

The Desert



Messenger

"Behold, I send My messenger before Your Face, who shall prepare Your way..." (Matthew 11:10)

Volume 18, Issue 9 St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, Las Vegas, NV

September 2020

**From
Father
John**

Beloved in Christ:

As we enter this New Ecclesiastical Year, let us first and foremost give thanks to God, regardless of our circumstance! While the past six months have been trying in every respect, due to the COVID 19 pandemic, hopefully we have learned not to take anything for granted – and to be grateful to God for every single blessing in our life, especially the fullness of Life we share in Christ Jesus! During a recent Zoom meeting with the Metropolis Clergy, His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos echoed the piercing question of our Lord Jesus Christ: ***"When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8)*** His Eminence reminded us that our primary task, as Parish Priests, is to build up people of faith – and that we must begin with ourselves and our families.

I must confess that 2020 has been most challenging for all of us Priests in meeting this holy task: With the closure of our Church and the inability to offer in-person Sacraments or prayers for three months, and the current restrictions during the past three months when our Church has been opened – and moreover with the expressed anger of some Parish members over the closures and restrictions, and the apprehension of still other faithful members over returning to the Divine Services – I have reflected soberly on many occasions if we Priests have become spiritually out of touch with the flock entrusted to us. While we have done the best we can in doing what we are able to do to minister to all of you, the current situation still prevents us from doing as much as we were used to doing without a second thought – and the prolonged separation makes us speculate that perhaps we have lost some sheep along the way, and additionally many children and young adults, which deeply concerns and saddens us.



With the New Ecclesiastical Year upon us, both Father Seraphim and I find it most needful – while remaining mindful of the pandemic – to start turning things around in our Holy Church. First and foremost, our priority is to reconnect with our young people in a personal and safe manner. We are aware that there are some parents who are not comfortable at this time with engaging their children in an in-person setting, and we will therefore respectfully continue to offer monthly Zoom meetings with our youth and young adults: However, the biggest change is that we will strive to make the content of these meetings more spiritual (while remaining fun), in order to offer the most quality

time possible when we connect virtually. Perhaps the ministry which has taken the biggest hit for several months is our Church School: Our attendance at the Sunday Divine Liturgy has been severely hindered due to the mandated limitations and restrictions (and of course the fear of contracting the virus), but the most painful outcome of all this is that our children are missing in Church. Our Lord commanded, ***"Let the children come to Me, and do not hinder them."*** (Matthew 19:14) We have only seen a handful of His children present in Church each week – ***and we must rectify this!***

(Continued on Page 3)

WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Sundays: 8:45 am Orthros ~ 10:00 am Divine Liturgy

*All our Sunday Divine Services are Available on Live-Stream!
Access the Live-Stream on <http://youtube.com/vegasgreekorthodox>*

Sunday, September 6/13th Sunday of Matthew/
Miracle of the Holy Archangel Michael at Colassai/
Holy Martyr Calodote

Orthros: Tone Four

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): Mark 16:1-8

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 16:13-24

Gospel: Matthew 21:33-42

Memorials: Antonia Pappas and Christina Rich (1 year); Stratos Hondros.

Tuesday, September 8/Nativity of the Theotokos
8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy

Epistle: Philippians 2:5-11

Gospel: Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28

Sunday, September 13/Forefeast of the Holy Cross/
Founding of the Church of the Resurrection of
Christ/St. Cornelius the Centurion and Martyr

Orthros: Tone Five (First Plagal)

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): Mark 16:9-20

Epistle: Galatians 6:11-18

Gospel: John 3:13-17

Memorial: Magdalini Constantinou (2 years)

O Lord, save Your people and bless Your inheritance. Grant victory to the faithful over the enemies, and protect Your nation with Your Cross.

Monday, September 14/Universal Elevation of the
Holy and Life-Giving Cross (Strict Fast)

8:00 am Orthros

Procession of the Cross at Doxology

9:00 am Divine Liturgy

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 1:18-24

Gospel: John 19:6-11, 13-20, 25-28, 30

Sunday, September 20/Sunday After Holy Cross/
St. Eustathios and Companions the Martyrs/
St. Eustathios the Archbishop of Thessaloniki

Orthros: Tone Six (Second Plagal)

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): Luke 24:1-12

Epistle: Galatians 2:16-20

Gospel: Mark 8:34-38; 9:1

Memorials: Frances Fotini Karas Berdell (40 days);
Christos Patsis (6 months); Chloe Nickolson
Christian (6 months); Georgia and Crist Nichols.
*Artoclasia Offered By Lekar/Eliades Family in
Honor of Ss. Sophia, Faith, Hope & Agape*

Sunday, September 27/1st Sunday of Luke/
St. Kallistratos and His 49 Companions/
Ss. Aristarchos and Akylina the Martyrs

Orthros: Grave Tone

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): Luke 24:13-35

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

Gospel: Luke 5:1-11



Baptized into Christ: Na Mas Zisoun!

Katerina (Keshia) Cacal on August 1, 2020 (Adult Baptism).
Godparent: Klearhia Ciulla.

Abigail, daughter of Richard and Angela Acovino,
on August 22, 2020.
Godparent: Presvytera Olenka Ramos.

Fallen Asleep in the Lord: Eternal Memory!

