



Issue 3

May - June 2023

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THE NEWS FROM ST. NEKTARIOS

PEACE, PRAYER, AND WORSHIP

Fr. Andreas G. Houpos

“In peace, let us pray to the Lord.”
“Lord, have mercy.”

In all the services of the Church and, particularly, in the Divine Liturgy, we frequently encounter the words “peace” and “prayer”. After inaugurating the Divine Liturgy by announcing that the Kingdom of God is blessed, the clergy make the first invitation for the faithful to entreat God’s mercy: “In peace, let us pray to the Lord”. The people respond to the invitation by saying “Lord, have mercy”.

This deceptively simple exchange could use a closer look. When we use the term “pray”, it can conjure up several different meanings. “Pray” might mean to one person “to ask for something”, and he would be correct. “Pray” to another person might mean “to meditate on God”, and she would be correct. Yet another person might take prayer to mean “talking to God” and he, too, would be correct.

Yet there are multiple words in the original Greek language that we pour into the single English word “pray”. In the above petition, the Greek term that is rendered “pray” in English is «δεηθῶμεν» (deēthōmen), a form of the verb «δέομαι» (deomai), which means “to be in want or need” or “to beg”. In other words, it has the particular meaning of seeking something that we ourselves cannot obtain. The faithful then declare what is needed: God’s mercy and pity («ἔλεος», eleos). So, we could rephrase the exchange this way: “Let’s beg the Lord in peace.”

“Lord, take pity on us!”

At the very outset of our communal worship that will culminate in the act of partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, every single person in the congregation—priest, layman; man, woman; young, old; healthy, sick; etc.—has been invited to recall his or her relationship to God: we are in desperate need of something that only God can give us, and that is his mercy.

“Let’s beg the Lord in peace.”
“Lord, take pity on us!”

The implication is a) that we are all sinners, b) that sin separates us from God both in this life and in the one to come, and c) that despite my weakness, God is merciful and can be approached by me to ask for help. Because there are eternal implications for my thoughts and words and deeds, the stakes are high. If I have even a flickering thought of spending eternity with Christ or eternity without him, I cannot be but moved to implore him for mercy on account of my innumerable faults.

But how can someone—indeed, an entire people—so desperately in need of God’s mercy even remotely be in the state of peace that accompanies the command to beg God for mercy? How does one beg in peace? Rarely does

one who is in a state of desperate need display signs of peacefulness. For the answer to this, we may look to these well-known, yet oft-forgotten, words of our Lord:

“Do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. Therefore do not be anxious...” (Matt. 6:31-34a)

If we consider our sinfulness before God as more biting than hunger, more parching than thirst, and more humiliating than nakedness, all the more ought we to know that our Father knows that we need healing. When we seek out the Lord’s kingdom among fellow sinners, gathered in the temple as if on that mountainside to hear Jesus repeat his words to us, we hear the resounding reminder that **“blessed is the kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit!”**

The “kingdom” of God is the reign of God. It is not simply a destination, as if an earthly kingdom with borders, but the state of being ruled and completely devoted to God. Moreover the kingdom or rule of God is not separate from God. Our Lord said, characteristically, that **“the kingdom of heaven is in your midst,”** with “in your midst” alternately interpreted as **“within you”** (Luke 17:21). Recall what Jesus said about loving God

(Continued on page 16)

Happy Birthday Fr. Andreas!

We wish you many
more blessed years
Fr. Andreas!



We surprised
Father Andreas
with singing and a
special cake for his birthday in June.



In Appreciation

Thank you to Diane Gilbert and Copycat for
printing the Church Bulletin and Newsletter.

Thank you to Eliana Davis for allowing us to
use one of your photos for the Holy Week
Insert last month and to all who allowed us to
use their photos.

Life and Family Ministry and Philoptochos prepared over 40 Pascha Baskets

Notes of Thanks from our Parishioners

Once again, we thank you for remembering us
at Pascha. The Easter Basket was full of
**special treats. The enclosed book "Habitation of
Holiness" is very beautiful and very much
appreciated. We are most grateful for our St.
Nektarios family.**

Bill and Jean Seymour

We just wanted to express our appreciation for
your kindness to us at Pascha. We were
blessed to receive such a beautiful basket full of
special treats and a wonderful book. Thank you
for thinking of us.

Mary and Perry Diamaduros

FOCUS ON OUR COMMUNITY

Celebrations, Milestones, Comfort & Support

In our prayers

Tim Aphroula John Pat Joe Kim Johanna Edward Tina Theona Helen DG Chuck Handsef
Mason Angela Robin & Benny John & Elaine Jennifer & family Eleftheria Mary Shan Dawn
Grant Jack Phyllis Melton family Tish Joanne Christina Stephen Barbara & Spiro Gloria
Phil & Ronnie John & Michelle & family MP MSR Ashley Christian Jeff Shannon Glen
Cheryl & Brian Paul Dina John T. John D. Terry Dorothy Erma (Hermione) Phyllis John
Emmanoeuel Marihiam Helen Debbie Hanna Chris Greg

FOR THOSE IN SERVICE TO OUR COUNTRY

Helene Jordan Krassimire Nicholas Michael Constantine Zack
Matthew Amanda Danielle Anton Jimmy Thomas Chris

Congratulations and best wishes Births & 40th Day Blessings

To Christina and Sam Herron on the birth of Alexis & Sophia's sister, Olivia Grace
To Danielle and Daniel Monroe on the 40th day blessing of their son, Daniel Herman

Chrismations & Baptisms

To Haifa Naber on her chrismation and to her sponsor, Salma Oushair
To Nicole & Andrew Rumpf on the baptism of their son, Henry James,
and to his sponsor, Alexis Koutroumpis
To Rebecca & George Koutroumpis on the baptism of their son, Cooper James,
and to his sponsors, Stephanie & Chris Koutroumpis
To Ellen & Sam Makkas on the baptism of their twins, Asteris and Vagelis,
and to their sponsors, Ioanna (Jana) and Konstantina (Toula) Bikas
To Casey Gerding & Nick Yiottis on the baptism of their daughter, Anastasia,
and to her sponsors, Yianni Margiotis
To Demitra & Red Farha on the baptism of Stephanie's brother, Evangelos,
and to his sponsors, Dr. George Soulis and Dr. Natalie Farha
To Christena Piksikoulis & Joshua Autrey on the baptism of their son, Mixalis Emmett,
and to his sponsor, Rian Fotinos

