Our society seems to be on the brink of chaos. The pandemic continues and COVID deaths have surpassed 180,000 as I write this. Who would have ever believed that we would soon pass 200,000 deaths from this virus? And yet, our society debates and battles with one another over whether we should wear masks, whether this virus is a hoax, or whether there is some giant conspiracy to control the world through this pandemic.

Then we have our presidential political season fully upon us. Two months until we will vote for our president, and again, chaos and ongoing acrimony as family members and friends and church members turn away from the life-giving relationships they once had with one another and allow the divisive political spirit to turn us against each other.

For me, it’s extremely sad to see this within our Church Family - our loving, warm, Christ-centered Church family - when people who fall into the temptation of judging one another, turning away from one another, and attack one another with erroneous, divisive, negative, and offensive posts on social media. We have democrats and republicans in our church family. Whenever we simplistically spew out labels that attack and stereotype the other side, do we realize we are attacking our own church family, we are attacking the Body of Christ, for each of us together make up the Body of Christ?

Too many have given in to the danger of posting something negative or attacking, without looking at the “other” in the eye and remembering that this “political adversary” is actually my brother or sister in Christ. We may disagree on certain political issues or a particular political ideology, but doesn’t or shouldn’t our Christian worldview prevail and take precedence over any political worldview? Our
Sts. Constantine and Helen
Greek Orthodox Church
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Facebook: St Constantine Helens (Church)
Church Office Hours: Monday, Fridays 9:00 am - 12:00 pm

The mission of Sts. Constantine and Helen Church is to proclaim
the Good News of Salvation through the Orthodox Christian Faith
for the glory of our Triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We are a community of believers who journey towards our Lord Jesus
Christ and one another through our **WORSHIP, FELLOWSHIP,**
**SPIRITUAL GROWTH, WITNESS,** and **SERVICE.** We invite
all people to join us on this journey in the Kingdom of Heaven.

We are under the jurisdiction of
His Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
His Eminence, Archbishop Elpidophoros of America
His Eminence, Metropolitan Methodios of Boston

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SOCIETAL CHAOS AND OUR RESPONSE

Christ-centered worldview highlights love for God and love for one another above all else! Love should always be our motivating factor in all we do or post. Do we remember this as we judge and condemn one another?

I like one facebook post I recently saw from Dr. Michael Svigel, which stated:

“Theology 101: The question should never be “Is this action leftist or right-wing… liberal or conservative… socialist or capitalist?” The question should be “Does this action love my neighbor… look out for their interests more than my own… manifest the fruit of the Spirit?”

Another facebook post I appreciated offered the following sage advice:

- Post wisely on social media over the next months
- Contribute to discourse, not division
- Check your facts and don’t pass on lies and deception
- Resist simplistic memes and childish attacks
- Create beautiful content that inspires and blesses others
- We can transcend the bitterness and be better, even when we disagree with one another.

Then we have the chaos of ongoing injustice and violence. Many people are angry - angry about the injustices they feel they face in our society, angry about not being heard or understood, angry that they are a part of the marginalized of society. Other people are angry at the violence they see destroying parts of our cities, angry at innocent people and businesses that needlessly suffer, angry at the perceived anarchy they think is coming.

Can both sides be right? And wrong? Do both sides have valid issues that need to be addressed? Can we hear the pain and suffering of those who feel marginalized? Can we hear the pain and suffering of those who feel victimized? Can we hear the fear that some express about an uncertain future?

And do we realize that if we ourselves aren’t grounded in a spirit of love, a spirit of peace, a spirit of hope, and a spirit of reconciliation, then we can so easily fall into despair, pessimism, and darkness. When we don’t have a solid foundation of love, we can give in to hatred and even violence towards the other.

Be careful and don’t give in to the spirit of this world, don’t give in to the spirit of fear, of anger, of acrimony, of hatred, of violence.

Pray every day to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God, and ask for the fruit of the Spirit to fill our hearts - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control.

If we strive to cultivate this fruit of the Spirit and make room for this fruit to grow in our lives, we will not be affected by the chaos of society. In fact, we will have an answer to all the chaos, and our witness will contribute to helping and healing the brokenness of society, instead of contributing to its destruction.

With love and hope in Jesus Christ our Lord,

+Luke
As we approach our political elections two months from now, we all hear plenty of political ads. Unfortunately, many of these ads are filled with fear, negativity, half-truths and distortions, along with outright lies of what the other candidate said. All this in an attempt to influence and even manipulate the voters. **What is worse for me is when the candidates talk about faith values and then in total contradiction to what they claim to believe they approve or accept such negativity and distortions of truth.**

We’ve lost civil and polite discourse in our society especially in our politics but even in our everyday life. **We look at the “other,” the one who disagrees with our opinions, and feel we have the right to disparage them and reject them, sometimes even dehumanizing them.** This especially happens via social media, where we don’t have to look at someone in the eyes as we say things.