Daniel Larson on July 25, 2020. Funeral on August 7.

Joanne Kolinas on July 30, 2020. Funeral on August 10.

Nikki Chomakos on July 30, 2020. Funeral on August 14.

Parish Council Report

We want to thank everyone who has worked so hard and contributed so much of their time, talents, and treasures to keep our Church going during these most difficult of times. We have recently received some amazing unsolicited gifts from various Parishioners over the past couple of months that have helped us enormously in meeting our financial obligations, and we cannot thank all of you enough. We urge each and every one of you who have the means, to continue contributing to help provide for and maintain the future of our Church.

Troubled times like these cause us all to reflect upon the simple blessings of life and to realize how important and vital the Church is to our everyday lives, and how important it is for us to have the freedom to worship in our chosen Faith unmolested by outside forces. The importance of freedom of religion cannot be overemphasized. Worship of God is the foundation of our Nation and the linchpin for people of any Nation to fruitfully exist without fear of persecution and tyranny. Freedom of Religion is without question, the bedrock of free thought and expression, and Religion is the inception of our laws and moral bearing, and we prosper when we follow the laws of God. As stated by Thomas Paine: "Spiritual freedom is the root of political liberty . . . As the union between spiritual freedom and political liberty seems nearly inseparable, it is our duty to defend both." We urge everyone to reject the notion that what we are experiencing is the "new normal" and pray we can soon get back to a real "normal."

We again urge everyone to pray to for those afflicted with this dreaded disease which has so profoundly affected our world, for our medical personnel who are on the front lines fighting it, for our first responders, for those in the laboratories working on treatments and cures, for those who are working to provide much needed resources such as medical equipment and supplies, for our leaders to learn from mistakes and continue making the right decisions, for strength and toughness to endure these strange and challenging times, and most of all, for a speedy victory and end to the effects of this dreaded disease. Lastly, we ask everyone to pray for an end to the various maladies affecting our Nation and for everyone to come together as fellow human beings and Americans, and work toward a better life for everyone. It is only through working together that problems are solved.

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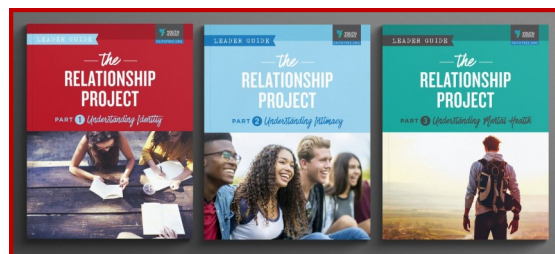
From Father John *(Continued from Page 1)*

As we still have government imposed limitations regarding how many can congregate in the Church and Panos Hall for the Divine Services, it is unrealistic and impractical to consider restarting our Church School on Sundays. However, we CAN open up our Community Center for Church School Classes ON A WEEKDAY! Church School would ideally occur later in the afternoon after regular school classes end and before dinnertime – of course, this would require pre-registration, limiting our class sizes to a dozen each and following social distancing and face mask mandates. Furthermore, the Metropolis is encouraging each Parish to adopt a program geared toward teens, starting this fall: As part of our Church School ministry, Father Seraphim and I will be leading the Faithtree Relationship Project – which was developed by Orthodox Christian theologians, educators and therapists – with the goal of developing healthy teens, in mind and in Spirit. We are planning to start the in-person classes the first week of October and, as space is obviously limited, both pre-registration and a "buy in" commitment from parents to bring their children each week will be absolutely necessary. For us to bear fruit in the lives of our youth, we must have the full-hearted support of our parents. More specific information will follow in the coming weeks.

As a Parish member wisely shared: All of us are in a storm right now . . . but we are all not in the same boat! Let us not turn our gaze away from those who are suffering: But let us simultaneously look to the Lord to guide us toward His Kingdom in this New Ecclesiastical Year.

With Much Love in Christ,

Father John



Parish Council Report *(Continued from Page 3)*

A key and central part for the future of our Church is Religious Education for our youth. Because of COVID, we had to temporarily suspend this vital Ministry; however, we are now in the process of starting up again with an improved concept. We intend to start in-person Church School beginning in October. Church School will be on a weekday starting in the late afternoon or early evening because on Sundays, we are at the capacity limitation mandated by our State Government. Because of Government guidelines, we will only be able to have 12 kids per class, which initially will be on a first come-first served basis. For our Teens, Father John and Father Seraphim will be teaching the "Faithtree Relationship Project," a new dynamic program endorsed by the Metropolis, focusing on the spiritual and emotional health of our teens. The costs of this Program is being underwritten by the family and friends of Daniel Larson, in Memoriam. In this same vein of Religious Education, we will be announcing the recipients of the "Kokkos Scholarship" this month. Congratulations in advance to the recipients for their hard work in earning this award.

As most of you are already aware, because of COVID, we had to cancel for the first time in 48 years, our Annual Greek Food Festival. We are presently looking at the weekend of May 14 through 16, 2021, as the new dates. September of 2021 will be our fall-back date. We should be in better position in December of this year to make a final decision as to the new dates. Hopefully, with a lot of prayer, the Festival will be in May. On another note, we respectfully request that any monies you would have expended this year at and for the Festival, be donated to the Church operating account. Every single bit helps immensely in meeting our obligations. Thank you.

