

# ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

# THE MESSENGER

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

## September 2016

### Mission Statement:

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is dedicated to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

### Vision:

The church shall seek to fulfill its mission by:

1. Embracing the Spiritual Life of the Orthodox Church through regular prayer, worship, and frequent participation in the sacraments.
2. Supporting the Church through stewardship of time and talent and sacrificial giving.
3. Providing a welcoming, caring, loving environment.
4. Having its members exemplify Orthodox Christian character and morals.
5. Supporting ministries that facilitate the overall mission of the Church.
6. Exemplifying commitment to community service and charitable outreach.
7. Creating an environment which encourages members to grow in their faith.

### Father Stavros' Message

## The Encouragement Project

*Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always. Pray Constantly. Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:11-23*

### Introduction

For the month of September, I'm going to be focusing on one word in my writing in the Messenger, for the prayer team, and in the weekly sermons—and that is the word ENCOURAGEMENT. Beginning August 28 and through September 25, each Sunday sermon will focus on this topic. Why this topic? There are two reasons—first, having

surveyed a number of people of all ages, from teens at summer camp, to our Sunday School teachers, to parishioners of all ages, there is an almost unanimous sentiment that the number of voices we hear in our daily lives are voices of discouragement, rather than encouragement. People are much more likely to feel torn down than built up. And because we are treated this way, we also tend to treat others in this way.

The concept of encouragement is something that:

**WE ALL NEED** - We all thrive more when we are encouraged rather than discouraged. We all need affirmation and positive reinforcement. Because these build confidence in us. When we hear voices of discouragement and negativity, this zaps both confidence and in turn productivity. We aren't as productive in anything—marriage, parenting, career, exercise, health, spirituality, etc.—when we are receiving messages of discouragement.

**WE CAN ALL GIVE** - Encouraging others is something that doesn't require much education. You don't need a college degree, or any formal training really. You don't need to invest any money to encourage, or own a home, or be famous, well-read or articulate. To be an "encourager" requires heart, patience and interest. Encouraging is something that come more naturally to some people than others. Some lack experience,

and some are just not in the habit yet. Encouragement is something we can all do, and for those already doing it, something we can all do even better and even more.

The goal of this series of writings and sermons is to bring encouragement to the forefront of our community. Because we all crave encouragement and because we have few places to go to get it, an infusion of encouragement in our community I believe will go over very well. So, join me on this month-long journey to becoming not only more encouraged in your Christian life but becoming encouragers of others in theirs.

### **My Purpose - Four Existential Questions**

Yes, I believe that this is the first time I have used the word “existential” in my life. I tend to stay away from philosophy. However, a sermon by a priest at summer camp highlighted four “existential” questions, questions that I must ask myself frequently because they are basic to my very existence. If I have no idea who I am, why I am here and where I am going, it will be hard to develop any goals or plans. And if I am without goals or plans, then encouragement is not going to mean much to me. Once one has identified his purpose, he sets goals, and then he can benefit from encouragement in working towards them. Allow me to set the background by examining four existential questions:

**Where did I come from?** This seems like a simple question. I have a mother and father who decided at some point to bring me into this world. We all know the biology of how children are born. Where did my parents come from? Of course, from their parents before them and on through the generations. But eventually, when we travel back to the very beginning of things, where did we come from? And the answer is God. Someone greater than us made us. Which means that we are not the center of the universe. He is. We revolve around Him. At least we are supposed to. We are not creators of ourselves. In the world we live in, we are surrounded by things made by us. But we are not the creators of ourselves. The world encourages us to make it all about us. Christianity says that God created us and we are to revolve around Him. There are more voices of discouragement about God than voices of encouragement today, it seems. This is one reason why we need to encourage one another, especially about our faith.

**What is my purpose?** Have you ever asked yourself this question? Many people feel that their jobs are unimportant. I could write an entire article on why every job matters. Let me talk about a couple of jobs that come to my mind as I am writing. Some people make their living as phlebotomists—they sit in a lab and draw blood day after day after day. And as I’m typing this morning, I hear the sound of workers mowing grass in the distance, as they do day after day, year after year. I wonder if the phlebotomist or the gardener ever thinks, is this the purpose God put me here for? Did God want me to draw blood or mow grass? Our purpose is to glorify God in whatever that is healing we are doing—and that can be cooking French fries at McDonald’s, or performing brain surgery. As you are working in whatever capacities you work—not only career, but in your home, for the church, coaching little league, etc.—ask yourself “Is God glorified in what I am doing?” If the answer is yes, then you are in line with our purpose in being here. If the answer is no, then you are not in line with the purpose for which God put us here.

**Why is there such a thing as good and evil?** God did not create evil. Evil entered the world as a result of the Fall. James 1:17 reads: *Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from Above, coming down from the Father of lights.* We know that if something is not good, it does not come from God. When something bad happens, there is either a manmade cause to it (I didn’t study, so I failed the test, or someone else decided to drive too fast and hit my car) or the cause is the consequence of the Fall (natural disasters). The biggest problem in the world today, in my opinion, is that we continue to redefine good and evil. The practice of Christianity is being branded as evil by many. So is the traditional family. And speaking up for God or for traditional values is seen as evil by many as well. Good has become whatever society will define as good, regardless of whether God has defined as good. It is as if many corners of society stand up and say to God “You got this wrong, we will tell YOU what we think is good.” Yes, the lines between good and evil are becoming increasingly blurred.

**What is my destiny?** In order to execute a plan, one has to have a goal. We know that goals without plans cannot be achieved. But what about plans without goals? Plans, or working, without a goal, is ultimately a fruitless exercise. At some point, everyone will have an end goal for their lives and then one’s life plan will be executed with that end goal in mind. Do we ever consider what happens when we die? Or do we ever wonder is this life all that there is to our existence? How we see the end affects (or should affect) how we approach today. We are on a continuum of time, somewhere between our beginning and our end of life. No one knows how close we are to the end of life. If we believe that the successful end of life is salvation in the kingdom of God, then we need to be working on that today.

### **The Purpose of the Church**

The church exists for some very specific reasons - The first reason we have the church is it is to **worship** God. At the core of our community in Tampa is the Divine Liturgy we celebrate each Sunday and on many other days. In the context of the Divine Liturgy, we are able to touch God and God is able to touch us, in the Eucharist. Not only do we speak with the Divine, as we do in prayer, we become physically one with Divine Nature in what is the most intimate and heaven-like moment that is possible for the human being on earth. Take the Divine Liturgy and the Eucharist out of our community and we would not be a church. We would be a club or a group of families who get along, but we would not be a church.

The second reason we have a church is for **healing**. Life is hard. We all know that. We are constantly victims of evil, evil of our own making, evil made by others, and evil caused by nature. So we all need healing. We need confession—that is our personal healing. We need counsel—that is healing for when we have been wounded by others. And we need prayer—for the evil caused by nature.

The third reason we have a church is for **education**. How can we know about the faith unless we are taught? Because Christianity is about “communion,” and “community,” then we learn in the context of a community.

The fourth reason we have a church is for **service**. The church is the platform from which we serve others. That’s why it is so important that our church does community outreach

and has philanthropic organizations like Philoptochos. Another form of service is **evangelism** which is spreading the faith to those who do not know God.

The fifth reason we have the church is for **fellowship**. In fellowship, we build bonds with people who share the same faith. In fellowship, we encourage others in the faith. Much more on this later. . .

Now, many have made an argument, can't I do these five things all on my own? Can't I worship God, pray, learn and serve without belonging to the church? Can't I just "commune" in my own way? Why must I participate in the Eucharist as defined by the church? Why can't I just "commune" with God while fishing or playing golf or lying on the beach?

There are two answers to this argument. The first comes from Christ Himself. Christ instituted the Eucharist as a "commandment." This is how He becomes one with us and how we become one with Him. He has defined how we commune with Him. It is not up to us to redefine "communion." Christ also told us that it is not enough to just love Him. We must love our neighbor as well. In John 13:34-35, Jesus tells His disciples, *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you; that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* So, it's not loving ourselves, or loving nature, or even loving God that makes us His disciples. It is loving God AND loving one another.

The second answer to the above argument is a practical one: NO ONE is strong enough to faithfully follow the Lord throughout this life and do it alone. NO ONE. This is because life is hard, and the hard things of life constantly discourage us. If our life was like the scales of justice, on one side there is constant messages of discouragement—anger, frustration, pain, sickness, etc. What is on the other side that keeps the scales balanced, if not to tip them away from discouragement? **This is where the church comes in, and specifically one thing we are supposed to receive consistently from the church:**

## ENCOURAGEMENT!

The dictionary defines encouragement as "the action of giving someone support, confidence or hope." The church helps answer the existential questions, I posed earlier, not only through education, but through encouragement. It provides us encouragement through worship, prayer and the sacraments. However, the key ingredient for encouragement is that it can only occur in the context of a community. The church is here primarily to offer encouragement to us as we fulfill our purpose (to glorify God) on the way to our destiny (His awesome judgment seat). It helps us to remember where we came from, and helps us remain focused on the good. When life gets hard and we just want to quit, the church community is supposed to be our "pick me up" so that we can continue.

In September we will kick off our small group Bible studies once again. This is our fourth year of these small groups. If you are not part of one of them, I encourage you to join. Why? For ENCOURAGEMENT. Because when you are in the group and you are "falling down" in your life, the group is there to pick you up. And when you are doing well in life, you come to the group so that you can pick up someone else who is falling

down. Our community is so large now that most of us don't know most of the people. Some of us hardly know any of the people. If the community is divided into smaller groups, then these small subsets serve as smaller communities within the larger community and they help encourage people in a personal way. When 300+ people gather for a Divine Liturgy on Sundays, it is sometimes hard to feel a connection to others. Indeed we feel a connection to Christ and we may even feel that connection "with" others because others are present. But a small group will connect us "to" others, who can help support and encourage. At a recent meeting of our Sunday school teachers, I made a comment that I wouldn't have made in front of the entire congregation, but in this small group, in a retreat setting, I felt comfortable making a certain comment and being vulnerable. Being part of a ministry or a small group is so vital, because it allows us to be more real and vulnerable. It allows us to encourage more specifically. And it allows us to be encouraged on a more personal level. The number one reason to go to a small group Bible study is for ENCOURAGEMENT.

**I bet you've never thought of confession as a form of encouragement.** It is. Because when you come to confession, when it's all over, the priest is going to encourage you with the words "have no further anxiety about the sins you have confessed; go in peace." What do those words mean? That GOD STILL LOVES YOU in spite of the sins you have confessed. Why do I personally go to confession? So that I can hear those words "God still loves you," and to hear them from a priest, God's representative. I went to confession this past July at summer camp. I didn't look forward to it, in fact I was really nervous. I didn't enjoy doing it—it's no fun to own up for sins, actually sometimes I even feel embarrassed and ashamed. But when I finished and the priest offered the prayer, and I heard those words "Go in peace," that God still loves me, it made me so glad that I went. I felt encouraged and empowered. So, the number one reason to go to confession is ENCOURAGEMENT.

We've all had moments in our lives where we wanted to give up on something. Without some support and encouragement, it is much easier to give up. With support and encouragement, it is much easier to keep going. When the scales of life are tilting to the negative, even a little encouragement can tip them the other way.