What a contrast when we compare this attitude with St. Paul’s words to the Corinthians when he says, **“Let all that you do be done with love.”** (1 Cor 16:14) Think how different our actions would be if we attempted to live by this precept. **Imagine if all we did, we did in love. Think how different our society would be, and the world around us, if we tried to live out these words every day, in every setting of our lives!**

Our Orthodox Christian Faith teaches the most basic principle that “God is love,” and He is the Source of all love. When we allow His Spirit to fill us with His presence, and guide us with His teachings, then we slowly become like Christ, people of love. Jesus clearly stated to His followers, **“By this the world will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

**Love is the essence of our faith,** and yet, all of us need to be reminded again and again how to live out such love in our daily lives. In this reflection, I will focus on only one aspect of living out this love – and that focus will be on what comes out of our mouths as well as on what we post in social media!

Our daily words. Our conversations. Our regular dialogue. Our common speech. Our social media posts. Are our typical conversations filled with love, or filled with fear and hatred? Are our words something that unite or divide? Do we speak in positive ways that builds up and encourages others, or in negative ways that tears people down.

One of my favorite passages from the Apostle Paul’s letters is what he writes to the Ephesians. **“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”** (Ephesians 4:29)

How often is our daily speech filled with exactly the opposite? How often do our social media posts represent the exact opposite? We participate in gossip that hurts and destroys. We pass on lies and outrageous fear. We naively accept conspiracy theories. We speak unclean words that add to the impurity of the world. We sometimes consciously injure, and so often unconsciously hurt. **Too often, our words don’t build up, but tear down!**
As a priest, I find it sad when I hear someone curse or swear in front of me, and then apologize because they said such words in front of a priest. “Sorry Father, I didn’t realize you were here.” For such people, they compartmentalize their language (and oftentimes their entire lives) so that it is OK to speak (or act) in certain ways in front of their friends, or co-workers, or buddies, but realize it’s not OK to speak or act this way in front of a priest. Why the compartmentalization? And we do similar compartmentalization in our social media. We post things there that we would never say to someone’s face.

We have to remember that God is present everywhere. We need to be conscious of what we say, and how we say it, regardless of whether a priest is around or not. We have to cultivate the sense of God being “everywhere present and filling all things,” as we say in our daily Orthodox prayer to the Holy Spirit.

God is everywhere present and is with us at each moment of the day. Do we realize this and are we conscious of this when we speak, when we act, in all that we do? I’m sure if we physically saw Christ before us, we would we speak, act, and live quite differently. But HE IS PRESENT, we just don’t have the mind and heart to sense His presence!

“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”

What a beautiful biblical passage to memorize, and then try to live by each and every day. Try today to memorize this verse, and then each morning, as you get ready to begin your day, strive to live by these words. Think of how you can become God’s instrument in imparting His Grace to whomever you speak with.

Imagine, if in every conversation we could impart grace to our hearers! In every discussion, if our words could edify the listener?

In the Theology of our Church, we look at every Sacrament as a sacred mystery by which the grace of God comes upon us. For example, in Holy Communion we take common bread and wine and ask the Holy Spirit to come down upon it, mystically changing these elements into the Body and Blood of Christ. In this Sacrament the grace of God comes upon us, and it is a means by which we commune with God and become united with Him.

And yet, our Church doesn’t limit its sacraments to seven. We believe many acts can become means of communing with God. Thus, maybe we can even look at our daily conversations and words as sacred moments of each day – moments by which God’s grace may come upon our listeners. In this way, we become instruments of God’s love, building up and blessing everyone we encounter each day!

“Let all that you do, be done in love... Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” May we strive to live by these words throughout this week!
THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

Fr Luke A. Veronis

It was Oct 2, 2006 and 20-year old rookie fire-fighter paramedic, Matt Swatzell, just finished a 24 hour shift. As he was driving home, he was tired and nodded off for three or four seconds, just enough time for his car to swerve across the center lane and hit an approaching car head-on. Thirty-year old June Fitzgerald, who was seven months pregnant, died instantly, but her 19 month old daughter Faith survived.

The paramedic, Matt Swatzell, was in despair. “I’m an EMT and paramedic who helps people in tragic situations,” he lamented. “And here I was the one who caused this terrible accident.” The husband, Erik Fitzgerald, who just lost his wife and soon to be baby was in shock.

Sometime later when prosecutors asked Fitzgerald whether he wanted to pursue the maximum sentence against Matt Swatzell, the newly widowed father said enough lives had been destroyed. Instead of vengeance, he wanted to demonstrate grace. You see, Erik Fitzgerald is a Christian pastor who knew he needed to practice what he preached. So the judge sentenced Swatzell with community service and a fine.

