439,518	\$493,628	\$524,859
Received Year to Date	\$579,251	\$571,489	\$551,032
Average Pledge	\$2,100	\$1,277	\$1,510
Median Pledge	\$1,350	\$1,100	\$920
# of Individual/Families Pledged/Giving	369	405	395
*YTD as of 12/20/2022, 12/19/2021, 12/19/2020			

TWELVE DISCIPLES PROGRAM

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



Brief History

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

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

Prayer Warriors

Father Stavros prays for all names that represent the entire St John the Baptist membership at each service and specifically at each Paraklesis.

Thinking that praying for members of our community should not be the responsibility of the Priest alone, in August 2020, we started a program called "The 12 Disciples Project." The names of all St. John members are arranged onto multiple pages. These pages are divided and distributed between interested individual volunteers that are referred to as *Prayer Warriors* (disciples). The idea is for each "disciple" or "warrior" to take one or more

page of names and pray for the entire group of people once a day.

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

We currently have 40 "disciples", meaning that each person in this community is being prayed for by at least three people every day.

Participating requires no special talent, no physical ability, no financial investment but only a desire to offer up prayerful love for your fellow parishioners. As Father Stavros admonished us in the past, "We (all) need time to be in the presence of the Son of God" and do it often!

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

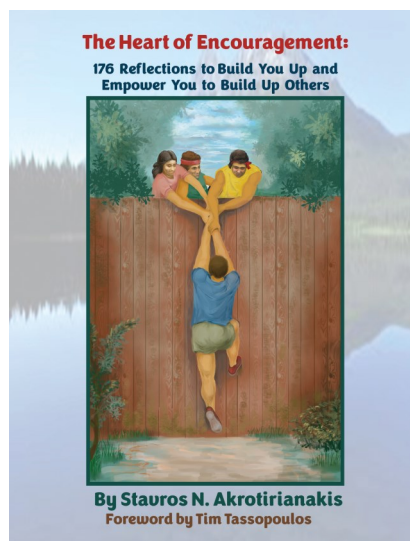
"As You were baptized in the Jordan, O Lord, then the worship of the Trinity became manifest, for the voice of the Father bore witness to You, naming You the Beloved Son; and the Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed the certainty of the word. O Christ God, who appeared and illumined the world, glory to You."



Apolytikion of the Feast of Theophany.

Start Your 2023 with Fr. Stavros' new book on Encouragement

The Heart of Encouragement: 176 Reflections to Build You Up and Empower You to Build Up Others



“As Christians, we reflect the spirit of Christ's belief in our personal worth. Yet, believing in ourselves can be difficult. No one wants to lack confidence. No one likes feeling anxious. Yet narcissistic living in feeling or behavior is equally dissatisfying. Living at either extreme does not allow us to become the best version of ourselves. The answer lies somewhere in the center, and encouragement is a vital component in finding the balance we seek.”

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

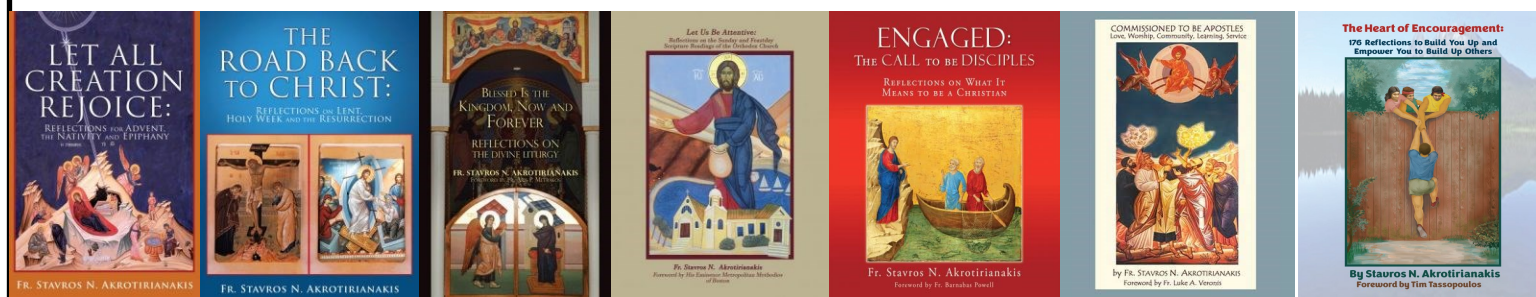
Over 3,757 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 6 years! Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email Vasili at Vasili@stjohntpa.org and ask him to add you. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email Vasili 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 **SEVEN** 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
The Heart of Encouragement: 176 Reflections to Build You Up and Empower You to Build Up Others



Nursing Ministry January 2023

January is National Thyroid Awareness Month

The American Thyroid Association reports, 1 in 10 people suffer from a thyroid disorder. They also found that at least 1 in 8 women will develop a thyroid disorder during their lifetime. More than half of the people in America that suffer from a thyroid disorder are undiagnosed. Raising awareness about the thyroid is important because it plays a significant role in the human body.

The thyroid is a small butterfly-shaped gland located just above your collarbone and in front of the windpipe. This gland controls important functions such as regulating breathing, heart rate, body weight, muscle strength, cholesterol, and body temperature.

Thyroid disease refers to several conditions that affect how the gland functions. The thyroid can be either overactive or underactive and both conditions can lead to health problems. Two of the most common thyroid diseases are hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism.