Marriages

To Megan Perkins & Hendrik Maximos Hanegraaff on their marriage
and to their sponsors, Mike & Kathy Clewell
To Marlena Heracklis and Konstantinos Morris on their marriage
and to their sponsors, Isidoros Frangoulis and Konstantinos Katsoudas
To Chantal Agamez Moreno & Nicholas Triantafyllides on their marriage
and to their sponsor, Pavlo Triantafyllides
To Theresa Shovlin & Stephen Truesdale on their marriage
and to their sponsor, Melanie McMinn
To Lauren Bou Ghazale and John Pamukci on their marriage,
and to their sponsors, Jack and George Pamukci

With Sympathy on the Repose of our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ

To the Shelton family on the repose of Tim's wife and John and Marisa's mother, Adrienne,
To the Milliones, Scott and Thomas families on the repose of Mary Hondropoulos Milliones,
mother of Natalie, Stacy and Lynne
To the Georgiou and Andritosogiannis families on the repose of Dino Georgiou
To the family of Sophia Valladares, the staff of the DRC & the St. Mark Boca family on her repose
To the family of Dr. Albert Lyles on his repose
To the Kizinopoulos family on the repose of Nikolitsa, mother of Tino Kizis
To the Chomakos family on the repose of Gail's husband and Andrea's father, Jim

Staff appreciation

Thank you, Helen Giles

for serving as Director of Youth Ministries for five years and as Catechism teacher for nine, for making a difference in the lives of our youth, educating and preparing them for a lifetime of spiritual growth as Orthodox Christians.

Sunday, May 21st Tribute

On the feast of Saints Constantine and Helen, Fr. Andreas recognized our high school graduates and the Director of our Youth Ministry, Helen Giles. It was appropriate for him to ask for God's blessing through her patron saint on this day. On behalf of the Parish and Parish Council, he presented her with an icon of Saints Constantine and Helen in appreciation for her years of service as Director of Youth Ministry and the last year as the Director of the Youth Catechism Program.

Father shared that we were prepared to recognize her several times which didn't come to pass because of scheduling conflicts. As it turned out, the Lord provided that we could appropriately thank her on her feast day and when we were going to be recognizing our catechism graduates.

He extended our deepest gratitude for her years of service to our youth, to their families and to this parish broadly. Father expressed how she has been "an amazing and indispensable link in the chain of what we try to transmit to our youth and what we give to them to hold onto in this turbulent life."



A few pictures of the many projects and events Helen has overseen in her many years of service to our parish.

Helping at Beds for Kids



Samaritan's Feet



In appreciation of managing 1000s of volunteer hours and programs and activities each year

- ◆ Youth Catechism
- ◆ Joy-Hope
- ◆ GOYA
- ◆ Orthodox Life
- ◆ Youth Athletics
- ◆ Oratorical Festivals
- ◆ Vacation Church Camp
- ◆ St. Phoebe Ministry
- ◆ Youth Protection
- ◆ Pageants
- ◆ Rallies, Retreats, Lock-ins
- ◆ Dance Troupes
- ◆ Service Projects
- ◆ Summer of Service
- ◆ Workshops and training
- ◆ Myrrh bearers
- ◆ Secret Saint



Service Projects



Lenten Retreat



Vacation Church Camp

Holy Land Pilgrimage

I am pleased to be able to bring good tidings to you of the recent pilgrimage offered through our beloved parish of St. Nektarios.

Our pilgrims were forty-one in number. The group included three priests and two nuns. The youngest participant was twelve years old, the eldest ninety-six. The itinerary was facilitated by at least five airline flights, two high-speed ferries, four 55-passenger buses, two separate caravans of minibuses, cable gondolas, and a fishing boat. Our pilgrims set foot in four countries, and visited innumerable churches, monasteries, as well as biblically and historically significant sites.

Our clergy served in two Divine Liturgies, one at the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem and the other in Aegina at St. Nektarios Monastery. The group met with the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and a number of clergy and monastics at various sites. Every day was begun with the chanting of "Christ is Risen" on the bus, and nearly every site had a Scripture reading and hymn associated with it.

I thank God for allowing this pilgrimage to take place, and express gratitude to:
His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta for his blessing, encouragement, and prayers; Fathers Peter Chamberas and Paul Tsahakis, for their priestly

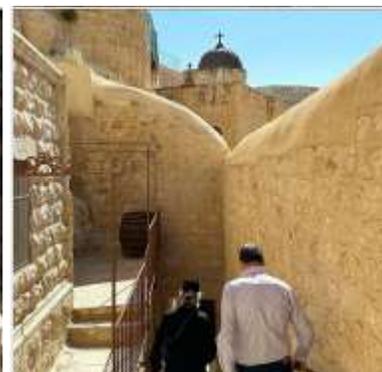
presence and contributions; Gerontissa Agne and Sister Ephraimia for enriching our experience with their example and words, each participant for their material investment, willing spirits, and unique contributions, Father Nektarios Karantonis for attending to the needs of our parish in my absence, our faithful parishioners for their many prayers, Gerry Clonaris for organizing the experience, Cloud Tours for their services, our excellent tour guides and all the stewards of the holy sites for their ministry and hospitality.

It is my hope that we will organize an event to share images and stories from our pilgrimage with the greater community in the near future. May God grant other opportunities for such pilgrimages, as He wills.

In Christ,
Fr. Andreas



Holy Land Pilgrimage



Youth Ministry



MAY 21 ~ GRADUATION SUNDAY AND CATECHISM TEACHER APPRECIATION

Outgoing Catechism Director, Helen Giles, with Scholarship recipients, Catechism Graduates, and Teachers



PARISH ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

Judges: Jim Keown and Sam Herron, Participants: Mario Barragan and Mary Tash Organizer: Joanne Azar



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION PARTY ~ June 3

Six of our families came together to host a party for their graduates and invited the community to share in the celebration.