Sometimes there is something permanent on the negative side of the life scale, an obstacle that cannot be overcome. It might be an illness. One might be poor. It could be a dead-end job, or losing a job. It could be a troubled marriage or difficult children. There are two things that can keep the scale balanced, one comes from God and one comes from our neighbor. From God we get "grace," Grace is a mystical but strong quality that completes what is lacking in us. Grace heals spiritual wounds and provides spiritual strength. Grace is found in prayer, worship and the sacraments. It is our greatest expression of God's love toward us, continual grace. And it is our greatest expression of how we love Him. We trust Him and keep leaning on and receiving His grace.

The greatest expression of love for our neighbor is in encouraging our neighbor. Encouragement comes in different forms. The easiest form is verbal. We use our mouths to build up our neighbor. We use our ears to listen to our neighbor. The next form of encouragement is "empathy." "Empathy" includes the Greek word "Pathos" which means "suffering." Many people

confuse “sympathy” and “empathy.” When one is sympathetic, they say “I know what you are going through and I’m sorry.” When one is empathetic, it means “I’m going to get in there and suffer along with you.” Empathy is putting yourself in the shoes of another. Empathy is what St. Paul refers to in Galatians 6:2 where he says *“bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.”*

At our recent Sunday School teachers’ retreat, we spoke about encouragement. When we went around the table and we each gave our definitions of this word, one of the teachers said “encouragement is putting courage into the heart of someone else.” What a great definition! When one is encouraged, it engenders their confidence, which gives them strength to use their talents and affirms their purpose. When one is discouraged, it ruins confidence, takes away strength and makes one question his or her purpose. This is why encouraging others is such a gift, because it puts courage into the heart of a person. For the person who has been wounded, encouragement restores strength. And for the person who is feeling confident, encouragement reaffirms and strengthens that sense of confidence.

Even leaders need encouragement. I need encouragement. Everyone needs encouragement. Hearing things like “I trust you,” or “I believe in you” or “I’m with you” or even “thank you,” these phrases of encouragement are empowering and building confidence. And this is where the church has to take the lead. I open the newspaper and the message I get each day is “Look how terrible the world is.” The message of ALL political leaders has become one of discouragement—“You are stupid and you need the government to do it for you.” We need the church more than ever, and we need it to be a source of encouragement. We need to encourage one another. We need ministries that will empower and strengthen us as human beings, to fulfill our purpose, to reach our destiny, to keep our focus on what is good, based on how the Lord has defined it.

### **The Encouragement Project**

The month of September is going to be dedicated to the topic of encouragement. The daily prayer team messages will provide concrete ways we can encourage one another. The Sunday sermons between August 28 and September 25 will do the same. We will cover topics like how to be encouraged when problems just won’t go away. And how do we know God still loves us when we’ve done something wrong. We will encourage encouragement.

There are a lot of things that get in the way of us living the life God wants us to have. There is a general lack of trust, and because of this there is a lack of vulnerability. People suffer and they suffer alone. They don’t have environments where they can be vulnerable, work through problems and receive needed encouragement. We can change that. Not we, the church, but we the people of the church. We can change that. We can create the environment that fosters encouragement and provides a place where one can be vulnerable. Because if we can’t do it, where are we going to find it? And if we can’t encourage people to live out their purpose, if we can’t help people carry their crosses by being empathetic and encouraging, then we are all going to struggle to find God’s intended destiny for our lives, salvation.

Going back to the existential questions and relating them to our church:

**The origin of our church** is Christ Himself. It is not a priest or a parish council or a ministry. It is Christ. This is why our church and ALL of its ministries and all of its meetings need to be Christ-centered.

**The purpose of the Church** is to preach Christ, to teach about Christ, to heal, to minister, to serve and to encourage. This is why the central activities of our church are worship, teaching, fellowship, outreach, evangelism and healing. This is why it is important that each of us take part in worship (the Divine Liturgy), teaching (going to a Bible study, regular personal reading of Scripture), fellowship (be part of a ministry), outreach (your stewardship), evangelism (spreading the Word to the unchurched) and healing (coming to confession regularly, developing a regular prayer life and encouraging one another).

**The difference between good and evil** is increasingly blurred in the world today. We know that only good things come from God. He is the source of goodness. We also know that fear and love cannot co-exist. So the church preaches goodness, as God defines it. The church preaches love and demonstrates that through service. The church also preaches the truth but does so with love. And the church encourages goodness. Again, the church is not the building and the icons. It is the people. And the ministry of the church is not executed by the priest alone but by every member of the church. Every member is supposed to spread the Word. Every member is supposed to be an encourager.

As now to the ultimate question, **what is our destiny?** The destiny of the church is to take our community and to translate it, every one of us, into the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the destiny that God wants for us. Will we fulfill it? This is not automatic. Not every member of the church will fulfill this destiny. This requires consistent work throughout life. And in order to remain consistent, especially when the storms of life seem to batter our faith and our resolve, we need encouragement from one another.

A few years ago, we had a campaign “Just Say Yes!” This spirit of positivity propelled us to start the small group Bible studies. It led to a paradigm shift for our festival. It boosted our attendance. It improved our stewardship. It improved our morale.

It’s time for a new campaign - **the Encouragement Project.**

On September 1, I will begin my 13<sup>th</sup> year of ministry. Yes, I wrote the number 13 down. Many people see that as an unlucky number. I’m praying that this year can be “lucky 13,” that this year will continue to propel our church forward. I invite everyone to come to church throughout the month of September, to listen with open hearts to messages of encouragement, to become encouragers in your own way, and to make this community a place of encouragement, where we put courage into hearts, where we bear one another’s burdens, where we encourage one another to fulfill our individual purposes in life, and where we work towards a collective purpose of salvation in the kingdom of God.

A few years ago, someone challenged (yes, encouragement can be in the form of a challenge) me to begin correspondence with a scripture passage. And since then, I try to begin all of my

pastoral letters, many of my emails, and articles with verses of scripture. I will conclude this lengthy article by going back to the Epistle from the Thessalonians that I began this article with. St. Paul wrote his Epistles to the early churches. We are still reading them 2,000 years later because they are as applicable to our church now as they were to the churches back then. Saint Paul uses the word “encourage” twice in this brief passage. He exhorts the people of the church of Thessaloniki to encourage one another and build one another up. When you read this passage, don’t think about the early church in an ancient city, think about our church in Tampa. “Encourage one another and build up one another, just as you are doing.” Let us ask ourselves, how can we do a better job with that?

*But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.* September 1 will mark my 12 year anniversary at St. John in Tampa. That’s twelve years of ministry, twelve years of efforts, many of which were successful (by God’s grace) and some of which were failures (by my own shortcomings). I could not make it for any amount of time here in Tampa without your patience without your forgiveness and without your encouragement. As I try to encourage you in your faith, please continue to encourage me in my faith and my ministry. I need encouragement as much as anyone else.

*Be at peace among yourselves.* In order to have a community of encouragement, we must first have a community of peace. Let us strive in our ministries to work together, for the greater goal, for the glory of God, for the common destiny, salvation, that we ALL hope to inherit. Sometimes we will disagree on the means. However, we must agree on the end. And when there is unity on the end, then the means to the end becomes easier.

*And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.* There are well over 1,000 people that call this church their spiritual home. Some are old, some are young, some are new, others have been here for decades, some are strong in faith, and others are not as strong. We are a diverse community, there are diverse talents, and there are also diverse needs. That is why there is also a need for a diverse amount of encouragement, so that everyone can feel encouraged to grow from wherever they find themselves in fulfilling their purpose and working toward the Kingdom of Heaven.

*See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.* Let us see the good in one another. Let us encourage good in one another. Let us strive to heal what is wounded and let us encourage one another in our good points.

*Rejoice always.* There is a great opportunity to rejoice the

weekend of October 8-9. It will our church’s 60th Anniversary. But we don’t need an anniversary in order to rejoice. There is a Divine Liturgy THIS Sunday. Will you be there for the celebration? You woke up today. Did you celebrate a new day?

*Pray constantly.* During the month of August, at our Paraklesis services, I used the example of jumping rope and how when we were kids, I remember that before people got in to jump rope, that they would waive their hands in time with the rope, get the timing down and then jump in. I could write an entire book on prayer, but today’s comment is brief—Prayer helps keep our timing down. It helps keep our hearts and souls timed to God’s timing. Prayer helps us see things in God’s light, it helps us to make better decisions, to be more patient. The waiving jump rope represents the chaos of the world we live in. Daily prayer helps get our timing down so that we can successfully jump through the challenges of the day.

*Give thanks in all circumstances;* for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. This is where we ALL need some encouragement. Some circumstances seem so dire that it is hard to find anything good in them, or even more critically, hard to find the resolve to move through them or move past them. Encouragement and empathy help us get through tough times.

*Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil.* Again, the question of discerning good and evil. Life is like the scales of justice. Good competes with evil. Keeping the scales with more good than evil is hard. Especially when the majority of voices are discouraging. We can hold fast to what is good by encouraging one another.

*May the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* This verse encapsulates the four existential questions. The God of peace is our origin. Our purpose is to be sanctified wholly. Our challenge is for our soul and body to be sound (the battle between good and evil) and our destiny is to be blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How will we do this? Through the church.

And the method by which we will work on these things starting this month will be a greater effort at ENCOURAGEMENT.

Thank you for 12 great years of ministry in Tampa. Thank you for your encouragement and your prayers! Please keep them coming!

With love in the Lord,  
+Fr. Stavros

## Leave the Church in Your Will

Part of our life’s legacy is the inheritance we leave our children. By leaving an inheritance, a part of us lives on through them. When preparing your will, you should consider leaving money to our church—this is the church of your children and part of their future can be positively impacted by leaving some of your inheritance to the church. The ability of the church to spread the Word of God is facilitated by everyone’s stewardship. By leaving a portion of your inheritance to the church in your will, you remain a steward in perpetuity, but more importantly, you help cement a solid financial future for the church for your children and your grandchildren. If you are interested in leaving the church in your will, please contact Fr. Stavros at [Frstav@gmail.com](mailto:Frstav@gmail.com). Thank you for your consideration.

# Liturgical Schedule for September

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

**Sunday, September 4**     **11<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Matthew**  
Orthros 8:45 a.m.     Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Altar Boys:** Any Attending May Serve

**Ushers:** Nick Kavouklis, Marcus Calpakis, Peter Theophanous

**Welcome Committee:** Greeters: Maria Karounos, Debbie Kavouklis; Ambassador: Jeannie Nenos;

Caller: Betty Katsamakias; Get Acquainted: Bessie Palios, Michael Palios

**Coffee Hour:** Young at Heart

**Thursday, September 8**     **Nativity of the Theotokos**  
Orthros 9:00 a.m.    Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Sunday, September 11**     **Sunday Before Holy Cross**  
**Service of Remembrance for 9/11 at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy**  
Orthros 8:45 a.m.     Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Altar Boys:** Captains and St. Luke

**Ushers:** Gregory Tisdale, John Christ, George Trimilkliniotis

**Welcome Committee:** Greeters: Edie Kavouklis, Jenny Paloumpis; Ambassador: Sandra Pappas;

Caller: Julie Palios

**Coffee Hour:** The AHEPA Family

**Tuesday, September 13**     **Ecumenical Service for the Environment with Christ the King**  
At St. John the Baptist                    6:30 pm.

