



ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

— THE MESSENGER —

SEPTEMBER 2026



*The Nativity of Our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos
and Ever-Virgin Mary— September 8*

Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis (Proistamenos)

Fr. John Stefero (Associate Priest)

Fr. Stratton Dorozenski (Retired Priest In Residence)

*Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople *Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America* Metropolis of Atlanta*



St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Without a vision, the people perish. Proverbs 29:18

MISSION:

Love God. Serve Others. Share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

VISION:

We encourage all to seek salvation through prayerful worship, active engagement, and Christ-centered ministry, cultivating a welcoming, generous, and growing church community rooted in authentic Orthodox Christianity.

CORE VALUES:

Love • Worship • Community • Learning • Service

ST. JOHN'S DIRECTORY

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.

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Shanna Thompson-Zamparas, Organist 352-573-8981
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Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963
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Hospitality Ministry

Amy Wenditz 727-251-2233

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Junior Olympics

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRIEST

—UNITY WITHOUT UNIFORMITY AND SOME OTHER THOUGHTS AS WE BEGIN A NEW ECCLESIASTICAL YEAR—

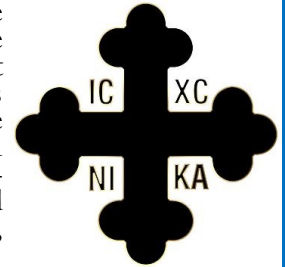
When Jesus Christ walked the earth two thousand years ago, He said on many occasions, “*The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” The Kingdom of heaven is not just a far off reality, but is also present in here and now. Yes, the Kingdom of heaven is a destination, one which we will enter permanently, but it is also part of the journey. The Kingdom of heaven is about connection—community, unity, Communion—both with one another, and especially with the Lord. When we connect with the Lord, we are living in the Kingdom. When we connect with one another, in ways that are helpful, loving and edifying, we are also living in the Kingdom. This is why at the Divine Liturgy, we begin the service with the words “*Blessed is the Kingdom. . . now and forever*” because in the Divine Liturgy, all elements of the Kingdom are present. We connect with Christ through the Eucharist and through prayer. We connect with one another in community. Every action of the Divine Liturgy is communal—we say “*let US pray to the Lord,*” “*let US attend,*” “*let US ask,*” “*let US give thanks,*” etc.

The other destination, that is not the Kingdom of heaven, is to be in hell. Hell is a place of isolation, estrangement from God, and absence of love. Hell, also, is not just far off reality. We enter hell each time we put emphasis on ourselves, when we isolate ourselves, when we isolate others, when there is absence of community, unity, and especially Communion with God. Hell is also a permanent destination. Those who have lived their lives in isolation, in self-centeredness, without love or communion with God will be judged by the Lord to be unworthy of heaven and will be consigned to hell. Isolated does not refer to those who happen to not have a lot of friends, or even monks who choose to live in strict ascetic practice. Isolated in this case means people who are self-focused, inward-focused. Isolated is what we are when we are only with our phones and without relationships. Isolation is when we want to win at all costs, including hurting our neighbor along the way. Isolation is when we assert our “rights” even if that means cancelling the rights of others. Our world is experiencing isolation as it never has before, with people more technologically connected but ironically more lonely than ever. Just as we have people striving to live in the Kingdom of heaven, people have isolated themselves and in a sense are getting a taste of what hell will be like.

Unity, not Uniformity

In the Divine Liturgy, the priest invites us to “*let us love one another so that with one mind we may confess.*” What follows is the Creed, which is the only thing in the Divine Liturgy which is offered in the first person, we say “*I believe*” not “*we believe.*” In other words, the Creed is a sign of unity, we all are invited to recite it together. But it is not a sign of uniformity. We each offer the Creed in a personal way, from our own

understanding of faith, and where we find ourselves in our journey to salvation. Some are reciting it for the first time, those who are new to Orthodoxy. And some have been reciting it their whole lives. Some are reciting it but at the same time are frustrated with God, or with life. Others are reciting it with fervor and with excitement. We are united in faith, but there is not necessarily uniformity in knowledge, feeling or experience as it relates to Christ. That’s one of the things that is so beautiful about Orthodoxy. There is one doctrine, and even one interpretation of doctrine, but there is room for various expressions of the one doctrine and its one interpretation. A two-year-old, a twenty-two-year-old and a seventy-two-year-old can each believe the same thing, but express it a little differently.



God is Doing Some Amazing Things in our Parish

God is most definitely working among us in Tampa. I can’t speak for other Greek Orthodox Churches, or other areas of the country, but God is certainly at work in a unique way in our community.

- We have unprecedented numbers of people who wish to join our church. Sunday attendance is higher than it ever has been in the history of our parish.
- On August 16, the first day of Sunday school, every seat in the church was filled (300 people) and every seat in the hall was as well (150 people).
- There was an overflow crowd each Sunday in the summer!
- Our young adult kick-off meeting had FORTY-FIVE young adults in attendance.
- Our GOYA meeting had THIRTY-TWO GOYAns in attendance.
- We held a vigil on the anniversary of the commemoration of the initial singing of the Akathist Hymn, the hymn “Ti Ipermahō,” and the preserving of Constantinople from a siege, all of which happened on August 7, 626. And for the vigil, we had 175 people participate at some point or another.
- We’ve baptized a record number of people this year (37, the old record was 36) and we still have one-third of the year left. We’ve Chrismated 13 people. Overall 50 people have come into Orthodox this year. (The record is 63, set in 2025)

This unprecedented growth does come with some challenges, which I would like to address. Remember at the outset, I wrote that the Church is concerned with unity, but not so much with uniformity. We are called to have similar beliefs, but not necessarily the same expressions. I’ve tried to think of a place to

address some concerns and challenges like the ones that follow. The pulpit does not seem like the appropriate place, as what follows are more guidelines than preaching the Gospel. So we will start the conversation here and see what that does.

A Dignified Body of Believers

Before addressing this, let me address the question of why our churches are adorned so intricately. The reason is that they represent heaven on earth for us. In our place of worship, we do not do anything else but worship. And we worship utilizing things that represent the best of what we have, like gold, silver, icons. We don't worship the materials, nor should we obsess about the ornateness of the church. If we didn't have painted icons, paper prints would suffice. But we want to have the best expression of a holy space in which to worship. We will see when we worship in the hall beginning early in 2027, it won't be exactly the church we've been used to worshipping in, but it will have a dignified presentation of a dignified worship space. When we enter the church to worship, it should be as if we are entering heaven itself. Our dress and our actions should reflect that. Because the Church is the Body of Christ, the people, more than the building. And even though we worship in an ornate building, the essence of worship is to come together as a dignified body.

Appropriate dress

We should come in clothing that is modest. We should wear our "Sunday best." Years ago, someone used to come to Divine Liturgy for exactly twenty minutes in hospital scrubs. People complained. I pointed out that this person was surgeon at Tampa General. They had a one hour break between 10 and 11 a.m. each Sunday. They had twenty minutes to drive from the hospital to church, twenty minutes to worship, twenty minutes to return. Asking them to change clothes would have cut into their twenty minutes of worship. Twenty minutes in scrubs was the best that they could do. If this is your situation, by all means come in for a few minutes in scrubs. Several people come to night services, straight from work in scrubs. That is fine. Most of us, however, don't have only twenty minutes on Sunday and don't wear scrubs.

Booty shorts and strapless tops do not reflect modesty. They are appropriate for a club, not the church. If this was literally all a person had, that would be a different story. But there is no one who has only this.

How about ripped t-shirts or graphic t-shirts? If this is the best we have, then it is better than no shirt. But again, the intention is to come to God, to enter into heaven, with clothing that is modest, not distracting, and presents the best version of ourselves.

Head covered or uncovered? Some women cover their heads in church, or when they approach for Holy Communion. There is a discussion written by St. Paul

in I Corinthians 11 about women covering their heads in church for modesty sake. There are some Orthodox church communities where this is the norm. It certainly is when women visit monasteries—they must wear a head covering. If a woman is choosing to honor this Scriptural teaching, there is nothing wrong with that. People have asked me my thoughts on this and every time I consider this, the answer leads back to modesty. If a woman is covering her head "to be more Orthodox than you", that's prideful and not modest. If someone has the thought to cover her head, and it is done with humility and for the sake of modesty, not comparison to others, there is no issue with that.

To drink or not to drink in church? It is the Orthodox practice that when one is going to receive Holy Communion, there is a complete abstinence from food and drink from the time one goes to bed the previous night, or six hours if one is receiving at an evening Divine Liturgy. The only thing that should be consumed is whatever is needed in order to take medication. If medication must be taken with food, then the food should be a modest serving. If medication is to be taken with water, that is certainly allowed. When we are in church, however, we should not be drinking water before Holy Communion. The exception to that is if we are involved in singing and we need water to preserve our voices. The priest, the choir, the chanters, are covered by this. At many services, I do not need to drink water, that is the goal. Occasionally I do.

Same thing goes with eating. We should be able to go an hour or so without food. The exceptions on food and water would be very young children. And if a toddler needs a snack, it should be small, and consumed quickly. It shouldn't be a constant throughout the service.

Gum chewing belongs at a baseball game, not at church.

Posture when sitting: Most Greeks were taught that women don't cross their legs in church. But we don't know why. The preferred posture in worship is standing. In the Orthodox world we stand a lot. When we sit, it is like a concession, out of concern for our stamina. Sitting should be at "attention," so to speak, feet flat on the ground, hands in our laps. Legs crossed, arm around our spouse, this is the posture when watching TV on the couch. The Lord deserves our full attention. ***PDAs***—And on the subject of arm around someone, there shouldn't be any PDAs (public displays of affection) in church, with the exception of holding hands with our spouse or significant other. Holding hands is a beautiful expression of intimacy between two spouses when worshipping.

How Often Should I Go to Confession? The answer to that question is, however often the person you go to confession to says you should. Every priest, and every Orthodox jurisdiction, answers this question differently. What we are united on is that everyone

should go to confession. What is not uniform is how often. Again, unity but not uniformity. In some Russian Orthodox churches, the expectation is that one will go to confession every time one wishes to receive Holy Communion. In this instance, confession takes place on Saturday evenings at the conclusion of Great Vespers, and people line up to go to confession, but have only a brief, few seconds, encounter with the priest. A few sins of the week are said quietly, and when everyone has gone, a general prayer of absolution is read over everyone.

In our Greek Orthodox practice, ideally one goes to confession during the four fasting periods of the year—during the Nativity Fast (November 15-December 24), the Lenten fast before Pascha, the Dormition fast (August 1-14) and the Holy Apostles fast which precedes the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul (June 29). In a parish the size of St. John, even this becomes impractical. I personally encourage people to come for confession once a year, and during this encounter, you confess our sins and then we have a dialogue about the sins, making a plan for how to avoid them going forward. Confession of sins, and a plan for repentance. This does not need to be repeated weekly or monthly, because if there is a plan for repentance, one has to give time for the plan to work.

There are some people now who want to go to confession every week or every two weeks. They are looking at confession similar to going to a therapist. A priest is not a therapist, and the ministry of a priest is not cut out to see people every week for confession. The people that are seen frequently are those who are acutely sick, but this is generally temporary, it does not go on for months and years. Please bear in mind when making an appointment with our priests that Fr. Stavros is our only full-time priest, and between Fr. Stavros and Fr. John, we are taking care of over 1,200 parishioners, as well as a fair number of emergencies that do not involve our parishioners. There is also a steady stream of inquirers who are not yet parishioners. In trying to cover all the needs, we are doing the best we can.

Please bear in mind that on Sundays, the clergy try to greet as many people as possible. Occasionally there is a long conversation in the hall but that is an exception. Please make appointments when longer conversations are desired. Also, please make appointments. There is a lot of juggling and scheduling that is done to make sure every need is met as best we can. When people just stop in the office unexpectedly, it is unreasonable to think that a long conversation can be had without having it scheduled.