We are so proud of our two speakers who participated in the District Level Oratorical Festival at Holy Trinity in Raleigh. Mario Barragan & Mary Tash finished 3rd and 4th place in their division pictured here with Fr. Paul Christy.



GOYA YEAR END FUN

Our GOYA enjoyed the lovely weather with some fellowship and a fun round of kickball with Fr. Andreas and Fr. Nektarios to close out this year's regular meetings. We wish all our students and their families a blessed and safe summer, and congratulate all graduates of all levels for their achievements!

St. Phoebe ministry

On May 21st our St. Phoebe Ministry helped fill and load 800 backpacks for those in need at Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina.

This agency has been in existence since 1981. They are serving 19 counties in North and South Carolina by providing education and by partnering with others to eliminate hunger by soliciting and distributing food to charitable agencies to assist those in need.

St. Phoebe Ministry offers opportunities for service to girls in grades 4-12. Participants serve in the Narthex and Nave on Sundays, assist in baking prosfora and take part in service projects in the local community like Second Harvest Food Bank.

Our St. Phoebe Ministry was happy to be a part of this endeavor. ❖



Scouts Ministry

Pack 490 held our Pinewood Derby on March 11th this year. The Pinewood Derby is the wood car racing event of Boy Scouts of America created by Cubmaster Donald Murphy in 1953. Murphy wanted to devise a wholesome constructive activity that would foster a closer parent/child relationship while promoting craftsmanship and good sportsmanship through competition. Scouts design and build (with grown up help) their own cars and then they race the cars on a track. In addition to an award for fastest car, there are several other award categories.

- ✦ Best Scout Spirit (outdoor theme, patriotism, scout symbolism, etc.)
- ✦ Best Paint Job
- ✦ Best Car Design
- ✦ Best Animal Design
- ✦ Overall Winner

It takes a lot of work to make these events a success. Many thanks to everyone who helped with set up and with registration, running the computer that timed the races, arranging decorations and supplying refreshments.

Lastly but most importantly, we want to thank our parents who spent time with their children and for your commitment to Pack 490 and to your children's futures. Your nurturing and guidance will create strong, godly adults who are willing to help others and who know what to do in most any situation. May God bless all of you. ❖



Philoptochos — Compassion in action

“The one who has mercy to the poor lends to God, and He will repay him according to his gift.” Proverbs 19:17
JANUARY TO JUNE: AN OUTPOURING OF INVOLVEMENT, SUPPORT, AND GENEROSITY

Your St. Nektarios Philoptochos Chapter thanks you for an incredible start to 2023! We have **already exceeded last year's membership levels** and received over \$26,000 in donations and through fundraising. We look forward to welcoming more members, working alongside with many volunteers and finishing a banner year making a difference in the lives of others.

January — We started the year with the blessing of the Vasilopita and hosting the New Year's Day brunch. We collected \$1200 for St. Basil's Academy.

Our annual Membership Tea took on a new approach by hosting the fellowship coffee hour on January 29. Through our program guide, we shared with the whole community the worthy work performed by the chapter, beneficiaries and volunteer opportunities.

Baskets on every coffee hour table were filled with items to benefit Baby Bundles. Their goal is to present new and gently used clothing and other baby essentials to underprivileged families in the Charlotte area. Baby Bundles partners with community agencies and local hospitals to identify families in financial need who will receive



a bundle of clothing, blankets, books and toys. We were honored to have Paula Faust, the Executive Director of Baby Bundles, speak on the impact these items will make.

February — We offered a “Sip and See” time at the Young at Heart Luncheon on the 9th. By taking our meetings to other ministry events and hosting their gathering times, we are able to share with more people our upcoming events and recruit their support.

The month launches our Lent preparations and our Pascha baking. We collected \$700 for the Metropolis Clergy Education Fund on the 12th.

March — On the 16th was our Feeding the Hungry initiative when we made 500 sandwiches for Roof Above and 300 sandwiches for the Salvation Army Centre of Hope — exceeding our goal of 500. Roof Above is a comprehensive homeless service provider serving 1,200 people per day through a spectrum of services ranging from street outreach, day services, emergency shelter, and permanent supportive housing.

Through our first Sunday of Almsgiving, we collected \$1261. for Hellenic College/Holy Cross. The Kuykendall Road clean-up on March 18th was completed in record time. Many hands do make light and quick work.

April — Pascha is one of times each year we remember our shut-ins with gift baskets. Thank you to Deidre Lepkowski for chairing this event, our numerous delivery people, basket preparers, and Ritsa Neary leading the bread baking. Over 40 baskets were prepared and delivered. In early April, we raised over \$1300. for Shelter



Health Services through our second Sunday of Almsgiving tray. Thousands of koulourakia were baked and sold along with Pascha Tsourekia bread. Thank you to Charlotte Nickolopoulos for chairing the baking and the many volunteer hours hand-twisting the dough to make these goodies.

The majority of our efforts focused on the annual Palm Sunday luncheon and Holy Week preparations. Beginning with Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Cross making, volunteers set tables, decorated the hall and tent, and prepared for the Palm Sunday luncheon. Thank you to the Koutroumpis family, who despite the kitchen equipment malfunctioning, prepared a delicious



luncheon. We cannot say thank you enough to our understanding parishioners enduring the long wait to get their meals. In the end we made the most ever to benefit our St. Nicholas Benevolence/Altar Fund and other charities.

Behind the scenes during Holy Week, 700 eggs were dyed, enough luminaries to surround the church were assembled and positioned for the Holy Friday procession, and of course decorating the Kouvouklion. Thank you to Phyllis Gianakopoulos and Pitsa Karres for chairing the egg-dyeing, Charlotte Nickolopoulos for chairing the luminary project, and Salma Qushair for chairing the Kouvouklion decorating. Our appreciation goes out to the many, many volunteers assisting in these activities.