**Wednesday, September 14**   **Exaltation of the Holy Cross**  
Orthros 9:00 a.m.     Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.  
Procession of the Holy Cross to take place at the conclusion of the Liturgy .

**Sunday, September 18**     **Sunday After Holy Cross**  
Orthros 8:45 a.m.     Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.  
Procession of the Holy Cross to take place at the conclusion of the Liturgy .

**Altar Boys:** Captains and St. John

**Ushers:** Brett Mourer, Demetrios Halkias, Amin Hanhan

**Welcome Committee:** Greeters: Tom Pessemier, Christy Pessemier; Ambassador: Marenca Patrascoiu

Caller: Vickie Peckham

**Coffee Hour:** The Daniel Plan

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

**Sunday, September 25**     **1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Luke**  
Orthros 8:45 a.m.     Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Altar Boys:** Captains and St. Matthew

**Ushers:** David Voykin, Ed Gerecke, Pete Trakas

**Welcome Committee:** Greeters: Megan Rindone, Katherine Sakkis; Ambassador: Lisa Alsina

Caller: Christene Worley

**Coffee Hour:** The Nicklow Family

**Monday, September 26**     **Falling Asleep of St. John the Theologian**  
Orthros 9:00 a.m.    Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

# Liturgical Notes for September

## Thursday, September 1 - New Ecclesiastical Year - Day of the Environment

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



## Thursday, September 8 - Nativity of the Virgin Mary

Major Feast Day-Placed right after the beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year (September 1), this feastday commemorates the birth of the Virgin Mary to her parents, Joachim and Anna. It is one of the 12 Major Feast Days of the Church year.

## Tuesday, September 13 - Ecumenical Prayer Service for the Preservation of the Environment with Christ the King Catholic Church

Let us join our Catholic brothers and sisters for an evening prayer service as we come to together to pray for our environment and also for peace in the world. Last February, a service was hosted by Christ the King and was well received by members of both churches. It is our goal to have each church host a service each year, with a service at Christ the King in February and one at St. John the Baptist in September. The service starts at 6:30 p.m. at St. John the Baptist with a reception will follow in the Kourmolis Center.



## Wednesday, September 14 - Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Major Feast Day-Commemorates the finding of the Precious Cross of Christ by St. Helen in the year 325. This day is equal in solemnity to Good Friday, as it draws our attention to the supreme sacrifice made by the Lord for us. Connected with September 14 is the Tradition of the Vasiliko. St. Helen went in search of the Precious Cross. In Jerusalem, she found the hill of Golgotha. But she did not know where to search for the cross. Vasiliko (Basil), a sweet scented plant, was found growing on the hillside. She looked beneath the Basil and that's where the cross was found. It is the Tradition of the Church that a Procession is held on September 14, where Basil is placed on a tray along with a cross and it is carried above the heads of the faithful. We will hold this procession on September 14, and also repeat it on Sunday, September 18.

## Donations Needed for the Feast of the Holy Cross

### We need Vasiliko (Basil) for the services of the Holy Cross

Please bring Vasiliko for Monday, September 14 and Sunday, September 18. Please bring to the side door of the altar by 10:00 a.m both days, so we will have time to make up the tray. The Procession for the Holy Cross will be held on Monday, September 14 and repeated on Sunday, September 18.

### Donations needed for flowers for Feast of the Holy Cross

We need a donation of \$100 for flowers for the tray for the procession of the Holy Cross on September 14 and \$350 for flowers for the tray for the procession of the Holy Cross on September 18. Please call the office if you are interested.

## Friday, September 23 - Conception of St. John the Baptist

There are four feasts each year that honor the Forerunner of Christ, St. John the Baptist. They are his Synaxis (January 7); Conception (September 23); Nativity (June 24); and Beheading (August 29). Even though we celebrate his feastday in our parish on January 7, because our church is named for St. John the Baptist, we celebrate all of his feastdays, including this one. The conception of St. John was miraculous, in the sense that his parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth, were both very elderly and had previously been unable to have children.



## ~Save the Date ~ October 8-9, 2016 ~ 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios will be visiting our parish on October 8-9, for the occasion of our 60th Anniversary. His Eminence will join us for our anniversary dinner on October 8. On Sunday, October 9, His Eminence will celebrate the Divine Liturgy in our parish, with Orthros beginning at 8:30, followed by the Divine Liturgy at 9:45 a.m. Please come and greet our Shepherd and Spiritual Father as he makes a pastoral visit to our community.

# Let us Shine Bright Because We are the Light of the World

By Charlie Hambos

Find the nearest mirror. Stand or sit in front of it. Look into the eyes for one minute. Take a hard look. We are looking at a reflection of our image. If we broke the mirror, the reflection would disappear but we would remain. Any human being, we know, is created in the image of God. We are the reflection of God. Let's say, if God could look in the mirror, He would see us. What He sees may not be pretty. That is why He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to repair the image of His reflection. Jesus Christ is the Light of the World. In John 8:12 he says, *"I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark, but will have the light of life."* As Christians we are a reflection of the Light, thus making us the light of the world.

As Orthodox Christians, we were baptized. Through baptism, we died with Christ and we rose with Him. We put on Christ. We have put on the light of Christ. After we are baptized, we hear the hymn, "Grant me a bright robe, O most merciful Christ our God, who arrayed himself with light as with a garment." Christ is the Light and we are to be the reflection of His Light to the entire world. This is what Christ tells us in Matthew 5:14-16:

*"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on a lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven."*

What does this mean? What does it mean to be the light of the world? What is the light? The light is Christ. The light is the knowledge of His saving power to heal us and to heal the entire world. The light is the truth. The truth is that God loves us so much that He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ to save us. The light also implies a sense of joy, of happiness, that we have a God that loves us so much. By having the light of Christ we must use the talents and the blessings that He gives us for the betterment of the entire world. We don't want to cover up the light we have. We want to place it high so everyone can see it. The light is not so people can see how great we are. It is not about us. It is about Him. The light that people see in us should not bring them to us but bring them to Christ. The "good works" that Christ is telling us do in the sight of others is so that they may give praise to God. Therefore, the "good works" that we do must be under the influence of a faith in Christ because we love Him and because we want to reveal His glory to everyone around us. Do things with a positive attitude. Once we have the Light, why would we want anything less?

We were dark but now we have the light. Yes, we are human. As much as we may want the Light of Christ, we may want even more to be in the darkness. Why? Because the more we yearn for the Light of Christ, the more the Evil One, wants to smother us with darkness. The only problem is, with light, there is no darkness, so let's shine. St. Paul is the epitome of someone who once walked in the darkness, but saw the light and he tells us what needs to happen in Ephesians 5:8-14:

*You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord; behave as children on light, for the effects of light are seen in*

*complete goodness and uprightness and truth. Try to discover what the Lord wants of you, take no part in the futile works of darkness but, on the contrary, show them up for what they are. The things that are done in secret are shameful even to speak of; but anything shown up by the light will be illuminated and anything illuminated is itself a light. That is why it is said: Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.*

In the world today, there is a lot of darkness. We have to be the light in this world. We have this responsibility because we have the light. St. Paul says, *"the effects of light are seen in complete goodness and uprightness and truth."* Don't we want these things in the world, in our life, in our households, in our mind? Then we need to bring Christ to the front and center. Here lies the challenge that St. Paul sets for us. St. Paul challenges us to discover what the Lord wants from us. We all have a talent and that talent is supposed to be used to spread the light in a dark world. So find it.

Let's face it though. We all do things in secret. We pull the blinds down within the confines of our rooms and the things that we do are shameful to God. We are human. We have to remember to bring the Light with us even into the shadows and dark spots of our life. It can be done. It takes some practice.

Our biggest responsibility is the world around us. Our neighbors, our colleagues, the cashier at Publix, the plumber, the homeless guy on the street, the annoying co-worker, the stupid drivers, the murderers, the cheaters, the evil-doers. We must bring the Light to them. If we act as they do, then we have lost a great opportunity and may even be worse than they are because we know about the Light and they do not.

In the book, *The Brothers Karamozov* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, an Orthodox Priest by the name of Father Zossimi explains that a Christian takes on a tremendous responsibility for his neighbor. He says, "the criminal in your community may be less guilty for his crime than you - his Christian neighbor. For you could have been a light to the evildoer, yet you were not, for the man remained beside you in darkness. If you have loved your neighbour as yourself and lavished upon him some of the care you generously lavish upon yourself, shared some of the warmth God has provided you to possess, that criminal might have been changed in time."

We see the same sentiment when St Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:3-6:

*If our gospel seems to be veiled at all, it is so to those who are on the way to destruction, the unbelievers whose minds have been blinded by the god of this world, so that they cannot see shining the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. It is not ourselves that we are proclaiming, but Christ Jesus as the Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. It is God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' that has shone into our hearts to enlighten them with the knowledge of God's glory, the glory on the face of Christ.*

The "god of this world" is the Evil One and every demonic thought and attack which aims to beat us down and tries to keep those who have yet to see the light, the opportunity to see



the light. We have to push the Light into their lives by being reflections of the Light.

Why is light, the force that describes Christ and describes our role as a reflection of Christ and His Light? Here is a list which was adapted from a Beechwood Blog post entitled, “Why are Christians “the light of the world”?”

**1. Because light dispels the darkness.** Darkness cannot exist where there is light. After all it was God who created light. It was the light that he created which separated the darkness from the light. The Light of Christ pushes way the evil darkness that is physical, spiritual and emotional. Christ came to expose the darkness of the world and we see this in John 3:19-21:

*And the judgement is this: though the light has come into the world people have preferred darkness to the light because their deeds were evil. And indeed, everybody who does wrong hates the light and avoids it, to prevent his actions from being shown up; but whoever does the truth comes out into the light, so that what he is doing may plainly appear as done in God.*

**2. Because light attracts.** At night, we know that any outdoor light attracts moths and other flying insects of many different kinds. As reflections of the light of Christ, we are also supposed to attract things to the Light, who is Christ. In the same token, light also makes bad things scatter, like rodents and other pesky nocturnal critters.

**3. Because light reveals color.** When there is that little bit of rain and the sun hits it in just the right fashion, it creates a rainbow. How could we appreciate a beautiful piece of artwork or figure out what to wear without light? The Light of Christ also reveals the truth in our motives or those around us.

**4. Because light fades things.** Colors also fade in the light. The only things that should fade in the Light of Christ are the cares of this world. This is what we hear in the Cherubic Hymn, “Let us lay aside all the cares of the world.” Christ has conquered the world.

**5. Because light heats things up.** We know this all too well, living in the hot Florida sun. The Son (of God) also heats things up. He sent us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit who came

down in the form of flames upon the heads of the disciples.

**6. Because light provides power and makes things grow.** Solar energy is used to power many things these days. Plants also use the light, through photosynthesis, to grow and use carbon dioxide and water, releasing oxygen which helps us breath.

**7. Because light brightens our mood.** We all feel dreary on a rainy cloudy day. It is also a proven fact that a lack of Vitamin D definitely makes our mood low. The Light of Christ should make us happy because He did it all and we can put our full faith and trust in Him.

**8. Because light indicates understanding.** When someone finally gets a concept, we usually say, “the light bulb came on.” We always need to ask God for wisdom and understanding and He will grant that to us. In todays world there always seems to be a lot of confusion, so we need the Light to provide some understanding. In the same way, as reflections of the Light, we need to help other people understand the crazy ways of this world.