Strict versus accessible. If someone were to describe me in five words, I would hope that one of those words would be “accessible.” By that I mean, easy to talk to, meets a person where they are at, and presents the Orthodox Christian faith and the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that is understandable and relatable. In meeting someone where they are at, that doesn’t mean the person stays where they are at.

Orthodoxy should be challenging, but it should also be accessible. There should be any sense of “so and so is more/less Orthodox.” We begin where we are, and we seek to deepen our relationship with Christ and our understanding of His message. The purpose of fasting, as we have discussed many times, has to do with discipline of our bodies, not deprivation, and the idea is that we will strengthen our souls through discipline of our bodies. To fast strictly means to not eat any animals products that contain blood—no meat, poultry, fish, dairy products, wine or oil. If one has never fasted strictly, that is not the recommended place to start. Because a strict start can lead to burnout (see article in another section of *The Messenger*).

Orthodoxy Christianity is a marathon, not a sprint

If you’ve ever watched a marathon on TV, there are always a few people at the start who come out almost sprinting, and they get a lot of time on camera, only to fall back and not finish near the top or at all. The people who win marathons are very rarely the people who are leading at the beginning. They run a steady and consistent pace and strike towards the end.

Orthodoxy is a marathon, not a sprint. And this figure is in two ways. Some people start off really strong, only to get tired and fade before finishing. And others put off getting going



until very late, trying to sprint at the very end. The problem with this is that we don’t always know when the end is coming, and if we begin our sprint too late, we may simply run out of time. Slow and steady wins the race, and it is the same thing in our journey to salvation in the Orthodox Church.

Everyone is in a different place in their relationship with Christ and that is okay. Again, unity, not uniformity. However, the goal is to advance from the place you are, to pray more, read Scripture more, to worship more, and to live more intentionally. The “more” is not merely quantity, but quality. It is not merely with form, but with substance. It is not merely going through motions but being transformed through them. It is not merely knowing about Christ but growing towards Him.

A Word of Caution about Internet Orthodoxy

Web MD is a website that gives out medical advice. It does not make one a doctor. In fact, if you type in “my head hurts” it will tell you that you might have anything from a headache to a brain tumor. Which is why when we want an authentic consultation about our health, we seek out a medical professional in a personal way.

There are a lot of internet personalities that are talking about their own ideas regarding Orthodoxy and how to practice it correctly. Some are ordained priests who have had years of service. Some are lay people who present themselves as theologians without any theological training. Some are priests from schismatic sects of "Orthodoxy." Studying theology on the internet does not make one a theologian any more than reading Web MD makes one a doctor. The best place to learn about Orthodoxy and Christ is within the context of a church community, to build an authentic relationship with a community and with a priest.

Arise & Build Arrived Just in the Nick of Time

On our first Sunday of Sunday school, we had nearly 450 come to church to worship. The parking lot was filled by 9:50, before Liturgy even began. There were 150 people who had to worship in the Kourmolis Center. Our Arise & Build Capital Improvement Project is going to expand the seating capacity in the church, so that we will all fit. It is going to expand the number of parking spaces we have, so more people can park. It is going to increase the ministry space, so we have more room for more ministries. And it is well underway. There are improvements to the ministry building with each passing day. We are recording videos each week to show the progress. There is still \$2M to raise to get everything done, so if you haven't contributed, please consider doing so. And if you have contributed, please consider an additional contribution.

The ministry building should be ready for occupancy by the end of January. The expansion of the church should begin in early February. And that is the point where we will begin worshipping in the Kourmolis Center and will all be together, instead of having people split between the church and the hall. So, just a few more months until we are all together for worship in the hall, and about sixteen months until we are in our new church.

Looking Ahead—We need to have two full-time priests

We talked about expanding our church for years, and now that has become a reality. People got used to the idea and now that it is here, it is something our community is embracing. Beyond Arise & Build, we need to set our sights on having a second full-time priest. Why? Because there are so many people now in our parish that the quality suffers because of the quantity. Because of the quantity of people, pastoral needs, requests for sacraments, etc. the quality of time we are able to offer suffers. Everyone deserves to have a personal relationship with a priest. Yet with the many people come many pastoral emergencies and once the triage is done, the day is often over without phone calls being returned, emails answered, etc. and there is a lag between making a request and having it met. That's not right or fair, to you or to me. The way to mitigate this is to bring on a second full-time priest. Doing the math, with 400 families, this amounts to an additional average of \$250 per family per year to make this a reality. There is more to say on this subject and you will hear more on this in the coming months, especially as we make our budget and stewardship goals for 2027.

Concluding Thoughts

The Kingdom of God is present on earth wherever there is unity in Christ.

Uniformity means that everyone is the same, and we are not.

So we seek unity, not uniformity. And unity comes when we are in Communion with Christ, and striving to live in community, especially as it relates to our parish of St. John.

We need to set high standards for ourselves and then work towards them, recognizing that each person has a different starting point. Patience, which is the first word used to describe love, covers the deficits between our different starting points. Kindness should lead as we encourage one another to move from where we are, to where Christ calls us to be.

There should be joy as we make this journey as a community. And with the changes going on in our community right now, both with new people coming in, and facilities being expanded, there should be encouragement that we are on the path to becoming what God has called us both as individuals and as community to be.

Remember that it is a marathon, not a sprint. A baseball season has 162 games. And along the way, even the best teams have losing streaks. The key to a long season is not to look at the whole thing, but to play each individual game with the best effort. Win or lose, tomorrow is another day. In our Christian journey, the same principle holds. If you are going strong, it is not a time to rest. And if you are not going strong, any day is a good day to begin a winning streak.

God is definitely at work in our community right now. A wave has already arrived and it seems as if more are coming. So let's keep up the good work, united in purpose, even though we are not necessarily uniform in experience.

Blessed Church New Year



September 1 is the beginning of the New Ecclesiastical Year! Sometime before next September 1, we will be in the new ministry building. Sometime before next September 1, we will all be in the Kourmolis Center worshipping. By next September 1, our church renovation will be almost complete. So this is an important Ecclesiastical

Year in the life of our church. May it be blessed by God, and may His guiding hand continue to be upon us.

With love in the Lord,
+Fr. Stavros

A MESSAGE FROM OUR MINISTRY COORDINATOR

Galatians 5:22-6:2

Revised Standard Version

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26 Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another. 6 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

This month continues a year-long series that will study the Fruit of the Spirit. In Saint Paul's letter to the Galatians, nine qualities are identified as the fruit produced by a life lived in communion with the Holy Spirit. This month highlights the first Fruit of the Spirit Paul lists: Love.

Love.

While planning this month's article, I found myself searching for songs with the word "love" in the title. One that instantly transported me back to my nostalgic 70s childhood was Wings' *Silly Love Songs*. ("What's wrong with that?") The song's central question is whether people have grown tired of hearing about love. As I reflected on St. Paul's words in Galatians, I found myself arriving at the same answer as another Paul, Sir Paul McCartney: apparently not. And perhaps that's because there is nothing silly about love.

Love is foundational to who we are as human beings. More importantly, it is foundational to the Christian faith and the message of the Bible.

Love embodies the very essence of God's character and describes His unending desire for relationship with humanity. The authors of the many books of the Bible explain that genuine love is grounded in God (1 John 4:7-8), who *is* love (1 John 4:16) and who works for the good of all creation. This divinely sourced, life-giving concept of love permeates the whole Bible. It's no wonder that "love" is used over 1000 times in the Bible. St. Paul uses the word *love* more than 100 times in his letters and approximately 75 of those references use the Greek word *agape*, the highest form of love.

Some other Greek words used to describe the different kinds of love are: *eros* (romantic love), *philia* (friendship love), *storge* (familial love). *Agape* love stands out:

Agape captures the kind of love God holds for His creation. *Agape* love is pure, selfless, and self-sacrificing.

Agape love is a love so profound and holy that it surpasses all human understanding.

Agape love always seeks the best for others, even our enemies, at all costs.

Love.

Love tops St. Paul's list of the Fruit of the Spirit, which is not surprising because he frequently teaches that love is more essential to human life than anything else. In 1 Corinthians 13, he famously writes that "love is patient, love is kind." Notice how those qualities echo the Fruit of the Spirit that follow in Galatians. Love becomes the lens through which all the other fruit are understood.

So how do we pursue this fruit of the Spirit?

First, we're called to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We're called to delight in God, pursue Him, and give all we have for Him. God is worthy of our deepest affection and highest praise. When we worship regularly, read his Holy Scripture, and spend time in prayer, we grow in love for the Lord.

Second, we are called to love each other. As Jesus said in John 13:34, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.*"

Jesus commands us to love one another, both in word and deed. We're called to serve one another, bear each other's burdens, care for one another, and lay our lives down for one another. All of these are forms of love in action.

We should never cease to ask the Holy Spirit to help us love our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, even when we don't feel loving or feel like loving others. In living out this love, followers of Christ are called to reflect God's love for us, extending it to others, including our enemies. Is this easy? Of course not.

This month's entry was quite the challenge to write – how you do write about love in less than 1000 words? It sounds oversimplistic to challenge us to love at all times. I suppose this is exactly why Paul lists this first as a Fruit of the Spirit. We must accept that to love requires the Holy Spirit to cultivate it within us. We can't do this on our own. Without the power of the Holy Spirit, we will fail to love, as the flawed humans that we are.

Love.

Everything begins with love.

Everything ends with love.

May the Holy Spirit cultivate the fruit of love abundantly in our lives, so that others may see Christ through us and we may see Christ in them.

Maria

GALATIANS 5:23-6:2

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26 Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another. 6 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

ARISE & BUILD



ARISE & BUILD

*"Let us arise and build!" So they strengthened their hands for the good work. **Nehemiah 2:18***

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I hope and pray everyone had a great summer!

We continue to be excited about the start of the construction phase of our Arise & Build project! The interior demolition in the Ministry Building has been completed, and the restoration and renovation activity is well under way. Regular updates on the progress of this phase will continue to be provided across multiple mediums as areas are completed and certain milestones reached.

As of the date of this article, the timeline is still on track for this phase to be completed in January, leading into the church expansion phase commencing in February. Because the Ministry Building is an active construction site, please be aware of and follow the safety messages and warnings that have been sent and signs that have been posted to keep you and your family safe, especially in areas outside the building that are marked by orange construction fencing.

The church expansion and renovation design and plans continue to be tweaked between our Arise & Build design and construction team, the architect and our general contractor, so that a full set of final construction plans can be ready to submit to the City of Tampa for permitting in early October.

As last month's A&B article indicated, our committee provided our recommended general contractor to the Parish Council for approval in early July, which was approved. Over the last few weeks, we have been negotiating a contract for the Ministry Building phase of the project with this company, which they signed on August 7, 2026. We presented the final contract to the Parish Council on August 12th for review and approval and the PC countersigned the contract on August 13th.

Therefore, the Arise & Build team is now pleased to announce that **McCullagh & Scott General Contractors (M&S)** has been selected to oversee the St. John building and renovation project. This talented general contracting firm was chosen for their experience, faith-based values and commitment to our vision for a new St. John's sanctuary and grounds.

Founded in 1987, McCullagh & Scott is a Riverview-based firm specializing in design-build services for commercial facilities throughout Tampa Bay, with church construction as one of its primary areas of expertise. Under the leadership of its owner and founder Jim McCullagh, the company has built its reputation on integrity, trust, technical expertise, and exceptional customer service.

Over the past four decades, they have partnered with more than 100 churches, completing projects ranging from small renovations to major campus expansions and new sanctuary construction. Some of their recent church projects include:

- Holy Trinity Lutheran Church – Campus expansion
- First Presbyterian Church of Tampa – Remodel, expansion, and additions
- Arise Church (Brandon) – New sanctuary and ministry building
- First Baptist Church of Riverview – Facility remodel

After a thorough evaluation process, several factors made McCullagh & Scott stand out. First, they are rooted in

strong faith and have values and a mission that aligns with St. John. Second, the Arise & Build project will be supported by a dedicated team of eight professionals, including executive oversight from company President David Lennon, who regularly participates in weekly progress meetings, along with an on-site project manager and assistant project manager. Additional team members will manage other parts of the project, including pre-construction planning, permitting and accounting. Four M&S employees are Florida State Certified General or Building Contractors, ensuring continuity throughout the project.

