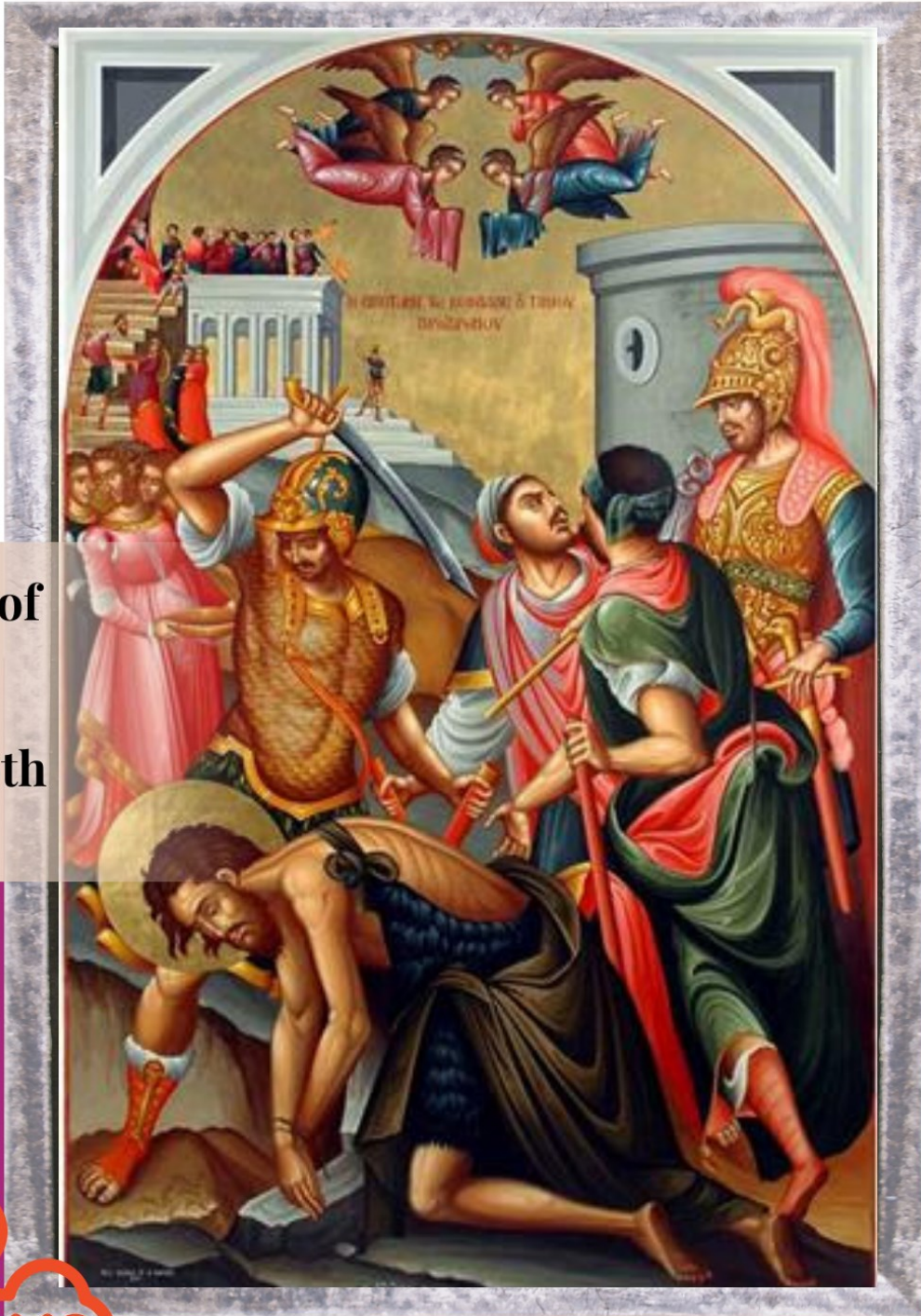


THE MESSENGER

August 2023 Edition

**Beheading of
John the
Baptist**
August 29th



St. John the Baptist
Greek Orthodox
Church

Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis (Proistamenos)
Fr. Stratton Dorozenski
(Retired Priest In Residence)
Fr. John Stefero (Retired Priest In Residence)



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

St. John's Directory

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) frstav@gmail.com 813-394-1038 (Cell)	Buildings & Grounds Euripides Panos 813-352-3972	MOMS Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862
Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. Stratton Dorozenski 813-876-8830 (Office)	Chanter Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134	Men's Fellowship Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038
Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830 (Office) jwstefero50@hotmail.com 678-637-4425 (Cell)	Choir Tara Swartzbaugh, Director Ruth Losovitz, Organist 813-313-0439 727-688-2782	Parish Nursing Ministry Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026
Pastoral Assistant Vasili Panagopoulos vasili@stjohntpa.org 414-254-5134 (Cell)	College Student Program Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134	Oratorical Festival Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374
Parish Council John Zelatis, President Euripides Panos, Vice President Marilyn Sandborn, Secretary Gary Ward, Treasurer Jim Armstrong Amin Hanhan Nick Katzaras Suzanne Pileggi Alexis Scarfogliero Marcelle Triantafilou Mike Xenick 813-727-2271 813-352-3972 813-760-6289 813-846-3898 954-295-6665 813-846-2957 863-581-2430 813-244-5855 813-892-1599 612-396-5026 813-340-8737	Community Outreach Greg Melton 813-967-2074	Photography Ministry Karina Findlay 813-476-9632
	Connect Through Christ - Special Needs Ministry for Children Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534	Philoptochos Katherine Sakkis 813-309-1073
	Dance Groups H XAPA MAΣ, Alexandra De Maio Bessie Palios, Maraquet Edquid 813-340-9668 813-523-0347 813-422-8963	Stewardship Chris Kyrus George Mitseas 757-672-1920 813-748-1220
	ΠΑΡΕΑ, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136	Sunday School Vickie Peckham 813-758-3102
	ΠΑΝΗΓΥΡΙ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668	Usher Pete Trakas 813-505-2193
	Daughters of Penelope Elena Paras Ketchum 813-229-0144	Veterans/1st Responders Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830
Office Staff Kim Rojas Administrative Assistant, Messenger & Bulletin Editor kim@stjohntpa.org Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper debbie@stjohntpa.org 813-876-8830 fax:813-443-4899	Festival Mike Xenick 813-340-8737	Website / Social Media / APP VOLUNTEER NEEDED!
Adopt a College Student Kathy Kaburis 813-240-6513	Finance Committee Gary Ward 813-846-3898	Welcoming Ministry Maria Xenick 813-765-3587
Adult Greek School Magda Myer 813-523-5771	Food Pantry Sandra Pappas 813-785-3747	Women's Bible Study Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038
AHEPA Thomas Sakaris, President 201-819-2319	GriefShare Donna Hambos 813-843-8412	Young Adult Aris Rogers 813-309-5525
Altar Angels Kalliope Chagaris 813-789-4134	Gasparilla Parking Alex Limberatos 262-370-0586	Young at Heart Bill Manikas Dora Morgan 813-716-8185 813-613-3738
Altar Boys Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038	GOYA Michael & Bessie Palios 813-523-0346	Youth Protection Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855
Bookstore Presbyteria Denise Stefero 678-464-4833	Hope/Joy George & Zackie Ameres 813-245-3813	12 Disciples Mathew Balasis 727-421-7376
Bible Study-Monday Night Fr. John Stefero 678-637-4425	Joy Tweens Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963	
	Junior Olympics Dwight Forde 561-310-5034	

Fr. Stavros' Message

Always Blessed—It Is Enough

This year, our theme for summer camp was “Always Blessed: A Study of the Beatitudes.”

The Beatitudes are found in Matthew 5:1-16. We took a whole week and studied all of these verses thoroughly. We learned things like we are blessed when we are meek. Most people think that “meek means weak.” It doesn’t. Meekness is power under control. Think of a surgeon. This person might have an athletic build, lift weights, run laps, mow grass, lift heavy objects, be well learned and well spoken. But at the moment he or she is performing surgery, this strength is under control—it is delicate, purposeful, intentional, and careful. This is what it means to be meek—to be delicate, purposeful, intentional and careful. And we are all called to be this, whether we are performing surgery, or having a delicate conversation.

BLESSED
ALL
WAYS
ALWAYS

We learned that we should feel blessed even when persecuted, especially when we are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. We are so obsessed with being liked that we will say and do things we are know are wrong just to be popular, just to be liked. Jesus teaches us that ultimately there is only one like that matters and that is His. When we are persecuted for Him, when the world reviles us because we love Him, that’s when He loves us even more, that’s when He blesses us even more.

To be poor in spirit has nothing to do with being materially poor, or even self-loathing. It to do with being humble and desiring to know God more. To be pure in heart means to have a heart that desires God, that empties itself of an agenda, that repents for sins, and that seeks to be patient, kind and optimistic.

These Beatitudes are really “be-attitudes.” These are the attitudes that we are supposed to have in life. These are attitudes that will make for a more fulfilling life.

Jesus concludes this section of Scripture, which is part of the Sermon on the Mount—Matthew chapters 5-6-7, the greatest sermon ever given—by telling us that we are two things. We are the salt of the earth, (Matthew 5:13) He tells us. Salt is used to give taste to something and as a preservative. Many things taste better with salt on them. Think French fries. The world is better when the Christians flavor life with the beatitudes, when we inject purity, humility and meekness where there is filth, ego and chaos.

We are supposed to be the salt that flavors the earth with Godly things.

Salt also makes us more thirsty. There is a reason why they put out free peanuts in bars. Peanuts have salt. Salt makes us thirsty. Thirsty patrons drink more. Well, when we are the salt of the earth, we should want to thirst more for God. We should want to drink more of Scripture, more prayer, and more good works.

Jesus then says “You are the light of the world.” (Matthew 5:14) THIS is the quality that we share with Him. Because in John 8:12, He says “I am the light of the world.” Where there is light, even a little light, there cannot be darkness. Light always defeats darkness, not the other way around. We know that the first thing God created was light. We know that His light can never be overtaken by darkness. (John 1:5) We are supposed to shine as lights in the world, by our example. We are supposed to bring His light into the world, by our words and deeds. If His light shines even in the darkest of places, we are supposed to always feel blessed, even in the most difficult of moments.

Intimacy and Contentment are based on “It is Enough”
And here is the problem/challenge:

We’ve lost the concept of always blessed because we live in a world of It’s Not Enough. We never seem to have enough. We have lost the concept of being content. And what has that cost us? It has cost us the concept of intimacy. And what is intimacy? A complete acceptance of someone by someone. Let’s unpack this:



Intimacy is a complete acceptance of someone by someone. Sex is an expression of intimacy, but there are many intimate things that are non-sexual. And sadly, our over-sexualized world has removed intimacy from sex as well. Because sadly in so many instances, sex is meaningless. Outside of marriage it is against God’s law. Outside of a meaningful relationship,

it is not only a sin against God but a sin against our own humanity. There’s one big mistake. We’ve lost the ability to have intimate non-sexual feelings. Where there is intimacy, there is no agenda. Think about life, there always seems to be an agenda.

When we post something on social media and we wait for the “likes” to come, we are hoping for more and more and more.

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More than everyone else. More than last time. We can't wait to post again to get our more likes again.

It's like an addiction. Some people are addicted to alcohol or drugs or pornography. And now even more people are addicted to being liked, our appetite for this has become insatiable in many instances, which is why intimacy is getting pushed away. We've forgotten what it's like to be content. In the end, all the likes in the world won't satisfy us. This state of always wanting for more (whether it is from our spouse, our kids, our friends, our circumstances, our presence on social media and even from God Himself) makes us anxious, depressed, and isolated. And most of us feel this way, a lot of the time. What we are doing isn't bringing us closer to one another. Or to God. In fact, it's just the opposite. We've never lived more public lives because of social media, and we've never felt more isolated because of it.

Imagine a relationship with someone else where there is no agenda. Okay, maybe that's not possible. There is always some agenda. Even in marriages, there is an agenda to get things done. In parenting, we set goals for our children. But imagine, at moments in a relationship, that there is no agenda. Where people just are, where they just enjoy each other's company, where there is no judgment, no self-promotion, where it is safe and expected to be honest without fear of reprisal. Imagine that. That is what intimacy is. And that only happens when we have a concept of "it is enough" with someone else, even if it is in brief moments. Many of us don't have this, even for brief moments, in our lives, with other people, or with the Lord.

The Common Denominator of the Most Beautiful Moments

My most beautiful moments with other people are when there is no agenda. When there is laughter, encouragement, or just friendly banter. Yes, there is an agenda with everyone—there wouldn't be a meaningful relationship if there was never an agenda. But there can't always be an agenda, or there won't be a meaningful relationship either.

Same thing goes with the Lord. The ideal relationship with the Lord is an intimate one, where there is no agenda. When prayer becomes a time to just be with God, rather than a time to ask Him for a bunch of things. Where worship is standing in the presence of God, together with others, and just enjoying praising Him, rather than just a box we check off.

The Intimacy of Worship

I was speaking recently to someone who is in a sorority in college. I was not part of Greek life in college but I know a lot about it from people who are in it who have spoken to me over the years about it.

Every fraternity and sorority has a weekly gathering where they come together, express some beliefs and rituals unique to their organization. The purpose of this is to reaffirm their identity and celebrate their identity. These weekly gatherings are something that members look forward to.



Worship works kind of in the same way. We have a weekly gathering—it is called the Divine Liturgy. It has rituals that we are very familiar with, that are unique to our identity as Orthodox Christians. A by-product of worship is that it reaffirms and celebrates our identity, but it does more than that. It brings us into closer alignment with the Lord, it allows us to touch the Lord, it allows us an intimate encounter with the Lord, where there is no agenda, where it is just Him and us—whether we've had a good week or a bad week, whether our faith is strong or weak, whether we've prayed or we haven't, Holy Communion is presented and received in the same way by every person. There is a chance for an intimate moment with the Lord every time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy.