- *Hyperthyroidism is an overactive thyroid disease; this condition occurs when your thyroid gland produces excess levels of the thyroid hormone thyroxine. Additionally, this thyroid disease can increase your body's metabolism, causing weight loss and an irregular heartbeat.*
- *Hypothyroidism is an underactive thyroid. This condition occurs when the thyroid gland doesn't produce enough thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH). Hypothyroidism's deficiency of thyroid hormones can disrupt things such as heart rate, body temperature, and all aspects of metabolism. Major symptoms include fatigue, cold sensitivity, constipation, dry skin, and unexplained weight gain.*
- *Thyroid cancer begins when the cells grow and multiply rapidly. These cells form a tumor, and abnormal cells can spread throughout the body. There are no early symptoms. However, as the cells grow, they may cause a lump in the neck, swollen lymph glands, voice changes, and difficulty swallowing. Most cases of thyroid cancer can be cured with surgery to remove most or all the thyroid.*

1. **Papillary thyroid cancer** The most common of thyroid cancers. It grows slowly but may spread to lymph nodes on the neck.
2. **Follicular thyroid cancer** The second most common form of thyroid cancer. These cancer nodules grow slowly and near areas with high iodine deficiencies in the body. This is one of the easiest forms of thyroid cancer to treat.
3. **Medullary thyroid cancer** This is less common, and cases are usually hereditary. However, it has a higher chance of spreading to the lymph nodes than other types.
4. **Anaplastic thyroid cancer** While this is the most aggressive form of thyroid cancer, it is thankfully the rarest. It is very dangerous because it grows rapidly and easily spreads.

Diagnosing and treating thyroid diseases

Thyroid conditions are all treatable. When diagnosing thyroid diseases, doctors use your medical history, a physical exam, and specialized blood tests. Some of these blood tests examine the amount of thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) in your blood. With these tests, a doctor can often tell from your TSH levels if you have hyperthyroidism or hypothyroidism. Disorders can be treated by medications or, in some cases, surgery. Treatment will depend on the disease of the thyroid.

Awareness is key to helping people recognize the symptoms of thyroid problems. With better awareness, people will know when to talk to their doctors about testing and treatment. The goal of this movement is to increase awareness of thyroid diseases as well as prevention, treatment, and cure.

Want more information? Check out these websites and talk to your healthcare provider.

www.thyroid.org

<https://nationaltoday.com/thyroid-awareness-month/>

Take Advantage of the Parish Assistance Program

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is excited to share we will continue to offer the Parish Assistance program together with BayCare Behavioral Health. The 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 that are sensitive to the values and beliefs of those they serve and provide compassionate care to children, adults, parents, and seniors. Parishioners can confidentially contact BayCare directly to request up to three free 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. 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-healthservices> Help is available for life issues including:

Help is available for life issues including:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Family discord
- Marital problems
- Substance abuse issues
- Behavioral issues

This service is completely confidential between parishioner and a BayCare Christian Therapist



BayCare Behavioral Health

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.

WELCOME TO OUR PARISH

If you are new to the Tampa Bay area or just visiting, we would love to get to know you better.

PLEASE TEXT THE WORD

"WELCOME" TO 813-790-5950

FOLLOW THE PROMPTS TO GIVE US
 YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION AND FROM THERE
 YOU WILL BE DIRECTED TO OUR ONLINE CONNECTION CARD

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

St. John's Bookstore

Our bookstore recently acquired some books in the Greek Language. The following is a writing by Fr. Basil Bamia from the book, "Interesting Articles for our Orthodox Faith" published in Thessalonica in 2005 and translated by Dora Morgan.

THE ROUTE OF LIFE VS. THE ROUTE OF DEATH

God is immortality and piety – Satan is death and impiety
 God is modest and moral – Satan is immodest and immoral

God is a lamb – Satan is a wolf

God is wise and powerful – Satan is foolish and weak

God is a rose – Satan is a thorn

God is worthy of every honor – Satan is unworthy and dishonest

God the judge is merciful – Satan the defendant is cruel and uncharitable

God is soft and kind – Satan is bitter and audacious

God is innocent and peaceful – Satan is guilty and quarrelsome

God is industrious and humble – Satan is lazy and proud
 God is affectionate and loving – Satan is a tyrant who loves evil-doing

God is glorious and hospitable – Satan is shameful and unwelcoming

GOD IS PARADISE – SATAN IS DEATH
WILL YOU NEED GPS TO CHOOSE THE ROUTE YOU'LL TAKE?

-Presvytera Denise

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
Demitrius & 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.**

Sunday School News

The Sunday School Staff and children would like to wish everyone in our parish many blessings in the New Year and we hope that you all had a wonderful Christmas with your family.

We hope you enjoyed our Christmas Pageant this year. Our students did an amazing job and we are so proud of them. Our actors with speaking parts did a wonderful job memorizing their lines and putting meaning behind their words. All the shepherds, angels, and animals were so adorable. A special thank you to our 7th grade students who stepped up when we didn't have enough actors. We would also like to thank all the people involved in this pageant: The teachers, the clergy, the parents, and the amazing cast of The Gifts of Christmas.

