



GREEK ORTHODOX
METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

THE SAINT THOMAS APOSTOLIC TIMES

GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF SAINT THOMAS

ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΗ ΚΟΙΝΟΤΗΤΑ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΘΩΜΑ



DECEMBER 2025 - FEBRUARY 2026



SAINT THOMAS ICONOGRAPHY "FOR THE AGES"

Upcoming Installations: Back Church Ceiling Panels, and Restorations

As of December 2025, 146 Icons and/or restorations have been pledged.

Only 4 Icons remain:

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and

Saint Zacharias and Saint Olga (\$15,000 each)

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 Ιερατικώς Προϊστάμενος - Parish Priest

THE SAINT THOMAS APOSTOLIC TIMES

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SAINT THOMAS GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΗ ΚΟΙΝΟΤΗΤΑ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΘΩΜΑ



Cherry Hill, December 1, 2025

My beloved brothers and sisters in Christ!

As I sit down to write this article, I realize surprisingly that I have already completed three months of serving as your priest in the wonderful community of St. Thomas. These months have been very full of God's blessings and the prayers of our Saint. I thought it would be fitting to share with you my first impressions.

In one sentence, I would describe the parish of St. Thomas as a model parish. Since its founding in 1967, the parish has faced many challenges and met each one with faith, unity, and exemplary stewardship. At the same time, it continues to bear witness to the vibrant Orthodox Christian faith in the modern world.

Thanks to the generosity and great sacrifices of those who envisioned this parish, a beautiful church was built to the glory of God. Over the years, the church has been beautified and renovated. The iconography and beautification projects allow the faithful to rejoice in the church's beauty, and visitors admire it with awe. Because of their hard work and sacrifices, they have given their children, grandchildren, and future generations a precious spiritual gift, this community, which they must preserve, strengthen, and pass on.

This is why our stewardship goal for 2026 is to reach one thousand members. Not for financial reasons, but so more people can share in the honor and responsibility of serving the church with joy and love. This goal is spiritual above all else. It speaks to the very nature, purpose, and life of the parish.

I often remember with deep emotion a parishioner from another community I served. Even though she struggled financially, she never missed sending a ten-dollar check each month. And this blessed woman reminded us of the Gospel story of the widow who offered only two small coins, yet Christ praised her publicly because she gave from her heart, all she had. In the same way, each of us is invited to participate according to the willingness and generosity of our heart, trusting that God rewards every offering with His abundant blessing.

We see this blessing not only individually or within our families, but also as a community. How great a joy and blessing it is to observe the children of the Greek School, the Sunday School, GOYA, the altar boys, the dance group, and all our young ones who worship and receive Holy Communion every Sunday. A wonderful and well-organized ministry is being done with our youth, and it is our greatest hope and the most valuable investment for the future.

We were especially moved by the presence and participation of our youth during the historic moment when our community welcomed the sacred relics, the icon, and the holy epitachelion of Saint Iakovos of Evia. The children rejoiced, and we are certain that these moments were engraved in their memory with bright, unforgettable colors. It was so beautiful to see our altar boys being tonsured and receiving the Laying on of Hands and the silver cross from our spiritual father, His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey!

My brothers and sisters, please keep our youth as your first priority, in your love, your prayers, and your support.

And now we walk together toward the Holy Feast of Christmas. The hymns of our Church already draw us into this sacred atmosphere, and each Sunday, we await them with longing: “Christ is born! Glorify Him! Christ is come from heaven! Go and meet Him!” or “On this day the Virgin Maid!”

We journey as humble pilgrims to Bethlehem, to the cave of the Nativity, and may God grant us the blessing to kneel before the eternal God who becomes a little child for our salvation.

I invite all of you to celebrate these holy days together, with participation in the divine services and the sacred worship of our Church. Let us unite our prayers with our brothers and sisters throughout the world. Let us unite our voices with the angelic hymn, “Glory to God on the highest and on earth peace,” and let us pray with all our strength for peace in our troubled world, peace that is a gift from above, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, the only peace that can bring healing to whole world.

A Blessed and Holy Christmas to all of you!

Christmas filled with Christ!

With love in Christ,

Protopresbyter Georgios Oikonomou



SAINT THOMAS GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΗ ΚΟΙΝΟΤΗΤΑ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΘΩΜΑ



Αγαπητοί μου αδελφοί εν Χριστώ!

Γράφοντας το άρθρο αυτό συνειδητοποιώ - μάλλον με έκπληξη - ότι συμπλήρωσα ήδη με τη Χάρι του Θεού τρεις μήνες διακονώντας ως ο ιερέας σας την ευλογημένη κοινότητα του Αγίου Θωμά. Ήταν τρεις μήνες πυκνοί, πλημμυρισμένοι με την ευλογία του Θεού και του Αγίου μας, και σκέφτηκα να μοιραστώ μαζί σας τις πρώτες μου εντυπώσεις. Θα μπορούσα να περιγράψω την εμπειρία μου με συντομία και πολύ απλά λόγια δηλώνοντας ότι η ενορία του Αγίου Θωμά αποτελεί ένα πρότυπο ενορίας, καθώς έχει καταφέρει να αντιμετωπίσει με επιτυχία και υποδειγματικό τρόπο πολλαπλές προκλήσεις από την ίδρυσή της το 1967 έως σήμερα. Αλλά επίσης έχει καταφέρει να παρουσιάζει μία ολοζώντανη μαρτυρία της Ορθόδοξης χριστιανικής πίστης στο σύγχρονο κόσμο.

Χάρη στη γενναιοδωρία και τις μεγάλες θυσίες των ανθρώπων που οραματίστηκαν την ίδρυση αυτής της ενορίας έχει οικοδομηθεί ένας θαυμάσιος ναός προς δόξαν Θεού. Και ο ναός αυτός στη συνέχεια ευπρεπίστηκε, ανακαινίστηκε, διακοσμήθηκε, ενώ οι εργασίες εξωραϊσμού συνεχίζονται με τη θαυμάσια εικονογράφηση και άλλες παρεμβάσεις, με αποτέλεσμα οι πιστοί της ενορίας να χαίρονται την αισθητική του και οι επισκέπτες εκτός ενορίας να θαυμάζουν την ομορφιά του. Με τον τρόπο και το αποτέλεσμα αυτό ο κόπος και οι θυσίες των ανθρώπων που προσέφεραν δικαιώνονται και αποτελούν ένα πολύτιμο πνευματικό δώρο στα παιδιά, τα εγγόνια και τις επόμενες γενιές, που θα παραλάβουν την κοινότητα με ευθύνη να την διατηρήσουν, να την ενισχύσουν και να την παραδώσουν με τη σειρά τους στους επόμενους.

Αυτός είναι ο λόγος, που ορίστηκε ως στόχος της Εθελοντικής Προσφοράς για το 2026 η ενορία μας να φτάσει τα χίλια μέλη. