

CHURCH STAFF

- Parish Priest: Very Reverend Archimandrite Christodoulos Margellos
- Parish Council President: Christy Chappell Belkin
- Philoptochos President: Maria Molzahn
- Sunday School Directors: Susu Saba
- Greek School: Ilektra Kolokouri
- Choir Director: George Tzougras



Wonder Worker

WINTER 2026

FROM SEEKING TO BELONGING

THE ORTHODOX JOURNEY FROM FAITH FOR ADULT INQUIRERS & CATECHUMENS

In the Orthodox Church, becoming a Christian is not understood as a simple decision or a single moment in time. Rather, it is a sacred journey of transformation, a gradual entrance into the life of Christ, His Church, and the Kingdom of God. From the earliest centuries of Christianity, the Church has recognized that faith is not merely learned, but lived, and that the heart must be formed as carefully as the mind.

For this reason, the Orthodox Church has always guided seekers through a deliberate spiritual process: first as inquirers, then as catechumens, and finally into full communion through the Holy Mysteries of Baptism and Chrismation or just by Chrismation. This ancient path reflects the Church's deep theological understanding of salvation as a lifelong movement toward union with God.

The Inquirer: Awakening to the Truth

The journey often begins quietly. A person may attend Divine Liturgy out of curiosity, accompany a friend, or begin reading about Orthodoxy on their own. At this stage, the Church does not rush to define or categorize the person. Instead, she offers hospitality, prayer, and space for discernment.

An inquirer is not expected to make commitments or declarations. The Church recognizes that faith must grow freely, guided by the Holy Spirit. Christ Himself called His disciples gradually, allowing them to witness His life, His teaching, and His love before asking for deeper commitment. In the same way, inquirers are invited to come and see, to experience Orthodox worship, to ask questions, and to encounter the life of the Church from within.

Theologically, this stage reflects the Orthodox understanding that God draws each person at His own pace. Faith is not imposed; it is awakened. The Church simply creates the conditions for that awakening to take root.

The Catechumen: Entering the Path of Formation

When a person's desire to become Orthodox deepens, the Church responds by offering a formal place of preparation through the ancient institution of the catechumenate. The word "catechumen" comes from a Greek term meaning "one who is instructed," but the instruction involved is far more than academic.

In the early Church, catechumens often spent years preparing for Baptism. They learned the Scriptures, the Creed, the moral teachings of the Church, and the rhythm of liturgical life. More importantly, they learned how to pray, how to repent, and how to shape their lives around Christ.

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The Orthodox Church continues this tradition today. When a person becomes a catechumen through a formal prayer of enrollment, the Church recognizes them as someone who is actively preparing for full entrance into the Body of Christ. From this moment, the catechumen is no longer simply exploring but instead are now walking a defined spiritual path.

This reflects an important Orthodox theological principle: faith must be formed within the Church. Christianity is not a private belief system; it is a communal life in Christ. The catechumenate exists so that conversion becomes not just a change of ideas, but a transformation of the whole person.

Formation of the Heart, Not Just the Mind

Orthodox theology understands salvation as theosis. A lifelong process of becoming more united with God. For this reason, catechumenal instruction is not merely about memorizing doctrines. It is about learning how to live the Christian life.

Catechumens are introduced to prayer, fasting, confession, Scripture, and the sacramental rhythm of the Church. They begin to understand that Orthodoxy is not simply what we believe, but how we live. The Church forms the heart through worship, repentance, and participation in the life of the parish.

This slow and careful preparation reflects the Church's belief that Baptism and Chrismation are not symbolic ceremonies, but powerful encounters with divine grace. To receive such gifts rightly, one must be spiritually prepared.

Baptism: Dying and Rising with Christ

When a catechumen is ready, the Church receives them through the Holy Mystery of Baptism. Baptism is not merely an entry ritual, but rather it is a spiritual rebirth.

Saint Paul teaches that in Baptism we are buried with Christ and raised with Him to new life. The water is not only cleansing; it is the place where the old self dies and a new life begins. The person is united to Christ's death and resurrection and becomes a living member of His Body, the Church.

For those who have never received a Trinitarian Christian baptism, Baptism is the normal and full entrance into Orthodoxy. The Church does not view this as a rejection of a person's past, but as the completion of their journey into the fullness of the faith.