**9. Because light serves as a warning.** Lighthouses are a little bit old school but many throughout the world are still used and help prevent the deadly collision of boats with rocky coastlines or any land at all. The light signals while driving prevent us from getting into accidents at intersections and give traffic a sense of order. Flashing light signals also signal some kind of danger warning.

**10. Because light signals a new day.** If we have had a bad day, we can always know that the sun will rise again the next day, signaling a fresh start. It was at the beginning of the day, the third day, that Jesus rose from the dead, bringing the Light of the Resurrection to the entire world.

As we begin a New Ecclesiastical Year this month, let us be the light of the world. Let’s discover what the Lord wants from us. Let us be the reflection of the Light of Christ to everyone around us.

## New Policy for Letters of Recommendation

Every year, Father Stavros gets many requests for letters of recommendation for students to get into college or for scholarships. Several requests that have come in on very late notice recently have prompted some changes in how these requests will be handled going forward.

- The person for whom the letter is being written needs to contact Father Stavros, not their parents.
- Please give Father at least two weeks’ notice to write a letter.
- Please send Father an email at [frstav@gmail.com](mailto:frstav@gmail.com).
  1. Your current school, year of study, major, and career objective
  2. The name of the scholarship, who it is to be addressed to, and whether the letter is to be mailed, or given to the student in a sealed envelope.
  3. The kind of scholarship that you are applying for—is it for sports, or writing, or business, etc.
  4. The due date of the letter
  5. Some information about yourself that will be helpful in writing the letter—i.e. if the letter is for leadership, please send leadership activities.



**Father Stavros is very happy to write letters for our students, please however use the above guidelines in making these requests.**

# Community News

## Parish Registry

**Adult Baptism** - Dustin (Joseph Merrell) was baptized on Saturday, August 6. John and Nicky Abramis were the Godparents. Congratulations and welcome to our church!

**Condolences** to JoAnn Hartung and family on the passing of her mother, Ourania Magafas, on July 15. May her memory be eternal!

**Condolences** to the family of Ann Jacobsen, who passed away on July 23. Her forty day memorial service will be Sunday, September 4. May her memory be eternal!

**Condolences** to Fr. Michael Soter, who has filled in many times in our parish, on the passing away of his Presbyteria Violet. May her memory be eternal!

**Condolences** to Jeff Swoyer and family on the passing of George Swoyer. May his memory be eternal!

## A BIG Thank You to Elaine Halkias!

Ten years of anything is a long time. Of course, we expect our marriage and our parenting to last decades, but other things in our seemingly disposable society do not last that long. People get new cars, new jobs and new homes all the time. So, for someone to do anything for ten years is a big deal, and it is an even bigger deal when someone spends ten years as a volunteer! I would like to recognize Elaine Halkias for TEN YEARS as our lead GOYA advisor. During her time, GOYA has grown to nearly forty teenagers. Elaine has been present for over 100 meetings, helped lead ten GOYA Lenten Retreats, spent at least a couple of months of her life staying at hotels with GOYAnS and at least twenty days staying overnight in the Kourmolis Center at our lock-ins. She has made thousands of phone calls and emails to make arrangements, collect forms and encourage people. She has made dozens of shopping trips for supplies. But most importantly, she has taken the time to get to know each child and parent who has come through GOYA. She has offered encouragement and help to anyone who needed it. She made the new people always feel welcome and kept it interesting for the old people. She did such a great job that at a certain point, our communications became seldom because she could almost read my mind. There is no question that GOYA has been a well-oiled machine with Elaine at the helm. There isn't anyone, GOYAn or parent, who has come through GOYA in the last decade that hasn't been affected positively by Elaine. She was not only lead advisor, but lead encourager in this ministry. I thank her for encouraging me, I thank her for loving the teens and parents. I thank her for caring not only about GOYA but about the people in GOYA. I can't tell you how many times she lent a sympathetic ear to those having a hard time. It's hard to take a group of kids and mold them into a cohesive group, but with Elaine's guidance and help, this is what we have here at St. John GOYA. I wish to express my thanks to Elaine for a job well done. Thank you personally for your assistance and also for your friendship. It has been a joy to share this experience with you!

With profound gratitude and love,  
+Fr. Stavros

## Get Acquainted Sunday, September 4



In an effort to get to know one another better, we are going to continue our "Get Acquainted Sundays" one Sunday of each month. We will have nametags and markers in the entry way of the Kourmolis Center and will ask that each person put one on during coffee hour and introduce yourself to at least one person that you do not know. This will serve to help us increase our fellowship and sense of community.



**There will be a meeting of the welcoming committee on Sunday, September 18, following the Divine Liturgy.**

## Community Outreach - Saturday, September 17

St. John the Baptist's Community Outreach will be serving breakfast to the Homeless at the First Presbyterian Church in Downtown Tampa from 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. The church is located at 412 Zack Street. The entrance is on Polk Street. Grab a cup of coffee and come help us! We love to see new and old faces!



## The Daniel Plan

You are invited to become part of The Daniel Plan Team! This group focuses on the five "Fs," Faith, Focus, Food, Friendship, and Fitness. It a wonderful group who encourages each other to lead a healthy life - Spiritually, Physically, and Mentally, all under the guidance of Rick Warren's Daniel Plan Program. The Daniel Plan will be meeting each week for 6 weeks starting September 25<sup>th</sup> in the School's Media Center immediately following Divine Liturgy. We hope to see many old and new faces! If you have any questions please contact Donna Trakas, 813-505-2194.



**New GOYA Advisors** - Maria and Dean Koutroumanis and Kara and Stefan Katzaras will be serving as our new GOYA advisors. May God bless them in this new undertaking.

**GOYA Meeting for September will be Sunday, September 11.** This meeting will involve water balloons and lots of messy games outdoors, so bring an extra set of clothes to change into afterwards. Our meeting will begin at 5:00 p.m. and last until 7:30 p.m.

## HOPE & JOY YOUTH MINISTRY

Welcome back! We hope that everyone enjoyed their summer vacation. We are looking forward to having another fun year with the Hope & Joy!

For those parents who are new to our parish or have children just starting school, Hope & Joy is the youth ministry of St. John the Baptist for children Pre-k through 6th grade. It is designed to help our youth learn more about their Orthodox faith, meet and socialize with their church friends and grow together in positive and spiritual ways. The fall harvest festival, boxes of hope outreach project, Christmas party, movie night, Souper Bowl of Caring fundraiser and the Holy Friday retreat are some of the events we host every year.

For the protection of our youth, online registration is being used for all youth ministries this year. If you have not already registered your child for the Hope & Joy youth ministry please go to Youth Ministry Registration link on the main page of the church website [www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com](http://www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com)

In His Service

**Amy Kafantaris & Debbie Nicklow**  
St John the Baptist Greek Orthodox  
Hope & Joy Directors

## Orthodoxy 101 Class to be held in September

Fr. Stavros offers this class two times per year, in the spring and in the fall. This will be the SAME CLASS so no need to take it again if you already have. This will be a three-week course of study on Monday nights to make people aware of the basics of being an Orthodox Christian.

### Who should attend the Orthodoxy 101 class?

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

The classes will be part lecture, part discussion, with lots of time for questions and answers.

The three sessions will be done as follows:

**Monday, September 19** A Tour of the Orthodox Church: What we see in the Church and what it means

**Monday, September 26** Orthodox Spirituality—The Seven Sacraments and the Divine Liturgy

**Monday, October 3** Orthodox Traditions—fasting, icons, prayer and separating Theology from “yiayialogy”

Classes will be held on these three Mondays from 6:30-8:30 p.m. and will be held in the CHURCH Sanctuary.

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



The Young at Heart will have their first meeting after summer break on Thursday, September 8. There will be Divine Liturgy for the Nativity of the Virgin Mary starting at 10:00 a.m. and our meeting will follow in the Zaharias Room. We would like for all to attend the Liturgy if possible before our meeting. What a wonderful way to get started again! We welcome all to attend. We will go to lunch afterwards. See everyone on September 8 at 11:30 a.m.

# Small Group Bible Studies Kick Off in September

For a fourth year, we will be having our small group Bible study ministry. For those who participated, it was a great experience. These groups gather once a week to study the Bible, discuss how to apply scripture to daily life, pray together and become small spiritual support groups. These sessions are discussion based, not lecture based. This is an opportunity to work side by side with each other to learn more about the faith. As group members get to know one another on a deeper level and as groups become more committed, you'll see that the groups will not only become a resource to help learn and live the faith, but through these groups, we'll eventually help *"carry one another's burdens and so build up the body of Christ,"* as we are told to do in Galatians 6:2. And this is what the church is all about—helping one another through this life, on the journey to everlasting life.

## NEW PEOPLE ARE WELCOME TO JOIN A GROUP AT ANY TIME!

With the groups starting again after summer break, it's a great time to join one!

### Monday Night Bible Study (for everyone)

We will be studying the book of I Corinthians.

**Location:** St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in the Administration Building meeting room

**Group Leader:** Charlie Hambos

Charlie.hambos@gmail.com, 813-843-8471

**Meeting time:** Monday evenings from 6:30– 8:00 p.m.

**September Meeting Dates:** September 19 and 26

### Women's Group (for adult women of any age)

**Location:** Meets at the home of Debbie Kavouklis, Debbie lives in South Tampa, a mile or so from the church. 3315 Jean Circle, Tampa, FL 33629

**Group Leader:** Debbie Kavouklis

dkavouklis1@verizon.net, (813) 690-0155.

**Meeting time:** Tuesday mornings from 10:00-11:30 a.m. (9:30 a.m. for coffee and refreshments)

**September Meeting Dates:** September 13, 20 and 27

### Men's Group (for adult men of any age)

**Location:** St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in the Administration Building in the meeting room

**Group Leader:** Father Stavros for the first one but we are going to rotate this among group members. Please email Fr. Stavros at [frstav@gmail.com](mailto:frstav@gmail.com) or contact him at 813-394-1038.

**Meeting time:** Wednesday mornings from 7:30-8:30 a.m.

For this early morning group, bring your own coffee or breakfast food if you wish—we will not be providing these things.

**September Meeting Dates:** September 7, 14, 21, 28

### South Tampa Mixed Group (for any adults)

Anyone can attend this group but obviously this will be most convenient for those who live in South Tampa

**Location:** At the Church in the Library

**Group Leader:** Bessie Palios

[bmp1126@yahoo.com](mailto:bmp1126@yahoo.com), 813-523-0347.

**Meeting time:** Tuesday evenings from 7:00-8:30 p.m.

**September Meeting Dates:** September 20 and 27

### North Tampa Mixed Group (for any adults)

Anyone can attend this group but obviously this will be most convenient for those who live on the north side of town.