May — At the 16th general meeting and pizza party, we elected our next board to serve a two-year term. We thank our outgoing board: Helen Bakos, Katherine Cestrone, Michaelina Franks, Phyllis Gianakopoulos, Renee Keretses, Niki Kleto, Evelyn Klund, Sharon Koutroumpis, Deidre Lepkowski, Madalina Lowen, Christine Malatras, and Charlotte Nickolopoulos.

Welcome to our new board (pictured at top):

President: Madalina Lowen
1st Vice President: Katherine Cestrone
2nd Vice President: Deidre Lepkowski
Treasurer: Evelyn Klund
Assistant Treasurer: Sharon Koutroumpis
Recording Secretary: Missy Davis
Correspond. Secretary: Christine Malatras
Board Members: Helen Bakos, Michaelina Franks, Phyllis Gianakopoulos, Renee Keretses, Ana Levantis, and Stephanie Scolinos

Now the work continues as we go into the summer months with planning and goal setting. We are here to serve. To get involved, please let us know at philoptochos@stnektarios.org or by speaking to one of our board members. ❖

Young at Heart

The Young at Heart met on May 9th and June 8th for their monthly dinner gatherings to share in faith, fellowship, food and fun.

On May 8th we honored our mothers while watching a special slideshow showcasing mothers of our Young at Heart members. We have been collecting photos for several years and are always accepting photos to build our library.

Congratulations to Christala Paraskeva being selected **“Mother of the Year”** in a random drawing. Thank you to George Couchell and his crew for providing a delicious Greek salad with grilled chicken meal. This is all done in memory of his mother, Anastasia Couchell. We celebrated our May birthdays with a tasty cake provided by our committee.

On June 8th, we gathered together again for our last regular meeting of the year, to honor our fathers before breaking for summer. Thank you to our host committee for serving a lamb dinner.

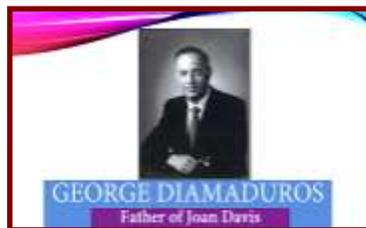
We had a little fun when seven of our fathers in the room participated in a good-looking leg contest. Through an informal, close, and somewhat subjective **“applause o-meter”**, the group determined that Emile Khuri had the best looking legs in the Group. As it turned out, all were winners just by participating in this light-hearted fun. Kerry Gionis was selected Father of the Year through a random drawing. We wished everyone a happy Father’s Day in advance of its national observance and as we did for Mother’s Day, presented a special slideshow of the fathers of our members. Send in photos of your dads too!

Since we are breaking for the summer, we celebrated those whose birthdays fall in June and July. This include Fr. Andreas who has a June birthday. He did the honor of cutting the cake.

Fr. Andreas convey his many thanks for the Young At Heart board for all their planning and hard work this year. **“May God continue to inspire us to provide opportunities for fellowship and community among all our people. Now in our 25th year, it’s a good time to start thinking and praying about how we can honor our elders and bring similar opportunities to those older members who laid the foundation for this community and continue to teach us the way of the Lord. May God bless all of you.”** ❖



Above and to left: Our hosts, Mother of the Year, Christala Paraskeva with husband, Costas, photos of past Mothers of the Year, a frame of the slideshow of our mothers and special cake for May birthdays



Above and to left: A frame from the slideshow of our fathers and special cakes for June and July birthdays



Pictured above left to right: Our contestants (left) and our June hosts (right)

Building for Generations

The Teams have been busy this spring with plans to move forward with the new Ministry Center and the renovation of the Spiritual Life Center.

Construction Team — continues to review and revise building and renovation plans.



On June 21st a meeting was held to conduct a preliminary review of our building and renovation plans with the Mecklenburg County Land Use and Environmental Services Agency (LUESA) which enforces building and zoning codes. The preliminary meeting identified some minor plan adjustments, but overall gave us the go-ahead to proceed.

Next steps include reviewing the plans with the Metropolis, obtaining proposal for fire protection systems, and securing initial permits. We will apply for 3 separate permits: one to renovate the Spiritual Life Center, one for the shell for the Ministry Center and one for the upfit of the Ministry Center. Soil testing is in process.

All document packages will be completed and submitted to the potential general contractors for bidding and to the building department around mid-September.

Fundraising Team —

Come and Learn: This past May and June we held gatherings to acknowledge, thank, update, and hear from parishioners who have pledged their support for our upcoming building project. Through round table discussions, we gathered ideas and suggestions on our next level of fundraising.



Come and Imagine: The team hosted a “Sundaes and Surprises” for the community after the Diving Liturgy early in June and asked them to imagine the future as they entered the new Ministry Center from the plaza. This was the first of four events. **Look for “A Cold Brew Sunday” on July 16 to again enter the Ministry Center and explore a new “Narrow Path.”**



Make a Pledge: With nearly \$6 million in pledges and over \$4 million of that as cash-on-hand, we're really off to a great start.

Glory to God! But we don't just need millions of dollars from a portion of the parish: we need everyone's commitment! We need to show our lenders that our community is serious about cementing our Orthodox Christian presence in South Charlotte. We need your name on that list! Have you pledged toward building for our future? Prayerfully consider what you will contribute towards new, adequately sized rooms for youth and adult catechism, a proper bookstore, opportunities for athletic and social fellowship, enriching conferences, expanded ministries, and overdue updates to spaces that have served us well for decades. This

year, we celebrate 25 years of blessings and inspiration. Let's commit to keeping that budding legacy alive for 25 more years and beyond. Visit our website for more information and to learn how to make your pledge today.

Endowment Scholarship Sunday ~ May 21

As many know, the Endowment's major gift is the Frank and Dee Cockinos Family Scholarship and its proceeds are dedicated to benefit youth 25 and under. We have endeavored to fulfill the mission of their generous gift.

Grants — Since its inception in 2017, we have awarded over \$85,000 in grants to over 50 different people, organizations and charities at St. Nektarios, in Charlotte, the US, and beyond.

