



ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

— THE MESSENGER —

FEBRUARY 2025



PRESENTATION OF OUR LORD CHRIST TO THE TEMPLE—FEBRUARY 2

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

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



VISION:

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

MISSION:

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

CORE VALUES:

Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

ST. JOHN'S DIRECTORY

Timetable of Services

Sundays: Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Weekdays: Orthos 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Parish Priest Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-876-8830 (Office) 813-394-1038 (Cell) frstav@gmail.com	Bookstore Presbytera Denise Stefero 678-464-4833	Joy Tweens Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963
Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. Stratton Dorozenski 813-876-8830 (Office)	Bible Study-Tuesday Night Fr. John Stefero 678-637-4425	Junior Olympics Dwight Forde 561-310-5034
Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830 (Office) 678-637-4425 (Cell) jwstefero50@hotmail.com	Buildings & Grounds Tony Magos 813-957-3206	Men's Fellowship Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038
Ministry Coordinator/Chanter Maria Xenick Mariapxenick@stjohntpa.org 813-765-3587(Cell)	Choir Tara Swartzbaugh, Director 813-313-0439 Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782 Maria Xenick, Chanter 813-765-3587	Parish Nursing Ministry Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026
Parish Council Alexis Scarfogliero, President 813-892-1599 George Ameres, Vice President 941-720-3494 Marilyn Sandborn, Secretary 813-760-6289 George Chagaris, Treasurer 727-420-1920 Peggy George 813-727-5587 Peter George 781-910-9971 Tony Magos 813-957-3206 Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855 Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026 John Carter 813-376-9196	College Student Program Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038	Oratorical Festival Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374
Arise & Build Expansion Project Mike Xenick, Chair 813-340-8737 Euripides Panos, Vice Chair 813-352-3972	Community Outreach Greg Melton 813-967-2074	Photography Ministry Karina Findlay 813-476-9632
Office Staff Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper debbie@stjohntpa.org 813-443-4899(fax)	Connect Through Christ - Special Needs Ministry for Children Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534	Philoptochos Katherine Sakkis 813-309-1073
Elli Kehagias, Administrative Assistant, office@stjohntpa.org 813-876-8830	Dance Groups HXAPA MΑΣ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668 Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963 ΠΑΡΕΑ, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136 ΠΑΝΗΓΥΡΙ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668	Stewardship George Mitseas 813-748-1220
Adopt a College Student Kathy Kaburis 813-240-6513	Daughters of Penelope Ourania Stephanides 813-546-4711	Sunday School Vickie Peckham 813-758-3102
Adult Greek School Magda Myer 813-523-5771	Festival Mike Xenick 813-340-8737	Usher Pete Trakas 813-505-2193
AHEPA James Sakaris, President 301-529-8857	Finance Committee Gary Ward 813-846-3898	Veterans/1st Responders Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830
Altar Angels Kalliope Chagaris 813-789-4134	Food Pantry Sandra Pappas 813-785-3747	Website / Social Media / APP VOLUNTEER NEEDED!
Altar Boys Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038	Gasparilla Parking Fady Hakim 678-294-7732	Welcoming Ministry Maria Xenick 813-765-3587
	GOYA Michael & Bessie Palios 813-523-0346	Women's Bible Study Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038
	Hope/Joy George & Zackie Ameres 813-245-3813	Young Adult Aris Rogers 813-309-5525
		Young at Heart Dora Morgan 813-613-3738
		Youth Protection Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855
		12 Disciples Theo Panopoulos 248-867-3697



SAVE THE DATE

CAMPAIGN KICKOFF!

Complimentary Luncheon
Sunday, February 23
Noon
Kourmolis Center

Join us for the St. John "ARISE&BUILD" Launch!



ARISE&BUILD
St. John the Baptist
Greek Orthodox Church

Come learn more about:

- The Capital Campaign progress
- Proposed plans for church expansion
- How you can join the Arise & Build campaign

Looking forward to seeing you there!

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRIEST

FEBRUARY WILL BE A HISTORICAL MONTH IN OUR PARISH

Two significant events are taking place in the life of our parish on consecutive weekends at the end of February. On **February 15-16**, we will welcome **His Eminence Metropolitan Sevastianos of Atlanta** to our parish for the first time since his enthronement as Metropolitan of Atlanta. The reason for his visit will be the ordination of **Alex Limberatos**, our former pastoral assistant, to the ranks of Deacon (**February 15**) and Priest (**February 16**). There will be Divine Liturgy on both mornings. The ordination to the Diaconate will take place during the Liturgy on Saturday, February 15 and the ordination to the Priesthood will take place during the Liturgy on Sunday, February 16. Alex will then celebrate his first Divine Liturgy as a priest on Monday, February 17. The following **Sunday, February 23**, we are going to kick-off a Capital Campaign, which we have named "**Arise & Build.**" This month's message is divided into two pieces, the first to discuss the Capital Campaign, and the second to discuss the Sacrament of Ordination, and specifically the ordination of Alex Limberatos, so that those who will be attending have a better understanding of what is going to happen and why.

ARISE & BUILD CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

*All things should be done decently and in order.
I Corinthians 14:40*

-SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND-

In the recent celebration of the Nativity, we again heard the Scripture passage that in the "**fulness of time**" God chose to Incarnate His Son Jesus Christ. Why it happened at the exact time in history that it did is a mystery, known only by God. There were lots of steps between the Fall of mankind and the Incarnation of the Son of God in the flesh. There were what seemed like long pauses without much progress, like 40 years of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. There were 350 long years before the Incarnation when there were no prophetic voices bringing hope to the people and it seemed like God's voice had gone silent. However, in the fulness of time, it all lined up as it did, Christ became Incarnate, walked the earth for 33 years, was crucified and rose from the dead, established the Church, commissioned the Apostles, and now we to this day continue in their footsteps, spreading the word of God, building churches, welcoming new people, and in the case of St. John the Baptist in Tampa, Florida, making an

intentional choice to expand the church and upgrade our facilities so that we can accommodate more people and do an even better job of spreading the Gospel and ministering to others.

-WE HAVE PROCEEDED IN AN ORDERLY FASHION-

We have been transparent in these plans at every step of the way. From the very first Sunday I was here back in September 2004, I said I dreamed that the day would come that we would need to expand our church, that we would have so many people worshipping here that we would need the sanctuary to be enlarged. I even asked a contractor in my first month here whether expansion was even architecturally possible, and he assured me that it was. Throughout my twenty years of ministry in Tampa, I've spoken often about the need to one day expand our church, and the desire to utilize our facilities for full-time ministry unencumbered by a tenant. Over the course of many years, we paid off a **\$2M debt** and put aside money in reserve. The community has grown past the point where we can accommodate everyone who wishes to worship to be seated in the church at the same time. A steady stream of people have moved into our parish over the past twenty years. Some have relocated to Tampa, and in the past year, many have come from other denominations to join ours and this trend is showing no signs of slowing down. The lease with our tenant is coming to an end in June. We've sent surveys to our parishioners in order to gain feedback and assess interest and potential involvement in this project. The results were favorable, both at the prospect of expanding our church and interest in helping make that a reality. We've had renderings drawn which have been shared in the recent issues of The Messenger. We've had a walk through of the proposed ministry building. We've shared our plans extensively with our ministry heads on two occasions. A small committee has been meeting for well over a year and has grown into a larger group with several small subcommittees working under its umbrella.

In late 2024, we submitted renderings and a report to the Architecture Committee of the Metropolis of Atlanta. In early January, members of our committee met with members of the Metropolis Architecture Committee and had a thorough discussion on our intentions, goals and plans for this expansion project. The committee recommended to His Eminence Metropolitan Sevastianos that the project be approved, and on **January 17**, His Eminence gave his approval on the project, a crucial step in this process.

-CAPITAL CAMPAIGN-

A "Capital Campaign" by definition is a process that is done in order to raise funds needed to complete a "capital" project. A Capital Campaign is different than our annual stewardship campaign. Our annual stewardship campaign raises money in order to take care of the yearly financial needs of our parish—personnel, ministry, maintenance. A Capital Campaign is done in order to make improvements to our facilities. It is over and above the stewardship campaign. However, a stewardship campaign happens on a yearly basis. A Capital Campaign is done on a large scale and at infrequent intervals—perhaps once a decade, or once a generation, or maybe even once in a lifetime. We have not had a capital campaign in our parish since 1981, when the Kourmolis Center was built. I've actually never participated in one in my ministry. So this is new territory for almost everyone.



A Capital Campaign always has two things—a vision of something to be accomplished, and a goal for how much is needed to accomplish that. In our case, the vision involves several objectives:

1. Creation of a ministry building to house our church offices and classrooms, which will also be utilized on a full-time basis for ministries that reach our St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox family as well as the local Tampa community in which we live.
2. Expansion of our Church Sanctuary to accommodate up to 500 worshippers, up from the 300 we can currently be able to seat. Additionally, we will be adding a proper narthex, including a bathroom, as well as ADA compliant ramps outside.
3. An upgrade to the Kourmolis Center—improvements will be made especially in the bathrooms and the kitchen, and the building will get an overall facelift.
4. Upgrades to our grounds—We will be adding a covered pavilion, a prayer garden, additional parking, a covered walkway that ties all the buildings together, an upgraded playground for our children, and a makeover of our landscaping, as well as our parking lots, fencing and other things.

THE PROJECT WILL BE DONE IN STAGES:

PHASE ONE

To begin **July 2025**

- ◆ Renovation of the school building into a Ministry Building, which will include a small fellowship hall, offices, classrooms and ministry spaces.

January 2026

- ◆ Relocate offices to the Ministry Building.
- ◆ Demolish the current administration building.
- ◆ Put in temporary parking.
- ◆ Build outdoor pavilion.

By the completion of Phase One, we will have a small fellowship hall, to compensate for the fact that we won't have the Kourmolis Center to function as a social hall while church services are being held in it. We will also have additional parking to compensate for the construction equipment and materials that will be placed on the parking areas near the church. This is why the Ministry Building happens first.

PHASE TWO

Spring 2026

- ◆ Prepare the Kourmolis Center to be used as a Church Sanctuary.
- ◆ **On the Sunday following Pascha**, relocate the furnishings of the church into the Kourmolis Center and begin holding services in the Kourmolis Center.

*The goal is to be back in the church in time for **Holy Week of 2027**, so that we do not have to celebrate Holy Week in the Kourmolis Center.*

PHASE THREE

Spring 2027

- ◆ Once church reopens, do significant upgrades to the Kourmolis Center.
- ◆ Create an outdoor prayer garden.
- ◆ Upgrade the parking lots, fences, landscaping and outdoor spaces.