He doesn't come to the Divine Liturgy with an agenda, so why do we? He doesn't tire of us, so why do we seem to tire of Him (and complain that the service is so long or it's the same and the same each week)? I've never heard someone in college complain about weekly chapter meetings—there is some comfort in ritual, in fact there is an innate desire for ritual because it brings structure, and that is a nice juxtaposition to the chaos all around us. To be intimate is to put aside all agendas and just be. If you have never done that in worship, maybe that's why you aren't getting out of it what you could be getting out of it. Maybe that's why it's boring. Come with nothing—no agenda, no watch, no expectation, no demand, and just be with God. I'm positive that will change your experience of worship, because intimacy is very needed, and intimacy is found when we empty ourselves and accept fullness that comes from outside of us.

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We Will Never Feel Blessed if We Never Feel Content
We can't feel always blessed if we are never content. We can't feel always blessed if we are always looking for more. There is nothing wrong with wanting things. Setting and achieving goals are important parts of a fulfilling life. Just sitting down to write this article is a goal, there is an agenda as to when I'm going to write it, how long it's going to be, etc.

Having no goals and no agenda doesn't work. It's like the guy in Matthew 25: 14-30 in the parable of the talents, who received one talent, hid it in the ground and did nothing with it. God was mad at that man and punished him. Yet at the same time as there is an agenda to use the things God has given us, there is also a call to feel content, and that is achieved not on our own but through Christ. In Philippians 4:11, St. Paul writes, "I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content." Why and how is this possible? He answers it in Philippians 4:13, when he writes, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Always blessed is an ideal. Just like intimacy is the pinnacle of any relationship, including our relationship with Christ. There are many steps to reach this. Before we can take any steps, however, there has to be an understanding of what the goal is, and a desire to get there.

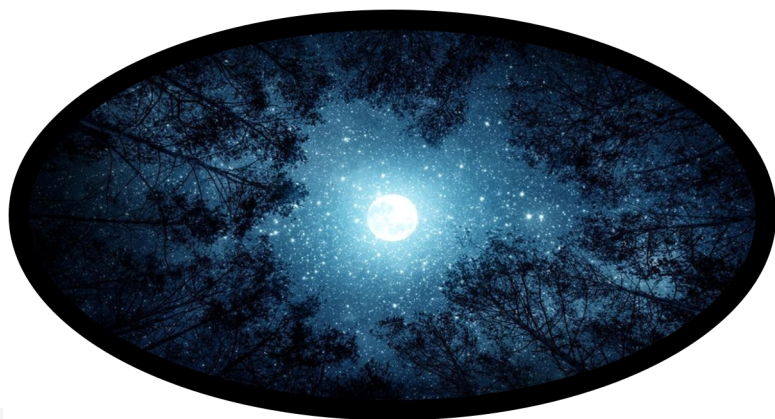
Intimate Moments with the Lord at Summer Camp

Summer camp was hard this year. It's hard every year. Managing 90+ campers and another 25+ staff and priests is challenging. Doing it with sleep deprivation is an added challenge. Doing it with changes in the weather, different personalities, and unforeseen things constantly happening is very difficult. In some ways, camp is a microcosm of my life when I'm not at camp. I work around a lot of people. I'm often sleep deprived. There are constant changes, difficult personalities and unforeseen things. I think the difference between life and summer camp is that at camp, I had a more keen sense of the Lord. And I had a deeper sense of intimacy in general. While there were many moments where I was disappointed, even sad, at the outcome of things, and where there definitely was a schedule, an agenda and goals for the week, there were some mind-blowing intimate moments I experienced, where it was enough, where I felt so blessed.

To look someone in the eye and tell them they have value. To tell someone who is going to confession that they should feel safe. To tell someone who is broken up because of sin that God still loves them. These are truly intimate moments, where I felt a great sense of "it is enough" and the people I shared them with felt them as

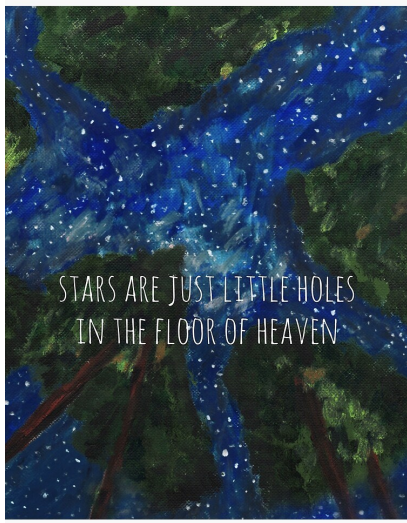
well. Of course, this was not on the first day of camp. It was only after a significant amount of trust building, laughter, seriousness and frivolity. But imagine if we had done all these things and never got to a moment we felt safe, or worthy or content. The image of the hamster running on the wheel comes to mind—and that is the state of many lives—we run and run and we never seem to get to that place of intimacy, with God or with one another. My point is that intimacy—a sense that we are safe, worthy and content—should be part of every life on a regular basis. And in this face-paced, "who has the most likes" world we live in, we're losing this.

My most vivid memory of camp this year was some intimate moments spent with the Lord. One night, I was



walking back from somewhere with one of the staff members. We looked up in the sky and both took notice of how the moon was shining through the trees. We had been talking about the week, about its ups and downs, and we had also been talking about life, and its ups and downs. The scene took us both by surprise. We had been so busy working that perhaps we had forgotten we were in this beautiful place of nature. We had been so busy problem solving that perhaps we had forgotten that God is in charge. He is the ultimate problem solver. He is the one who gives us the wisdom to meet life's challenges. It's not us operating alone, but Him operating in us. At that moment, we stopped problem solving, in fact we stopped talking. We paused and looked at the moon. We looked at the stars. We saw the rays of the moon coming through the trees like God's fingers blessing us. The little gray spots on the moon made us think of God's angels up there in His presence. It was at these moments that I realized I am not the center of the universe. He is. I don't need lots of likes, only His. My goals are important but they are not as important as His goal for me—salvation. And my never-ending pursuit of contentment, feeling blessed and wondering "is it enough?" found its ending right where I was standing. With HIM. I was reminded of Psalm 147:4, where the Psalmist writes, in relationship to God "He determines the number of the stars, He gives to all of them their names." I realized that I am one star in His galaxy, even if I feel unnoticed in the world.

Continued...



I realized that I am a star. But I'm His star, because I'm a star in His galaxy. I'm not here to be a star on earth, but one of His stars in heaven. And that only happens when I am content, with Him. In that moment, I experienced contentment, peace, and intimacy, with Him. For the first time in a long time, it felt like it was truly enough. Him, me, all of it.

Now I'm back in Tampa, where on most nights the city lights make it too bright to see the stars. It's back to the busy rat race, the agendas, the list of tasks that never gets completed, the tough personalities, the temptations, the joys and the failings. It's hard to feel always blessed, and some days its hard to feel blessed at all.

But I will forever remember my images of the moon and the stars from summer camp. And I will forever remember that feeling of intimacy with God, where it was enough, in fact it was more than enough.

Alone with God

How can we feel this in Tampa? The first way is to do something we did at camp that can be replicated anywhere. Spend a few moments alone with God. At summer camp, we put a 15-minute block of time on the schedule each day, to nothing else but be alone with God. And before you make your list of requests, (yes, I make a list too), spend a few moments just thanking God for your blessings. It is easier to feel blessed when we are grateful, and harder to feel blessed when we feel greedy or needy. Start off with gratitude. Second, pray for others. And not only pray for them, look for opportunities to do for them, whether they deserve it or not. We are blessed by God when we bless others. We feel blessed by blessing others. It's like when we teach the campers about the importance of encouragement, and how the one who is doing the encouraging feels just as good as the one being encouraged. We will feel blessed when we bless others. And after we've thanked God and blessed others, it will be easier to come to God with our own needs and our own shortcomings. It will be easier to deal with the shortcomings because we will still feel blessed in spite of them. And it will be easier to deal with our own needs, because we will still feel a sense of contentment with God, even if our needs aren't exactly met the way we want them to be. My night under the stars didn't change the things I want and still can't seem to get. It just made me okay with that. It didn't change my circumstances. But it changed me.

Many of us have never heard the acronym JOY, which stands for Jesus-Others-Yourself.

We can get to a place of intimacy, of contentment, of feeling always blessed when we keep this acronym on the front burner of our minds and hearts.

When we keep Jesus first, when we bless others, and only after this do we go with our own needs.

The month of August is probably the most challenging month of the year. Because it sets the tone in so many ways for the year that is to come. School resumes and so does the daily routine around it. Sunday school resumes and the ministries of the church gear up. We get yet another opportunity for a new start. The memories of summer will quickly fade into the stress of the present. But it doesn't have to be that way. Have goals. Work at achieving them. But leave room for Jesus and for others. Because it's not all about you, or me. It's about Him.

Pray for intimacy with Him. Work at intimacy with others. We get there when we have a concept of "it is enough," that someone else is enough despite their shortcomings, that God is enough even when life doesn't go our way. A be-attitude of being always blessed and choosing gratitude will go a long way to help.

The Church

This is the church—the place where we learn and live intimacy with God, the place where we share God with other people. We are the church. The church is not the building, or the budget, or the by-laws. It's not our Greek culture, or the Greek Festival, renting out our facilities or wondering if we will meet our budget. It is you, the people. We are the Body of Christ. Wherever we gather in His name, so He tells us in Matthew 18:20, there He is in



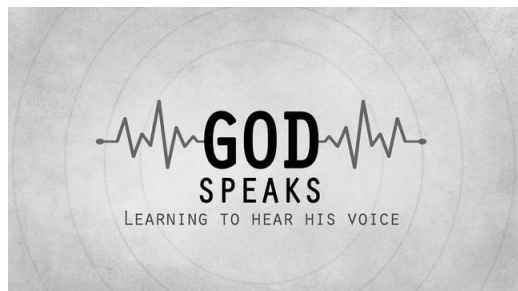
the midst of us. The key thing is that we must gather, and we must do it in His name. Which is why coming to worship and participating in a ministry is so important, because it gathers us in His name, so that we can feel His presence in the midst of us. If we never worship, if we never gather in His name, we will never feel Him in our

midst. Which is why so many are having trouble with the church in general. Because we are focused on things that don't involve worship. And because we as a church are presenting a church that is not worship-centered, I dare say sometimes not even Christ-centered.



There are plenty of places where we gather. A baseball team is a place to gather, so is a bar, a golf outing, and so many other examples. But the church is where we gather in His name. The church is where we find intimacy with Him. There are so many opportunities for this—worship, Bible Study, GOYA, Philoptochos, choir, Orthodoxy 101, Sunday school, JOY/HOPE, college group, young adults, men's group, community outreach and more. Please take advantage of them.

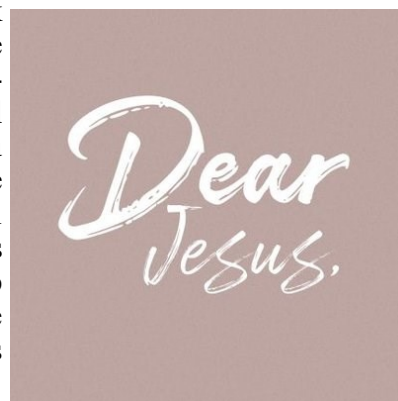
A Final Comment--Reconditioning



world is trying to recondition us, by drowning out God's voice. The world has redefined the Sabbath—it is no longer holy. Sundays used to be preserved for worship and family. Now Sunday is a sports day, the number of people who worship each week nationwide is down, and the family unit is being ripped apart. The world has redefined marriage. Yes, there is the whole same-sex marriage argument, but it's even more than that. People live together without being married, which undermines love and commitment, and ultimately intimacy. It's the ultimate expression of "I'm not sure you are really enough." Because it is convenient acceptance rather than complete acceptance. We've redefined the sanctity of life, by making it easy to terminate a life that is not wanted. In fact, we demand and celebrate our ability to do this. Life, when it begins, how it ends, and what we do with it, is not seen as holy, but as disposable. Which is why so many people are so reckless. We're trying to redefine gender, as if God makes mistakes, or as if God didn't deliberately create two distinct genders. We are redefining intelligence. You can now type in a request and some artificial intelligence will write your term paper or Sunday sermon in the way it wants to. We are created after God's image and likeness, with God-giving intelligence that is real and not artificial. We are abrogating our intelligence in a way that doesn't show humility (I'm not that intelligent) but rather shows laziness (Let something else do the work), but will ultimately lead to even more anxiety (I'm not good enough). And after we redefine intelligence, after we've redefined the Sabbath, marriage, life and gender, there will be nothing left to do but to redefine God as an entity that revolves around us, rather than the center around Who we revolve. And what has this gotten us? We've never felt more isolation, loneliness, anxiety and shame. Because we've taken Him from the center and put ourselves in His place. And we've forgotten that real contentment and real intimacy comes from having Him at the center.

I've often used the analogy of the boiling frogs, who were either too ignorant or too lazy to jump out of the pot of water they were in until it was too late and they boiled to death. We're at this point in our society. We're about to boil. So we need to turn the heat down and jump out, before we're all cooked. And we need to jump not to another political cause or protest about our perceived rights. We need to jump to Jesus, the light that shines in the darkness, that no darkness can overtake, the only way to turn down the boiling water and make it tranquil once again.