Scholarships — Part of this gift, is the opportunity for students to earn a scholarship. We are pleased to again offer this opportunity and congratulate all the applicant for their hard work and accomplishments. The committee identified two paths for scholarships. One is for scholars of distinction, chosen by the committee, each recipient will receive a \$2,000 scholarship. The other path is a random drawing of all other qualified recipients, each of whom will receive a \$1,000 scholarship.

This year there were 14 applicants. The committee was able to award 3 Scholars of Distinction and 5 scholarships through the random drawing. Scholars of Distinction recipients were Michael Azar, Anthony Choueiri, and Christina Georgiou. The random drawing scholarships went to Olivia Jurney, Ariana Kanelos, Demetri Kanos, Michael Keretsis, and Christopher Kontakis. This is our third year and in all we have awarded 23 scholarships totaling \$31,000.

We thank all the applicants and pray their next chapter is blessed and of course we thank the Cockinos Family for making these scholarship possible.



Fr. Andreas and our Scholarship Committee pictured with our scholarship recipients
Left to right: Sam Kleto, Demetri Kanos, Michael Keretsis, Olivia Jurney, Michael Azar, Anthony Choueiri
Fr. Andreas, Theodora Sexstone, Chris Levantis, Emile Khuri, Julie Milich and Maria Mortis

Goal — Our long-term goal remains to grow the Endowment so we can continue and expand our good works, but we need your help. Please consider the Endowment in your estate plans. The committee members are always available to answer your questions on how we can build on the initial Cockinos Family gift to the Endowment.

Members of the Endowment Board are Theodora Sexstone (chair), Chris Levantis, Peter B. Pappas, Maria Mortis, and also serving on the scholarship subcommittee are Sam Kleto, Emile Khuri, and Julie Milich.

A Note of Appreciation

"I am very thankful to the Cockinos Family for their generosity in providing more students an academic opportunity to achieve their dreams. I have grown up in this parish and it is very meaningful to me that the Cockinos family invests in the youth of our community.

I am also very appreciative to the St. Nektarios Endowment Committee for their time and effort."

Financial Matters

Your Generosity Supports
our Lord's Ministry through Worship, Witness, Service and Fellowship

FOCUS ON WORSHIP

*"We have seen the true light;
we have received the heavenly Spirit.
We have found the true Faith,
worshipping the undivided Trinity;
for the Trinity has saved us."*

(A hymn of the feast of Pentecost)



Through your generosity of time, talent and treasure, we can make sure our church home is in order for our weekly worship services, sacraments, and times of personal prayer and veneration. Preparation is ongoing by our Clergy, staff and volunteers. Everyone is busy with varied activities. Here is just a sampling:

- ◆ Preparing the weekly homilies and teachings by clergy
- ◆ Learning and practicing the hymns for the week by chanters
- ◆ Making the sanctuary available for private prayer and veneration
- ◆ Informing the community, the Staff prepares the weekly missal, sends out the mid-week E-Bulletin, publishes periodic newsletters
- ◆ Scheduling and training volunteers who greet, usher, welcome, monitor safety, teach our youth, and serve as hospitality hosts
- ◆ Baking prosfora and making kollyva in a well-maintained kitchen
- ◆ Scheduling and preparing for weddings, baptisms, 40-day blessings, chrismations & memorials
- ◆ Creating flower arrangements to adorn our icons
- ◆ Coordinating special presentations and events
- ◆ Ordering & maintaining liturgical supplies and inventory (candles, icons, communion wine, linens, robes, etc.)
- ◆ Reviewing rubrics for each Sunday
- ◆ Setting up the Youth Catechism classrooms
- ◆ Preparing St. Nektarios Anointing Kits
- ◆ Serving hundreds at Fellowship Coffee Hour
- ◆ Setting up and working the sound and broadcast systems
- ◆ Inspecting the property inside and out, making sure everything is operational and befitting of our Lord's temple

**OUR 2023 STEWARDSHIP GOAL
TO FUEL OUR MINISTRIES IS
\$933,000**

**AS OF JUNE 18, WE HAVE RECEIVED
\$888,325 IN PLEDGES
WE HAVE REACHED 95% OF OUR GOAL!
GLORY TO GOD**

\$45,000 LEFT TO GO

**OUR CHALLENGE:
KEEPING OUR CASH FLOW STEADY AND ON
TRACK THROUGH THE SUMMER**

Consider:

- ◆ We are half-way through the year. Is your stewardship pledge half-way completed?
- ◆ Become a steward if you have not already done so.
- ◆ Make a special summer offering before going on vacation.
- ◆ Add one more offering to the year if you have fulfilled your stewardship pledge.

So You Know . . .

January 1 through June 18, 2023

Operating Income and Expense Report

Stewardship Received	\$ 406,204
Other Income Received	132,987
Total Income	\$ 539,191
Total Expenses <small>(paid and accrued)</small>	\$ 597,749
Net Income	\$ -58,558

PROFILES IN FAITH

Through your generosity, lives are transformed as we build our relationship with God

We know that worship places us in mystical communion with God. This communion is where God reveals Himself to us, we reveal our true selves to Him, and we share both with each other in faith. Every life, every person is a word spoken by God. We may know the name of the person sitting in the pew next to us, but we may have no idea of the word God is speaking to us through them. Some may be at the beginning of their life and spiritual journey, filled with the joy and wonder

of God and His miracles. Some may be suffering unspeakable loss and isolation but are holding on for dear life to God's promises. Others may be seeking to understand the harshness of the world in the context of our Orthodox faith. Whether it is birth, death, joy, sorrow, wonder or a combination of many factors across a lifetime that draw us to worship, we do it together, while ever-changing, transforming and preparing for the world that is to come.

Foods in Faith

Kollyva Series

Every single service offered by the Orthodox Church is a cosmic event, an ineffable manifestation of God's perfect eternity in this finite and fallen world. Such is the case with the sacred services for the Saturday of Souls. Also noteworthy was the completion of the "Foods in Faith" kollyva class.