*The goal is for the project to be finished by **December 31, 2027**.*

PROJECTING THE SCOPE OF WORK AND ESTIMATING THE COST

Just about any project we do in life begins with a concept and by the time the project ends, the concept has changed a little bit, or the path to completion has changed. We have a goal in mind as far as how much we'd like to raise in a Capital Campaign. We also have renderings and concepts that we've presented. As with all projects, we know that the scope of work and potential costs will change, and as we go along, some of our goals may change and we may find opportunities for improvements that we haven't considered yet. We have proceeded with prudence and caution at every step, and our renderings and cost analysis reflects that the concepts may change slightly along the way.



St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
2114 W. Seward Ave., Tampa, FL 33609

QUIET PHASE OF THE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

Successful Capital Campaigns, we have learned, generally begin with a "Quiet Phase" where potential donors are approached and asked to make a pledge (**over 1-3 years**). This serves two purposes. It takes a sampling of the community to make sure that people not only are in favor of the project but are willing to back their opinion with a financial contribution. It gives a gauge of how much the community can potentially raise. Ideally, the Quiet Phase raises 50-60 percent of the goal. If the quiet phase does not get to the 50 percent threshold, the goal may be adjusted down. If the quiet phase exceeds 50-60 percent of the goal, the goal may be adjusted up. The second reason a quiet phase is done is because if the entire goal is revealed right away, there may be some fear and hesitancy on the part of the general community. If the quiet phase is able to raise 50-60 percent of the goal before a public campaign begins, the public campaign can begin with confidence that the goal is attainable since the amount pledged will be more than half of what was needed.

We are in the final stages of the quiet phase. Pledges have been coming in at a steady pace. Once the quiet phase ends, we can adjust the goal appropriately and reveal to everyone the results of the quiet phase and begin the public campaign.

AND THIS IS WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN ON FEBRUARY 23!!!

We will begin the public phase of the Capital Campaign with a kick-off event on **February 23**. We are having a free lunch after the Divine Liturgy, with a short program, to kick off this event. This day will be the first of many exciting and fun days connected to the **Arise & Build Expansion Project**. More details to follow, but save the date of **February 23**.

Materials will be sent out to the entire community, and everyone will be asked to consider a pledge to the capital campaign. It is important to note that pledges to the capital campaign may be paid over a three-year period, or in one installment, that is up to each person. It is also important to note that a pledge to the capital campaign is over and above one's stewardship pledge. We still have to maintain the regular finances of our parish to pay during the Capital Campaign. And it is most important to note that every pledge to the Capital Campaign will be received with gratitude and prayer.

We hope to have everyone's pledge in by Palm Sunday. Notice, that is the pledge, not the payment. We would like to meet our goal by receiving everyone's pledge by Palm Sunday, which we will mark as a Capital Campaign Commitment Sunday. And with our goal achieved, we can commence work with confidence that everything will be fully financed as we commence the work this summer. We have enough already to complete Phase I of the project, the goal is to get pledges to cover the cost of all the phases, so that all can proceed without delay. We will not begin a phase unless we have sufficient pledges/funds to cover the cost.



Here are a few things to keep in mind as you consider your pledge. Pledges should be offered in a way that is:

1. **PRAYERFUL**—Your pledge should be made after a period of prayer, and even fasting. We will be doing our Capital Campaign during the Lenten season intentionally, as this is a period of heightened prayer, fasting, and worship. Every pledge that has been received thus far has been received with prayer. On Sundays after church, and by appointment on weekdays, pledge forms have been received in the church in front of the Icon of Christ, with a prayer that I have offered over each donor family. These moments have been beautiful and humbling for both me and for each family.

2. **SACRIFICIAL**—The Arise & Build Campaign and Expansion Project is a once in a generation event. The goal is to expand and improve our facilities so that another major renovation is not needed for at least 30 years. And then the next generation can lead the charge. Because of this, our pledges should be sacrificial. They should challenge us. But this challenge is temporary. We will meet this challenge over the next three years, and then we won't have to meet a similar challenge again.
3. **PATIENT**—When there are many people involved in something, there will be many opinions. That is natural. All ideas are considered but not all ideas can practically be implemented, especially ones that are in opposition to one another. We also know that in any project, unforeseen opportunities and challenges will present themselves, which might result in goals and plans being slightly altered. Anyone who has built a house, gone to college, or planned an extensive trip knows that changes and challenges are par for the course. This is why we will give patiently, knowing that there will be unknowns and knowing that not everyone will like everything that is being done.
4. **JOYFUL**—We know from reading 2 Corinthians 9:7 that "God loves a cheerful giver." Whatever gift we decide to offer should be offered joyfully. Each gift that is received will be received joyfully, with gratitude and with prayer. There are many people who have given during the Quiet Phase of this capital campaign. And ALL have given joyfully.
5. **UNIFYING**—This Arise & Build project should be something that unifies our community. Not only should it bring our community together in a spirit of unity, but everyone in the community should have an opportunity to participate. In the months and years to come, as we go through this project, everyone, from our oldest parishioner to our youngest will have the opportunity to participate, whether it is turning over a shovel of dirt at a future groundbreaking, or signing a beam that will be part of the new church, everyone will have an opportunity to leave their own mark on this project. And everyone will have an opportunity to give something of themselves to this project.
6. **PURPOSEFUL**—The Arise & Build Campaign will help us realize our purpose as a church. The purpose of the church is to make disciples. That is the Great Commission given by Christ to the Apostles in Matthew 28:19-20, to "go and make disciples of all nations." This charge was read over each of us at our baptisms. All of us are responsible for this. All of us will be accountable for this. We are so blessed in our parish that we

don't have to go far to make disciples—they are coming to us, in larger and larger numbers. And yes, at some point we should go into the community and invite others in as well. We are supposed to go into the community and minister to the needs of those around us. Hence the Ministry Building, to offer community-based ministries to our greater Tampa community. Expanding our sanctuary allows room for more disciples to worship. Upgrading our facilities will allow us to make our ministries more efficient, effective and welcoming.

-Conclusion-

I read this great quote that I wanted to share with you as this part of my article concludes:

"If we lose a generation of young people in the church, it won't be because we didn't entertain them. It will be because we didn't dare them to do something meaningful with the Gospel in light of the world we live in." ~ **Shane Claiborne**

We have a responsibility that has been given to us by Christ, to go and make disciples, and "to seek and to save the lost." (**Luke 19:10**) We have been gifted an opportunity to go and fulfill this charge. We are well on our way to our goal. We will need everyone's help in order to reach it. **Ephesians 4:7** reads *But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.* Each of us will do something different, because each of us has been given something different. However, each of us have been given something, and that's why it is important that each of us does something.

Back to the quote with which I begin this reflection: *All things should be done decently and in order.* **I Corinthians 14:40** .Everything to this point has been done decently and in order, and this will continue going forward. We've grown our church, we've made prudent preparations. The fullness of time has come for our community.

~The time to Arise and Build is at hand!~





GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS ^{OF} ATLANTA
ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΑΤΛΑΝΤΑΣ

January 17, 2025

Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis & Esteemed Parish Council of St. John the Baptist Church
2418 West Swann Avenue
Tampa, FL 33609-4712

My Beloved in the Lord,

I greet you with love and joy in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Upon reviewing your plan for the expansion of your church, catechism building & campus, and with the advice of Archon Frank Boardman (AIA), Chairman of the Parish Facilities Committee, I am pleased to offer my permission and blessings to proceed.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, Fr. Stavros, the Parish Council President, Euripides Panos, and all the faithful who have undertaken the responsibility to carefully grow this beloved community of our Holy and God-Protected Metropolis of Atlanta.

With Christ's love in my heart, you have my understanding that 'time is of the essence' and I congratulate you on this development. May this endeavor meet with our Lord's abundant grace and every blessing from Above. I remain,

With paternal blessings and with love in our Lord,

Metropolitan Sevastianos

+SEVASTIANOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta

Cc: Mr. Frank Boardman

HOLY ORDERS – THE SACRAMENT OF ORDINATION



Jesus chose twelve men to be His Disciples. For three years, they followed Him around, learned His message and understood why it needed to be spread throughout the world. After the Resurrection, Jesus appeared to the Disciples and said to them "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:21-23)

This was the first "ordination," in that Jesus imparted the Holy Spirit unto the Disciples, in this case by breathing on them. In Matthew 28: 19 - 20, Jesus commissioned these disciples to be Apostles, by commanding them "Go therefore and make

disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to do all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

The Apostles then went into all the cities of the world and established churches. Peter went to Rome. James stayed in Jerusalem. Thomas went to India. Andrew went to Asia Minor (Turkey today). This is why the Patron Saint of our Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople is St. Andrew, because he founded the church there. Now, when the church was founded, communities were small. They met in homes. It was easy for an Apostle to lead the entire church in one city. The Apostles, head of a church in each city, were the precursors to what we now call bishops. A bishop is the ecclesiastical head of a geographic area, like a city or a country.

As the churches grew, they became unmanageable for one Apostle. We know from Acts 6, that the work of the early church was two-fold, preaching the word of God and the daily distribution, feeding the poor and the widows.

ACTS 6: 1-6 READS:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good

repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. Be we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philp and Prochoros, and Nicanor, and Timon and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

(Again it's amazing how much of our history is easily seen just from reading the Bible). This passage shows us that the early church was concerned only with preaching the word of God and feeding the hungry. There wasn't a cultural dimension or a social dimension or an athletic dimension. It was just worship and philanthropy. This was too much work for the Apostles, so they asked for assistance. Notice that the Apostles did not choose the ones who would assist them. They told the people to pick out from among you those that would be appointed to this duty. These seven men they chose became the first deacons, or helpers, to the Apostles, who were the first bishops. The Apostles (bishops) laid their hands on them, and this happened in public. It was not a private thing.

As the church expanded, and more communities were established in cities, (think a major city with several church communities) it became too much work for one Apostle to lead multiple church communities. Thus, the office of "presbyter" was created, to lead the community in place of the bishop. In other words, the bishop was still the overseer of the city (or territory) and had oversight of all the parishes in that area (or diocese). The presbyter would lead the day-to-day affairs of the individual church community. The bishop would visit occasionally, and be kept apprised of the community's progress. When the bishop would be present, he would lead the worship.