But that’s not the end of the story. Two years after the accident, these two men accidentally met at a grocery story. When the pastor saw Matt, he walked up to him and the paramedic began to cry uncontrollably. Pastor Erik just hugged him and told him he forgave him.

“Just hearing the words “I forgive you” completely changed my life,” Swatzell would say. “I had two years of guilt and anguish built up within me and I couldn’t imagine how he could ever forgive me.”

The two men talked for two hours that day and bonded in an unexpected and indefinable way. Pastor Erik told the young man, “I don’t know what you’re going to say to this, but I just feel like I’m supposed to stay connected with you somehow.” Imagine, a man tells the one who accidentally killed his wife and unborn child that he wants to stay connected with him.

And that’s exactly what happened. Over the next 10 years, the two men met regularly. The pastor would tell Swatzell not to let that accident define who he is. The paramedic found hope in the mercy he received and in this special friendship.

Their friendship deepened as the years unfolded. Swatzell got to know Pastor Erik’s daughter, Faith, who is now 12, and after he himself married and had children of his own, the two families still get together, even spending holidays together.

"He's become like a big brother to me,” Matt admitted. “We have a lot of fun together as crazy as this might sound. It’s really something unique.”

“Just seeing his daughter Faith play with my kids puts a smile on my face. It really hurts when I think about Faith’s mother, but it’s the cards that we were dealt. And now it’s our story together. I’ve learned that where there's mercy and grace, authentic healing can take place. There’s always hope for miracles to happen.

While he knows Pastor Erik has truly forgiven him, Matt Swatzell confessed that he still wrestles with his own demons of guilt and admits he’s not sure if he has forgiven himself. “I can’t say, ‘This is a beautiful story and it's got a great ending because something sad and tragic really happened. It’s real and it's something that I'm going to struggle with for the rest of my life, yet from this tragedy came an amazing blessing.”

Both men view their friendship as a special blessing from God, a feeling cemented recently after Pastor Erik welcomed another child into his life with his new wife. Their baby was born on the same due date as the unborn child he and his first wife June had been expecting. (This story was written by Robin Sindler and Eun Kyung Kim)
Think about the power of such mercy and forgiveness, the power of Pastor Erik to not allow a terrible tragedy to poison his heart with anger, bitterness, resentment and hatred. He tasted one of the worst possible experiences in life through the death of his wife and child, yet he made room for God’s grace to not only heal him and his daughter Faith, but to share that divine grace with Matt Swatzell, giving him also a chance to find healing and new life.

Whenever we are confronted in life with a choice to forgive or not forgive someone else, we are given a choice to experience the grace of life or the horror of death. By holding on to resentment, bitterness, anger, and even hatred, we open the door to misery and death in our own lives. We may be tempted to think that by holding on to a grudge, by not forgiving the other, we are punishing this person. Yet our unwillingness to show mercy and to forgive another, even if they have deeply hurt us, will ultimately impact us in a negative way. By our unwillingness to forgive and offer grace, we close ourselves off from the mercy and grace that Almighty God offers to us.

I love the analogy that holding on to a grudge and not forgiving another is equivalent to swallowing poison and then waiting for the one we are angry with to die from it. Our pride fools us into not forgiving another, and this ungracious act will hinder us from receiving God’s grace.

We get an understanding of this in Gospel story of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:23-35). Jesus describes a servant who owed a king an insurmountable debt. Ten thousand talents would be equivalent to millions of dollars for a simple servant who could never possibly repay this debt during his lifetime. The king, though, forgives the debt for no other reason than his great mercy. Following this incredible act of grace, this same servant meets a fellow servant who owes him 100 days wages. For a simple man, his fellow servant owed him a serious debt. Yet, a debt incomparable to the one he owed the king. And instead of imitating the king’s grace and forgiveness, he chooses to NOT show the same grace and mercy to his fellow servant and doesn’t forgive him. By turning away from God’s mercy, he basically rejects his master’s mercy. His hardness of heart and his arrogant rejection of God’s grace, in the end harms himself, because he no longer stays open to God’s gracious spirit of love.

May we all remember this in our lives, whenever we are confronted with a choice to forgive or not forgive someone else. We are given a choice to experience the grace of life or the misery of death. By holding on to resentment, bitterness, and anger, and being unwilling to forgive and offer grace to someone else, we close ourselves off from the mercy and grace that Almighty God gladly offers to us. Yet by showing mercy and forgiving another, we open our hearts to receive the healing power of God’s amazing grace, and to help another experience that healing grace as well!
An Interview with Archbishop Anastasios

Archbishop Anastasios has served the people of Albania for the past 30 years. He was asked, “Don’t you ever have reservations or apprehensions about your years there? Do you ever get frustrated or angry?” His answer is that if he feels these emotions ever beginning to rise, he ascends to the loft in his apartment where he sleeps and has a small chapel for prayer and meditation, and simply spends time with God. His name “Anastasios” literally means “Resurrection” and he has led a resurrection of Orthodoxy in Albania. Before this resurrection, though, there is a Cross in Golgotha, through which the Archbishop is still journeying, ungrudgingly, modestly, and with absolute faith.