**Location:** Home of George and Cindy Xenick 614 Downs Ave. Temple Terrace, FL 33617

**Group Leader:** Cindy Xenick

[gatormomx@aol.com](mailto:gatormomx@aol.com), 813-505-7657

**Meeting Time:** Monday mornings from 10:00-11:00 a.m.

**September Meeting Dates:** September 26

### East Tampa Mixed Group (for any adults)

Anyone can attend this group but obviously this will be most convenient to those who live on the East side of town

Riverview, Brandon, Valrico, Seffner, Lakeland

**Location:** Home of George and Donna Hambos

2604 Herndon Street, Valrico, FL 33596

**Group Leader:** Donna Hambos

[dhambos@msn.com](mailto:dhambos@msn.com), 813-843-8412

**Meeting Time:** Tuesday evenings from 6:30-8:00 p.m.

**September Meeting Dates:** September 20 and 27

# Some FAQ's about the small group ministry:

- 1. Who leads these groups?** The groups will be led by people of the community, with guidance from Fr. Stavros. Fr. Stavros and Charlie are providing the curriculum as well as training for the leaders of each group. Fr. Stavros and Charlie will also visit each group periodically and be available as a resource at all times to each group.
- 2. How often do the groups meet?** The groups will meet once a week, running the same schedule as the school year. That means there will be a week off at Thanksgiving, a few weeks off at Christmas, a week off for spring break and one for Holy Week, and the groups will be in recess for summer.
- 3. Which group should I join?** The one that is easiest for you to attend. There are groups in different parts of town. If you'd rather drive farther and go to a different group, by all means do so. Just pick ONE group and stick with it.
- 4. Are we on "Greek time" or "American time" for these group meetings?** The answer is AMERICAN time—the groups will start and end on time. The morning meetings will last an hour—they will start ON TIME. Of course, if group members wish for the meeting to go longer, that will be up to each group, but they will end at the time advertised. The evening groups may last longer because they will involve eating—probably a pot luck each week, with each member bringing a small dish to share, again, this will be up to the group how this works.
- 5. I don't know the group leader or host. Am I just supposed to show up at the house of someone I don't know, is that okay?** YES, the group leaders are expecting to have people they don't know come to their homes. You probably want to call or email the group leader if you need information or directions but yes, you are welcome to join any of the groups.
- 6. Can I bring a non-Orthodox spouse or friend to these groups?** ABSOLUTELY. One of the reasons we are starting these groups is because several members of our parish are attending Protestant Bible studies, because they have been invited by co-workers or friends. If you have a friend or co-worker who you think would benefit from small group ministry, please invite them.
- 7. I don't know the Bible very well, is that a problem?** NO, not at all. In the small group, you are going to study the Bible together, by reading short passages and answering questions about how the passage relates to life in general and to your life specifically.
- 8. What are the requirements to be in a group?** There are some expectations of group members:
  - a. Commit to participating every week (or nearly every week, obviously, we know people travel, kids get sick, etc., but the idea is that you will attend on a regular basis)
  - b. Respect what other people have to say. In a discussion where people are sharing experiences, they need support and validation, not judgment.
  - c. Everybody participates—when you go to small groups, it is expected that you are going to participate in the discussion. Again, this is not a lecture, or a traditional Bible study where the priest or professor gives a lecture. A group leader leads a discussion in which all group members participate.
  - d. Everybody commits to praying for the group members. The best way to bear one another's burdens is to do so through prayer. Group members will pray for one another.
- 9. Do I RSVP or just show up?** Please RSVP to the group leader so they know how many to expect.

# Youth Worker Training

**Saturday, September 10 from 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.**  
at St. John the Baptist in Tampa

**Cost:** Nothing with a Free Lunch **Benefit:** LOTS

**What are we going to do?** We are going to go over ways to make your youth program more effective, how to engage kids in discussions, how to lead icebreakers, how to impart the Gospel to them even if you don't have much experience in doing this. Lots of materials will be provided at no cost. Everyone will get hands on experience leading activities to get some practice.

**Who should come to this?** GOYA advisors, Sunday school teachers, Hope/Joy Advisors, anyone who wants to learn more about working with youth.

**RSVP** to Fr. Stavros by September 1 if you are interested. Minimum 10 people needed in order to have this event. Please email me at [frstav@gmail.com](mailto:frstav@gmail.com) or call me at 813-394-1038.

*Isaiah 30:21*

*Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."*

## Choices:

### How to make Godly decisions - A workshop for pre-teens and their parents

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church invites all **pre-teens in grades 4-7** and their parents to join us for an afternoon of discussion, activities, and prayer.

**Sunday, October 2, 2016 1:00 – 3:30 p.m.**

*\*lunch served at 12:30 p.m.*

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church 2418 Swann Ave. Tampa, FL~33609

*Proverbs 3:5-6*

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.*

*Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take*

*For more information or to RSVP, please email or call Maria Xenick – [mpxenick@gmail.com](mailto:mpxenick@gmail.com), (813)839-9897*

## ~Stewardship Update~

Last month the St. John the Baptist Ministry Open House was an opportunity to see first hand the many ways to get involved and give of your time and talent at St. John the Baptist. It's humbling to see our ministries come together and showcases not only the fellowship of Ministry involvement but Christians coming together to give and grow together as a community. Continue to seek ways to uncover your God given personal gifts to give back and help spread the word of Christ.

Remember Orthodox Christian Stewardship is a way of life, to acknowledge accountability, reverence and responsibility before God. A primary goal of Stewardship is to promote spiritual growth and strengthen our faith. As Stewards, we affirm that every aspect of our lives comes as a gift from Him.

The dedication of our parishioner time, talent and treasure sustains our church for present and future generations.

***The Stewardship Committee expresses sincere appreciation and thanks.***

### ***Little of This & That ...***

It is not too late! If you have not completed a Pledge Form in 2016 please take time to do so today – available on line and in the Church Narthex and Office. When you give to God, you discover what God gives to you!

- Individual/Family Stewardship Summary statements were mailed in August; please call the church office with any questions.
- We will publish a list of 'Stewards' at St. John the Baptist in the October Messenger as we prepare for Fall General Assembly and Parish Council Nominations and Elections. Specific dates will be announced soon.
- NEW ADDITION –PayPal Donation Button for Ministry Donations! Located on the Donate Tab of our Church Website. This complements the online payment options available for Stewardship and General Donations. Many of our Stewards have taken advantage of submitting their pledge form on line and setting up systematic payments for Stewardship. And don't forget online banking as an easy and convenient option for automatic payments if you chose not to use paypal.
- We love hearing from our parishioners, If you would like to share something regarding your calling to Stewardship, please contact Sandra Pappas (Stewardship Co-Chair) at [spappas11@gmail.com](mailto:spappas11@gmail.com) or call 813-785-3747.

\*We require a completed Pledge Form to be considered a Steward of St. John the Baptist.

Stewardship Summary	2016
<b><i>Pledged for Year*</i></b>	<b>\$430,321.<sup>36</sup></b>
<b><i>Collected for Year</i></b>	<b>\$278,789.<sup>62</sup></b>
<b><i>#Parishioners/Families Pledged</i></b>	<b>334</b>

TICKET • TICKET • TICKET • TICKET • TICKET

Celebrate the 60th Anniversary of Our Church



October 8, 2016  
at the  
Floridan Palace Hotel

Cocktails at 7:00  
Dinner at 8:00  
(chicken or fish)  
Music provided by  
John Demas and the Omega Project

semi to formal attire

ADULT	<input type="checkbox"/>	CHILDREN	<input type="checkbox"/>	UNDER 10	<input type="checkbox"/>
\$60.00		10-18		FREE	
		\$25.00			

**Not a Ticket**

Please join us for the  
**60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration**  
Banquet. The tickets are now being  
sold on Sunday following Liturgy in the  
Kourmolis Center. You may also contact  
Carole Fotopoulos at 813.982.0947 or  
Edie Kavouklis at 813.758.0305 for  
additional details or to purchase.  
Seating is limited so please act fast!

### 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Directory

Sign up on Sundays after the Divine Liturgy to take your  
**St. John the Baptist Directory Photo!**

We will be taking photos Saturday, September 24 and Sunday, September 25.  
Please contact Jenny Paloumpis to sign up or for more information at  
[ajpaloumpis@verizon.net](mailto:ajpaloumpis@verizon.net) or (813) 382-5144



St. John  
TAMPA

**GREEK FESTIVAL**




**~Save the Date~**

**St. John the Baptist - November 11, 12 & 13, 2016**

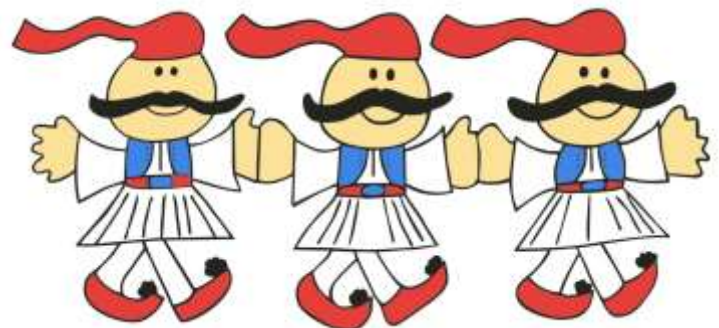
We will unite as a Parish to support our Festival. Look for communication soon from the individual Festival Chairs as they look to staff their areas. As well as the Chair of Manpower to coordinate the efforts of our hundreds of volunteers!

### Panigyri Dancers

St. John the Baptist Adult Dance Group will be having practice every Wednesday Night in the Kourmolis Center at Starting on September 7 from 6:30-8:00 p.m. in preparation for our festival performances. Anyone interested in dancing can contact Vanessa Aviles at 813-417-4364 or Alex De Maio 813-340-9668.

### H XAPA ΜΑΣ Dancers

Our children's dance group will be starting practice Sunday, September 11 in the Kourmolis Center immediately following Sunday School. H XAPA ΜΑΣ means Our Joy and this group is for school age children. If your children are interested dancing or if you have any questions please contact Marina Choundas at 813-877-6136 or Alex De Maio at 813-340-9668.



# Sunday School News

What a great start to the 2016-2017 Sunday School year. We've had record attendance in August thanks to all the teachers, parents, and children who are committed to our program. The first day of Sunday School was on Aug. 14th and on the August 13 the teachers had an inspiring retreat with Fr. Stavros and Charlie. We would also like to welcome our newest member of our staff. Georgia Kane is assisting in our 2nd grade classroom.

Thank you to the many families who have registered their children in Sunday School and for the generous donations they have made to our program. Your donations go towards the Sunday School materials and supplies. It also enables us to have three retreats for our children (Christmas, Pre-Lent, and Good Friday). Please register your child online if you have not done so already.

The Sunday School sponsored the Coffee Hour on Aug. 14. Thank you to the many families who brought in food donations and to the parents who helped set up, serve, and clean up afterwards. We also had a couple of dad's who really stepped up to serve. The Sunday School is blessed to have such wonderful parents and students.

We are very excited about our Weekly Topics that each classroom will include into their program this year. The topics for the month of August were THE THEOTOKOS, PRAYER, and THE LORD'S PRAYER. We would like to thank Fr. Stavros and Charlie for creating this curriculum for us.

Our YOUTH SUNDAY PROGRAM will continue this year. Our first one will take place on September 11. Our students in 1st -6th grade will sing the Liturgical Hymns with the choir. As a result of the many years of our Music Program we now have eight of our older students singing with the choir on a regular basis. We need to thank Maria Xenick for making this possible and inspiring our children's love for the hymns of our church. We would also like to thank our high school student who will read the Epistle on Youth Sundays.