And thus we have the three offices of the "holy priesthood" – the bishop (episkopos), the presbyter or priest (presviteros) and the deacon (diakonos). **Some facts about the priesthood.**

1. One must be ordained deacon first, then priest, then from the unmarried priests, the bishops are chosen.
2. Each position has ranks within the position. There is a title deacon, as well as archdeacon. For the priests, there is the presbyter, the confessor (pneumatikos), the economos (who served as the "quartermaster" so to speak, watching over the church's property), and the protopresbyter (who was the leader of a large church community). Amongst the bishops, there are bishop, Metropolitan, Archbishop, and Patriarch. All, however, are bishops. Every bishop also has a diocese, such as Metropolitan Sevastianos of Atlanta, or Archbishop Elpidophoros of America. It's not just a bishop at large. The bishops are from the ranks of the unmarried clergy.
3. If a person is going to be married, they have to be married before they are ordained deacon.
4. There are minor orders of clergy, including the

- subdeacon, the reader and the altar server.
5. When the bishop is present, he is the main celebrant. Because the diaconate was created before the presbyterate (priests), when the deacon serves with the bishop, he actually stands closer to the bishop than the priests.
 6. The deacon cannot celebrate a sacrament alone. He is able to distribute Holy Communion and Holy Unction. But he cannot consecrate the Holy Gifts or do a liturgy alone.
 7. The priest can conduct all the sacraments, except ordinations. Regarding the Sacrament of Chrismation, the priest may anoint someone with Holy Chrism. However, he cannot create Chrism. Only the Patriarch (or head of an autocephalous/self-governing church) can do that. When the Chrism is created, it is sent to each parish priest so he can use it when someone is Chrismated.
 8. The sacrament of ordination can only be done by a bishop. When a bishop is ordained, it requires three bishops in order to ordain a bishop.
 9. The sacrament of ordination for the Bishop, Presbyter (priest) and deacon is nearly identical for each rank. The prayers are nearly identical, they just use the proper position—deacon, priest, bishop. Where the ordinations take place is different. However, an ordination always takes place in the context of a Divine Liturgy.
 - a. The ordination of a deacon takes place after the consecration of the Gifts, shortly before the Lord's Prayer. That is because the job of the deacon is to help distribute Holy Communion, not to consecrate the Gifts.
 - b. The ordination of a priest takes place after the Great Entrance but before the Consecration of the Gifts. That is because the role of the priest is to consecrate the Gifts.
 - c. The ordination of a bishop takes place right before the Scripture readings, because the primary role of the bishop is to teach.
 10. One has to be a deacon for at least a day, then a priest for at least a day and then can become a bishop.
 11. Once a person is ordained, they serve at the direction of the bishop. So, a deacon will remain a deacon as long as he is needed as a deacon, which is usually not long. Most deacons are a deacon for a day, or a week or a month. Some deacons are permanent deacons, though that is rare. And some deacons will remain a deacon for a long period of time and serve a bishop as his deacon. (This is why I was a deacon for a year, I served as the deacon to Metropolitan Methodios of Boston in 1997-1998). Because priests are what is most needed in the church, the time as a deacon for most people is very short. They are ordained to the priesthood usually very quickly.

12. An ordination always takes place publicly. There are no private ordinations. This is because at an ordination of a clergyman, the congregation says "Axios" (worthy). If they feel the candidate is unworthy, they say "Anaxios," and then the person cannot be ordained.

Alex Limberatos served as our Pastoral Assistant for two years, from 2020-2022. He presently is working as a hospital chaplain. Alex graduated from Holy Cross Seminary in 2017. He and his wife Alexandra have three children, and have been members of our community since January 2019. The Orthodox Church has a severe shortage of priests in America. There are communities without full-time priests. There are communities that would like to have a second priest. There are small communities that can't afford a full-time priest who need one on Sundays. And every priest needs coverage when he takes a vacation or is absent from his parish. His Eminence has decided that Alex will continue to serve full-time as a hospital chaplain and will be available to serve in the Tampa Bay region as a substitute priest when one of the priests is away from his parish. At some point, he may be called to serve a smaller parish that can't afford a full-time priest, or he may be called as an interim priest for a parish that is in between priests. When he is not requested to be somewhere else, he will serve on Sundays in our parish. It is important to note that Alex will be "attached" to St. John but not assigned here. He is NOT becoming our assistant priest. Fr. John Stefero will hopefully be returning to us on a more regular basis in the summer. It is still the goal for our parish at some point to have two full-time priests in our parish. Because of the severe shortage of priests, that goal will not be attained for the foreseeable future. And with Fr. John willing to continue serving us on a part-time basis, we will continue functioning as we have been for the time being.

His Eminence Metropolitan Sevastianos of Atlanta will ordain Alex Limberatos to the Holy Diaconate on **Saturday, February 15**; and to the Holy Priesthood on **Sunday, February 16**.

For the ordination to the Diaconate on **Saturday, February 15**, at the conclusion of the Orthros, at the end of the Great Doxology, Alex will be led from the altar to the Bishop's throne and be presented to the Bishop who will "ordain" him to the office of subdeacon, which is the highest rank that a layperson can have. A subdeacon is considered a minor order of the clergy. A letter from Alex's Spiritual Father will be read. This letter is called a "Symatryia," and is the endorsement of Alex's Spiritual Father that he is worthy to be ordained. Alex will be vested in a white robe, and will hold a pitcher of water and a bowl in his hands. The Metropolitan will pray over him. He will wash the Metropolitan's hands. The Metropolitan will dry his hands on a towel and the towel will be placed over the head of Alex. Alex will then be escorted before the icon of Christ, where he will stand and pray. At the time of the Great Entrance, Alex will again wash the hands of the Metropolitan and will walk last in the Great Entrance. After the Great Entrance, he will stand before the icon of the Virgin Mary.

The ordination will begin right after the blessing "And the mercies of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, be with you all." This is shortly before the Lord's Prayer.

The ordination of the deacon takes place at this point, since the primary role of a deacon is to assist in the distribution of Holy Communion. At the time of the ordination, the candidate will again be presented before the Metropolitan. Alex will then address the Metropolitan as to why he wishes to be ordained. I remember when I was getting ordained, my spiritual father told me to address the Metropolitan as if I was addressing God Himself, stating to God why I want to be ordained and why I think I have been called to serve as a clergyman. The Metropolitan will then offer words of exhortation and advice to Alex.



After this, Alex will be escorted by two priests through the Royal Doors of the Holy Altar for the very first time. (only the clergy enter through this door) He will be escorted around the altar table three times as the same three hymns from the wedding service (when the couple goes around the table) are chanted. This is because in the ordination service, the person being ordained is marrying the church. (The three hymns from the wedding, affectionately known as "Isaia Horeve" are done, but in a different order. At the wedding the themes of the hymns are joy-sacrifice-glory to God. At the ordination, the more somber hymn of sacrifice goes first. So it is sacrifice-glory to God-joy.) After this "dance" around the altar table, Alex will kneel before the Holy Altar, and the Metropolitan will ordain him as a deacon. In those few moments, he will leave the rank of laity and become a clergyman. (I can say from personal experience, this moment was among the most powerful in my life. I felt like I got hit by a bus or something, like an out of body experience. It is hard to explain). After the ordination prayers, now Deacon Alex will stand in front of the congregation. The white robe will be removed, and he will be vested with the vestments of the deacon. The Metropolitan will proclaim "Axios" – "Worthy" and all the people will shout and then sing "Axios." And just like that Alex will be a clergyman in the Orthodox Church, and he will take his place in the Divine Liturgy, offering the petitions before the Lord's Prayer and doing the rest of the deacon parts for the remainder of the Divine Liturgy.

If you want to witness all the steps of the ordination service, it is important that you are in church 9:30 a.m. on Saturday, February 15.

The ordination to the priesthood will be taking place the next day, **Sunday, February 16**. Orthros will begin

as usual at 8:45 a.m. There are certain parts of the Orthros that the deacon does, such as offering the incense during the chanting of the 9th Ode. Deacon Alex will take part appropriately in the Orthros. When the Divine Liturgy begins as usual at 10:00 a.m. Deacon Alex will offer the petitions, carry the Gospel for the Small Entrance, read the Gospel passage and carry the Paten for the Great Entrance. You will see that when a deacon serves at a Divine Liturgy, he does quite a bit of the service. Metropolitan Sevastianos will again be the celebrant of the Divine Liturgy.

The ordination to the priesthood takes place immediately after the Great Entrance, after the Gifts have been placed on the altar but before they have been consecrated. That is because the main role of the priest is to consecrate the Gifts to become Holy Communion. The same procedure from the previous day will happen again. Deacon Alex will address the Metropolitan as to why he wishes to be ordained and the Metropolitan will then offer words of advice to Deacon Alex.

After this, Alex will be escorted by two priests through the Royal Doors of the Holy Altar and will be escorted around the altar table three times as in the ordination of the Deacon with the same hymns. He will kneel at the altar and be ordained as a priest. After the ordination prayer, no Fr. Alex will stand in front of the congregation. His deacon vestments will be removed and he will be vested with the vestments of the priest. The Metropolitan will proclaim "Axios" – "Worthy" and all the people will shout and then sing "Axios." Fr. Alex will then take his place at the altar table as a priest. In fact, on the day of one's ordination, Fr. Alex will have the honor of being the senior priest for the remainder of that Liturgy.

After the consecration, the Metropolitan will place the entire consecrated Body of Christ and place it in Fr. Alex's hands with the following charge: "Receive this Divine Trust, Guard it until the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, at which time He will demand it from you." This is called the "Parakathiki". This act represents the priest receiving not only the Body of Christ, Holy Communion, but the Body of Christ, the Church. Every crumb in that piece of bread represents every person that priest will encounter in his priesthood. He has to safeguard the crumbs, all of them, for if one of them is lost, his salvation will be lost with it. Fr. Alex will stand before the Cross of Christ behind the altar table and will pray to God that he will safeguard the church well until the Second Coming. Right before Holy Communion, Fr. Alex will come again before the Holy Altar and present the Body of Christ to the Metropolitan, a foreshadowing of him doing that before the Awesome Judgment Seat of Christ.

Each priest will wrestle with the Parakathiki in his ministry, in his mind and in his soul. The older I get, the more I think about it. When I think about it too much, I become both stressed and sad. Yet, I know that someone must step forward to serve as a priest, or there is no church. I pray that I will be able to present the Parakathiki given to me at my ordination in 1998 back to the Lord as intact as possible. It is not intact, however, and for this I pray for His mercy. And this is why we pray for our priests, for God to give them

wisdom to know, say and do the right thing, and for God's mercy in the times when they do not. An ordination does not make one a saint, or put one on the path to sainthood. To the contrary, the ordination begins a lifelong struggle for the new priest to a) balance his flock and his family, since he has married both his wife and the Lord; and b) for a sinful man to enter the divine realm and to reconcile God's holiness with his own sinfulness.

At the end of the Divine Liturgy, Fr. Alex will distribute the antithoron, so that we can greet him, kiss his hand and receive his blessing for the first time.

On **Monday, February 17**, Fr. Alex will celebrate the Divine Liturgy for the first time as a priest. It will be a chance for us to witness with him something he has been called to do for many years and has prepared for over the course of many years.

