



from Fr. NIcholas

Acquiring the Holy Spirit

On January 6, we celebrate Theophany as the Holy Trinity is revealed and the Holy Spirit descends upon the water.

This revelation is a pattern for our own. Theophany proclaims that God enters the world to sanctify and illumine it, and to restore humanity.

In the same way, this month we celebrate 18th century Russian St. Seraphim of Sarov (January 2), whose life offers a living proof of what a human being becomes when fully open to acquiring the Holy Spirit.

Just as the river Jordan waters were made radiant by the presence of the Holy Trinity, so too the heart of Seraphim became a living "Jordan," filled with the grace and peace of the Holy Spirit.

His life shows us that the feast of Theophany is not merely historical - it is deeply personal. It reveals what God desires to do in each of us: to cleanse, renew, and to fill us with the divine light that transforms all of life.

Seraphim is a shining example of what a human life becomes when it is completely open to the Holy Spirit. His holiness was not marked by noise or dramatic signs, but by a quiet radiance that transformed everyone around him.

(continued, pg. 3)

Love Your Neighbor



A tour Philoptochos meetings we often ask our members to let us know about organizations in our community that we could work with.

Joanne Sutryk did just that and introduced us to "Love Your Neighbor."

"Love Your Neighbor" was created in 2015 by Nancy Shepherd. Nancy was a designer who had a home décor shop in Wheaton.

After several years, Nancy felt called to use her talents to serve others and started "Love Your Neighbor."

"Love Your Neighbor" is a non-profit organization that transforms and restores the lives of those transitioning out of hard circumstances.

Local non-profits refer individuals and families to the program (such as Bridge Communities, Habitat for Humanity, DuPage Pads, Families Helping Families, Hesed House, Naomi's House and Reclaim 13).

Volunteer designers meet with the families to learn about them and what they would like for their future home. This is when it starts to remind one of an HGTV design show.

In October, nine Philoptochos members stepped in and met at the "Love Your Neighbor" warehouse in Wheaton and helped coordinate furnishings and home décor using locally donated items.

We also donated \$1500 which helps to purchase new and used items to finish the transformation.

On a Saturday morning in November, volunteers met at the house that was purchased by a mother in the Bridge Community program.

(continued, pg. 3)



FEED THE HUNGRY



On October 7 and November 4, our Philoptochos volunteers made 140 sack lunches to "Feed the Hungry" and went to Annunciation Cathedral to hand out the lunches to the homeless.

Philoptochos is committed to this initiative two to three times a year.



Acquiring the Holy Spirit (continued)

"The goal of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit" (theosis) Seraphim shared.

These words patterned his life. Seraphim's strict asceticism, long solitude in the forest, compassion for pilgrims and tears of repentance opened his heart and soul to God's grace. The Christian life is not merely following moral laws but participating in divine life itself!

St. Athanasios said: "God became human so that humans might become god." Acquiring the Holy Spirit is participating in God's uncreated energies or deification. Seraphim, like St. Anthony the Great, sought solitude—not in the desert, but in the woods.

Holiness is forged in silence as the Desert Fathers teach. Our primary Christian struggle is internal – not against external circumstances or other people but passions that darken the heart and prevent us from receiving God's light.

Seraphim's spiritual peace was not privately possessed by him. He greeted each person – beggars, monks, royalty and sinners with the same joyous words: "My joy! Christ is Risen".

These were not mere words but a revelation! The saint saw the image of God in each person that he encountered. People

Please join the Philoptochos as they host the

Sunday, February 1, 2026
Following Liturgy
Please RSVP by 1/27 to:
http://www.tinyurl.com/haphilo2501

\$10 for ages 4 and older
Free for ages 3 and younger
Catered by Greek Islands

Send Inquiries to:
Holyapostlesgodparentluncheon@gmail.com

wept, confessed and found the Lord's healing in his presence. The Lord's peace was contagious! "Acquire the Spirit of peace" he taught "and thousands around you will be saved".

We often attempt to fix the people around us - our family members, friends, coworkers - or to solve problems through programs and strategies. But Seraphim reminds us that real transformation begins in the secret place of the heart. When peace is cultivated through prayer, humility, and repentance, we create the space for Christ to work in others through us even without words.

Seraphim continually prayed the Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." He stood on a rock for 1,000 days continually praying this prayer.