M&S intentionally limits its workload each year, and our project is one of their larger projects and will receive significant attention from their leadership team. Their senior construction manager, Fred Morgan has been assigned to oversee our project onsite, which is a wonderful blessing.

Third, M&S has demonstrated professionalism and preparation throughout the general contractor decision-making process. They responded to our Request for Proposal exactly as requested, showed a clear understanding of the unique logistical challenges involved in building on an active church campus, anticipated our questions, and offered thoughtful, flexible solutions, as well as value-engineering suggestions. Throughout the interview process, they inspired confidence and trust.

Every reference we contacted spoke highly of M&S's workmanship, professionalism, communication, and ability to complete projects successfully. They also had competitive pricing comparable to other qualified firms that submitted bids.

We are excited to partner with McCullagh & Scott as we move forward with this important project. We ask that you continue to pray for them, our church leadership, the design and construction teams, the Arise & Build team and everyone involved in bringing this vision to life.

Financial Update

As of August 14th, we have received \$8,901,419 in pledges from over 425 donors and over \$5,989,611 million (67%) of that has been collected! We have invested most of these collected funds into a money market mutual fund account that keeps the funds safe and also allows us to earn interest as and until funds are needed. To date, we have earned over \$113,000 in interest in addition to collected donations. Thank you to everyone who continues to fulfill their pledges and to those donors who are providing new pledges to support the campaign.

We continue to invite everyone to participate and donate to the Arise & Build capital campaign. As we have consistently communicated since the beginning of the year in all of our communications, additional funds will be necessary to fully complete the entire project. As we get ever closer to finalizing the church construction plans and finalize (we have set a target to complete this by August 31st) the full list of furniture, fixtures, equipment and other needs for our community to occupy and utilize the expanded and revitalized facilities, we will have a better understanding of the additional financial need.

I thank you for your continued trust and humbly ask that you continue to pray for Father Stavros, our committee, the many other parishioners who are also donating their time to this effort, the construction and other professionals we are working with and for the continued progress of the Arise & Build project and our beloved St. John community.

We pray our Lord continues to bless and sanctify our efforts and each of you.

With Love in the Lord,

Mike Xenick
Arise & Build Chairman

—Some Thoughts on Arise & Build By Dr. Nick Kavouklis—

Personally, I consider this a sacred calling for generations. What a profound and inspiring endeavor we are embarking upon together, one that will bless our church, strengthen our community, and echo with God's grace for generations to come. This renovation is more than a project; it is a living legacy of faith, vision, and stewardship. It is a gift we are lovingly crafting for our children, our grandchildren, and all who will walk through these doors long after us as a beacon of hope and worship that our community will remember with pride for decades.

As we step forward in unity and purpose, let us embrace the journey with open eyes and steadfast hearts. We must anticipate that, in any great work of this magnitude, there will be:

- unexpected challenges,
- unforeseen delays,
- unplanned changes,
- occasional cost overruns,
- and moments of general frustration.

I suggest we recognize these unavoidable eventualities not as signs of failure, but the natural companions of meaningful progress. By expecting them, we guard our spirits against discouragement. We align our hopes not with perfection, but with perseverance. We remember that every trial overcome, every obstacle surmounted, becomes part of the beautiful testimony of what faithful hands and devoted hearts can achieve when united in God's service.

Let this mindset anchor us in peace and patience. Together, with prayerful resolve, generous spirits, and unwavering commitment, we will rise above every difficulty. We will not only restore these walls, but we will also renew our sense of shared purpose and deepen our legacy of love.

May I suggest we move forward with joy, faith, and confidence, knowing that the One who began this good work in us will carry it to completion, for His glory and for the blessing of all who follow.

What we are undertaking is much more than a building renovation. We are building for a future filled with worship, fellowship, and enduring hope in Christ's teachings.

*God Bless & many thanks to all - Dr. Nick
Dr. Nick Kavouklis is a long-time member of St. John Greek Orthodox Church.*



*Your Safety.
Our Priority.*

CONSTRUCTION IS UNDERWAY AT ST. JOHN!
Thank you for helping keep everyone safe during this time.



STAY OUT

Of fenced off construction areas



FOLLOW

All posted signs and directions



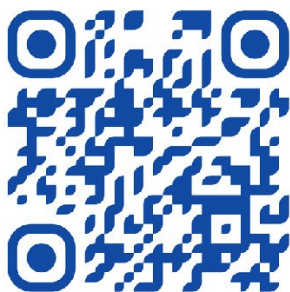
WATCH FOR

Workers, vehicles and equipment



KEEP CHILDREN

With you at all times



DRIVE SLOWLY

And park only in designated areas

CONSTRUCTION UPDATES

Scan the QR code above to see the current timeline, photo gallery and Quarterly Report updates

QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

Please email ariseandbuild@stjohntpa.org
or call Mike Xenick at (813) 340-8737

LITURGICAL SCHEDULE FOR SEPTEMBER

Tuesday, September 1	<u>BEGINNING OF ECCLESIASTICAL YEAR</u> Orthros 8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Sunday, September 6	Orthros 8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Tuesday, September 8	<u>NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS</u> Orthros 8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Thursday, September 10	Paraklesis		5:30p.m.
Friday, September 11	<u>REMEMBRANCE OF 9/11</u> Orthros 8:46a.m.	Divine Liturgy	9:30a.m.
Sunday, September 13	Orthros 8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Monday, September 14	<u>EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS</u> Orthros 8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Sunday, September 20	Orthros 8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Wednesday, September 23	<u>CONCEPTION OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST</u> Orthros 9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Sunday, September 27	Orthros 8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Monday, September 28	Orthodoxy 101 (Teaching Liturgy)		6:30p.m.
Sunday, October 4	Orthros 8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Wednesday, October 7	Paraklesis		5:30p.m.
Sunday, October 11	Orthros 8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.



Beginning of Ecclesiastical Year – September 1



Exaltation of Holy Cross– September 14



**Conception of St. John the Baptist—
September 23**

LITURGICAL NOTES FOR SEPTEMBER

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

Tuesday, September 8 - Nativity of the Virgin Mary - Placed right after the beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year, this feast day 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.

Thursday, September 10 - Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary - We will offer the Paraklesis service once a month, to pray for all the members of our community, as well as any special prayer requests that you may have. The Paraklesis service for September will be Thursday, September 10 at 5:300 p.m.

Friday, September 11 - Day of Remembrance—25 Year Anniversary of 9/11 - This year marks 25 years since the terrorist attack on America on 9/11/01. Every year, we have paused to offer some service in remembrance of this day. On Friday, September 11, we will celebrate the Divine Liturgy, to call the Holy Spirit down upon not only the Holy Gifts but on all of us, in Tampa and throughout the United States. We will have a memorial service of remembrance at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy. You are encouraged to pause and pray on 9/11. The service on 9/11 will begin with Orthros at 8:46 a.m. and will end at approximately 10:28 a.m. These were the roughly 100 minutes between the time of the first plane crash the the collapse of the Twin Towers, and it is most appropriate that we pause during THESE moments of that day.

Monday, September 14 - Exaltation of the Holy Cross - This 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 repeat it on Sunday, September 20.

Wednesday, September 23—Conception of St. John the Baptist - The feast of the Conception of St. John the Baptist marks the beginning of the New Testament, it is the first major step towards the Nativity of Christ. It is commemorated on September 23.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Women's Bible Study on Tuesday mornings with Fr. Stavros will begin again on **Tuesday, September 15 at 10:00am**. Women's Bible study meets in the Administration Building in the Parish Council Room, or via zoom for those who can't make it in person. We will be studying the book of Colossians.

Tuesday night Bible study with Fr. John—Will continue meeting at 6:30 p.m. on most Tuesday evenings. Join us in person or via zoom for some very informative, lively and interactive discussions on how we apply Biblical principles in our everyday lives. See the Sunday bulletin for specific topics. **For September the dates are:** Tuesday September 1, Tuesday September 8, Tuesday September 15, Tuesday September 22 & Tuesday September 29.

Young Adult Dinner/Discussion—Thursday, September 10—Our young adult group meets once a month for dinner/discussion(and other times for fellowship and service). The meeting for September will be on **Thursday, September 10, from 7:00-9:00pm** in the Kourmolis Center. All young adults, ages 18-40, are invited to participate. Our topic for September will be **"What Does Living An Orthodox Life Look Like."** Group members use What's App for communication. Please contact Aris Rogers to be added to our what's app for young adults at 813-309-5525.

Youth Worker Training Seminar—Fr. Stavros will conduct his annual youth worker training seminar on **Saturday, September 12, from 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.** This seminar is open to anyone who works with youth in our churches on any level—GOYA, JOY, HOPE, Sunday school, etc. Please see attached flyer.

Dance Groups—Greek dance practices for Y Hara Mas (3rd-6th grades) will start on **September 13 at 12:15pm** in the Kourmoulis Center (during coffee hour). Practices will continue every Sunday from 12:15 to 12:45pm for the remainder of September and October. Please contact Jamie Hartzler Smith (716-713-9642) with any questions. OPA!

Orthodoxy 101—Our Fall installment of Orthodoxy 101 will begin on **Monday, September 14**. Please see enclosed flyer.

Father Stavros to be out of town—Fr. Stavros will be presenting at a seminar for candidates for the Diaconate Program on **September 17-19** at the Alexios Retreat Center (ARC), at the request of His Eminence Metropolitan Sevastianos of Atlanta. He will again be returning to the ARC September 25—26 as a presenter for a retreat of the Holy Unmercenary Medical Society (HUMS) of the Metropolis of Atlanta. Fr. John will cover all pastoral needs on these days.

College Student luncheon—Fr. Stavros will meet with college students on **Sunday, September 20**, after church, in the Parish Council Room, for lunch and discussion. More details to follow.

GOYA— The GOYA Meeting for September will be **Sunday, September 20, from 5:00pm-7:30pm**. Dinner, as always, will be provided.

GOYA Senior Lock-In—Our 10th-12th Grade GOYAns are invited to a special lock-in for our older GOYAns, which will begin at **5:00 p.m. on Saturday, September 12**.

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

Choir—Choir practices will be held on most Wednesdays in the Zaharias Room from 7:15-8:30 p.m. New singers are always welcome. If you are interested in joining our choir, please contact Tara at tswatzbaugh@ut.edu or 813-313-0439.

Children and worship/sermon—We are delighted to have so many young children in church each Sunday. We encourage people to bring children so that they are familiar with worship from the youngest age. However, on the occasion when a young child's crying or fussiness cannot be calmed quickly, especially during the sermon, we kindly ask that you step out for a few minutes, and either go to the nursery, or participate via livestream in the Kourmolis Center, so as to not disrupt the opportunity for others to hear the sermon.

Dance practice started **Sunday, August 30th** after church for Parea Dance Group (7th grade -12 grade). If you would like to dance at the festival, you must come to the first practice or email Genie Carter lgncarter@verizon.net.



STEWARDSHIP



STEWARDSHIP

— AS AN ACT OF FAITH AND LOVE —



Happy New Year! We know what that means in January: resolutions, new calendars, cleaned-out closets, and promises that *this* will be the year we exercise more, spend less, get organized, and stop eating cookies for breakfast.

But the Church gives us another New Year. **On September 1, the Orthodox Church begins the new liturgical year.** Instead of asking, “*What do I want to accomplish this year?*” the Church invites us to ask a different question: “***What will I offer?***” That is the heart of stewardship.

We often hear *stewardship* and think immediately of money. Certainly, maintaining our parish, supporting its ministries, and caring for those in need require financial generosity. But stewardship begins before we ever write a check. It begins with recognizing that everything we have is first a gift from God. As King David prayed, “All things come from You, and of Your own have we given You” (1 Chronicles 29:14). We give because we have first received.