I did an exercise with our staff at camp called "letters to Jesus." Each person wrote a short letter to Jesus. We put them in a pile, no names on them, then we each took out a card and we read the letters (not our own, but we knew the letter came from someone in our group) aloud as a prayer. This exercise was heart-breaking because of the sorrowful things written on the cards. But more than that, it was refreshing, because it was so honest and so raw. This too, was an intimate moment, because it was safe and honest, and it put Him at the center. So as we begin a new school year, perhaps take out a piece of paper and write your own letter to Jesus. Tell Him how you really feel about Him, and about life. And ask Him, in your letter, to move you towards a state of contentment, so that you will feel like He is enough, you will feel like you are enough, so that you can feel like it is enough. And this will be a valuable first step towards getting to the place where you are "always blessed."



The loudest voice wins. The voices of the endless news cycle, the voices of discontentment, the voice that makes us feel we have to keep up, and the internal voice that makes us feel anxious and isolated—none of these voices can match the voice of the Lord if we let Him be the loudest voice. Here's the thing though, Elijah heard God's voice we are told, in I Kings 19, not in the strong wind, or in an earthquake, not in a raging fire. He heard God in a small voice. I saw God at summer camp, not in the busyness of the schedule, not in the disappointments and challenges, not even in the frivolity and fun. I saw God in the faces of others when there was no agenda, when there was intimacy, when there was complete acceptance. And I saw God when I stopped looking down at my schedule and my agenda and when I looked up and saw Him in His majesty.

+Fr. Stavros



Pastoral Notes

Thank you Vasili—Vasili Panagopoulos came to work for us in January 2022 as our pastoral assistant/chanter. The Orthodox Church is a hierarchical church, meaning that it is led by our Hierarchs (Patriarch, Archbishop, Metropolitan, Bishop). Part of what makes us Orthodox is a sense of belonging. We belong to a Metropolitan, and to a Metropolis. We aren't free agents or independent. Vasili came to us from the Metropolis of Chicago. He interrupted his studies at the seminary and while he was on this break, he came to work for us. Now his Metropolitan requested that he return to seminary to complete his studies and this is why he is leaving us at this time. We are thankful to Vasili for his 19 months of service and we wish him well in his future studies and eventual ordination to the priesthood. Hopefully one day he will visit us as a priest, though his placement as a priest will most likely not be here, it will be based on where his home Metropolis of Chicago needs him. Best of luck Vasili, Moriah and Andoni.

Pastoral Notes about Not Having a Pastoral Assistant—On August 15, for the first time in over nine years, we will not have a Pastoral Assistant, and for the first time in my ministry at St. John, we will not have a full-time chanter. This presents several challenges. We have had ads for both positions on various Orthodox job websites and we have had no one appropriate step forward. While we have had a couple of bites, including someone who interviewed and visited here, there is no one who is interested in these jobs. This is a product of there being virtually no one studying at our Seminary. Only a handful of graduates are coming out each year. There is simply no one to hire. And we've tried. While we remedy this problem, I ask for your patience. We are playing a man down, and for those in any sport, imagine playing baseball with 8 players, or soccer with 10, or basketball with 4—it is hard to make that work. **I also ask for your help.** **There are several things that the pastoral assistant/chanter does that we will have to make up for in house:**



Chanting—if you are interested in chanting/learning to chant, we will need help at EVERY service.

Chanting sacraments—we need people to chant and help set up at sacraments—that means opening the doors, filling the baptismal font, getting wedding papers signed, i.e. all the things that happen behind the scenes at sacraments. The chanter gets \$100 for each baptism and wedding.

Wedding rehearsals—conducting wedding rehearsals.

Social Media—someone that can put things on social media.

Constant contacts—people who can be administrators on constant contact to send things out.

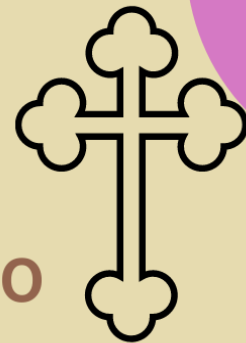
This is a short list of things that can be done by someone who is not full-time employed by our parish. I am willing to teach people how to do all these things. There is only one thing I ask, and that is that “your yes be yes.” If you volunteer to do something, like chant at a sacrament, you have to come. Because if the day comes and no chanter shows up, or no one shows up for the wedding rehearsal, these things don't happen. Please contact me directly if you are interested in any of these things. The silver lining is that we should be able to do all these things from within our community without having to go outside for help. So doing this for a little while may not be the worst thing in the world. We do have our eyes out for either a) a pastoral assistant, b) a ministry coordinator/chanter and c) a full-time second priest. It will take many months to get any of these.

Fr. Stavros will be out of the country August 16-24—I will be going to Greece for the first time in my life, as I have been invited to do a wedding in Athens. Fr. John will be available for all pastoral care and emergencies during this period. I will be of the office following Liturgy on August 15 and will return to the office on Saturday, August 26. Also, just so you aren't shocked, I will be growing a beard before I go to Greece. It is culturally appropriate in Greece that priests wear beards and black robes. Just as I firmly believe that Orthodoxy in America should include things that are culturally normal for America, such as pews, choirs and organs, I respect the cultural norms for priests in Greece and will have a beard, wear a robe, as well as black hat, as is customary in that society.

JOIN US FOR OUR

YOUNG ADULT RETREAT

Saturday, September 30
10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.



Theme: Renewal of Mind and Soul: A Discussion with an
Orthodox Priest and an Orthodox Therapist

Presenters: Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis, priest of
St. John Greek Orthodox Church in Tampa, FL

Mary Ann Konstas, licensed Mental Health Counselor



\$15.00 (lunch included)

Retreat to be held at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox
Church, 2418 Swann Avenue, Tampa, FL

RSVP to kim@stjohntpa.org by Monday, September 25

“Answering the Call: Rejoice, and Do Not Be Afraid”

By: Vasili Panagopoulos

On August 15, the Orthodox Church commemorates the Dormition, or more appropriately, the Translation to Heaven of the Theotokos. We are familiar with the foretelling of the birth of Christ as is found in scripture, specifically the Gospel of Luke 1:26-38.



The Archangel Gabriel appears to the Virgin Theotokos and says “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you... Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name Jesus.” To which the Theotokos responded, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” We may not be familiar with the second time the Virgin Mary was approached by an angel, many believe to also have been the Archangel Gabriel again, which happened three days before her translation to Heaven, who said: “This is what your Son says: “The time has come to call My mother to Me.” Do not be afraid at this news, but rather rejoice, for you are going to eternal life.” Three days later, “having given her blessing to the Apostles and hierarchs, she, with a smile, peacefully gave her soul, white and more resplendent than any light, into the hands of her Son and her God, who had appeared together with the Archangel Michael and a host of angels.”

Notice the similarities between both encounters with the Archangel Gabriel: Both times the Archangel tells her to not be afraid, and to rejoice in the news that he brings. In the first encounter, she is bringing the Son of God who allows eternal life. In the second, she is going to her Son, to eternal life. And in both encounters, the Theotokos rejoices in the Archangel’s call, and is not afraid.

The phrase “being called by God to do [fill in the blank]” is typically associated with an occupation. Some of us believe that we are called by God to be a doctor, teacher, truck driver, business owner, actor, garbage collector, etc. But the Theotokos, she wasn’t called to an occupation, she was called to be the bearer of God! And she submitted herself to His will.

How the Panagia reacted to God and His Will is very different from how we individually and as a society react to making decisions. Many of us overthink and over calculate; we weigh all of our options for every single decision: whether it’s what makes us the most money, the easiest, the most convenient, the happiest, etc. In a sense, we don’t allow the grace of God to flow through our decisions, ultimately through our lives, because we allow our will to get in the way of God’s Will. But the Panagia, however, simply submitted herself entirely to God, without fear or anxiety. See how when we turn to God completely, and allow His Will over ours, everything is easier and bearable.

It is the Panagia’s humility that we need to replicate in ourselves as Christians. And it takes a great deal of humility to submit yourself to God’s Will. As I mentioned earlier, being called does not mean just a profession, it could be anything, and if we are seeking His Will, we must be open and willing to do His Will. For example, God calls people to marriage, and parenthood. If you already are married and have children, your calling doesn’t end there. Are you living up the Sacrament of Marriage, and are you being the best parent you can be? Above all else, though, we are all called to be one thing: an Orthodox Christian. A calling that takes a lifetime to answer. But, if we submit ourselves to Christ, then we too will be called to everlasting and eternal life.



Continued...

Whatever your call may be, answer it. Embrace it. And don't just seek to do it, but rather let it become who you are. Completely submit yourself to the calling, and allow the grace of God to flow through you.

May we have the intercessions of our Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary as we chant her Paraklesis over the two weeks, and commemorate her Translation to Heaven on August 15.

Our Pastoral Assistant, Vasili Panagopoulos, Will Be Returning to Seminary

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ of St. John's,

In November of 2021, I received a phone call from Fr. Stavros about an opportunity to serve the St. John's community as Pastoral Assistant. After prayer and conversation with my wife, and a tour of the community later that month, I felt that it was God's Will to move to Tampa.

While I was certainly an outsider to the community, my family and I quickly felt a warm embrace from the congregation, and we immediately felt at home. And I would be remiss if I didn't offer my sincere thanks to Alex Limberatos, my predecessor and lifelong brother and friend for guiding me along the way throughout my time here in Florida.

Since January of 2022, I have had the honor and privilege to serve the community of St. John's as Pastoral Assistant. It is the experience and knowledge that I have gained by serving here that will stay with me forever. I especially want to extend my thanks to Fr. Stavros for all of the advice, guidance and wisdom that he gave me while I've been here in Tampa. May God grant you many more years in serving His Holy Vineyard.

As I said in my article before, we must answer our call, which is why on the 15th of this month, my family and I will be departing from the St. John's community, and heading back north to Boston, MA. I will be starting classes at Holy Cross Seminary at the end of this month, and will be there for the next three years.

I believe that it is God's Will for me to return to the seminary and finish my graduate studies. Upon graduation, I will return to my home Metropolis of Chicago and seek further instruction from my Metropolitan.

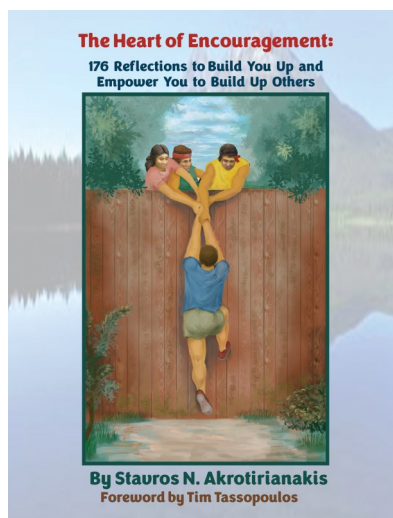
On behalf of Moriah and Andoni, I want to thank you for your love and support that you have all given to us since we arrived over a year and a half ago. Thank you for the opportunity to serve this congregation. Please forgive me for all the many mistakes and failures that I have made since I have been here. I ask that you please keep Moriah, Andoni, and myself in your prayers as we take this step, as you will always be in ours.

In Christ,
Vasili



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 Encouragement." 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. It can be purchased from our bookstore or from Amazon/Barnes and Noble. 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

You Don't Do Stupid Things When You Feel Full

God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control.

2 Timothy 1:7



One year at summer camp, after doing an activity where everyone encouraged each other, I asked the campers, "How do you all feel?" They said, "We feel really full." Then I asked them, "What if I suggested to you that we go drink or smoke weed right now? What do you think about that?"

They looked at me a little puzzled. Why would I be making a suggestion like that?!

One answered, "No, that would be really inappropriate." I answered, "Why? Because it's illegal?"

And the person answered, "No, it would be inappropriate because we all feel full. People do that stuff when they feel empty, to fill empty spaces."

One of the reasons why encouragement is so important is that it fills empty spaces. It makes people feel full, complete. And when people are full and not empty, they are less likely to go and do the things that fill the empty spaces—drinking, drugs, overeating, porn, and so on. When people feel discouraged, they feel empty, and they go to unhealthy places to fill those empty spaces.

When a person feels full of food, like after you've had a good meal at a restaurant, there is no desire for anything else to eat because eating more would make a person go from feeling full to feeling uncomfortable. When a person feels empty, they will go looking for food. And if they can't find food they like, they will go looking for food they don't like, just to have some food.

Many times, I have asked people, "Would you eat food out of a garbage can?" And the answer is always, "Heck no! That's disgusting!" To which I respond, "What if you hadn't eaten in a week?" And then the answer becomes, "The garbage can would look pretty good."

Most people can't conceive of eating out of a garbage can, but if they were hungry enough, they would.

Most of us don't think we're capable of robbing a store, but again, if you hadn't eaten in a while and were so empty and in need, you might cross that line and break the law, just to get some food.

When we are "hungry" in the sense that we need something that we can't get in an appropriate way, that is when we start doing inappropriate things. We go outside who we are to fill empty spaces. No one is born desiring violence. Violence is born out of a sense of emptiness—it might be caused by poverty, an-

Continued...

ger, or rejection. Something negative causes violence.

It is negative things that drive us to escape into food, alcohol, drugs, porn, watching too much TV, and so on.

Think about this—when you have had a very positive experience, you generally will not run to something negative, such as, “I just got a great grade on a test, so I’ll



run out and shop-lift.” You wouldn’t do that. Negative things happen when we feel discouraged, that is, “I just got a bad grade, and I’m not thinking very highly of myself, so I’ll go get high.”

Even words of encouragement can help to stem a negative tide from rising. If someone says, “I’m counting on you,” the response is generally not going to be, “Let me go get high” because when one is high, they can’t be counted on. Words of discouragement make us feel empty and sometimes are even more harmful than a bad action, like a bad grade on a test. Because tests seem temporary, there will always be other tests to take. Words, however, seem permanent. Once they are said, they can’t be unsaid, and they tend to haunt us. As encouragers, it is critical that we watch our words and use them to build up rather than tear down, to help fill people rather than empty them.

When we are filled with hope and positivity, things like anger and rejection and their consequences are harder to fall into.