According to Galatians 5:22, acquiring the Holy Spirit produces the fruits of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness and faithfulness"! True asceticism is not harshness or severity but a gentle clearing away of the inner clutter that hides the light of Christ. It leads not to heaviness but to joy.

May the example of St. Seraphim stir a renewed longing for the Holy Spirit, so that the light revealed at Theophany may shine in our hearts each day. And as we acquire even a little of this peace, may the Lord make us vessels of His joy, bringing hope and healing to the world around us.

+ Fr. Nicholas

Love Your Neighbor (continued)

Through their guidance and support, she was able to transform her family's life. She went back to school and studied to become a Registered Nurse. It was through her hard work and strong faith in Jesus that she was able to get to this special day. After we prayed with the family, they left the house, and we went to work. Within four hours, an empty house was filled with furnishings and became a home! It was a blessing to be able to be part of such a special day.

So next time we ask about an organization or someone who may need a hand, please do not hesitate to reach out!



We collected and donated \$4,000, which

was used to purchase gift cards, winter gear and toys and delivered to Metropolitan Family Services for families to "shop" – free of charge – for Christmas presents.

THANK YOU to Angela Neboysky and Marion Karras for coordinating and to all who donated, volunteered and shopped for this wonderful cause!

Parish Vasilopita Celebration - January 11

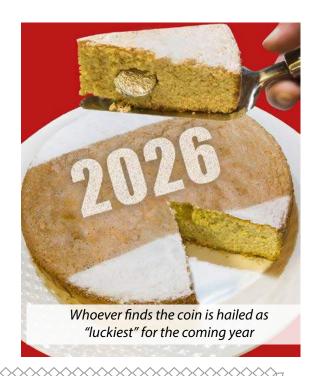
oly Apostles will have the cutting of the Vasilopita on Sunday, January 11, 2026. Philoptochos welcomes you to join their hosted coffee hour with Vasilopita after the Divine Liturgy in the multipurpose room.

A special thank you to Wanita & Paul Loupakos for hosting the Philoptochos sponsored Vasilopita Celebration and to Eleni Poteres for baking the Vasilopita for the blessing in the nave.

Philoptochos sends its best wishes to the Holy Apostles Community for a blessed New Year.

In the fourth century, Saint Basil the Great established various philanthropic institutions and distributed money to the poor in a discreet manner by placing gold coins in the sweetened bread.

The recipients cutting the bread were surprised to find the gold coin which provided them with material sustenance. These special loaves became knowns as the bread of St. Basil or Vasilopita.





VASILOPITA RECIPE

- 1 cup butter
- 2 ½ cups sugar
- 7 eggs, separated
- 1 teaspoon almond extract
- 3 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 3 cups flour
- 3 teaspoons baking powder

DIRECTIONS:

Cream butter and sugar for 10 minutes, add egg yolks and flavorings. Add remaining ingredients, except egg whites. Beat egg whites until stiff in a separate bowl. Fold in stiffly beaten egg whites. Blend well. Grease baking pan (round 14" pan). Pour in batter and tuck coin (thinly wrapped in aluminum foil) into batter, then hand lay whole blanched almonds around perimeter of surface. (You can also spell out the current year in the middle of cake). Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes.

Note: For a smaller cake, prepare half of recipe, and bake in a 10" round greased baking pan for about 30 minutes.



HOUSE BLESSINGS

Fr. George and Fr. Nicholas are looking forward to blessing your homes during the holy season of Theophany.

If you would like to have your home (or business) blessed, please call the church office to set up your visitation (708) 562-2744.

May God bless you this New Year!

Koukla's Kafenio Honors Our Veterans —— Pillars & Rocks ——



Philoptochos hosted our Koukla's Kafenio luncheon on November 13, honoring our veterans.

A delicious lunch, catered by Greek Islands, was served and special entertainment was provided by Grecian Formula.

Philoptochos is always pleased to host and celebrate the pillars of our community who have laid the foundation for future generations.

Hats, gloves & scarves were collected and donated to the Midwest Shelter for Homeless Veterans.

Thank you to Cathy Magas & Aleka Mandelaris who lead our Pillars & Rocks committee and thanks to all the volunteers who made this event so special for our seniors!