We have only had two ordinations in our community in the history of our community. One was in the 1990s and the other was in 2018, for a priest not from our parish. One of our young men, Fr. Kyriakos (Charlie) Hambos was ordained both deacon and priest in 2022 but neither of those ordinations took place here. Alex is one of our parishioners, a former pastoral assistant and a friend to many of us. We've known him for years. We've seen him grow in his ministry, when he was here as a pastoral assistant and now that he is a hospital chaplain. All of his children were baptized here. So it is fitting that both of his ordinations will be here in Tampa, and it is a beautiful opportunity we will have to witness his transformation from layperson to clergyman and to say "Axios/Worthy" to him as he takes these big steps in his life. Most likely, we will never have the opportunity to witness this transformation from layperson to deacon to priest all in one weekend ever again. So I hope we will set aside February 15-16 to celebrate with Alex, to pray for him, and to witness a special event in his life and in the life of the church as we welcome a new priest into the ministry.

With love in the Lord,

+Fr. Stavros



Walking around the Holy Altar, marrying the Church



Parakatathiki



Ordination of a deacon, holding the pitcher and bowl

BY THE GRACE OF GOD
AND THROUGH
THE APOSTOLIC TRADITION OF THE
LAYING ON OF HANDS



*His Eminence Metropolitan
Sevastianos of Atlanta*

WILL ORDAIN THE SERVANT OF GOD

Alexander Limberatos



TO THE HOLY DIACONATE

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2025

8:45 AM ORTHROS | 10:00 AM HIERARCHICAL DIVINE LITURGY

AND TO THE HOLY PRIESTHOOD

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2025

8:45 AM ORTHROS | 10:00 AM HIERARCHICAL DIVINE LITURGY



ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

2418 W. SWANN AVE. TAMPA, FL 33609

We humbly request your presence and your prayers

A MESSAGE FROM OUR MINISTRY COORDINATOR

1 Peter 4:9-11 ESV

⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ **whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.**

This monthly article will continue to break down these beautiful verses from St. Peter's Epistle one phrase at a time. This month, let's consider the first part of verse 11 of St. Peter's writing "...**whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God**..." This was one of the more difficult, and technical, parts of Peter's letter, and one that needed a lot of research to present it!

There are several places in the Bible that mention the oracles of God. Because this phrase is found in both the Old and New Testaments, we have Hebrew and Greek to comprehend the nuances. In the Old Testament, it sometimes refers to a part of the temple. The Hebrew word (2 **Samuel 16:23**) *dabar* means speech. So essentially, the spoken Word of the Lord.

2 Samuel 16:23 reads, "Now in those days the counsel which Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the **oracle of God**; so was all the counsel of Ahithophel esteemed, both by David and by Absalom. The "oracle of God" that gave **Ahithophel**, one of David's chief advisors, wisdom means "the Word of God" or, more specifically, "a divine utterance delivered to man." Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the "oracle of God" refers to the place where God dwelt—the **Most Holy Place** in the temple that contained the **Ark of the Covenant**—and thus the place where inquiry could be made about God's wisdom, will, and word.

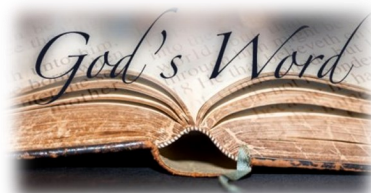
In the New Testament, the term **oracles of God** refers to the Word of God. The New Testament Greek phrase sometimes translated "oracles of God" is *logion Theou* (*logion* being the plural form of *logos*). In the Greek form in Acts 7:38, *Logion* means one of two things: the Word of the Lord as seen in the Mosaic law or a divine utterance of God. In other words, God's word. In this verse of scripture, Stephen is speaking of how Moses received "**living oracles to give to us**" (ESV)—a reference to the life-giving nature of God's Word: "This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he **received living oracles to give to us.**"

Getting back to Peter's letter, Peter instructs us to be extremely careful with the gifts we receive from God (verse 10). Our words should be chosen wisely and spoken as if we are speaking the very words (oracles) of God. When we quote Scripture and expound on its meaning, we actually *are* speaking the oracles of God. Peter states the goal of our use of words: "So that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen." (more on this next month!)

It is difficult in modern times to think of ourselves as oracles of God, isn't it? Rather than focus on the word oracle, let's go back and focus on the word "whoever" as in **everyone** who speaks. We are all supposed to steward our speech carefully. Seems like a huge responsibility as well as a difficult task. If we can take St. Peter's encouragement to heart, then we would take very seriously the duty as a Christian to always be mindful of what we say and how we say it. Remember the old saying, "if you can't say anything nice don't say anything at all?" Perhaps there are times when we should consider our silence as an oracle of God as well.

May we all carefully speak as one who speaks oracles of God!

Maria



LOOK FOR THE HEARTS

We all have so many blessings in our lives. And yet most of the time, we fail to acknowledge them. Either we don't recognize them, we forget them, or we simply take them for granted.

In *The High 5 Habit* (a book I highly recommend), author Mel Robbins contends that we see what we are looking for. When we start actively looking for something, we will start to notice things that have always been there.

Your brain has a filter known as the Reticular Activating System, or RAS, for short. It's a bundle of nerves that filters out unnecessary information so that important information can get through. It has to decide in real-time what information is allowed to enter your conscious mind. All of this happens without you ever noticing.

Your RAS takes what you focus on and creates a filter for it. It then sifts through the data and presents only the pieces that are important to you. Without it, our brains would go on overload with ALL of the data surrounding us ALL THE TIME.

Here is the cool thing. You can train your brain to focus on what is important to you. This will help you achieve your goals, see life through a different lens, build your confidence, feel more encouraged.

As soon as you think something is important, your RAS will let it into your conscious mind. For example, if you have ever shopped for a car, you have experienced this. The second you decide you're

interested in a red sportscar, you suddenly see them everywhere! Here's the thing – those red sportscars were always there. Your RAS was just blocking them because they weren't important to you yet.

I can't help but think of St. Paul and several examples of his wisdom as the original Christian encourager of the power of positive thinking. In his letter to the Romans he tells us, *"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."* **Romans 2:2.** And in his letter to the Philippians, which he likely wrote from a Roman jail cell, he reminded the readers then and now, *"8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."* **Philippians 4:8.** St. Paul knew 2000 years ago that what we think about matters!

Can we then make a connection between how our faith can encourage us with our thinking and what modern science tells us about our brain?

To point out the power of your RAS, Mel recommends a simple game. Each day, as you go about your business, look for naturally occurring heart shapes in the world around you. It could be a heart-shaped leaf, cloud, or rock, or even cream in your coffee or a stain on your garage floor. Our family has started doing this as a daily challenge. Each day, as we look for hearts around us, we snap a quick picture and send it to our family group chat. We even allowed ourselves to see non-natural hearts: a card in the grocery store, a note on our phone lock screen, clothing with a heart.

In the words of Mel Robbins, "Looking for hearts will turn your life into a scavenger hunt where you wake up every day knowing at some point today, you'll stumble across that little secret heart you're meant to find."

Now let's add God into this equation. WHAT IF God placed each and every heart shape in your path, meant just for you to discover? WHAT IF God, in His abounding love for us – for YOU – wanted you to see this sign of His love every day? WHAT IF God consistently places a little visual reminder or cue that you are indeed loved by Him? And WHAT IF, every time you see a heart, you repeat a short verse, or even a partial verse, of scripture? Here are a few suggestions:

- *Create in me a clean heart, O God! (Psalm 50:10)*
- *Love the Lord your God with all your heart! (Luke 10:27)*
- *My heart rejoices in the Lord (1 Samuel 2:1)*
- *Blessed are the pure in heart (Matthew 5:8)*

There are over 2000 references to "heart" and "love" in the bible! Find one that resonates with you and

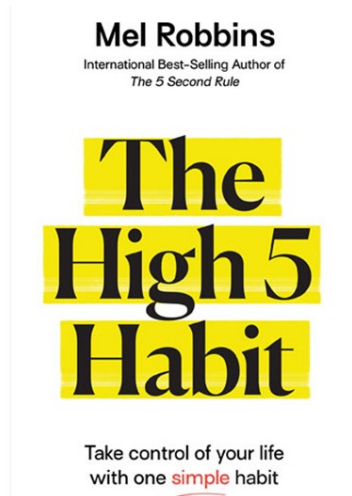
memorize it! Or when you see a heart, just offer a smile and a simple prayer: *"Thank you Lord for the heart today!"* or *"I love you, Jesus!"*

While indeed I did start to notice hearts (a lot of them!) I also discovered that "looking for the hearts" kept me present and focused on the small, beautiful parts of my everyday life that God has surrounded me with. Each heart I have seen has made me smile. I have a special album on my phone where I have saved the daily photos. Ask me to show you the album one day if you have a minute!

Lastly, can I encourage you to share the hearts you find with someone you love? Someone who needs a boost of encouragement? Someone who may need a reminder of God's love? Or how about this: Feel free to share them with me! Send them to my phone or email (listed on the back page of the Messenger.) I promise (with all my heart!) they will give me a smile and a boost! Perhaps they will be published in future publications.

May the Lord in His goodness and generosity always help you look for all that is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, excellent, and praiseworthy!

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." Luke 10:27



LITURGICAL SCHEDULE FOR FEBRUARY

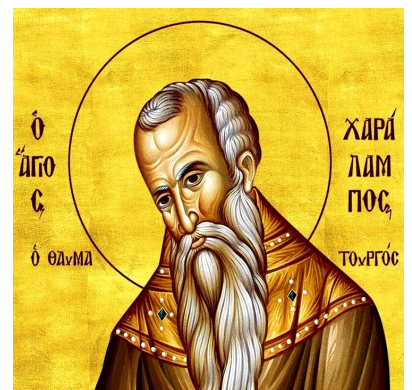
Sunday, February 2	<u>PRESENTATION OF CHRIST</u> Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Monday, February 3	Teaching Divine Liturgy as part of Orthodoxy 101 Class	6:30-8:30p.m.		
Thursday, February 6	<u>ST. PHOTIOS</u> Orthros	9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Saturday, February 8	<u>ST. THEODORE</u> Orthros	9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Sunday, February 9	<u>BEGINNING OF TRIODION – SUNDAY OF THE PUBLICAN AND PHARISEE</u> Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Monday, February 10	<u>ST. HARALAMBOS</u> Orthros	9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Wednesday, February 12	Paraklesis	6:00p.m.		
Saturday, February 15	Orthros Ordination to Diaconate of Alex Limberatos	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Sunday, February 16	<u>SECOND SUNDAY OF TRIODION – THE PRODIGAL SON</u> Orthros Ordination of Deacon Alex Limberatos to the priesthood	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Monday, February 17	<u>PRESIDENT’S DAY</u> Orthros	9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Saturday, February 22	<u>FIRST SATURDAY OF SOULS</u> Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Sunday, February 23	<u>THIRD SUNDAY OF TRIODION – THE LAST JUDGEMENT</u> Orthros	8:45a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Wednesday, February 26	Paraklesis	6:00p.m.		
Saturday, March 1	<u>SECOND SATURDAY OF SOULS</u> Orthros	9:00a.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.
Sunday, March 2	<u>FOURTH SUNDAY OF TRIODION – FORGIVENESS SUNDAY</u> Orthros Forgiveness Vespers	8:45a.m. 6:00p.m.	Divine Liturgy	10:00a.m.