Participants gathered to learn about kollyva's significance, and to prepare the dish. The morning of the service they

gathered before Matins to complete the decoration of their plates. The kollyva were then brought in by the students and offered alongside those brought by other members of the congregation in order to memorialize their loved ones. May their memory be everlasting! ❖



Post Pascha Services

Feast of the Life-Giving Spring

At the end of Divine Liturgy on April 21st, we proceeded to our fountain, and offered the Small Blessing of Water on the occasion of the Feast of the Life-Containing Spring, which is celebrated the Friday of "Bright" or "Renewal" Week. Year round, some of our neighbors like to stop at the fountain while walking the church grounds. Many do so because their children are attracted to it. Others stand or sit in prayer. May the day's blessing extend to them, and may the Theotokos, the Spring of Life, guide them to her Son and His Church, the well of Living Water. ❖



Farewell to the Season of Resurrection

Between a night's Vigil and an evening's Ninth Hour, and Vespers for the Ascension of our Lord, we bade a proper farewell to the season of the Resurrection, and cried, "Christ is Risen!" one last time. Of course, this must ring in the depths of our hearts continually! We thank Fr. Christian Siskos from Holy Trinity Cathedral and the faithful who were present to honor the Lord in the day's services. ❖



Kneeling Vespers of Pentecost and Feast of the Holy Spirit

Pentecost day vespers includes the kneeling prayers which mark beginning of the practice of kneeling during the Liturgy at the time when the holy gifts of bread and wine are consecrated as the body and blood of Christ. The practice of kneeling has been suspended during the Paschal season.

Blessings to the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Cathedral Charlotte community for their parish feast and for the occasion for our local communities to gather with them in celebration. ❖



Beyond St. Nektarios - Pillars of Byzantium



By Tim Klund and Fr. Steven Klund, St. Nicholas GOC, Wilmington, NC

Our family took a trip to visit two sites of great importance to the Christian church development and growth, Thessalonica and Mt. Athos in August 2022. The impetus for the trip was predicated by a former parishioner, Arthur Lage, who passed away in 2019. Some of you may remember him, an elderly transplanted gentleman from New York. Arthur sometimes participated in Young at Heart activities and the Agape picnic, but distance and mobility difficulties limited his presence at other church activities.

But of note, was a spiritual experience of his from a visit to Mt. Athos (Xenophontos Monastery) sometime in the distant past. That visit with the monks living there, and in particular the abbot (yeronta), made a lasting impression on him. That impression prompted him to remember the monastery in his Will. As Executor to his estate, I was responsible for seeing to it that his substantial donation to the Xenophontos Monastery was distributed according to his wishes. I wondered if it **wouldn't be nice and appropriate to convey the spiritual impact of Arthur's visit, to the monks residing there today, and inquire if the current abbot was the one he met.** That became a reality with this trip, as recounted below from **Fr. Steven's daily note taking.**

[Please note that a much better historical account of the sites visited, is documented by Fr. Steven Klund in two YouTube clips he recorded, edited, narrated, produced and uploaded to the St. Nicholas GOC, Wilmington, NC YouTube site. The clips are entitled, Pillars of Byzantium Part 1: Thessalonica, and Part 2: Mt. Athos]. Mt. Athos (Xenophontos Monastery)

The journey to Mt. Athos began back in Charlotte, months before the actual trip itself. One needs to secure an invitation from authorities at Mt. Athos with monasteries to be visited. There is a limit on number of pilgrim

visitors (male only) that can be accommodated **(accepted) and issued a "visa" for the visit.** Accordingly, a pilgrim must apply and receive confirmation of their registration prior to arrival. Most pilgrims visiting Mt. Athos depart from mainland Greece by ferry from Ouranoupolis.

Fr. Steven and I began our journey from Thessalonica very early in the morning in order to make it in time for an early morning, two hour, scenic bus ride to Ouranoupolis. At the bus station we met Chase, a non-Orthodox fellow pilgrim, who was a Lutheran seminarian from Minnesota. We had wonderful discussions and association with him during our visit. (See later recount of the meeting at the bookstore with the abbot).

Upon arrival at Ouranoupolis, everyone had to be Covid-19 tested resulting in a negative reading before being allowed to board the ferry. The ferry made several stops before reaching the Xenophontos Monastery to let some of us off, then continued on its appointed journey around the Mt. Athos peninsula to other stops. We would take this same ferry on our return trip to Ouranoupolis.



The hospitality for which Mt Athos is known was readily apparent upon arrival. Also of immediate impact, was the beauty and serenity of the setting right at the foot of the mountain range, with clear blue water lapping on the shore. Our accommodations, as expected, were spartan. The food was plentiful, primarily vegetarian in nature, but seafood on occasion. Meals are conducted as communal (family) events, presided over by the abbot, and in silence, while listening to a reader of scriptural selections throughout. Service and upkeep at the monastery is done on a rotating weekly schedule, akin to a duty roster. Kitchen duty and servicing the meals falls into that scheduling duty.

Our "sponsor" for the visit, Fr. Ieremias, was just finishing duty as Chaplain and starting kitchen duty for the next week. Fr. Ieremias is an American priest-monk who began his calling to Mt. Athos in 1996.

The first evening's meal included some dignitaries responsible for the relations between Mt. Athos and the Greek government. We were surprised to be seated, by extension table, with the Abbot's main dining table as part of the honored guests. Something truly unexpected. That treatment of seating at the Abbot's table continued throughout our visit. Something truly unnecessary... but appreciated.

The timing of our visit coincided with the feast for the Dormition of the Theotokos (old calendar). Mt. Athos is considered Her garden and its patron saint. As such, there were many pilgrims on their own spiritual journey visits along with us. The main (new) sanctuary was under renovation, so all the services were held in the old sanctuary building, which is some thousand years old! I am glad we experienced that happenstance, but in practical terms it made for very crowded services in the much smaller chapel sized sanctuary.