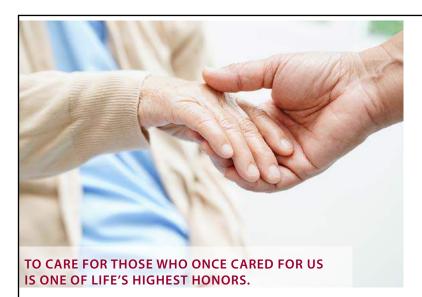




50 "BLANKETS OF LOVE"



n November 15, a group of Holy Apostles volunteers came together to make blankets for the needy. Thirtynine blankets went to Metropolitan Family Services/Family Shelter Service Holiday Shoppe which supports victims of domestic abuse and eleven blankets went to Phil's Friends which supports cancer victims and their families.



CAREGIVERS SUPPORT GROUP

A Holy Apostles Ministry

Tuesday, January 13 1 PM - Philoptochos Room

SPECIAL PRESENTATION:

On the Big Decision: At Home Care, Assisted Living, Memory Care or Long-Term Nursing Care

SPEAKER: ALLISON GREEN
Certificed Senior Advisor

Please Join Us For This Presentaton, Discussion & Coffee!

Please contact Kathy Steffenson at <u>gksteff@gmail.com</u> or Val Dranias at <u>valdranias@aol.com</u> with any questions.

We hope that you will join us.



FEED MY STARVING CHILDREN



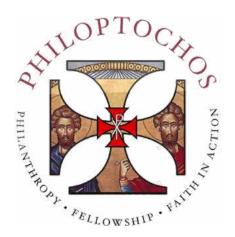
Philoptochos members and Holy Apostles parishioners met at Feed My Starving Children in Aurora on November 15 to pack specially formulated meals for under nourished children.

The meals they packed, along with other volunteers, were enough to feed 79 children a daily meal for one year.

The following week the meals were shipped and are headed to Guatemala, Haiti, and Uganda.

Philoptochos thanks all the volunteers for taking time to serve others.

PHILOPTOCHOS GENERAL MEETING



Wednesday, February 18

Details coming in weekly emails & bulletins

It's NEVER too late to join Philoptochos!

We welcome new and returning members.
For more information or to request a volunteer form,
contact Membership Chair:

<u>philomembership@holyapostleschurch.com</u>

Membership fees can be paid online
at www.tinyurl.com/haphiloptochos



⋖ scan to join



NICOLEFAILLA@GMAIL.COM

KOLIVA DEMONSTRATION



SATURDAY, JANUARY 17 1 PM - 2 PM HOLY APOSTLES MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM

We use koliva in our Memorial Services. Want to learn the basics of making koliva? Or looking to perfect your technique?

Join us as we follow a recipe developed by our own Eleni Poteres!

SIGN UP IN THE WEEKLY EMAIL

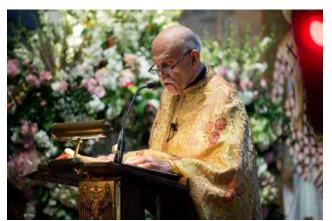
Questions: parishfamily@holyapostleschurch.com







ON OUR WEBSITE ...



OUR CHURCH'S FOUNDING PASTOR, FR. BILL CHIGANOS (OF BLESSED MEMORY), WAS A VERY GIFTED PREACHER AND TEACHER. HIS INSPIRING SERMONS WERE RECORDED SO THAT WE CAN GROW IN OUR FAITH AND LEARN MORE.

Access some of them here:

HTTPS://HOLYAPOSTLESCHURCH.COM/1661-2/



The word "prosphora" comes from the Greek (προσφορά) and means "sacrifice, offering"



It is made from leavened dough of only flour, water, salt and yeast

PROSPHORA



It has to be prepared by someone with a chaste life



The two pieces of dough that form the prosphora represent the two natures of Christ



During preparation, prayers are said



The prosphora seal is used for stamping the dough



Saints Spyridon and Nicodemus of the Kiev Caves Lavra are known as the "prosphora bakers"



Often, the seal includes the abbreviation "Jesus Christ Conquers"

thanks to basilica.ro for content



PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE NOVEMBER 2025 PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

NOVEMBER 20 2025

PC SECRETARY: PATTY PAPPAS EDITED BY: VAL DRANIAS

The meeting was called to order by President James Maragos at 7:33 PM. The opening prayer was offered by Father George Dokos. The Mission Statement was read aloud by Steven Milak: "The mission of the Holy Apostles Greek Orthodox Church is to proclaim and live our Orthodox faith as One Church and One Body of Christ through worship, ministries, education, and youth guidance. For we walk by faith, not by sight (II Corinthians 5:7)."

