



THE HOLY TRINITY

HERALD

Faith. Family. Community

December 2021
Volume 29 | Issue 8

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PHOTO OF THE MONTH



Board Members of the Holy Trinity Church "Omonoia" Philoptochos Chapter are installed into office with a blessing following the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, October 3.



CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

Icon of the Nativity of Christ from Saint Paul Monastery, Mount Athos, Greece

THE NEWS MAGAZINE OF HOLY TRINITY GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH, PITTSBURGH, PA



Father John Touloumes
Proistamenos

Stir up the gift of God that is within you.

2 Timothy 1.6

My beloved Holy Trinity family,

In the above passage, Saint Paul reminds his disciple Timothy that he has been blessed with the Gift of God—the grace of the Holy Spirit—through the laying on of hands, and that gift cannot be allowed to lay dormant and unused, but must be “stirred up” and “rekindled.” There are a number of ways that “stirring up” and “rekindling” is happening right here at Holy Trinity Church and in the lives of our members and families, and they are quite exciting. This issue of *The Herald* testifies to that.

- The rekindling of the grace of ordination through clergy sabbatical
- The return to participation in active ministry life in all areas of parish life.
- The stirring up of the support for the life and ministries of the church.

First, the Sabbatical. In her beautiful comments at the Sabbatical Sendoff Luncheon, Sabbatical Committee member Joyce Athanasiou said that the Sabbatical was not a gift, yet I cannot help but see the underlying gift that makes that statement possible: the gift of a loving and faithful community that understands the need for their clergy to have the opportunity to do what Saint Paul directed Timothy to do above: to rekindle the flame of ministry so the work of the Holy Spirit in this community can continue to bear much fruit. I am so thankful for that and for all of you, for you make the life and spirit of Holy Trinity Church possible as you make her vision real: “Faith. Family. Community.” I am also thankful to Anita Sinicrope Maier for the wonderful way her article in this issue captures the spirit of the Sabbatical and I pray that this community’s example of love and support for its clergy can be a witness to others throughout the Church.

Second, the return to active ministry life. By now we are all tiring of even referring to the past two years and the many challenges the pandemic has wrought, so let’s look at today and tomorrow instead. When I do that around here, I see life. I see faithful members of this parish returning to the ministries, studies, philanthropy and worship that grow and inspire their lives, and I am again so thankful to witness that. Walking in faith, we know “God is with us” and each time we renew our commitment and participation in the life of Christ and His Holy Church, we do so with “with faith and with love.” Onward together, friends!

And finally, though the Stewardship message in this issue is a serious one, it is also one of thanks. By the grace of God we have been able to build, support and soon complete our beautiful Church. Mike’s message, like Saint Paul’s, is that we never take for granted what made it possible: the gift of the Holy Spirit. As we are surrounded by gift-giving this Christmas, may we hold that most precious gift close to our hearts and let it power our continued support and thanksgiving for this Holy Church! Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

With paternal love in Christ,

OUR VISION
Faith. Family. Community.

OUR MISSION:
The mission of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church is to proclaim and live the Orthodox Christian Faith in its fullness as faithful members of the Body of Christ.

DECEMBER

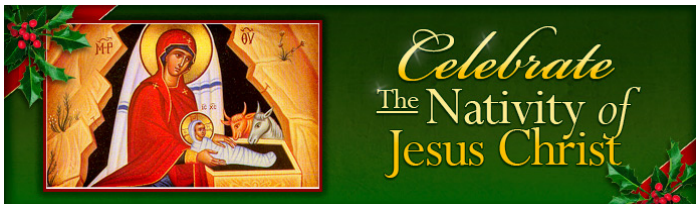
WORSHIP LIFE

Weekday Services - December

In addition to regular Sunday Orthros at 8:30am, and Divine Liturgy at 9:30am, the following weekday services will be offered this month at the same time unless otherwise indicated. Please see the online parish calendar at HolyTrinityPgh.org/calendar for updates. (Location code: HT=Holy Trinity Church; SG=Saint George Chapel.)

- **Sat. Dec. 4** - St. Barbara/St. John of Damascus (SG)
- **Sun. Dec. 5** - 7:00pm Great Vespers - St. Nicholas the Wonderworker
(Note: Service held at St. Nicholas Cathedral)
- **Mon. Dec. 6** - 9:00am Orthros/10:00am Liturgy - St. Nicholas the Wonderworker
(Note: Service held at St. Nicholas Cathedral)
- **Thu. Dec. 9** - Conception of the Theotokos (SG)
- **Wed. Dec. 15** - St. Eleftherios the Hieromartyr (SG)
- **Sat. Dec. 17** - St. Dionysios of Zakynthos (SG)
- **Fri. Dec. 24** - 8:30am: Royal Hours of the Nativity (HT)
- **Fri. Dec. 24** - 6:30PM **EVENING** Vespers/Liturgy of the Nativity of the Lord/Christmas(HT)
- **Sat. Dec. 25** - The Nativity of the Lord/Christmas (HT)
- **Fri. Dec. 31** - 6:30PM **EVENING** Orthros/Liturgy - St. Basil the Great (SG) (Note: **EVENING** service begins at 6:30pm)

Services for the Nativity of Christ ... December 24/25



Please remember these festal celebrations for the Nativity of Christ and participate in them with your family. Please note that all Christmas services will be held at Holy Trinity Church.

- **Fri. Dec. 24, 8:30 am: Royal Hours of the Nativity**
This special service offers readings, prophecies and hymns which point to and interpret the Incarnation.
- **Fri. Dec. 24, 6:30pm: Vespers/Liturgy of the Nativity**
This service "opens the liturgical day" and begins the celebration of the Nativity. Also, the Holy Trinity Choir will be offering a selection of beautiful Christmas carols following the service. (Note: This is a Divine Liturgy. Those wishing to receive Holy Communion need to observe proper fasting and spiritual

preparation during the day)

- **Sat. Dec. 25. 8:30am Orthros/9:30am Liturgy of The Nativity of the Lord**

This is the main service of the Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Open the best gift first by attending Liturgy with your family and receiving the Holy Mysteries together! Make it a family tradition to keep the most important thing about Christmas the most important thing in your home!

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION NEWS

Church School Reminder: Bring Your Children!

Attention Church School parents and families: **Remember, "Church School" starts with "Church!"** All families are asked to attend Divine Liturgy each Sunday, starting at 9:30. The Youth Sermon, a special feature of our Sunday Liturgy at Holy Trinity Church, is offered following the Gospel, so be sure to arrive on time for a message created for the students. Thank you, parents!

Christmas Pageant Rehearsals December 5-18

This year's Christmas pageant will once again be an "all new" Holy Trinity production, so everyone will need to be there for rehearsals. It's going to be exciting, so please don't miss out!

Sun. Dec. 5: Rehearsal will take place for grades 5-12 following Divine Liturgy and Church School. Please plan on staying until 12:00pm after Liturgy to make sure everything is completed. This includes the Christmas Orchestra and Christmas Jr. Choir.

Sun. Dec. 12: Rehearsal will take place for grades 5-12 following Divine Liturgy and Church School. Please plan on staying until 12:00pm after Liturgy to make sure everything is completed. This includes the Christmas Orchestra and Christmas Jr. Choir. We will also be taking photos of all the student participants to be displayed the Sunday of the pageant.

Sat. Dec. 18: The complete cast rehearsal for the Holy Trinity Church School Christmas Pageant will be held on Saturday morning, December 18.

- 9:00-10:00am: Pre-School through Sixth grades.
- 9:00-10:00am: Christmas Jr. Choir rehearsal.
- 9:00-10:00am: Christmas Orchestra rehearsal.
- 9:30-11:00am: 5th-12th grade rehearsal.

Also note: "Bonus" attendance credit will be given for all students who participate in the December 18 rehearsal!