Then, only two weeks into the new Church year, the Church places something extraordinary before us: the Cross. On September 14, we celebrate the Universal Exaltation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross. There is something beautifully fitting about encountering the Cross so near the beginning of our year.

If September 1 asks, “*What will you offer?*” the Cross shows us Christ’s answer: ***Himself***. Christ does not offer a convenient portion of His life. He gives Himself completely. Standing before the Cross, then, the question of stewardship becomes much larger than “*How much should I give?*” It becomes: “**Lord, what have You placed in my hands, and what would You have me do with it?**”

The Church does not begin her year by inviting us to reinvent ourselves. She invites us to offer ourselves. And before September is half over, she raises the Cross to show us what self-offering looks like.

So perhaps this September we might make a different kind of New Year’s resolution. Look at your calendar. Look at your resources. Look at your gifts. Look at the people God has placed around you. Then look at the Cross.

What has God entrusted to me? What can I offer back to Him? Everything we have first came from Him. Perhaps the best way to begin a new Church year is simply with open hands.

STEWARDSHIP HOUSEKEEPING

Thank you to everyone who has already submitted a **2026 Stewardship Commitment Form** and to those faithfully honoring their stewardship commitments. Your generosity strengthens the worship, ministries, outreach, and mission of St. John the Baptist.

If you have not yet completed your 2026 Stewardship Commitment Form, we invite you to prayerfully do so. Forms are available in the Narthex, Church Office, Bookstore, and online.

Reminder: Please include the **Stewardship Year** in the memo line of your check or in the comments field when giving electronically. If you have questions about your commitment or need assistance, please contact the Church Office or George Mitseas, Stewardship Chair.



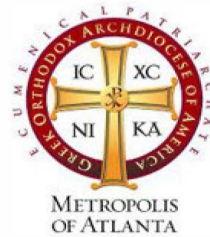
This month's submission for our One Word comes from a member of our St. John parish, Demetre Kokoris with permission to print. Demetre's word of the year was **Decision**. We are more than halfway through the year and may this word encourage us to revisit our goals for the year in the next few months. Thank you Demetre for the reminder!

Please enjoy this "one word" encouragement.

I'm drawn to it (decision) because of its original meaning: to cut off. A decision isn't just about choosing what to move toward; it's about intentionally cutting away what doesn't belong. In order to truly decide, something must be left out.



EFFECTIVE PARISH ASSESSMENT



Your Voice, Our Future: 10 Minutes to a Stronger Parish

As a member of our parish family, your voice matters. The Effective Parish Assessment is a short, confidential survey designed to help parish leadership understand how to improve parish life, identify priorities, and strengthen our health and effectiveness.

CONFIDENTIAL

Your responses are 100% anonymous so please share honestly.

QUICK & EASY

The assessment takes only 10–15 minutes.

DEFINE THE FUTURE

Your feedback helps parish leaders improve what matters most.

**TAKE THE PARISH SURVEY STARTING AUGUST 15, 2026
THROUGH SEPTEMBER 6**



WHY PARTICIPATE?

- **Direct Impact:** Your unique experience provides insights that parish leadership cannot gain any other way to shape our future.
- **Strength in Numbers:** Every single confidential response increases the accuracy of our results, helping us build a healthier, stronger parish for tomorrow.

Scan the QR code to take the parish survey or go to
<https://www.effectiveparish.org/survey>

Thank you for taking the time to help our parish

DONATIONS NEEDED FOR VASILIKO 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**. Please bring to the welcome table by 10:00 a.m on that day, so we will have time to make up the tray. The Procession for the Holy Cross will be held on Monday, September 14.

DONATIONS NEEDED FOR FLOWERS FOR FEAST OF THE HOLY CROSS

We need a donation of \$400 for flowers for the tray for the procession of the Holy Cross on Monday, September 14. *Please call the office if you are interested.*



INSPIRATION

A Place to Belong

In Christ we who are many form one body and each member belong to all the others. Following Christ included *belonging*, not just believing. We are *members* of His body—the Church. C.S. Lewis noted that the word *membership* is of Christian origin, but the world has emptied it of its original meaning. Stores offer discounts to “members,” and advertisers use member names to create mailing lists. In churches, membership is often reduced to simply adding your name to a roll, with no requirements or expectations. To Paul, being a “member” of the church meant being a vital organ of a living body, an indispensable, interconnected part of the Body of Christ. We need to recover and practice the biblical meaning of membership. The church is a body, not a building, an organism, not an organization.
(Rick Warren, Purpose Driven Life, Chapter 17, a place to belong)

SOME THOUGHTS ON MARRIAGE

by Father Andrew Stephen Damick

Marriage is a skill. We would probably do better at it if we stopped evaluating it with words like “happy” and start thinking of it as a project. You don’t have a good marriage on your wedding day. You’ve started a new project, learning a new skill that can contribute to mutual healing and growth. That picture-perfect wedding picture is not a picture of a perfect marriage. It’s a picture of a project that’s just begun. It’s the first day of school. It’s an opportunity for repentance. It’s a path of transformation. God doesn’t give us the spouses we want for our happiness and comfort. He gives us the spouses we need for our salvation.

When you discover that your spouse has qualities that challenge you, those are the areas where God is saying you need the most work. Marriage can be a great consolation if undertaken well, but that consolation is not its point. Holiness is its point.

When marriage reveals our sins, we haven’t “lost” anything - that means it’s working. And we get a chance to change. And if we change in the right way, we grow to become more the likeness of the One Who created marriage. They won’t be putting any of that on a greeting card any time soon, though. “Have a Great Lifetime of Repentance on Your Path to the Kingdom” just doesn’t have that Hallmark ring.

**JOIN US FOR OUR
SERMON SERIES**



SEPTEMBER 13 - OCTOBER 11

—Don't Give the Enemy a Seat at Your Table—

By Mia Lenardos

Mia Lenardos is a second year medical student at Liberty University, and a long time member of our parish. She was the Logistics Coordinator for St. Stephen's Summer Camp from 2024-2026, and gave this presentation to the staff at camp this year.

Psalm 23

*The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside quiet waters,
He refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
For his name's sake
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
For you are with me;
Your rod and your staff,
They comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me
All the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

I am really going to focus on this line:
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

Pick Jesus, us, and demons/the devil. Roll play Jesus reaching out with the holes in his hands pouring you a glass a water. The devil and demons swarming around the table. They are asking to sit down. They now mock Jesus and ask Him to pour them a glass of water. What a slap in the face. The Lord, Creator of all things, wants to dine with you, and you just invited not only an unexpected guest to the feast, but his greatest enemy.

It's so easy to think, I would never do that. I would never invite Satan to come sit down. I'm going to challenge you to say that everyday we do that. We invite Satan to come sit with us. We mock our Lord. We make Him feel alone just like He did on that cross.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

The Lord sets the table. Think of your favorite meal—steak, mashed potatoes, mac n cheese, chocolate cake, wine, etc.—the Lord has put it all on the table, but all you need to do is sit down. I remember thinking, why wouldn't I sit down. That sounds appealing, BUT I think we are missing the biggest part of that verse.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

The Lord doesn't set the table when we are winning awards, succeeding in all of our classes, on family vacations. He sets the table in the presence of HIS

enemies—He sets the table where life feels lost, we are in danger, and we need HIM the most. He sets the table—in the middle of divorce, during a breakup, the chemo ward, when you feel like you don't know what the future holds. We are most vulnerable that's when the enemy knows to attack.

I'm not going to make any share who doesn't want to but take a second to write down something you've gone through this year where the Lord set the table for you in the midst of trouble. Would anyone like to share? I can go first, my parents' divorce.

Now look down at your card, did you have feelings during that time of "Where is God? Why isn't He with me? Why would He make this happen?" because I sure did. But, we have to ask ourselves who's voice is that: God's or Satan's?

How can we decipher between God and Satan's voice?

I had someone tell me one time that if you feel at peace about it, then it's God's voice and I try to live my life by that.

Those questions we asked earlier though are real thoughts: "Where is God? Why isn't He with me? Why would He make this happen?"

At my school we have an opportunity once a week to hear from patients and their experience with Christian health care workers. One week we had this young woman who came in, she was disabled for the rest of her life because of the car accident she was in when she was 12 years old. Couldn't walk. Slurred speech. Mentally delayed. Most would look at her and say, "How unfair. She didn't deserve that." – those were my exact thoughts. She got up and said something within the first 5 seconds that completely changed my entire perspective on life. She said "How lucky am I that God looked down and chose me. He knew this could happen to me and I would still come back to Him."

Another example, Job in the Bible was stripped from everything –his family, his wealth, the way he made a living. The Lord allowed the Devil to tear those things away from him because He knew Job would come back.

One final example, a couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity to travel to Eswatini, Africa on a medical mission trip. My first code—for those who don't know a code is when a patient comes in with no heartbeat. A three year old little girl—no heartbeat. Shocking her time and time again. Finally back to life. Everyone shouting around—push atropine, keep the mask on her, don't let her close her eyes, put a mask on she has tuberculosis. I looked down at this little girl, her breath so unregulated. Usually its in and out. In and out. But for her it was in in out. Pesticide poisoning. In a

coma for 3 days. Finally recovery. Her parents take her home. Two days later, she's back. Another incidence. This time her parents waiting 4 hours to bring her in. Shocking her again. Back to life—but this time brain dead. She's lying there, I'm watching her breath, but her brain is dead. Being in that room, telling her parents they came in with a child and they aren't going home with one is probably one of the worst conversation I've had to be apart of. They cried. We cried. The Lord set the table in that room. He knew it felt undeserving but He said I have a greater plan—I wanted to bring her home. All ten of us in that room circled together, not leaving any space for the Devil to sit at our table, and prayed. We prayed for that little girl, that Jesus was waiting for her with open arms. We prayed for her family, we knew that hole in her family would never be filled, but their faith in the Lord is the only thing that could fill that space. We prayed to continue to be physicians to feel with our patients and leave space for the Lord. In our everyday lives the Lord prepares a table, but we need to give Him space to sit with us.

After that day, I told my best friend on the trip that I want to be the type of physician who sets good precedents—good habits. After every birth I'm apart of, it doesn't take long to say "Thank you Lord for new birth. Bless that family." After every loss, it doesn't take long to say "Be with that family and please welcome your servant with open arms."

I've been thinking about setting good habits just in life. So, I want to take a second to think about what are some good habits that you can start when trouble hits. The Lord is going set the table for you and Him. How are going to make sure you don't invite the Devil to come sit with you?

None of this is "fair". Yet it is. Think of Jesus sitting across from you with holes in his hands. Stakes pierced through his hands just for you. He did absolutely NOTHING wrong, yet He took it on the chin. I don't have every explanation of why things go "wrong" in the world, but I do believe that we need to have enough trust in the Lord to say "I don't get it, but I'll sit with you because you are Lord."

We wear a cross around our necks everyday to symbolize death, not life. The most "wrong" but "right" death there ever was. Jesus bared the burden of the cross just for us to have eternal life with Him. Really think about that. He sacrificed himself for us. He died for us. Just so we can be with Him. The Lord did that—for us.

Don't give the enemy a seat at your table. Not just this week, but every single day of your life. Show your campers that its you and the Lord dining together. Be honest with them this week. Tell them its hard but its worth it. Then go out into this world, where its not normal to dine with the Lord, and let it be known.

~The Masculine and Feminine Sides to the Orthodox Church~

I love that the Orthodox Church is masculine—although, I would say that it is not so much masculine as it is paternal. Like a good father, the Orthodox Church sets an example for me, instructs me, challenges me, corrects me, even chastises me. It gives me disciplines to work on and learn from. It will not let me make excuses for myself, but to stand again and keep going. It reveals to me an inner strength that I didn't know I had (specifically, Christ energizing me). It prepares me to be in this difficult and treacherous world. It shapes me, and grows me into the person I need to be.

And at the very same time, I love that the Orthodox Church is feminine—or, more rightly, maternal. Like a good mother, the Orthodox Church feeds me (the Eucharist), washes me (baptism and absolution), clothes me (baptismal garments and priestly vestments), provides me with a home (church) and a family (fellow members). It holds me in my pain, tends to my wounds, reassures me when I am frightened, comforts me. It doesn't tell me to stuff my feelings down, but gives them a voice in the prayers and hymns. It allows me to weep with sorrow and joy.