It is important for us to feel full. It is important for us to feel encouraged. And we play an important role in making others feel full by encouraging them.

In closing off our small unit on letting the Spirit lead, it is important that we allow the Spirit to work through us as encouragers because encouragement will help fill us, and through it, we can help fill others. When one is full, there aren’t empty spaces available that we generally fill with bad things.

If the Holy Spirit is the one who “fills all things,” the Spirit is an encourager, and we, in tandem, work with the Spirit and in the Spirit to encourage others to fill their empty spaces.

It is such a great feeling to be satisfied, to not be in want. Seek out healthy ways to feel full, and make a conscious

effort to fill others. There is enough “stupid” things going on in the world today. A little encouragement can go a long way to eliminating or significantly reducing some of them.

Only God can
fill the void.

Mark 10:17-31

Lord, thank You for all the positive things that fill my life and my mind (list some of them). When I feel empty, let Your Spirit fill my empty spaces. And send people into my path who will encourage me and help keep my empty spaces filled. When I feel empty, help me to resist unhealthy temptations. Help me also to fill others. Bring people into my path today who feel empty and beat down so that I can encourage and fill them. Give me the thoughts and words to help fill others. Amen.

Encouragement Challenge: Seek out healthy things and healthy people so that you will feel “full.” Help others feel full by encouraging others.

ENCOURAGE
SOMEONE
TODAY



St. Stephen's

Summer Camp Testimonials

This summer, we sent 28 campers and 11 staff members to week TWO of St. Stephen's Summer Camp. Below are some of their testimonials about camp. (KIM-Put camp pictures here and throughout the testimonials.) in email

PJ Zelatis—11th Grade-St. Luke Cabin

This is my fourth year at St. Stephen's Summer Camp, and I had a blast. There was so much to do in such a short span of a week. I enjoyed learning about the Beatitudes and how we are always blessed. We also carried logs around camp throughout the week to symbolize the sins and other things weighing us down. After confession, we got to throw the logs into the lake to show that the weights had been lifted. The amazing race was so much fun. We had to go around camp to do various activities like volleyball, basketball, canoeing and a crossword puzzle. Our cabin, St. Luke won due to our great teamwork and determination. The ropes course was fun and challenging too, but my favorite activity was hang-time with Father Stavros. Going to camp is a great experience that allows for spiritual and personal growth. I can't wait for next year!

Frank Giallourakis—Counselor-St. Luke Cabin

I am grateful to Father Stavros for allowing me the opportunity to serve our church's ministry as a St Stephen's Summer Camp Counselor. Although it was my first week on staff, I was fortunate to be assigned to the St. Luke cabin which includes the oldest young men of the camp. I could ramble on about the fun we had throughout the week but I feel it is most significant to discuss the willingness to learn that these young men exhibited. One example of this is evident in their collective choice to skip the entire block of swim time, which is many campers' favorite time of the day, so that we could continue our conversation about manhood and the challenges of living up to certain standards in today's societal climate. Furthermore, these young men took their newfound knowledge and began applying it rather quickly. As the week went on, I witnessed more respect, prayer, and maturity within the cabin. Based off their willingness to learn and their application of introduced lessons, I am encouraged to observe what these young men will do in their futures. It is my hope that they realize their full potential to develop themselves into beacons of God's light. If they do this, then we will have gained great traction in our battle against the evil one to keep God at the center of our world. Thank you to a great group of co-counselors who I not only spent the week with but grew closer to. I look forward to returning to St. Stephen's soon.

Marianna Giallourakis—12th Grade-St. Euphemia Cabin "Always blessed!"

What does it mean to be "always blessed"?

Well week 2 of St. Stephens camp explained to me what it really meant. When I first arrived at the DRC for the first time I was anxious because of the people I would be meeting and the activities I would be participating in! But once I realized that I had spent the week with such amazing people that would guide me, support me, and get me acclimated to my surroundings, I never once questioned or hesitated on going back another 3 years. St Stephens has taught me to grow in so many ways! Not only did it teach me to step out of my comfort zone or teach me how to grow in my communication and interactive skills with other fellow Greek Orthodox Christians, but it also taught me how to grow even closer to God and in faith! I am very blessed to be a Greek Orthodox Christian and I am so blessed to have been able to go to a camp like St. Stephens! This week I learned that not all your prayers can be answered right away especially the ones you may be begging for to be answered. Sometimes you are blessed in so many ways and most of us don't realize it! I've been blessed in so many ways. I've been blessed to have been born and baptized in the Greek Orthodox Church, I've been blessed to have the family I have, I've been blessed to have met so many wonderful people at camp that I can now call "really good friends". I've been blessed by being able to walk, speak, see, and hear today! So in closing I ask you to thank God for what he has provided you with and if it is still possible.... Send your kids to camp because it will change their lives!

Teddy Kafantaris-9th Grade-St. Mark Cabin

Respect, faith, and trust were reiterated throughout the week. You had to trust your cabin and others to watch out for you. Many of the ropes course activities wouldn't have been completed without the cabin-mates' trust in each other. Also, it is key to respect God and have faith in Him so you can succeed in life. Between the ropes course, playing football in the lake, and the singalongs, I had so much fun. Knowing most of the people there gave me an opportunity to strengthen my relationships with them. The highlight of the week was getting closer to my cabin - mates and my counselors so that we all felt like family by the time we left. I had one of the best weeks of my life this year and I look forward to going back next year so I can " Rise and shine and give God your glory."

Popie Kafantaris-11th Grade-St. Euphemia Cabin

As any other camper, I had a lot of worries going into camp; who would I room with?, would this year be fun?, would I fall in the lake?. Stuff like that. I'm pretty sure God heard all my ridiculous worries, and made sure none of them came true. Arriving at camp, I immediately felt like it was going to be a great year.

Continued...



I ended up rooming with 3 people I absolutely love and being in a cabin with 16 girls who made my time at St. Stephens camp so valuable. Throughout the whole week, I felt as if I was surrounded by family. From the girls in my cabin, to the smelly boys in St. Luke, I was surrounded by people who loved and cared for me. That feeling is one that I will always cherish and never forget. As for a favorite memory, its almost impossible to chose. But I would have to go with any memory from the ropes course. The ropes course is a place where you let everything go and you learn important life lessons that can mend your relationship with God and even strengthen it. Whether it's being blindfolded and guided around by two people you might have never talked to, or falling off a platform into the arms of your cabin mates. Each activity creates memories you will never forget. This year at St. Stephens camp, I have grown even closer to the girls I started my camp experience with, felt Gods presence within me, and of course had fun. I encourage all kids that are worried about coming to camp next year to go and to trust that God will be by your side and guide you through the amazing experience St. Stephens provides.

Kenny Kane-9th Grade-St. Mark Cabin

I really enjoyed camp because it was beneficial for me to become closer to my spiritual self. It was really fun being in St. Mark for the first time and getting to know new people that at the end of the week were like brothers to me thank you Father Stav for a wonderful week I can't wait to come back next year.

Philip Kane-7th Grade-St. Nicholas Cabin

This year of camp was very fun for a couple of reasons . First I wasn't in the same cabin as my brother and some of my past friends, but I made many new friends throughout the week. the activities were super exciting and educational especially learning about the beatitudes. Thank you father I cant wait to come back next year.

Maria Palios-11th Grade-St. Euphemia Cabin

Every year St. Stephens surprises me with how amazing it is. It's the highlight of my summer. I not only grow closer to the people at the camp but also to God. I will be forever grateful for all of the memories that camp has given me and the friendships I have formed there. It's a great experience to be there with teenagers who share the same faith as you and can learn about Jesus together. There's no other place where we can learn and worship like at St. Stephens. This year specifically I was looking forward to Thursday, which is the day everyone has the opportunity to go to confession, and this year I had an experience which I'll remember for the rest of my life. Before my cabin went to confession we all had a talk with Fr Stavros and I will never forget it. I love St. Stephens's and will always be grateful for everything it has given me. I would also like to add a HUGE thank you to all of the staff and Fr Stavros. Camp wouldn't be the same without them, they truly make it special. And to all my girls in St. Euphemia, I love you all and WE ARE AT CAMP!!!

Constantine Ameres-8th Grade-St. Nicholas Cabin

This was my first year at camp and I had so much fun. I recommend it to anyone eligible to attend. I only knew 1 person in my assigned cabin, but I quickly made a lot of new friends. My favorite things about camp were meeting new people and making my relationship with God stronger. The activities were all interactive, really fun - never boring and designed to help us grow in our faith. I cant wait to go back next year.

Artemis Xenick-Counselor-St. Katherine Cabin

Going to St. Stephen's is such a great gift every year. It is so refreshing to be in a bubble of pure fun, disconnecting from the world, and being surrounded by amazing people. I've been to St. Stephen's six times as a camper, and this was my third year attending as a counselor.

I was a counselor for the middle girl's cabin, and it was such a privilege to get to see them grow and encourage each other throughout the week. To see this group of girls grow together in teamwork was awesome to watch. Beyond our campers, the staff for this week of camp was truly incredible. From our staff training, we were all open and vulnerable with each other, and there was a deep sense of trust from the beginning. This was so important throughout the week, as each day ended up bringing a lot of challenges and changed plans. I felt consistently supported and loved by the staff members that made up the most amazing team.

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

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

Victoria Magos-8th Grade-St. Helen Cabin

For me camp is always fun. I see camp as an opportunity to make new friends, get closer to people, and make my relationship with God stronger. The ropes course is always fun and involved God at the same time. For example, the ropes course makes you go through various activities. One of those activities is the trust walk. The trust walk is an activity where one person is blindfolded and their partners have to guide them through different obstacles. I think that teaches you a lesson that God will always guide you, even if you can't always see it. The Art Barn is another activity at camp. They make us do fun crafts while also including God in them. For example, one of the days the counselors made us do a craft where we sculpted something that reminded us of the Beatitudes. Another big part of the Art Barn was making friendship bracelets.

Continued...

Making friendship bracelets allowed you to get closer with people or even make new friends! The lake is another activity at camp. The lake is just a fun activity to cool off or play. Though in the morning a lot of people like to sit on the lake's dock for Alone With God, including myself. The lake is full of different life which makes it a peaceful and relaxing place to pray. Sports is a good activity to make new friends. You can either play basketball or volleyball. Although sports is fun, it can sometimes feel too long for some people because of how hot it is and sports aren't for everyone. A lot of people just like to hang out during sport time. Building our relationship with God is very important and at camp we do that! Orthodox Life is an hour long talk with a priest that helps build our relationship with God. In Orthodox Life we talk about new things every day. This year I had Father William as my priest and he was amazing! He gave me and the other girls advice that will definitely help us in the future. Everybody has their own struggles. In Hangtime that's what we talk about. What people say in Hangtime stays in Hangtime. For Hangtime, St. Helen cabin got advice that has and will continue to help us. Camp's focus is growing our relationship with God and having fun. Camp does an amazing job at both, and I am so excited to go back next year!

Nicholas Magos—11th Grade-St. Luke Cabin

This was my third year of camp. This year's Week 2 has to be my favorite week of experiences over the others. It was my first year in St. Luke and I got to experience privileges that only people in St. Luke get to experience. One thing that will always stick with me are the talks we had with the counselors and the priests. All the evening activities were great and fun. My favorite evening activity is the Amazing Race. It was fun and brought our cabin closer together as a team. Another thing I will always remember from this week was carrying the logs around. At first it started as a joke and became something more and I will always remember that. Overall I have never been disappointed with my experience with Week 2 as a lot of care and hard work has always been put into the week.

Toula Trakas—12th Grade-St. Euphemia Cabin

This was my 5th year going to St. Stephen's, and my last as a camper. I have made so many special memories at camp, and it is always one of my favorite parts of the summer. My favorite part of camp is the little moments, like deliriously laughing with your cabin at 3 am and making new inside jokes. This year I also loved the amazing race, an activity we did where we had different challenges throughout camp to complete. I'm so grateful for St. Stephen's and i can't wait to go back as a counselor! Thank you Father for all you do for camp!!

Jasmin Dakkak-Logistics Coordinator

St. Stephen's Summer Camp will always hold a special place in my heart. This year was special and I am very thankful to have worked with such a wonderful staff, excited campers, and I learned so much from Father Stavros.

The beautiful diakonia retreat center gave each of us a chance to recharge and anchor in our faith. Father Stavros helped to equip each camper and staff member with practical tools to use in our daily lives. My heart was so full leaving camp and my relationship with God has never been stronger. Being able to just take in the beauty of His creations was incredible. This camp has changed my life in the best way.

Maggie Trakas—7th Grade-St. Helen Cabin

This is my first year at camp. I loved meeting new people and being able to see people from our church at camp. My favorite part of camp was the ropes course, because the activities were fun. I also loved the dance! I had a super fun week and i can't wait to go back next year. Thank you Father Stavros for everything you do at camp!

Nicholas Akrotirianakis—11th Grade-St. Luke Cabin

This summer was my fourth year at Saint Stephen's summer camp. I had an amazing time and I learned some very important lessons. I learned how to become a better Christian leader and I learned the meaning of some the beatitudes that were confusing to me before. I also learned some valuable strategies on how to keep the faith. I had a ton of fun doing team work activities on the ropes course and helping my cabin St. Luke win the amazing race. I really enjoyed the encouragement walks and providing insight during the serious discussions. I made a lot of new friends. I am so thankful to God, Father Stavros, and Jasmin for making camp an amazing experience and I look forward to going back next year.

