

THE CHAMPION

A Monthly Publication of Saint Athanasios Greek Orthodox Church

JANUARY 2025



MESSAGE FROM FR. PANAGIOTIS

Entering 2025 there are countless blessings for our parish to celebrate, and even more for us to anticipate.

2024 Recap

2024 saw St. Athanasios grow in both membership and spirituality. Not since 2013 have we Baptized and Chrismated as many new Orthodox Christians (ranging in age from infants to adults) as in the past year. Likewise, the number of couples from our community that got married was the highest in the last decade. Across the country Churches are diminishing in size, yet St. Athanasios has bucked that trend by growing both sacramentally and with the number of stewards in the past year. This is surely a reflection of the work of Christ in the hearts and lives of our parishioners and the community as a whole.

Financially we met our Stewardship goal while simultaneously raising an additional \$167,000 to eliminate our parish mortgage.

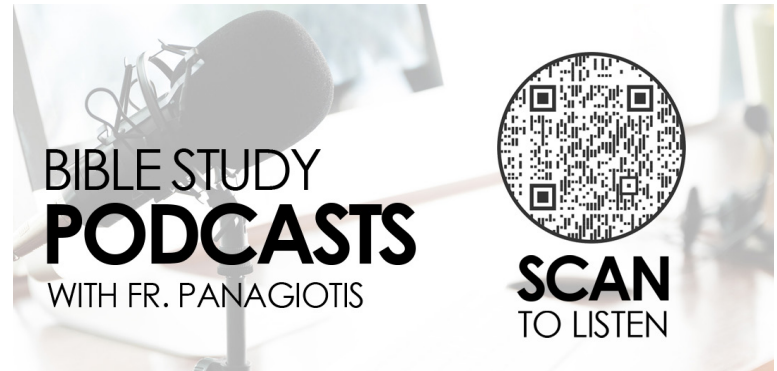
Ministry in the parish and community expanded to with the addition of our Agape Senior Ministry, Soul Sisters, our women's small group ministry, the addition of local pilgrimages, and the hiring of our Youth Director.

2025 Look Ahead

The above successes will serve as the foundation for 2025 and the celebration of our parish's 60th anniversary. We would like to spend this year celebrating our history, while simultaneously laying the groundwork for our future.

In the coming months we will be publishing features of different parishioners and their experiences of St. Athanasios through our storied 60 year history. By sharing the stories of the past, we bring them into the present and honor them into the future.

We hope to build on the strong finances of the past year as we undertake our 2025 Stewardship Campaign: Your Own From Your Own with a target of \$408,300 for the year. This will run in conjunction with Phase 2 of our Capital Campaign to raise funds for long-term building projects like the our roof and parking lot replacement.



Most importantly we will continue the ministry work of the Church so "that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of truth" (1 Tim 2:4). Knowing Christ and knowing ourselves in Christ is the source of our salvation. Growing this knowledge will be the focus of our liturgical life, parish Lenten retreat, our small groups, youth programs, and all ministries. Sharing this knowledge then is the next step. As we have seen an increase in the number of Catechumens, we must make it a priority in the coming year to incorporate these new brothers and sisters in Christ into the full community of the Church and into our family lives.

I wish you all a blessed and fruitful 2025. May the Lord continue to bless us as He has so abundantly for the past 60 years.

MEMORIALS

- Athanasia Mavrogiannis (40 Days)
- Victor Kasmouski (1 Year)
- Theodore (Ted) Macks (1 year)
- Angelo Hasapis (1 year)
- Eleni Zafriopoulos (3 year)
- Desi Stamatopoulos (6 month)
- Kalliope Haralampopoulos (1 year)

WEDDINGS

- Nick Kallas & Natalia Kosmoukaya
- Zachary Digrindakis & Summer Alvey

PARISH COUNCIL

Happy New Year!