Chrismation: The Seal of the Holy Spirit

Immediately following Baptism, or sometimes as the sole rite of reception for those previously baptized in another Christian tradition, the Church administers Chrismation. Through holy anointing, the newly illumined Christian receives the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Chrismation fulfills what began in Baptism. The same Spirit who descended at Pentecost now dwells within the believer, strengthening them to live the Christian life. This reflects the Orthodox understanding that salvation is not only about forgiveness, but also about transformation. The Holy Spirit does not merely declare us righteous; He makes us holy.

Reception of Converts and the Church's Pastoral Wisdom

Some may wonder why the Church sometimes receives converts through Baptism and sometimes through Chrismation alone. This is not inconsistency, but pastoral wisdom guided by the bishop and the Tradition of the Church.

Orthodoxy recognizes that God's grace has been at work in many Christian communities. When someone has already received a Trinitarian baptism, the Church may receive them through Chrismation, affirming what God has already begun and bringing it to completion within the Orthodox Church.

This reflects the Church's theology of both truth and mercy, holding firmly to the fullness of the faith while honoring God's work beyond visible boundaries.

Full Communion: A Beginning, Not an End

When a person is baptized and chrismated, they receive Holy Communion and are fully united to the life of the Church. But this moment is not the end of the journey. It is the beginning of a lifelong process of repentance, prayer, and growth in Christ.

Orthodoxy teaches that salvation is not a single event, but a lifelong movement toward God. The Church does not simply create Orthodox Christians, she nurtures saints.

Why This Matters for Our Parish

Understanding this process helps our parish appreciate the sacred responsibility we share. Every catechumen is not just a student, but a soul entrusted to the Church's care. Every inquirer is a person God is gently drawing toward Himself.

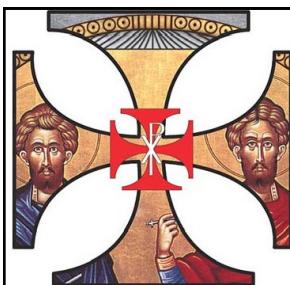
By welcoming, praying for, and supporting those on this journey, we participate in the Church's mission of bringing souls into the life of Christ.

The Orthodox Church does not rush people into faith. She walks with them, teaches them, prays for them, and prepares them — just as Christ did with His disciples.

And in doing so, she continues the sacred work entrusted to her by the Apostles themselves.

+Very Rev. Archimandrite Christodoulos Margellos





FOCUS ON PHILOPTOCHOS HELP US TO HELP OTHERS

"Doers of the Word," St. James, 1:22

Welcome to a new year bringing with it opportunities for us to continue growing our faith and service.

During our December meeting, we had a chance to hear Voula Kodoyianni's wonderful presentation: *From the Aegean to America's Dairyland*. After the presentation, we held our monthly meeting. During the discussion the importance of understanding the history and role of the Ladies Philoptochos Society, the separately incorporated philanthropic arm of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America arose. As reflected in our national Mission Statement, we "help, promote, preserve, and participate," in philanthropy to spread Agape.

The late 1800s saw the first 'waves' of immigrants from Greece, however, people, such as Don Teodoro Griego, existed in the Americas since the beginning of European exploration and colonization. And two of this country's founding fathers: Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, persuaded the scholar John Paradise to emigrate. Similar to today, immigrants found that faith communities provided opportunities for assimilation and support. From these independent organizations in 1931, Archbishop and later, Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I, established the Ladies Philoptochos Society. Similar to our church organizations each philoptochos chapter follows the mandate and mission established by our National Board.

Our local chapter is a true beacon of the Philoptocho mission. As required by our charter, each August we set up our annual budget. Included in this budget are our philanthropic expenditures. For example, each year, the National and Metropolis Philoptochos request each chapter supports a specific number of organizations such as the IOCC and Orthodox Prison Ministries. For the 2025-2026 calendar year we allocated around \$7,000.00 towards these obligations. Further, we strive to provide services and support to a myriad of local philanthropic organizations such as The River Food Pantry, the Goodman Center, and Porchlight. Around \$20,000.00 have been allocated for these organizations.

It is important to understand that this outreach is the minimum, not the maximum, we distribute. Based on our various fundraisers, including the monthly mission baskets, dinners, auctions, and donations, we distribute an average of \$50,000.00 per year. Of course, we can not do any of this without our wonderful community, the 60-65 Philoptochos members, our church, and our friends. I've said this before, and it still rings true, together we move mountains. And, most importantly, the more of you that join our organization, the stronger we become.

As Archbishop Demetrios stated, "You have surpassed your original philanthropic mission. You are not only *philoptochos*, but also *philotheos*, *philadelphos*, *philanthropos*, and *philoxenos*." We are friends to the needy, to God, our Neighbors, Humanity, and Strangers.

- There are three events this month including:
- Our next meeting is scheduled for January 6 at 7:00 pm via ZOOM;
- The Vasilopita Meal on January 11, right after church; and
- Our annual Philoptochos Luncheon on January 31.

We look forward to seeing you in any and all of these events. Please feel free to email me at philomadison@gmail.com for the ZOOM meeting link.

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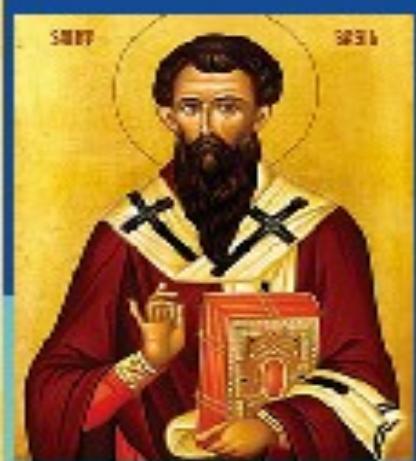
Happy New
Year

Join us for
our annual

Vasilopita Luncheon and raffle

After liturgy

Sun. Jan. 11, 2026



**Adults - \$15
Children - \$10**

Net proceeds go to **Philoptochos** beneficiaries:
**St. Basil's Academy, Orthodox Christian
Fellowship, Hellenic College/Holy Cross,
International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC)**

Menu: Meatballs & pasta, spanakopita, Greek salad, pita, Vasilopita bread, wine/coffee,
light dessert. Vegetarian option available.

Please RSVP by Jan. 7, 2026 so we can have a headcount.

**To RSVP: Email Philomadison@gmail.com with your full name and
number of people attending (indicate children or adult).**

Payment will be collected day of luncheon.

YOUTH CORNER

January

Happy New Year Sunday School families,

We hope you all had a wonderful winter break and a blessed start to the new year. May this new year bring you all more joy, peace, and good health.

Events happening in January:

1. **Sunday January 11th:** Sunday school resumes
2. **Sunday January 11th:** After Liturgy at 1:30 pm the parish will go to Lake Monona for the blessing of the water. Brittingham Beach 701 W. Brittingham PI Madison, WI 53715
3. **Sunday January 18th:** children will be making Godparent day invitations to give to their Godparents. Parents please help your kids reach out to their Godparents, so they can send them the invitation for an event happening in February, more details to come soon.
4. **Sunday January 25th:** Winter youth family outing to go tubing at Tyrol Basin from 1-5 pm you can buy tickets at the door or online in advance.

Below are pictures from the events we had during 2025, we can't wait for all the exciting events that will happen in the new year! We encourage all parents to continually bring their kids to church and all the fun activities that we have, so they continue learning about the faith and build friendships that last a lifetime.





Hello Sunday school families,

Just a quick reminder, Sunday classes are in session after Holy Communion for 30 min. We love teaching your children about the Orthodox faith and this year we have had the most student attendance. We appreciate all the help and support from our amazing teachers and families!

This month we have two events happening, please mark your calendars!

- **Sunday Feb 1st** is Godparent day! Children will sit next to their Godparent during liturgy, take Holy Communion together, and enjoy a delicious pancake breakfast with their Godparent(s). There will be a free will offering basket.
- **On Sunday February 15th** there will be a family bowling outing from 5:00 - 7:00 pm. More details will be announced about the event as we get closer to the date!

In Christ,
Susu Akkawi

BLESSING OF THE WATERS OF LAKE MONONA



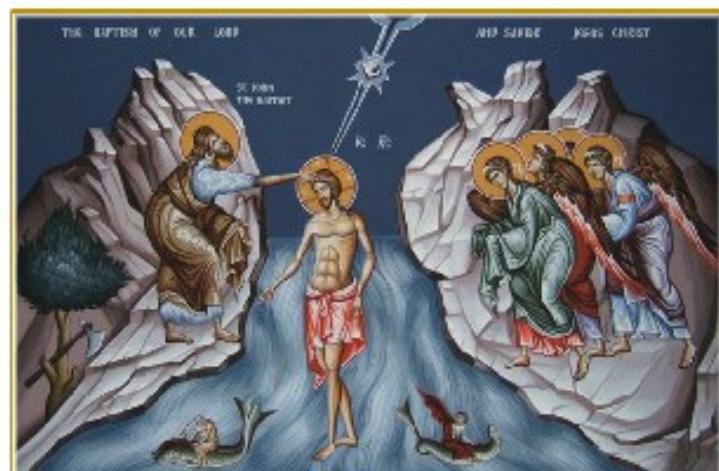
Join the Orthodox Communities of Assumption, Saints Cyril & Methodius & Saint Ignatius in coming together for a Blessing of Lake Monona.

