



**Issue 1
Winter 2026**

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OUR MISSION:

St. Nektarios Greek Orthodox Church is dedicated to the continuation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ's ministry of salvation through the proclamation and teaching of the Gospel; through Baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and through loving service to God and to mankind.

OUR VISION:

The community will provide a loving, caring and welcoming environment where all belong and grow in the faith through worship, service, witness, and fellowship

THE NEWS FROM ST. NEKTARIOS

CHEERFULLY BEGIN THE SEASON OF THE FAST!

BY FR. ANDREAS HOUPOS

Beloved in Christ,

With the Great Fast ("Lent") beginning, a number of the faithful inevitably seek guidance, and many of our catechumens and inquirers have asked permission to participate. To desire this is righteous, and to seek a blessing for it is noble. In order for our fasting to be a beneficial endeavor, it will be good to consider a few things.

First, we must have some sense of why fasting exists at all. It is one of the first commandments of God to Adam and Eve: there was a tree from whose fruit they were to abstain. Illicitly breaking that fast brought sin into the world and, through sin, death.

Those who are now in Christ, our Redeemer and fulfiller of the law, are not under dietary restrictions. However, to honor our salvation and redemption in Christ, we fast as an act of love toward him, by acknowledging his sacrifice and also by keeping our appetites in check so as not to be led astray and betray the great gift.

Fasting is therefore a means to an end—not to ritual purity, but a clearing of the intellect by having it focus as much as possible on Christ and his providence and love. Fasting does not aim to destroy the body, but to deaden the passions.

Therefore, a profitable fast is one founded on love for God

and neighbor, guided by faith and humility, and in pursuit of joy. The Church has a wealth of both divine inspiration and human experience, which have led to certain practices in which all of the faithful are invited to participate, as able.

While the prospect of weeks of fasting can be daunting, that it is a collective undertaking provides support. Orthodox Christian faithful and catechumens in good health

... a profitable fast is one founded on love for God and neighbor, guided by faith and humility, and in pursuit of joy."

fast throughout the year on Wednesdays and Fridays. During the Great Fast this extends to all weekdays, being somewhat attenuated on the weekends. If not already observing these fasting customs, begin by at least honoring the fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, and the Eucharistic fast, during Lent.

Husbands and wives should prayerfully discuss and agree upon what can reasonably be done to mutually observe the fast in their household. Generally, pregnant and nursing women, and those who are ill and infirm, are advised to follow doctor's orders with respect to diet.

Parents are encouraged to introduce fasting to their children in age-appropriate ways. If things need to be lightened in the household for meals and activities done in common, those desiring to be more strict should be so only on themselves (e.g., while at work, when running errands, or during downtime).

Fasting extends to much more than food, to all means of consumption or enjoyment. In the spirit of the dietary discipline, we should also consider the intention, quality, and quantity of everything we purchase, watch, listen to, and say.

It is important to note that our fasting should not be a burden to others. It should not be undertaken to the detriment of our health or that of others. It is not to be talked about, compared, or displayed.

Here are some practical considerations: With respect to the Eucharist, we fast from midnight (basically, from the time we go to bed) before receiving Holy Communion. No food or drink should pass our lips in the morning prior to receiving Holy Communion. In the event that one's health requires medication or food, the bare minimum should be taken as far in advance of communing as possible.

In the case of the evening offering of the Presanctified Gifts, the faithful are encouraged to abstain all day

(Continued on page 16)

In the Spotlight Gerry Clonaris Honored at HDF



The Metropolis of Atlanta celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Hellenic Dance Festival in New Orleans on January 15-19. Thousands of participants come from parishes from all over the country. Our own, Gerry Clonaris, led HDF Executive Committee for 21 years. The first two years were the development of the program and 19 years of presenting the Festival. Gerry retired in 2019 to begin work on the Metropolis Religious Education Festivals of Faith. He was honored at the Anniversary gala for his service and commitment to set the foundation and build the program.

A Note of Appreciation

Thank you to everyone who reached out with such love and support after Safwat's passing. Thank you also to everyone who sponsored Safwat's memorial by bringing food or dessert. It has been a blessing to see how much he was loved by our community.

May his memory be everlasting.+
Lula Wassef and family



IN NEED OF A CLERGY VISIT?

Please contact the office staff if you or a family member may be in need of a clergy visit in times of illness, to receive Holy Communion, and for prayers and comfort.

FOCUS ON OUR COMMUNITY

Celebrations, Milestones, Comfort & Support

IN OUR PRAYERS

Tim John Pat Joe Johanna Edward Tina Theona Helen DG Chuck Handsel Mason Angela Mary Robin John & Elaine Jennifer & family Eleftheria Mary Shan Dawn Grant Caerra Jack Phyllis KS Melton family Joanne BE Luna Christina Stephen DG Barbara Spiro Gloria Phil & Ronnie Daniel John Michelle MP MSR Jeff Shannon Sandy Glen Tish Cheryl Brian Elliot Paul Dina Cris John T. Ashley Christian John D. Dorothy Ella Terry Erma (Hermione) Phyllis John Emmanoeuel Marihiam Don Helen Tom Debbie Hanna Chris Greg Tim Missy Chris Jeremy Daniel Dino Rebekah

REMEMBERING THOSE SERVING OUR COUNTRY

Aidan Thomas Seth Helene Jordan Krassimire Cristofer Nicholas Michael Constantine Zack Matthew Amanda Danielle Anton Jimmy Jerry Georgia