Vespers & Feast Day:

Please be sure to join us for our Parish Vespers and Feast Day! Vespers will take place on Friday January 17th at 7:00 pm and our Feast Day Divine Liturgy on Saturday January 18th at 9:30 am. Please make arrangements to attend these services as we celebrate and honor our Saint Athanasios.

Feast Day Luncheon:

Please join us on Saturday January 18th after Divine Liturgy in St. Mathew Hall for our Feast Day luncheon. More information about the luncheon will be sent via email and in our weekly bulletin.

Stewardship Campaign:

We would like to thank all of the parishioners that participated in our 2024 Stewardship Campaign. If you haven't already completed your 2024 pledge, please do so at this time. We have now launched the 2025 Stewardship Campaign and had three presenters speak to us about the importance of Time, Talent & Treasure. The presentations are available for viewing on our website in case you were not able to attend. Thank you to Peter Dagiantis (Time), Steve Jacobson (Talent), & Lou Halkias (Treasure) for their testimonials. We ask that you pray and listen to your heart before submitting your 2025 Stewardship Pledge. Thank you for your continued generous giving.

Capital Campaign:

We are now in phase 2 of the capital campaign. Phase 2 is to plan for and execute the upcoming needs of the building and grounds (Roof, HVAC, Parking Lot, and Landscaping). The mortgage has been paid off and we are now able to put aside these funds to contribute to phase 2 along with the funds generated from increased stewardship and capital campaign contributions. We would like to thank our parishioners for their contributions and successfully completing phase 1. It could not have been done without your help and generosity. Please remember that this campaign is a long term 3 phase plan to eliminate our barriers and plant seeds for the future. Saint Athanasios still needs all of our continued participation with the campaign so that we can fulfill God's desire "That all should be saved and come to the knowledge of truth"

Wishing you and your families a blessed healthy and happy new year!

Brian McAnally

Parish Council President



THEOPHANY HOUSE BLESSINGS

- 1/8 - East Aurora
- 1/9 - West Aurora
- 1/10 & 13 - Naperville (North of 75th)
- 1/15 & 16 - Naperville (South of 75th)
- 1/20 - Make up (Aurora/Naperville)
- 1/21 - Montgomery/Oswego
- 1/22 - Plainfield/Bolingbrook
- 1/23 - Geneva/Batavia/St. Charles
- 1/24 - Downers Grove/Lisle/East of 1-355
- 1/27 - Make up (Montgomery/Oswego/Plainfield/Bolingbrook)
- 1/28 & 29 - Make up (All Areas).

CONTACT THE OFFICE OR
SCAN THE QR CODE TO SCHEDULE



VASILOPITA THROWDOWN SUNDAY, JANUARY 5, 2025

Calling all bakers! Vasilopita Throwdown coming January 5th.

Please join the fun after liturgy and come taste vasilopita cakes and breads offered by parishioners for judging. This event raises money for Philoptochos charities serving the needy. We welcome anyone who would like to participate by offering a vasilopita cake or bread (there will be two categories).

To sign up as a baker, please contact Elli Koulos at ekoulos23@live.com or text 630-346-3447.





New Icons added to the Church

Two new icons were added to the walls of the Church to commemorate two great but perhaps lesser known saints of the Church: St. Vincent the Deacon & St. Kassiani the Hymnographer.

St. Vincent

Saint Vincent is the most illustrious of the Martyrs of Spain. Because of his virtue, he was ordained deacon by Valerius, Bishop of Saragossa, who, because of his advanced age and an impediment in his speech, commissioned Vincent to be preacher of the Gospel. In 303, the impious Emperors Diocletian and Maximian sent Dacian to Spain as governor, with an edict to persecute the clergy. Saint Vincent was brought with Bishop Valerius to Valencia; the bishop was sent into exile, but the holy deacon was tortured on a rack, and after suffering other cruel torments, gave up his soul into the hands of God on January 22 in the year 304.

St. Kassiani

Saint Kassiani is a well-known Byzantine poet, who lived during the reign of Emperor Theophilos (829 – 842).