We will be gathering on Sunday, January 11th at Brittingham Beach at 701 W Brittingham Pl in Madison. Service will begin at 1:30 p.m. If the Ice thickness is sufficient we will be just off shore on Monona Bay.

This a wonderful blessing not only for our communities but also for the entire Madison Area.

When: Sunday, January 11th, 2026 at 1:30 p.m.

Where: Brittingham Beach on Lake Monona. 701 W. Brittingham Pl. Madison, WI



ASSUMPTION Snow Tubing

Please join us at Tyrol Basin on
Sunday January 25th from 1-5 pm

To purchase tickets please visit:

<https://tyrolbasin.com/tubing/>

\$30 per ticket

Buy online one week in advance

We hope you can come out for some parish family fun!



Please join us &
share with your friends.



OCCA CHICAGO PRESENTS A PAN-ORTHODOX
SANCTITY OF LIFE

Prayer Service
FOLLOWED BY RECEPTION AND PANEL DISCUSSION

Guest Homilist:

FR. NICHOLAS GREANIAS

SUNDAY
25 January 2026 **6:30PM**

AT SAINT LUKE THE EVANGELIST ORTHODOX CHURCH
10700 S. KEAN AVENUE, PALOS HILLS, ILLINOIS 60465

happy God Parent

day

Sunday Feb 1st, 2026

Come join us for pancakes to celebrate God Parent day
with your God children!

Sunday school students will sit by their God parent/s during
liturgy and take Holy Communion together. Then during
coffee hour there will be a breakfast celebration with
delicious pancakes!

There will be a basket for free will offering.

Donations will go towards Sunday school.

www.reallygreatsite.com





Details will be announced later

Sunday February 15th

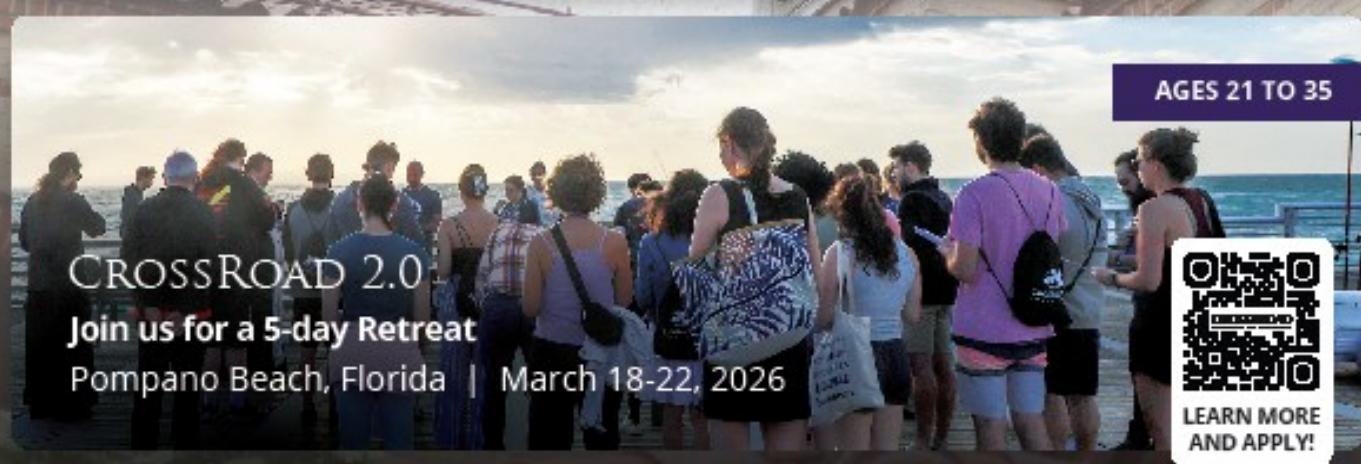
Join CrossRoad to *Explore* Your Faith and Purpose!



11TH & 12TH GRADES

CROSSROAD SUMMER
Join us for a 10-day session
Boston • New York • SoCal | June & July 2026

LEARN MORE AND APPLY!