CAST:

Visitor - MAGGIE TRAKAS

Friends - ASPASIA PANOS

Narrators:

1 - ILLIANA MATASSINI

2 - ALAINA ROBY

Angel Gabriel - VICTORIA MAGOS

Angel of the Lord - JULIE KONSTAS

Mary - PHEOBE SENGSOUVANNA

Joseph - GIANNI MATTASSINI

Innkeeper - JOVAN LAKIC

Speaking Angels:

1.) CAROLINE ANTON

2.) EBBY SERBANOS

3.) KOULA NIATSIKAS

4.) GABRIELE MOLINA

5.) DAPHNE SETZER-TORRES

Herod - CONSTANTINE AMERES

Bible Scholar - KRIS CHRISTOPHER

Shepherd 1 - PETER KONSTAS

Shepherd 2 - ZACK ZAHARIS

Shepherd 3 - LOUIS MANTZANAS

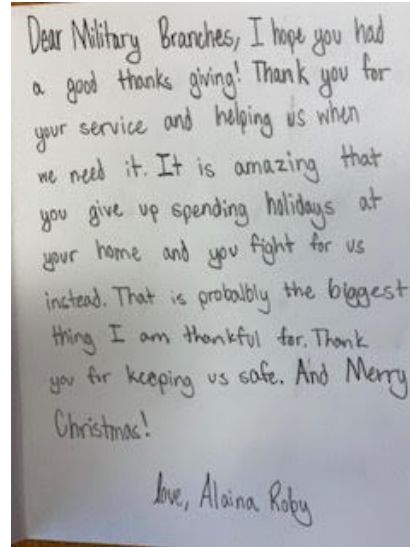
King Gaspar - ZACH GEORGE

King Melchior - PENN SERBANOS

King Balthazar - DORION SETZER-TORRES

A special thank you goes out to Zackie Ameres and all the parents who helped with the Christmas pageant rehearsal and the Hope & Joy/Sunday School Christmas party on December 10th. Our children prepared many BOXES OF HOPE and made about 40 loaves of Prosphora for St. John's. The students learned about the importance of both. They also created a number of crafts, had a delicious lunch, and played some games. A good time was had by all.

In addition to our Pageant, our Sunday School topics covered in December were STEWARDSHIP and THE NATIVITY. Our students are truly great stewards of our church. They gave so much of their TIME and TALENT for the Christmas Pageant. St. John's is truly blessed.



SUNDAY SCHOOL CALENDAR FOR January:

- Sunday, January 1: Happy New Year! No Sunday School
- Sunday, January 8: Vasilopita - St. Basil - Epiphany
- Saturday, January 14: Sunday School Teacher Retreat 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
- Sunday, January 15: Confession
- Sunday, January 22: Zacchaeus - Youth Sunday
- Sunday, January 29: Presentation of Christ

Christmas Pageant 2022



Visit our Flickr page to
see more!!!
[https://www.flickr.com/
people/
stjohngoctampa/](https://www.flickr.com/people/stjohngoctampa/)



Christmas Pageant 2022



Archangel Michael Award Recipients Jim Armstrong & Melissa Krinos



On Sunday, December 4,
we presented the Archangel Michael Award to this
year's winners—Jim
Armstrong and Melissa
Krinos.

Congratulations to Jim
and Melissa for this
award and much gratitude
and thanksgiving from
our parish for the many
years of service you have
so faithfully offered.



St. John Greek Orthodox Church's Young-at-Heart Ministry

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

MEETING DATE AND TIME

Our meetings are held once a month from 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., usually at the Kourmolis Hall or a restaurant in place of meetings at the hall. From time to time we may go on fieldtrips.

December 3, the YAH group had their Christmas gathering at the Kourmolis Hall. Diane and Mike Trimis drove to Ocala and brought back Peter Nenos to join.



Peter Nenos is in the front row of the festivities. The twenty-one participants relaxed with coffee, juices and pastries. Then there was a video presentation of the Nativity of our Lord Savior Jesus Christ. This was followed by a second video which explained the symbolism in the icon of the Nativity of our Lord. A discussion was led by Father John.

Afterwards the participants had their potluck luncheon. The participants brought a variety of Lenten foods. Then there was an exchange of Christmas gifts. This was followed by a

sing-a-long led by Presbyteria Denise. We like to thank Father John, Presbyteria Denise, Tina Haritiri in taking charge of the festivities and thanks to Joanne Dalaklis for the pictures.



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

Dora Morgan at 813-613-3738

Beware the Dangers of 'Self-Silencing'

By: Dr. Oz and Dr. Roizen, MDs

Actor Will Rogers wittily asked for less blather and a lot more listening when he said, "Never miss a good chance to shut up." Ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu advocated silence as "a source of great strength."

But there's a serious downside to stifling the expression of your thoughts and feelings — and the toll it takes isn't only emotional.

Researchers from the University of Pittsburgh interviewed 306 women and did ultrasound imaging of their carotid arteries. They found that the more frequently women reported being what's called "self-silencing," the more likely they were to have atherosclerosis in that major artery to the brain.

Carotid plaque is a serious threat. Reduction of blood flow to the brain limits the oxygen essential for healthy brain function, and heavy plaque deposits or pieces that break off can lead to a stroke.

Bottling up your feelings isn't good for anyone — men or women. If your response to a tough conversation is to shut up and shut down, here are three strategies from cognitive behavioral therapy to help you protect your health:

1. Tune in to how suppressed feelings affect your body. Notice where tension sets up camp.
2. If you don't have a friend or therapist to talk with, write down your thoughts and feelings. Get them out.
3. When communicating your feelings to another person, start the sentence with the phrase "I feel ..." and avoid "You make me feel ..."

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 January. 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.

January 1-7

Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go.

Isaiah 48:17

As we begin a new year, we set goals, make resolutions and in some sense we begin anew. This verse reminds us that it is the Lord our God, who is supposed to be our guide, our life, our goal, our purpose. The only true "profit" in this life is the spiritual profit, because all other profit is temporary. We work for that which perishes. But the spiritual life is something which we can enjoy now which will not perish when life on earth ends. This week is a good time to ask yourself the question, "Who is the leader of my life?" And by extension, who is the leader of my family, my company, etc. It is the Lord, and only the Lord that leads us in the way we should go. No other leader, no other path can lead us to salvation. My spiritual father told me once that I should get in front of the altar as often as possible, to remind me who is in charge in my life. Every time we worship, we

reaffirm our worship of the Lord and His placement at the head of our lives. Every time we go to confession, we recommit our lives to Him. So, start the new year off with some new habits, especially weekly worship, not only to remind you who is in charge, but to remind us of our purpose, our destiny and our roadmap to get there.