Charlie Hambos presents a sermon on Youth Sundays for our 1st - 5th graders. This year he will also teach two lessons in each of the classrooms. Last month he brought the Church Vessels into our 5th Grade Classroom and to the High School. Thank you Charlie for all you do in our Sunday School. Our students LOVE having you in their classrooms. Each month one of our classes will also learn about and make Prospora. We would to thank Melissa Krinos for directing this program for our children.

For the 2016-2017 school year, we will acknowledge students with perfect attendance and award those students at our Graduation Ceremony. If you are out of town and attend church, we will count it, so please let us know. This year we had ten students accomplish this...Could we have more next year?

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

Our HALL of FAITH program is a success and many children have been added. This program is to encourage our children to memorize and understand the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. Our Pre-K through 3rd Grade will be focusing on the Lord's Prayer and our 4th graders on up will do the Creed. Look for our HALL of FAITH poster on our Sunday School bulletin board. Will your child's name be on it?

Please feel free to contact us with any questions, suggestions, or comments regarding St. John's Sunday School Program. Parents: If you do not receive our weekly e-mails about our Sunday School Program, please contact Vickie Peckham at 813-406-5626 or e-mail her at vickiepeckham@gmail.com.

## **First Youth Sunday - Sunday, September 11**

Every month, from September through May (see enclosed calendar), we are going to have one Sunday designated as Youth Sunday. On Youth Sunday each month, all Sunday school students are requested to be in church no later than 9:50 a.m., and to sit near the choir in the small section on the right side of the church (or in the front pews on the right side if there are too many to fit in the small section). We will sing along with the choir and there will be several hymns where the children will sing on their own. This is a great way for them to learn the hymns of our church and to inspire our congregation with their angelic voices



# Highlights on the Calendar 2016-2017

Tuesday, September 7	Men's Bible Study begins—Wednesdays at 7:30 a.m.
Tuesday, September 13	Women's Bible Study begins—Tuesdays at 10:00 a.m.
Tuesday, September 13	Ecumenical Prayer Service with Christ the King RCC (at St. John the Baptist)
Week of September 19	Charlie's Bible Study—Mondays at 6:30 p.m.
	East Tampa Bible Study—Tuesdays at 6:30 p.m.
	South Tampa Bible Study—Tuesdays at 7:00 p.m.
Monday, September 26	North Tampa Bible Study begins—Mondays at 10:00 a.m.
Monday, September 26	Orthodoxy 101 Fall Class begins—for three Mondays at 6:30 p.m.
Sunday, October 2	Preteen Retreat
Thursday, October 6	Adult Greek School Begins
Saturday, October 8	60 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Banquet
Sunday, October 9	60 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Divine Liturgy with Metropolitan Alexios
Sunday, October 23	JOY/HOPE Fall Festival
Monday, October 24	Liturgy of St. James in the Evening
Friday, November 11 - Sunday, November 13	Tampa Greek Festival
Wednesday, November 23	Evening Liturgy for Thanksgiving
Saturday, December 3	Adult Advent Retreat
Sunday, December 4	Stewardship Sunday
Saturday, December 10	Sunday School Christmas Program Rehearsal/Christmas Party
Sunday, December 11	Sunday School Christmas Program
Sunday, December 11	Parish Council Elections
Monday, December 19	Service of Preparation for the Nativity
Tuesday, December 20	Young Adult Christmas Retreat in the evening
Saturday, December 24	Christmas services
Friday, January 6	St. John the Baptist Feastday Vespers/Reception
Saturday, January 7	St. John the Baptist Feastday Liturgy/Luncheon
Sunday, January 8	Vasilopita Sunday
Saturday, January 21	<b>Gasparilla Children's Parade Fundraiser</b>
Saturday, January 28	Gasparilla Adult Parade Fundraiser
Saturday, February 11	GOYA Lockin
Saturday, February 18	YAH Apokreatiko Glendi
Saturday, February 25	Saturday of Souls—Liturgy at Garden of Memories Memorial Park
Sunday, February 2	Sunday School Pre-Lenten Retreat
Monday, February 27	Beginning of Great Lent
Sunday, March 5	Sunday of Orthodoxy
TBA	Greek Independence Day Program
TBA	Adult Lenten Retreat
TBA	GOYA Lenten Retreat
Sunday, April 9	Palm Sunday
Friday, April 14	Good Friday—Sunday School Retreat
Sunday, April 16	PASCHA
Sunday, April 23	Parish Picnic
Sunday, May 21	End of Sunday school
Sunday, June 4	Pentecost
Friday, June 16- Sunday, June 18	GOYA Junior Olympics
July	<b>Metropolis of Atlanta, St. Stephen's Summer Camp</b>

# National Philoptochos Society Biennial Convention

July 3-7, Nashville, TN

## Celebrating 85 Years of Philoptochos! (1931-2016)

Three words signify Philoptochos:

### Faith, Fellowship, and Philanthropy

We met in Nashville, TN on Sunday, July 3 - 8 2019, at The Gaylord Opryland Hotel. There were over 396 registered Philoptochos Delegates from all over the USA.

**On Sunday, July 3, 2016,** Orthros and Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the Grand Ole Opry Auditorium. It was celebrated by the following Hierarchy: His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios, Metropolitans: Iakovos, Methodios, Isaiah, Alexios, Nicholas, Savas, Gerasimos, and Evangelos. It was very beautiful and inspiring. A truly "Spiritual" service for all of us who were present and a Special Blessing to open our week long Convention.

At 4:00 PM, President Maria Logus welcomed everyone! Eminence Archbishop Demetrios Geron who offered the Invocation and lead everyone in reciting The Lord's Prayer. And shared The theme of the 2016 Clergy Laity Congress: "BE THE VOICE OF CHRIST IN A CHANGING WORLD"

President Maria Logus presented the Highlights of her report: re-dedicated ourselves to offer a hand to those in need, delivering 250,000 meals to the Homeless from 2014-2016, and to continue to support St. Nicholas Church and Shrine in N.Y.(to date National Philoptochos has donated \$1.2 million and will shortly present an additional \$100,000). She then thanked Convention Co-Chairs Irene Arsoniades and Theone Dickos for a job well done and to Bishop Sevastianos for his guidance and support of National Philoptochos.

**On Monday, July 4, 2016,** the following four resolutions were adopted by the Resolutions Committee on Sunday, July 3, 2016 and brought before the delegates for a vote: **1.** Human life and Religious Freedom **2.** Amend the by-laws on the issue of a Censure of a Chapter or member standing vote was taken adopted by a majority vote **3.** clarify the waive process- adopted by standing vote of the majority **4.** Resolution to expand the purpose of OCMO/SAMP commitment. All were adopted by a majority of the body. ( If anyone wants to read these resolutions presented, please see or call Cincy Xenick, \*813-985-2636 or [gatormomx@aol.com](mailto:gatormomx@aol.com).

**On Tuesday, July 5, 2016,** the meeting was called to order by Presiding Officer Theone Dickos at 9:20 a.m.

Philoptochos Leadership Institute: Chairwoman Elizabeth Seignethaler Courtney and CEO spoke on the opportunity to change the face of Philoptochos. **Vision** is provide all members to lead, serve and share with a "Servant's heart". **Purpose:** to inspire, motivate, and empower women to reach their fullest potential to do community service, education and stewardship of the Greek Orthodox Faith. **Core goals are:** to prepare and mentor stewards from the Archdiocese. Program prepares participants to recognize, cultivate, and demonstrate leadership attributes, knowledge and ethical protocols.

Aid to Greece and Cyprus was Presented by Chairwoman Vicky Scaljon, over \$400,000 has been distributed to carefully vetted charities.

**Social Services Report:** 467 Orthodox Christians have been helped over the last 2 years from every Metropolis: \$500,000 were awarded financial grants with proper documentation. Each Chap-

ter needs to continue to give to our Social Services Obligations for us to continue to help those in need.

A power point presentations was shown to all on the history, purchase, use and future of Our Center of Philanthropy.

Feeding the Hungry Campaign: 667,504 meals were served from 100 Chapters 2014-16.

There were four Discussion Groups we were able to attend:

**Group A:** A Rare Opportunity to Meet Face to Face in Our Digital World

**Group B:** Fiscal Fitness

**Group C:** The Culture of Philoptochos

**Group D:** Evaluating Cases of Need

**On Wednesday, July 6, 2016** the Agape Awards Presentation and Breakfast was held. The Agape Award was established in 2008 to honor and recognize nine outstanding women of the Greek Orthodox Philoptochos Society, who embody the true spirit of Philoptochia! These are the honorees for this year's Convention: Christina Vasilakos, Ismini Arges, Catherine Biblos, Nia Cortese, elieni Kyriazis, Catherine Stuman, Tessie Lekas, Elaine Sotiropoulos and Maria Antonakas.

Opening prayer was offered by His Grace Bishop Sevastianos of Zela. He welcomed "Miss America" Betty Basiliki Cantrell for being with us. Her platform is "Healthy Kids, Healthy America." an advocate for "Children's Miracle Network" and works with the USO. Ms. Arsoniades presented her with a "Face of Philoptochos" pin and President Logos presented her with a Philoptochos charm bracelet. By the way she has been a Philoptochos Member since age 18!

Making a Difference ---"Acts Of Kindness" " Make a Difference Day" takes place in October and is a cross-generational project. Focus is on engagement with the young children in our Parishes: (S.S. and GOYA) in order to make a difference ex: making health kits for homeless and to victims of disaster, cards and Icons to Vets in VA Hospitals, Heart pillows to young Heart patients, etc.... Note: over 4,000 good deeds were done in 2015! MAKE A DIFFERENCE DAY IS OCTOBER 22,2016\*\*\*\*\* TRY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and Shrine at World Trade Center: Report: so far as of this year, \$19 million has been collected out of 38 million pledges from National Philoptochos.

**On Thursday, July 7, 2016:** Feeding Children everywhere hands On Workshop! **We Fed 25,188 Hungry Children!**

"Water is Life" Speaker from Cumberland River Compact, Dr. Gwen Griffith, DVM, MS gave a comprehensive report on water and we should conserve it for our planet and our health.

**Chapter Awards:** presented by Dee Nicolaou, Metropolis of Atlanta Philoptochos President: Dee presented Award Certificates to the winning Chapters and Metropolises for their dedication, sacrifice, devotion, and perseverance that has helped make our Society what it is today. She thanked everyone for sharing their "Cherished" projects with our Sisters in Christ throughout our Archdiocese.

**85th Anniversary Celebration,** Featuring the "85th Anniversary" Video. A beautiful Tribute for our Society for over 85 years! Hosted by Metropolis of Detroit.

# AHEPA FAMILY NEWS – SEPTEMBER 2016

## Tampa AHEPA and Daughters Receive Leadership Roles at District and National Conventions

This year members of AHEPA Lycurgus Chapter 12 and Daughters of Penelope Alcmaeon Chapter 167 were honored by being elected to leadership positions!



### Michael Trimis elected to AHEPA Citrus District 2 Lodge as District Secretary.

Michael Trimis is shown being sworn in during the Citrus District 2 convention held in Tampa, Florida to the position of District Secretary. He is receiving the jewel of his office and the AHEPA pin from Past District Governor Bill Caras. Michael who has served the local AHEPA Lycurgus Chapter 12 in many capacities including President for several terms, has been honored for his exemplary service to AHEPA and the local Tampa AHEPA Chapter. Ourania Stephanides elected to Daughters of Penelope Citrus District 2 Lodge as Lieutenant Governor. Congratulations Mike!