ST. PHOTIUS, THE GREAT– FEBRUARY 6



ST. THEODORE, THE GENERAL–FEBRUARY 8



ST. HARALAMBOS– FEBRUARY 10

LITURGICAL NOTES FOR FEBRUARY

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

What We Celebrate on the Sundays of Triodion and Lent – Pascha will be celebrated this year on Sunday, April 20. Holy Week will begin with the Saturday of Lazarus on Saturday, April 12. Forty Days prior to that is the start of Great Lent, which is Monday, March 3. And for four Sundays prior to that the Church has the period of the Triodion, or preparation for Great Lent, which will begin on Sunday, February 9.

Sunday, February 9 - Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee – The focus this Sunday is on the Gospel of Luke 18:10-14, in which two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, an externally decent and righteous man of religion, and the other was a publican, a sinful tax-collector who was cheating the people. Though the Pharisee was genuinely righteous under the Law, he boasted before God and was condemned. The publican, although he was truly sinful, begged for mercy, received it, and was justified by God. There is NO fasting this week, in preparation for our great journey.

Monday, February 10 - St. Haralambos – St. Haralambos was a Saint of the first century and lived in Greece. He was a priest who was martyred. Our parish has a special connection to St. Haralambos since his relics were interred in our altar table when the church was consecrated in 1986.

Wednesday, February 12- Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary – We will continue to offer Paraklesis once a month, so that we can pray for all the members of our community by name, out loud. For February, the Paraklesis will be offered on Wednesday evening, February 12, from 6:00-7:00 p.m. and again on Wednesday, February 26 from 6:00-7:00p.m. (We will not have a Paraklesis in March).

Sunday, February 16- Sunday of the Prodigal Son - On this Sunday in the preparation for Great Lent, Orthodox Christians are to read Christ’s parable about God’s loving forgiveness (Luke 15:11-24). They are to see themselves as being in a foreign country far from the Father’s house and to make the movement of return to God, where we truly belong. The parable gives assurance that the Father will receive them with joy and gladness in their journey through Great Lent, their journey home.

Saturday of the Souls - Saturdays, February 22, March 1, March 8

It is a Tradition in the Orthodox Church to offer prayers for the souls of all of our loved ones who have departed this life, in the hope of the Resurrection to Eternal Life. There are four Saturdays of the year that are dedicated specifically to this purpose. There are three Saturdays at the beginning of Lent and the Saturday before Pentecost. Everyone is encouraged to submit the names of their loved ones to be commemorated at the services (see enclosed form). Everyone is encouraged to

attend one of these services (and bring Kolyva) if you are able, as a way of honoring the people in your family who have passed away, once a year.

Sunday, February 23 – Judgment Sunday (Meatfare)

Judgment Sunday is also called - Meatfare Sunday because it is the last Sunday, according to the fasting canons, that the faithful eat meat before Easter. During the following week, we do not fast on Wednesday and Friday (except for meat, of course). On this Sunday, we call to mind something that has not even happened yet: the Second Coming of Christ. Our Lord has promised us that He will come again, "to judge the living and the dead, and His Kingdom will have no end" (from the Nicene Creed). We call to mind the "criteria" of our entrance into Paradise, as our Lord said in today's Gospel: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."

Sunday, March 2 - Forgiveness Sunday (Cheesefare)

Cheese-Fare Sunday is the last day in which dairy products are allowed. The Monday after Cheese-Fare Sunday is the official beginning of the Great Lent; this Monday is also called Clean Monday (Kathara Deftera). On Cheese-Fare Sunday the Church commemorates the sending away of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Paradise. Adam and Eve were in complete harmony with God, nature and themselves. They were tempted by the devil and they agreed to eat from the tree of knowledge, in order that they themselves might become gods. The result was fatal; they were cast out of Paradise and sin came into the world. The Holy Fathers selected this event to remind us of our obligations to God and about the laws of fasting and Christian behavior (Matthew 6:14-21).

Sunday, March 2 - Forgiveness Vespers – Great and Holy Lent begins on Monday, March 3, a day called Clean Monday, or "Kathara Deftera" in Greek. Vespers is the service that ends one day and begins another, so we will celebrate the Vespers of Forgiveness and beginning of Great Lent on Sunday evening, March 2, at 6:00 p.m. This service lasts about an hour and marks the beginning of Great Lent, which is announced during one of the hymns mid-way through the service. During this hymn, the priest changes vestments from white to purple, the lights in the church are dimmed and the mood of the service becomes somber. In fact, it is the opposite of the Resurrection Service on Easter, where everything begins dark and goes to light. The service concludes with a prayer of forgiveness being read over the congregation and the exchange of mutual forgiveness among the members of the congregation. This service is an especially appropriate way to begin the Lenten season, and for those who attended last season, is one of the most moving services of the church year.

Monday, March 3 - Canon of St. Andrew – The Penitential Canon of St. Andrew will be read from 10:00-11:00 a.m. on Monday, March 3 as we begin Great Lent. The Canon, in its entirety, takes hours to read. We will read and chant an abridged version of this Canon on Clean Monday. Service books for this service will be available in the narthex.

Monday, March 3 - Holy Unction on Clean Monday – The Sacrament of Holy Unction is always offered during Holy Week on Holy Wednesday. But the sacrament can be done at any time of the year. The emphasis of this sacrament involves, spiritual healing, spiritual cleansing and repentance. What better way to begin Great Lent than the sacrament of Holy Unction. Please bring your Holy Week book to follow along. The service will be held on Monday, March 3, from 6:00-7:30 p.m.



COMMUNITY NEWS

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 February, the dates are Tuesday, February 4, Tuesday February 11, Tuesday February 18 & Tuesday February 25.

Women's Bible Study – Women's Bible Study meets on most Tuesday mornings with Fr. Stavros from 10:00-11:30 a.m. either in person or on zoom. We are studying the Epistle of First and Second Peter. For February the dates are Tuesday February 4, Tuesday February 11, Tuesday February 18 & Tuesday February 25.

Men's Retreat – Saturday, February 8, from 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. The topic will be "Growing in Christ This Upcoming Lenten Season."

GOYA Lock-In – We will be having our spring lock-in on Saturday, February 8, beginning at 5:00 p.m.

Wear Red Sunday – February 9 – Every year on a Sunday in February near Valentine's Day, we have a "wear red Sunday." We ask everyone to wear red to church in honor of healthy hearts. Our Philoptochos will sponsor a healthy heart luncheon after Divine Liturgy that Sunday.

Young Adults – The February meeting will be on Thursday, February 13, from 6:30-9:00 p.m. The topic for February will be: **Growing in Christ this Lent**. Please contact Aris Rogers to be added to our what's app for young adults at 813-309-5525.

Parish Council Officers for 2025 – The Parish Council officers for 2025 are as follows: Alexis Scarfogliero, President; George Ameres, Vice-President; Marilyn Sandborn, Secretary; and George Chagaris, Treasurer.



PARISH REGISTRY

BAPTISM – Henry Michael Glenn, son of Christopher Glenn and Stacie Milonas, was baptized on Sunday, January 19. Alyssa Milonas was the Godparent. Na Sas Zisi!

WEDDING – Timothy Peregoy and Deanna Milonas were married on Sunday, January 19. Stacy Glenn was the Koumbara. Congratulations!

FUNERAL – Evangelos Liras passed away on December 29. His funeral was held on Wednesday, January 8. May his memory be eternal!

CONDOLENCES – Condolences to Mary Maas on the passing of her brother, Lawrence (Larry). May his memory be eternal!

God Is Talking To You My Child...

In me you live and move and have your being...Acts: 17:28

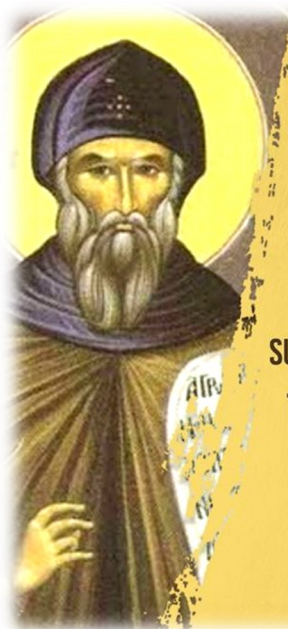
For you are my offspring... Acts:17:28

I knew you even before you were conceived... Jeremiah 1:4-5

I chose you when I planned creation...Ephesians 1:11-12

You were not a mistake...all your days are written in my book...Psalm 139:15-16

To be continued...



”

BASILICA.RO

WHEN WE MORTIFY THE PASSIONS,
UTTERLY DESTROY DESIRES, AND
SUBJUGATE THE WILL OF THE FLESH TO
THE SPIRIT, WE TAKE UP THE CROSS
AND FOLLOW CHRIST.

St Theodore of Edessa

WARNING SIGNS AND CHANGING DIRECTION BY FR. STEVEN POWLEY

Have you ever been hiking and come upon a warning sign that truly spelled out the danger of going forward on this side trail? It just might be time for rethinking your hike! The same principle is true with sailing. When sailing in the ocean, one cannot simply set a certain compass setting and kick back for the next few weeks until the destination is reached. Winds and currents change. One needs to adjust their heading regularly or the destination will not be found.

This is so very true in life as well. The spiritual breezes (or winds) and the currents of life can easily get us off-course. We need to regularly take a look at our spiritual compass to make sure we are on the right path. The Lord encourages us to pay attention to where we are going. Often, we need to readjust our direction and get back on the right course.

An extreme example of this is found in the story of Cain and Abel found in **Genesis chapter 4**. Cain worked the soil growing crops and Abel kept flocks. When it was harvest time, we are told that Cain brought “some” of his crops as an offering to God. Note that word “some,” meaning that it wasn’t the first fruits of his harvest. Abel brought the firstborn of his flock to offer to God. It was Abel’s offering that was accepted by God.

Cain headed off in the wrong direction with his thinking and emotions. He needed a course adjustment or he would crash. God, in His mercy, warns Cain with these amazing words:

“Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” (Genesis 4:6-7)

The counsel was simple: **“Change directions Cain!”** But Cain was too caught up with his anger. Instead of making a course adjustment, he continued on the wrong path and ended up committing murder.

This extreme example can be a head’s up for all of us. It is so easy to find ourselves on the wrong path spiritually, emotionally, mentally, physically...you name it. The Lord has many, many ways of speaking to us when we get off-course. Regardless of how He lets us know, the message is the same: *“Change direction now before you crash!”* Warning signs can be found in our thoughts and in our actual words: “I have a right to be angry!” “Come on, it is just a little sin!” “I will never forgive that person!”