And with both the paternal and maternal voice, the Church tells me how much I am loved.

We need the Church to be both. And, thanks be to God, it is both.

~AGING~

When I turned 63 last year(64 in March) I sat in my favorite chair, looked back at my life, and thought to myself, "So... this is the beginning of the final stretch."

And slowly, the truths I had avoided all my life began to surface.

Kids? They're busy writing their own story.

Health? Slips away faster than sand through open fingers.

The government? Just headlines, promises, and numbers that never change your daily reality.

Aging doesn't hurt your body first — it hurts your illusions. So I sat down with myself and carved out a handful of bitter but necessary truths.

Kids don't save you from loneliness

Children grow, life pulls them in every direction, and you become a memory they visit when time allows.

You smile... and yet something inside you remains strangely hollow.

Kids bring joy — but they are not a shield against loneliness.

Health is not forever

One day, the outings you once jumped into with enthusiasm feel like a marathon.

You realize health was never a background character — it was the main pillar holding your life steady.

Retirement and money

Retirement is not a reward — it's a reality check.

Depending on the system is like standing on thin ice.

Bills grow, needs grow, prices grow... but support doesn't.

So I rebuilt my life on new rules — honest, sharp, practical rules for living with dignity.

Rule 1: Money is more reliable than anything else.

Love your kids, cherish them — but don't make them your retirement plan.

Save for yourself.

Even small savings create big freedom.

Financial independence is dignity.

Rule 2: Your health is your real job

Nothing else matters if your body refuses to cooperate.

Move. Walk. Stretch.

Guard your sleep like treasure.

Eat cleaner. Reduce the poison disguised as sugar and salt.

Illness doesn't discriminate,

but it respects those who take responsibility for themselves.

Rule 3: Create your own joy

Waiting for others to make you happy is the fastest way to heartbreak.

So you learn to enjoy the small things — a peaceful breakfast, a good book, music that warms the soul.

When you know how to make yourself happy, loneliness loses its power.

Rule 4: Aging is not an excuse to become helpless

Some people turn aging into a performance of complaints.

And slowly, even those who love them start stepping away.

Strength is attractive.

Resilience is magnetic.

People respect the ones who stay capable, not the ones who surrender.

Rule 5: Let go of the past

The good old days were beautiful — yes.

But they're gone, and there is no return ticket.

Clinging to the past steals the present.

Life today may look different, but it still holds moments worth living.

Rule 6: Protect your peace like it's your property

Not every argument needs your voice.

Not every insult needs your response.

Not every relative deserves access to your emotions.

Peace is expensive.

Protect it from drama, negativity, and draining people — even if they're your close ones.

Rule 7: Keep learning something — anything

The day you stop learning is the day you start aging.

A new recipe, a new word, a new app, a new hobby — your brain needs movement just like your body does.

Learning keeps you young.

Stagnation makes you old.

Strength and freedom still belong to you

Aging is an exam no one can take for you.

You can adapt, rebuild, and rise stronger... or sit back, complain, and wait for someone to rescue you.

And if

No one comes to rescue you

Stand up for yourself ...

Because you still can..

And that single truth is enough to transform the rest of your life.

Orthodox Burnout: A 100% Chance of It

How I Learned To Stop Fearing Spiritual Burnout And Want To Love God

Fr James Bozeman

Editors note: This lengthy article is a worthy read not only for those who have converted to Orthodoxy, but even to people who have been Orthodox their whole life. Anyone who has ever had a spiritual reawakening, and even people who have not, people who are excited about faith and people who are bored. Take a few minutes and read a thought-provoking article on Orthodox burnout. +Fr. Stavros

Before I begin, please forgive me. I know that when one is in the throes of Orthodox Burnout, it is sometimes frustrating being offered advice about it. But here goes:

I was one of the lucky ones, so to speak (I don't believe in luck, strictly speaking). I entered the realm of Holy Orthodoxy at the end of the 20th century. It was the mid 90's, and my friends and my brother were discovering the world of Orthodox Christianity. And the fact was that I didn't like it. At all.

Icons. Incense. Priests. Dead Saints. Mary. Bottom of Form

Yuck. Weird. Wrong. Cult.

That was where I was back then.

I spent almost a decade dealing with many of those close to me and those who were in what we now call a "friend group" being pulled into a tight orbit of the Orthodox faith, many of them converting. Looking back now, I realize that I had the benefit of a long "rejection" of Orthodoxy drawn out over years. And then, as I watched my converting friends change before my very eyes, becoming what I could only call "true Christians", I felt that pull start to grow in myself. Despite myself, I began to want what they had as lovers of Orthodoxy (or better: as lovers of Christ who were being matured in the Orthodox faith).

You see, I was a faithful Evangelical at that time, and had been pretty much all of my life. I did not feel discontent as an Evangelical. I loved my pastor and my church family. But I could not deny the fact that my fellow evangelical friends who were becoming Orthodox converts had something that I did not have. I wanted what they had, but I did not want to have to become Orthodox to get it.

And so my love affair with Christ in His Church truly, finally began, despite myself.

It was a ten-year struggle before I was willing to cross the threshold of an Orthodox church and finally witness a service (Great Vespers on a Saturday evening as it turns out). When I think about it now, nearly a quarter of a century later, I can still feel that nervous tightness in my throat, remembering walking into St Timothy Orthodox Church in Toccoa, Georgia. I was like a man afraid of heights who has proposed to step out onto a high wire and walk across into empty space with no safety net. As I walked into the church, I had tempting thoughts and fears pummeling me, making me feel as if I was betraying my church and my pastor. I had doubts and confusion swirling in my mind.

If I knew then what I know now about the work of demons and the thoughts (*logismoi*) that assail us in such blessed moments, I would have relaxed a bit more. But I had the strange feeling I was on enemy territory: and I was the enemy, as it turned out. As Great Vespers began and continued, much to my shock and surprise, I had the sensation of being born again. All the last walls had been breached that had withstood the decade-long season of unintended searching and the gentle compelling by God to seek His fullness in this place and within these people, His Church. Or rather, I guess, I finally opened the door and walked into the Light.

Fast forward from 2004 to 2026. I've been an Orthodox Christian for all of this time after my decade-long period of reluctant blindness. I've been an Orthodox priest for 14 years of that time.

And now, we are seeing waves of inquirers pouring into many of our churches, with a shocking number of them eager to be made catechumens almost from the first visit. The question of the jailer in Acts, "What must I do to be saved?" comes to mind. And most (maybe nearly all of them) have had only the briefest of encounters with the Orthodox Church, Orthodox teaching, Orthodox Tradition, and the "mind of the Church" as it is understood from the fullness and perfection of the Orthodox Christian *phronema*. Most have found Orthodoxy online, which is sharp, two-edged sword that often inures the one who uses it.

I was so fortunate: I had that long, long series of years to work through what so many people who come to the Orthodox faith must work through "on the job", so to speak. And I did it almost entirely without the internet to "help" me! These inquirers become Orthodox in the excitement and innocence of a newborn child in the faith, as we all do, but they too often have not had enough time to digest the implications of this *conversion*. I was speaking to a potential convert recently about this term *conversion*, which they found a bit repugnant, and I stressed that — even though one has been a Christian of some sort all one's life, as I had been — becoming Orthodox is such a radical change that even the most

pious, most holy, most Christ-like person from any heterodox Christian group (I hesitate to say “church” in this instance) will need to undergo this true “conversion”. We are not merely moving allegiances or rearranging the spiritual furniture. We are rebuilding the house. We are changing our citizenship. We are becoming human.

It is true that (in some cases) some of what we bring with us into the Orthodox Church can be blessed by the Church. But I have found over time that even the best of what I had to offer from my Evangelical days still needed to be washed in the waters of baptism and anointed by the blessed oil of my chrismation into the one, true Church. Perhaps I am phrasing this poorly, but I hope that what I am intending to say here is understood.

This being said, I embraced *conversion* with both hands and I still seek the joy that comes from taking whatever thoughts come to my mind and allowing Christ to conform them to His Body, the Church.

This essay is intended to talk about the wave of articles and online postings regarding the subject of converts to Orthodoxy experiencing “burnout”: that feeling one gets after such a brief time within the walls of the Orthodox Church, in which one seems to feel a betrayal of the joy you felt when you (the novice in the Faith) began this journey into Reality itself.

Questions assail the neophyte Christian: Where did my first love go? Why do I feel so resentful, so reluctant and so put-out these days after becoming Orthodox? Shouldn't this sort of thing be behind me now?

Like I said, my “mostly-intentional-self-inflicted-decade-of-delusion” before becoming Orthodox ended up being well spent. I remember at the end of my losing battle against the Church I was listening to Fr Thomas Hopko speaking on some subject or other (it probably didn't matter what the subject was, since all of Fr Thomas' talks were essentially the same and equally excellent). He mentioned that *everyone* who is an Orthodox Christian—whether adult convert or “cradle” baptized at birth—will at some point “hit the wall”. That is, to summarize his long talk on this subject, every single one of us will experience that moment of burnout. And how we face it and how we determine to accept it and “absorb” it into our lives is crucially important. It is a part of the maturing process of every Orthodox Christian.

His words sunk deeply into me as I listened. But I could not understand what he meant by “hitting the wall”... until I hit it (and I did: hard). I struck the wall while speeding along in the glory of one Holy Week, running head long into the arrogance and sinfulness of *another* Orthodox Christian. I was despondent,

seeing suddenly the sinfulness of another person revealed to me *within the fold of the Orthodox Church*. I only say this to explain the most basic details of my own particular “wall”. Fr Thomas said that for everyone, the “wall” we will all hit will at least be the experience of each one of us eventually “souring” on the Church and this new life we have converted into in some way. He said something like this: we will go to church and feel like hearing one more “Lord Have Mercy” will make us want to puke. Our frustration with ourselves, each other and the *perceived* flaws of the Church will grow in us to such an extent that we will be legitimately tempted to run away, to isolate ourselves, to become our own Church and our own Pope (once again) and our own God. We will be utterly convinced that we have gotten worse since becoming Orthodox, or (even worse) that the Church has failed us, and not the other way around.

True maturity in the faith would see this situation through clear vision, but when one is still new to the faith, we don't see things so clearly, and we need the encouragement necessary to continue in the Faith and not give up.

And, Fr Tom says even now, we must both *accept* this situation as a part of growing and maturing as a Christian, and we must *overcome* the temptation as a mature Christian would by means of humility and faithfulness to Christ. This (of course) is a vastly overly brief summary of how we are meant to survive our first wall-crash in the Orthodox faith. But the key here is the word “faith”: it means an active choice. It means a working out of one's salvation without losing one's conversion and one's hard-won convictions. It means self-denial and a radical rejection of self-righteous indignation. And these are the true temptations one has once one has fought his first fight with the devil and emerged victorious: spiritual arrogance, pride, prelest, delusion, disobedience and a rebellious heart. All of these are the rewards for one who encounters “the wall” and then (by his own sinful rebellion) refuses the healing that comes from accepting the struggle God has sent him for his own salvation.

Burnout is (I think) basically unavoidable. There really is a 100% chance of experiencing it when we convert, though each person's experience of it will be different. That moment of experiencing hitting Fr Tom's “wall” or feeling the loss of joy that you once had when you first converted or that sour taste of the bile of Orthodox burnout is one of the first hints that you are actually, truly, really, finally growing as an Orthodox Christian.

This seems so counterintuitive to us that many rebel against it and began to cry out like the Israelites in the desert: *why did you drag me out here into this place? I was better off as a slave back in Egypt!* As a pastor, I counsel everyone that when they are feeling this sort of frustration, this dryness and this spiritual irritation, it means that they are growing. But this is hard to hear.

In fact, the one phrase that gets my new converts so angry at me, specifically, is when they come to me in tears and anger over the way that their lives seem to be going and I say, "It's going to be OK. You are OK. This is a good sign."