How Do You Know that God Exists?
I see him everywhere. In the mystery of the macrocosm—the boundlessness of the heavens; in the mystery of the microcosm—the complexity of a cell and an atom. I perceive him as I wander through unspoiled nature, and as I ponder the inconceivable miracle that I constantly transport: my body, its astounding organs, their diverse functions. We are not the cause of ourselves, the culmination or combination of chance, the product of some impersonal force. I sense him within.

My conviction about the phenomenon of religion in general is that it opens the horizon to a transcendent reality. Religions are the creation of human desire for the Sacred. They keep the door of human experience open to the boundless.

Do the difficult challenges that Albanians have faced lead them to a more intense quest for God?
All people are in an unceasing evolution till their last breadth; and I feel that the obligation of the Church is to face everyone’s quest with a sense of respect, whether these are blaring or silent or replete with doubt. This can be achieved with respect and patience, so long as we offer freedom and love.

What do you believe the role of the Church today might be?
First and foremost, the church must remain exactly what it is: namely, the Ark of Truth that reveals the mystery of God and the mystery of humanity - the Body of Christ that gives meaning to life and death. It is a presence from the outset of our life to the very end. At the same time, it cannot remain closed within itself; it cannot become a ghetto. It is the leaven that is destined to transform the world. This is why the Church has to offer is the elevation of humanity, through purification, from the multifaceted nature of sin, to something more refined, more genuine. The goal is to advance to another level, to what we call illumination, to deification by grace, which is our ultimate yearning. It is participation in God, who is love.
church should demonstrate sensitivity to social conditions and should be as intimate as it can with the daily needs of humanity. What always remains a danger is the temptation that we all face, namely the temptation of opulence, of arrogance, of meaningless luxury. On a certain level, we need constant self-criticism in order to preserve our simplicity and directness.

What does the future look like?
History is in the hands of God; space and time are in the hands of the One “who is, who was, and is to come” (Rev.1.8), in the hands of the God who always existed, exists, and is approaching. We have nothing to fear if we remain with God.

What is the role of religions?
The oil of religion should never be exploited by any faction in order to exacerbate conflict. Instead, it should be used to heal wounds and calm hearts.

Are there experiences that defined your life?
In 1963, just before I departed for Africa, I was in Patmos at the time, in silence and mediation, and the question facing me was: Should I leave my beloved homeland and go to Africa, or should I stay where I was loved? I still recall that wave that broke on the shore, the boundlessness of the sea, and the question that arose in my heart: Is God enough for you? If he is, then proceed without fear. If he isn’t, then turn back. Yet, if I am afraid to go forward, the next question must be: If God is not enough for you, then what God do you ultimately believe in? Can you live this truth? Then proceed with faith and hope.

How Does the Church Give Meaning to Life?
The language with which we communicate today is very different, and there are new challenges, while even scholarly research has assumed new categories. Religious experience is one of the most valuable elements of human existence. The unparalleled contribution of the Church is the giving of meaning to life, the transcendence of death. No science, no computer, no technology in general, can ever have anything to say on this subject. Allow me to adopt theological terminology, which can sometimes sound standoffish—much like mathematicians who employ equations to express profound truths. I believe that what the Church has to offer is the elevation of humanity, through purification, from the multifaceted nature of sin, to something more refined, more genuine. The goal is to advance to another level, to what we call illumination, to deification by grace, which is our ultimate yearning. It is participation in God, who is love. It is a never-ending movement of limited humanity to the unlimited divine. Tell me honestly: Is this not the most daring anthropology?

Who is Your Greatest Opposition?
Listen. The Orthodox community is not critical of anyone. We are here, we believe, and we enjoy what God has given us, but what we have is a gift and not a weapon to be used against others. We must show respect for all people, irrespective of what they believe or don’t believe. In this way, we avoided conflict—not for political reasons, but for reasons of theological consistency.

Orthodoxy welcomes another person’s freedom without negative pronouncements, without xenophobia, without perceiving others as the enemy. No one is an adversary. Our only opposition is sin and our ego. Why would we label others as rivals?

At every liturgy in the Orthodox Church, just before the singing of the Nicene Creed, the priest or the deacon intones the words, “The doors! The doors!” This call dates back to the earliest times, when the doors of the church had to be barred shut, to prevent outsiders (in those days, Roman soldiers) from entering the church, witnessing those who confessed the faith, seizing them, and killing them.