We would also like to announce that we were able to pick up a lot of kitchen equipment and other miscellaneous equipment as a donation due to the efforts of Paul Hamilton and his company. This equipment belonged to the Culinary Arts Institute and is in pristine condition. We were able to pick up stainless steel tables, speed racks, oven stove units, refrigerators, an ice machine, tables, desks and a host of other very necessary items. We would like to thank Steve Tzelalis, Demetrious Asim, Telly Eliades, Jennia Szukiewicz, Steve Likourinou, Constantin Petriuc, and others who helped pick up this equipment, and to thank Pete and Telly Eliades for allowing us to store this vast amount of equipment at their facility. This is a great gift for the Church and will significantly cut down a lot of the equipment expenses of the Festival.

Of particular import, the 45th Biennial Clergy-Laity Congress will take place on September 9 and 10, 2020. It will of course be done virtually. We will share all pertinent information we receive from this vital event. Also, we have a Parish Assembly scheduled for mid-November 2020. We are presently working out the details for allowing everyone to attend while maintaining compliance with State Government guidelines. This may involve a combination of in-person attendance and attendance through Zoom.

Please note again that we will continue live-streaming all our Sunday Church Services, which we are doing through YouTube. To access the live-stream Church Services, please go to <http://youtube.com/vegasgreekorthodox>. Again we would like to thank Bill and Erin Bruninga, Steve and Juliana Likourinou, and Skip Ruffner for making this happen each week.

In closing, we look forward to the time when we can all worship in Church together in person without fear and without restrictions. We urge everyone to be safe, and to comply with the guidelines and mandates for dealing with and defeating COVID 19, and we urge everyone to take care of one another during these taxing times. The more we allow God to direct and guide our lives, the more power and blessings we are going to have. God Bless!

Gus Flangas, Parish Council President

The AHEPA Las Vegas Chapter 314 . . . hopes everyone is safe and well. Please reach out if you or anyone from our AHEPA family has any needs. We will not be meeting this month due to meeting restrictions. We are currently looking for Board Members to assist with the redevelopment of the Chapter. If you are interested in a Board Position or assisting with this very important organization please contact me. Thank you, Kouli Pouridis, Acting Chapter President pouridis5@cox.net or (702) 604-0885

Philoptochos News

Dearest Sisters of Philoptochos and the St. John the Baptist Community,

As we are embarking upon the New Ecclesiastical Year, I greet you in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I hope everyone had an enjoyable summer, even through these trying times of COVID 19. The pandemic has given us time to re-focus our relationships with family and friends. We now have a newfound love and hope moving forward.

On Saturday, August 15, the Dormition of the Theotokos, our Panagia Philoptochos Chapter celebrated its Feast Day in honor of the Mother of God. As a chapter, we open our hearts and minds to her life, and we strive to imitate her faith, her nurturing love, her resolve and her strength in our own lives, families and communities. May our Most Holy Theotokos protect, strengthen and bless our ongoing efforts in our mission of Philanthropia!

We are ever so grateful to our dear Ernestine Kachikis who, with reverence and love and on behalf of our Philoptochos, has devoted her service to floral decorations in our Church for 18 years. Once again, the icon of the Dormition was decorated beautifully with fresh red roses and white anthuriums.

Our social services projects in August included: Delivering food and underwear to Project 15 for homeless teens; special thanks to Jennifer and Rob Santamaria for delivering the items. Our chapter also delivered food and presented a check for \$300 to Serving our Kids Foundation, for the weekend food program; special appreciation to Geri Kypreos for doing so on our behalf. Finally, Philoptochos sent a check for \$1,000 to Camp Cartwheels, supporting local kids with cancer to go to camp; this year bags were delivered to all kids and they enjoyed a virtual camp due to COVID 19.



On Sunday, September 13, the Sunday before the Elevation of the Holy Cross, Philoptochos would customarily take up a collection and host a Fellowship to benefit Hellenic College Holy Cross School of Theology. Due to our current COVID 19 restrictions, this is obviously not possible. Therefore, Philoptochos, is making an appeal for donations to be mailed to the Church or by calling Karen at the Church Office if you choose to donate via credit card. Please make checks payable to Ladies Philoptochos Society, and write HCHC in the memo. Hellenic College Holy Cross is one of Philoptochos' principal national ministries – we hold this institution close to our hearts, and especially so at this time because we have our own Thomas Fleetwood as a newly enrolled seminarian! Philoptochos remains determined to offer support to HCHC, as this is the primary institution in the Western Hemisphere which educates and graduates our Orthodox clergy and lay leaders. No donation is too small or too large: Your contribution is a true blessing and we are thankful for your generosity.

Emails will be sent out for upcoming Philoptochos meetings. Please contact me at bgbeeman@cox.net or call (702) 885-6217 with any questions or suggestions. May the Lord continue to bless our work and ministry through the months and years to come.