Church School Christmas Pageant.....December 19

The Holy Trinity Church School ministry will be offering its annual Christmas Pageant this year on Sunday, December 19. ALL the students of the Church School will be involved in this event. On that day, following Holy Communion, all Church School students and staff will depart for their classes and final preparations for the pageant. All our parishioners are asked to stay for the pageant and coffee hour in the social hall. Also, please note: Coffee Hour that day is sponsored by the Holy Trinity Church School Alumni. Any parents or graduates that would like to help, please contact Presvytera Becky.

No Church School ClassDecember 26

Attention, parents: there will be no Church School class on December 26 due to the holiday break, so please join together to worship as a family on that day.

YOUTH MINISTRY NEWS**GOYA Christmas Fireside Chat.....December 5**

The GOYA teen ministry will hold its annual Christmas Fireside Chat on Sunday, December 5 from 2:30-4:30pm. Information and location is being sent directly to GOYA families on the GOYA email and Remind systems.

GOYA Parent MeetingDecember 6

GOYA parents are asked to attend a pre-basketball season meeting in the Grand Room at 6:45pm on December 6.

GOYA Christmas BreadOrder by December 14

Our GOYA teens will once again offer their delicious and popular Greek Christmas Bread this year. Orders must be placed by Wednesday,, December 14 for pickup following Divine Liturgy on Sunday, December 19. **Orders may be placed at the GOYA bread table during Coffee Hour in December, directly with any GOYA teen OR ONLINE at HolyTrinityPgh.org/goyabread.** See page 21 of this issue for more information.

GOYA Christmas Bread Prep December 17, 18

All GOYAs are asked to help prepare Christmas bread on December 17 (all day) and December 18 (9:00-11:00am).

GOYA Basketball Practices December 13, 20

GOYA will hold basketball practice at Franklin Elementary School from 6:00-8:00pm on December 13 and 20.

MINISTRIES NEWS**Bereavement Ministry Remembrance Night.... Dec. 6**

Special Vespers Service offered by our Bereavement Support Ministry - Monday, Dec 6th at 6:30pm..Holidays may bring mixed feelings for those experiencing grief and loss of a loved one. Father John and our Bereavement

Support Ministry Team have coordinated a special Vespers Service for those who have experienced recent loss or one that has been for many years. It will be a quiet, sacred time for worship, reflection, and prayer. We encourage each person to bring a framed photo of their loved one. We will display these photos on a table. Each person will be given a special votive candle to be lit by each photo as a remembrance of the light and warmth that our loved ones have shared in our lives. Please join us for this special evening together as we prepare for the Nativity of our Lord and the Christmas holiday. If you want to learn more, contact Amy Armanious, Visitation Ministry Coordinator at visitation@holytrinitypgh.org.

Visitation Ministry Drivers Needed

The Holy Trinity Visitation Ministry Team is in need of drivers to help parishioners with medical appointments, shopping, local errands and pharmacy drive thru. If anyone can assist, please contact Amy Armanious at visitation@HolyTrinityPgh.org or see Amy in person. Any helping hands are appreciated. Thank you!

COMMUNITY NEWS & EVENTS**Christmas Card FormsDue December 6**

If you would like to include your name in this annual community tradition, please be sure to submit your form and donation to the Church Office by December 6. The card will be mailed with the Christmas/New Year bundle.

Holiday Poinsettias Form.....Due December 6

Holy Trinity Church is again offering sponsoring of holiday poinsettias for use in the church during the Christmas and Theophany season. To donate one or more flowers in memory of a loved one or in honor of a special person or event, please complete the form and return it to the Church Office with your donation by December 6.

Demetri Constantine Ordination.....December 11

The Ordination of Demetri Constantine to the Holy Diaconate has been rescheduled for Saturday, December 11. The service and reception will take place at St. John Greek Orthodox Church, 4955 Glenwood Ave., In Boardman, Ohio. Orthros begins at 8:30am, followed by the Divine Liturgy/Ordination and reception. RSVP by December 4 if you plan on attending the reception to demetriconstantine@gmail.com.

Vasilopita Celebration January 9

On Sunday, January 9, Holy Trinity Philoptochos will offer the annual Vasilopita celebration in the Grand Room following the Divine Liturgy. Proceeds from the Vasolita celebration go to the Saint Basil Academy, and education and philanthropic institution of the Archdiocese. ❖

Stewardship Report: An Update, Many Thanks... and a Plea

Michael Kritiotis, Stewardship Ministry



Dear faithful stewards of Holy Trinity Church: With Christmas time upon us and the end of the year at hand, there is one reflection that stands out: the love and generosity you have been showing towards your Holy Trinity Church over the years are unmatched!

Even through the past two difficult years, while a devastating pandemic has been impacting the world, and after starting a new fundraising drive for the completion and consecration of the church, you have shown to be extraordinary stewards of this community.

While pledges to support the operating budget (our “normal” Treasures stewardship for the church) have slipped since their peak in 2019, they are beginning to bounce back from last year and now stand at over \$392,000 (2019 record was \$426,500). Here is the catch, and the concern, though: of that \$392,000 pledged, only about \$286,000 has been actually given so far! In other words, at this writing, 47 of the 52

weeks of the year have passed. However, our donations are only “worth” 38 weeks, if we were to split them equally each week of the year. So, we basically have to speed up our giving so that the next month or so could bring us up to, or hopefully above, our pledged level. After all, at this level of pledging, we are still only covering 58% of the operating budget. So, if we all could strive to exceed our pledged amount for the year, we would be very grateful as the result will relieve much financial pressure during these low-revenue winter months!

We are praying that, through your generous end-of-the-year donations, the gap will be completely filled and the goal exceeded. We are looking forward to giving you the good news update in the next *Holy Trinity Herald*, because you have never let this community down when called upon. Having just celebrated Thanksgiving, we’d be remiss to not thank you, the members who realize that God and His people are their highest priority, who put their hard-earned money in that

envelope, who trust us to put it to good use, who know that the mission is too important to not be a part of it, who faithfully give and offer all your gifts (Time, Talents and Treasures), knowing that God will return it tenfold through the so many blessings and opportunities around us. All of you, the Holy Trinity stewards, are the heartbeat that pumps continued life into this community. So, Thank You, good and faithful servants; we are very grateful for your commitment and hope that your blessings grow proportionate to your generous hearts!

Now another new year will soon begin, with new hopes and new challenges – we strive to better ourselves, our finances, our health. We’ll also certainly strive to better our church and its community. As we have in the past, by pushing through innovations and ideas, we will continue to listen to your wishes and needs, and improve the way we operate. We’ll continue to rely on each of our stewards and their hard work to keep the church vibrant.

The next two years should actually be quite exciting. The enthusiasm around this, our spiritual home, is palpable. One feels it by simply walking in; it grows as they begin to interact with you; it peaks when they see and feel the deeds and cheerful ministry you carry out. God planted us in this vineyard for a high purpose. He intends for us to do good in the world around us, to add to our ministries, to teach our children well, and to show others Christ’s love from within our hearts. These truly are new-year resolutions worth keeping!