**Being a Christian was not safe.**

Centuries later, under the Muslim Turks, Crypto-Christians – those who lived publicly as Muslims, but secretly as Orthodox Christians – attended Liturgy in secret churches, often hidden beneath secret doors in the floors of their own homes, or in unknown caves. In rural villages, Orthodox priests sometimes posed as Muslim imams just to maintain their cover. If such a village of Crypto-Christians was discovered, everyone – from the old people down to the infants – was put to the sword.

**Being a Christian was not safe.**

Centuries later, under Communist regimes, faithful Christians would meet secretly in grey concrete apartment blocks, where priests would baptize little ones who had been brought by their grandmothers, without the knowledge of the parents – a legitimate excuse for the parents to give to the atheist authorities if the family was ever caught. In the most severe Communist regimes, a handful of faithful would gather outside a city or town for a clandestine nighttime Liturgy, served by a priest brought in from far away to avoid the prying eyes of local authorities. In all these cases, the faithful knew, if they were found out, the punishment would be a swift execution, or worse – a slow and painful death in a concentration camp.

**Being a Christian was not safe.**

In the last few months, faithful around the world have experienced the closure of our churches, the prohibition of the public celebration of Holy Week and Pascha, and the effective ban by bishops and civil authorities in different places on the reception of Holy Communion. In most places, churches have now reopened (at least in part).

Yet formal studies and informal observations show that about one-third of those who regularly attended holy services at the start of this year have now become accustomed to staying home on Sundays and feast days, and have not returned to church.

Perhaps good habits have been broken. Perhaps
laziness has set in. Perhaps the lure of Sunday breakfast in bed has proven seductive. Perhaps some are still afraid or uncertain to come back.

Yet what has covered all the human laziness and brokenness behind the spiritual falling away is a single self-deception. These are the words, “I will return to church when it is safe again.” Curiously, one does not hear the same phrase repeated in relation to the liquor store – i.e. I will return to the liquor store when it is safe again. Nor does one hear it applied to the purchase of groceries: grocery stores seem somehow protected from all sicknesses, and remained so throughout the recent worldwide crisis.

Neither does one hear this phrase when it comes to the workplace – i.e. I will refrain from making an income, because the risk to my health is too high. I will return to work when it is safe again.

It seems that churches suffer from this unique level of danger – just as they did throughout the earlier part of this year, making them more risky than public transport and dollar stores combined.

The truth is, in the current climate of uncertainty, many people have not only shifted from realistic medical precaution to social hysteria, they have also found social hysteria to be a most convenient cloak for avoiding anything inconvenient or difficult.

Have to visit a relative? Not until it’s safe again. Have to finish some difficult job? Not until it’s safe again. And how about going back to church every Sunday morning…?

Brethren, attending the holy services of the Orthodox Church – Sundays or feast days – has never been safer than it is today. The truth is, however, it has never been safe to be a Christian. In the catacombs around Rome rest the remains of countless martyrs for Christ. In the former Soviet Union and other communist countries, there were tens of millions of martyrs for the faith. Being a Christian and going to church was always a risk for them – and so it will be for every generation of Christian, unto ages of ages.

Please, be careful and set aside the idea that you will return to the holy services “when it’s safe”. That day will never come.

If you are going out of your house for other reasons, think about coming back to church as well. Being a Christian is not always about being safe. But it is about remaining faithful.
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The Lord said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). In these words is a twofold invitation.

First, we hear a call to follow the Lord along the path of struggle and pain. Christ suffered for our sake, in body, soul, and spirit, because “love bears all things” and “endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:7). In whatever ways we serve the Church in days ahead, we will likewise endure stresses and challenges, disappointments and difficulties.

“There is more than adequate labor for those who zealously seek the Lord.” (Luke 10:2). In Church life, there is much to be done, always. There are never enough hours in the day, ever. As clergy and as laity, we must often put aside our own will. Out of love for Christ and His people, we bear all things and endure all things. These sufferings are summed up in the image of the Cross. Thus, the Lord commands us: to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, and to follow Him.

But there is a second invitation in these words. For the Cross is also an image of triumph.

Through the Cross, Christ canceled the debt of human transgression (Colossians 2:14).

Through the Cross, Christ disarmed the powers of darkness (Colossians 2:15).

Through the Cross, Christ was lifted up and so drew all people to Himself (John 12:32).