May we pay attention to the **“warning signs”** that show up on our trail this year. May we regularly check of our spiritual compass stay on-course as we journey toward our ultimate destination: **The Kingdom of God for all eternity.**

**“GROWING IN CHRIST THIS UPCOMING
LENTEN SEASON.”**

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8
10:00 A.M. - 4:00 P.M.**

ALL MEN ARE WELCOME, ORTHODOX OR NOT

\$15 (COVERS LUNCH)

**STARTING WITH DIVINE LITURGY, FOLLOWED BY
PRESENTATIONS AND GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

**FR. STAVROS
AKROTIRIANAKIS**



**ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK
ORTHODOX CHURCH**

2418 W. Swann Ave. Tampa, FL 33609

Kindly RSVP by February 5 to frstav@gmail.com



Seven Words:

“LET US ARISE AND BUILD”

A SIX-WEEK LENTEN STUDY

JOIN US WEDNESDAY EVENINGS DURING GREAT LENT



MARCH 5

“LET US”

*“O come, let us worship
and bow down, let us
kneel before the Lord, our
Maker.”*

Psalm 95:6

DINNER SPONSORED BY
THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

MARCH 12

“ARISE”

*“Arise, shine; for your
light has come, and the
glory of the Lord has
risen upon you.”*

Isaiah 60:1

DINNER SPONSORED BY
THE CHOIR

MARCH 19

“BUILD”

*“Unless the Lord builds
the house, those who
build it labor in vain.”*

Psalm 127:1

DINNER SPONSORED BY THE BIBLE
STUDIES, NURSING MINISTRY AND
THE WELCOME MINISTRY

MARCH 26

“STRENGTHEN”

*“But the Lord is faithful;
he will strengthen you
and guard you from evil.”*

2 Thessalonians 3:3

DINNER SPONSORED BY
THE PHILOPTOCHOS

APRIL 2

“THEIR HANDS”

*“All these rely upon their
hands, and each is
skillful in his own work.”*

Sirach 38:3

DINNER SPONSORED
BYAHEPA/DAUGHTERS

APRIL 9

“GOOD WORK”

*“Comfort your hearts and
establish them in every
good work and word.”*

2 Thessalonians 2:17

DINNER SPONSORED BY THE
YOUNG ADULTS AND THE
YOUNG AT HEART

EACH WEDNESDAY EVENING SCHEDULE:

- 6:00 pm Pre-Sanctified Liturgy
- 7:15 pm Lenten Dinner provided by one of our ministries
- 7:45 pm Presentation by Father Stavros
- 8:05 pm Small group discussion
- 8:30 pm Concluding remarks and closing prayer



GREAT LENT 2025
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
TAMPA, FL

The Philoptohos Society of
St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
is sponsoring a Women's Retreat



Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ (Colossians 3:23-24)

Balancing Family, Work and Faith

Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis - Retreat Leader

**Saturday, March 1- The Holy Righteous Martyr
Eudocia the Samaritan
10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.**

All women are welcome, Orthodox or not

**Starting with Divine Liturgy, followed by lunch,
presentations and group discussions**

Donations Accepted

**ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK
ORTHODOX CHURCH**

2418 W. Swann Ave. Tampa, FL 33609

**Kindly RSVP to Pres. Denise Stefero at
denises54@hotmail.com**

JOY TWEENS

Welcome to the **2025** school year! Our Holy Orthodox Primary Education (HOPE) & Junior Orthodox Youth (JOY) ministries have lots of fun activities planned for this year.

In addition to the HOPE/JOY combined events, we will have meetings and fun activities for our JOY Tweens (4th- 6th grades) at least once per month..

We pray that the JOY Tweens Ministry will give our children, at this pivotal age, an opportunity to develop their faith while also strengthening their bonds with their peers, through age-appropriate activities centered around worship, fellowship, and service. Please mark your calendars and join us. We can't wait to see you!



SAVE THE DATE!

JOY Tweens (Grades 4th - 6th)

Calendar 2025

Sunday, February 9 HOPE/ JOY – Superbowl of Caring (Donation drive to benefit Children's Home)

Sunday, February 23 JOY Tweens - Offsite Activity (2:00pm)

Sunday, March 23 JOY Tweens - Meeting with Father Stavros(12:15pm)

Friday, April 18 HOPE/JOY - Good Friday Retreat

Friday, May 2 JOY Tweens – Movie Night (6:00pm)

Sunday, May 18 All Youth - End of Year Party

Thank you to all our JOY Tweens and parents who have attended our events thus far. We've had a lot of fun and are looking forward to more exciting activities in the coming months! Stay tuned for more details by email and/or text messages, as well as our weekly church bulletins and Sunday school flyers.

Sign-Up for Text Updates!

To get updates and other messages for JOY Tweens, **text @783gc6 to 81010** on your mobile phone.

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

Orthodoxy 101

BEGINS IN JANUARY & 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. GOING FORWARD, THIS CLASS WILL BE A REQUIREMENT FOR THOSE WHO WISH TO JOIN OUR ORTHODOX FAITH.

· NEW CONVERTS TO ORTHODOXY. FOR THOSE WHO RECENTLY JOINED OUR CHURCH AND WHO WANT TO KNOW A LITTLE BIT MORE.

· 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.

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

WHEN WILL THE CLASSES BE HELD?

• MONDAY, JANUARY 20
A TOUR OF THE
ORTHODOX
CHURCH, WHAT WE SEE
AND WHAT IT MEANS

• MONDAY, JANUARY 27
INTRODUCTION TO THE
SACRAMENTS. BAPTISM
CHRISMATION,
CONFESSION,
MARRIAGE, UNCTION

* MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3
THE DIVINE LITURGY –
A “TEACHING” LITURGY

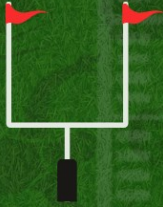
* MONDAY, FEBRUARY 10
ORTHODOX TRADITIONS –
FASTING, ICONS, PRAYER
AND LIVING AN
ORTHODOX
CHRISTIAN LIFE

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



A Hope & Joy and Philoptochos

Partnership



SOUPER BOWL OF CARING



2/9/25

BENEFITTING HOPE CHILDREN'S HOME



**KICKOFF BEGINS
AFTER DIVINE LITURGY**



**SOUPER BOWL OF CARING IS A NATIONAL INITIATIVE
CELEBRATING THE THRILL OF THE BIG GAME WHILE TACKLING
CHILDHOOD HUNGER.**

**PLEASE BRING CANNED GOODS OR A DONATION AND ENJOY A
DELICIOUS HEALTHY LUNCH WITH US.**

****KID AND ADULT RAFFLE PRIZES****

PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS!

February Calendar!



2/9 - **Souper Bowl Luncheon**—Start the New Year off with a healthy mix of Homemade Soups & Salad!



Donation Drive—We will be gathering donations of school supplies the whole month of February for the Hills Education Foundation. Drop off in the Hall Foyer



Thank You!

Thank you to all who supported our Christmas Bake sale. It was a great success and all the proceeds with benefit various Philoptochos causes.

Thank you to all the ladies who brought desserts and helped with our Epiphany Vespers reception.

Thanks to all who donated to our Vasilopita event. All proceeds will go directly to St. Basils Orphanage and other Orthodox youth causes.



It's time to join Philoptochos! We need you to be part of the Army of Agape that is not only the right hand of the church, but the friend and champion of the poor. See Presvytera Denise for additional info.

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

We are thankful to be updating you with the activities of our Sunday School for January. Our topics for January were **The Epiphany, St. John the Baptist, Vasilopita, St. Basil, Salvation -The Story of Zacchaeus, and The Sacrament of Confession.**

We would like to thank Melissa Krinos for providing the Sunday School with our very own Vasilopita **on January 19th.** Each child and teacher received a piece of this sweet cake and one of our lucky student's found the coin this year.

One of the best ways to prepare for Pascha is to participate in the Sacrament of Confession. Each Sunday School class had, or will have an opportunity to participate in this important Sacrament. **On January 19th** our 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Graders participated in the Sacrament of Confession. **On February 9th** our 4th, 5th and 6th Graders will have the same opportunity. Our 7th - 12th graders will go to Confession during their upcoming GOYAN Lenten Retreat. We would like to thank Father Stavros for hearing the confessions of these children. It is a wonderful thing to see our children go to Confession year after year.

FEBRUARY:

February 2nd: TOPIC: The Presentation of Christ
YOUTH SUNDAY

February 9th: TOPIC: The Publican and Pharisee
4TH, 5TH, and 6TH GRADERS - CONFESSION

February 18th: TOPIC: Prodigal Son

February 23th: TOPIC: Last Judgement

SUNDAY SCHOOL PHOTOS

Dear Ms. Patricia,

I hope you have a wonderful Christmas! We miss you and hope you have the best Holidays! ♥

merry
Christmas

"Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you."

-1 Peter 5:7

- Mageje Trebek and the 7/8 grade St. John's Sunday school class.

Dear Ms. Patricia,
Merry Christmas!

I hope that you have a joyous and bright holiday season! Let God be a light to you and fill you with the meaning and truth of the Christmas story. St. John's misses you!

Happy Holidays from the
7th and 8th grade Sunday School

- Julie Konstas



Before Christmas, the 7th and 8th graders sent cards and crafts to our Homebound parishioners. These parishioners were delighted to receive these surprises in the mail. Below are photos of what was sent to one of them. I visited her recently and she couldn't stop talking about how sweet these gifts were and how thankful she was to receive them. It is amazing how small gestures make a difference in someone's life.

YOUNG AT HEART

~YOUNG AT HEART JANUARY GATHERING COMMEMORATING ST BASIL THE GREAT~



COLLEGE STUDENT OUTREACH

Kathy Kaburis is once again leading our college Student Outreach Ministry. We want to connect with our college students who are in school away from home as well as those students who are attending college here at one of our local schools in Tampa from other areas around the country who are new to our St. John community.

TO OUR COLLEGE STUDENTS—Please join our mailing list to stay connected! Please send your name, current email, mailing address and phone number so you can be placed on our list!
TO OUR COLLEGE PARENTS—Please confirm with your student that we have their contact information!

You can send your information to **Kathy at kkaburis2000@yahoo.com and or (813)240-6513.**

College Student Contact Information

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



BOOKSTORE

Our bookstore has an entire section of titles geared toward the many issues young married couples face. Check out the following books along with many others in our bookstore this month.