With Love in Christ, Benita Beeman, Philoptochos President

*“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
(1 Corinthians 1:3)*



FAITHTREE.ORG

METROPOLIS OF
SAN FRANCISCO

—the—
**RELATIONSHIP
PROJECT**

GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF SAN FRANCISCO
INITIATIVE ON TEEN MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS
IN COLLABORATION WITH FAITHTREE RESOURCES

Who could have imagined that 2020 would have changed our world so much? It feels surreal. With all these changes and challenges, our teens have been affected the most. This is a time in their lives when connection with others is so important, and the isolation brought on by the pandemic has been devastating.

But, we have a solution!

If you are a teenager or young adult, this is for you!

The Metropolis of San Francisco has gifted this program to each parish in our Metropolis. Faithtree Resources developed *The Relationship Project*, a six-month program divided into three areas – Understanding Identity, Understanding Intimacy, and Understanding Mental Health. The Metropolis Family Wellness Ministry will support the implementation of this life-changing program.

Check with your priest for the schedule of when the program will begin at your parish and for more details to connect you to this incredible opportunity!

METROPOLIS FAMILY
WELLNESS MINISTRY

Faithtree

What is Faithtree Resources?

Faithtree Resources is a nonprofit organization that works with dozens of Pan-Orthodox hierarchs, clergy, professionals and faithful to create uniquely Orthodox resources to supplement parish ministry. Faithtree specializes in articulating the fullness of the Orthodox Christian Tradition in a language people can understand and apply. The materials inspire dialogue and relationship building in the context of small groups. Through this work, we help people grow in the Faith, grow closer to each other, and grow closer to God.

Read more about how you can participate in [The Relationship Project](#), and learn about this and other programs developed by [Faithtree Resources](#).

The Relationship Project and Faithtree Ministries

Recognizing the widespread and increasing emotional and mental health needs of our young people, His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos announced a new initiative for clergy and youth workers to support the mental health and wellness of our teenagers. The Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco is partnering with Faithtree Resources to launch *The Relationship Project*, a six-month program which focuses on Understanding Identity, Understanding Intimacy, and Understanding Mental Health. The Metropolis gifted each of its Parishes with this program, which will begin implementation with the support and assistance of the Metropolis Family Wellness Ministry in early October 2020. Moreover, the cost of the three Workbooks that will be provided to our Parish teen participants, has been underwritten by the family and friends of Daniel Larson, in his memory.

“We have found a treasure in Faithtree Resources. *The Relationship Project* is crucially important at this time in our lives. It is a wonderful addition to the tool box of anyone who takes ministry to young people

seriously,” stated Metropolitan Gerasimos. “The timing of this opportunity also coincides with the need to provide even more support for our teens and young adults, as they navigate through a different world brought on by the COVID 19 pandemic.”

This new initiative is a comprehensive response to a challenging reality: One in five Americans have a mental illness and

many are reluctant to reach out for help, or do not know where to get help. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among 15-24 year olds (CDC.gov), and more than one in four students report feeling persistently sad or hopeless. One in three American teenagers is being diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. Almost 10% of adolescents ages 12-17 (an estimated 2.3 million young Americans) have had a least one major depressive episode with severe impairment (National Institute of Mental Health).

Orthodox teenagers are not exempt. When 530 North American Orthodox clergy and youth workers responded to a survey by Faithtree Resources, 97% reported that anxiety was a major issue for the young people in their Parish; 94% reported their teens struggled with depression; 74% shared that self-harm was an issue in their parish; and 68% of those polled reported that suicidal ideation was a major concern they had for teens in their Church. *The Relationship Project* includes three robust Leader Guides, over 20 teaching videos and a library of tutorial videos that comprise this six-month curriculum. By providing these materials to each Parish, the Metropolis of San Francisco is demonstrating its longstanding commitment to investing in ministry development. “We cannot stand on the sidelines and not address the real issues facing our teens today,” commented Metropolitan Gerasimos. “The Church has always been a safe haven for love and protection, and *The Relationship Project* provides a vehicle for us to put those words into action.”

“Research proves that for many of our young people, good mental health is in jeopardy. This impairs relationships, spiritual well-being and their inner lives. Research also proves that belonging to a faith-based community is one of the strongest protective factors against poor mental health,” said Faithtree Executive Director Michelle Moujaes. “By equipping his clergy and Parishes through this initiative, and the use of *The Relationship Project*, His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos is prioritizing our young people and tackling the issue of poor mental health head on. There is no question his willingness to support young people and their leaders – in the context of the Church – will contribute to the good spiritual, mental and physical health of our teens.”



— the — RELATIONSHIP PROJECT

Ministry News

Church School

Dear Church School Parents:

Blessed beginning of our New Ecclesiastical Year! Normally we would be gearing up for our first day of Church School with the traditional *Agiasmos* or Blessing of the Water – but this year due to the current restrictions by our Governor on gatherings of people inside of Church buildings at 50, we are testing the waters and planning on moving our *Church School Classes to Wednesdays, beginning October 7, 5:00-6:00 pm*. We thank those who have participated in the short three-question survey; we still welcome your input if you have not already done so. We may not be able to have Church School on Sunday, but we believe nothing can replace in-person Church School and as a community we are ready to do what it takes to make that possible. For those not comfortable with in-person classes, we will continue our monthly Zoom meetings with our youth and young adults; if there is more interest, we are open to offering additional Zoom meetings – just give us your input! Of course Church School does not ever replace, but rather supplements the Christian life first and foremost lived and modeled in each Orthodox Christian home.