She was tonsured about the year 820, and founded a convent on Xerolophos, one of Constantinople's seven hills. There she led "an ascetic and philosophical life" which was pleasing to God. She was an energetic Igoumeness who not only regulated the life of the convent, but also found time to pursue her literary interests. She combined the talents of poet, theologian and musician, writing hymns and composing musical settings for them. Originally sung by her nuns, many of her compositions have enduring value. At least twenty-three of her hymns were later included in the Church's liturgical books.

One of Saint Kassiani's most famous hymns is sung during Matins on Holy Wednesday, on the subject of the woman who had fallen into many sins, which is based on Saint Luke's Gospel (7:36-50).

Another of her hymns is sung in the Canon of Matins for Holy Saturday, and is repeated at the Midnight Office on Holy Pascha: "Do not weep for me, O Mother, beholding in the tomb the Son Whom thou hast conceived without seed in thy womb, for I shall arise . . ."



FOX RIVER BLESSING

SATURDAY, JANUARY 11, 2025 (11:00 AM)

Join St. Athanasios Greek and St. Athanasios Romanian Orthodox Churches along with officials from the City of Aurora for the 2nd Annual Fox River Blessing in celebration of the feast of Theophany.



PARISH CALENDAR

All services are live streamed on our YouTube Channel.

Orthros begins at 8:30am with Divine Liturgy following at 9:30am (unless otherwise noted below)

Wednesday, January 1

Divine Liturgy - Circumcision of the Lord;
Saint Basil the Great

Sunday, January 5

Divine Liturgy - Sunday before Epiphany
11am Vasilopita Throwdown
Sunday School classes resume

Monday, January 6

Divine Liturgy - Holy Theophany
7pm Vespers - St. John the Baptist
St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
2350 E Dempster St., Des Plaines, IL 60016

Tuesday, January 7

Divine Liturgy - Synaxis of John the Holy Glorious
Prophet, Baptist, & Forerunner

Thursday, January 9

11am Agape Ministry Meeting
7:00 pm Spiritual Growth: Soul Sisters

Friday, January 10

6 pm JOY meeting

Saturday, January 11

11am Fox River Blessing
Men's Group - NFL Playoffs Party

Sunday, January 12

Divine Liturgy - Sunday After Epiphany
PC Oath of Office
Parish Vasilopita

Tuesday, January 14

7:00 PM Discover Orthodoxy

Thursday, January 16

7:30 PM Choir Rehearsal

Friday, January 17

Divine Liturgy - St. Anthony the Great
7pm Vespers - St Athanasios
8:30 PM Philoptochos Vespers Coffee Hour

Saturday, January 18

Divine Liturgy - Feast Day of St Athanasios the Great
11am Philoptochos Feast Day Lunch

Sunday, January 19

Divine Liturgy - 12th Sunday of Luke

Tuesday, January 21

7pm Parent University

Thursday, January 23

7:30 PM Choir Rehearsal

Sunday, January 26

Divine Liturgy - 15th Sunday of Luke
11:00 AM Choir Rehearsal

Tuesday, January 28

7:00 PM Discover Orthodoxy

Wednesday, January 29

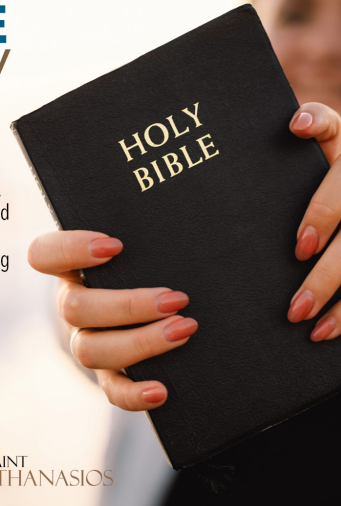
7:00 PM JrGOYA Meeting

Monday, January 30

Divine Liturgy - Three Holy Hierarchs
7:30 PM Choir Rehearsal

BIBLE STUDY

Join our Bible Study this Fall as we explore Creation (Genesis 1-3). Sessions are the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month at 11am starting September 18th.