Fr. Steven was invited to assist in the altar for the main Dormition service, and also chant at others. A truly wonderful experience for him. In **Fr. Steven's own words:** **"I was asked to serve during the vespers! It was overwhelming to be inside an altar that is 1000 years old surrounded by holy men. They asked me to concelebrate tomorrow at the liturgy! I helped chant the rest of the vigil ... it was overwhelming to be praying in the same altar that saints have prayed for over 1000 years! Who am I!? The liturgy was wonderful and Yeronta [Abbot] Alexios was so generous. He treated us like equals and was gracious in giving out parts to pray."**

The service included a six-hour vigil lasting well into the early morning hours. Favoring a bum right knee during the visit, I never could have lasted for the entirety of the vigil if not for finding a reserved seat up front. After dinner and during compline, it is the usual custom at the monastery to bring out the Holy Relics in their custody for veneration. Among those they displayed were: the Holy Cross, Andrew, Philip, Barnabas, Anna, Basil the Great; the skulls of Tryphon; Paraskevi; and St. Stephen; the right hands of George and Marina; and the foot of Panteleimon.

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Thessalonica & Mt. Athos, Greece

Then Fr. Ieremias took us on a private tour of the museum. All of the STUNNING artwork was done by a single world-renowned monk, Fr. Loukas, who was at the time of our visit enroute to NY to finish the iconography for St. Nicholas at the WTC! The artwork done by his hand ranges from paintings, to mosaics, to Jewelry, to metal work, to even bas relief sculptures. The crowning piece was a jade and gold chalice that a recent Russian pilgrim offered to purchase for 1 million euros. The monks declined his offer so as not to put a price tag on the vessel for the holy gifts. Among the highlights, was also a lavra of a horseback St. George over the monastery of Xenophontos that was handmade by their sister convent for their millennial celebration in 1998.



After the tour we sat outside and talked with Fr. Ieremias, until we were joined by the abbot himself, Alexios! He invited us up to his office (which was immaculate and lush with leather chairs, and expansive custom iconography and hand carved wooden furniture). Fr. Ieremias translated as the abbot thanked us for **executing Arthur's will and sending the** donation to the monastery. He has been the abbot there for some 46 years (!) and said he had a recollection of Arthur from his visit. I had hoped to find out the name of the abbot that Arthur had met, and lo and behold, it was Abbot Alexios. He gave both of his blessing and a komboskini that he blessed (the same gesture that meant so much to Arthur during his prior visit).

Some other notes about the monastery:

There is a miraculous icon of St. George there. It was found along the shore next to the monastery by a miraculous freshwater spring (that still exists). It was found during the period of iconoclasm. It was originally from

Constantinople, but the iconoclasts there tried **to destroy it. They cut it under St. George's** chin and blood came out of the wood! The iconoclasts were terrified and threw it into the sea so it could go where God wanted. The monastery has been dedicated to Saint George ever since.

Fr. Xenophon was the first recorded abbot of the monastery and the first to recognize its canonicity. It was renamed Xenophon by his disciples who later became monks and abbots here.

It was expanded in the late 19th century when the northern wall was torn down to double the **campus' size and build the larger katholikon** (whereas other monasteries simply knock down their existing church but cannot expand their geographical footprint, Xenophontos **could expand and that's why it has two churches**).

There is another miraculous icon of the Theotokos Odiyitria. It was originally an icon at Simonopetra, but one day appeared inside the church at Xenophontos. Both monasteries were locked all night and neither group of monks could explain how it was moved. It was returned immediately, but the NEXT day it appeared again in Xenophontos. When this happened a third time in as many days the fathers at Simonopetra agreed to allow the icon to remain at Xenophontos permanently.

The next day after morning services, we had a **large breakfast all together. It wasn't as** elaborately presented as the day before with the political dignitaries, but still as delicious and bountiful. The octopus served the last two days was caught by the monks themselves.

Abbot Alexios called all the visiting pilgrims into the upstairs reception room. We were given



ouzo, coffee, water, and a chocolate bar. He spoke to us:

Every monastery on Mt Athos has a **miraculous icon of Panagia. "That's how she wanted it."** (That's also why the odiyitria icon miraculously came to Xenophontos from Vatopedi). She is our chief intercessor.

"Every monastery, every chapel, every cell will have lambadas lit in her honor tonight!" "Our gratitude to her must be sleepless!"; We honor Panagia because she is always with Christ. She never left his side in life and now she is still by his side in heaven. But not only that, she is always ALSO WITH US! That is why we keep this holy feast:

Our children are failing because our parents are failing. They have become lazy in faith and now our kids are deprived simple but profound spiritual treasures;

We cannot stand here now complacent in the incorrect teachings of the west over the last millennium. We must always MOVE to seek the truth, always diving deeper into our studies of these ancient yet timeless tradition;

He has been here for 46 years (all as abbot), he came when he was 37 years old. He was the youngest abbot on Mt Athos. He came after 11 years as a monk at Meteora (where he also served as abbot). He was begged by the other 19 Yerontas (Abbots) of Mt Athos to come here to revitalize the monastery. It was dying and in real danger of sliding back to skete status (a group of monks who just celebrate the services **together, but don't work or live with each other**); There are 20 monasteries and shall always be. The most recent monastery is Pantocratora (1990). The Greek government established a charter that prohibits any of the sketes to try to form their own monastery, and any monasteries to downgrade back to skete status. No one else is allowed to buy or develop land on the holy mountain other than these 20.