We pray for all of God’s blessings to you and your families. ❖

Faithfully yours,
The Holy Trinity Stewardship Ministry

Stewardship 2021 Roster

Rev. Fr. John & Pres. Becky
Touloumes
Rev. Fr. Radu & Pres. Loredana
Bordeianu
Rev. Fr. George & Pres. Evangelia
Daskalakis

Dr. & Mrs. Andrew Abboud
Ms. Alexandra Abboud
Mr. & Mrs. Mark Adamczyk
Ms. Gabrielle Alberty
Mr. & Mrs. Justin Ambrose
Mr & Mrs Victor Amurgis
Ms. Georgiana Anargyros
Mrs Beatrice Andromalos
Mr Michael Andromalos-Dale
Ms Victoria Andromalos-Dale
Drs. Alexander & Katherine Anetakis
Mr. and Mrs. H. William Areheart
Mr & Mrs Mark Armanious
Mr & Mrs Vasilios Athanas
Mr & Mrs Harry Athanasiou
Mrs. Tessie C. Athens
Ms. Andrea R. Athens
Mrs. Desi Anthou Austin
Mr & Mrs Alvin Backeris
Mr & Mrs Van Backeris
Dr & Mrs Christ A. Balouris
Dr & Mrs Constantine A. Balouris
Mr & Mrs James T. Balouris
Mr. Anthony C. Balouris
Mr & Mrs. Chris T. Balouris
Mr. Nicholas Balouris
Mrs. Katherine Balouris
Ms. Penny T. Balouris
Lynn and Ethel Barker
Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Barron
Mrs. Anne-Marie Battaglia
Mrs Georgia Beckas Miller
Mrs Olga Beckas
Victoria and Maurice Bedel
Chris and Maria Berexa
Adam & Christina Bishop
Ms. Constance Bistolas-Walters
Mr. Michael J. Bober Jr.
Mrs. Athena Bober

Mr. Todd Bogdanovich
Ms. Pamela M. Bolkovac
Dr. & Mrs. Christopher Bonfield
Dr & Mrs Reggie Bonfield
Mr. & Mrs. Jonathan Bonfield
Mr. & Mrs. Michael Bounos
Dr. & Mrs. Alexander Bournias
Mr. & Mrs. Michael Bournias
Marisa and Joshua Boyd
Mr. & Mrs. Robert Brewer
Clifford Brubaker & Sondra Balouris
Mr & Mrs James Buldas
Alexandra and Anthony Cameron
Mr. & Mrs. Jonathan Caromano
Mr. Peter J. Castellano
Mr. & Mrs. Doug Cervenak
Mr & Mrs Charles Chapas
Mr & Mrs James Chapas
Mr Thomas Chapas
Mr & Mrs William Chapas
Mr Louis Cherpes
Mr. John Clayton
Ms. Sherry Clayton
Mrs. Elenie Cocheres
Mr. & Mrs. Steven E. Cole
Mrs Afrodite Condos
Amanda and Ryan Copeland
Ms. Cynthia Morris Criss
Mr & Mrs George Danis
Mr. & Mrs. Evan Danis
Mr. & Mrs. Peter Dedousis
Mrs. Helen P. DeMoss
Mr. & Mrs. George Dickos
Mrs. Christine Dickos
Mr. & Mrs. Nikolas Doris
Krystina and Sebastian Dovenor
Mr. & Mrs. Jeff Durosko
Mr & Mrs Frank Erdeljac
Ms. Theodora Fakles
Dennis Bossick & Penny
Fakles-Bossick
Mr. & Mrs. Christian Farmakis
Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Ferrari
Mrs Georgeann Festas Graf
Mr & Mrs William Fiedler
Mrs. Carol Fiffas

Mr & Mrs Andreas Fournaridis
Mr. Andrew Fournaridis & Ms. Anna
Mamo
Mr. & Mrs. John Franciscus
Mrs Tessie Frankos
Lauren and Gerald Freismuth
Miss Diana Fries
Mr. John Fries
Mrs Constance Fries
Dr & Mrs Peter Gagianas
Mr. & Mrs. Josh Skrba
Mr & Mrs Markos Gambieris
Mrs. Joan Gatsiopoulos
Mr & Mrs Thomas Geanopulos
Mr. & Mrs. George Geanopulos
Mr and Mrs Troy Geanopulos
Ms. Efthalia Geanous
Mrs. Fabiola Georgallis
Mr & Mrs George Georges
Dr. and Mrs. Mark Georgiadis
Mr & Mrs Basil Georgiadis
Mr & Mrs Gus Georgiadis
Mr & Mrs Steven Georgiadis
Ms. Jamie Georgiadis
Mr & Mrs Thomas Germanos
Mr. & Mrs. Spiros Giannoutsos
Mr & Mrs Peter Giannoutsos
Mr. & Mrs. Jason Gidas
Mr & Mrs Gary Glew
Ms. Alexa Glew
Mr & Mrs Peter Glyptis
Mrs Eugenia Graser
Mr. George Gregorich
Mrs Voula Hareras
Ms Pennie Hareras
Mr. & Mrs. John Anthony Hastings
Mrs. Faye Henigin
Ms. Victoria Hinchee
Mrs. Tina Houmis Connors
Mr. & Mrs. George Hulse
Mr. & Mrs. Carlo Iasella
Dr. Kristina Johnson
Mr & Mrs James Johnson
Mr. & Mrs. George Kachulis
Mr & Mrs Nick Kakavis
Mr. Gus Kalaris

Thank you to the following faithful stewards who have submitted their pledge cards for the 2021 pledge year. Please join them in their support for the ministries of Holy Trinity and complete your "One Holy Trinity" 2022 pledge commitment today!

Mr. & Mrs. Evangelo Kaparakos
Dr. & Mrs. Gregory Karabin
Mrs. Irene Karavolos
Mr. & Mrs. George Karpakis
Dr & Mrs James Kermes
Dr Imad Alizray and Ms Zelfa Khalil
Mr & Mrs Gus Kilantonis
Mr & Mrs Lazarus Kirifides
Mr. & Mrs. Peter Kladias
Ms. Rachel Klipa
Mr. Jonathan Kohan
Mr. and Mrs. James Kolovos
Mr. & Mrs. Doug Lupnacca
Mr. & Mrs. John Komninos
Mrs Penelope Komninos
Mrs. Fanny Kostos
Dr & Mrs Dimitris Kraniou
Mr. & Mrs. Jonathan Kratsas
Mr. & Mrs. Marios Kritiotis
Mr & Mrs Michael Kritiotis
Brian and Christina Kuhn
Mr. & Mrs. James Kukunas
Mr. Stephen Kukunas
Mrs Irene Kukunas
Mrs Despina Ladakos
Mr. James L. Lakes
Mr. & Mrs. Philip LeDuc
Mr. & Mrs. Michael Leist
Mr. & Mrs. Nektarios Leontiadis
Antonia and David Lesser
Mr. & Mrs. Chris Loomis
Mr & Mrs Louis T. Loomis
Mr & Mrs Nicholas Loomis
Brett and Eleni Lucido
Ms. Margo Machuga
Mr. Curtis B. Magnuson
Shayne and Elizabeth Stiger
Mr & Mrs Nicholas Manis
Mr & Mrs Gregory Manis
Mrs. Anne Manis
Mr. George Manolagas
Mr & Mrs N. Jeffrey Mason
Mr & Mrs John McCann
Marc McMullen and Alexandra
Valliant
Mr. & Mrs. George Mellis

Mrs. Milita Mellis
Mr & Mrs Jeff Mercadante
Mr. & Mrs. James Mermigas
Mrs. Arlene Metropulos
Christine Metropulos and Dave Steiner
Dennis and Susan Michaels
Mr & Mrs Meno Mitaras
Mr. & Mrs. Eric Mitchell
Mr. Gregory Morris
Mr Stanley Morris
Mr & Mrs Mark Opacic
Mr. & Mrs. Richard Paese
Gen. & Mrs. William Pagonis
Mr. Michael Pagonis
Mr & Mrs William Pagonis
Mr & Mrs Matthew Palamara
Ms. Thespina Palka
Mrs. Veroniki Panagiotou
Mr & Mrs Robert Panagulias
Mr. & Mrs. George Pandelios
Mr Michael Panos
Mr Peter Panos
Mr & Mrs George Pantelakis
Dr & Mrs Robert Papas
Ms. Loukia Papatheodorou
Ms. Eleni Pappas
Mr. Anthony Pappis
Mr & Mrs Orestes Paras
Mr Eleftherios Parikakis
Mr. Basil Paschaledis
Mr & Mrs Nicholas Passaretti
Mr & Mrs Constantine Passodelis
Mr & Mrs Michael Passodelis
Mr & Mrs George Pastor
Mr. James J. Patsilevas
Mrs. Anna Patsilevas
Mr. & Mrs. Charles Petredis
Mr. & Mrs. Charles W. Petredis
Mr. Christian Petredis
Ms. Athena Petredis
Mr. & Mrs. John S. Petropoulos
Mr. & Mrs. Joseph P. Phaturos
Mr & Mrs John H. Phillips
Mr & Mrs Stephen Pickios
Ms Rania Pontikos
Ms. Christine Pusateri