AGES 21 TO 35

CROSSROAD 2.0
Join us for a 5-day Retreat
Pompano Beach, Florida | March 18-22, 2026

LEARN MORE AND APPLY!



PARISHES

TELOS PROJECT
Parish-level coaching to grow your young adult ministry
Our next cohort starts **November 2025**

LEARN MORE AND APPLY!



COMMUNITY NEWS

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING: Will be held on Tuesday, January 20th & Tuesday, February 17th at 7:00 p.m.

PHILOPTOCHOS MEETING: The Next meeting will be on Sunday, January 6th Via Zoom and Sunday, February 8th following Liturgy in the conference room.

ADULT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CLASS: We are currently in the process of restructuring our Adult Religious Education Classes. More details will come once plans have been finalized.

WOMEN'S SPIRITUAL MEETING: Women's spiritual zoom meetings will be on Thursday, January 22nd & Thursday, February 19th at 7:00 p.m. If you are interested in participating and you haven't signed in yet please contact Peli Galiti at pegaliti@gmail.com You will get the zoom link in your email.

BLESSING OF THE WATERS OF LAKE MONONA, SUNDAY, JANUARY 11th AT 1:30 P.M.: Join the Orthodox Communities of Assumption & Saint Ignatius in coming together for a Blessing of Lake Monona. We will be gathering on Sunday, January 11th at Brittingham Beach at 701 W Brittingham Pl in Madison. Service will begin at 1:30 p.m. If the Ice thickness is sufficient we will be just off shore on Monona Bay. This a wonderful blessing not only for our communities but also for the entire Madison Area.

SAVE THE DATE: PARISH OUTING TO THE MADISON CAPITALS GAME: Once again our parish is going to be doing an outing for the Madison Capitals Hockey Team on Saturday, February 21st. This year we have gotten one of the suites for the game and cost will \$25 per person. It is also Team USA Bobblehead night. This will be a great game to attend with the whole family. Come cheer on our Madison Capitals to defeat the Des Moines Buccaneers on February 21st at 7:05 p.m. at the Bob Suter's Capital Aren

STEWARSHIP 2026 APPEAL: At our Stewardship meeting, we have discussed the changes at Assumption. The church is in constant transition, and our aim is to anticipate the time, talent, and treasure needs of our community. We need to combine the Strengths of our heritage, our Orthodox Tradition, and our faith in God to encourage what we do now & toward the future. The Church needs the involvement of you and me, & with the Help of God, to shape our programs to meet the needs of our community & to reach out to others, outside of our community. Please volunteer this year your time and talents, for the good of the church. Nearly every committee has need of the talents and time of leaders & contributors.

PARISH VASILOPITA CUTTING & LUNCHEON: On Sunday, January 11th, 2026, we will have our annual Vasilopita cutting. We invite all the families of our Church to join us in the "cutting of the New Year's Vasilopita." Following dismissal from the day's worship services, the Philoptochos invites everyone to attend a luncheon in the Social Hall. Donation is \$15 for adults & \$10 for children. All proceeds raised this day go to benefit Saint Basil's Academy.

ALTAR BOY WORKSHOP SUNDAY, JANUARY 18th: We are hosting a workshop for our current Altar Boy & for anyone wanting to join the ranks. We will be going over proper procedure and order for services and processions. Anyone who would like to join the Altar boys is Welcome but must be at least 8 years old. Come join our blessed tradition of serving God.

GODPARENT SUNDAY FEBRUARY 1st: This is a special day to honor and celebrate Godparents. During liturgy there will be a special service for Godparents and godchildren before Communion. Children are encouraged to sit with their Godparents and receive communion with them. After Sunday School and Liturgy are complete Sunday School will be hosting an All You Can Eat Pancake Breakfast. A free will offering will be collected with all proceeds going to our Sunday School Program.

Our children will make an invitation card for their Godparents inviting them to join us. See the attached a flyer for more information.

SNOW TUBING OUTING: Please join us at Tyrol Basin on Sunday January 25th from 1:00-5:00 p.m. Tickets are \$30 per ticket and can be purchased at [CLICK HERE](#). We hope you can come our for some parish family fun!