January 8-14

He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Psalms 23:3

Some people enter this year not in a great place. Perhaps 2022 wasn't a good year for you. Perhaps 2023 isn't off to a good start. Or you just can't make a good start because of something bogging you down from the past. One thing that God can do, and only God can do, is to restore your soul. When we forgive one another, we restore relationships. When we get back to work after a failure, we can restore success. But the associated guilt, shame, sin, whatever darkens our soul as a result of whatever things we've failed at can only be restored by God. Prayer is a great place to start. So is worship, confession reading of Scripture, and just some quiet time with God, and quiet time with your own thoughts. We don't get enough stillness in our lives. We don't take enough time for reflection. Psalm 23 paints a beautiful picture in the verses before verse three, as the Psalmist writes of lying down in green pastures and being led beside still waters. This is a beautiful picture of what is possible with God, to be led, even through the valley of the valley of the shadow of death (23:4) and still feel restored. This is the kind of peace, confidence, and restoration that can only come from God. He is also the one that points on the path of righteousness, but only when we are traveling for His name's sake.

January 15-21

When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come.

John 16:13

In order to be guided by someone, one has to accept guidance. And in order to accept guidance, one has to have a posture of humility, recognizing the need for guidance, recognizing that they are somewhat "lost" or "off the path." Sin causes all of us to be somewhat lost. Sin is what causes us to miss the mark on God and on relationships with one another. Sin is what causes us to drift from truth. The Holy Spirit is supposed to be our guide. He guides us in all truth. The challenge for us is to be open to truth, and to have that posture of humility and recognition that we have missed the mark. There is an often-used phrase, "leave room for the Holy Spirit."

it.” We are not supposed to micromanage our lives down to the smallest unit. We are supposed to allow the Holy Spirit to come into us and to guide us, where He wills sometimes, and not necessarily where we want to go. More importantly, we need to allow Him to guide us away from the things we shouldn’t be doing, many of which we know we should be doing. A lie is a rewriting of history. We lie all the time. Yet, Jesus tells us that the truth will set us free. (John 8:32) Relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit is a big step in our quest for true freedom.

January 22-28

You whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, “You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off.”

Isaiah 41:9

When I was a kid, I had to endure the humiliating experience of people choosing teams for a game and being the last one chosen. (Many of us, perhaps most of us have had this experience, it is not unique to me). When one is chosen last, there is the inference that they are not valued and not wanted, that everyone is better than them. It is not a good place to be. Isaiah 41:9 is God’s firm answer to the thought that we are not wanted. We are wanted, by God, always. He doesn’t have a hierarchy of who He picks first, He wants everyone. We need to hear the message from Isaiah in a personal way, and to believe it in a personal way. The Lord says that He has taken us, from the ends of the earth and called us from its farthest corners. This does not only mean geographically. It is much more than that. The “farthest” corner means the one who works in obscurity in the office cubicle farthest from the window, the patient in the hospital who is the farthest from recovery, the one who is in prison who is the farthest from freedom, the one who is sad, who is the farthest from confident, the one who has failed and is the farthest from success—all of these and more, these are the ones God wants. If we are in any of these unenviable positions, we need to hear these words “You are my servant, I have chosen you and

not cast you off.” We have to believe that we are chosen, that we are not cast off, that we are not forsaken, that God will not send us away. This is part of what faith is, to believe in something that seems unbelievable, that God actually wants ME, that He actually wants ME to succeed, that He’s rooting for ME, that He values ME, despite who I am and what I’ve done.

January 29-February 4

If Thou, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you.

Psalm 130:3-4

It’s a good thing that the Lord doesn’t mark iniquities, because if He did, no one could stand. I can say for certain that there are certain people I’ve sinned against a finite amount of times. For instance, there is someone I’ve made exactly one mistake with. There are others that I’ve made so many mistakes, I can’t count. Each time we sin against someone, we are also sinning against the Lord. Which means that if you total up all of our sins, against God and against one another, the total is incalculable, that’s how high it is. If the Lord kept a record of all those sins and couldn’t forgive any of them, then no way does anyone stand before Him, no way does anyone get into the Kingdom of God. We only make it because of His forgiveness and mercy. Now, if we expect mercy from God, it stands to reason that we should have mercy on one another. If we expect the Lord to forgive our sins, which are incalculable, we should be able to forgive one another. If we marked iniquities of others toward us, we would have no friends. We’d hate everyone. The only way that any relationship lasts, whether with God or with someone else, is through forgiveness, which is based on patience and mercy. We all have some growing to do in this area.

St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

Have you downloaded our App?

Download the St. John’s app in the App Store, or Google Play Store by typing in “St John GOC Tampa.” You can access the Messenger, weekly bulletin, livestream services, and much more all through our app!

Do you Like our Facebook page? Like our page and suggest it to your friends. Announcements are posted frequently so you are up to date with everything going on at St. John the Baptist.

You can find our page at [StJohnGOCTampa](https://www.facebook.com/StJohnGOCTampa).

Live Streaming

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

To access this page

1. Go to our Church’s website: 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.

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



Like





Daughters of Penelope (DOP) Alcmaeon 167 Tampa

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

*The DOP is Wishing Everyone a Blessed Year Ahead Filled
with Love, Joy, Health, Peace, and Prosperity!*

10 Brutal Truths

Here are 10 brutal truths that every single person needs to hear.