SAINT
ATHANASIOS

COFFEE HOUR

Coffee-hour host(s) are needed! Please help us promote fellowship, community, and friendship following the Divine Liturgy by hosting Coffee-hour. There are several open dates. Please call the church office to sign-up today!

We are looking to expand our Coffee Hour Ministry. If you are interested in joining, please reach out to the office.



FOOD PANTRY



Thank you for your support!

Please donate food that is Healing to the Hungry - Lean Proteins (Saturated Fats), No Sodium, Low Sugar Fruits, Whole Grain Items. No dented cans or open packaged foods. Expired food can not be accepted. This month's request is:

Pasta, Rice, Beans & Lentils (Bag, Can, Box or Dried)

Please contact Betty Roussos at bettyroussos@yahoo.com with any questions.

PHILOPTOCHOS

Happy New Year! We had a great turnout for our Christmas party. Thank you to Kristin Standish for hosting, and thank you to everyone who contributed a grocery store gift card for Father Panagiotis to distribute to parishioners as needed.

Our Vasilopita Throwdown is quickly approaching on Sunday, Jan. 5th, after the blessing of the waters. We will have separate bread and cake categories. Contact Elli Koulos asap if you want to participate! Proceeds will go to St. Basil's Academy and youth-related ministries.

We are organizing coffee hour and lunch for our church Feast Day vespers and liturgy, Jan. 17-18. Please look for more information in your email as well as a signup to bring food.

Mark your calendars for our Apokreatiko Glendi, Saturday, Feb. 22nd! This is our biggest fundraiser of the year and we need your support. Last year we donated \$3000 to Orthodox Christian Fellowship from the money raised at the Glendi; in 2022 we donated \$3000 to the Green American Rehabilitation Center. Our goal is similar this year, with proceeds earmarked for Philoxenia House and Fanari Camp. We have invited Stacy Stathulis from Philoxenia House to speak after Liturgy on Feb. 9th so we can learn more about the great work of this charity. Please mark your calendars and join us for an evening of great food and fellowship!

Sue Manos
Philoptochos President



APOKREATIKO GLENDI

FEBRUARY 22, 2025 | 6 PM
ST. ATHANASIOS CHURCH
1855 E. FIFTH AVE. | AURORA, IL

DINNER | DANCING | DRINKS
MUSIC BY DJ APOSTOLIS

ADULTS \$60
CHILDREN 12 & UNDER \$25
CASH BAR

RSVP TO LEAH FANNING AT
LEAH_FANNING@YAHOO.COM OR 630-664-3220.

PORTION OF PROCEEDS TO BENEFIT
FANARI CAMP AND PHILOXENIA HOUSE.

SPONSORED BY THE SAINT ATHANASIOS PHILOPTOCHOS SOCIETY

STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship Update,

A little girl noticed that after the collection was taken in Church, the ushers brought it up to the altar. She whispered to her mother, 'Mommy, how do they get the money up to heaven?' The mother replied, 'The church does not send the money to heaven, but uses it to bring heaven down to us.' That mother could not have given a better answer. For the purpose of the church is to get God's heaven into each one of us. Jesus said, 'The Kingdom of God is within you.'

Source: Fr. Anthony M. Coniaris

Please look into your heart and think about your how future Stewardship commitments can bring Heaven into our lives. Thank you for your Generous Giving of your Time, Talents, and Treasures. They are making a difference in our Church Community and the Communities that we live in and are bringing "Heaven into our Lives".