A motion to approve the October 16, 2025 Parish Council Meeting Minutes was made by Sandra Pihos and seconded by Bill Leider. Motion carried unanimously. Received correspondence making a suggestion to wrap the multi-purpose room rafters in order to assist with soundproofing. This recommendation will be taken into consideration during the room's remodel. Received a thank you letter from Assumption Greek Orthodox Church of Chicago for Holy Apostles' \$1,000 contribution to their Centennial Fund, along with a commemorative book. Assessment letter from the Metropolis explaining our financial obligations to the Archdiocese and the Metropolis.

Father George distributed a handout and led a group reading regarding the Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Theotokos. A brief group discussion followed.

Ministry Reports

Financial: Report by George Antonopoulos. Revenue is ahead of budget by approximately \$127,000, largely due to unbudgeted cemetery plot sales totaling \$80,500. Expenses are under budget overall, with the exception of electrical and plumbing. Operating account profit currently stands at \$93,000 profit. The capital projects budget totals \$400,000, of which \$81,000 has been spent to date. The remaining projects need to be closed out.

Stewardship: Steven Milak provided a report on stewardship pledges, attached below. No significant changes in stewardship pledges were reported. Discussion held on adding a metric to track 'fair share' pledges (\$2,250-\$2,500); Lou Kafkes will compile this data. A 12-month execution plan was distributed, defining the problem, strategy, solutions and tracking methods. Future stewardship efforts will be aligned with a potential joint fundraising campaign. Emphasis placed on educating parishioners regarding stewardship needs.

Metric	Oct 2025 YTD	Oct 2024 YTD	% Change
Number of Pledges	674	690	-2%
Total Pledged	\$846,175	\$860,267	-2%
Amount Collected	\$807,676	\$800,396	1%
Median Pledge	\$600	\$600	0%
Average Pledge	\$1,255	\$1,247	1%

Building & Grounds: No Report

Technology: Report by Steven Milak. The church email system was upgraded with two-factor authentication to be in line with the Archdiocese best practices. The parish laptop computer utilized by Alexa Kakis is no longer functional. Motion by Steven Milak to approve up to \$1,200 for replacement of the laptop, to be paid from the technology budget. Seconded by Sandra Pihos. Motion carried unanimously.

Ushering: Report by Ted Dres. Communion service scheduled for Wednesday, November 26; additional ushers are needed. Noted the passing of Bishop Timothy; visitation to be held on Monday at Assumption Church with the funeral on Tuesday. Discussed cashless giving options, including usage of an iPad near the pangari, QR codes in the trays and pews, and education through the weekly bulletin.

Hellenic Academy: Report by Nicole Ostendorf. The Ellinomatheia program currently has five students. A Zoom license was purchased and reimbursed by the church. The Hellenic Academy Bake Sale is scheduled for this Sunday. Parish support is encouraged. Adult Greek class interest noted (three individuals); possible Wednesday sessions from January-May to be explored. Hellenic Foundation awards reception will be held at St. Haralambos on December 10. Principal Koultourides will be in attendance. Greektown Tree Lighting will occur on November 23. The Hellenic Academy Kalanda will take place on December 21.

Feed 6: Report by Norm Pomrening. The goal for Feed 6 is for 400 participants and \$63,000 raised. To date, only 19 individuals have registered and \$3,100 collected. If donations do not increase by the end of December, the event scale may need to be reduced. The Feed 6 event will be held on January 24.

Old Business

Metropolis Clergy/Laity Assembly: Report by Sandra Pihos. Highlights included: Metropolis commitment to the St. Iakovos Retreat Center at \$350,000 per year; Metropolis Foundation council elections ran smoothly; Keynote speaker - Dr. Demetrios Katos, President of Hellenic College Holy Cross. He noted enrollment of 131 students in total; a wide range of engaging online courses offered; Three dynamic speakers about the Young Adult League; Speaker regarding the Pilgrimage of Discovery program; Budget discussion included explanation of the 13th payment, some of which will be earmarked for the St. Iakovos Retreat Center in addition to other needs as deemed by the Metropolis; Motion passed for acquisition of real estate as the new location for the Metropolis center; Review of clergy leadership training initiatives.