1. You're going to die and you have no idea when.

Stop pretending that you're invincible. Acknowledge the fact of your own mortality, and then start structuring your life in a more meaningful way.

2. Your material wealth won't make you a better or happier person.

Even if you're one of the lucky ones who achieves his or her materialistic dreams, money only amplifies that which was already present.

3. Your obsession with finding happiness is what prevents its attainment.

Happiness is always present in your life--it's just a matter of connecting to it and allowing it to flow through you that's challenging.

4. Donating money does less than donating time.

Giving your time is a way to change your perception and create a memory for yourself and others that will last forever.

5. You can't make everyone happy, and if you try, you'll lose yourself.

Stop trying to please, and start respecting your values, principles, and autonomy.

6. Your achievements and successes won't matter on your deathbed.

When your time has come to transition from this reality, you won't be thinking about that raise; you'll be thinking about the relationships you've made--so start acting accordingly.

7. Your talent means nothing without consistent effort and practice.

Some of the most talented people in the world never move out from their parent's basement.

8. Nobody cares how difficult your life is, and you are the author of your life's story.

Stop looking for people to give you sympathy and start creating the life story you want to read.

9. Investing in yourself isn't selfish. It's the most worthwhile thing you can do.

You have to put on your own gas mask to save the person sitting right next to you.

10. Time is your most valuable asset--you need to prioritize how you spend it.

You have the power and responsibility to decide what you do with the time you have, so choose wisely.

Weddings, Divorces, Baptisms, Funerals, Memorials as well as Office, Fundraisers and Hall Use Procedures

*The Greek Orthodox Church is not a church of rules. But without some guidelines to go by, there would be chaos. The following guidelines are rooted in Orthodox Tradition and Canon Law. These guidelines are printed in **The Messenger** in the beginning of each calendar year, and it is a good idea from time to time for people to review them. These guidelines have been copied from the 2020 Year-book of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Please review them, and keep them in mind when planning for your important life events. If you have any questions, please contact Fr. Stavros. (Special requirements specific to sacraments at St. John the Baptist appear in italics.)*

Weddings

For the union of a man and woman to be recognized as sacramentally valid by the Orthodox Church, the following conditions must be met: The Sacrament of Matrimony must be celebrated by an Orthodox Priest of a canonical Orthodox jurisdiction, according to the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church, in a canonical Orthodox Church, and with the authorization of the Metropolitan.

Before requesting permission from the Metropolitan to perform the marriage, a Priest must verify that: a) Neither of the parties in question are already married to other persons, either in this country or elsewhere (if a person comes to the United States after age 18, they need to provide a letter from their country of origin that they are indeed free to marry); b) the parties in question are not related to each other to a degree that would constitute an impediment; c) if either or both parties are widowed, they have presented the death certificate(s) of the deceased spouse(s); d) if either or both of the parties have been previously married in the Orthodox Church, they have obtained an ecclesiastical as well as civil divorce. (The Ecclesiastical Divorce process is done after the civil divorce becomes final, and involves counseling with the parish priest, forms that are filled out, a review by the Metropolitan, a divorce hearing which in the Tampa Bay area is held in Clearwater, and this process usually takes several months to complete. Fr. Stavros will not set a wedding date for anyone until an ecclesiastical divorce has been secured, so please plan accordingly, the ecclesiastical divorce process often takes several months.) e) the party or parties who are members of a parish other than the one in which the marriage is to be performed have provided a certificate declaring them to be members in good standing with that parish for the current year; and f) a civil marriage license has been obtained from civil authorities.

No person may marry more than three times in the

church, with permission for a third marriage granted only with extreme oikonomia.

In cases involving the marriage of Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christians, the latter must have been baptized in water, in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Church cannot bless the marriage of an Orthodox Christian to a non-Christian. The couple should be willing to baptize their children in the Orthodox Church and raise and nurture them in accordance with the Orthodox Faith. *There is a list of religious groups that Orthodox are prohibited from marrying, i.e. Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, all non-Christians and others. Fr. Stavros can provide you with this list. **This is IMPORTANT to consider when you begin to date someone. Make sure your children are aware of this!** Because circumstances exist where a couple is dating where one of the two is not eligible to be married in the Orthodox Church, and this causes heartache in the relationship and often leads to someone leaving the church.*

An important change effective immediately. Fr. Stavros will not schedule a wedding for a couple where one of them is not Christian, until the non-Christian person is baptized. All too often, the situation arises where a couple asks for a wedding date to be set and one of them isn't baptized. They promise to come to church, take the Orthodoxy 101 class and then don't. This presents a dilemma and forces a priest essentially to do a "shot-gun" baptism, in order to satisfy a requirement so that the wedding may take place. So as not to put our priest in the awkward position to do a baptism for someone who hasn't prepared whatsoever, versus cancelling a wedding and dealing with that fallout, the wedding simply will not be scheduled until both parties present evidence that they are baptized (with at least one being Orthodox).

The same goes for someone who needs an ecclesi-

astical divorce. It takes several months to get an ecclesiastical divorce. Thus, a wedding will not be scheduled until the ecclesiastical divorce process has been completed. Again, because there have been cases where someone is ineligible to get married because they need an ecclesiastical divorce, the date has been scheduled, the person then does not go through the divorce process and that creates a problem. The problem is now solved, no wedding date set until the ecclesiastical divorce process has been completed.