Oh, do they hate this! And I have seen this in essays written by practically new-born Orthodox recently, railing against these frustrations, as if they were old soldiers of the Faith, when what they really need is to have their diapers changed, to be fed a warm bottle of milk, and then tucked into bed.

Becoming a mature Orthodox Christian who is not tossed by every wave one encounters (and you will encounter MANY waves in your lifetime after your conversion) takes time and it takes having a priest in your life who prays for you, endures you and cares for you. It also takes you, the new convert, being willing to be led and taught and corrected and willing to trust a trustworthy guide.

You converted and became Orthodox? That is the best kind of news! Glory to God! Now: go pick up a broom and start sweeping the church building. Or, better yet, go sit down and talk to that old lady or that strange young man at church who no one will talk to. And after that, make a humble, open confession with your priest, and accept his guidance, trusting God to protect you. And then, once you have denied yourself and picked up your broom-shaped cross, you may return to your theological musings and read a few pages of a book that isn't the Bible (which you should be reading far more than any other thing). And stop skipping church services! How do you expect to make Christ the center of your life while you reject His instruction to gather in worship in the presence of other struggling believers?

Did I mention that Internet Orthodoxy is usually toxic to those who are new in the Faith? It is. Very. And you must detox rapidly, lest you hit that wall we have been speaking of at such a high rate of speed that it kills you and your soul. You can go back online later, once you have been properly inoculated.

We must acquire the mind of Christ and we must do this within the context of acquiring the mind of the Church. We can only achieve this essential necessity through humility, and humility must be cultivated over time. Time, time, time. Without it and without a faithful willingness to be one who "endures to the end", our burnout will kill us. It will convince us that all of this conversion business was not only a mistake, but it will mask devilish deception in a cloak of truth so convincing, that we will forget why we came to this place—the one, true Church, which is the Orthodox Church—in the first place. If we let him do it, the Evil One will gently lead us out the door of the place of our salvation and then lead us out into the empty places and wastelands of our

heart, and then into a cleverly constructed imitation of the Church. It will be a wax-work dummy by comparison, but by this point (if we fall into the hands of our own self-delusion and faithlessness) our spiritual eyesight will be so poor that we won't be able to tell the difference between a living man and a rotting corpse.

Burnout for the new (and old) convert is real, and we should expect it. But this knowledge forewarns us and forearms us, so to speak. Knowing to expect this is more than half of the battle. It is what saved me when I hit the wall, and realizing that God allowed this so that I might mature, moving from spiritual milk to meat, was enheartening. We don't need to fear it, but we do need to recognize it.

And when your priest tells you that it is going to be OK, and that this is just a part of your growth in Christ, *believe him* and don't become some sort of spiritual brat. He has been there and he knows. And, more crucially, you need to draw on the experience of those older in the faith, weathered by years of hitting different "walls" and coming away from each encounter with new wisdom and a renewed humility and trust in Christ.

Take all of this for what it is worth. I offer my experience hoping to encourage those new to Orthodoxy to slow down and try to smell the incense for a bit. Don't get lost in your heads, dozing and dreaming and resentful, but rather get to work and pray and offer to help those around you. Talk less and listen more to the Lord working through those more experienced around you (we all have those sort of people around us, no matter how mature we are in the faith!). We may have differences with those of the older generations, but their lived experience of the faith should not be overlooked simply because we are younger and "know better". Show some humility and realize that where they are today, you will be tomorrow: "Gen Whatever", a bunch of old fogies. Did I mention picking up a broom and sweeping the church building? This is actually my best advice. Just shut up with all the theological and philosophical yapping and do some sweeping. God will speak to you there, and the contentment that pours out of simple moments like those spent in the humble act of serving Christ, broom in hand, cannot be underestimated.

Don't give up and never surrender to the temptations that will inevitably come. May God bless our humble efforts. And when Christ returns, may He find us ready, broom in hand, faithful to the end.

Fr. James Bozeman is the Proistamenos of St. James Orthodox Church (OCA) in Beaufort, SC.

“You only need one like.” ~God

About three years ago, I gave a sermon about the pressures of social media, particularly the pressure to get “likes.” I commented that at the end of the day, we only need one like, and that is from God. And so the phrase was born,

“You only need one like.” ~God

Someone suggested that I trademark this phrase, and after some research, I found there was no trademark on this phrase, so I went ahead and trademarked it. Three years later, there is a website, www.youonlyneedlike.com, on which you can find various items such as t-shirts, sweatshirts, hoodies, coffee cups, tote bags, keychains and hats, all bearing this phrase. They are available in multiple sizes and colors.



ALL PROCEEDS FROM THIS VENTURE WILL GO TO CHARITABLE CAUSES

After a lot of thought and prayer, I have decided that any proceeds made from this venture will go to charity. This cause may generate a lot of money or may generate hardly any. That is not known now. However, from the outset, I want to commit that I will not take any income from this venture. Any profits will be earmarked as follows:

49% will go towards Arise & Build, until the project is completed

51%, the majority, will go toward non-Orthodox Charities.

25% will go to Smile Train (which provides surgeries for cleft palate patients)

26% will go to cancer research

Please consider supporting this endeavor, helping to get an important message out, and supporting charities in the process.

PARISH REGISTRY

CHRISMATION—Carter (Demetrios) Todd, was chrismated on Saturday, August 8. Karterios Lenardos was the sponsor. Congratulations!

FUNERAL—Maria Jaskiel, fell asleep in the Lord on Wednesday, July 15. Her funeral was on Tuesday, July 21. May her memory be eternal!

FUNERAL—Fr. Ron Kovac, a priest of the Carpatho-Russian Metropolis, passed away and his funeral was held at St. John on Thursday, August 13. May his memory be eternal!

CONDOLENCES to Christine Scourtes, on the passing of her son, Jimmy Reader, and to all the Reader family. May his memory be eternal!

CONDOLENCES to Rudy Reynoso and family on the passing of his grandfather, Rafael Martinez, on July 28. May his memory be eternal!

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

Orthodoxy 101

BEGINS IN SEPTEMBER & OFFERED BY
FR. STAVROS N. AKROTIRIANAKIS, PARISH PRIEST

WHY SHOULD I ATTEND ORTHODOXY 101?

- INTERFAITH COUPLES. THIS WILL HELP THE NON-ORTHODOX PERSON UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON IN OUR CHURCH.
- ANYONE WHO IS CONSIDERING JOINING OUR CHURCH. THIS CLASS IS A REQUIREMENT FOR THOSE WHO WISH TO JOIN OUR ORTHODOX FAITH.
- NEW CONVERTS TO ORTHODOXY WHO RECENTLY JOINED OUR CHURCH AND WHO WANT TO KNOW A LITTLE BIT MORE.
- ANYONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE BASICS OF OUR FAITH, OR WHO WANTS A REFRESHER

WHAT FORMAT CAN I EXPECT?

A RELAXED ATMOSPHERE WITH PRESENTATIONS, INTERACTIVE DISCUSSIONS, AND LOTS OF TIME FOR QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

CLASSES WILL BE HELD FROM 6:30-8:30 P.M. IN THE CHURCH SANCTUARY.

WHEN WILL THE CLASSES BE HELD?

- MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14 - A TOUR OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH, WHAT WE SEE AND WHAT IT MEANS
- MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21 - INTRODUCTION TO THE SACRAMENTS. BAPTISM, CHRISMATION, CONFESSI ON, MARRIAGE, UNCTION
- MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 28 - THE DIVINE LITURGY- "TEACHING" LITURGY
- MONDAY, OCTOBER 5 - ORTHODOX TRADITIONS- FASTING, ICONS, PRAYER AND LIVING AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN LIFE

Please sign up using the QR code:
There is no charge for this class.



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

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS: SEPT 2026



Welcome to Sunday School

What a blessing it was to welcome back our Sunday School students on Aug 16th. We had a wonderful first day and enjoyed reconnecting with our returning students and getting to know our new students. Our ministry is 170 members strong and fully funded thanks to your Stewardship. Registration will continue this month, it's not too late to join us!

Registration is Open

Online Registration is still open! Please refer to the Friday weekly Sunday School email for the link to register or email Zackiec@yahoo.com if you are not on our email distribution list.

This Month's Topics

Sept 6 No Class/ Labor Day
Sept 13 Sign of/ Holy Cross
Sept 20 The Lords Prayer
Sept 27 The Creed- Youth Sunday

Our Sunday School Purpose

Our Sunday School exists to serve both parents and children. We serve parents by coming alongside them in their effort to teach their children about our Orthodox Faith with the love for the Lord and a heart to serve Him.

We serve children by providing a safe and enjoyable environment where the Word of God is taught faithfully and Christ is exalted.

Success in Sunday School

STUDENTS:

- Get to class on time
- Be respectful
- Be kind
- Come ready to learn
- Be helpful
- Participate
- Be ready for God's Spirit



FAMILIES:

- Attend Divine Liturgy every week as a family
- Arrive on time at 10am
- Pray as a family
- Follow up and discuss the lesson with your kids

PARENTS:

- Encourage independence and drop off quickly in classroom
- Return to church for the sermon
- Limit early pick ups. Sunday School ends at noon
- 3rd grade and younger, pick up your children on time

Ministry Connections

Sunday School is hosting the community coffee hour on **Sept 27th**. Please drop off a sharable item and let us know if you can assist with set-up, service or clean- up. We look forward to having a cup of coffee with you!

Contact



Look for our Sunday School email every Friday afternoon for weekly updates. Please let us know if there is any specific way we may better serve you and your child during their time in Sunday School.

Zackie Ameres -Phone: 813.245.3813
-Email: Zackiec@yahoo.com

YAL METROPOLIS OF ATLANTA CONFERENCE OCTOBER 9-12, 2026



The Metropolis of Atlanta is thrilled to announce the return of our YAL Conference! Young adults ages 18–35 are invited to join us in **Tampa Bay** for an unforgettable weekend of worship, fellowship, and inspiration.

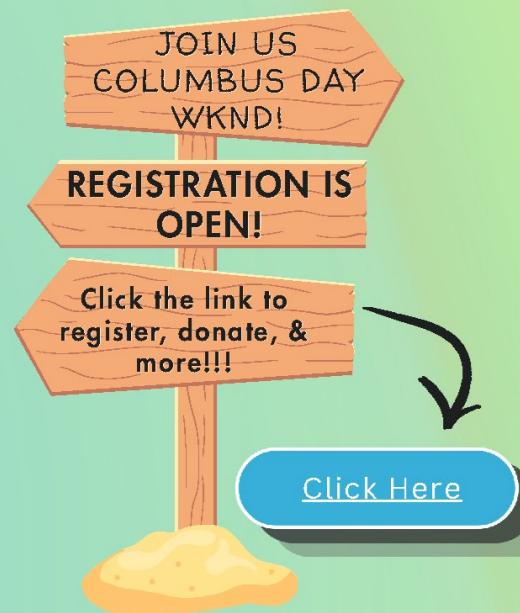
Come connect with other young adults, deepen your faith, and leave feeling refreshed and renewed as we focus on living lives anchored in Christ.

*If you have any questions, please email:
yalatlantconference1@gmail.com*

PRICING

EARLY BIRD	\$330
REGULAR	\$370
GREEK TIME	\$390

 Follow us @yalatlconference





DONATE BLOOD

St. John's Greek Orthodox Church
Sunday, October 18
 11:00 AM - 3:00 PM

All donors receive*:

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

Fact: Small Act. Big Impact.



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

ID REQUIRED

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

Donors
Receive



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Share your power.