Penny Markowski-Counselor-St. Helen Cabin

When it was my first year attending Saint Stephen's as a camper, I remember being really nervous to be in a new environment. However, some thing about the place and the people that I was surrounded by really made me feel like Saint Stephen's was my home . Every discussion we had and every fun activity we did as a camp will forever be a part of the countless memories I've made at camp. I knew without a doubt that I wanted to attend as a counselor. While being on staff was stressful at times, having the opportunity to be a counselor is truly an honor that I'll never be able to repay. Madeline and I were counselors for the youngest girl's cabin, Saint Helen. These were some of the most high energy and funniest girls I've ever met. Since it was most of these girls' first year at camp, being able to see them thrive in a new environment, make new friends, and just have fun was the most remarkable thing. There will be nothing more rewarding than hearing them say "I just can't wait to come back next year. " Thank you so much Father Stavros for giving me the opportunity to be a staff member at Saint Stephen's, it will always be my second home.



Ava DiRienzo-Camp Nurse

I served as a nurse for the first time at Saint Stephen's Camp on week two with Father Stavros, counselors and campers from Tampa.

I wasn't sure exactly what to expect since this line of nursing is not native to me. I've learned how to manage allergic reactions, rule out concussions, treat various bug bites, respiratory virus, and a sprained ankle. It made me truly appreciate my career, as it also rekindled my love for nursing. I was very thankful to God that nothing major happened during that week of camp. It was an honor to help the campers medically. As for me, I was receiving help spiritually. God's hand and provision was over all of us the entire time. The camp has a sense of holiness as you would feel visiting a monastery. Peaceful. Still. God-centered. Through Father Stavros' exercises, we learned trust, faith, vulnerability, companionship and good tears. I'm thankful Father asked me to serve as the nurse. I'm thankful for the clergy, counselors, campers, and staff. Truly, it was a one of a kind medical and spiritual experience.

Madeline Moran—Counselor-St. Helen Cabin

St. Stephens has been such a special place for me since I was first a camper. This year I was blessed to come back as a counselor for the youngest girls in St. Helen. Although we had a lot of struggles throughout the week, meeting and spending time with these girls was such a rewarding experience. This group of girls were some of the most hilarious, high energy girls I've ever met and I am so grateful I was able to spend time with each of them. Watching them all open up with each other and share many vulnerable moments together was one of the highlights of the week for me and I hope to see them all continue to grow together in years to come. I was incredibly blessed to be able to share many intimate moments with members of the staff and girls in my cabin this week that I know I will always remember. Thank you Father Stavros for trusting me this week and for giving me an opportunity to return to such a beautiful and important place in my life. St. Stephens has done wonderful things for so many people and it would not be the same without the love and effort you dedicate to it every year.

Emily Nicklow-St. Euphemia Cabin

Hi, my name is Emily and this was my third year attending St. Stephens summer camp. During the school year, all I looked forward to was going to week two of camp. This year was my first year in the St. Euphemia cabin and I was surrounded by people who made camp great. If you are reading this and are debating on going to camp I HIGHLY suggest you go. St. Stephens is the only place where screaming for joy, staying up talking with cabin mates, being blindfolded while people walk you around, and having alone time with God every morning is normal. Going to camp helps you learn more about yourself and others. I have created lifelong friendships and made my old friendships even stronger by attending camp every year. These friendships you make at camp also come with lots of memories and jokes you will always remember. Aside from jokes, you will also remember the advice you are given throughout the week.

Again, if you are debating on going to camp GO because these experiences don't come often. I'm already counting down the days until I get to go to St. Stephens next year.

Maria Nicklow-St. Katherine Cabin

This is Maria Nicklow and this was my 3rd year of camp. Every single year, I'm so happy I go. At St. Stephens, you make so many new friends you'll have for a lifetime. Every year you look forward to so many new experiences at camp. From alone time with God, to arts and crafts, making tons of friendship bracelets for each other, swimming in the lake, paddleboarding, the ropes course, singing songs till you lose your voice, the wake up songs, 4th of July, and of course winning the spirit stick. Camp is really special to go to, and you will remember every minute of it once you leave.

Elizabeth Xenick-Counselor-St. Katherine Cabin

I can confidently say that this year of St. Stephen's was both my favorite and my hardest. It was my first year as a counselor, so I experienced camp in a totally different light. I was counselor of the middle girls cabin with my sister Artemis and another counselor named Kaeli. This age group definitely brought certain challenges, but it pushes us to show them ways to encourage each other and build each other up. A highlight of my week was how supportive the staff was. Even on the most challenging days, I knew I could confide in any of the other staff members and they would console me and find a way to make me feel better. We truly were the only ones who understood what the others were going through, and we had a really special level of trust between us. I had so many God moments this week, but I think my top one was after really tough day on Wednesday, during vespers there was a rainbow right over the ropes course, and to me that showed that God had our backs and was there to help us through the obstacles we still had left in the week. Thank you Fr. Stavros for allowing me to be on the week 2 team and for another amazing week at St. Stephen's.

George Xenick—St. Luke

This was my fourth year at St. Stephen's camp. I was in the oldest boys' cabin, St. Luke, and it was a much more spiritual experience than any of my other years in the other cabins. We had an evening discussion with Father Stavros every day that taught us how to be better Christian men and how to be better people in general. Our counselors Frank and Taki also led us in some great conversations and stories that set the tone for the week with a clear message of what it is to be a man. I feel like my entire cabin learned from those experiences because by the end of the week we all felt like brothers. Another great bonding experience at camp is the ropes course, which this year presented some new challenges because our cabin was required to carry around 35-pound logs everywhere we went. This provided an analogy for the burdens we have to carry throughout life and at the end of the week, we were glad to toss the logs in the lake. Thank you to Father Stavros and all the staff for making this week so amazing and memorable. It's a great week to make friends and memories and grow closer to God that I would recommend to anyone.

Sunday School News



WELCOME BACK TO SUNDAY SCHOOL! We pray that you had a wonderful summer with your family. Our first day of Sunday School is August 13th. All of our 23 teachers are looking forward to serving the children of St. John's for the 2023-2024 school year. Please make sure to register your children on July 27th and August 6th. We will have a table set up in the hall.

The teachers will meet with Father Stavros for a Sunday School Teachers' Retreat on Sat. Aug 12th. This is a wonderful way to start the new Sunday School year. Father Stavros is such an inspiration to all of us and we look forward to our two retreats with him every year.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO VASILI PANAGOPOULOS for all he has done for our Sunday School these past few years. He is loved by our congregation at St. John's and he will truly be missed. Vasili is going to the seminary to become a priest. We will continue to pray for him and his sweet family. We wish them all the best.

We are so thankful to have our teachers commit to our Sunday School Ministry year after year. We would like to welcome Mary Guirguis and Katherine Kyrus to our Sunday School staff and say farewell to Alexis Scarfogliero. Alexis has taught our Pre-K students for 14 years. We appreciate her dedication to our little ones and we will miss her as a teacher in this ministry.

WE ARE PROUD TO ANNOUNCE OUR OUTSTANDING STAFF FOR THE 2023-2024 SCHOOL YEAR.

THEY ARE:

Director of Sunday School: Vickie Peckham

Music/Special Programs: Maria Xenick

Toddler 2's Program (Must be 2 years old by Sept. 1st): Jenny Paloumpis

Pre-K 3 (Must be 3 years old by Sept. 1st): Zackie Ameres - Teacher and Mary Guirguis - Assistant

Pre-K 4 (Must be 4 years old by Sept. 1st): Denise Panos - Teacher and Rachel Zaharis - Assistant

Kindergarten: - Debbie Nicklow - Teacher and Donna Trakas - Assistant

Grade 1: Maraquet Edquid - Teacher and - Doukissa Moshos - Assistant

Grade 2: Nicole Mantzanas - Teacher and Jaime Brewer - Assistant

Grade 3: Amy Kafantaris and Stacie Garcia - Co-Teachers

Grade 4: Georgia Kane - Vivian Samuel - Co Teachers

Grade 5: Vickie Peckham

Grade 6: Stephanie Moran - Katherine Kyrus - Co Teachers

Grade 7 and 8: Betty Katherine Katsamakis - Teacher and Marina Choundas - Assistant

High School:

Girls: MaryAnn Konstas - Teacher

Boys: James Konstas - Teacher

Thank
you!



Welcome
Back!!

More information will be provided about the first day of Sunday School in the bulletin and through our weekly Friday e-mails to parents. Parents, if you don't get these weekly e-mails, please let us know. Feel free to contact Vickie Peckham at vickiepeckham@gmail.com or 813-758-3102 with any questions, suggestions, or comments regarding St. John's Sunday School Program.

Liturgical Schedule for August

Tuesday, August 1 **Procession of the Holy Cross**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, August 2 Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.

Friday, August 4 Paraklesis 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, August 6 **Transfiguration of our Savior**
Orthros 8: 45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Monday, August 7 Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.

Wednesday, August 9 Paraklesis 10:00 a.m.

Friday, August 11 Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, August 13 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Monday, August 14 **Great Vespers for the**
Dormition of the Virgin Mary 6:00 p.m.

Tuesday, August 15 **Dormition of the Virgin Mary**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, August 20 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, August 27 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Tuesday, August 29 **Beheading of St. John the Baptist**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, September 3 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Transfiguration of our Savior



Beheading of St. John the Baptist



Dormition of the
Virgin Mary



Counting Wins in our Community

Artemis Xenick was awarded the Scholarship 100 Award from the Southeastern Federation of Greek Orthodox Musicians. She received the honor at the 2023 Clergy Laity Conference in Tarpon Springs this summer.

Established in 1986, the †Father George and Anna Gallos and †Michael Zanakos Music Scholarship has made it possible for aspiring students to further their education in the field of music. It is expected that scholarship award and grant recipients will utilize this training of their talents, in part, in service to the Greek Orthodox Church, to the Federation, and to its church music ministry. May these young people utilize their musical talents for the enhancement of the Southeastern Federation music ministry and to the Glory of God.



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.

Parish Registry

Adult Baptism-Millie Jane (Emilia) Simpson was baptized on Sunday, June 4.
Hannah Passalaris was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism-Eliza Rose Carreon, daughter of Delfin and Danae Carreon, was baptized on Sunday, June 18. John Poulos was the Godparent. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism--Leonidas Lambros Zinelis, son of Andreas and Eva Zinelis, was baptized on Saturday, June 24. Spiro and Nataliya Menegatos were Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

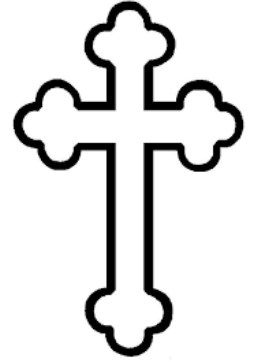
Wedding-Lewis Roger Zessis and Beatrice Anne Bohm were married on Sunday, May 28.
Marilyn Sandborn was the sponsor. Congratulations!

Wedding-John Walter (Jack) Vitou and Maria Lyn Cauthorn were married on Saturday, June 17.
Emmanuel Gonatos and Mary Deffigos were the Koumbaroi. Congratulations!

Liturgical Notes for August

Tuesday, August 1 – Procession of the Holy Cross

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



Paraklesis Services of Supplication to the Virgin Mary

The service of Paraklesis or “Intercessory Prayer” to the Most Holy Theotokos, the Mother of God, is chanted during the fasting period of the first fourteen days of August, preceding the Feast of the Koimisis or “Falling Asleep” of the Virgin Mary, which is August 15. In this service we ask the Theotokos to pray for us and to intercede for us with her Son and our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not the Theotokos who saves us. God saves us. Thus we do not pray to the Theotokos, but we pray through the Theotokos, that through her intercession, we may find favor with God. We ask her to join us in extending our prayers to the Lord. The Paraklesis service is chanted not only for fourteen days in August, but can be chanted in at any time of the year, for those who are in need of prayer in time of sickness, despair, struggle, or any occasion, since any of life’s experiences provide us an opportunity for prayer. The Paraklesis Service consists of soft, melodic chants of supplication to the Virgin Mary, and lasts about an hour. It is also one of few services in the church where we commemorate individuals out loud during the service. You will find a place to write the names of you and your families, loved ones and friends (who are living) to be commemorated at the Paraklesis Services in the August Messenger. The Feast of the Dormition will be celebrated on Monday, August 15. We should all attempt to keep the fast, at least from meat, during the first fourteen days of August, and we should each plan to receive Holy Communion on August 1, 6, 7, 14 or 15. Paraklesis dates for 2023 are: Wednesday, August 2 (6:00 p.m.), Friday, August 4 (10:00 a.m.); Monday, August 7 (6:00 p.m.); Wednesday, August 9 (10:00 a.m.); and Friday, August 11 (6:00 p.m.). Paraklesis will be held once a month beginning in September.

Sunday, August 6 - Transfiguration of our Savior We read in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke, how Jesus was Transfigured on Mount Tabor in the presence of His Disciples. Matthew 17:2 says, “His face shone like the sun and His clothes became as white as the light.” Jesus was shown in the fullness of His glory as God, and standing beside Him were Moses and Elijah, the two greatest prophets of the Old Testament. This showed the Disciples that the man Jesus was indeed God as well, and pre-figured His glory at the Resurrection and Ascension. Grapes are blessed at the end of the Divine Liturgy on August 6. This coincided in past centuries with the blessing of the harvest. The “harvest” for Christ are all those who have dedicated their lives to following Him. Because this event occurred historically only a few weeks before Holy Week, it is connected to the harvest of Christian souls that was ready to be had after the Resurrection. Because this feastday is so important, and would have been lost in the midst of the Lenten cycle, the church moved it to August 6, exactly 40 days before the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on September 14, since the Transfiguration took place a few weeks before the Crucifixion.

Monday, August 14 - Great Vespers for the Feast of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary—In the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church, the day begins with the setting of the sun. On August 15, we celebrate the Dormition of the Virgin Mary. But the actual feast begins with the setting of the sun on the evening of August 14. An evening service,

Continued...

called Vespers, announces each new day. In most parishes, Vespers is only offered a few times a year.