Katina and Salvatore Re
Mr. & Mrs. Evan Rigas
Kevin and Andrea Rohm
Mr & Mrs Stephen Roman
Mr. Christopher Sarandou
Christopher and Sandra Schall
Dr & Mrs Dean Scoumis
Mrs. Angeliki Scoumis
Mr. & Mrs. Stephen E. Sedor and Valya
Ms Stephanie L Sedor
Presvytera Eileen Sedor
Mr & Mrs Emmanuel Sideris
Mrs. Anita Sinicrope-Maier
Ms. Theone Stateson
Mr & Mrs Robert Stearns
Mr. Stephen D. Stearns
Mr. & Mrs. Craig Steiner
Dr & Mrs Samuel Stepanow
Mr. & Mrs. Kirk Stephen
Mr. & Mrs. Daniel C. Stephenson
Mr. & Mrs. Theodore Stewart
Mr & Mrs Jon Stipanovich
Mr & Mrs Nicholas Terezis
Mr. & Mrs. James Thomas III
Mr & Mrs James Thomas
Mrs Georgia Touloumes
Mr & Mrs Michael Tzanakakis
Ms. Eleni Valliant
Mr & Mrs Gerri Valliant
Joseph and Christina Waters
Mrs Joanne Ladakos Watson
Mrs Elaine Weaver
Miss Mary-Magdalene Welsh
Mr & Mrs Eric White
Mr & Mrs Daniel Willow
Mr. & Mrs. Michael Zagnacky
Mr. & Mrs. George Zappas
Dr & Mrs Antonios Zikos
Mr & Mrs Anthony Zissis
Ms Anna Zissis
Mr & Mrs Louis Zozos

TO GOD BE THE GLORY! ❖



October 24: Holy Trinity Church celebrated its annual Youth Sunday by having the young people step up to many levels of responsibility. Above: GOYA officers for the new year are installed. Left/Right: Teens take over the Parish Council and Hospitality Ministry duties for the day. Bottom: The youth sermons are delivered by members of HOPE (Christina Stepanow), JOY (Athan Lupnacca) and GOYA (Alex Tomalski). Bravo to all!





Holy Trinity ministries are back in action! And there is something for everyone! We're waiting for you!

Top Row: The new Philoptochos Board is installed ; Philoptochos holds its November meeting.

Second Row: The JOY ministry starts its year with an afternoon of crafts, games and a chat with Fr. John; our choir and chanters are honored on Church Music Sunday.

Third Row: Faith and Family Weekdays returns with Father Radu leading the "Explore the Word" Bible study; three generations enjoy the first Parish Family Game Night.

Bottom Row: Young people and teens enjoy a crisp afternoon of flag football on the church lawn during the annual Thanksgiving weekend GOYA Turkey Bowl.

Faith & Family Weekdays

Something for Everyone!

JOM

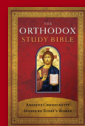
Journey of Marriage
1st Tuesday, 7:00pm



Marriage seminar aimed at preparing couples for their wedding. Based on the "Journey of Marriage" course by Dr. Philip Mamalakis. Conducted as group sessions with other couples to share and grow together. Nov. 2, Dec. 7, Jan. 4, Feb. 1, Mar. 1, Apr. 5, May 3.

ETW

Explore the Word
Alternate Wednesdays, 6:30pm



Father Radu continues his exploration of the Holy Bible, this time with a survey of the Old Testament. Learn about Genesis, Exodus, Job, the poetry of the Book of Psalms and the Prophecies of Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah. Bring your Bible and your questions!

PBC



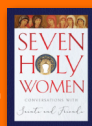
Parish Book Club
Alternate Wednesdays, 6:30pm



Men and women of all ages can learn more about Christian living in the midst of challenges with a discussion of the book, "Gratitude in Life's Trenches: How to Experience the Good Life Even When Everything's Going Wrong." Sounds like help everyone could use!

SLF

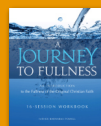
St. Lydia Women's Fellowship
2nd & 4th Tuesday, 7:00pm



Our longest-running study group, aimed at giving women the opportunity to share and grow together. This year based on the new book, "Seven Holy Women: Conversations with Saints and Friends." Dec. 14; Jan. 11 & 25; Feb. 8 & 22; May 10, 24

JTF

Journey to Fullness
Mondays (7-week series), 7:00pm



An overview of the Orthodox Christian Faith for newcomers interested in joining or life-long members yearning to deepen their understanding. Format: Videos and Q&A/discussion. Nov. 8, 15, 22, 29, Dec. 6, 13 & 20. Repeats May 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 & Jun. 6, 13.

P&P

Prayer & Panera
2nd & 4th Thursday, 7:00am



Prayer and Christian fellowship for men. Meets at church promptly at 7:00 a.m. for a 15-20 minute morning prayer and scripture, then moves up the hill to Panera for 45 minutes of coffee & conversation. Dec. 9, 23; Jan. 13, 27; Feb. 10, 24; Mar. 10, 24 & more.

Faith and Family Weekdays is back, and there is something for everyone! Ready to learn more about the Bible, about your Faith, about navigating life's challenges as a Christian, a woman or a man? It's all there. New this season: the **Parish Book Club**, based on the Orthodox Christian book "Gratitude in Life's Trenches." Having been through the challenges of the past two years, we could all use a perspective that helps us find blessings and thanks even in the most challenging situations. Also new: **Family Game Night**. Enjoy games, fun and fellowship with other parish families of all ages! For adults and young people, too!

There are lots of other opportunities to learn about the Faith, the Bible, marriage and Christian living. Something for everyone! Watch the bulletin and check the online calendar at HolyTrinityPgh.org/calendar for details and locations. ❖

FGN



Family Game Night
First Friday, 7:00pm

Games, fun and fellowship for all ages! Board games, skill exercises and more. Bring your own favorites with you to share! Popcorn, snacks and drinks provided. It's for the entire family, so bring Papou & Yiayia, Mom & Dad, too! Dec. 3, Jan. 7, Feb. 4.

TOP SCOUTING AWARD

REBECCA BORDEIANU

Holy Trinity teen receives Girl Scout Silver Award, the highest in her grade, for her philanthropic work with a local Orthodox Christian mission.



Girl Scouting's highest awards—the Bronze, Silver, and Gold Awards—are a girl's chance to make a lasting difference in the world. Girl Scouts Western Pennsylvania is honored to present Rebecca Bordeianu with the Girl Scout Silver Award, the highest recognition for achievement in Girl Scouting for girls in grades 6-8.

This award recognizes girls who demonstrate—individually or as a group—extraordinary leadership through sustainable and measurable Take Action projects that address important community needs.

Bordeianu's 50-hour Silver Award project began in early 2020 and was completed in August 2021.

Through a leadership project, Bordeianu wanted to address the ongoing and often overlooked issue of hunger within our community.