YOUTH WORKER TRAINING SEMINAR

WHEN: Saturday, September 12 from 9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

WHERE: St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church,
 2418 Swann Avenue, Tampa

WHO: GOYA Advisors, JOY/HOPE Advisors, Sunday School teachers, Older GOYAns (10-12th grade), anyone who works with youth

LED BY: Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis

COST: NONE

WHY: To learn more about how to impart the Gospel of Jesus Christ to our youth in ways that are safe, fun and meaningful

LUNCH: Included

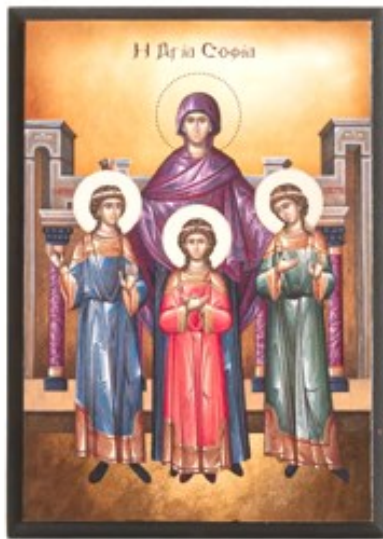
AGENDA: Learn how to lead an icebreaker, discussion and best practices of working with youth

RSVP to Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com by Tuesday, September 8

Questions: Call Fr. Stavros at 813-394-1038



YOUNG AT HEART



Young at Heart September Gathering

September 19, 2026
1pm to 3pm

Join us for our monthly gathering on the
19th as we meet
for a catered lunch followed by a video
presentation on

St. Sophia and her daughters

who are commemorated on September 17th

Look for more information in upcoming Sunday bulletins or
contact Presvytera Denise.



Young at Heart August Gathering

Thank you to everyone who joined us on Saturday,
August 15th

for the Commemoration of

The Dormition of our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary

Fr. Stavros and Fr. John con-celebrated
Orthros and Divine Liturgy. Afterwards, a
luncheon hosted by Young at Heart was
enjoyed by all attending the service.
A brief video presentation explaining the
icon of the feast was presented as well.



‘Most Holy Theotokos, Intercede for Us’

NURSING MINISTRY

CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Childhood obesity is a tender and important concern that touches the lives of many children and families. As a church family, we are invited to respond not with judgment or worry, but with Christ-like compassion, gentle encouragement, and steady support. In every child, we see a beloved creation of God—deeply valued, deeply loved, and worthy of care, dignity, and grace.

The statistics are concerning:

- More than 1 in 5 U.S. children and adolescents ages 2–19 have obesity.
- About 7% have severe obesity, while another 15% are overweight.
- Among adolescents ages 12–19, nearly 1 in 4 has obesity.

Rather than focusing on numbers alone, we gently acknowledge that some children today are facing health challenges that can be influenced by many different factors. These may include daily routines, access to nourishing foods, opportunities for activity, sleep patterns, genetics, and the environments in which children are growing and learning. This reminds us that every family's journey is unique, and that understanding, patience, and support are so important.

Small steps offered with love, can make a Big difference:

In a spirit of kindness rather than pressure, children can be gently encouraged toward small, life-giving habits that support their well-being:

- **Choose water often** as a simple and refreshing way to care for the body.
- **Enjoy fruits and vegetables** as part of meals and snacks, appreciating the beauty and variety of God's creation.
- **Include more wholesome foods, when possible**, such as whole grains, lean proteins, nuts, yogurt, and less processed options.
- **Move and play each day**, whether through walking, biking, dancing, sports, or joyful outdoor activity, celebrating the gift of a body that can move and explore.
- **Create gentle rhythms around screens**, making space for rest, conversation, creativity, and connection.
- **Honor the importance of sleep**, recognizing it as part of God's design for restoration, peace, and renewal.
- **Practice mindful eating**, slowing down and listening with care to the body's natural signals of hunger and fullness.
- **Share healthy habits as a family**, remembering that children are most shaped by love, example, and togetherness.
- **Embrace progress with patience and grace**, trusting that small, steady steps over time can gently support lasting well-being.

Creating a Healthier Coffee Hour:

Our church gatherings, including coffee hour, are beautiful moments of fellowship, warmth, and care. They also offer a gentle opportunity to reflect our shared values of hospitality, stewardship, and love in the foods we provide.

With gratitude for all who contribute, we can slowly and thoughtfully include more nourishing options alongside traditional treats. Some healthy options include;

- ⇒ Fresh fruit
- ⇒ vegetables with hummus
- ⇒ yogurt
- ⇒ Nuts
- ⇒ Whole-grain choices

This is not about limitation or removing joy, but about **hospitality with intention and care**—ensuring that all children and families feel welcomed and supported in body as well as spirit. In this way, we quietly model that health is not about perfection, but about honoring the bodies God has lovingly entrusted to us.

Above all, no child should ever feel shame about their body or health. In Christ's love, we are called to lift one another up with gentleness, patience, and grace.

TWELVE DISCIPLES PROJECT

The 12 Disciples Ministry in Honor of Mathew Balasis

What is 12D?

This ministry is simple. We pray.

Know someone that needs prayers?

Visit this link, add their first name and we pray for them:
stjohntpa.org/PrayerRequest

Want to join?

It takes 5 minutes per day. Send an email to 12D@stjohntpa.org



BOOKSTORE & GIFT SHOP



[This Photo](#) by Unknown

Our store offers a full line of books and gifts for your entire family:

- Orthodox Study Bibles and Bibles for children of all ages
 - Icons for your home prayer corner
 - Incense burners, charcoal, and incense
 - Books on the Saints for you and your children
 - Prayer ropes and prayer bracelets in all sizes
 - Crosses and jewelry
- And Much More!

Stop in Soon – open every Sunday following Divine Liturgy

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Love thy Neighbor through our Monthly Community Outreach

We have the privilege to help serve the needs of our homeless community in East Tampa on the 3rd Saturday of each month. We partner with Matthew 25 (a local Charity), Metropolitan Ministries and USF to serve breakfast, provide clothing and medical needs for our guests.

Our next dates are: 9/15, 10/13, 11/17.

What to expect: A rewarding experience and we welcome new volunteers!

To Volunteer: [Click Here](#), (link below) or scan our QR code to access our Signup Genius - <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0F48A5A62DA3F49-community1/8067245#/>

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

Time: 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

Questions on Arrival: Look for Matthew 25 founders, Peggy & Mike Kanter or Greg & Victoria Melton, our dedicated parishioners that organize this ministry. They can help answer any questions or if you need direction when you arrive.

You may also call Greg directly at 813-967-2074.

'Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men' Colossians 3:23



PARISH ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church together with BayCare Behavioral Health, will provide our parishioners access to **free and confidential** counseling services - offering additional support when life's challenges become overwhelming. The PAP utilizes a network of faith-based providers that are sensitive to the values and beliefs of those they serve and provide compassionate care to children, adults, parents, and seniors. Parishioners can confidentially contact BayCare directly to request up to three free counseling sessions from a licensed mental health professional. **The BayCare helpline, 800-878-5470, is answered 24/7** by mental health professionals. Many BayCare therapists are also offering telephonic and virtual counseling sessions to help parishioners maintain their emotional wellbeing during these trying times.

Help is available for life issues including:

- 1) Stress
- 2) Anxiety
- 3) Depression
- 4) Family discord
- 5) Marital problems
- 6) Substance abuse issues
- 7) Behavioral issues



The service is completely confidential between parishioner and a Baycare Christian Therapist

DAUGHTERS OF PENELOPE

Alcmaeon #167 Tampa

AHEPA Supreme Convention – Philadelphia

Our President, Ourania Stephanides, proudly represented our chapter at the AHEPA 104th Annual Supreme Convention, held in Philadelphia July 26-31, 2026. It was a wonderfully successful gathering filled with fellowship, reconnecting with friends from across the country, and forming new bonds within our AHEPA family.



AHEPA 104th Annual Convention



"Erase the Need" Collection

"Erase the Need" School Supply Collection

In partnership with **Philoptochos**, the Daughters collected school supplies to support students in need. We extend heartfelt gratitude to the generous members of **Philoptochos**, the **Daughters of Penelope**, and our church community. All donations support the **Hillsborough Education Foundation's "Erase the Need" initiative**, providing essential materials to local students. This collaboration is a beautiful expression of compassion and service – another successful project that strengthens our community. If you missed the deadline and still wish to contribute, please visit <https://educationfoundation.com>

Upcoming Activities

- **Walk to End Alzheimer's – Saturday, October 17, 2026** The Daughters are preparing for our annual walk to end Alzheimer's, taking place on **Saturday, October 17, 2026**, at **Benchmark International Arena** in downtown Tampa. This meaningful event supports Alzheimer's care, research, and awareness – an effort close to our hearts.
- **YiaYia's Table – December, 2026** We are also beginning our **brainstorming and crafting sessions** for the beloved **YiaYia's Table**, where handmade, vintage and new items will be available to support our scholarship efforts.

Join the Daughters of Penelope

We warmly welcome new members who wish to share in fellowship, service, and Hellenic values. **Membership Contacts: Maria Zabetakis**, Vice President & Membership Chair – maria1106@live.com **Ourania Stephanides**, President – stephanides.ourania@gmail.com Please visit the national website for more information about the Daughters of Penelope: www.DaughtersofPenelope.org.

DANCE GROUP

Y Hara Mas (3rd-6th Grades) Greek Folk Dance Group

Greek folk dance practices for our youth in grades 3rd through 6th will start on Sunday, September 13, at 12:15pm -12:45pm in the Kourmoulis Center (during coffee hour). We will meet and practice in front of the stage. Practices will continue every Sunday until the Greek Festival on November 6 and 7. Feel free to contact Maraquet Edquid (813-422-8963) with any questions. OPA!

CHOIR

TIME TO JOIN THE CHOIR!

September is a great time to join the St John Chancel Choir!

We will be busy preparing for all our fall holidays, culminating with our Advent and Christmas Celebrations.

If you have ever been in a choir, or played piano or other instrument, if you read music or just enjoy singing, the St. John Choir might be for you!

We have rehearsal at 7:30 on Wednesday evenings and meet for warm-ups on Sunday mornings at 9:15. We sing every Sunday for the Liturgy and for special occasions.



*Members of St. John's Choir
at the Summer Conference
with Chris Kypros*

Interested in joining the Choir? For more information, please email me (tswartzbaugh@ut.edu) or text me at 813-313-0439. See you in Choir!

COLLEGE STUDENT OUTREACH

**Attention College Students-
WE NEED YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION—**

We want to stay in touch with our college students this upcoming school year. Please scan this QR code and send us your contact information. Thank you.

**2026-2027
College Student
Contact
Information**

*Please scan the QR code to go directly to a
google form!*



FOOD PANTRY

Thank you to everyone who has supported our Food Pantry through your generous donations. Because of your kindness, we continue to replenish our inventory, keeping our shelves stocked and ready to serve both our parish family and local outreach ministries whenever a need arises.

As our supplies are shared, our shelves need to be replenished on an ongoing basis. **Large or small, every donation is appreciated and makes a meaningful difference.**

Did You Know? In addition to assisting members of our parish family and local requests, we also support our Community Outreach Ministry by providing a tray of grab-and-go snacks for those in need. Your donations help ensure we are always ready to share Christ's love through this ministry.

Monetary donations or grocery gift cards are also welcome and help us purchase the items needed most throughout the year.

Donations may be placed in the Food Pantry collection area. **Questions?** Please contact **Sandra Pappas** at **813-785-3747**.

Requested Food Pantry Items

*Please be mindful of expiration dates. **Bolded items indicate our greatest current needs.***

- **Grab-and-Go Snacks**
- **Easy Meals with Pull-Top Lids or Pouches** (soups, pasta, chili, ravioli, tuna or chicken pouches, etc.)
- **Peanut Butter** (*plastic jars only*)
- **Individual Hygiene Items** (toothbrushes, toothpaste, deodorant, soap, shampoo, tissues, etc.)
- **Granola Bars**
- **Canned Meat** (tuna, chicken, Spam)
- **Canned Fruits & Vegetables**
- Canned or Dried Beans
- Cereal / Shelf-Stable Milk
- Instant Mashed Potatoes
- **Jell-O / Pudding**
- **Macaroni & Cheese**
- **Oatmeal**
- **Pasta & Ramen Noodles**
- **Rice**
- **Soup** (cans or ready-to-go varieties)
- **Spaghetti Sauce** (*no glass jars*)
- **Dry Goods**
- **Paper Towels / Toilet Paper**



KITCHEN (PLUS) TIDY TEAM

Our Kitchen (Plus) Tidy Team may be small, but they faithfully care for one of the busiest spaces in our parish. Month after month, this dedicated group gives of their time and talents to clean, organize, and prepare our kitchen and community spaces for the many ministries, fellowship events, and gatherings that take place throughout the year.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who serves in this quiet but important ministry. Your efforts may often happen behind the scenes, but they are truly appreciated and make a lasting difference.