CONGRATULATIONS AND BEST WISHES

To Virginia Atkinson for her baptism and to her sponsor, Presbyteria Maria Dalber
To Matina and Dimitrios Batziakas for the baptism of their daughter, Georgina Nektarios and to the godmother, Katerina Katsiitis
To James "Panagiotis" Bonello for his baptism and to his sponsor, David Bodin
To Elena and Sam Burrus for the baptism of Vaia and John's brother, Constantine, and to the godmother, Katherine Putnam
To Angelica and Georgios Chinoporos for the birth & 40th day blessing of their son, Angel Georgios
To Adam Jessup for his baptism and to his sponsor, Erik Kash
To Tyler Johnson for his baptism and to his sponsor, Mike Scolinos
To Luciana and Dustin Johnson for the birth and 40th day blessing of their son, Arthur
To Dara and Andrew Major for the 40th day blessing of their daughter, Emmelia
To Lukshmi Solos and Angelo Manolatos for the baptism of their daughter, Anjeli
To Kaleb Page for his baptism and to his sponsor, Mike Scolinos
To Katelyn Prete and Jacob Palmer on their Orthodox marriage and to the sponsor, Zachary Palmer
To Constance and Alexander Santos for the birth and 40th blessing of their daughter, Olivia Marie
To Autumn and David Sullivan for the birth, 40th day blessing and baptism of their daughter, Belladonna and to her godmother, Emily Hahn
To Hayden Williams for his baptism and to his sponsor, Benjamin Peddycord
To Paul Young for his chrismation and to his sponsors Vasiliki and Deacon Harry Lainis

WITH SYMPATHY ON THE REPOSE OF OUR BELOVED BROTHERS AND SISTERS

To the family of His Eminence Metropolitan Dimitrios of Xanthos on his repose
To the Andraos and Choueiri families for the repose of Nabila's brother, Nabil
To the Bopp family for the repose of Ola Bopp
To the Diamaduros, Prattes, Davis, and Maheras families for the repose of Mary Diamaduros' husband, Perry George Diamaduros
To the Dresser family for the passing Dawn's mother-in-law and Ben's grandmother, Evelyn
To the Heracklis, Vavaliarou, Jones, Entas, and Morris families for the repose of Omer Heraklis' mother, Maria Vavaliarou Heraklis
To the Hilal and Yateem families for the repose of Sawsan's mother, Elham and father, Saliba
To the Jacob family for the repose of Teresa Jacob's mother, Lily Jacob
To the Karres, Kerhulas, Gianakopoulos, and Boukidis' families for the repose of Nick Karres and Phyllis Gianakopoulos' mother, Patricia (Pitsa) Kerhulas Karres
To the Madbak, Tarazi and Farah families for the repose of Nadine Madbak's sister, Tami Bashir Tarazi-Farah
To the Mitsou and Hamby families for the repose of Olga's mother, Amalia Mitsou
To the Nixon family for the repose of Laura's husband, Tom
To the Pann and Couchell families for the repose of Vivian Shirley Pann
To Pavlakos family for the repose of Connie's brother and Michelle and Michael's uncle, Chris :Pavlakos
To the Rigas family for the repose of Anne's husband, Lambros Constantine Rigas
To the Smith family for the repose of Athanasia's mother, Sevasti Serpetini
To the Walker family for the repose of Sandra's husband, Phillip
To the Wassef family for the repose of Loula's husband, Safwat
To the family of Esther Williams for her repose
To the Zampetopoulos family for the repose of Andrea's husband, Democritos "Dean" Zampetopoulos

IN APPRECIATION AND THANK YOU

To Diane Gilbert and Copy Cat Printing for printing the newsletter.

DO YOU HAVE INFORMATION FOR THE NEWSLETTER?

If you have information or photos for the newsletter, please contact Kim Braswell in the office at kbraswell@stnektarios.org.

PARISH COUNCIL

ELECTION RESULTS

Parish Council Elections were held on December 7, 2025, following the Divine Liturgy. Four candidates were nominated at September 28, 2025 Parish Assembly to fill the three open positions to be elected.

Congratulations to Elie Azar, Manal Choueiri and Dan Wixon who were elected. Thank you to Dustin Holland for his dedication and service to our parish.



Elie Azar



Manal Choueiri



Dan Wixon

AFFIRMATION OF OFFICE

The 2026 Parish Council was installed on February 8. The meeting of the council followed with the election of officers.



We would also like to thank outgoing member, Patrick Taylor, for his years of service and continued commitment to St. Nektarios.



2026 PARISH COUNCIL

President: Chris Mortis

Assist. Treasurer: David Hanegraaff

Members:

Kathryn Mason,

Vice President: Peter Reinhart

Secretary: Gene Borowski

George Bacogeorge

Andrew McCullough

Treasurer: Elie Azar

Assist. Secretary: Manal Choueiri

Zack Hair

Dan Wixon

PARISH COUNCIL RETREAT

On Saturday of Cheesefare, our Parish Council held a retreat at nearby Elatos Park. Beginning with the Divine Liturgy and moving on to substantive presentations about vision, goals, and next steps, the PC has taken its first formative steps in reviewing and refining its governing role.

Fr. Andreas laid out six areas of focus:

1. Deepening our Life in Christ
2. Cultivating the Capital Campaign
3. Reinvigorating Parish Governance
4. Refining the Staffing Model
5. Refining the Reception of Converts
6. Renewing Awareness of Context



Our President, Chris Mortis, also laid out a vision of responsibility to those who have come before us, and those who will follow us, a motivation to implement best practices across the board and to ensure ministry to our youth.