A baptized Orthodox Christian whose wedding has not been blessed by the Orthodox Church is no longer in good standing with the Church, and may not receive the Sacraments of the Church, including Holy Communion, or become a sponsor of an Orthodox Marriage, Baptism, or Chrismation. A non-Orthodox Christian who marries an Orthodox Christian does not thereby become a member of the Orthodox Church, and may not receive the Sacraments, including Holy Communion, serve on the Parish Council or vote in parish assemblies or elections. To participate in the Church's life, one must be received into the Church by the Sacrament of Baptism, or in the case of persons baptized with water in the Holy Trinity, following a period of instruction, by Chrismation.

Canonical and theological reasons preclude the Orthodox Church from performing the Sacrament of Marriage for couples where one partner is Orthodox and the other partner is a non-Christian. As such, Orthodox Christians choosing to enter such marriages fall out of good standing with their Church and are unable to actively participate in the sacramental life of the church. While this stance may seem confusing and rigid, it is guided by the Orthodox Church's love and concern for its member's religious and spiritual well-being.

The Sponsor (koumbaros or koumbara) must provide a current certificate of membership proving him or her to be an Orthodox Christian in good standing with the church. A person who does not belong to a parish, or who belongs to a parish under the jurisdiction of a bishop who is not in communion with the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, or who, if married, has not had his or her marriage blessed by the Orthodox Church, or, if divorced, has not received an ecclesiastical divorce, cannot be a sponsor. Non-Orthodox persons may be members of the wedding party, but may not exchange the rings or crowns.

Days when marriage is not permitted

Marriages are not performed on fast days or during fasting seasons or on the feasts of the church as indicated: September 14 (Holy Cross Day), December 13 -25 (Christmas), January 5 and 6 (Epiphany),

Great Lent and Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, August 1-15 (Dormition Fast) and August 29. Any exceptions can only be made with the permission of the Metropolitan. Also a wedding can only be done on a Friday, when Friday is a fast day, with the permission of the Metropolitan.

Prohibited Marriages

The following types of relationships constitute impediments to marriage:

Parents with their own children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren or Godchildren of the same Godparents; Brothers-in law and sisters-in law; Uncles and aunts with nieces and nephews; First cousins with each other; Foster parents with foster children or foster children with the children of foster parents.

Godparents with Godchildren or Godparents with the parents of their Godchildren. (In the Chrismation of an adult, one has potential marriage impediment. For any questions regarding, please see Fr. Stavros)

A date cannot be set for marriage unless one of the parties getting married, NOT THE PARENTS, contact Fr. Stavros, who sets all the dates for weddings. In order for the date to be locked in, one person in the couple has to come and meet with Fr. Stavros to go over the wedding procedures. Pre-Marital Counseling is also required for weddings at St. John the Baptist. There is a two-fold requirement. One is that the couples need to meet with Fr. Stavros for two sessions. Second, the Metropolis of Atlanta requires couples participate in a Saturday regional premarital counseling seminar. Contact the Metropolis of Atlanta or visit the Family Life Ministry section of their website for dates in 2023. For people who wish to be married at St. John the Baptist who are not members anywhere, a substantial fee is imposed for use of the church, (it's actually rather appalling that people think they can just show up at the church, use it, and never be seen again, thus the fee to use the church for non-members. Further appalling is that non-members complain about a fee when they are spending thousands of dollars on a wedding. The fees are imposed to discourage this kind of behavior) thereby encouraging all those who wish to have the sacraments of the church to be members in good standing. Also, the Koumbaro/Koumbara for a wedding

must be in good sacramental standing. If they are not members of St. John the Baptist, they must bring a letter from their parish priest saying that they are in good sacramental standing. Otherwise, there will be a fee imposed as well.

A Note on Bridesmaids Dresses

We have asked that shoulders be covered, i.e. no strapless dresses, for bridesmaids. A shawl or throw can be worn in the church and ditched for the wedding reception. ***Because this has been an issue at several weddings, we require the bridesmaids dresses to be approved by Fr. Stavros. A picture of someone wearing the dress will be sufficient. Should this continue to be a problem, we will look into buying something appropriate (shawls of shame) that can be placed over dresses that are inappropriate for church.***

Baptisms

A person who wishes to sponsor a candidate for Baptism or Chrismation must be an Orthodox Christian in good standing and a supporting member of an Orthodox parish. A person may not serve as a Godparent if the Church has not blessed his or her marriage or, if civilly divorced, he or she has not been granted an ecclesiastical divorce, or for any other reason he or she is not in communion with the Orthodox Church. Baptisms may not be performed from during Holy Week, or on any of the Great Feastdays of the Lord.

For people who wish to have a child baptized at St. John who are not members anywhere, a fee is imposed for use of the church, thereby encouraging all those who wish to have the sacraments of the church to be members in good standing. Also, the Godparent must be in good sacramental standing. If they are not members of St. John, they must bring a letter from their parish priest saying that they are in good sacramental standing. Otherwise, there will be a fee imposed as well.

Funerals

Funeral services are permitted on any day of the year, except for Sunday and Holy Friday, unless permission is granted by the Metropolitan. If you wish to have a service outside of the church, it will not be a funeral service. It will either be a Memorial Service or a Trisagion. A funeral service must be in an Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church does not allow for cremation. This is based on Ezekiel's vision of a valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37) and St. Paul's writing that the Body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (I Co-

rinthians 6:19) and thus must be treated with dignity even in death and allowed to return to its elements naturally. The Orthodox Church will not allow a funeral service for someone who has been cremated. *Many people have mentioned in their will their desire to be cremated. Please discuss this with Fr. Stavros if there are any questions regarding this, and make the appropriate changes, because Fr. Stavros cannot grant oikonomia (dispensation) and do a funeral service if someone has been cremated. Further, it is the custom of the church for the casket to be open at a funeral. This shows honor for the person who is deceased and makes us aware of the reality of death.*

Additionally, eulogies offered in the church at a funeral service may only be offered by an ordained Orthodox clergyman. If members of the family wish to offer testimonials, these may be done at the funeral home the night before the funeral or at the makaria luncheon.