The Cross is a symbol of ultimate victory over sin and death and the Devil. No human achievement can compare to the Cross. Saint Paul declares, “God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14). Nothing in his life could compare to the triumph of the Cross. He counted his own ambitions as rubbish (Philippians 3:8); he put aside every former aspiration as irrelevant. To know and to serve Christ was enough for him. In this way, the great Apostle denied himself, took up his cross, and followed in the triumph of Jesus Christ.
As we celebrate the Precious and Life-Giving Cross on this Feast of its Universal Exaltation on September 14th, we are led to contemplate the great offering that was made by our Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation. On this Cross He died for all, so we might live for Him (2 Corinthians 5:15). Through faith in Him, we are a new creation, the old has passed away… as God, through Christ has reconciled us to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).

We have been reconciled to God through Christ by His grace. From His great love for us, Christ entered our humanity, sharing in it unto death on the Cross. The magnitude of His love for us as His creation was revealed through this tremendous offering. In love He acted for our sake so that He might restore His image within us and renew our communion with Him. In love He revealed His great mercy and offered us forgiveness of our sins.

Our reconciliation to God through the Cross was an act of great sacrifice. In lifting up the Cross before us, we recognize that an instrument of grace was also an instrument of suffering and death. We acknowledge the unfathomable burden that was assumed by our Lord as He took our sin upon Himself as an unblemished offering.

Through His sacrifice we are reconciled to God because we come to the Precious Cross in faith. We look upon it, and we proclaim the power that was revealed. We believe in the mighty act of redemption that was accomplished by our Lord upon the Cross. In faith we repent of our sins, receiving God’s grace and seeking to be reconciled with our Creator.

As we are reconciled to God through Christ and the Cross, we are given the ministry of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:18-19). We are called by our Lord and emboldened by His Life-Giving Cross to share the grace of God. From lives that are being transformed and commitment to our commission to share the Gospel, we demonstrate the power of the Cross to restore life, to renew, to heal and to save.

Our ministry of reconciliation is also a witness of sacrifice just as He gave His life for us. We give in full measure. We offer our lives, our gifts and our resources so that others might come to the Cross. We stand in the face of persecution and suffering, proclaiming a message of reconciliation so that others may have abundant and eternal life. Through that message, we ask all to look to Christ, to believe in Him and to be reconciled to God.

As we exalt the Cross of Christ each year on this Feast, we also remember in prayer our beloved Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology and for the students, faculty and staff who serve there. This community of learning and spiritual development is dedicated to the ministry of reconciliation through training the future clergy and lay leaders of our Holy Archdiocese. In a beautiful environment of worship and academics, our students are equipped for this ministry by the grace of God. Many do this by making significant vocational and financial sacrifices to follow His calling. In faith they commit to His will, to a life of service to His people and to all in need of the life that has come to us through the Cross.

Pray for our beloved School and all the men and women who dedicate their lives to serving our Lord and proclaiming the message of His Holy Cross.
In the reign of the Roman Emperor Hadrian (117-138) there lived a widow called Sophia, which in Greek means "wisdom". She was a Christian, and in accordance with her name, she lived her life wisely. She had three beautiful daughters whom she called by the names of the three Christian virtues: the first was called Faith, the second Hope, and the youngest Love. She taught her daughters to live in a way pleasing to God by prayer, fasting and helping the poor. As the children grew in age, so also they grew in virtue, being obedient to their mother. They read diligently and knew well the books of the Prophets and Apostles; they were fervent in prayer and housework. Their beauty combined with their virtuous lives attracted the attention of many.

When the fame of their lives reached the pagan Emperor Hadrian, he sent for them to come to him. The wise mother warned her daughters that the Emperor persecuted Christians and would tempt them to worship the pagan idols by promising them great gifts, riches and honor and all the things of beauty and pleasure in this vain world. She begged them to choose rather their beloved Lord Jesus Christ and the heavenly beauty such as human eyes have never seen and which God has promised to those who love Him.

"O my dear daughters," she said, "remember my words with which I taught you the fear of God and comfort your mother in her old age by your good and courageous confession of faith in Christ."

Encouraging and supporting one another, they promised their mother that with Christ's help they would put into practice all her valuable advice.

When the Emperor's servants came for them, all four, mother and daughters, protected themselves with the sign of the Cross saying: "Help us, O God, our Savior, for the glory of Your holy Name."

On reaching the palace, they were presented to the Emperor. Seeing their beauty and their bright and fearless faces, the Emperor began to ask them their names, they answered that they were all Christians and wished to live for Christ alone Who is to be worshipped by all generations.

Hearing this, the Emperor grew angry. Just as the mother had warned. He asked
the girls to become as his children and wor-
ship his gods, promising them glory and
honor; but if they would not obey he threat-
ened to torture and kill them.

The holy virgins answered him with one
voice: "Our Father is God Who lives in
heaven. He takes care of us and our lives.
We want to be loved by Him and we wish
to be called His true children. Worshipping
Him and keeping His laws and com-
mandments, we reject your gods, and we
are not afraid of your threats."