2026 Parish outing to the Madison Capitol's Hockey Team



**On Saturday, February 21st 2026 we will have a Parish
Outing to the Madison Capitol's Hockey Game vs the Des
Moines Buccaneers**

**This year we have one of the Suites reserved for the
church. This means we will only have a limited amount of
Tickets available. The cost is \$25 which will include food
in the Suite.**

RSVP with Fr. Christodoulos

**Join us for what is sure to be a great night of fun &
fellowship.**

January 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 Happy New Year Circumcision of our Lord Saint Basil the Great 8:00 a.m. Orthros followed by Divine Liturgy	2 Fast Free Day	3
4 Sunday before Theophany 8:30 a.m. Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy	5 Strict Fast Day Eve of Theophany 7:30 a.m. Vespers Divine Liturgy followed by Great Blessing of the Waters	6 Epiphany of our Lord 8:30 a.m. Orthros followed Divine Liturgy with Great blessing of the Waters 7:00 p.m. Choir Practice	7 Strict Fast Day	8	9 Strict Fast Day	10 Russian Mission Ethiopian Mission
11 Sunday after Epiphany 8:30 a.m. Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy Parish Vasilopita cutting and Vasilopita Luncheon Sunday School/Greek School 1:30 p.m. Blessing of Lake Monona	12	13	14 Strict Fast Day 7:00 p.m. Choir Practice	15	16 Strict Fast Day	17 Saint Anthony the Great 8:30 a.m. Orthros followed by Divine Liturgy
18 12th Sunday of Luke Saints Athanasios & Cyril Patriarchs of Alexandria 8:30 a.m. Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 8 Year Memorial Service For +Fr. Michael Vanderhoef of Blessed Memory Sunday School/Greek School	19	20 7:00 p.m. Parish Council Meeting	21 Strict Fast Day 7:00 p.m. Choir Practice	22 7:00 p.m. Women's Spiritual Meeting	23 Strict Fast Day	24 Russian Mission Ethiopian Mission
25 15th Sunday of Luke Saint Gregory the Theolo- gan 8:30 a.m. Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy Sunday School/Greek School Winter Youth Outing Tubing at Tyrol Basin	26	27	28 Strict Fast Day 11:00 a.m. Adult Religious Education Class 7:00 p.m. Choir Practice	29	30 Synaxis of The Three Hierarchs: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, & John Chrysostom 8:30 a.m. Orthros followed by Divine Liturgy	31 Philoctetes Mid- Winter Luncheon Madison Club

February 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee; (Triodion Begins) God Parent Sunday 8:30 a.m. Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy God Parent Sunday Luncheon	2 Presentation of our Lord to the Temple 7:30 a.m. Orthros followed by Divine Liturgy	3	4 Fast Free Day	5	6 Fast Free Day	7 Russian Mission Ethiopian Mission
		Fr. Christodoulos out of Town for Leadership Cohort				
8 Sunday of the Prodigal Son 8:30 a.m. Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy Sunday School/Creek School Philoptochos Meeting	9 Saint Haralambos 7:30 a.m. Orthros followed by Divine Liturgy	10 11 7:00 p.m. Choir Practice	12	13 Strict Fast Day	14 1st Saturday of Souls 8:30 a.m. Orthros followed by Divine Liturgy with Memorial Service	
15 Judgement Sunday (Meatfare) 8:30 a.m. Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy Sunday School/Creek School Youth Bowling Night	16 Fast Day (Dairy Permitted)	17 Fast Day (Dairy Permitted)	18 Strict Fast Day	19 Fast Day (Dairy Permitted)	20 Strict Fast Day	21 Second Saturday of Souls 8:30 a.m. Orthros followed by Divine Liturgy with Memorial Service
22 Forgiveness Sunday Cheesefare Sunday 8:30 a.m. Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy Sunday School/Creek School	23 Clean Monday Great Lent Begins Strict Fast Day 6:00 p.m. Great Compline with Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete	24 Strict Fast Day 6:00 p.m. Great Compline with Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete	25 Strict Fast Day 5:30 p.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 7:00 p.m. Choir Practice	26 Strict Fast Day 6:00 p.m. Great Compline with Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete	27 Strict Fast Day 6:00 p.m. 1st Salutation Service to the Theotokos	28 Fast Day (Wine & Oil Permitted) Russian Mission
1 Fast Day (Oil & Wine Permitted) Sunday of Orthodoxy 8:30 a.m. Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy Sunday School/Creek School 4:00 p.m. Pan-Orthodox Vespers Saint Ignatius	2 Strict Fast Day 6:00 p.m. Great Compline	3 Strict Fast Day	4 Strict Fast Day 5:30 p.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 7:00 p.m. Choir Practice	5 Strict Fast Day	6 Strict Fast Day 6:00 p.m. 2nd Salutation Service	7 Fast Day (Wine & Oil Permitted)