Memorials

Memorial services may not be chanted from the Saturday or Lazarus through the Sunday of Thomas, or on any Feastday of the Lord or any Feastday of the Theotokos. We customarily do not offer memorial services on the 1st Sunday of Lent (Sunday of Orthodoxy) or the 3rd Sunday of Lent (Sunday of the Holy Cross), or the Sunday after September 14. In 2023, the Sundays when NO memorial services will be offered include: March 5 (Sunday of Orthodoxy), March 19 (Sunday of the Holy Cross); April 9 (Palm Sunday); April 16 (Pascha); April 23 (Sunday of St. Thomas); June 4 (Pentecost); September 17 (Sunday after Holy Cross Day).

Memorial Services may be scheduled through the church office.

You must contact the church at least two weeks in advance of when you want the service. 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. 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 the Philoptochos does the kolyva, there is a \$100 charge for this service-checks may be made payable to "St. John Philoptochos." 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.

Organ Donation

The Orthodox Church allows the faithful to donate organs after death if they wish.

Forty-Day Blessings

Forty-Day Blessings for babies may be done on any day. The prayers of this service connect the 40-day churching of the baby with the mother of the child (if she is Orthodox) receiving Communion. Thus, if this service is offered on a Sunday, or before any Divine Liturgy, Father Stavros schedules them at 9:30 a.m., prior to the Divine Liturgy, so that the new mother can receive Holy Communion in the context of the Divine Liturgy.

Some Guidelines Unique to our Parish

In line with the guidelines from the Archdiocese provided above, we also have some guidelines for things in our parish that are helpful to review as we start the new year. The Parish Council has adopted what is below with the approval of Fr. Stavros. Most of these guidelines are old, though a few of them are new. For the "Good of the Order" at our church, we ask that everyone cooperate in following these guidelines. Please read these over carefully and if you have any questions, please address them to the Parish Council or Father Stavros.

PROCEDURES FOR THE OFFICE:

- The deadline for submitting information for the weekly bulletin is Wednesday at 12:00 p.m. All submissions must be sent electronically to office@stjohntpa.org.

- The deadline for the Messenger shall be the 10th of the month. As a cost cutting measure we reduced the size of the Messenger, so no full page flyers will be put in. All submissions must be sent electronically via email. Simply send in your event information to office@stjohntpa.org

- Events may be advertised a maximum of two months prior to the event date for *The Messenger* and *four weeks prior for the bulletin*.

- **Open Office Hours and Monday - Friday 10:00 a.m. -2:00p.m. Or By Appointment Only.** If you wish to see Fr. Stavros or the office staff, you must make an appointment. Also, when meeting with the office staff, or when meeting with Father Stavros on a non-pastoral matter, please be efficient with your time. There is lots of work that goes on in the office

and constant interruptions make for little progress. Planned appointments are fine, they are not interruptions.

FUNDRAISERS/HALL USAGE:

- All fundraisers and events by ministries or church affiliated groups should be scheduled at the August calendar meeting. For those, not scheduled at this meeting; please submit your event request to the Parish Council; via the office email office@stjohntpa.org

- **Please clean up the kitchen after your event.** No food, trays, utensils, etc., should be left on the counters, sink, or drying rack. Please throw away all trash and wash all dirty dishes, trays, etc. and return to the appropriate places.

- All sales of tickets and other fundraising items, shall take place at designated tables immediately outside of the foyer and in the center of the hall. These tables will be preset for your use. Our foyer has become increasingly crowded and we need to maintain clearance per fire code.

- All contracts for caterers, bands, etc., made in the church name that obligate the church for payment shall be submitted and signed by the Parish Council.

COFFEE HOURS/FUNDRAISERS:

- Our time after Sunday Liturgy provides fellowship that we all look forward to and appreciate. This time is often a mix of simple to more elaborate coffee time and also includes fund raisers and more formal luncheons. As we begin a new year we would like to reiterate some procedures and policies. We have a calendar meeting in August to establish the schedule and luncheons that will be considered fund raisers during the year. Each Ministry is asked to give input before this schedule is finalized.

- The Parish Council discussed that each Ministry should determine what they bring to Coffee Hour without strict guidelines. With the end goal that our parishioners should not be pressured or asked to give additional money just to receive a cup of coffee and cookie. Luncheons/Fundraisers fall into a different category and will be published in the monthly calendar.

- Additionally, when a Ministry needs to setup a table for a special purpose - Information/Sales - **The ministry must call the church office to reserve a table during coffee hour.**

- Lastly any Ministry that wants to charge for a lunch (not on the original schedule) will need to get approval from the Parish Council by sending written notice prior to the monthly Parish Council Meeting.