The Emperor was very surprised at the cour-
age of these young girls. At this time Faith
was only 12 years old, Hope was 10, and
Love was just 9.

The Emperor again tried to force them to
worship his false gods. He commanded
Faith to offer sacrifice to the goddess Arte-
mis. When she refused she was beaten and
tortured. Faith endured all of this evil brave-
ly by calling upon her Lord, and when she
was put in a cauldron of boiling tar and oil
she remained unharmed. She sat in it as if it
were cool water and sang praises to God.
Seeing that no amount of torture could force
the girl to give up her faith in Christ, the
cruel Emperor ordered her to be beheaded
before the very eyes of her mother and
younger sisters.

When the second sister Hope also refused to
worship the false gods, she was thrown into
a fire, but she too remained unharmed and
glorified the true God. The torturer was fur-
ious that he could not hurt her and ordered
her to be thrown into the boiling cauldron,
but it at once melted like wax, and the tar
and oil poured out and burnt the bystanders.
Ashamed that he was unable to shake the
faith of such a young girl, the torturer or-
dered Hope to be beheaded. Knowing that
the same cruel torture awaited her younger

sister, Hope encouraged her and said, "Do
not be left here, sister. Let us stand to-
gether before the Holy Trinity." Then she
bent her head and was beheaded with a
sword.

When the torturer called the youngest sis-
ter, Love, to worship the false gods, she
also, even after seeing her sisters' tortures,
did not hesitate to confess her faith in Je-
sus Christ. She was ordered to be thrown
into a stove, but just like the three youths
in the Old Testament, Love remained in
the stove unharmed; walking about as if in
a cool place, singing and praising God.

The Emperor ordered still more cruel tor-
tures, but the young girl proved true to her
name for love "endured all things" (I Cor
13:7). Finally, she too was beheaded and
got to join her sisters who stood before
the throne of their beloved Lord Jesus
Christ.

Their mother rejoiced, knowing that each
of her daughters had received a heavenly
crown. Soon she too passed on to the
Lord and shared with her daughters in the
heavenly kingdom after she received a
martyr's crown.

(Taken from Stnicholasstratford.org)
Come and Join a New Small Group

“BECOMING TRULY HUMAN”

Saturdays
September 19, 26, Oct 3, Oct 10

5:00pm-7:00pm
Vespers followed by a 30 minute Video and Discussion

Do you ever wonder, “How do you know there is a God?”
25% of U.S. Adults have No Religious Affiliation.

Many of us have doubts about the religion of our childhood. Hear the stories of eight people who are caught in this tension between belief and doubt.

Come and Join Us!

Commit to Attending for FOUR Weeks and discover the joy of

+ Christ-centered fellowship,
+ Thought-provoking discussion
+ A Journey Towards a Deeper Faith

George and Annalisa Dunning, together with Fr. Luke will lead the discussion.
**GREEK FOOD FEST & BAKE SALE**

Due to our current pandemic, we are unable to have our typical annual Greek Festival. As a substitute, we are having a Drive Thru Food Fest & Bake Sale offering delicious Greek food and pastries.

In the efforts to keep our costs at a minimum, we welcome any monetary donation towards the ingredients. Or please consider buying a $100 banner that we will display outside during our two day Food Fest.

Please contact Evelyn Pappas if you can bake pastries or if you want to volunteer or serve during these days, contact Lisa Healy or Marie McNally.

Thank you !!!!

**YOUTH EPISTLE READERS**

Sept 6—Kara Bilis
Sept 13 - Helen Dunning
Sept 27 - Panayiota Veronis
Sept 20 - Maia Beaudry
Sept 20 - Zach Beaudry

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**USHERS & GREETERS SCHEDULE**

*(Only for Ushers and Greeters who feel comfortable being back in Church)*

- Sept 6: Marie McNally, Matt Benoit, Lisa Healy, Nick Seferi
- Sept 13: Arthur Bilis, Chris Geotis, Thomai Gatsogiannis, Trish Lareau
- Sept 20: Neal Neslusan, Mike Chito, Jimmy Karapanos, Brenda Romillard
- Sept 27: Nicoleta Cojocaru, Chris Dillon, Bill Thompson, Tatyana Zhuk,

*We need more ushers. Please call Fr. Luke if you can join a group!*

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**Please Continue Stewardship Support With Online Giving**

During these uncertain times, we want every member in our Church Family to know they are not alone, but we are there for one another. If there is anyone in our Church Family that has a need, please contact Fr. Luke. If you want to donate toward our Church COVID Fund, which Fr Luke will give to those in need, please send a check to the Church office.

Please continue to support our Church through your stewardship and generosity:

1. By sending in your stewardship offering each week or month.
2. Making online donations or buy candles to light up our church at [https://my-site-108326-103062.square.site/](https://my-site-108326-103062.square.site/).
3. Or go to our website on bottom left corner for online giving at [http://schwebster.org/](http://schwebster.org/)
GOD GRANT YOU MANY BLESSED YEARS!