With four different grade level classes offered (K-1; 2-3; 4-5; 6-12) size will be limited to 12 students per age group. *Pre-registration is required to participate in Church School (see Registration Form on Page 9)* – no walk-ins permitted, and enrollment is on a first come-first served basis. Your registration is your promise to commit to bringing your child or teen to class each week. Our students will be socially distanced and wear a mask; the classrooms will be sanitized before and after each class.

Again, if you did not complete the survey – please click this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/YFNM3VF>. We know this is a trying time and we are eager to see your children again in Church School learning about our Holy Orthodox Faith!

Love in Christ, Father John and Father Seraphim

Orthodox Family Fellowship

As we begin with a fresh start both in School and in the life of the Orthodox Church this month, we would like to invite you to a *Zoom Meeting on Sunday, September 6 at 3:00 pm*. At this time we will be able to hear about the life of our Most Holy Theotokos – who celebrates her Birthday (Nativity) *on September 8*. Most of us know the Christmas story concerning our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but fewer have had the opportunity to learn about the unique circumstances around the birth and life of *Panagia*.

We will also have the opportunity for a little friendly competition with an in-home scavenger hunt, so stay tuned! We will distribute the information for the Zoom link via email and text blast. If you are not connected with either of these media please contact us so that we can connect with you.

God Bless You! Amy Khuri, Jelena Boskovic and Father Seraphim

GOYA - For Teenagers

Happy New Year! Did you know that every year *on September 1* our Church begins a new cycle through the feasts and fasting seasons? One of the very first feasts we celebrate (and it is a strict fasting day) is *the Elevation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross on September 14*. We will gather this month at a *Zoom Meeting on Sunday, September 13 at 3:00 pm* for a discussion of the importance of the Cross in our lives. We might even have a little fun with an in-home scavenger hunt as well! Look for the email and text blast for the Zoom information and link.

At this meeting we will also share some important information about a new ministry coming out of our Metropolis of San Francisco and being adopted by every Parish on the West Coast! Please be in attendance so we can share some vital information about *Faithtree Ministries and the Relationship Project*. We hope to see you then! Love in Christ, Kouli Pouridis, June Likourinou and Father Seraphim



ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

2020-2021 CHURCH SCHOOL REGISTRATION

Please Write Legibly - Use One Form Per Child.

Church School Classes Begin Wednesday, October 7, 5:00 – 6:00 pm.

Please Arrive Early and Pick Up Your Child Promptly After Class.

Student Name: _____ Birth Date: _____

School Grade (2020-2021 school year): _____

Special Needs, Allergies, Medications: _____
(e.g. "Autism Spectrum," "Peanuts," "Insulin Dependent")

Patron Saint and Date of Commemoration: _____

PARENT/GUARDIAN OR OTHER RELATIVE (Relationship: _____)

Name: _____ Name: _____

Phone: _____ Phone: _____

E-mail: _____ E-mail: _____

Home Address: _____
Street City ZIP

Student Cell Phone: _____ Student E-mail: _____
If you DO NOT want your child to be contacted by phone/text or by e-mail, please leave one or both of these blank.

PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED. NO WALK-IN PARTICIPANTS.
CLASSES ARE LIMITED TO 12 STUDENTS - YOUR REGISTRATION IS YOUR COMMITMENT
TO MAKING SURE YOUR CHILD OR TEEN IS IN CLASS EVERY WEEK.
YOUR "BUY-IN" MEANS YOU WILL TAKE CHURCH SCHOOL SERIOUSLY, ESPECIALLY GIVEN
THE RESTRICTIONS THAT PRECLUDE US FROM ALLOWING MORE STUDENTS!

CLASSES OFFERED: KINDERGARTEN/1ST, 2ND/3RD, 4TH/5TH GRADES AND TEEN CLASS.
All students are required to wear face masks (we can provide) and practice social distancing.

Signed, Parent or Legal Guardian: _____

First come - first served: Please return this registration form to Karen at the Church Office ASAP.

Ministry News

Young Adults

Greetings in the Lord and Blessed New Ecclesiastical Year!

This month we will have the unique opportunity to share an inside look into the lives of our own Parish Seminarian Couple – Thomas and Melissa Fleetwood! Thomas begins this year his four years of study, prayer, and training both in the classroom and in the Chapel at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology (the Alma Mater of both Father John and Father Seraphim). *On Sunday, September 13 at 6:00 pm* we will share in a *Zoom Meeting* and have a spiritual discussion about the Holy Priesthood, spiritual formation, and be able to hear what is going on at the campus where 90% of the priests in our Archdiocese are formed for the ministry. Look for the email and text blast for the Zoom information and link.

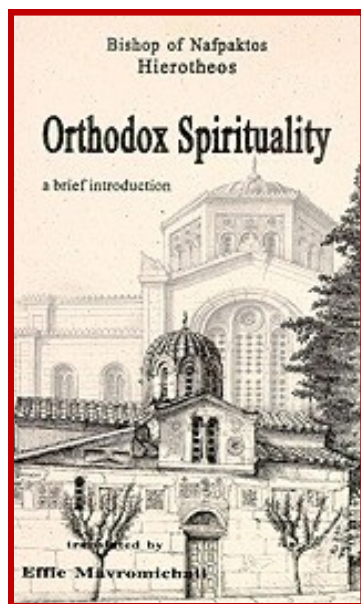
This is an extra special blessing because Thomas will have just experienced the Vespers for the *Feast Day of Holy Cross Seminary, which is on September 14*. Please join us for an enlightening discussion, and bring your own questions!