### Marina Paras elected District Governor of Daughters of Penelope Citrus District 2

Marina Paras is shown being sworn in by Aspa Kostopoulos, Grand Liaison of the Daughters of Penelope Grand Lodge and Connie Pilallis, Grand President of the Daughters of Penelope. Marina has served as President of the local Daughters Chapter and as Secretary and Lt. Governor of the District Lodge. She follows in the footsteps of her cousin Janet Gout Daniels, who served as District Governor in the 1950's. Congratulations to Marina!



Ourania Stephanides is shown receiving the jewel of her office from Connie Pilallis, Grand President of the Daughters of Penelope during the recent Citrus District 2 Convention in Tampa. Ourania has served the Daughters of Penelope in Tampa in numerous leadership positions and follows in the footsteps of her mother who served the Daughters in Tampa during the 1960's. Congratulations to Ourania!

### Gus Paras elected AHEPA Supreme Governor of Region 1 at National Convention in Las Vegas

Gus Paras is shown being congratulated by Connie Pillalis and Marina Paras after being elected unopposed as the Supreme Governor of Region 1 of the National Order of AHEPA. Region 1 includes Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina and Tennessee. The Supreme Governors are also part of the International Supreme Lodge which represents the over 400 chapters in the AHEPA Domain which includes United States, Canada, Australia, Asia, Europe and other areas of the world. Gus has been a member of Ahepa since 1963 and has served Lycurgus Chapter 12 as Treasurer, Secretary, Vice President and President for many years. He has also served on Citrus District 2 Lodge as Secretary.



## St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church Adult Greek School Want to Learn Modern Greek?

Teacher born, raised and educated in Greece with over 19 years of experience teaching the Greek language. Adult classes for beginners taught at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church (2418 W. Swann Ave, Tampa, FL 33609).

Classes are held at 6:00 p.m.—8:30 p.m. on Thursday evenings, starting on October 6, 2016.

This will be the first of three sessions.



Speak Greek  
Read Greek  
Write Greek

Basic Grammar & More.  
Some Greek History  
BOOK INCLUDED



Price per session is \$100 for church members and \$125 for non-members  
Contact Ms. Magdalini Myer: at (813) 909-2327, [aspis69@aol.com](mailto:aspis69@aol.com)

# Reflections on St. Stephen's Summer Camp

## **Larissa Krinos - 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Camper**

When I told my friends that I was willingly going to a religious camp in South Carolina where I had to relinquish my cell phone and all contact with the outside world, they were confused to say the least. When I first heard about the parameters of the camp I thought it was insane, how could I be kept from my family and friends? I couldn't stand the thought of all the information that I would be missing without my phone.

The world we live in is in constant contact, I text my friends every day, I keep my Snapchat streaks, I check Tumblr, and camp is a great excuse to just step away from it all. I could focus completely on the people around me, and I know many of them better from six days than I know the students who I have gone to school with for three years. Religious camp has also gained somewhat of a negative connotation amongst my peers, they see it as constricting, they hear that you can't have your phone and they automatically assume you are being forced to join a convent. It isn't just a religious experience, it is a heavily social experience as well. There was no negative energy in our cabin, we all acted like we had known each other for years by the second day. We talk on a daily basis, and have already met up multiple times since camp. We went to church together but we did so much more, swimming, arts and crafts, music, you get so close to these people and by the end you wish you all didn't live in different states.

My biggest regret is that, as a rising senior, I have only attended camp twice. I would highly encourage anyone considering to learn from my mistakes and have as many great summers as possible.

## **James Kavouklis - 7th Grade Campers**

Greek camp was full of fun activities and a spiritual experience for me. Since it was my first year I wasn't sure what to expect. The activities were exciting and everyone enjoyed participating in them. The counselors were upbeat and engaging and encouraged you with the ropes course and going to confession. Everyone got along with each other and it was fun to hang out and be with each other. You seemed to fit in the moment you got to camp. The church services and the hymns made the camp great. You felt closer to God by the end of camp and just left with a good feeling. I talked about my camp experience all the way home and can't wait to go back next year.

## **Eleni Stillian - 12th Grade Camper**

This summer was my first time going to St Stephen's Camp. For the past couple of years I have heard from my friends who had gone that the camp was their favorite part of the year and that they actually count down the days until the next session. I was skeptical. I thought, 'Really? How much fun could one week be?' My skepticism was way off because once I arrived at camp, I found out just how extraordinary the camp and the experience is. From outdoor services under a pavilion, swimming in the lake, music lessons, meeting people from other cities and states that share my faith and desire to embrace it, to the many other activities that are offered there are just so many opportunities for learning, growing, and making memories to last a lifetime.

Upon arriving at camp, it felt as if everyone was old friends.

Even though I was new I was welcomed so warmly by the staff and campers alike; it was a feeling I won't ever forget. I soon grew very close with my cabin mates, which isn't hard to do after living with them for the week, but I felt like I had known them all my life. We laughed, we prayed, we sang, we danced, we cleaned, we shared, we stayed up late, and most importantly we united as Orthodox Christians.

St Stephen's camp is a place of God's beauty where I forged friendships to last a lifetime, I built a stronger relationship with God, I saw the most beautiful sunset ever, and I witnessed one of my most shy friends become the single most celebrated camper. I wouldn't trade my experience of St Stephen's for anything and you can count on the fact that I will be up bright and early to get in line to board a plane to my favorite place on God's earth in only 331 more days.

## **Edie Kavouklis-Camp Nurse**

My week at St. Stephen's summer camp was one filled with nature, exploration, new friends, fun and peace. The camp grounds, Diakonia Center, are truly a slice of heaven here on earth and a wonderful gift available to our children. I am grateful for the opportunity I had to serve in the infirmary and work with a variety of talented people. Throughout my week at the camp I re-discovered the gentle presence of the Holy Spirit, a source of inspiration, creativity, and hope in my spiritual life. The Holy Spirit was ever present and was manifested in so many ways; my favorite were the sweet smiling faces of the children and the evening fireflies.

## **Harry Koutroumanis - 10th Grade Camper**

Hi my name is Harry Koutroumanis and this was my third year attending Saint Stephens It's amazing how quickly your years fly by at Saint Stephens and camp has changed me for the better. I mean we did things ranging from rap battles in the cabins to learning about God and getting the opportunity to discover God in your own way! I have made bonds that I know will last a life time and I want to thank Saint Stevens for bringing me closer to God and my friends.

## **Gregory Koutroumanis -12th Grade Camper**

Words cannot describe the effect that St. Stephen's has had on my life. Camp is truly a special place where one can disconnect from the outside world and all the stress and drama that comes with it. In a culture that seems to have forgotten about God and morals, it is very refreshing to see that there are youth from all across the country that are in the same battle as you are. My spiritual life has grown exponentially and I have met great friends that I would have never known existed if it wasn't for camp. This was unfortunately my last year as a camper, but I know that I'll be back as a counselor as soon as possible. Although I will always remember all of our fun activities; camp will be defined by the friends I've made and the memories we share. St. Stephen's has changed my life for the better, and I can't thank God enough for letting me be a part of it.

## **Frankie Giallourakis - 10th Grade Camper**

Spiritual Rejuvenation. These two words describe my visit at St. Stephens's summer camp. As you approach the camp, the wooden fences seem like a defense against the outside world and any temptation. At St Stephen's, we are all Orthodox

Christians trying to be the closest to God. Every morning at St Stephen's we are offered a chance to spend 15 minutes of alone time with God. Alone with God is a sacred time to be in prayer and communion with God. Two other spiritual enrichment segments of camp are Orthodox Life and Hangtime. In these hour long sessions, we are able to ask questions, and gain valuable knowledge about our faith from the wonderful priests that are with us. Orthodox Life and Hangtime invite the campers to open up about things so that we can all come together and worship Christ.

Now as I wrap things up, I would like this part of my speech to be directed to anyone who has not witnessed the St Stephen's camp experience. St Stephen's is the best thing you could attend in your teenage years. You are able to meet so many friends from all over the South Eastern United States that share the same spiritual beliefs as you do. If you are lost in life, St Stephen's is the ultimate cure. This camp will rejuvenate your spiritual life and will send you back to the world ready to face the challenges of temptation and sin. Thank you and God bless!

#### **Artemis Xenick - 9th Grade Camper**

This year was my third year going to St. Stephen's and it was easily the best week of my life. I made so many fantastic friendships and learned so much about our beautiful faith.

One of the best things about my week at camp were my cabin mates. By the end of the first day, we had already become unbelievably close friends. Throughout the week, they all became like sisters to me and every moment spent with them was amazing. We got along and worked really well together, which caused us to win a lot of the activities that we had at camp.

One of my other favorite things at camp was the ropes course. Throughout the week, you and your cabin get to experience a series of trust exercises that strengthened our bond even more. It built a sense of teamwork that was kept throughout the entire week.

Another one of the best things we did at camp was Alone with God. Every morning, the entire camp would go and sit out on the dock in complete silence for fifteen minutes and pray. Everyone respects this time of quiet and it's awesome to just take some time out of the day to reflect and thank God for the beautiful place to have such an amazing part of our life.

My week at St. Stephen's was life changing and I'm already counting down the days until I go back next year.

#### **Elizabeth Xenick - 7th Grade Camper**

This was my first year at St. Stephen's and it was better than I could have imagined. One of my favorite activities was the ropes course because it helped me build trust with my cabin mates. Another one of my favorite parts was the Olympics because we got to work with people from other cabins. This experience has strengthened me both mentally and spiritually. My week at camp was one of the best weeks of my life and I cannot wait to go back next year.

#### **Maria Xenick - Camp Counselor/Teacher**

It is hard to capture in a few short words a week of experiences at this very special place. St. Stephen's provides our children of the Metropolis a safe and caring environment they can share with their fellow Orthodox peers that is unlike anything I have ever been able to witness. There is a unique and beautiful at-

mosphere that is so very encouraging and uplifting. The presence of the Holy Spirit is felt so strongly at St. Stephen's. The camp has tight structure and rules, which allow these kids to be more free than anywhere else in their life. They are free to openly pray, to unashamedly sing, to boldly worship, to actively participate in spiritual discussion, and also to purely play! For the last three years, I have had the opportunity to be a counselor for the senior girls and also have had the privilege to teach the Orthodox Life and Hangtime classes. The staff that I have worked with have become true friends in a short amount of time, many of whom are half my age. Their commitment to our faith formed a fast bond. I am so grateful for my time spent with the campers – they inspire and teach me as much as I try to do for them. Watching them interact with each other, listening to their laughter and seeing how they support each other is truly awesome. It is a great reminder that despite all of the pressures of the world, they are still kids, who need peers that will build them up and support them in their own Christian journey. Thank God St. Stephen's provides that for them. Thank you to my husband Mike for encouraging me to go again this year. Thank you to Father Stavros for trusting me to serve and represent our parish and for all of the hard work that goes into making the camp so special.

#### **Sophia Crassas - 9th Grade Camper**

I had the best time at camp this year, but don't we say that every year? This was my second year going to camp. My favorite things that we did with the Olympics and the ropes course. These activities have a lot of teambuilding and they were just really really fun. I was in Saint Katherine's this year with the best counselors and girls ever. We had so much chemistry with each other. We are all on a group chat and we still text every single day. Overall camp is such a surreal experience. Having church every day is so uplifting and amazing. I have met some of the kindest people at camp and made friendships that will last a lifetime.