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

Tuesday, August 15 - Dormition of the Virgin Mary—This is one of the Twelve Major Feastdays of the Church Year, and commemorates the Falling Asleep of the Virgin Mary. When the Virgin Mary died, all the disciples were present, save for Thomas, who could not get there in time for the funeral. When Thomas arrived, they opened the tomb for him to pay his respects to the Virgin Mary. The tomb was found empty, save for the belt of the Virgin Mary. Her body, along with her soul, had been assumed into heaven. This shows us that those who are righteous will be taken to heaven. It is not just Christ who went to heaven, but all of us can go. The Virgin Mary was not God—she was one of us, and shows to us, in the most excellent example, of what it means to live a life of obedience to God. We honor her above every person, even every angel, as we chant, “Greater in honor than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim (Cherubim and Seraphim are two order of angels, the ones who stand closest to God), you without corruption gave birth to God the Word, and are truly Theotokos, you do we magnify.”

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

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 4,018 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 prayerteam365@gmail.com has been added to your contacts so that these emails stay in your Inbox rather than going to the Junk or Spam folders.

**The Prayer Team has a new dedicated website: PrayerTeam365.com
Check it out! Search by topic and grow in your faith today!**

Father Stavros has authored NINE 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

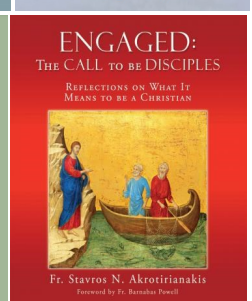
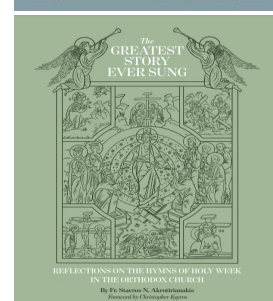
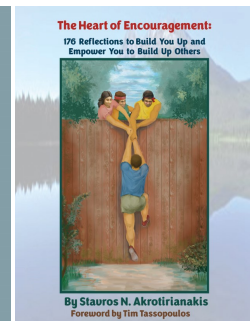
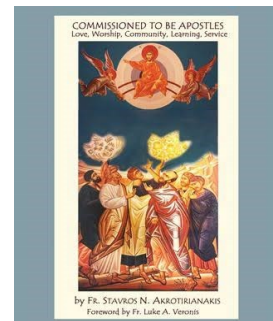
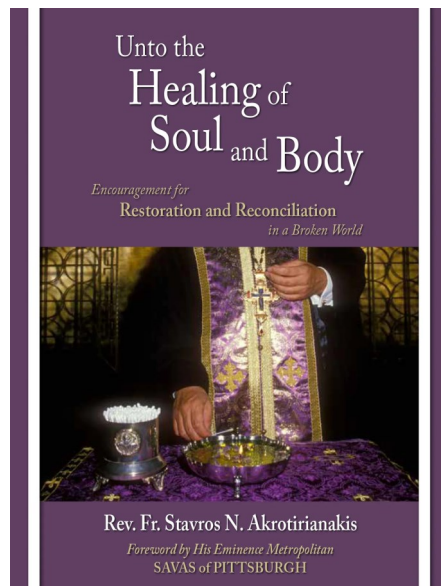
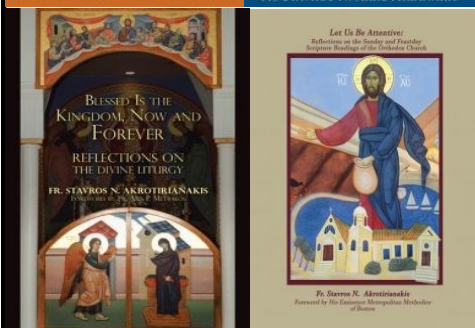
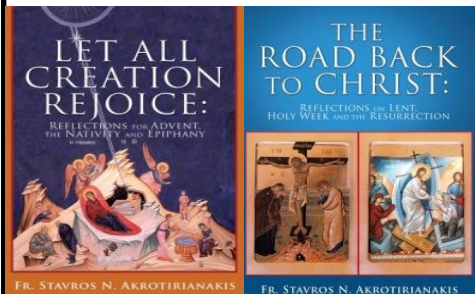
Engaged: The Call To Be Disciples, Reflections on What it Means to be a Christian

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

The Greatest Story Ever Sung: Reflections on the Hymns of Holy Week In the Orthodox Church

NEW: Unto the Healing of Soul and Body: Encouragement for Restoration and Reconciliation in a Broken World



Unto the Healing of Soul and Body

*Encouragement for
Restoration and Reconciliation
in a Broken World*



Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis

*Foreword by His Eminence Metropolitan
SAVAS of PITTSBURGH*

**Introducing the Newest Book by Fr.
Stavros**

**Unto the Healing of Soul and Body:
Encouragement for Restoration and
Reconciliation in a Broken World**

There has never been a greater need for healing in the world than there is today. The Orthodox Sacrament of Holy Unction is intended for the healing of soul and body. What makes this sacrament so powerful is not just the anointing that occurs at the end of the service, but the journey there—through seven Epistle readings, seven Gospel passages and seven powerful prayers. *Unto the Healing of Soul and Body* will serve as an aid on this journey, helping us understand our need for healing, as well as God's role and our own participation in spiritual healing.

The Sacrament of Holy Unction, celebrated on Holy Wednesday and at other times throughout the year, lasts about 90 minutes. Yet, that time is packed with such spiritual richness that it deserves to be reflected upon more deeply. This book contains 46 reflections on the hymns, Scripture readings and prayers of the service.

The human body is comprised of mind, body and spirit, all of which are interrelated. When one part of the body suffers, so do the other part. For every physical wound, there is also a spiritual consequence. This book not only reflects on God's ability to heal our physical infirmities, but especially how our souls can be healed along with our bodies. In the times when our bodies are beyond physical healing—at some point we will all suffer a physical death—Holy Unction serves as a reconciliation with God and a preparation for eternal life. This service includes many prayers offering forgiveness, many which speak of the mercy of God, and many which speak of the ultimate destination, eternal life. The sacraments of the church provides us a means to prepare for eternal life, by offering us the spiritual stamina to get through this life.

This book is dedicated to the memory of Fr. George Livanos, an exemplary priest for over thirty years, who won the battle for his soul, even as he lost his battle with cancer. Father George's bishop, His Eminence Metropolitan Savas of Pittsburgh, has written the foreword for this book, paying tribute to one of his long-time faithful priests.

DONATIONS NEEDED

**WE ARE LOOKING FOR DONATIONS FOR
THE FOLLOWING:**



**1. FLOWERS FOR THE ICON OF THE
DORMITION--\$100—THIS ICON WILL BE
DISPLAYED AUGUST 14 AND 15.**

**2. GRAPES FOR THE FEAST OF THE
TRANSFIGURATION. WE NEED ENOUGH
GRAPES CUT IN SMALL CLUSTERS SO
THAT WE CAN GIVE ONE SMALL CLUSTER
TO EVERYONE IN CHURCH ON SUNDAY,
AUGUST 6.**

**IF INTERESTED IN DONATING EITHER OF
THESE,
PLEASE CONTACT FR. STAVROS.**



Six Facts about the Dormition of the Theotokos

The Archangel Gabriel announced to her three days before that the time of her approaching departure into eternity was about to happen. As a pledge of this, the Archangel gave her a palm branch from Heaven.

She prayed fervently to be delivered from the evil spirit, and the Lord heard her prayer, coming to receive her soul.

She wanted to bid farewell to the Apostles, and Christ gathered them from the ends of the earth, except for St. Thomas.

She was buried in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the place she herself chose.

The Apostles opened her tomb after three days so that St. Thomas could also bid farewell, but they saw that the grave was empty.

The Mother of God appeared to them, telling them that her Son had exalted her body to Heaven and is sitting near His throne.
~from basilica.ro

“Feast of visitation of Mother Mary and Elizabeth”- The Virgin Mary as the Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant with its content resembles Mother Mary. Many early church fathers beautifully expressed this in their writings and Orthodox Church uses this typological expression in their Liturgy. Especially the writings of Church poets, St Ephrem the Syrian and St Jacob of Serugh.

Below is the typological meaning,
When the pregnant Mary meets her cousin Elizabeth, Elizabeth greets her by saying,

LUKE 1:43
“why has this happened to me, that the MOTHER of my Lord comes to me?”

The phrase by Elizabeth is referring to the Old Testament scripture where King David asks,

2 SAMUEL 6:9
“How can the ARK of the Lord come to me?”

When the Ark of the Covenant is brought before David, the scriptures declare,

2 SAMUEL 6:14
And David danced before the Lord with all his might. And David was wearing a linen ephod.

And what happens when Mary is brought before Elizabeth?
LUKE 1:41-42
And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”

The baby in the womb of Elizabeth was John the Baptist and like the priestly ephod that David wears, John the Baptist is in the priestly line of Aaron. When brought before the Ark, David dances. When the new Ark is brought before John, he leaps for joy.

Then according to scripture, the Ark remained for three months in the house of a priest.

2 SAMUEL 6:11
And the ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months, and the Lord blessed Obed-edom and all his household.

We see that Mary also remained for three months in the house of Zechariah the priest.

LUKE 1:56
And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home .

YOUTH PROTECTION PROGRAM REMINDER:

It's that time again . . . time to register with the Youth Protection Program! Our child and youth ministries will be starting up soon and the ministry heads will need your assistance with meetings and events. Would you like to help out? Great! But first you must register with the new Youth Protection Program, get screened, and do a training module before you can help your favorite child/youth ministry. To get started, please contact Suzanne Pileggi at smpileggi1@gmail.com or (813) 244-5855. Thank you!



Adopt A College Student Program *Thank you!*

I'd like to thank those of you that adopted our college students last school year. I know how much the students appreciated the notes, cards and small gifts of encouragement. If you would like to continue this school year, please reach out to me at kkaburis2000@yahoo.com or 8132406513. If you would like to adopt a student and have not done so, we would love your support.

We are excited for the new year!

Current college students and upcoming college students, please send the church office or me your current email, cell phone number, college and year in school. We are here to support and encourage you. God bless you and good luck!

**Kathy Kaburis
Adopt A College Student Ministry
kkaburis2000@yahoo.com**

8132406413



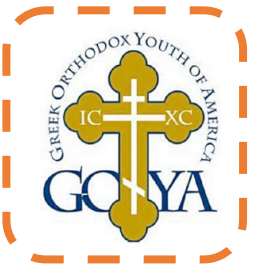
St. John the Baptist Community News

TWO Meetings of Ministry Heads in August-There will be two meetings of ministry heads during the month of August, one on zoom and one in person. The first meeting will be on Monday, August 7 at 7:30 p.m. This will be a single subject meeting. This meeting will be held via zoom, so that we can look at the calendar on a shared screen. If you have specific calendar dates, please send those ahead of time to Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com. The second meeting will be on Tuesday, August 29 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. This one will be in person, so we can discuss ministry issues for the fall. Each ministry is asked to have a least one representative present at each respective meeting.

Prayer for School Students - Sunday, August 6 All school students and teachers (high school and below) are invited to participate in a special prayer that will be held at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on August 6, prior to the beginning of the public school year. Fr. Stavros will offer a special prayer for all of our students and teachers as they begin the new school year.

Prayer for College Students - Sunday, August 13 All college students and professors are invited to celebrate the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, August 13 with us. At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, Fr. Stavros will offer a prayer for all college students as they begin a new school year.

GOYA Meeting - Sunday, August 13 Our first GOYA meeting of the new school year will be held on Sunday, August 21 from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner will be provided. One parent of each GOYAn is asked to attend the meeting. Also, there will be a parents' meeting, while the GOYAns meet with Fr. Stavros, to go over procedures for the year, review the yearly calendar, fill out emergency forms and arrange for parents to sign up to do a meal for one of the meetings.



GOYA Lock-in - Saturday, August 26 Our GOYA will have an end of summer lock-in on Saturday, August 26, beginning at 4:00 p.m. and ending after Divine Liturgy on Sunday, August 27.

Mandatory Altar Boy Meeting & Training Sunday, August 27

All altar boys are requested to attend a meeting on Sunday, August 27, following the Divine Liturgy. We will go over procedures on how the altar boys serve, updating and making a few small changes. This meeting is important for new altar boys but also older ones, as we seek to continue to improve our service. The meeting will last approximately 1 hour. Each boy is asked to have at least one parent present. New Schedule to take effect on August 20. As of publication time, the new altar boy schedule is still being finalized. All altar boys will receive a copy of the new schedule prior to August 20.

College Student Dinner-Tuesday, August 8—Our college students are invited to a dinner on Tuesday, August 8 at 6:00 p.m. This will be a chance to meet before returning to school for fall semester. Please RSVP to Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com if you plan to attend by Wednesday, August 2.

Young Adult Dinner/Discussion-Thursday, August 10-We will be resuming our once a month Young Adult Dinner/Discussion on Thursday, August 10 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. All young adults ages 18-40 are invited to participate. We will be having a monthly discussion based on some set topics. For August 10, the topic will be worship.



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

Adopt a college student -We started an adopt a college student program two year ago. We will be contacting all those who had college students they “adopted” last year and making sure you want to continue, as well as reorganizing which students are still in college, who is new to college, who has graduated college, etc. If you would like to participate and adopt a college student, please send your name to **Kathy Kaburis** at **kkaburis2000@yahoo.com** by August 14. If you were part of this program last year, you don’t have to contact us, we will be contacting you. Only people who are new to the program need to contact us.

Men’s Group—The Men’s Group will meet on Sunday, August 27, at 5:00 p.m. We will walk to a nearby restaurant and have dinner and then come back to church for a discussion, concluding by 7:30 p.m. All men of the community are welcome to participate.