Vice President Peter Reinhart led a robust exploration of governance principles, and a formative exchange for a working model supported by rich committee work.

Parish Administrator Evelyn Klund led PC members through a review of Parish Bylaws.

Our 2026 Parish Council comes out of today's retreat ready to work for the building up of the Body of Christ. Please pray for our clergy and lay leadership as they undertake this sacred work!



BUILDING FOR GENERATIONS

Lifting up our past. Laying down the foundation of our future.



Commemorative watercolor by Candy Thomas,

Not Just a House

In the near future, the house that served as the first worship and ministry space on our property will be taken down and replaced with a new Ministry Center. In the name of the Holy Trinity, we removed three bricks from that house to incorporate into the new building and to show that continuity because that is not just a house. It was a sanctified place of worship. **It is a relic.**

On Sunday, January 11, 2026, we honored the legacy of our first space and those who founded it; and looked ahead to those that would preserve and multiply it in the future. Our “current generation” represented by the Parish Council and members of our youth ministry processed into the temple to welcome our first generation represented by Fr. Steve Dalber with members of the first Parish Council, Dennis Kokenes and Gary Anderson. Each carried a brick, a part of the relic.



As they gathered on the solea, the first generation reverently placed the bricks into the receiving hands of the “current generation”.

Thus the faith, commitment and dedication of our founders were now placed directly into the hands of the next generation.

Bless Our Inheritance Prayer — Fr. Andreas

Lord our God, who in your inexpressible love visited mankind and bestowed your blessings on all who entreat you, and who have brought us to see this day, may it be magnified in your sight and in our hearts.

Every new community that bears your name has been established by the planting of the Tree of Life, your Holy Cross. And just as in that first garden you established for our sustenance and delight, causing plants of various kinds to grow, and “trees bearing fruit in which is their seed,” see now the fruit of the Tree that we have tended in this garden, and behold these seeds. Lord allow them to be planted on this fertile soil and to bring forth fruit of the Spirit in more and more abundance, so that “all men may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth”.

As you granted for Elijah to hand over his prophet’s mantle to Elisha, you now allow these stones to be handed over from one generation of your royal priesthood to the next. May this act of tradition unfolding in our midst today be a sign to all who witness it of the bold faith of our founders and the faithful readiness of those who will carry it forward from this day.

Lord, we pray to you and ask of you: look with kindness on us, who have chosen to embark upon this work, putting our trust in your strength, and bless this undertaking.

Protect us against all evil influences, and bestow upon us all peace, love, concord, and justice. Grant us your abundant mercies and direct our steps to every good work. Lord, bless our undertakings in peace, and bring them to a successful conclusion—for this land has not been obtained by violence and treachery, but by honest sweat and the pursuit of good works. The edifices upon it were erected by sacrificial giving in faith, and are maintained by faithful stewardship.

Let this property you have entrusted to us endure from generation to generation, unto the ages. For in obedience to you we accomplish all things, working by your power and to your glory.

Lord, our God, save your people and bless our inheritance, which is your inheritance. Protect the fullness of your Church. Sanctify those who love the beauty of your house. Glorify them in return by your divine power, and forsake us not who have set our hope in you.

For yours is the dominion, and yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages.

FEAST OF HOLY THEOPHANY

At the Vespers Divine Liturgy on the eve of Theophany, we were blessed to add new members to the Church by way of Holy Baptism and/or Holy Chrismation.

In accordance with the sacred rites of the Church, the Great Blessing of Water was offered on both days, bringing renewing and refreshing grace as we enter a new year.

May God's appearing be an ongoing reality in our lives, and may our lives themselves become a theophany to a wounded and God-starved world.



NEW YEAR'S VASILOPITA CUTTING



We asked for the Lord's blessing upon our ministries and their leaders, by way of offering a Vasilopita (St. Basil's bread) following Divine Liturgy on January 4th. Members of our ministry groups came forward to receive for their ministry, eagerly looking for the coin and blessing.

Our New Year's Day celebration follows a 4th century tradition. A band of pirates stole from the townspeople. St. Basil retrieved the items from the pirates.

A dispute arose as to who owned which items. In order to

Fr. Andreas distributed slices to the following representatives of each ministry group:

Jesus ~ Fr. Andreas
Panagia ~ Fr. Panayiotis
St. Basil ~ Vasilios Steele
St. Nektarios ~ Nolan Atkinson
Patriarch Bartholomew ~ Dennis Kokenes
Metropolitan Sevastianos ~ Evelyn Klund
Archbishop Elpidophoros ~ Evelyn Klund
Parish Clergy ~ Fr. Steve
Presbyters ~ Pres. Eirini Steele
Altar / Sexton ~ Jim Keown
Liturgical / Acolytes ~ Angelo Diazo
Liturgical / Music ~ Sam Herron
Parish Council ~ Chris Mortis

Facilities Management ~ Marko Milich
Administrative Support ~ John Lowen
Philotochos ~ Laurel Bacogeorge
Adult Religious Education ~ Maryann Zitsos
Bookstore ~ Luke Monette
Broadcast ~ John Gretes
Endowment ~ Julie Milich
Fund Development ~ Despina Gallis
Stewardship ~ Mike Burgan
Greek Language School ~ Catherine Giles
Hospitality ~ Daniel Siragusa
HUMS ~ George Harris
Life & Family ~ Madalina Lowen
Men's Group ~ Tyler Hahn