Letters of good standing-

When a parishioner goes to another parish to participate in a sacrament, i.e. to get married somewhere, or to be a sponsor of a wedding or a baptism, they must have a letter of good standing sent on their behalf. The reason for this is two-fold. First, to verify that they are an Orthodox Christian (people come here for sacraments, how do we know if they are Orthodox if we don't know them, so their home priest writes a letter testifying that they are Orthodox), and secondly, to verify that they belong somewhere. A person cannot be considered in good standing merely because they were once baptized Orthodox. A person is in good standing if they are actively participating in the sacramental life of the church—i.e. they worship regularly, they receive Holy Communion regularly, ideally they go to confession regularly, and they offer stewardship somewhere, they participate in sustaining the life of the church and spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. People will often, sadly, approach asking for a letter of good standing when they don't do any of these things. They don't worship, they don't commune, they are not a steward, and yet, somehow, they expect a letter of good standing to be sent on their behalf to another parish, essentially lying for them. So, here's the policy at St. John. For the person who approaches for such a letter, a \$500 fee will be collected. Then, a letter will be written and sent to the priest where they are going stipulating that they gave \$500 to the church, even though they rarely if ever attend, and the other priest can decide what he wants to do. It pains me to write this paragraph, but this practice of asking someone to lie about being in good sacramental sending is actually preposterous and I'm not going to continue to do it. As I have said before, people come with their "you understand, Father, we have baseball, sports, work (insert excuse here) and can never come to church, or even be bothered to fill out a pledge form to support the church so it is here on Pascha when we come once a year." And the truth is actually, I don't understand. Hence, this policy. You understand, right?

+Fr. Stavros

THE TRAIN:



At birth we boarded the train and met our parents, and we believe they will always travel by our side. As time goes by, other people will board the train; and they will be significant i.e. our siblings, friends, children, strangers and even the love of your life. However, at some station our parents will step down from the train, leaving us on this journey alone. Others will step down over time and leave a permanent vacuum. Some, however, will go so unnoticed that we don't realize they vacated their seats. This train ride will be full of joy, sorrow, fantasy, expectations, hellos, goodbyes, and farewells. Success consists of having a good relationship with all passengers requiring that we give the best of ourselves.

The mystery to everyone is: We do not know at which station we ourselves will step down. So, we must live in the best way, love, forgive, and offer the best of who we are. It is important to do this because when the time comes for us to step down and leave our seat empty we should leave behind beautiful memories for those who will continue to travel on the train of life. I wish you a joyful journey for the coming years on your train of life. Reap success, give lots of love and be happy. More importantly, thank God for the journey!

Lastly, I want to thank you for being one of the passengers on my train.

January 2023						Feb 2023 ▶	
◀ Dec 2022	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 St. Basil-New Year's Day- Circumcision of Christ Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	2		3	4 Royal Hours 9:30 a.m.	5** Eve of Theophany Vespers 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 9:30 a.m. Blessing of Waters 10:00 a.m.	6 Theophany Liturgy at Tarpon Springs at 9:30 a.m. Vespers 6:30 p.m.	7 St. John the Baptist Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
8 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Sunday school resumes Vasilopita Sunday GOYA 5:00 p.m.	9 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.		10 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Meeting of Ministry Heads 6:30 p.m.	11**	12 Adult Greek School Young Adult Discussion 6:30 p.m.	13**	14 Sunday School Teachers' Seminar 9-12
15 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Parea Dance Practice	16 Martin Luther King Jr. JOY Tweens Bible Study 6:30 p.m.		17 St. Anthony Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Veteran's First Responders 6:30 p.m.	18** Sts. Athanasios and Cyril Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	19 Adult Greek School	20** GOYA Clearwater Event	21 Community Outreach GOYA Clearwater Event
22 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Youth Sunday AHEPA/Daughters Tampa Bay Clergy Vasilopita	23 Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.		24 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.	25** St. Gregory the Theologian Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	26 Adult Greek School	27**	28 Gasparilla Parking
29 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Prayer for Teachers JOY Tweens Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	30 Three Hierarchs Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.		31 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.	Philoptochos collection for the spring (diapers) **Fast Day			

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

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St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Timetable of Services

Saturdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sundays: Orthros 8:45 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Weekdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.

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

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

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

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Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134 (Cell)
vasili@stjohntpa.org

Parish Council
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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 Dalakis 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

Office Staff
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debbie@stjohntpa.org fax: 813-443-4899

Adopt a College Student
Kathy Kaburis 813-240-6513

Adult Greek School
Magda Myer 813-523-5771

AHEPA
Thomas Sakaris, President 201-819-2319

Altar Angels
Kalliope Chagaris 813-789-4134

Altar Boys
Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Bookstore
Presbyteria Denise Stefero 678-464-4833

Bible Study-Monday Night
Fr. John Stefero 678-637-4425

Bible Study-Tuesday Morning
Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Buildings & Grounds
Euripides Panos 813-352-3972

Chanter
Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134

Choir
Tara Swartzbaugh, Director 813-313-0439
Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782

College Student Program
Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134

Community Outreach
Greg Melton 813-967-2074

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

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

Daughters of Penelope
Elena Paras Ketchum 813-229-0144

Festival
Mike Xenick 813-340-8737

Finance Committee
Gary Ward 813-846-3898

Food Pantry
Sheila Vukmer 412-719-1005

GriefShare
Donna Hambos 813-843-8412

Gasparilla Parking
VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

GOYA
Michael & Bessie Palios 813-523-0346

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

Joy Tweens
Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963

Junior Olympics
Dwight Forde 727-685-9028

MOMS
Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862

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

Parish Nursing Ministry
Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026

Oratorical Festival
Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

Photography Ministry
Karina Findlay 813-476-9632

Philoptochos
Melissa Krinos 813-716-9975

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

Sunday School
Vickie Peckham 813-758-3102

Usher
Pete Trakas 813-505-2193

Veterans/1st Responders
Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830

Website / Social Media / APP
VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

Welcoming Ministry
Maria Xenick 813-765-3587

Young Adult
Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Young at Heart
Bill Manikas 813-716-8185
Dora Morgan 813-613-3738

Youth Protection
Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855

12 Disciples
Mathew Balasis 727-421-7376

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“May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father and the Communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” From the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.