In His Service,

Elli Koulos and Pete Nassos



You're Invited
SAINT ATHANASIOS
FEAST DAY LUNCHEON
JANUARY 18, 2025 | 11:30 AM | SAINT MATTHEW HALL

ADMISSION:
COMPLIMENTARY

QUESTIONS?
CALL 630.851.6106 or
EMAIL office@saintathanasios.com

SOUL SISTERS

All women of St. Athanasios ages 18 and above are invited to participate and explore the theme for this ecclesiastical year: "Stillness and Prayer as a Cure for our Busy Lives"

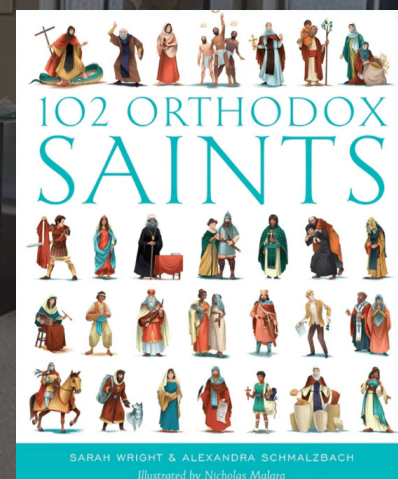
Soul Sisters will meet monthly on Thursday evenings in St. Matthew Hall from 7-8:30 pm. Whole group fellowship followed by small group discussions.

Mark your calendars for the second Thursday: Jan. 9 & Feb 13.

Questions? Contact Maria Lambrou: makokoslambrou@yahoo.com or 708-269-9991

BOOK STORE

Start your New Year in our Bookstore to purchase the book, 102 Orthodox Saints. Did you know there was a saint who rescued icons from the town dump? Or a saint who secretly lived outside the gate of his parents' home? Discover these stories and more in this updated second volume of new saint stories, written for children and for those with a childlike curiosity. Use this visual encyclopedia with your family to help understand and celebrate the saints of the Church by viewing beautiful illustrations, icons, graphics, and fascinating facts about the Martyrs, Monks, and Mothers who boldly lived out their faith to the glory of God.



MEN'S GROUP

Thank you all for your support and participation in this ministry in 2024! We hope to continue our successful ministry in 2025 with your help.

NFL Playoff Watch Party

Our annual NFL watch party will be Saturday, January 11. A terrific opportunity to watch some playoff football and catch up with friends. Stay tuned for more details!

Men's Workshop - Busyness & Stillness

Fr. Panagiotis is leading a four-part workshop on busyness and stillness. Please attend our next workshop on Monday, February 27.

2025 Hesed House Dinner Service

We will be working with Bill Collins and the Hesed House ministry in 2025. More details to follow about dinner service dates.

You can like and follow our Facebook page by searching for "Men's Group of St Athanasios Greek Orthodox Church"

If anyone is interested in learning more about the Men's Group, please contact Spiro Hountalas (naperspike@aol.com), Peter Metrou (pnmetrou@gmail.com), Bill Collins (bctc@sbcglobal.net) or Nick Dagiantis (ndagiantis@gmail.com).



MEN'S GROUP WATCH PARTY

JANUARY 11, 2025

Spartan Ale House (Naperville)
Party starts at 6:00 PM



AGAPE MINISTRY

The Agape Ministry had a wonderful Christmas party after the liturgy of St. Spyridon. We enjoyed a delicious breakfast, played "Name that Christmas Tune," and had a fun white elephant gift exchange! Join us in the new year on January 11th for our next meeting.





JOY

January 10, 2025 | 6:00 PM

JOY students, join us as we discuss Christ's Baptism and the significance of Theophany. Please RSVP in the Remind App:



JR GOYA

January 29, 2025 | 7:00 PM

Jr. GOYA students, our next meeting is January 29th from 7pm to 8:30pm at the Church. Please rsvp by messaging us in Remind.



GOYA

January 26, 2025 | 11:30 AM

GOYA is hosting Coffee Hour on Jan 26th. Make sure to bring a dish. Contact Margarita with any questions.