Through her project research, Bor-

deianu learned that a very crucial part of ending world hunger is having a dedicated group of people with a strong will to help others. Those words resonated with Bordeianu, and she made it her mission to not only fight to end hunger and serve her community, but to inspire those around her to do the same. Over the course of several months, she recruited friends, classmates and fellow Girl Scouts to pack and deliver healthy lunches to the hungry. In Spring of 2021, Bordeianu led her team through the process of preparing and packaging lunches and

delivering them to the Neighborhood Resilience Project in the Hill District. Her efforts provided 145 free lunches to those in need. Bordeianu then created a website to share how different non-profits around the world are working to fight world hunger and what the general public can do to help. To learn more, visit sites.google.com/view/worldhungry/home.

Bordeianu used her strength, talent, and skills and put her plan into action to earn the Silver Award while taking a leadership role.

Rebecca Bordeianu is the daughter of Radu and Loredana Bordeianu from North Allegheny School District, Marshall Township. She has been a member of Girl Scout Troop #52534 for 7 years. She was supported in her Silver Award efforts by Mike Krititotis for the Neighborhood Resilience Project. ❖

Source: 11/9/2021 online edition of neighborhoods.triblive.com/northalleghejnyjournal.



A PRIEST'S SABBATICAL: A BLESSING FOR ALL

How what started out as a Sabbatical for our priest turned out to be a blessing for the entire community

A Holy Trinity Herald Feature Article by Anita Sinicrope Maier, MSW



May 16, 2021: Parish Council President George Danis, Father Radu and the Sabbatical Committee offered a "Sabbatical Sendoff" message to Father John and Presvytera Becky on their last Sunday before leaving for their travels.

Whether it is at Divine Liturgy, a trip to the church office, or just attending any church function or meeting, we are all used to seeing Father John Touloumes present at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Pittsburgh, PA. Walking down the hallway with his garment swaying from his fast pace, it is apparent he is a busy man with things to do. He may be setting up or fixing AV equipment for a presentation or announcement, on the way to coffee hour to talk to a particular parishioner about a personal issue or need, facilitating a "Faith & Family Weekdays" event or taking care of a myriad of other church affairs. Not to mention all the off-campus duties he may have such as visiting the sick or dying, attending Archdiocese business meetings, counseling parishioners in distress or overseeing and participating in the various missions created for Holy Trinity Church.

For 28 uninterrupted years, this has been the life for Father John, who is "Proistamenos" (head priest) at our parish. His tireless energy is seen in everything he does. The Energizer Bunny has nothing on him. Does anyone wonder when or if he has a day "off" from the duties of the parish or whether he takes a vacation with Presvytera and his family to rest and renew? The

answer is he does—but not enough. Oh, yes, he may travel for a day or two for a family wedding, funeral or Archdiocese event, but you can be sure that when it is over, he is quickly back at the parish resuming duties serving his people, his church and the calling of our Christ.

Until this year. In May of 2021, Father John and “Pres. Becky” (as she is affectionately called by everyone) departed for a three-month sabbatical with the blessing of all—the Metropolitan, the Parish Council, the staff, his assistant priest and the entire community. When it was first announced that this event would occur, it was probably met with some confusion or lack of understanding what this would exactly mean. Yes, teachers and professors take sabbaticals but a priest? How would the parish function without that steady presence? Would Father Radu Bordeianu be able to take over all Father John’s duties? What if some crisis occurred? How and who will manage COVID situations if they should change?

What is a Clergy Sabbatical?

To better understand all this, I think we must first discover what the definition of a clergy sabbatical is. Looking for a simple definition for the word sabbatical tells us that the concept of sabbatical is based on the biblical practice of “shmita,” which was related to agriculture. In Leviticus 25, the Jews in Israel took a yearlong break from working the fields every 7 years. The root word for “sabbatical” is the word “sabbath,” meaning “a day of rest dedicated to God.” Sabbatical, technically, then is several sabbaths put together “to strengthen your relationship with the Lord.” In Hebrews 4:9, sabbath is referenced in this way: “So then there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God.” A clergy sabbatical is about stepping back from the never-ending responsibilities of a

SABBATICAL: A TIME TO RENEW, REFRESH, RECHARGE
FEATURE ARTICLE

Sabbatical 1-2-3

1	2	3
		
<h3 style="margin: 0;">RENEW</h3> <p>One of the greatest investments a church can make is to invest in a pastor’s long-term personal growth and renewal, which is the purpose of the sabbatical.¹</p>	<h3 style="margin: 0;">REFRESH</h3> <p>Sabbatical puts the words of Psalm 23 to the test. “The Lord is my shepherd,” we say with David. “I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.”²</p>	<h3 style="margin: 0;">RECHARGE</h3> <p>Staying spiritually strong is a challenge for all Christians, but particularly for those who have the never-ending responsibility of pouring into the lives of others.³</p>

“Parish growth and renewal has engaged all segments of the church in an active development mode for nearly 20 years, and it is time for us all to take a breath, renew our strength and harvest the fruits of those labors. This sabbatical is designed to be that breath.”

¹ ExecutivePastorOnline.com ² SoulShepherding.com ³ SmartChurchManagement.com

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Page from the April-May Holy Trinity Herald article explaining what a Sabbatical is and what the goals for the priest and the community are. Community preparation was embraced as an essential element and a key to success.

priest while standing still in the Lord. The most concise definition of clergy sabbatical that I found, however, to fit our purpose of understanding is this: “an official extended period away from current ministry and responsibility for the purpose of ministerial, personal, spiritual and theological development and enrichment.” In other definitions, there is additionally a

component of “renewal and the ability to refresh while first slowing down to regain one’s vision.”

In researching various Greek Orthodox sites on the Internet, I was not able to find anything which clearly described a clergy sabbatical in our Orthodox Christian Faith, even though it is officially listed as a clergy benefit in our Archdiocese regulations. So how



May 16, 2021: Offerings of love from the Sabbatical Sendoff Luncheon. L-R: The invitation; one of the creative travel centerpieces; a bon voyage card for Father John and Pres. Becky signed by the Church School students.

could a lay person understand the concept pertaining to their priest? This lack of information also made me believe that perhaps not even many priests know where to search for information on a clergy sabbatical. I am hoping that this article can provide information and description of the process that Holy Trinity Church followed, and this may aid other priests and parishes to consider this option when a sabbatical for their priest is wanted or needed. Surely other Orthodox clergy also work without respite or the chance to enhance their faith while away from their everyday pastoral duties. Our parish and Father John's very successful and beneficial experience will hopefully prove to be a model for others to explore or follow.

How It All Started

Where to begin? Father John felt called to explore the possibility of his sabbatical back in 2019. As President of the Archdiocesan Presbyter Council from 2014-2018, one of his major concerns was clergy welfare. He realized that in addition to encouraging

other brother priests to take better care of themselves, he needed to do the same. He had heard of The Lilly Endowment, a private philanthropic foundation, which has a Clergy Renewal Program. First, however, he needed to present the idea of a sabbatical to Metropolitan Savas and receive his blessing—which he did. He then began researching this endowment, which provides sabbatical grants through the Christian Theological Seminary and its program for Pas-



“He has been an active and tireless leader for so many years. We realized it was his time to rejuvenate and recharge his battery.

George Dickos

toral Excellence. It is aimed at strengthening Christian congregations of all denominations through clergy and parish renewal and reflection. They describe this process as “not a vacation” but instead time for intentional exploration and reflection and “for drinking again from God’s life-giving waters for regaining enthusiasm and creativity for ministry.” The application process is lengthy, however, and they receive several thousand grant proposals each year.

The guidelines caution that this grant is for “congregations that have a high degree of mutual trust and support, have a strong relationship with one another, and are eager to see their relationship strengthened, renewed and continued.”