**Under the Laurel Tree - Grieving Infertility with Saints
Joachim and Anna**

Children of My Heart - Finding Christ Through Adoption

Fertile Ground - A Pilgrimage through Pregnancy

Of Such is the Kingdom - A Practical Theology of Disability

**Parenting Toward the Kingdom - Orthodox Christian Principles of
Child Rearing**

**Preserve Them O Lord - A Guide for developing marital unity for
Orthodox Couples**

STEWARDSHIP

"You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God" 2 Corinthians 9-11

Please give back your Time, Talents and Treasure in 2025!

We thank our **365** loyal Steward Families of 2024 for your support of St. John's Vision & Mission. Stewardship contributions reached **\$743,433 for the year**. Your gifts enable us to spread the word of Christ and support Orthodox and non-Orthodox charities throughout the year.

It is your sacrificial giving that enables us to sustain our beautiful church, enjoy fellowship, and most importantly worship together as Orthodox Christians.

December was the Kickoff month for Stewardship. At this time, we have received Stewardship Forms from over 100 families. We are on our way! Please take the time to reflect on what you and your families can offer in Time, Talent and Treasure. All of us together make a huge impact on our church and community.

YES - Stewardship Pledge Forms really are required and can now be completed on-line. They not only provide family information on areas of interest and talents but also help us determine how much income the Church can expect to support our operations. **Pledge Forms and current contributions are required to meet the Uniform Parish Regulations (UPR) of our Archdiocese as well as our local by-laws, which enable participation at Parish General Assembly Meetings, Nominations and Voting for Parish Council in December.**

Please feel free to contact The Stewardship Committee at [813-748-1220](tel:813-748-1220) if you any questions or comments that you would like to share. We return ALL voice messages or texts, promise.

TWELVE DISCIPLES PROJECT

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



St. John the Baptist's Twelve Disciples Project continues, as dozens of your fellow Orthodox Christians, Prayer Warriors, set aside a few minutes each day to pray for "mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, protection and pardon and remission of the sins for servants of God" all members of the St. John's congregation.

Are you interested???

You too may join us in this endeavor that, not only broadens your community awareness with others in our congregation, but also sharpens each of our personal prayer disciplines.

"Prayer is doxology, praise, thanksgiving, confession, supplication, and intercession to God. 'When I prayed I was new,' wrote a great theologian of Christian antiquity, 'but when I stopped praying I became old. Prayer is the way to renewal and spiritual life. Prayer is aliveness to God. Prayer is strength, refreshment, and joy. Through the grace of God and our disciplined efforts prayer lifts us up from our isolation to a conscious, loving communion with God in which everything is experienced in a new light. Prayer becomes a personal dialogue with God, a spiritual breathing of the soul, a foretaste of the bliss of God's kingdom." <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-fruits-of-true-prayer?inheritRedirect=true> "Pray for others by name and ask people to pray for you, too. The Church is a praying Body. When we pray for others, we lift them up and embrace them. It connects us in Christ, no matter how far away our loved ones may be from us. Prayer is even more intimate when we offer up specific people, by name, (and their specific needs) to the Lord." (Sam Williams, blogs.goarch.org, Sept. 24, 2015)

Participating requires no special talent, no physical ability, no financial investment but only a desire to offer up prayerful love or your fellow members of the St. John the Baptist congregation. There are no restrictions. You may choose a time during the day when you can spend a quiet moment with God.

Mathew Balasis led this ministry since its inception in 2020. With his recent passing, we are looking for someone to direct this ministry and hope to fill this in the next month. **Memory Eternal Mathew!**

~Participation will warm your spiritual heart.~

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 : 2/15, 3/15

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

DAUGHTERS OF PENELOPE

Alcmaeon #167 Tampa

In the month of February we are collecting school items at the Kourmolis Hall! The Daughters are teaming with Philoptochos, to collect items which are needed by our area students. The collected items are donated to the Hillsborough Education Foundation program which distributes them to the students to “ERASE THE NEED” of the essential items/tools they need. Please check the following website: <https://educationfoundation.com> for additional information.

Items we are collecting to “ERASE THE NEED” include:

Backpacks	Erasers (Cap & Pink)	Mechanical Pencils
Binders (1 & 2-Inch)	Glue (Bottles & Sticks)	Notebook/Filler Paper
Colored Pencils (12 Count)	Highlighters	Pencils
Composition Books	Index Cards	Pencil Boxes
Crayons (24 Count)	Spiral Notebooks	Rulers
Pencil Sharpener	Pocket Folders	Scissors
Markers (Dry Erase, Washable & Permanent)	Paper (Copy, Construction & Graph)	

Donating school supplies is a continuation of the work that the Daughters started in Aug 2024. Due to many generous donations a significant number of items were delivered to the Hillsborough Education Foundation.



School Items Collected -Aug 2024



Delivery of the School items to Hillsborough Education Foundation



Delivery of School items to “ERASE THE NEED”

UPCOMING EVENTS:

*In addition to the scheduled meetings, the Daughters are marching in the **Greek Independence Day Parade in Tarpon on Sunday March 23** and going out afterwards to share a festive meal together.*

To join the Daughters please contact Maria Zabetakis, Vice President and Membership Chair at maria1106@live.com or Ourania Stephanides, President at stephanides.ourania@gmail.com.

Pease visit the national site for information regarding the Daughters of Penelope organization www.DaughtersofPenelope.org.

NURSING MINISTRY

BE HEART SMART: SLEEP APNEA AND HEART DISEASE

Sleep apnea is a sleep disorder in which a person repeatedly stops breathing during sleep. These pauses in breathing can occur a few times a night or, in severe cases, more than once every two minutes during sleep. Sleep apnea can often worsen heart conditions. That can create a cycle in which heart problems then worsen sleep apnea. The [Heart Rhythm Society](#) reports that people with sleep apnea are about four times as likely to develop a heart rhythm disorder called atrial fibrillation, or AFib, and about half of people with AFib also have sleep apnea. Between 40% and 80% of people with cardiovascular disease also have sleep apnea.

Beyond feeling tired during the day, repeated pauses in breathing deprive the lungs of oxygen and cause significant stress on the body. Sleep apnea has been linked to several cardiovascular complications, including high blood pressure, especially when it is difficult to treat; stroke; worsening heart failure and heart disease; Type 2 diabetes; metabolic syndrome; and pulmonary hypertension (a type of high blood pressure that affects the arteries in the lungs and the heart). It also occurs more often in people at high risk for heart attacks.

Common signs and symptoms of sleep apnea include:

- Frequent, loud snoring or gasping during sleep
- Reduced breathing or pauses in breathing during sleep
- Daytime sleepiness and fatigue
- Difficulty maintaining attention and concentration
- Dry mouth or headaches when waking
- Sexual dysfunction or decreased libido
- Waking up often at night to urinate



Screening advances have changed how sleep apnea is diagnosed and treated. Patients no longer need to spend the night at sleep study centers. They can use FDA-approved sleep devices they take home and send back to their doctors for assessment.

Treatment depends on the type of sleep apnea detected and may include:

- Lifestyle changes:** Doctors may begin by informing patients about lifestyle changes that may reduce the severity of this condition. **Weight loss**, exercise, limiting alcohol, quitting smoking, and even changing your sleeping position may be helpful.
- Positive airway pressure (PAP) devices:** PAP devices pump air through the airway, preventing the upper airway from collapsing during sleep.
- Mouthpieces and oral appliances:** Oral appliances reduce disordered breathing by changing the position of the jaw, tongue, or other part of the body that's constricting the airway.
- Mouth and throat exercises:** Depending on the cause of a person's sleep apnea, special exercises of the mouth and throat may help tone these muscles, making them less likely to interfere with breathing during sleep.
- Surgery:** Surgery for sleep apnea may involve changing parts of the body that cause airway constriction or implanting devices that causes tightening of the muscles around the airway.

FOOD PANTRY

Tampa Bay is blessed with faith-based organizations that collaborate. We are honored to support them through our SJGOC Food Pantry and Community Outreach.

We are grateful for your ongoing donations to support our SJGOC Food Pantry. The SJGOC Food Pantry and Community Outreach will continue to work together throughout the year. We trust our community will provide for the organizations we support and many individuals, through your donations and commitment of time. In addition to our monthly Community Outreach at Tampa Hope where we serve the 3rd Saturday of the Month, we support individual requests from our pantry, prepare **'Bags of Groceries to Go'** and will prepare **'Snack Bags'** during this year for the residents of Tampa Hope.

We welcome your ideas and support to expand our outreach in 2025!



TAMPA HOPE - MATTHEW 25 - METROPOLITAN MINISTRIES

Matthew 25 – Outreach for First Presbyterian. They feed men and women at Tampa Hope 1x per month at 2 locations, Ybor City and Downtown Tampa. Their commitment is unwavering, and we are honored to serve and support their outreach.

<https://firstprestamp.org/ministries/matt-25-ministry-hungryhomeless>

In Matthew 25 Jesus said, *“When I was hungry you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. When you do it to one of these brothers and sisters you are doing it to me!”*

Tampa Hope - is a shelter for up to 300 men and women, providing shelter, meals, basic hygiene requirements, and services. The goal of Tampa Hope is to move clients into permanent, stable housing with income or increased income opportunities. <https://www.ccdosp.org/tampa-hope/>

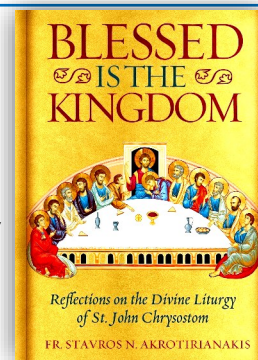
Metropolitan Ministries – started humbly in 1972 by the efforts of 13 churches. They offer comprehensive services for at-risk and homeless families in underserved and impoverished communities and provide the food served at Tampa Hope weekly by Matthew 25 and our volunteers.