Missions & Philanthropy ~ Gus Gianakopoulos
Outdoor Ministry ~ Presbytera Meredyth Houpos
Outreach and Welcoming ~ Nadia Boldt
Safety and Security Monitoring ~ Jimmy Clonaris
St. Hermione Home ~ Deidre Lepkowski
St. Panteleimon ~ Audrey Mason
St. Phoebe Ministry ~ Christina Bonderer
St. Sophia School ~ Emily Hanegraaff
Ushers/Captains ~ Dustan Holland
Young Adults ~ Nicole Azar
Young at Heart ~ Presb. Sandy Stanar & Steve Panteliodis
Youth Ministries ~ George Karavokiros
Socrates Academy ~ George Couchell

Rejoice, O Unfading Rose: History and Meaning of the Akathist Hymn

Reverence for Mary, the Mother of God, is woven throughout the Gospels. By the close of the 1st Century A.D., she already held a singular place in the hearts of the faithful, fulfilling the prophecy in the Gospel of Luke: "For, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (Lk 1:48). Over the centuries, this devotion was bolstered by miracles and homilies, such as those preached by Saint Gregory the Theologian in Constantinople. By the late fifth century, the first recorded church dedicated to the Mother of God, the Theotokos Kyriou (θεοτόκος Κυρίου), was established. Shortly thereafter, in the sixth century, Romanos the Melodist (often called the "Pindar of Byzantine hymnography") transformed the liturgy through his kontakia, reportedly receiving his poetic gift through a vision of the Virgin.

Structure and Form

While the specific composer of the Akathist remains lost to history, the hymn's roots lie in the 6th-century Golden Age of Constantinopolitan poetry. The service follows a precise pattern: an alternation between an Oikos (a long stanza) and a Kontakion (a shorter hymn).

The Oikoi all conclude with the salutation: "Rejoice, O unwedded Bride!" *

The Kontakia all conclude with the joyful: "Alleluia!" Remarkably, the hymn is an alphabetic acrostic; in the original Greek, each of the 24 stanzas begins with a successive letter of the alphabet. Many English translations attempt to preserve this "A to Z" structure to maintain the poem's rhythmic integrity.

The Miracle of 626 A.D.

The Akathist was etched into the heart of the Empire in 626 A.D. While Emperor Heraclius was away on an expedition against the Persians, a massive army of Avars besieged the walls of Constantinople. As the city reached the brink of desperation, the Venerable Patriarch Sergius led the clergy and officials in a procession along the great walls, carrying an icon of the Theotokos to bolster the defenders' spirits.

History records a sudden miracle: a violent storm destroyed the enemy fleet, forcing a full retreat. The people of Constantinople spontaneously flooded the Church of the Theotokos at Blachernae. In a night-long vigil of thanksgiving, they sang praises to the Virgin Mary while standing, giving the hymn its name, "Akathistos," which literally means "not seated." It was at this time that the famous introductory



hymn, "Τῇ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ" (To Thee, the Champion Leader), was added.

The hymn is divided into four distinct thematic parts:

The Annunciation: Covers the Angel's visit, Mary's wonder, and Joseph's hesitation.

The Nativity: Focuses on the birth of Christ, the worship of the Magi, and the Flight into Egypt.

The Incarnation: Reflects on the renewal of the world and the awe of the Angels at God becoming man.

A Poetic Offering: A final rhetorical appraisal of the Virgin, asking for her intercession for the salvation of the human race.

A Note on Intercession: Orthodox Christians pray to God alone. However, just as we ask friends on earth to pray for us, we ask the saints in heaven—and especially the Mother of God—to join their prayers with ours. This "intercessory prayer" is a part of the foundation of the Church's liturgical life.

At the intercessions of the Theotokos,
O Christ our God,
have mercy upon us and save us. Amen.

SERVICES AT ST. NEKTARIOS

SATURDAY OF SOULS

Divine Liturgy followed by a memorial service is celebrated on the first two Saturdays before Lent and on the first Saturday of Lent.

The first is a common memorial for all those who have reposed in right belief and hope of resurrection. The second, Saturday for the Holy Ascetics, is a remembrance of those who reposed as monks and nuns.

The Third, which is the first Saturday of Lent, commemorates the Miracle of the Kollyva by St. Theodore the Tyro.

During the memorial service, prayers are said for the departed. The faithful submit names of their reposed loved ones and bring kollyva, which is a dish based on boiled wheat. After the service, the priest blesses the kollyva and it is eaten as a memorial by all present.



With the Saints give rest, O Christ, to the soul(s) of Your servant(s) where there is no pain, no sorrow, no sighing, but life everlasting.

FORGIVENESS VESPERS

"The Lord said, 'If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.'" (Matthew 6:14-15)

We held vespers on Forgiveness Sunday, February 22nd. We were pleased to see so many parishioners line entire length and width of the sanctuary asking forgiveness of each other. What a beautiful way to start our Lenten journey.

What a blessing to seek and give forgiveness. Following this evening's Forgiveness Vespers, we gathered for a joy-filled community dinner before we embark together on a journey of repentance and recovery. May the Lord guide us and bless us.



ST. HERMIONE HOME — NECESSITIES ROOM



Representation of the future Holy Sanctuary at St. Hermione Home

St. Hermione Home (SHH) is a Christ-centered ministry offering hope and healing to homeless, pregnant women who have chosen life for their child. SHH provides a safe haven where mothers receive housing, education, counseling and life-skills training to build stability, embrace self-sufficiency and create a brighter future for their families. The home has 6 bedrooms, 3 part-time staff, pre-natal care, daily spiritual services and mental health support.