Strategy for Fundraising Meeting: Report by James Maragos. Identified three fundraising needs: Stewardship, Capital Campaign, and Foundation. Goal to coordinate a single unified message. Thania Panopoulos to chair the vision effort. The plan includes vision development, needs assessment, feasibility study, and one-on-one engagement. Meeting with Melpomeni Murdakes, Archdiocese Director of Parish Planned Giving, to discuss planned giving. Meeting with David McGowan of David McGowan Consulting to discuss fundraising strategies.

Chapel Hill Cemetery Plots: Report by Patty Pappas. Patty Pappas and Lou Kafkes met with Chapel Hill Gardens West on November 4. Attendees included Madison Underwood, Office Manager, and Terry Washington, General Manager. Topics reviewed: Status of current plot sales; Available unsold plots; Older transactions not properly executed.

Due to multiple open items and unresolved questions, Patty and Lou will draft a memorandum listing and reviewing each transaction. Chapel Hill provided a list of 20–30 additional plots that may be owned by Holy Apostles, compared to fewer than 10 previously identified. Insufficient documentation exists to confirm ownership of these additional plots.

Further investigation and follow-up meetings will continue to resolve plot ownership and status.

Youth Worker Protection Training: Report by Patty Pappas. Patty Pappas and Andrea San Luis will work to establish a more robust compliance system. The goal is to achieve higher and faster rates of volunteer compliance. The system will include: Monthly emails from the office notifying volunteers of noncompliance; Notification that compliance requirements must be met to resume volunteering; Follow-through by ministry leaders, priests, and the office to assist volunteers in achieving compliance; Policies for the Safety of Children and Youth will be enforced in accordance with Archdiocese guidelines.

Vulnerability Review/Safety Committee: Report by Steve Milak/Mike Parafink. Steve Milak and Mike Parafink will co-chair the Safety Committee. A hired consultant has conducted a vulnerability review. Interest expressed in offering a situational awareness class.

New Business

Calendar Committee: Report by Sandra Pihos. Goal to approve the 2026 calendar at the next Parish Council meeting.

Key discussion points included parish events, audit reports, elections, parish assembly, golf outing, office closures, macaronatha luncheon, and combined church picnic/graduation Sunday. Each committee is to set its own schedule and communicate its dates to the Calendar Committee.

Parish Directory: Report by Lou Kafkes. A contract has been signed with United Church Directories. Family photography sessions scheduled for December 12, 13, 29, and 30. More dates to come. Approximately half of available slots are already filled. Guidelines to be set for submitted photos. Parish demographic data continues to be updated in the church database system.

October 26, 2025 Bears Game Potluck: Report by Lou Kafkes. Attendance of approximately 35-40 people. Future potluck may include church sponsorship of staple items.

Handicapped Parking: Report by James Maragos. Ushers available to assist parishioners into the church. Further assessment to be conducted with upcoming parking lot repaving.

Metropolis Assessment: Report by James Maragos. Annual Metropolis assessment of \$17,555.51 is now mandatory. Payment of this assessment is included in the 2026 budget cycle; no formal motion is required.

Website Updates: Report by Nicole Ostendorf. Nicole is reviewing website edits to improve usability, navigation, and content accuracy. Emphasis was placed on improving accessibility to the church calendar and other frequently used church resources.

Next Regular Meeting: Thursday, December 18, 2025 at 7:30 PM

Key Upcoming Dates: Sunday, December 14: Divine Liturgy with His Eminence Metropolitan Nathanael (Greet at 8:00-8:30 AM); Holy Apostles Christmas Pageant; Metropolis Christmas Reception. Tuesday, January 6: Theophany. Sunday, January 11: Vasilopita after Divine Liturgy. Saturday, January 24: FEED 6. Closing Prayer Offered by Father Georgiou. Adjournment: Motion to Adjourn made by Steven Milak, seconded by Nicole Ostendorf. Motion carried unanimously.



Philoptochos Christmas Party 🐗





■ oly Apostles Philoptochos members gathered on December 11 for a General Meeting and their annual Christmas Party.