<https://www.metromin.org>

We welcome donations anytime and have a dedicated drop-off, to the left, inside the church hall entrance. If you know of someone in need or wish to take a bag of groceries to go, we can make that happen! Please call or text Sandra Pappas at 813-785-3747

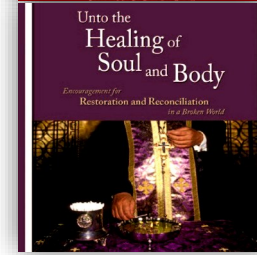
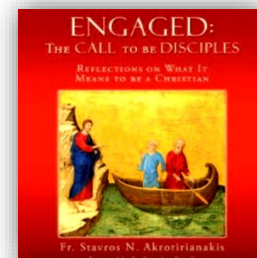
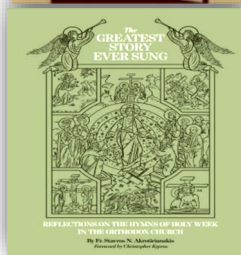
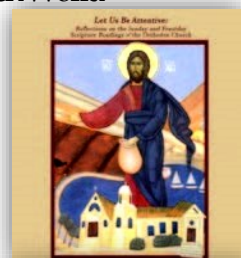
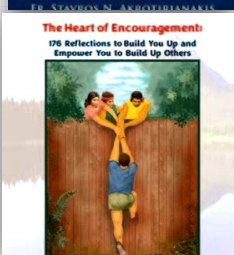
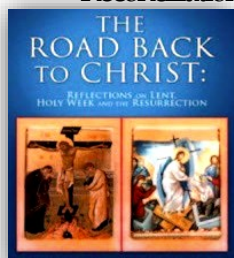
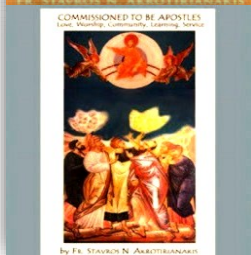
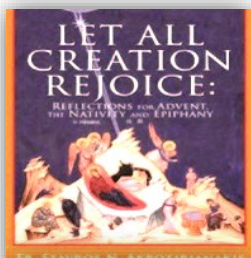
FR. STAVROS NEW BOOK

FR. STAVROS NEW BOOK **"BLESSED IS THE KINGDOM"** REPUBLISHED BY ANCIENT FAITH PUBLISHING—FR. STAVROS RECENTLY HAD HIS BOOK **"BLESSED IS THE KINGDOM: REFLECTIONS ON THE DIVINE LITURGY OF ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM"** REPUBLISHED BY ANCIENT FAITH PUBLISHING. THIS BOOK HAS BEEN EDITED, UPDATED AND IMPROVED AND IS AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE THROUGH OUR OWN BOOKSTORE, OR THE ANCIENT FAITH BOOKSTORE. WITH THIS BOOK NOW IN PRINT, FR. STAVROS HAS NINE PUBLISHED BOOKS THAT ARE AVAILABLE BOTH IN THE BOOKSTORE AND ONLINE.



The additional 8 are entitled:

- Let All Creation Rejoice: Reflections on Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany
- The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection
- Let us Be Attentive: Reflections on the Sunday and Feastday Scripture Readings of the Orthodox Church
- Engaged: The Call To Be Disciples, Reflections on What it Means to be a Christian
- Commissioned to be Apostles: Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service
- The Heart of Encouragement: 176 Reflections to Build You Up and Empower You to Build Up Others
- The Greatest Story Ever Sung: Reflections on the Hymns of Holy Week In the Orthodox Church
- Unto the Healing of Soul and Body: Encouragement for Restoration and Reconciliation in a Broken World



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

UNHURRIED GRATEFUL BALANCE FLOURISH CONSISTENT FORWARD STILL UNCERTAINTY
 DECREASE LOVE COMMITMENT GRATITUDE GROWTH
 PERSEVERANCE TODAY ENLIGHTENED GRACE TRUST FREE
 PERSISTENCE BLESSED REBIRTH THRIVE LOOK
 PATIENCE CONNECT REMEMBER
 VICTORY REST HOPE HEALTH LEARN FAITH RENEWAL PRAY
 CONFORMATION REDEMPTION FREEDOM
 BUILD
 PRIORITIZE DISCOVERY DEFY STABILITY EXECUTION
 FOCUS DEPTH STEADFAST PEACE
 ENDURANCE SELF-CONTROL CONTENT
 THANKFUL CHERISH YES FORGIVE
 DIFFERENT WORSHIP BELIEVE LISTEN MINDFULNESS



Our 2025 word for our parish is **BUILD**. The verse that accompanies it is from **Nehemiah 2:18** *“Let us arise and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work.”* As the year unfolds, may we use the word **BUILD** to encourage us to build on solid foundations, plan and prepare with prudence, and remember always to use what we have been given for good work!

Thank you to everyone who sent in a word for 2025. May your word edify and encourage you throughout the year!

PHOTO GALLERY



On the evening of **January 6**, we celebrated the **Great Vespers for the Feast of St. John the Baptist**. Fr. Stavros, Fr. John Stefero and Fr. Jim Paris (Holy Trinity, Clearwater) celebrated the service. Special thanks to the Philoptochos Society for sponsoring the reception that followed the service.



On **January 7**, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated by Fr. Stavros, assisted by Fr. George Matsis (Sts. Nicholas, Raphael and Irene, Palm Harbor), Fr. Stratton, Fr. Gabriel Gadah (St. Mark, Ocala) and Fr. Theofanis Katsiklis (St. Nicholas Cathedral, Tarpon Springs). Following the Divine Liturgy, the Parish Council sponsored a luncheon in the Kourmolis Center. Special thanks to Melissa Krinos who offered the Artoklasia for both services.

VASILOPITA SUNDAY —
January 19, 2025



Feasts of Epiphany and St. John Celebrated **January 6-7** –
On January 6, thousands of faithful from the Tampa Bay area gathered at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Tarpon Springs to observe the Feast of Theophany (**Epiphany**). His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America officiated at the services, assisted by Metropolitan Sevastianos and the clergy of the Tampa Bay area, including Fr. Stavros. This year we had four young men from our parish dive for the cross – **Nicholas Carter, Zachary Carter, Kenny Kane and George Xenick**.



HAPPY 10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY FOR THE PRAYER TEAM!

This month marks 10 years that 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 Post-Paschal Gospels and on Saturday-Sunday, Father is writing on the Scripture passages of each Sunday. There are 4,677 people on the Prayer Team.

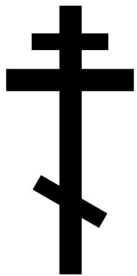


INTERESTED IN JOINING THE PRAYER TEAM?

Over 4,677 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 6 years! Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email 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(es), the family will be responsible for scooping the Kolyva(es) in the kitchen after the Memorial Service to share with the entire community.
4. If the Philoptochos does the kolyva, there is a \$100 charge for this service-checks may be made payable to “St. John Philoptochos.”
5. Also, please send the church office all of the names you wish to have commemorated at the memorial service, and how many pews, if any, you would like reserved for your family.

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



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on Instagram @stjohntpa



stjohntpa.org

2418 W. Swann Avenue

Tampa, FL 33609

(813)876-8830

St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

Have you downloaded our App?

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

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

We Are Live

We have switched from LiveStream to Vimeo as the streaming platform for our church services. You can easily access our Live and Recorded Events from the following **URL link: <https://stjohntpa.org/live/>**

This link will be included in the weekly Constant Contact Bulletin Message and is also accessible from our Church Website and SJGOC App. The sermon portion of services will continue to be shared on YouTube as recordings. Happy Streaming! Please call our Church Office with any questions.



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.

WELCOME TO OUR PARISH

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

PLEASE TEXT THE WORD

"WELCOME" TO 813-790-5950

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

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

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 smpileggi@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:

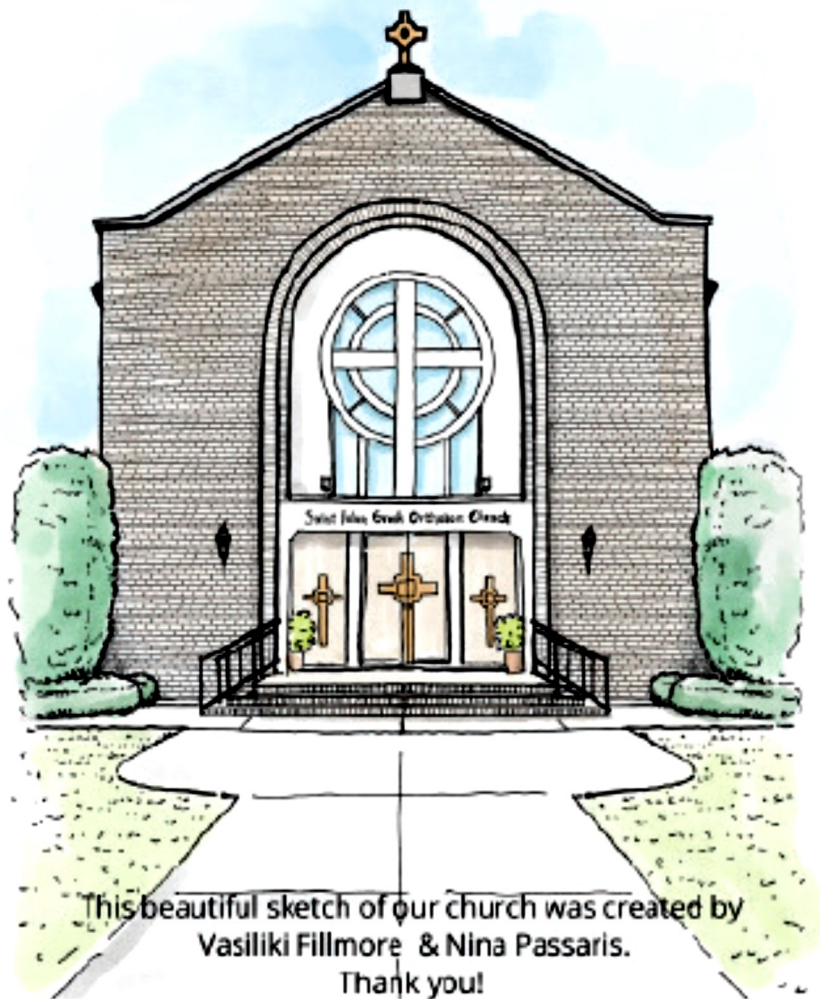
_____ \$50 _____ \$100 _____ \$200 _____ Other

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

January 2025	February 2025					March 2025
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Philoptochos School Supplies charity	** Fast Day					1 Young at Heart 3-5 Adult Greek School Children's Greek School
2 Presentation of Christ Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. ALTAR BOY OUTING	3 Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m. Teaching Liturgy	4 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	5 ** Choir 7:15 p.m.	6 St. Photios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Philoptochos Board Meeting zoom	7**	8 St. Theodore Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Men's Retreat 10am-4pm Adult Greek School Children's Greek School GOYA Lockin 5pm
9 Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Soupier Bowl of Caring Superbowl Sunday	10 St. Haralambos Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m.	11 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	12 Paraklesis 6:00 p.m. Choir 7:15 p.m.	13 Young adult discussion	14 Valentine's Day	15 Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Ordination to Diaconate Alex Limberatos Adult Greek School Children's Greek School Community Outreach
16 Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Ordination of Deacon Alex Limberatos to the priesthood	17 Presidents Day Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	18 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	19** Choir 7:15 p.m.	20	21 **	22 1st Saturday of Souls Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Adult Greek School Children's Greek School
23 Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Twens— off site activity College student? GOYA 5:00 p.m.	24 **	25** Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	26 ** Choir 7:15 p.m.	27 **	28 **	

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX
CHURCH 2418 W. SWANN AVENUE
TAMPA, FL 33609-4712
OFFICE: (813) 876-8830
FAX: (813) 443-4899
OFFICE@STJOHNTPA.ORG
WWW.STJOHNTPA.ORG

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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