#### **Natalia Xenick - 7th Grade Camper**

Deciding to go to St. Stephen's Camp was the best choice of my life. We did so much, we were never bored. We did sports, swimming, art, various evening activities, and more! The staff members were so kind, and the food was amazing. I enjoyed singing during the services, as well! St. Stephen's was the best experience of my life. I will definitely be returning to camp next year!

#### **Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis—Camp Director**

This year we had a record number of people attend St. Stephen's Camp from our parish. Over twenty of our teens went as campers and eight adults went in some capacity. With the blessings of His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios, I served for two weeks this year, weeks two and three, as the director of the camp. I've spoken many times about camp—that it is a safe place, it is a place where people are encouraged to grow in their faith, a place where people are encouraged to make a new start in their spiritual journey if their journey isn't going well or going anywhere. The theme of camp this year was "Spread the Word," and our curriculum focused on reading the Bible. Sadly, most of our children's experiences of the Bible consist of "whatever I hear the priest read in church if I get there on time." Only a few of them, about 3 or 4 per group of 96 at each session, actually read the Bible on a daily basis. A handful of them read the Bible occasionally. The Bible is, among other things, a source of spiritual encouragement. It's like God's

love letter to us.

At summer camp, we create an environment where people are encouraged to grow in their faith. Everyone sings when we go to worship, and no one feels awkward because everyone is doing it. Everyone goes on time to church, there are no stragglers. Everyone spends a few minutes a day “alone with God,” which is made easier because it's on the schedule. There are rules that everyone follows, because the number one goal of camp is safety, and everyone agrees that that is the number one goal. Everyone learns something at camp, because everyone agrees that that is the number two goal of camp. And everyone has fun at camp and because that's the number three goal.

Now, camp is a controlled environment. Food is provided, there is no need to drive anywhere, the schedule dictates what everyone does so there is no need to make a lot of decisions, especially if you are one of the campers. However, the principles and things that make camp so successful and what make campers have meaningful experiences of the Lord are things that can easily be replicated in our parishes.

Let's start with coming on time—we get to work, to movies and doctor's appointments on time, why not come to church on time?

How about a few minutes alone with God? We all make at least a few minutes to text, to email, to use social media, to watch TV and to just daydream. We certainly can all give a few minutes to the Lord in prayer and in scripture reading.

What about singing in church? Worship is supposed to be the work of the people. And believe it or not, worship goes by much quicker when we are singing along.

Can we all act a little nicer to one another? If we all could agree that the most important thing in the church is safety—the safety of our souls, our bodies, our spirits, then our behavior at all times would be a “safety first” behavior, safeguarding one another, encouraging one another.

Learning is a goal at camp, but also in our parish. Learning happens because of two things—first, we show up. At camp that was easy, it was part of the daily schedule. And second, we show up with a mind and a heart that are open to learning. Come to church, read the Messenger, join the prayer team,

open the Bible—there are so many opportunities to learn.

Have fun. Kids at camp will say that they make lifelong friends at camp, they certainly make lifelong memories. Church should also be a place where we make friends. How helpful and encouraging it is to have people who are sharing the same faith and to call them friends. We should all be young at heart—it is fun to laugh, it is fun to throw water balloons, it's fun to be a kid. We need more fun in our lives, we need more places where laughter and silliness are encouraged. We can use more laughter at church too.

So yes, camp is a controlled environment. And yes, it is in the foothills of South Carolina, far away from Tampa. And yes, it is in the summer, for teenagers. But the principles that make camp successful provide the blueprint for what makes a successful parish and what makes for a better experience for the parishioners.

I couldn't be more proud of our kids and adults. Our kids are well behaved, they present themselves well and they represented our church well. Our adults took on roles as counselors, teachers, in arts and crafts, as the nurse, and in the kitchen, and also represented our community well. I encourage all of our young people to go to camp when they are in 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade. I encourage our adults to consider going to camp in some capacity. I encourage our ministries to make trips to the Diakonia Center for retreats of your own. And I encourage our whole parish to make the things that make camp so successful to become cornerstones for our community.

And in case you wanted to know my favorite part of camp, they are: 1) hearing confessions and offering encouragement to our kids. 2) facilitating the ropes course—I love experiential learning and being able to facilitate this and help our campers make connections to our faith and real life is a lot of fun. It's nice to have an office in the woods of South Carolina for a few weeks. 3) throwing water balloons at the Olympics. We used several THOUSAND and this never gets old. And like the kids, I have made some lifelong friends through St. Stephen's Camp. Many of them started out as campers, some are now staff and a few of them have even become brother priests. How awesome is that!"

## Thank You to all of Our Friends!

Barbara Akrotirianakis - Whittier, CA  
William J Camarinos - Alexandria, VA  
Richard & Mickie Bass - Asheville, NC  
Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL  
Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL  
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI  
Perry & Fay Stamatziades - Asheville, NC  
Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI  
Wesley & Melissa Thompson - Clearwater, FL

Demitrius & Katherine Klimis - Boardman, OH  
Mary Spanos - St. Augustine, FL  
Bessie Bliziotes - Palm Cost, FL  
Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL  
Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL  
William & Kane Chapman - Palmetto, FL  
Lillan Thomas - Highland, IN  
Kathleen Mendez - Ponte Vedra, FL  
Theodora Poletis - Baltimore, MD

**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 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.**

# ~ September 2016 ~

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<b>WBS</b> -Women's Bible Study <b>EBS</b> -East Bible Study <b>MBS</b> -Men's Bible Study <b>NBS</b> -North Bible Study <b>SBS</b> -South Bible Study	YAH-Young at Heart **Fast Day			<b>1</b> <b>Beginning of Ecclesiastical Year</b> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	<b>2**</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4</b> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Get Acquainted Sunday No Sunday School	<b>5</b> Labor Day Office Closed	<b>6</b> Basketball 8:00 p.m.	<b>7**</b> MBS 7:30 a.m. Panigyri Dance Practice 6:30-8:30 p.m.	<b>8</b> <b>Nativity of the Virgin Mary</b> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. YAH Meeting 11:30 a.m.	<b>9**</b>	<b>10</b> Youth Worker Seminar
<b>11</b> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Youth Sunday Welcoming Committee Meeting GOYA Youth Protection H XAPA MAΣ	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b> WBS 10:00 a.m. Ecumenical Service with Christ the King, to be held at St. John the Baptist, beginning at 6:30 p.m. NO BASKETBALL	<b>14**</b> MBS 7:30 a.m. <b>Holy Cross</b> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Panigyri Dance Practice 6:30-8:30 p.m.	<b>15</b>	<b>16**</b>	<b>17</b> Community Outreach
<b>18</b> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. No High School SS Philoptochos Mtg. AHEPA DOP mtg. H XAPA MAΣ	<b>19</b> Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m.	<b>20</b> WBS 10:00 a.m. EBS 6:30 p.m. SBS 7:00 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	<b>21**</b> MBS 7:30 a.m. Panigyri Dance Practice 6:30-8:30 p.m.	<b>22</b>	<b>23**</b> <b>Conception of St. John the Baptist</b> Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	<b>24</b> Pictures for Directory
<b>25</b> Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Daniel Plan Pictures for Directory H XAPA MAΣ	<b>26</b> NBS 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m.	<b>27</b> 28 WBS 10:00 a.m. EBS 6:30 p.m. SBS 7:00 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	<b>28**</b> MBS 7:30 a.m. Panigyri Dance Practice 6:30-8:30 p.m.	<b>29</b>	<b>30**</b>	

# St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

2418 W. Swann Avenue

Tampa, FL 33609-4712

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

officestjohngoctampa@gmail.com

www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com

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## St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

### Timetable of Services

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

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

#### **Parish Priest** Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis

813-876-8830 (Office) 813-394-1038 (Cell)  
frstav@gmail.com

#### **Pastoral Assistant** Charlie Hambos

813-876-8830 (Office) 813-843-8471 (Cell)  
Charlie.hambos@gmail.com

#### **Parish Council**

Alkis Crassas, President 813-690-3867  
Mike Xenick, Vice President 813-340-8737  
Sandra Pappas, Secretary 813-785-3747  
Ed Gerecke, Treasurer 813-229-4306  
George Chagaris 727-420-1920  
Carole Fotopoulos 813-982-0947  
Skip Higdon 813-831-9021  
Catherine Mitseas 813-571-0658  
Byron Nenos 813-789-0729  
Despina Sibley 813-758-0520  
Dante Skourellos 813-765-9534

#### **Office Staff**

Monica Gjerde, Office Manager 813-876-8830  
officestjohngoctampa@gmail.com  
Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper  
debstjohntpa@gmail.com fax: 813-443-4899

#### **Adult Greek School**

Magda Myer 813-909-2327

#### **AHEPA**

Gus Paras, President 813-254-6980

#### **Altar Angels**

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

#### **Basketball**

Perry Katsamakis 516-403-3118  
Jimmy Konstas 813-220-7352

#### **Bible Study**

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

#### **Bookstore**

Bill Manikas 813-960-3679

#### **Chanter**

Nick Andreadakis 813-516-6081

#### **Choir**

Artie Palios, Director 813-831-1294  
Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782

#### **Community Outreach**

Betty Katherine Katsamakis 813-468-1596

#### **Dance Group**

H XAPA MAE, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668  
Bessie Palios, 813-523-0347  
Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963  
St. John's, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136  
Anna Maria Bavaro 732-239-9085  
Panigyri, Vanessa Aviles 813-221-2194

#### **Daughters of Penelope**

Edie Kavouklis, President 813-758-0305

#### **Finance Committee**

Gary Ward 813-846-3898

#### **Food Pantry**

Anetta Alexander 813-758-2689

#### **Gasparilla Parking**

John Kokkas 727-992-4615

#### **GOYA**

Maria Koutroumanis 813-245-3854  
Kara Katzaras 772-643-5634

#### **Hope/Joy**

Amy Kafantaris 727-743-1297  
Debbie Nicklow 813-690-0671

#### **Junior Olympics**

Bryon Nenos 813-789-0729

#### **MOMS**

Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862  
Lindsey Skourellos 813-503-7845

#### **OCF**

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

#### **Oratorical Festival**

Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

#### **Philoptochos**

Lisa Alsina 813-728-1094

#### **Small Group Bible Study**

East, Donna Hambos 813-843-8412  
Men, Fr. Stavros 813-394-1038  
North, Cindy Xenick 813-505-7657  
South, Bessie Palios 813-523-0347  
Women, Debbie Kavouklis 813-258-5571

#### **Stewardship**

Sandra Pappas 813-785-3747  
Pete Trakas 813-505-2193

#### **Sunday School**

Vickie Peckham 813-406-5626

#### **Usher**

Tom Georgas 813-985-0236

#### **Visitation Committee**

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

#### **Welcome Committee**

Maria Xenick 813-765-3587

#### **Young at Heart**

Carole Fotopoulos 813-982-0947  
Mary Nenos 813-935-2096

The Messenger of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is published on a monthly basis. Publication is the first of each month. Deadline for notices and announcements for The Messenger is the 10th of each month. You may send announcements to the church office through email.

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