Entertainment was provided by the Hinsdale Central Orchestra. The ladies enjoyed a bountiful Lenten Buffet and delicious desserts.

A raffle of ceramic ornaments created by Mud Girls Studio and Christmas décor pieces was held. Everyone enjoyed a beautiful evening of fellowship.







Holy Apostles Greek Orthodox Church

JANUARY 2026

				1 Feast Day of St Basil Office Closed 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy	2	3 5:00 pm Vespers 6:00 pm Vespers Potluck Dinner
48:15 am Orthros 9:30 am Divine Liturgy (Sunday School following Communion) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour	59:00 am Royal Hours of Theophany 6:00 pm Vesperal Liturgy of Theophany	6 Theophany 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy 4:30 pm Greek School Vasilopita Cutting (MPR) 6:15 pm JOY	7 Feast Day of St John the Baptist 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy 7:00 pm Jr GOYA Meeting	6:45 am Brotherhood of St Peter the Apostle 1:00 pm Bible Study 4:30 pm Greek School 5:30 pm Greek School Meeting 6:15 pm Neolea Dance Troupe	6	10 12:00 pm Vasilopita Baking Class 5:00 pm Vespers
8:15 am Orthros 9:30 am Divine Liturgy (Sunday 9:30 am Divine Liturgy (Sunday School following Communion) 11:30 am Vasilopita Celebration 1:00 pm Baptism 6:00 pm Dive for the Cross (Oak Brook Park District Pool)	12	13 1:00 pm Caregivers Support Meeting 7:00 pm Greek School 7:00 pm GOYA Meeting 7:00 pm Philoptochos Board Meeting	10:00 am TOTS	50	16 7:00 pm Small Paraklesis	17 Feast Day of St Anthony 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy 10:30 am Philoptochos Blanket Making Day 11:30 am Baptism 1:00 pm Koliva Demonstration 7:00 pm Vespers for St Athanasios at St Athanasios in Aurora
18 Feast Day of St Athanasios 8:15 am Orthros 9:30 am Divine Liturgy (Sunday School following Communion) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour 12:30 pm Baptism	19 Office Closed	20 11:00 am OCCA Meeting 4:30 pm Greek School 6:15 pm JOY 7:30 pm YAL Bible Study	21 1:00 pm Bereavement Group the Meeting to 7:00 pm Jr GOYA Meeting to 100 pm Jr GOYA Meeting to	22 Feast Day of St Timothy the Apostle 6:45 am Brotherhood of St Peter the Apostle 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy 1:00 pm Bible Study 4:30 pm Greek School 6:15 pm Neolea Dance Troupe	23	24 8:00 am Feed 6 5:00 pm Vespers
25 Feast Day of St Gregory the Theologian 8:15 am Orthros 9:30 am Divine Liturgy (Youth in the Loft / Sunday School following Communion) 11:30 am Fellowship Hour 11:30 am Fellowship School Staff Meeting 12:30 pm Baptism 6:30 pm Sanctity of Life Service	2 6	27 4:30 pm Greek School 7:00 pm GOYA Meeting	28 10:00 am TOTS	1:00 pm Bible Study 4:30 pm Greek School	30 Feast Day of Three Hierarchs 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy	3.1 10:00 am 5th Saturday Serve Day 5:00 pm Vespers

HOLY APOSTLES GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH 2501 S. Wolf Road Westchester, IL 60154 (708) 562-2744

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MEMORIALS

DECEMBER
James Peter Chicouris
Anastasia Georgiou
Konstantinos Margetis
His Grace Bishop Timothy

JANUARY Nathan & Katherine Principato William Simios

BAPTISMS

Eva and Chloe, daughters of Tim & Alyssa Orlowski Sponsor: Sam Failla and Sabrina Glover

Keri, daughter of Nick & Leah Georgopoulos Sponsor: Nick Bizios

Phoebe, daughter of James and Constantina Savas *Sponsor: Anna Fisher*

Nikeforos, son of Peter and Megan Savas Sponsor: Jim and Naomi Tselepis

Laurel, daughter of Justin and Jacqueline Marcinkowski Sponsor: Jonathan Mavros





■Watch: Tarpon Springs, FL Epiphany Cross Dive, 2023.

https://youtu.be/pw4ePYSED3Q