Proposing a Sabbatical

Father John believed we had this type of community. So, he brought the idea to the Parish Council. They were very receptive to his proposal. “He has been an active and tireless leader for so many years,” said Parish Council Vice-President George Dickos. “We realized it was his time to rejuvenate

and recharge his battery. I think none of us really understood the commitment that was expected of both him and Pres. Becky. Their demands are constant, and their responsibilities are deep." George went on to say that the Council's quick approval of the sabbatical showed the love, respect and approval that is felt for them.

They then created a Sabbatical Committee, as required by the grant application. It was composed of Spiritual Life Ministry chairperson Joyce Athanasiou and Parish Council member Rick Paese. They were to help make the application for the grant and be the voice of the parish by getting community feedback. They presented an announcement to the community after Liturgy and then hosted a table in the Gallery where people could write their messages of support or concerns. "I didn't hear any negative opinions about it from any community members," said Rick Paese. "I am a convert and only in the parish for 6 years, so I felt honored to be on the committee. Working through Father's schedule and helping plan it made me feel closer to him and his family."

Joyce was hesitant at first about presenting it to the community, but "the reactions of the church members turned out to be such a blessing. They were all so happy to be able to see both Father and Pres. Becky have this opportunity to be renewed." Joyce believes the community was so receptive "because they love both of them. The community and Father John have evolved together over many years. We are a family. If he wants to do this...let's do it!"

Sabbatical Speed Bumps

The first application for 2020 was not granted, but since COVID struck our community and the world so hard, the whole sabbatical had to be postponed anyway. Between January and March of 2020, it was apparent that the

country would be shutting down and travel would not be permitted. But when 2021 rolled around and the restrictions were slowly being lifted, Father John decided to re-submit a new application to the Lilly Endowment. Rick believed Father realized that maybe his traveling was too ambitious in the first application. "He was willing to listen to suggestions and other people's opinions to make the sabbatical more realistic in the second proposal," said Rick. "He tweaked it this time," Joyce added. He chose Greece as the country of travel where he proposed to visit both his and Pres. Becky's family homelands and various sacred churches and places important to our faith. He also sketched out time to get together with family and do things they haven't normally done together in these past 28 years.

The second application also did not garner the grant. It turns out the odds of the number of applications were against it due to a huge number of applications. But all involved believe the

process of applying learned from the Lilly Endowment turned out to be a great blessing. In the application, they had to submit reasons for the sabbatical, financial information, a schedule and other information that provided a template not only for his own sabbatical, but perhaps one that other priests desiring to do the same thing can learn from. "Filling out the application gave Father John and us a really good framework and many guidelines as to the purpose of this request. It also helped us to know how to present it better to the community," explained Joyce. When it was presented again to the community for 2021, the new plan was warmly approved once more. "It is a testament as to what the parish feels for both of them. We'd be honored to give this gift to them and give back for how much they have done for the church," explained Rick.

The Sabbatical Send-Off

The last thing that the Sabbatical Committee was in charge of was to oversee a "Sabbatical Sendoff Luncheon." It was planned to occur fol-

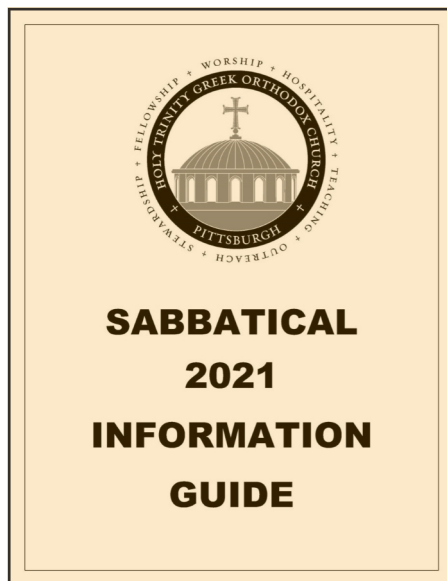


May 16, 2021: Father John and Presvytera Becky said farewell for the summer with a message reminding everyone that even though they were going to be apart physically, the Holy Trinity family would go with them in their hearts and prayers.

lowing the last Divine Liturgy Father John would serve before he left our church for his sabbatical. The Sabbatical Committee and the Parish Council worked diligently—even without Father John knowing about some surprises, and that is not an easy task! People were able to wish him and Pres. Becky good wishes and offer them goodwill gifts to help with his traveling. It was a poignant and loving event, yet for those who knew they would be without Father John for an extended time, it was filled with a bit of trepidation about the roles they were about to play in their priest's absence. It was agreed by all that this was the last time anyone would have communication with Father or Pres. Becky until their return. No phone calls, emails or texts! This was truly to be a time of respite from his duties at Holy Trinity.

Sabbatical Blessings in the Office

Father John and Pres. Becky did indeed experience many blessings on their time away, but another major blessing was the amazing way the parish functioned in his absence! There was no need for trepidation. Not that Father John was not missed—because he certainly was—but the life and ministries of Holy Trinity Church continued without interruption. There were several factors, however, that contributed to that success, one being the detailed preparation that Father John undertook before he left. Mary Portellos, the Administrative Assistant at Holy Trinity, called it the “Sabbatical Information Guide” and said it was a “fountain of information.” It included information on who was responsible for everything at the Metropolis level, a guide to the audio-visual system, phone numbers, emails, technical details on the live streaming of services, security, website and more. “It was a lifeline for me,” said Mary. “It saved me so much time and trouble. If I had questions



before Father left, the answers were written down here.” She learned to do things she had never done before like the listserv used for email blasts. She referred to the guide every day. Although no crises occurred during the sabbatical, everyone felt very prepared and that they would be able to handle them if they would have. “Here, more so than at other parishes, Father John is a very knowledgeable technical problem solver. He is so good at what he does. We are always asking him ‘how do I do this or that?’ The sabbatical encouraged everyone to learn how to solve problems on their own,” said Mary. Another blessing! Parish Council President George Danis said, “This sabbatical proved



The sabbatical encouraged everyone to learn how to solve problems on their own.

Mary Portellos

that we could adapt to changing circumstances and step in and fill a different role. Not that we can do fine without Father, but for the short term, we could take up the slack—especially in a slower time of year like the summer.”

Sabbatical Blessings for the Ministry

We cannot underestimate another tremendous blessing that our community possessed that others may not. We already had an assistant priest who knew our parish very well after serving it for 15 years. Over and over again, I heard from those I interviewed how wonderful it was to get to know Father Radu better and see him, perhaps, in a different light. Everyone praised his competence, enthusiasm and dedication to the role he assumed. He was in the church office every day fulfilling the duties normally done by Father John. He worked closely with Mary, as well as Dan Tender, our talented and highly valued custodian. He addressed any problems or issues that needed attention. “He took over hospital and nursing home visits, counseling, confession, baptisms, holy unction and funerals. He met with visitors, Parish Council members and anyone who stopped in with questions concerning our faith. Of course, above all, he offered all the church services, as only a priest can do. Father Radu was amazing as he handled the day-to-day duties of a parish priest,” said Mary. “He really undertook responsibilities wonderfully and with joy,” said George Dickos. “He attended all Council meetings that Father John would normally attend. He jumped into his duties fully.”

Indeed, Father Radu’s participation and full support was a key element in making Father John’s sabbatical possible. In his words, “After so many years of service as a parish priest, Father John needed and deserved a



I never realized how involved so many parishioners were. I felt my relationships with the parish community changed for the better as I became more aware of their needs while giving pastoral care.