Orthodoxy 101 to Begin in September-The Fall installment of Orthodoxy 101 will begin on Monday, September 18, and will meet for four consecutive Mondays—September 18, 25; October 2 and 9.

Women’s Bible Study will begin again on Tuesday, September 12.

Monday night Bible study with Fr. John—will continue meeting at 6:30 p.m. on most Monday evenings. Join us in person or via zoom for some very informative, lively and interactive discussions on how we apply Biblical principles in our everyday lives. See the Sunday bulletin for specific topics. For August, the dates are; Tuesday, August 8; Tuesday, August 15; Monday, August 21; and Monday, August 28.



FIFTY- TWO VERSES IN FIFTY- TWO WEEKS



THE BIBLE PROJECT
BY FR. STAVROS

May God bring good things into your life everyday.



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

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

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

Below are verses for the month of August. There is one verse for each week. I have written a few comments below each verse to get your mind going. Don't let my thoughts be your interpretation. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you through your reflection on Scripture. If you have any favorite verse you'd like me to comment on, please forward it to frstav@gmail.com.

August 6-12

He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed the, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.

Matthew 17:5

On August 6, we celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration of our Savior. The word "transfigured" means to be changed. To literally take your figure and change it. In this instance, the figure of Jesus became changed, as He was elevated into the sky, and He shined so brightly that no one could look at Him, and next to Him appeared the two pillars of the Old Testament—Moses and Elijah, to endorse Him. And in addition to this, the voice of God was heard saying "This is my beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased." This is an echo of what was said at the baptism of Christ. But in this case, one additional phrase is added "Listen to Him." Based on the content of the Bible and what happened before and after the event of the Transfiguration, this occurred only a few weeks before Palm Sunday and the Passion of Christ. Jesus was about to do and say a lot of things which would define Him not just as a moral teacher and miracle worker, but as the Son of God who came to die for our sins. It is not enough for us to acknowledge Jesus with icons on our walls and crosses around our necks. We need to listen to His words, and beyond that, we need to follow those words. Our lives are supposed to be transfigured from what the world calls us to be to what He calls us to be. We are living at a time when transfiguration is more important than ever, because the world calls us to conform to societal standards, but God calls us to transform to standards of holiness.

Continued...

The standards of the world lead to materialism and individualism, which ultimately lead to fear and death. The standards of God lead to love, service, faith and ultimately salvation.

August 13-19

And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God."

Luke 1:35

LUKE 1:35 - JESUS IS GOD'S SON - WHAT IT MEANS



As we celebrate the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, we commemorate the day she fell asleep in the Lord. This is the most significant day for everyone of our lives, the day we pass from this life, because how we pass determines whether we go to eternal condemnation or eternal glory. However, how we live goes a long way in determining how we pass. The Virgin Mary was special—she carried the Christ inside of her. That’s why she is called the “Theotokos,” the God-bearer. Because of her, Jesus came into the world and died for our sins. And because of this, we can all become a “Theotokos,” we can all bear Christ within us, especially in the sacrament of Holy Communion. So the saying of the angel, while it reads profound in the Bible and certainly was profound to the Virgin Mary, is a statement that is actually made to each of us. The Holy Spirit does come down on us, and the power of the Most High can overshadow us, if we let it. And therefore, we, too, can carry within us the Son of God. Each time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, and we call the Holy Spirit down “upon us” and then the gifts that we are presenting to the Lord, we are reliving this. And just as Mary had to accept this grace, so we also must accept it, and be willing participants in God’s divine plan of salvation, for each and all of us.

August 20-26

For with God nothing will be impossible.

Luke 1:37

We cannot put a limit on God. God is Almighty and incomprehensible.

We can’t put a limit on God’s power to do anything. Including to forgive. There are many people who feel that they are beyond God’s ability to forgive or to love them. People who think they’ve messed up so bad that God doesn’t want them. People who are angry at God who don’t feel like they can express that. God is greater than all of us. He has the ability to forgive anyone who comes to Him with a repentant heart. He has the ability to love those who can’t love themselves. He has the ability even to absorb our anger. Note that the verse does not say that “with God everything is possible,” but rather nothing is impossible. God is not going to necessarily bow to my every whim and wish. Just because I have God doesn’t mean I have a free ticket to an easy life. It means that with God nothing is ever off the table, especially our salvation. God willed that a Virgin would give birth to the Christ.

And if God can do that which would have been (and sadly still is) thought to be impossible, there is nothing that God cannot do.

August 27-September 2

Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord, keep watch over the door of my lips!

Psalm 141:3

The part of us that gets us into the most trouble is our mouths. That’s why it’s good we only have one of them. God gave us two ears, with which to hear, two eyes with which to see and two hands with which to do His work, and two feet with which to walk as we do His work. But we only have one mouth. The mouth is our greatest tool to praise God, and to praise and help others. It is also our greatest weapon. Because the mouth is the part of us that can cause the most destruction. Therefore we need to be careful what we do with our mouths, what we say, and how we say it. There is also another thing that our mouths are doing, and that is that we use our mouths to overindulge in food and drink. So the guard we pray will be over our mouths must also guard not only what is coming out of us, but what is going into us as well

**“SET A GUARD
OVER MY MOUTH,
LORD; KEEP WATCH
OVER THE DOOR
OF MY LIPS”**

PSALM 141:3

FOOD PANTRY UPDATE

St. John's Food Pantry is being reorganized and revitalized! Our mission is to properly collect, maintain, and distribute food items in a timely manner to those in need. We will support four main quarterly Food Drives throughout the year. These will include St. John's HOPE/JOY Food Drive around Thanksgiving time and three other drives to benefit Metropolitan Ministries, Feeding Tampa Bay, and families at the Bridgeprep Academy located on our campus. We will receive these items (a partial specific list is shown below) on an ongoing basis throughout the year. Please donate items from the list below being careful not to donate items that are expired or near expiration. If you are interested in being a part of this Ministry, please contact **Sandra Pappas at (813)785-3747** and she will contact you. Have an enjoyable summer and we thank you in advance for your support and cooperation!

Requested Food Pantry Items

- Canned fruits and vegetables
- Canned beans (Pinto, etc.)
- Canned Meat (including Vienna sausage, spam, chicken, and tuna)
- Cans of soup
- Cereal
- Instant mashed potatoes
- Jell-O/Pudding
- Macaroni & cheese
- Oatmeal
- Pasta
- Peanut Butter & Jelly (in plastic jars)
- Ramen noodles
- Rice
- Spaghetti sauce
- Dry goods
- Paper towels
- Toilet paper





We Will Serve the Lord

Our word for our parish for 2023 is “serve.” Every month this year, an article about service will appear. During some months, the article will be written by one of our ministry heads, talking about how their ministry serves and why they serve in it.

*This month, the message is written by **Alex DeMaio and Marina Choundas**, two of our dance group leaders.*

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Joshua 24:15



ST. JOHN Dance Group Ministry



GREETINGS EVERYONE,

WE ARE ALEXANDRA DEMAIO (Y HARA MAS, PANIGYRI) AND MARINA CHOUNDAS (PAREA). ALONG WITH MARAQUET EDQUID (Y HARA MAS) AND GENIE CARTER (PAREA), WE ARE THE DANCE GROUP TEACHERS. EACH OF US EMBODIES THE STATEMENT IN JOSHUA 24:15 THAT, "AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE, WE WILL SERVE THE LORD." WE SERVE THE LORD AND OUR CHURCH THROUGH THE DANCE MINISTRY IN A NUMBER OF WAYS:

FROM OUR YOUNGEST DANCERS IN Y HARA MAS, TO THE TEENAGERS IN PAREA AND THE ADULTS IN PANIGYRI, WE SERVE BY PROVIDING FELLOWSHIP TO OUR CHURCH CONGREGANTS, THE PEOPLE IN "OUR HOUSE." WE BRING CHILDREN, TEENAGERS AND ADULTS TOGETHER IN A FUN, WELCOMING ACTIVITY.

WE PERFORM COMMUNITY OUTREACH IN THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY, WELCOMING DANCERS OF ALL AGES AND LEVELS TO JOIN US IN DANCE AND IN WORSHIP. WE TRY TO EXEMPLIFY THAT WE ARE A "CHURCH FOR OTHERS."

WE SERVE OUR PARISH BY GIVING ALL AN OPPORTUNITY TO BOND WITH EACH OTHER, FORMING A STRONGER "HOUSE" AND ORTHODOX COMMUNITY.

WE TEACH AND WE LEARN HOW TO DANCE, HONING OUR SKILLS ALONG THE WAY THROUGH MANY WEEKS AND MONTHS OF PRACTICE.

WE PROMOTE OUR ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN FAITH BY PERFORMING AT OUR CHURCH'S CULTURAL EVENTS TO REMEMBER OUR HERITAGE AND SHOW OUR COMMITTED FAITH.

AS DEVOTED SERVANTS WE GIVE THE BEST PERFORMANCES WE CAN, DEDICATING THEM TO GOD, OUR COMMUNITY, AND TO OUR CHURCH, OUR "HOUSE."

WHY DO WE SERVE? BECAUSE THROUGH OUR TIME, TALENTS AND SKILLS, EACH OF US AND EACH OF THE DANCERS IN OUR "HOUSE" ARE ABLE TO SPREAD OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH THROUGH DANCE.

AS FOR US IN THE DANCE MINISTRY AND FOR "OUR HOUSE," WE WILL SERVE THE LORD BY CULTIVATING AND SHARING THE JOY OF DANCE!

AUTHORS: ALEXANDRA DEMAIO AND MARINA CHOUNDAS.





★ ★ ★ ★ ★ **VETERANS DAY & 1ST RESPONDERS MINISTRY**



THREE ST. JOHN'S PARISHIONERS, SPEROS AND ELLIE GEORGIOU AND GEORGE XENICK RECENTLY PARTICIPATED IN THE "HONOR FLIGHT" PROGRAM AT OUR NATION'S CAPITAL. HONOR FLIGHT NETWORK IS A NATIONAL NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION THAT HONORS AMERICA'S VETERANS BY INVITING THEM TO SHARE IN A DAY OF HONOR AT OUR NATION'S MEMORIALS IN WASHINGTON, D.C. IT CELEBRATES OUR NATION'S VETERANS BY PROVIDING THE APPRECIATION AND HONOR THEY DESERVE. CURRENTLY IT HONORS THOSE WHO SERVED DURING WORLD WAR II, THE KOREAN WAR, THE VIETNAM WAR, AND VETERANS OF ANY SERVICE ERA WHO ARE CRITICALLY ILL. PARTICIPATION IN AN HONOR FLIGHT TRIP GIVES VETERANS THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE THIS MOMENTOUS OCCASION WITH OTHER COMRADES, REMEMBER THE FALLEN, AND SHARE THEIR STORIES AND EXPERIENCES WITH OTHER VETERANS. HONORED VETERANS ALWAYS TRAVEL FREE OF CHARGE.

FOLLOWING IS A MESSAGE FROM MIKE AND MARIA XENICK SHARING THEIR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE INVOLVING THE HONOR FLIGHT:



Honor Flight of West Central Florida
Mission 46 ★ June 13, 2023

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
HONORING ALL WHO SERVED &
DEDICATE THEIR LIVES TO SAVING LIVES

Continued...

DEAR FATHER JOHN,

I WANT TO SHARE A NOTE OF "THANKS" FOR NOMINATING OUR FATHER, GEORGE XENICK, FOR THE "HONOR FLIGHT" PROGRAM. WHILE WE WERE NOT WITH HIM ON HIS TRIP IN WASHINGTON D.C., OUR TIME WAITING FOR HIM AND FOR ALL OF THE OTHER VETERANS AND VOLUNTEERS TO RETURN HOME WAS A MEMORY OF A LIFETIME FOR US. IT WAS JUST A THRILL TO BE AMONG SO MANY HEROES OF OUR NATION. THE ATMOSPHERE AND ENERGY IN THE AIRPORT, WHICH HAD BEEN CLOSED ENTIRELY FOR THIS SPECIAL GROUP OF PEOPLE, WAS SO PATRIOTIC. EVERYONE HAD A FLAG, EVERYONE CHEERED, EVERYONE SANG THE PATRIOTIC SONGS THEY PLAYED CONTINUALLY. WE WELCOMED THESE MEN AND WOMEN HOME WITH GREAT ENTHUSIASM. IT WAS QUITE EMOTIONAL FOR US, TO SEE MEN AND WOMEN I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW, KNOWING THAT SO MANY YEARS AGO, THEY PROUDLY AND FAITHFULLY SERVED OUR COUNTRY.

IT WAS A PARADE-LIKE ATMOSPHERE IN THE AIRPORT. THE RETURNING VETERANS WALKED DOWN THE WIDE CORRIDOR WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS ON BOTH SIDES. PEOPLE WAVED AND CHEERED FOR VETERANS OF ALL BRANCHES OF THE MILITARY AS IF THEY WERE JUST RETURNING FROM A TOUR OF DUTY. MANY OF THE VETERANS SERVED IN VIETNAM, SOME IN KOREA, AND THERE WERE EVEN STILL A FEW WHO SERVED IN WORLD WAR II. THE CROWDS THANKED THEM FOR THEIR SERVICE, BUT WHAT REALLY STRUCK ME, WAS THAT THE VETERANS WERE THANKING US, TOO. IT WAS VERY POIGNANT AND SPECIAL!