SUNDAY SCHOOL

At St. Athanasios, we are blessed to offer a vibrant Sunday School program designed to nurture our children's spiritual growth, strengthen their Orthodox faith, and build connections within our church community. Our Sunday School operates on a ****rolling admission**** basis, meaning your child can join at any time during the year! Whether you're new to our parish, recently moved, or just decided it's the right time to enroll, we warmly welcome you to sign up. There's no need to wait for a new semester—our program ensures your child can jump in and benefit immediately. Our dedicated teachers create a supportive environment where every child feels included and inspired. We look forward to having your family join us!



SCAN TO REGISTER

PARENT UNIVERSITY

Join us for Parent University, where we'll explore the challenges facing today's youth and how to navigate them as Orthodox Christian parents. Enjoy light refreshments, engaging discussions, and insights from knowledgeable guest speakers.

JANUARY 21, 2025: AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN HOUSEHOLD

APRIL 29, 2025: TACKLING CHALLENGES IN TODAY'S ORTHODOX YOUTH

Classes begin at 7:00 PM.
Scan QR Code to Register.



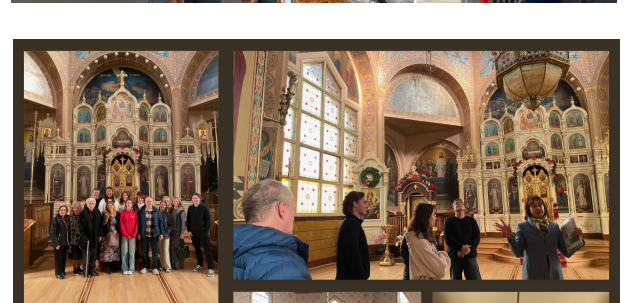
Family Synaxis
METROPOLIS OF CHICAGO



SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral pilgrimage on Saturday, December 7

We volunteered at Cathedral Kitchen, a service-based ministry feeding the church's neighborhood needy. Serving 50+ guests, the experience was most humbling, for seeing the genuine thankfulness for the meal of those being fed, manifested within us a deeper appreciation for all the blessings we have, yet take for granted - be it food, winter clothes, shelter, etc. Afterwards, we went on a tour of the cathedral that is an architectural and spiritual icon. Designed by Louis Sullivan, both the priest and the bishop at the time of its building 100+ years ago, are now saints - St John (Kochurov) of Chicago and St. Tikhon of Moscow. Spiritually edifying to hear of how the Orthodox immigrants' faithfulness along with Chicago philanthropists' generosity worked collaboratively to build the church. Truly well worth it ... enlightening and educational ... time well spent!!!



LENTEN RETREAT



Mark your calendar: St. Athanasios Men's and Women's Lenten Retreat. Saturday March 8, 2024. More information to follow.

DISCOVER ORTHODOXY



Join us to learn more about the Orthodox Church. Discover Orthodoxy teaches the basics and foundations of Orthodox Christianity, our theology, worship, spirituality, and practices. The class is intended both for those who are preparing to join the Orthodox Church and for Orthodox Christians who wish to deepen their understanding of the faith. Classes start at 7pm on the following dates: 1/14, 1/28, 2/25

2024 SAINT ATHANASIOS

Christmas Pageant





MODERN STEAKHOUSE WITH A GREEK ACCENT.

Beyond our delicious line-up of Prime Steaks, Chops, and Seafood, we offer an authentic selection of Greek Specialties, including Whole Oven Roasted Branzino, Lamb Racks & Greek Potatoes, Classic Pastitsio, and much more. Check out the **Greek Classics** on our menu for all your favorite Mediterranean flavors.

CityGate GRILLE

Reservations 630.718.1010
www.citygategrille.com



CityGate Centre | Rte. 59 & Ferry Rd., Naperville | A Calamos Family Property

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1965-2025



HAPPY
NEW YEAR!



A Monthly Publication of Saint Athanasios Greek Orthodox Church

THE CHAMPION



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