Left: Future Living Room of Fellowship Right: Future kitchen of Care

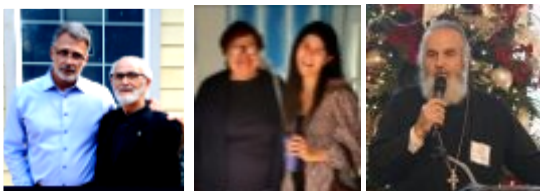


Future Bedroom of Blessing



Above: Presbytera Leah with the relics of St. Hermion

Inspired to do more? Donate now to help change a life through St. Hermione Home. Just scan the QR code. Or visit the Shop for Hope Necessities Room to make your offering.



PHILOPTOCHOS CHRISTMAS BRUNCH BENEFITTING ST. HERMIONE HOME

Philoptochos Christmas Brunch 2025
On December 6, 2025, Philoptochos hosted their annual Christmas Brunch, and our church community responded with extraordinary generosity in support of St. Hermione Home (SHH), an Orthodox-based ministry offering hope and healing to homeless, pregnant women who have chosen life for their child.

This year, we joyfully transformed our traditional Auction Room into something new: Shop for Hope, Necessities Room! Through this effort, your giving went beyond fundraising and became a powerful act of God's love, generating a whopping \$80,800! Every dollar raised will help furnish and equip St. Hermione Home, opening in 2026, a haven of faith, safety, care, and healing for pregnant women without a home. Parishioners and guests were invited to "Shop for Hope" by donating toward essential items that will fill the home with comfort and care. The room was thoughtfully designed so each person could imagine walking through the future St. Hermione Home and envision the spaces where mothers and babies will live, heal, and grow.

For each donation, a feather was placed on the Angel's Wings; a beautiful symbol that each gift was also a prayer and a step closer to opening St. Hermione Home. As the wings filled, they became a visible reminder that together, we are creating a message of hope and love.

St. Hermione Home will provide a safe haven where mothers receive housing, education, counseling, personalized medical care and life-skills training to build stability, embrace self-sufficiency, and create a brighter future for their families. Your generosity is helping make this vision a reality.

We are deeply grateful for every donation, prayer, and act of kindness. May God bless our church family abundantly for your faithfulness, compassion, and commitment in serving other who need it the most!

With gratitude,
Philoptochos Society



PHILOPTOCHOS SUNDAY AND MEMBERSHIP TEA

Our annual Membership Tea, held on February 8, offered a blessed opportunity to formally present a ceremonial check in the church temple to our 2025 beneficiary, the St. Hermione Home. This check represented the net proceeds pledged and received from our Christmas Brunch—an extraordinary total of **\$80,800**.

Each year, we select a beneficiary whose mission reflects our core values: philanthropy, the preservation of life and family, and the promotion of our Orthodox faith and traditions. The St. Hermione Home beautifully embodies all three. Its mission—to break the cycle of homelessness *before* it begins, at birth—makes it uniquely positioned to create lasting impact for vulnerable mothers and their children.

The Christmas Brunch remains our largest annual fundraiser thanks to the tremendous generosity of supporters within our St. Nektarios community and beyond. We were grateful for the chance to express our appreciation during the Tea. This year's sold-out brunch welcomed 280 guests and was supported by numerous sponsors and donors who made the event a remarkable success.

The Membership Tea also marks the official start of our 2026 Philoptochos membership year. By joining or renewing your membership, you directly support individuals living in poverty, those with disabilities, those in prison, orphans, the elderly, the youth, and victims of natural disasters—locally, nationally, and globally. Our reach is broad, but our mission remains steady and faithful.

To learn more, please visit our volunteers at the booth on Sundays or explore our webpage at stnektarios.org/philoptochos, where you'll find the 2025 Impact Statement, Programs and Activities Guide, and membership links.



FROM SORROW TO JOY

an Orthodox Perspective on Sickness, Death and Healing



Four of our ministries —Young at Heart, Philoptochos, Life and Family, and Adult Religious Education— joined together to host Sarah Byrne-Martelli on Saturday of Souls. This engaging two hour retreat featured group discussions and creative exercises that drew on the life-giving resources of Orthodoxy.

How do we cope with grief? How do we support others who mourn? Dr. Sarah helped us explore these issues to discover the joy through our faith. She taught us that when we love and care for each other, we encounter Christ; we find joy in the midst of our suffering. She reminded us that as Orthodox Christians, we do not seek to "get over" grief but to carry the memory of our loved ones eternally in our hearts.

Dr. Sarah concluded her time with a book signing of ***Memory Eternal: Living with Grief as Orthodox Christians***. In this book, Dr. Sarah draws on theological, scriptural, and liturgical



resources, as well as the collected experience of a variety of people undergoing grief and loss. It provides "a kind of roadmap to the grieving process." It includes a guide to an eight-week bereavement curriculum that we plan to use at St. Nektarios to develop our Grief Ministry.

Dr. Sarah is a board-certified chaplain and bereavement counselor with over 20 years of experience in hospice and palliative care. She serves on the faculty of Harvard Medical School, is a Research Fellow at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, and teaches Spiritual Care at St. Vladimir's Seminary.

LITURGICAL ARTS ACADEMY



Early February saw another inspiring winter session of the Liturgical Arts Academy. Held at the Alexios Retreat Center (ARC) in Salem, SC, the Academy provides a rich program of worship, master-level instruction in liturgical arts, and fellowship. The attentive and dedicated ARC staff go out of their way to make the experience comfortable and hospitable.

By God's grace, the St. Nektarios community is integral to the life of the Liturgical Arts Academy, both behind the scenes and in the classroom. This session was no different, and inspired excellence and a commitment to continued development of skills to edify the faithful and glorify God.