ONE OF THE SWEET MOMENTS OF THE NIGHT WAS WITH OUR SON, GEORGE. HE WAS 'BLOWN AWAY' BY THE EXPERIENCE! HE HAD NEVER SEEN ANYTHING QUITE LIKE THIS BEFORE. HE ASKED HIS GRANDFATHER IF HE REMEMBERED COMING HOME FROM KOREA WITH A SIMILAR CELEBRATION. AND JUST AS CASUALLY AS YOU MIGHT EXPECT, HIS GRANDFATHER SAID, "OH, NO. MY MOTHER DIDN'T EVEN MEET ME TO PICK ME UP AND I WENT TO WORK THE NEXT DAY!" QUITE A DIFFERENT, AND EYE-OPENING EXPERIENCE! WE GOT TO HEAR ABOUT HIS DAY, THEIR TOUR OF ALL THE MEMORIALS, AND HOW THEY WERE TREATED LIKE ROYALTY.

THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU FOR GIVING HIM THIS 'ONCE IN A LIFETIME' OPPORTUNITY. WE ARE SO HAPPY TO HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SHARE EVEN THIS SMALL PART OF IT WITH HIM.

MIKE AND MARIA XENICK



IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO JOIN OR SUPPORT OUR "VETERANS/1ST RESPONDERS" MINISTRY, PLEASE CONTACT FATHER JOHN AT JWSTEFERO50@HOTMAIL.COM OR 678-637-4425.

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

Panigyri *Adult Dance*



PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR MONTHLY
ADULT GREEK DANCE PRACTICE
@ THE KOURMOULIS HALL.
PLEASE WEAR DANCE SHOES OR SNEAKERS AND
COMFORTABLE CLOTHES FOR DANCING.

**STARTING AUGUST ON
WEDNESDAY'S**

[AT] 7 PM

*THEREAFTER WE WILL CREATE LINE-UPS FOR
THOSE THAT COMMIT TO PERFORMING SEVERAL
TIMES EACH DAY FOR THE FESTIVAL

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 - Lynchburg, VA
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
Sharon Colonis- Vero Beach, FL

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.**



*St. John is responsible to
have 6 volunteers sign up
each month.*

SIGN UP!

*Have a heart, lend a hand,
and make a difference.*

COMMUNITY OUTREACH 2023

OUR SCHEDULE FOR THE REMAINING MONTHS OF 2023 IS
AS FOLLOWS:

SATURDAY AUGUST 19, SEPTEMBER 16,
OCTOBER 21, NOVEMBER 18, DECEMBER 16.

TIME: 8:00 AM - 10 AM

PLACE: TAMPA HOPE
3704 E. 3RD AVENUE
TAMPA, FL. 33605



Sign up via SIGNUP GENIUS



AUGUST IS NATIONAL EYE EXAM MONTH

This August, observe National Eye Exam Month by learning about ways to keep your vision clear and healthy. As we age, getting routine eye exams can detect early signs of disease or damage to your eyes. Provided you do not have any symptoms or vision problems, Ophthalmologists generally recommend periodic eye exams at least every 2 years from the ages of 18 to 64, and every year for ages 65 and up. Getting a simple checkup and following a doctor's orders can greatly lower the risks of more severe and future damage, and you can continue to enjoy healthy vision.

Why are eye exams important?

Eye exams can help reveal other issues.

- Eye exams can reveal much more than simply the health of your eyes — such as issues with diabetes, glaucoma, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure.

Eye exams offer a preemptive strike.

- Many diseases that affect the eye often do not have warning symptoms but can have severe effects on vision and eye health later. Eye conditions can often be easily managed when caught early.

Good vision improves work performance.

- It's tough to focus on work if you're having vision problems, which may contribute to reading and concentration issues. Getting your vision corrected would help — and make you much more efficient and successful at the office.



To honor National Eye Exam Month here are some fun eye facts:

- The human eye can distinguish around 10 million different colors. We often don't appreciate all the colors we are able to see. It's important to keep them healthy with regular eye exams so that we can continue to enjoy God's gift.

- An article about night vision goggles stated that goggles used to see in the dark show green hues because our eyes can see more shades of green than any other color. The next time you go for a walk outside, observe all the different shades of green trees, grass, signs, and lights that are around. This may put into perspective the millions of colors our eyes are able to detect.

- Researchers have successfully treated adults with lazy eyes by having patients play Tetris. According to an article in the Huffington Post in 2013, Researchers from McGill University discovered that Tetris could help people with lazy eyes train their eyes. Not only is it a fun game, but it's also a health remedy for some people!

- Eyeballs can get sunburnt! Sunscreen to skin is sunglasses to eyes. The sun can do more damage to your eyes than you can imagine! Be sure to protect your eyes all year round by wearing sunglasses or protective hats. Keep in mind, sunglasses aren't only meant for summertime!

Check with your eye doctor to see when you are due for a comprehensive vision exam. If you are experiencing symptoms, be sure to make an appointment as soon as possible.

Want more information? Check out this website -

<https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/healthyvisionmonth/index.htm>



Young
A T

Heart

M I N I S T R Y



On July 8th we gathered together at ABC Pizza on West Hillsborough Ave. Fifteen members were present who enjoyed a nice variety of entrees and exchanged different experiences each had in their past.



We meet once a month, usually the 1st or 2nd Saturday from 11:30 to 2 p.m., to partake, usually, in a potluck luncheon at the Kourmolis Hall or at a restaurant in place of meetings at the hall. From time to time we may go on fieldtrips. In the past we have gone to a dinner theater, or the Henry B. Plant Museum in Tampa, the Museum of Cigars in Ybor City or to Tarpon Springs for Lenten shopping and the monasteries in Ocala.

Continued...

During our potluck luncheons we meet new friends, share stories, watch religious videos followed by a discussion under the guidance of Father Stefero, and play games such as trivia pursuit (religious topics) and bingo. Prizes are awarded to the winners. We welcome people of all ages to join us as a member or a friend of the YAH.

Before and during COVID-19 we called or sent get well cards to members of our community who were homebound.



Nancy's Birthday



All are welcome to come join us on outings and other events.
You'll have a wonderful time!

If you wish to be put on the email list of members, please contact Bill Manikas at wmanikas@gmail.com or see Dora Morgan.

WANT TO LEARN MODERN GREEK

ST. JOHN GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH



ADULT
GREEK
SCHOOL

TEACHER BORN, RAISED, AND EDUCATED IN
GREECE WITH 24 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
TEACHING THE GREEK LANGUAGE.
ADULT CLASSES FOR BEGINNERS TAUGHT @
ST. JOHN GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
(2418 W. SWANN AVE, TAMPA, FL 33609). CLASSES
ARE HELD AT 6-8:30PM ON THURSDAY EVENINGS,
STARTING ON SEPTEMBER 28, 2023. THIS WILL BE
THE FIRST OF THREE SESSIONS, WITH EACH
SESSION LASTING THREE MONTHS

- SPEAK GREEK
- READ GREEK
- WRITE GREEK
- BASIC GRAMMAR & MORE.
- SOME GREEK HISTORY
- BOOK INCLUDED IN PRICE

PRICE PER SESSION IS \$150 FOR CHURCH MEMBERS
AND \$175 FOR NON-MEMBERS.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN JOINING,
PLEASE REACH OUT TO MS. MAGDALINI MYER AT
ASPIS69@AOL.COM OR (813) 523-5771

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



DONATE BLOOD

St. John's Greek Orthodox Church
Sunday, September 17
11:00 AM – 3:00 PM

All donors receive*:

- **\$20 eGift Card**
- **OneBlood T-shirt**
- **Wellness Checkup** including blood pressure, pulse, temperature, iron count, and cholesterol screening.

Fact: One in three of us will need a blood transfusion.

Donors
Receive

\$20
eGiftCARD

TARGET
Walmart
amazon
...and more!

– PLUS –



– PLUS –



Appointments are encouraged, please visit oneblood.org/donate-now and use sponsor code **14583**



ID REQUIRED

*One offer per donor, per donation. No cash value. Not-transferable. Gifts may vary. For more information please visit oneblood.org/details.

oneblood
Share your power.

St. John's Bookstore

Orthodox Books Now Available through Hillsborough County Public Library System

We have some exciting news to share! Due to the efforts of Jamie Hartzler, there are now new Orthodox books in the Hillsborough County Public Library System catalog. What motivated Jamie to do this? In her words, "My husband is Orthodox but I am new to the Orthodox faith and have much to learn. Although the library has some beautiful children's books about the lives of the saints, none appeared to be Orthodox. I wanted my girls, Senna and Kiernan, to be able to learn more about the lives of the saints and appreciate the beautiful iconography of the church through children's books.

The gorgeous illustrations in these books are a beautiful way to learn about church history and traditions. So, this meant that I needed to start making purchasing suggestions to the library".

Through her persistence and dedication to this project she has succeeded in getting 13 Orthodox books on the shelves! The following are titles recently acquired.

For Children of All ages:

Laurel and the Wind by Gaelan Gilbert

The Saint and His Bees by Dessi Jackson

A Taste of Paradise: Stories of Saints and Animals by Katherine Bolger Hyde

In the Candle's Glow by Elizabeth Crispina Johnson

North Star, St. Herman of Alaska by Dorrie Papademetriou

The Wonderful Life of Russia's Saint Sergius of Radonezh by Alvin Alessi Currier

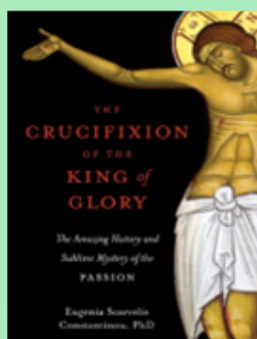
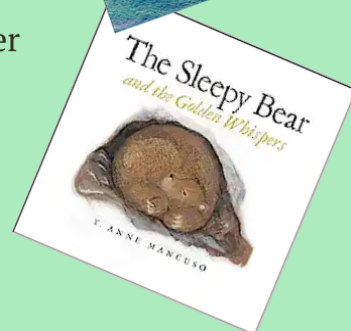
The Monk Who Grew Prayer by Claire Bradenburg

Saint La Rides a Leaf by Melinda Johnson

The Sleepy Bear and the Golden Whispers by T. Anne Mancuso

Snow on Martinmas by Heather Sleightholm

Brigid and the Butter: The Legend of Saint Brigid of Ireland by Pamela Love



For Adults:

Thinking Orthodox: Understanding and Acquiring the Orthodox Christian Mind by Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou, Ph.D

The Crucifixion of the King of Glory: The Amazing History and Sublime Mystery of the Passion by Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou, Ph.D

As only one copy of each title is available in the catalog, please place the book you'd like on hold after logging in to your library account . You can specify which branch is your preferred pick-up location. The library will notify you when the book becomes available.

Are you interested in suggesting titles of Orthodox Books for purchase by the Hillsborough County Public Library? If so, see Jamie or Presvytera Denise for more information on how you can get involved. Please thank Jamie for her efforts in planting this seed and watching it blossom!

Presvytera Denise



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

Junior Olympics



Our annual GOYA Junior Olympics was held June 9-11 at St. John. GOYAns and advisors from around North and Central Florida came together for a weekend of athletic competition and fun. Special thanks to Dwight Forde for chairing this event and to all the volunteers who helped make it happen.- Flickr account look up pics.

JUNIOR



Continued...



Continued...



Continued...



Thank
-You!
♥♥♥



2023



GRADUATES

GEORGE JR. HAMBOS

George Jr. graduated from the University of South Florida with his Master of Music in Piano Performance this past May. He looks forward to some exciting performance opportunities including one with MidAmerica Productions this June at Carnegie Hall in New York City and was also recently invited as a participant in the Harvard Music Festival, a week-long festival of chamber music intensives where he will perform with his piano trio (violin and cello) in Harvard, MA.

In addition to his artistic pursuits, George has accepted a full-time position with The Florida Orchestra as Development Associate for the 2023/2024 season. "I thank my St. John's Family for all the support and encouragement through this journey, my faith has guided me the entire way. Thank you!"

JOSEPH HAMBOS

We are happy to share that Joe Hambos has graduated from Southeastern University in Lakeland, FL. Joe graduated with a B.S. in Kinesiology (concentration in Physical Therapy) with Summa Cum Laude Honors. After seeing his grandmother suffer from Parkinson's Disease in her later years and Joe suffering from leg injuries (ACL and Hamstring) playing soccer throughout the years, he has found great passion in the ever-growing field of physical therapy. Joe will use his love for rehabilitating others by attending Florida Southern College's Doctor of Physical Therapy Program this fall.



St. John
the
Baptist

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(813)876-8830

August 2023						◀ Jul 2023	Sep 2023 ▶
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	
**Fast Day		1 ** Beginning of the Dormition Fast Holy Cross Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	2 ** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m. Choir Practice Parish Council 7:00 p.m.	3 **	4 ** Paraklesis 10:00 a.m..	5 **	
6 ** Transfiguration of our Savior Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Back to school prayer for K-12 students	7 ** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m. Meeting of ministry heads calendar (zoom) 7:30 p.m.	8 ** Bible Study 6:30 p.m. College Student dinner at 6:00 p.m.	9 ** Paraklesis 10:00 a.m. Choir Practice	10 ** Young Adult Discussion 6:30 p.m.	11 ** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	12 ** Sunday School Teacher's Seminar 9 a.m. - 12 p.m.	
13 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. College student prayer GOYA kick-off 5:00 p.m.	14 ** Vespers 6:00 p.m.	15 Dormition of Virgin Mary Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	16 ** Fr. Stavros out of office August 16-24 Choir Practice	17	18 **	19 Community Outreach Children's Greek School Young At Heart	
20 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	21 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	22 Veterans/ 1 st Responders meeting @ 6:30 pm	23 ** Choir Practice	24	25 **	26 Children's Greek School GOYA Lock-In 4:00 p.m.	
27 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Altar Boy Meeting Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	28 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	29 Beheading of St. John the Baptist Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Meeting of ministry heads 6:30 p.m. (in person)	30 ** Choir Practice	31			

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This beautiful sketch of
our church was created
by Vasiliki Fillmore &
Nina Passaris.
Thank you!



As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before Thy face, who shall prepare thy way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight -- " Mark 2:3