Would you consider joining us? Whether you can help for an hour or stay for the morning, every helping hand is welcome. It's a wonderful way to practice stewardship, enjoy fellowship, and care for the parish home God has entrusted to us.

NEXT KITCHEN (PLUS) TIDY DAY

Tentatively planned for Wednesday, September 30

Please watch the weekly bulletin for confirmation of the date and time, as they may vary based on the parish calendar.

For more information, please contact: Sandra Pappas 813-785-3747

ADULT GREEK SCHOOL

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



Teacher born, raised, and educated in Greece with 28 years of experience teaching the Greek language. Adult classes for beginners taught @ St. John Greek Orthodox Church (2418 W. Swann Ave, Tampa, FL 33609). Classes are held at 12:30-3:00pm on Saturday afternoon, starting on September 12, 2026. This will be the first of three sessions, with each session lasting three months.

- Speak Greek
- Read Greek
- Write Greek
- Basic Grammar & more.
- Some Greek History
- BOOK INCLUDED IN PRICE

*Price per session is \$125 for church members and \$150 for non-members
Contact Ms. Magdalini Myer: at (813) 523-5771, aspis69@aol.com
or the church office at (813) 876-8830*

THE SCHOOL OF GREEK LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IS BEGINNING AGAIN

On **Saturday, September 12th** the School of Greek Language and Culture will start its lessons again for the new school year.

The registrations will take place at 12 pm of that day and the lessons will start at 1:00 pm. We are very proud to announce that all ten candidates from our school passed the Ellinomatheia Test last May and they are getting the Diploma of Ellinomatheia in several levels (A1, A2 and B1).

The A2 level diplomas give three (3) College credits and the B1 level diplomas give five (5) College credits.

This is the third year our students take the Ellinomatheia Test and our school has 100% success on it (23 students took the diplomas until now)!

We are all excited for the upcoming school year to continue our amazing journey to Greek Language and Culture.

Best Regards
Yannis Giavaras
Director of the School
of Greek Language and Culture

Our website is: greekshooloftampa.org



THE PRAYER TEAM

For over 11 years now, Fr. Stavros has been writing a daily reflection called "The Prayer Team." It comes out every morning at 12:30 a.m. via Constant Contact. From Monday-Friday, Father will be writing on the topic of "**Called to Love**" and on Saturday-Sunday, Father is writing on the Scripture passages of each Sunday. There are **5,586** people on the Prayer Team.

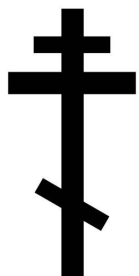


INTERESTED IN JOINING THE PRAYER TEAM?

Over 5,586 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 10 years! Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email our office at **office@stjohntpa.org** and ask to be added. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email the office or follow the link at the bottom of the daily emails to do so. If you want to forward to a friend, please use the "forward to a friend" option. Also, make sure prayerteam365@gmail.com has been added to your contacts so that these emails stay in your Inbox rather than going to the Junk or Spam folders.

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

MEMORIAL & KOLYVA PROTOCOL



1. Memorial Services **MUST** be scheduled through the church office at least two weeks in advance of when you want the service.
2. Memorial services for 40 days and one year will be done on the Sunday closest to the appropriate date. All other memorials will be done on the designated Memorial Sunday each month.
3. Please let the office know when you call or email whether you will be providing your own kolyva or whether you wish for the Philoptochos to provide. If a family chooses to make their own Kolyva, the family will be responsible for scooping the Kolyva in the kitchen after the Memorial Service to share with the entire community.
4. If the Philoptochos does the kolyva, there is a \$125 charge for this service-checks may be made payable to "St. John Philoptochos."
5. Also, please send the church office all of the names you wish to have commemorated at the memorial service, and how many pews, if any, you would like reserved for your family.

In our effort to support efforts for improved mental health, our parish is proud to support the 988 suicide hotline. Spread the word and you might help save a life!



Have questions?

Just need to talk? Worried? Sad? Happy?

We are here for you!



Fr. Stavros
< 813-394-1038

Fr. John
678-637-4425>



OPT-IN ON THE MESSENGER

*In an effort to be more environmentally conscious, we will be mailing **The Messenger** **ONLY** to those who ask. If you wish to receive **The Messenger** by mail, you certainly may. We just ask that you indicate on your stewardship form, or let the office know, that you wish to receive **The Messenger** by mail. We will no longer be mailing **The Messenger** unless you ask us to.*

Follow Us on Social Media



St. John the Baptist



Let's Get Connected for Our Latest News & Updates



on Flickr

@<https://www.flickr.com/photos/stjohngoctampa>



on Facebook

@<https://www.facebook.com/StJohnGOCTampa/>



on Instagram @stjohntpa

stjohntpa.org

2418 W. Swann Avenue
Tampa, FL 33609

(813)876-8830

St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

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

You can find our page at StJohnGOCTampa.



We Are Live

Our services are live streamed through our church website.

<https://stjohntpa.org/live/>

Youtube

Subscribe and turn on notifications so you don't miss a sermon, weekly update, or Bible study.

<https://www.youtube.com/@st.johnthebaptistgoctampa5658>

Beware of Emails or Text Messages Asking for Gift Cards



This is a common and very scary thing that is happening. People who are impersonating as Fr. Stavros have been emailing people and asking them to buy gift cards, scratch off the back to reveal the code, take pictures of the code and email them the pictures. Fr. Stavros would never under any circumstances ask for a gift card via email. If you receive an email like this, please call Fr. Stavros immediately. Many people these days are falling victim to scams like these. Please double check and even triple check any emails or phone calls that ask for money even if it looks real.

Any questions? Please contact the office.

PHOTO GALLERY



Prayer for College Students— August 2, 2026



Prayer for School Students— August 9, 2026



We held a vigil for the 1,400 year anniversary of the Akathist Hymn. The service lasted from 7:00 pm on Friday August 7 until 1:15 am on August 8. About 175 people came for at least part of the vigil. What a wonderful evening of worship.



We had a record 45 young adults at our first meeting of the fall on August 13.



*First day of
Sunday
School—
August 16,
2026*



*We had our
first Goya
meeting of
the fall on
August 16
with 32
Goyans in
attendance.*





*Great Vespers for the Dormition of
Our Most Holy Theotokos—
August 14, 2026*





*Prayer for Sunday School
Teachers— August 18, 2026*



WELCOME TO OUR PARISH

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

PLEASE TEXT THE WORD

"WELCOME" TO 813-790-5950

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

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

Youth Protection Program



GREEK ORTHODOX
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA



Would you like to participate in or help with child/youth programs, events, or activities at our church? If the answer is yes, then you must register, screen, and train through the new Youth Protection platform first.

If you are interested and would like to get started or if you have questions, please contact Suzanne Pileggi at smpileggi1@gmail.com or (813) 244-5855. Thank you!

Thank You to all of Our Friends!

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

Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

Friend of St. John the Baptist:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

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

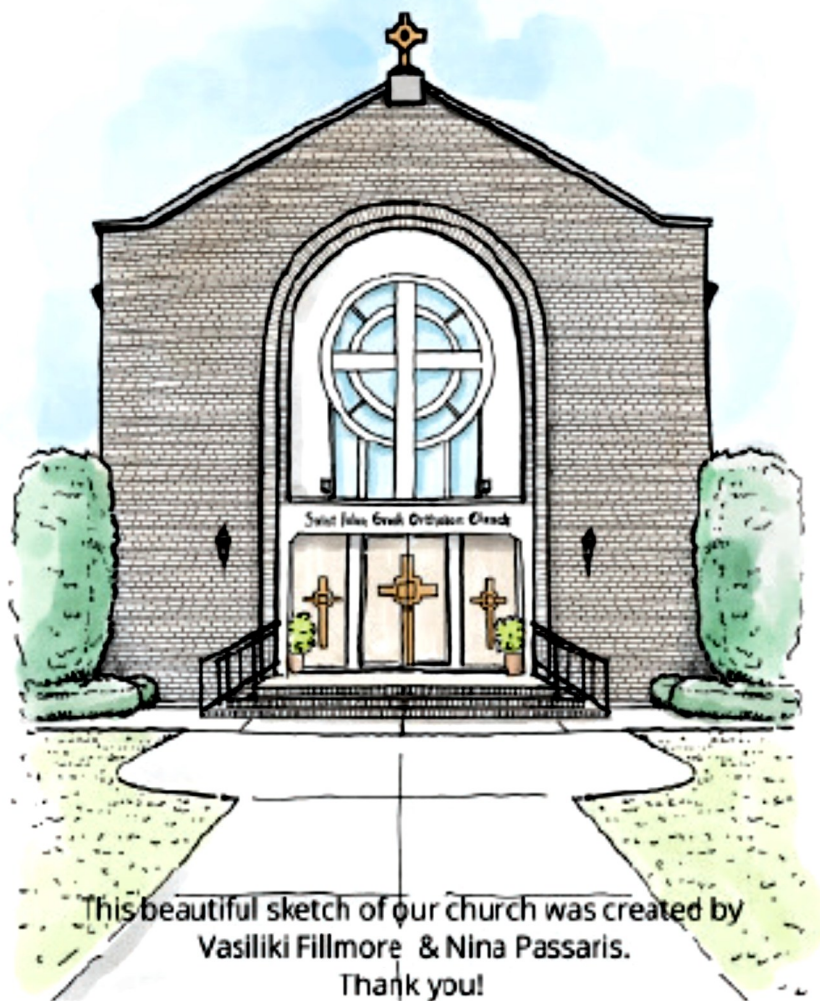
_____ \$50 _____ \$100 _____ \$200 _____ Other

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

September 2026						October ►
► August						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		¹ Beginning of Ecclesiastical Year Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	² Adult Dance Group 7:00 p.m. Choir 7:30p.m.	³ Orthodoxy 201 6:30 p.m.	⁴	⁵
⁶ Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. No Sunday School	⁷ Labor Day Office closed	⁸ Nativity of the Theotokos Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	⁹ Adult Dance Group 7:00 p.m.	¹⁰ Paraklesis 5:30 p.m. Young Adults 7:00 p.m.	¹¹ Remembrance of 9/11 Orthros 8:46 a.m. Liturgy 9:30 a.m..	¹² Youth Worker Training Seminar 9:30-4:30 Adult Greek School Begins 12:30-3:00 p.m. GOYA Senior Lock-in 5:00p.m.
¹³ Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. I Hara Mas Dancing	¹⁴ Holy Cross Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	¹⁵ Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	¹⁶ Adult Dance Group 7:00 p.m. Choir 7:30p.m.	¹⁷ Fr. Stavros at the ARC 9/17-9/19	¹⁸	¹⁹ Adult Greek School Community Outreach YAH 1-3
	Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m.					
²⁰ Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. I Hara Mas Dancing College luncheon GOYA 5:00 p.m.	²¹ Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m.	²² Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	²³ Conception of St. John the Baptist Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Adult Dance Group 7:00 p.m. Choir 7:30p.m.	²⁴	²⁵ Fr. Stavros at the ARC 9/17-9/19	²⁶ Adult Greek School
²⁷ Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Youth Sunday I Hara Mas Dancing Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	²⁸ Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m. Teaching Liturgy	²⁹ Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	³⁰ Adult Dance Group 7:00 p.m. Choir 7:30p.m.			

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX
CHURCH 2418 W. SWANN AVENUE
TAMPA, FL 33609-4712
OFFICE: (813) 876-8830
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OFFICE@STJOHNTPA.ORG
WWW.STJOHNTPA.ORG

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