This year's cohort from Charlotte / St. Nektarios:
Fr. Andreas Houpos — Board Member / Chaplain / Iconography Teaching Assistant / 'Foods In Faith' Lecturer
Protopsaltis Sam Herron — Byzantine Chant Instructor
Presbytera Meredyth Houpos — Foods In Faith Instructor
Fooshan Kashkooli — Iconography Student
Nektaria Rizos — Iconography Student

The summer session, for intermediate to advanced Byzantine Chant and Iconography instruction, will take place August 23-29, with the call for applications opening March 27. For more information, visit theliturgicalarts.org.

Record Snowfall in February



Following the sixth-largest snowfall in Charlotte's recorded history—an impressive 12.2 inches—our campus temporarily closed and schedules were adjusted.

With snowfall averaging only 1.7 inches over the past decade, St. Sophia students enjoyed a rare treat; the chance to play in fresh snow during recess.



YOUNG AT HEART

JANUARY GATHERING

Happy New Year, Young at Heart!

On January, 15th Young at Heart rang in the New Year with a fun and relaxing tribute to our favorite sports teams, always the topics of much discussion and debate! The luncheon of pizza and wings was donated to Young at Heart through the efforts of Peter Reinhart, who with Young at Heart Board Member, Ayoub Ayoub, Mawad Rafael and others baked the delicious handcrafted pizzas! Despina and George Gallis contributed the most delicious wings in the county from their business, Picadeli's Pub-In-Deli.

After blessing the food and the gathering, Fr. Andreas offered congratulations and condolences for the various football teams. For the condolences, he was looking at Presby Sandy Stanar and Fr. Steve Dalber, steadfast Steelers fans.

Fr. Panayiotis blessed the Vasilopita, lovingly baked and presented by Ritsa Neary, longtime Young at Heart Board member. Young at Heart received the coin from the Church Vasilopita this year, and Maria Balatsias received the blessing of the coin at the luncheon. We are looking forward to a very blessed year. Thank you Fathers, Young at Heart Board members and all who contributed to this fun event.



Members with December and January birthdays, including Fr. Steve on January 1



FEBRUARY GATHERING

Love was truly in the air for our Young at Heart group on February 12th! More than 60 members gathered for a joyful, love-themed Valentine's Day celebration. We extend heartfelt thanks to Danny Ziozios for generously donating the delicious meal of chicken kebab, rice, salad, and bread. Birthday celebrants were honored with cakes, and festive touches—heart-shaped cookies, sugar candies, and chocolate treats—adorned the dining and serving tables.

A highlight of the afternoon was the delightful performance by the St. Sophia School children. Their sweet serenade filled the room with smiles, and afterward they lovingly handed out handmade Valentine's Day cards. We are grateful to Director Ariadne Zitsos and the dedicated teachers for making this visit so special.

The celebration concluded with a Zoom visit from Dr. Sarah Byrne Martelli of Harvard Medical School and St. Vladimir's Seminary. She offered a preview of her upcoming Lenten Retreat topic, *"From Sorrow to Joy: The Orthodox Perspective on Illness, Death, and Healing."* Be sure to read more about the retreat in this issue.

Please mark your calendars for our "Be Our Guest" luncheon on March 12, as well as for hosting fellowship refreshments on the Saturday of Lazarus following Liturgy and during the Palm Cross-making session for Palm Sunday.

Sending heartfelt wishes and blessings to all!



Members with February birthdays



Door Prize Winners



Thank you for our beautiful Valentine's Day cards from our artistic St. Sophia School students



The St. Sophia School serenaded us with love songs for Valentine's Day.



FINANCIALS MATTER

“Your own of your own, we offer to you in all and for all.”

FINANCIAL PORTFOLIO 2025 HIGHLIGHTS

<p>Operating Fund</p> <p><i>Sustaining the Mission and Ministries of Our Parish</i></p>	<p>The Operating Fund supports the ongoing life, mission, and ministries of our parish through the generosity of our faithful stewards.</p> <p>This is funded by stewardship, weekly offerings, special appeals and donations.</p> <p>Through these contributions, our parish is able to provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rich and reverent liturgical life, for the celebration of worship and the sacraments. • The service of our dedicated staff, who provide the orderly, efficient, and faithful operation of the parish on a daily basis. • Proper care and stewardship of parish property, ensuring that our facilities remain safe, welcoming, and well-maintained. • Robust ministry offerings, including faith enrichment programs, youth ministries, religious education, and programs for inquirers to the Orthodox faith. • Pastoral and compassionate support for our parish family, fostering a community rooted in love and service. • Administrative and operational resources, which strengthen and uphold the work of our many ministries. 																
	<table border="0"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">2025</td> <td colspan="2"></td> <td style="text-align: center;">OUR STEWARDSHIP COMMITMENT TO OUR SPIRITUAL HOME</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">\$1,435,663</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Total income</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">- \$1,440,040</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Total expenses</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$ 1,094,665 — Stewardship grew by \$47K and 4.4% over 2024</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">\$ - 4,377</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Net income</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>Income surpassed our goal by 2.7%; and exceeded 2024 by \$102K. Our total expenses exceeded our financial plan by 3% creating a shortfall of less than half of one percent.</p> <p>Thank you for your offerings which</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Grew from giving back to God what is His. ♦ Came from our growing Membership ♦ Funded 76% of our total operating income 	2025			OUR STEWARDSHIP COMMITMENT TO OUR SPIRITUAL HOME	\$1,435,663	Total income			- \$1,440,040	Total expenses		\$ 1,094,665 — Stewardship grew by \$47K and 4.4% over 2024	\$ - 4,377	Net income		
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<p>Dedicated and Benevolence Funds</p> <p><i>Our Faith in Action</i></p>	<p>\$15K to St. Nicholas Benevolence Fund</p> <p>These funds are used at the discretion of our clergy to provide confidential financial assistance to members who are experiencing extraordinary circumstances in their financial well-being. Funds are received through the fundraising efforts of our Philoptochos and by the generosity of our members. .</p>	<p>\$460K to our Dedicated Fund</p> <p><i>in addition to the Operating</i> — support includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child of God <i>feeding</i> hundreds of children in Kenya, five days a week with two meals per day. • St. Anastasia Medical Assistance Fund <i>offering financial assistance</i> for extraordinary medical needs • 5K Taking Steps and St. Hermione House <i>supporting homeless</i> women & children in Charlotte • St. Dionysius Hospital, Matthews Help Center, Prison Ministry, Crisis Assistance and more 															
<p>Capital Fund</p> <p><i>Building for Generations</i></p>	<p>Our current initiatives will renovate our well-worn Spiritual Life Center and build a ministry center that will address our tremendous growth in membership, ministries and outreach.</p>	<p>\$936K Cash Received towards our Building Project</p> <p>Bringing our cash balance to \$6.2million</p>															