Yours in Christ, Father Seraphim



Orthodox Bookstore

Greetings from the Bookstore!



With ongoing chaos and fear in our world today, on top of a pandemic, it seems there is no better time than the present to get reacclimated to the ultimate purpose of our Holy Orthodox Faith traditions and practices: Communion with Jesus Christ. In *Orthodox Spirituality: A Brief Introduction*, Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos teaches us the core elements of our Holy Tradition – specifically, the heart and the nous which “needs to be treated so that man’s complete psychosomatic constitution can be healed.” He teaches us about different degrees of spiritual perfection, together with *praxis* (lived out or active spiritual practices) and *theoria* (associated with mystical contemplation, and the practice of the Prayer of the Heart, the Jesus Prayer).

Metropolitan Hierotheos also describes and comments on the three stages of the spiritual life that Father Seraphim recently mentioned in his homily on the Holy Transfiguration of our Lord and Savior. A rather short and succinct read, this book might perhaps serve as a great follow-up to the homily and a “reboot” tool for the soul in a world mad with distorted reason.

From *Orthodox Spirituality: A Brief Introduction*:

“Orthodox Tradition makes a distinction between *nous* and reason. Reason is a function of the brain, whereas *nous* in its natural state should be united with the heart. In the saintly person, who is the exponent and bearer of Orthodox spirituality, reason functions and is conscious of the surrounding world while the *nous* is within the heart, praying unceasingly. The separation of the *nous* from reason makes a person spiritually healthy, and is the goal of Orthodox spirituality.”

Much gratitude to Constantine Frangakis, Mary and Paisios Pursell for years of dedication and service to our Orthodox Bookstore and its many patrons.

The Bookstore is open by appointment only. Please call Karen if you are interested in making any purchases. Until next month, God willing, Paraskevi Santamaria, New Bookstore Director

Stewardship and Community Outreach



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Glory be to God for all things! As we start the new Ecclesiastical Year it does indeed seem strange that we are not all hustling about getting ready for our 48th Annual Las Vegas Greek Food Festival. This annual event has always been a way for the members of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church to come together to share our TIME, TALENTS, and TREASURES – and to celebrate and share our Orthodox Faith and Greek culture with the people of the Greater Las Vegas Metropolitan Area.

Alas, due to the pandemic, the Festival is not to be this year. However, we must remember that the Good Lord is in charge and continues working through His people. It has been very gratifying during this difficult time to witness the response of our parishioners toward one another and our Parish. The way that our parishioners have used their God-given TIME, TALENTS and TREASURES is a true reflection of our faith and our love for Him and His Church.

So many of our parishioners have used their precious and finite TIME to reach out and help others. They have done this by way of phone calls, going out and doing shopping for them, taking them to medical appointments and so on. Some have even taken the time to read Holy Scriptures, the lives of the Saints and offer prayers with one another.

Many parishioners have offered their TALENTS to their fellow parishioners and our Parish in many ways. They have done minor repair work on their air conditioning units, helped replace light bulbs, fixed leaking faucets, and done other minor repairs and upkeep. Many others have volunteered both TIME and TALENTS to move a large amount of donated kitchen and office equipment to an offsite storage (which was donated) and to the Church property – and to help set up some of that equipment. At the same time, one parishioner in particular has generously offered TIME, TALENTS and TREASURES to improve the look of the exterior landscaping of our Church. In the words of St. Peter, *“As each one has received a gift (TALENT), minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” (1 Peter 4:10)*

In the area of our TREASURES, while many of our Parishioners have suffered significant loss of income, due to the ongoing pandemic and restrictions imposed by the government, there are many others who have not seen a loss of income and done much to help. This generosity has come in the form of buying groceries for those in need, helping pay bills, putting gasoline in the car, and making donations to the Priest's Discretionary Fund, to anonymously assist those who reach out to him with a need. At the same time, many have continued offering their TREASURES in the form of the financial Stewardship Commitment. Additionally, the Parish has seen a few sizable donations, earmarked to support our daily operating expenses and to help us keep our talented employees working.

Indeed, these are trying times. However, it is clear that our parishioners have understood that *“every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with Whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” (James 1:17)* It is wonderful to see that so many have shared their gifts of TIME, TALENTS and TREASURES with their fellow parishioners, all to THE GLORY OF GOD!