Father Radu Bordeianu

May 16, 2021: Father John offered Father Radu his thanks, prayers and a special "Just One Cup a Day" coffee mug to help him through his new responsibilities during the Sabbatical!



time for rest and reflection, to experience the faith as it is lived in other places and come back to see the parish with fresh eyes. It is also important for the parish as well to see the day-to-day workings of their priest and realize all that he does." He looked at assuming this role as a 'gift' for him. "I had been a parish priest in Raleigh, North Carolina, before coming to Holy Trinity Church and I missed that role. Being in the office every day with Mary and Dan was a blessing to me. People would drop by, and I could talk to them and get to know them better. I never realized how involved so many parishioners were. I felt my relationships with the parish community changed for the better as I became more aware of their needs while giving pastoral care." He was happy that he got to meet many people for the first time. "It was such a joy to be present, to listen, to give comfort and joy." One thing he emphasized was that he was very impressed with the love, respect and support that all members of the community offered to each other. "It is essential to have a good trustworthy relationship like this, everyone working together—priest, community, Parish Council and staff—for a sabbatical to work. Father Radu is also a full-time professor at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, so it was great advantage that the sabbatical occurred during the summer months. "One thing is very clear after this experience. I could not do both [being a full-time professor and a full-time parish priest] and do them 'right' at the same time!", exclaimed Father Radu. He described one of his greatest joys and blessings during this time was that he had the opportunity to baptize 12 children! And two of them were double baptisms—a rare experience indeed. He and others felt that one of the biggest accomplishments they all achieved was that they never had to call or reach out to Father John while he was gone—not even once!

Post-Sabbatical Blessings for All

Now that we are past the event, how do parish members and staff experience Father John and Pres. Becky? One aspect of a spiritually-centered clergy sabbatical is that those who take one do not intend to remain the same as they were before they left. So, what were the observable benefits of the sabbatical? Were the proposed goals met? What has been brought to the parish that is new as a result of their experiences?

One thing that was mentioned by various people in different positions was the level of confidence they felt in being able to do their jobs without constant supervision. Most of this change was due to the preparations that were done before the sabbatical began. The sabbatical information guide that Father John wrote and the personal communications and information that others received concerning their 'what if' questions really helped their tasks to appear more manageable. That knowledge would be continued to be used after the sabbatical. It created a sense of independence although all acknowledged that our church could never operate as well as it does without Father John. These benefits would also be valuable if a state of emergency were to occur such as illness of a priest.

Sabbatical Reflections

The following personal comments capture the experience and the growth the Sabbatical brought for Father John and all those involved.

Father Radu (Assistant Priest): "I think there is a benefit to the parish in the sharing of experiences and memories that Father John had and witnessed during his time away. There is a rich list of things he saw that can be added to his sermons. He has not told us 'all at once' what he saw but has instead added it to sermons that especially apply to his experiences."

George Danis (Parish Council President): "I think Father was definitely refreshed and I see him really enjoying the sharing of his experiences. For instance, during the feast of St.

Demetrios, Father shared what he saw and learned when visiting Thessaloniki, the place where the saint lived, and this truly enriched our appreciation of the feast day. There is a reconnecting with faith that also occurs, and we can see that."

George Dickos (Parish Council Vice-President): "I also think he has come back refreshed and energized. He brought back new ministry which he is implementing this fall. It is apparent he wants to move forward. His goal was to take some time off and come back stronger and he did."

Joyce Athanasiou (Sabbatical Committee Member): "I think Father John is learning that he doesn't have to be busy every minute of the day for things to be a success. He seems that he is taking everything in a more relaxed way. He is more tolerant and he has a lot to share in bits and pieces. He even visited other parishes in the United States and saw how they operated. But I want to also mention how much we appreciate that we could give Pres. Becky a break also. She does so much for the parish. She



June 25, 2021: Father John was invited to celebrate Divine Liturgy at the Evangelistria Church on the Island of Tinos. The red arrow indicates the location of the miraculous icon of the Theotokos that pilgrims from around the world come to venerate.

is head of Church School, Goya, the Christmas Pageant and has such a rapport with the kids and teenagers. Pres. Becky is such a unique Presvytera and we all love her. She and Father John are such a great team."

A View from the Inside: Presvytera on the Sabbatical

It seemed to be important for the sake of this article to ask Pres. Becky her thoughts on the sabbatical. After all, she was with Father John the whole time and also experienced what he did. A goal of a sabbatical was that they both needed this time to not only refresh and renew but to also broaden their relationship and their own ministries as well.

"My husband shares his ministry with me, and I am blessed to be a part of it. We all really needed it in more ways than I would have believed," she said. "It was amazing how many doors God opened for us and all we saw, heard and experienced. One example is our time on the island of Tinos, a famous religious pilgrimage shrine, where people come by the thousands to see

the miraculous icon and receive blessings or healings. Father John was asked by the head priest there to offer a Paraklesis service to the Theotokos, which he was honored to do. Then he was invited to come back the next day and serve the Divine Liturgy. While attending a private reception after the service, we were blessed to hear story after story about Panagia (The Virgin Mary, All-Holy, Full of Grace) and the miraculous weeping icon of her that resides there. The stories a local Archimandrite shared were amazing and told of the Panagia's wonderful visitations and healings. These kinds of things happened everywhere. People would invite us into their inner circle, and we got to see how faith was working in different places."

During the sabbatical, she realized it was more important and easier to spiritually recharge when a parish priest is away from the administrative duties that he lives with on a daily, non-stop basis. It truly is a 24/7 responsibility and church duties often take priority over personal needs. So it is ironic that the preparation for the

sabbatical actually added to his daily work for a time. "But, by the time we left, he knew that everything would be fine," said Pres. Becky. "That heightened his ability to relax. It was the right time and the right place, and we left everything in the hands of our capable community."

"When we finally departed and began to truly relax," she went on, "we did so in a different way, without the usual responsibilities. We focused on where we were and what we were going now instead of focusing on what we left behind and what we would do when we returned." She laughed, saying they had a "pact" not to talk about their responsibilities back at the church. If one of them would start to mention something, the other would help realize they were not supposed to go there...then they would return to the moment at hand. They truly practiced mindfulness during this sabbatical!

The "Win/Win" of a Clergy Sabbatical

A good priest is indeed a "healing presence," according to Orthodox Christian author and therapist Dr. Al Rossi. He is called to be one who by just "being there" promotes spiritual safety and wellness for those whom he serves. When

he is married, his wife stands by his side helping, wherever she is needed while she still carries on her own responsibilities. Clergy children are often asked to make unseen sacrifices at times, but they also receive many blessings by having a life of service modeled for them. Too many years of all that without respite can take its toll on everyone, starting with the priest. So blessing a parish priest with a sabbatical can indeed be a "win/win" situation for all: the priest, his wife, their family and the entire parish.

This is the Sabbatical story of Father John Touloumes at Holy Trinity Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 2021. It is just one model of a Sabbatical, but it was the perfect one for the entire Holy Trinity family at this moment in time. Each parish is unique with its own personality, strengths and challenges. While other clergy and parishes may choose to craft their Sabbaticals differently, we hope our experience can be of value as they take up the call to walk the road of Sabbatical renewal, refresh and blessings together, always to the glory of God! ❖

Comments, feedback or just want to say thank you for this article? Contact Anita via email at pened1@aol.com

Joyce Athanasiou, Sabbatical Committee member and a longtime faithful, hard-working parishioner of Holy Trinity Church, delivered this eloquent speech at the Sabbatical Sendoff Luncheon.

Father John,

This last year has brought many challenges and a storm that our church and its clergy have never weathered before. One of the things that this past year has taught us is to not take things for granted. Today we recognize that one of the things we need to not take for granted is the sacrifices and dedication that you continue to provide this community.

While the last year was difficult, our parish continued to move...our ministries did not become stagnant... they continued to flourish, and we were fed spiritually. I can only imagine that at many points there were temptations to stop...to give in to the idea of using excuses to take a break or take it easy. But you didn't and this is a testimony to your leadership that you have offered this community for 28 years.