2025 Year end Financial Reports

Beginning, March 15, 2026, a full set of Income and Expense Reports for all funds and Schedule of Assets and Liabilities will be available for your review at the Information Center in the Hall and at the Receptionist Area in the Lower Level

YOUTH MINISTRIES



The photos above, left and right are at the Winter Youth Rally. Each year our youth in grades 7-12 travel to WYR and this year we were able to travel to Atlanta for a blessed weekend of games and fellowship.



Team building at a February GOYA.



An enjoyable pitstop on the way back from WYR at a Middle Eastern market



Youth evening light continues this Lent! Come join us on Wednesdays at 5 PM to fine your voice.

GREEK LANGUAGE SCHOOL

Οι μαθητές και οι μαθήτριες του Σχολείου Ελληνικής Γλώσσας Αγ. Νεκταρίου συμμετείχαν σε μια ζεστή και κατασκευαστική αναπαράσταση της Γέννησης του Χριστού, με αφήγηση, τραγούδια κι ένα υπέροχο ταμπλό βιβάν που απέδωσαν με ευλάβεια και χαρά την Παρασκευή, 19 Δεκεμβρίου 2025 στις 5:00 το απόγευμα.

Ευχαριστούμε θερμά τις αφοσιωμένες δασκάλες, την δις. Κατερίνα Τζαίλις, την κα. Ελένη Τζαίλις, την κα. Παναγιώτα Κοψιαύτη που επιμελήθηκαν την παράσταση, τα κοστούμια και τα σκηνικά, καθώς και τους γονείς και φίλους που φρόντισαν για την προετοιμασία των φαγητών και των γλυκών, προσφέροντας σε όλους μια όμορφη γιορτινή εμπειρία. Ευχαριστούμε επίσης τον Άγιο Βασίλη, που με την παρουσία του χάρισε τόση χαρά στα παιδιά, και τον εφημέριο ιερέα μας, πατήρ Παναγιώτη, που παρέστη στη γιορτή και μίλησε με αγάπη δίνοντας το δικό του μήνυμα για τις ημέρες αυτές.

Την Παρασκευή 12 Ιανουαρίου κόψαμε την παραδοσιακή βασιλόπιτα. Ευχαριστούμε θερμά τους γονείς, που ετοίμασαν τις βασιλόπιτες· ήταν πραγματικά νοστιμότες! Με τη βοήθειά σας συνεχίζουμε να κρατάμε ζωντανό το έθιμο και να το μεταδίδουμε στα παιδιά. Μεταξύ των τυχερών ήταν η μικρή Αναστασία Καφούρ, η Μαίρη Μπέρντ και ο Θανάσης Δίγκας! Ευχόμαστε σε όλους τους μαθητές και τους γονείς μια χρονιά γεμάτη υγεία, χαρά και δημιουργικότητα! Ευτυχισμένο το νέο έτος 2026!

Αναστασία Κ.Χολέβα

The students of our school took part in a heartfelt and reverent reenactment of the Nativity, with narration, the apolytikion of the Nativity, songs, and a beautiful tableau vivant that they performed with devotion and joy on Friday, December 19th at 5:00 pm. We warmly thank our dedicated school teachers who assisted with preparation of the performance, the costumes, and the set props, as well as all the parents and friends who set up the hall and contributed to the preparation of food and sweets, offering everyone a wonderful festive experience. Special thanks to Dr. John Gretes for helping us with the microphones and Mr. Chris Mortis for assisting us with the music as well as this year's Christmas committee volunteers, Paula Rooker, Louisa Kleto, and Vasi Digkas, our PTO Co-chairs, and the office staff, especially Marko Millich and Kim Braswell for her help with the program and newsletter. We are grateful for our creative PK/K teacher, Catherine Giles, who took the initiative to decorate the wooden star and with her mother, Helen, cut and created the

adorable animal costumes for the children's performance! Many thanks to Pam Copsis for purchasing new wings and candles that made our angels look ever so beautiful on stage! We would also like to thank Santa Claus, who brought so much joy with his presence, and our assistant priest, Fr. Panayiotis Steele, who attended the children's performance and shared his Christmas message with kindness and love. Friday, January 12th we cut the traditional Vasilopitas. We warmly thank the Digkas, Davros and Coker families who prepared the vasilopitas; they were truly delicious! With your help, we continue to keep the vasilopita custom alive and pass it on to the children. Among the lucky ones to receive the coin were little Anastasia Kafoure, Mary Byrd, and Thanasi Digkas! We wish all students, teachers, and parents a year filled with health, joy, and creativity! Happy New Year 2026!