In Christ, Stewardship and Outreach Committee

Greek School

I have missed you and hope you and your families are staying well. For the time being we will not have Greek School. However, the publisher of our textbooks, Papaloizos Publications, has many resources and education materials available for both children and adults in book form and online. Please check out www.greek123.com. If you need any help with ordering a book please contact me (702) 249-4740 and I will gladly help you. Please keep looking in *The Desert Messenger* or for email blasts with updates on Greek School here at St. John the Baptist. Καλή Αρχή for the New Year! Paula Kelesis, Director

From Father Seraphim



I have been inspired to write this reflection by my interactions with different catechumens during the course of initiating and continuing their formal process of education in preparation for reception into the Orthodox Church through Holy Baptism and Chrismation. This is my first experience of a presidential election as a priest. Perhaps the impending election in November may have had something to do with politics and ideologies coming up more often in my catechetical meetings, or perhaps it was simply the historical events playing out in our nation. Either way, a handful of catechumens have said things to me in my office about their own perceived identity; these stated identities are always political affiliations, such as party or ideological alignment. It was not simply these statements or beliefs that caused me to begin to think more deeply, but rather, the *faithful* way in which these individuals made these statements.

As a result, I have attempted to reorient some conversations to focus on an Orthodox Christian Identity, with the goal of explaining why, in becoming Orthodox, our primary and sole identity is found in Jesus Christ – and not our skin color, ethnicity, political slant, sexual orientation, or any other fleeting aspect of our worldview or personality. In becoming Orthodox – by living according to the teachings of the Church, the lives of the Saints, and our Sacred Tradition – we need to leave our political allegiances behind as primary identifiers: Christian life, centered in the Gospel, cannot *fully* embrace the party line of either the Right or the Left. The timely words of Metropolitan Gregory of St. Petersburg further help us understand what basing our identity on Jesus Christ and His Gospel means: “Do you call yourself a Christian? Do you live as a Christian in actual fact? The Christian must be such as was Jesus Christ . . . Are you the kind of person Jesus Christ was? Do you live by His teaching, or Gospel, that He gave us as a rule of life? A Christian must not love the world. **(1 John 2:15)** But many are completely bound to the world, so that it seems like they live only for the world: They always think like the world, they behave like the world, and all the rules that they follow in their lives are precisely those rules that the world follows. Such a life is not a Christian one and is quite disastrous.”

Certain political ideologies are in clear contradiction with the Gospel teachings, the moral character of the Holy Canons, spiritual life, prayer, teachings, and the ethos of the Orthodox Church. Some of these issues include, but are not limited to: Abortion, physician-assisted suicide, same-sex marriage, the transgender movement, and the imposition of atheism in every facet of society. These are not purely political issues in the same way as something like tax law, infrastructure development, or immigration policies: These are moral subjects. Although moral subjects are being politicized, we cannot cede this territory to politics. Otherwise, we lose the ability to clearly articulate the truth and beauty of the Gospel to those in drowning in a world of murder and moral depravity.

Furthermore, any political or activist group that claims the position of being the savior and solution for our fallen world, has trespassed outside of the realm of politics. Karl Marx declared that, “*Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution.*” The Apostles Peter and John, however, said concerning Jesus Christ: “***There is no salvation in any other Name in Heaven or on earth by which men are saved.***” (Acts 4:12) This is the dilemma in taking on the identity of a “Marxist” while also clinging to the Christian identity: One cannot have two saviors, or rather two masters. There is no ultimate solution, peace, or salvation in the name of Karl Marx – or any other sinful and fallen politician, economic theory or party – regardless of political alignment. This is not to say that we who are Christians need not be aware, vote, or engage in the world. In fact, it is the opposite: We must love the world just as God did, Who “***sent His only begotten Son.***” (John 3:16) This world is not merely political, but rather, the world found in the life of our neighbor: Indeed, in every Divine Liturgy we pray for our President (*regardless of party*), our civil authorities, our armed forces, our city and every community.

(Continued on Page 13)

From Father Seraphim (Continued from Page 12)

We Orthodox Christians understand that any form of the political organization of society is simply doing the best it can in a fallen world. The Christian knows that in this life, evil can never be eliminated. Having escaped from the Soviet death camps, Alexander Solzhenitsyn famously said, "If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?" (*The Gulag Archipelago*)

Those who identify passionately with a political party feel this way many times because they have a belief that, if the right candidate were to get into office, or if the right policy were to be implemented, then real justice, real peace, real order – perhaps even an earthly utopia – could be achieved. This however is contrary to the words of Christ: "*The poor you shall have with you always.*" (*Matthew 26:11*) "*Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.*" (*John 15:20*) "*I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*" (*John 16:33*)

This life has been called "The Valley of Weeping," and thus we have to acknowledge that this world, despite being the entirety of our knowledge, is not the final destination of our lives. Rather, the earth is a training ground for our life in the Kingdom of God, for "*our citizenship is in Heaven,*" (*Philippians 3:20*) St. Paul uses the word "*politeia*", which in English is translated as "citizenship" but is actually the derivation of the word "politics". Therefore, it is not of this world's political affiliations, parties and ideologies to which we ascribe, obey and consecrate ourselves, but rather we live in this world longing for and expecting the everlasting Kingdom that Christ Himself will return to give us: In His Kingdom alone there finally will be real justice, peace, freedom, perfection and love. Our focus on the intersection of politics and theology is to have such a deep and keen awareness of the Scriptures, of our Holy Church Fathers, of the lives of our Saints that we truly come to have the "mind of Christ." If we attain to this, then whether we are a Democrat or a Republican, we will be able to reject the evil and immoral aspects, policies, or practices of either party, and remain steadfastly anchored in our Holy Orthodox Identity.