After we left the abbot, and with a couple of other American pilgrims, we traveled to the neighboring Russian monastery of St. Panteleimon. During this time we met Paul, a bilingual anthropology major at UCLA, who has been to Mt. Athos three times for a total 9 weeks. He was our translator with the abbot earlier and served as our guide at Panteleimon. We also met a third-year seminarian at Holy Cross who joined the trek. The monastery was huge! It is newly renovated (last 40 years or so,

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Beyond St. Nektarios - Pillars of Byzantium

including a new guest house this past year that sleeps over 600!). Originally a Greek monastery, it was Russified in the middle of the 20th century. The monastery has giant cypress trees all throughout and rows and rows of olive trees. But the three most notable things there are:

The LARGEST bell in all of Greece! It is only rung when the abbot dies;

The Incredible relics listed below;

A PHOTOGRAPH of the VIRGIN MARY attending a Divine Liturgy in their monastery in 8/21/1903! There is clearly a female monastic in the antidoron line in the picture. No one saw her before the service nor after, but she was clearly caught on film. There is now a holy water font where she appeared;

Saint Panteleimon relics: Luke (skull), Aristoteli, Ephemios/Akakios/Ignatius of Athos, George, ALL Three Hierarchs, Cosmos & Damianos, martyr Mamant, John the merciful, Nicholas, Kirik, Isaac (Dalmatian monastery), Euthymios of Athos (hand), Holy Unmercenaries, Andrew (foot), John the Baptist, Righteous John, Seraphim Sarov, John Kronstadt (cuff), St Silouhan (skull).

Upon our return to Xenophontos, we went to the bookstore where Abbot Alexios was working the register! Chase, the Lutheran pilgrim from Minnesota, had just left for Kares, but was summoned back by the abbot, to have an audience with him. That conversation took place in front of all of us in the bookstore. It consisted of a half hour of encouragement/discussion with the abbot to send him on his way with blessings for his continuing studies.



Thessalonika

Fr. Steven and Elena Klund first went to the Anopolis where they saw the church of Saint Paul. It was supposed to be open but it was locked. Still, they said it was amazing to stand where the Apostle first evangelized the people of this city! The family touring continued. We met a couple from Georgia, US. The husband was of Greek descent, but both are Protestant since there is no Orthodox Church near where live. They were trying to walk St. Paul's



footsteps. The wife said she prayed for God to send her someone who could help her dive deep into her spiritual journey. She started crying when they found us and heard Fr. Steven recording his catechetical video on site there. They spoke at length and said they wanted to visit Wilmington when they get back to the states. She took down the St Nicholas' YouTube and website URL links. Fr. Steven told them about the nearby Vlatades monastery that was built around the spot in the wall where Paul and Silas made their escape, as recorded in the Book of Acts. We bumped into them later at the Church of St. Gregory and they said they found it and it was AMAZING (we didn't get to go ourselves).



We visited the Museum of Byzantine Culture which was very impressive. Four floors and spanning more than a city block, it had stunning exhibits of art, relics, and artifacts from the entire Byzantine (and Post Byzantine) period dating back to the 4th century. The very first display was a set of marble columns and an Ambon from the church of the Panagia Archieropoitos, located right next to where we were staying. Possibly the most impactful thing on display, was the collection of middle Byzantine prints. Not because of their beauty or scale, but because they contained prints from the monasteries of Xenophontos and Panteleimon that Fr. Steven and I had just visited on Mt. Athos. In general, we left very impressed with the city of Thessalonika. We had no idea that it was so integral in BOTH the Roman AND Byzantine empires (the second

largest city in both during those eras). Nor did we realize how impactful the city was to the development and expansion of Orthodoxy (especially in the fields of art and theology), and how intertwined with Mt Athos it has been over the last 1000 years.

Museum notes:

Good shepherd - 4th century;

Cosmos & Damian painting - 6th century;

Gospel codex page - 6th century;

Stonework from St. Demetrios (pre-1917 fire) - 5th century;

3rd century barrel-vaulted tombs with Christian symbols with old & new testament scenes.

After the museum, we walked along the water to the famous Umbrella public art display, past the White Tower, to Alexander the Great Square, and Aristotle Square.



One final note/observation from Fr. Steven on his last days' experience.

"boarded a plane from the tarmac that was already partly full. The gate check worker almost didn't let me take my bag, but after a few minutes a stewardess allowed me to proceed. I was the last to get on the bus to go from the gate to the plane, so I was among the first to actually get on the aircraft itself. Thankfully I was, because it was already partly full, there wasn't a whole lot of room for bags overhead. I found one spot a couple rows past my seat but couldn't get the bag's arm to collapse so it could fit (this had been an issue since we landed in Thessaloniki due to an unthreaded screw). I knew if I couldn't get this back down, I would have to surrender my bag and it didn't have a [baggage claim] ticket (and I knew it would be lost in Europe forever). Thank God (and who else could it have been), that when I tried in desperation to manually unscrew the tiny screw with my fingers so the arm could collapse...it worked (after three angst-ridden tries). GLORY TO GOD in all things!"



Fr. Andreas' article continued from Page 1

(Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and keeping his commandments, leading him to dwell in us, bringing us peace, and leading us to all truth:

"If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:23-27)

Our Lord said this despite knowing that our tendency toward sin would at times leave us feeling forlorn and desperate. **Keeping God's commandments and seeking after his kingdom** and righteousness is a lifelong endeavor. It is the entirety of the Christian life presented to us by his Church. It entails personal and public prayer, fasting, acts of mercy, confessing our sins, participation in the mystical life of the Church, and so on. All of these things contribute to an increasing awareness of **our sinfulness and neediness and, simultaneously, of God's** providence and mercy.

It is for this reason that the worship of the Church is **characterized by these awesome yet tender words: "In peace, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy". What grace! What sobriety! What promise! What power, when two or three—or two or three hundred or thousand—are gathered in the name of Christ, invoking his peace and begging him for mercy! Arrive at the beginning of the divine services with your brothers and sisters in Christ, to receive and express these holy words!**

And even at this very moment, consider all your cares, all your worries, all your mistakes, all your wanton trespasses, all your uncontrollable desires, admit them and their foreignness to **God's kingdom...and then, remembering that he loves you** infinitely and wants nothing more than your wellbeing in him, **be at peace and pray to the Lord: "Lord, have mercy!" ❖**

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.

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Protopsaltis - Sam Herron

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Vice President: Mike Burgan
Treasurer: Chris Mortis
Assist. Treasurer: (vacant)
Secretary: George Harris
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Members: Elie Azar, Frank Bartis,
Gus Giannakopoulos, Joanne Kiser,
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Ana Levantis, and Stephanie Scolinos
(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

Prospora

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

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:
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