Having been intimately part of the process of exploring this Sabbatical opportunity, my heart and mind have been opened to the needs of this Sabbatical for you, Father John, and Presvytera Becky. The life of a priest is 24/7, and I know for many this concept doesn't resonate. But being

the mother of two priests, I have an intimate understanding of that reality and the sacrifices that are made.

When people call, the clergy spring into action. When a loved one dies, the clergy drop their own lives (be it a dinner, a child's soccer game or even sleep) to comfort us and pray with us. When we face troubles of this world, they inspire us (knowing that they, too, have their own daily struggles).

Our clergy miss birthdays, anniversaries, important family events, etc, and for what? For whom? For us! So that we may grow as faithful Orthodox Christians and as a parish. This sabbatical is not a gift...it's not a thank you. It is an affirmation that we understand and cannot continue to take for granted the Good Shepherd that has blessed Holy Trinity with your presence.

We send you off today with our prayers and our love. While you take a break from us, all we ask from you is that you continue to pray for us and that you come back to us with that same dedication that you have offered all these years.

THE ICON OF THE NATIVITY EXPLAINED

The Orthodox Christian icon of the Nativity of Jesus Christ is one of most beautiful and complex in all iconography. It is rich in symbolism and powerful in theology. This tour helps us embrace its full meaning.

At the very top is a blue shape sometimes called a mandorla. It signifies the presence and the glory of God. The star beams from the heavens, pointing to the Christ child, which shows His descent from heaven to the earth.

The dark cave, where the newborn Child lies, represents the world's darkness in sin before Christ. It also symbolizes the tomb of Christ, where He was buried after His death on the Cross. Compare it to the parallel dark cave in the icon of the Resurrection.

In the upper left are the angels glorifying God. The inscription above them reads, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men" (Luke 2:14).

Other angels are located on the upper right serving different roles. Some minister to the divine birth, some sing praises and another announces the Good News to the shepherds.

The Wise Men, royal figures from the East, come to witness the fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus's birth. They bring gifts: gold signifies Christ's kingship; frankincense signifies His divinity; and myrrh signifies His sacrifice, death, and His resurrection.

On the left, shepherds listen to the good tidings with awe. A young one sits on a rock playing his flute, showing humanity's joy at Christ's birth, adding the music of mankind to the angels' hymns.

At the lower right corner of the icon the midwives wash the newborn Christ child, demonstrating that the Son of God came to the world through a real human physical birth and assumed a complete human nature, except without sin.

The Righteous Joseph is depicted away from Jesus and the Theotokos, because he was not paternally involved in the miracle of the Incarnation of the Son of God, but he was the protector of Mary and Jesus. The old man speaking to him represents the devil bringing new doubts to Joseph.

The Virgin Mary—the Theotokos—is the largest figure in the icon, depicted either reclining away from the newborn Child or kneeling toward Him. Her larger size and central position emphasize her essential role in the divine plan of salvation. She is wearing a veil with three stars, signifying her inviolate and perpetual virginity, before, during, and after giving birth to Christ, the Son of God.



"The Son of God was born as a child so that we may become perfect humans. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes so that we may become free from the snares of death. He was in a manger so that we may be in the altar. He was on earth that we may be in heaven. He had no other place in the inn, so that we may have many mansions in the heavens." (Ambrose of Milan, 4th c.)

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Close to God

When we enter into the open spaces of the church, we experience a feeling which confirms for us that our Helper is at hand.

Geronda, what does it mean to be close to God?

Think for a moment: can you be close to an icon and not be moved to venerate it? Can you be close to a fire and not be warmed? Can you be close to the light and not be illumined? Of course not. How, then, can you be close to God and not become godlike? How can you stretch out on God's open spaces and not be raised up to the heights of His grandeur?

It follows, then, that [when we leave the world and enter the Church] we find ourselves close to God. We do not, however, find ourselves before the face of God. Why? Because, for the most part, the eyes of our soul and body (which are both earthly) do not see God: they only seek Him. In the darkness broken by the brazen lamps, we seek Him, but we do not see Him.

And that is the tragedy of human existence: we see everything except that which truly exists. All Creation, which had a beginning and which will come to an end, falls under our gaze, which means we see things that, in reality, have no independent existence. The tragic figure of man does not see that which alone truly exists: the "One Who Is," and Who is always with us.

That is what it means to be close to God. And when we enter into the

open spaces of the church, we immediately experience a particular feeling, a feeling which confirms for us that here, in this place, our Helper is at hand. He is invisible, but you feel Him, as if He were rushing toward you, as if you could hear the sound of His breathing. He is your Helper, the One Who can deliver you, Who can redeem you, Who alone can satisfy your insatiable soul, which is forever being gnawed by hunger. You are close to God, and God is invisibly present. But, you may ask, where is He? Who can see Him?

But this doesn't happen to me when I go to church. Am I doing something wrong?

If you wish to see God, my beloved children, there's only one thing to do: go to church filled with longing to see His face, filled with divine and heavenly desire to be able, somehow, to feel the presence of your Helper and Defender. When you do this, your soul will experience an initially strange feeling: it is God touching your heart. And what will the heart do in response?

Will it laugh and rejoice? No. It will be filled with a blessed, godly grief, and begin to weep and lament. In the presence of the Lord, you'll feel your heart — which is like a useless sack — filling to the brim with the sense of its own emptiness and thereby overflow-



Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra

ing with tears. And these tears will be its secret cry, saying: "Where are You, Lord? Have mercy on me."

So that sense of longing deep in my soul means I am drawing closer to God?

When the soul begins to cry, it cries to God, my beloved, very easily indeed, because God, in a sense, is the soul's only surviving relative, and what could be more natural than that it should seek Him, and that it should cry when it realizes that it cannot see Him?

When you allow your soul to cry, when you reject everything that cuts off the flow of your tears, then you'll have a feeling of much greater intimacy with God. You'll understand that now someone else governs your life. You'll sense that now someone else has grasped the tiller, someone else has taken hold of the wheel (indeed of your own hands) and is now directly guiding you Himself. You become someone guided by the grace of God.

We are guided by God's grace, to which you can surrender yourself in all confidence. Indeed, it is impossible for you to do the slightest thing without it. ❖

Excerpted from
The Way of the Spirit

THE HOLY TRINITY

HERALD*Faith. Family. Community***About the Herald**

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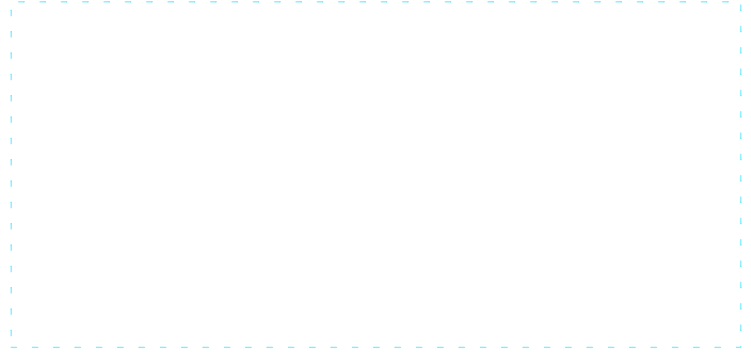
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CHRIST GIVES HIMSELF TO US IN THE LITURGY



The Liturgy takes place on earth, but it belongs to the realm of heavenly realities. In fact it was not instituted by a human being or an angel, but by the Spirit himself, so that those who are still living in the flesh should think of performing the service of angels. Something is happening that is greater than any marvel. Oh, what mercy, Oh, what love of God for human beings! Christ who is seated with the Father in highest heaven is at that moment grasped by the hands of all and does not hesitate to give himself to anyone who wants to embrace him and be bound to him. He whom the eyes of faith perceive is possessed by everyone.

Saint John Chrysostom, 4th century