Anastasia K. Holevas



CHEERFULLY BEGIN THE SEASON OF THE FAST!

(Continued from page 1)

ahead of Holy Communion; if this is not possible, then after a light lunch at midday. We have to be realistic about the demands of our day.

To be literal, "fasting" means taking no food and drink. In many places, it is customary to observe the first day of the Fast ("Clean Monday") with this type of strict fast. Some observe this to varying degrees of austerity for the first three days (Triemerion) of the Fast, breaking the fast with Holy Communion on Wednesday evening. This is not demanded of the faithful, but it is a blessing to attempt it, if we are in good health.

A strict fast generally entails abstention from meat, dairy, wine/hard liquors, and olive oil, assuming simply prepared dishes, and to only eat what is necessary (i.e., to not eat until full). Typically, shellfish and other boneless seafoods are considered fast-friendly. For those who are traveling or do not have much say in what they eat, the spirit of the fast should be applied as able.

It should be noted that we are not served well by scrupulosity when reading ingredient labels on purchased foods. If meat and dairy are not among the first few ingredients listed, be satisfied that something is compatible with the fast. Likewise, foods that by some measure are technically considered to be "fasting", but are nevertheless indulgent, negate the spirit of our fast.

It is impossible for us priests to address every individual scenario, question, or concern. Hopefully, these few points will help in most situations. In the event that you have circumstances that are not addressed here, either directly or by implication, then by all means try to speak to one of us. In short: be humble, be honest about both your limitations and your abilities, and don't overthink it. Fasting is just one aspect of the lenten season; we should strive to see it as a lightening of burdens, not imposing them. Ask yourself each morning: "What is one thing I can do today to show love for God and love for my neighbor?".

Let us cheerfully begin the season of the Fast, and undergo the spiritual struggles. Let us purify and cleanse our souls and bodies. As we fast from foods, let us also abstain from giving in to any of the passions, and instead delight in the virtues of the Spirit. May we persevere in them with love, and then be counted worthy to see the solemn Passion of Christ our God, and to celebrate holy Pascha with spiritual joy. — Sticheron VII, Vespers of Forgiveness

Καλή σαρακοστή! A blessed forty days to all!

DIRECTORY

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Email: fr.andreas@stnektarios.org

Father Panayiotis Steele, Ephemeros
Cell: 703-964-7712
Email: fr.panayiotis@stnektarios.org

Father Steve Dalber, Pastor Emeritus
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Email: frdalber@stnektarios.org

Father Paul Tsahakis, Presbyter
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Email: frtsahakis@stnektarios.org

Parish Staff

Parish Administrator - Evelyn Klund

Administration Staff
Silva Awaimrin, Kim Braswell,
Sharon Koutroumpis, Sofia Nicolopoulos

Director of Youth and Young Adults -
Caroline Mellekas

Facility Manager - Marko Milich

Sexton - Jim Keown

Protopsaltis - Sam Herron

2026 Parish Council

President: Chris Mortis

Vice President: Peter Reinhart

Treasurer: Elie Azar

Assist. Treasurer: David Hanegraaff

Secretary: Gene Borowski

Assist. Secretary: Manal Choueiri

Members: George Bacogeorge,
Zack Hair, Kathryn Mason,
Andrew McCullough, Dan Wixon

Philoptochos Board

President: Madalina Lowen

1st Vice President: Deidre Lepkowski

Recording Secretary: Laurel Bacogeorge

Corr. Secretary: Sharon Koutroumpis

Treasurer: Kathrine Cestrone

Ass't. Treasurer: Evelyn Klund

Members: Helen Bakos, Renee Keretses,
Janet Rogers, and Nia Tefakis

(Email: philoptochos@stnektarios.org)

SUNDAYS AT SAINT NEKTARIOS

Worship on Sundays

Matins 7:45 a.m. and

Divine Liturgy 9:15 a.m.

Fellowship Coffee:

Following Divine Liturgy

Prosphora

Please contact the church office or Christie Asimos at 704-756-1512 if you would like to provide or sponsor Prosphora.

Coffee Hour

Please contact the church office if you would like to host or co-host a Coffee Hour on Sunday. Your Stewardship pays for the coffee hour refreshments provided by the Hospitality Ministry Team.

Flowers

You may donate flowers in honor of a family member's feast day, in memory of a loved one or friend, on the occasion of a holiday, or simply as a gift to the community of St. Nektarios. To donate flower arrangements to be placed at the Iconostasis, St. Nektarios Shrine or in the Narthex for Sunday Services, please contact the church office to reserve a Sunday.

Sacramental Wine & Pure Olive Oil

You may make a financial gift to help defray the cost of the sacramental wine that is used for Holy Communion. Please note on the memo line of your check or on the envelope "Communion Wine". You may also donate a bottle or can of pure olive oil which is then blessed at the Shrine of St. Nektarios and is offered in the anointing kits. Please feel free to bring this with you to any of our services and give to an usher on duty.

For additional information contact the church office.

UPCOMING DEADLINE

Newsletter & Bulletin Due Dates:

Information Due: April 14, 2026

Published: April 28, 2026