Important Dates in SEPTEMBER:

*Try to make a visit, give a call, or express your congratulations to members of our Church family who celebrate special days during this month.*

**BIRTHDAYS:**

- Sept 6  Gus Zahariadis
- Sept 7  Maria Zhuk
- Sept 8  Scott McWilliam
- Sept 10  Nick Popiak
- Sept 10  Kristina Mironidis
- Sept 11  Zachery Beaudry
- Sept 12  Evelyn Pappas
- Sept 12  Barbara Pappas
- Sept 13  Kiera Mackenzie
- Sept 14  Michael Mackenzie
- Sept 15  John Neslusan
- Sept 16  Madison McWilliam
- Sept 16  Chuck Pappas
- Sept 18  Bob Mirandola
- Sept 18  Nicholas Thompson
- Sept 20  Lucy Dunning
- Sept 21  Katie Neeland
- Sept 22  Kathy Kunkel
- Sept 24  Niko Totolos
- Sept 24  Jared Quill
- Sept 25  Marie McNally
- Sept 26  Olga Pappas
- Sept 26  Christos Atsales
- Sept 27  Diane Atsales
- Sept 28  Titi Chito
- Sept 28  James George
- Sept 29  Paul Veronis

**WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES:**

- Sept. 3  Lorna and Scott McWilliam
- Sept 3  Gary and Tina Colello
- Sept 6  Jared and Stephanie Quill
- Sept 9  Del and Marie Monroe
- Sept 12  Norman & Barbara Desrosiers
- Sept 15  Nick and Mary Seferi
- Sept 29  Neal & Charlotte Neslusan

**NAMEDAYS:**

- Sept 1  St. Antigone
  Ann Chito
- Sept 5  Prophet Zacharias
  Zach Beaudry
  Zach Giannaris
  Zach Giannaris
- Sept 7  St Kassiane
  Lorna Kassiane McWilliam
- Sept 14  Feast of the Cross
  Laurie Stavroula Manthos
  Stavros Pappas
  Stephen Stavros Pappas
- Sept 17  St Sophia
  Sophie Apostal
  Sophia Barakliulis
  Sophia Bethune
  Sophia Foisy
  Sophia Koulax
  Sophia Mackenzie
  Sophia Quill
  Sophia Stephanidis

**ORDINATION TO THE DIACONATE**

- Sept. 17  Fr. Luke Veronis
IS OUR CHURCH IN YOUR WILL?

Remember Christ’s Beloved Church in your Estate Planning and Legacy Giving!

What a beautiful way to remember the Church that has blessed you and nourished you throughout your life.

Even after you have gone to be with the Lord and join the Church Triumphant in the company of the saints, you can still help the Church here on earth continue her sacred ministry of love and hope to the world!

COMMIT TO 20 MINUTES WITH GOD EACH DAY

Use Fr. Luke’s Daily Email to help you spend 20 minutes every day connecting with God through Meditation and Scripture.

Sign up to the daily email at www.schwebster.org and go to bottom right column of homepage.

Look for our safe and convenient

at bottom left of Church webpage at www.schwebster.org

Learn your Orthodox Faith from Orthodox podcasts, music, teachings at www.myocn.net

www.AncientFaith.com
Thank You to those who sponsor our monthly bulletin!
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- **SEPTEMBER 2020**

- **August 30**
  - 8:30 Matin
  - 9:30 Divine Liturgy
  - 11:30 Parish Council Meeting

- **September 1**
  - New Church Year
  - 8:45 Matins
  - 9:30 Liturgy
  - 10:00 Zoom Bible Study
  - 6:30 Parakles

- **September 5**
  - 5:00 Vespers

- **October 1**
  - 5:00 Vespers

- **October 2**
  - 5:00 Vespers
FALL EDUCATION PROGRAM

Hybrid Sunday School Begins September 20th

“Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6)

With the challenges of COVID19, we will try to create Sunday School lessons that can be partly on Sundays at Church, along with material for home. Try to bring your children to Church weekly to worship together and participate in our Sunday School. Church Worship begins at 9:30. Have children present to hear a sermon directed towards them following the Gospel.

Wednesday 10:00am Bible Study on ZOOM

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105)

Everyone is welcome to join and learn together! If you have never read the Bible before and want to learn more about our Faith, join our group!

NEW Saturday “Becoming Human” Small Group Following 5:00pm Vespers

This new group will watch a video about people who have fallen away from the Church, who have questions and doubts, and who just aren’t sure about Christianity. Lively discussion will follow. This is a FOUR-week group running from Sept 19-Oct 10.