With Love in Christ,

Father Seraphim

"For the word of the Cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"
(*1 Corinthians 1:18-20*)

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Philoptochos: Benita Beeman

Stewardship & Community Outreach:
Justina Szukiewicz

Choir: Athena Mertes

Chanters & Youth Choir:
Presvytera Maria Hondros

Church School: Eileen Koutsulis

Altar Servers: Father John

GOYA:
Kouli Pouridis & June Likourinou

Orthodox Family Fellowship:
Jelena Boskovic & Amy Khuri

Young Adults:
Fr. Seraphim

Greek Folk Dance: Sia Dalacas

Greek School: Paula Kelesis

Mr. & Mrs.:
Fr. John, Fr. Seraphim & Presvyteres

Kali Parea: Demetrios Asim

Adult Basketball:
TBD

Forerunners: Victoria Xikis

Orthodox Bookstore:
Paraskevi Santamaria

Greek Food Festival: Gus Flangas

Hellenic Historical Society:
Nitsa Filios, Cheryl Pandelis &
Susan Stamis

Photography & Live-Streaming:
Bill & Erin Bruninga

LIGHTING A CANDLE FOR YOU:

Your Priests are here to light a candle for you and your loved ones on a request basis. Please call Karen at the Church Office with your request. Any offering you can make during these challenging times, though not required, will be most appreciated.



2020 Stewardship Report (as of 8/28/20)

Stewardship Gifts Pledged: \$436,630 (\$438,143 in 2019)
 Stewardship Gifts Received: \$359,588 (\$323,964 in 2019)
 Unfulfilled Pledge Balance: \$77,042 (\$114,179 in 2019)
 Stewardship Families Pledged: 383 (384 in 2019)
 Average Pledge to Date: \$1,140 (\$1,141 in 2019)
 Average Pledge Needed: \$2,599 (383 Families)

Church Account Summaries ~ July 2020

Nevada State Bank Accounts	June	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	July	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
General Operating Account (GOA)	\$56,396.45	\$39,749.44		\$18,472.03	\$53,815.76	\$23,858.10	
Community and Education (C&E)	\$5,527.68					\$5,527.68	
Greek Food Festival (GFF)	\$4,966.47		\$10.00	\$270.00		\$4,706.47	
Designated, Restricted & Other (DR&O)	\$310,638.60	\$1,045.00	\$4,000.00	\$61,970.00	\$62.16	\$253,651.44	
Folk Dance Group	\$17,966.00					\$17,966.00	
Hellenic Historical Society	\$3,292.94					\$3,292.94	
Designated Funds	June	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	July	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Bookstore	\$9,813.74	\$845.00			\$62.16	\$10,596.58	
Ornaments	\$1,169.41					\$1,169.41	
Restricted Funds	June	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	July	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
ICON	\$140,167.76	\$50.00				\$140,217.76	
Library Account	\$1,470.77					\$1,470.77	
Giving Tree	\$0.91					\$0.91	
Line of Credit Reserve	\$24,000.00		\$4,000.00			\$28,000.00	
Building Fund	\$25,119.26	\$50.00				\$25,169.26	
Landscaping	\$4.88					\$4.88	
Youth Choir	\$2,989.18					\$2,989.18	
Church School	\$1,306.37					\$1,306.37	
Three Priests	\$39,033.50					\$39,033.50	
Roof Appeal	\$64,911.22	\$100.00		\$61,970.00		\$3,041.22	
Baptismal Water Heater	\$69.24					\$69.24	
Altar Servers	\$440.00					\$440.00	
GOYA	\$142.36					\$142.36	
PPP Loan - W2	\$0.00					\$0.00	Transfer to GOA for payroll & associated expenses
PPP Loan - Fr John	\$0.00					\$0.00	Transfer to GOA for payroll & associated expenses
PPP Loan - Fr Seraphim	\$0.00					\$0.00	Transfer to GOA for payroll & associated expenses
Designated, Restricted, and Other Total	\$310,638.60	\$1,045.00	\$4,000.00	\$61,970.00	\$62.16	\$253,651.44	
Other Funds	June	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	July	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Kokkos Scholarship Fund	\$70,650.45					\$70,650.45	

July 2020 Candles \$2,590.00
 July 2020 Trays \$1,613.00
Total July Candles & Trays \$4,203.00



SEPTEMBER 2020 ~ IN THE YEAR OF THE LORD



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 Beginning of New Ecclesiastical Year	2	3	4	5
6 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy 3:00 pm OFF Zoom	7 Labor Day Church Office Closed	8 Nativity of the Theotokos 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy	9 <div>Virtual Nat'l Clergy Laity Congress</div>	10	11	12
13 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy 3:00 pm GOYA Zoom 6:00 pm YA Zoom	14 Elevation of the Holy Cross (Strict Fast) 8:00 am Orthros Procession of the Cross 9:00 am Divine Liturgy	15 6:00 pm Parish Council Meeting	16	17	18	19
20 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy	21	22	23	24	25	26
27 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy	28	29	30			

The Desert Messenger

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THE DESERT MESSENGER

The Way of the Lord

*“If any man would come after Me,
let him deny himself and
take up his cross and follow Me.
For whoever would save his life
will lose it; and whoever loses his life
for My sake and the Gospel’s
will save it.”
(Mark 8:34-35)*

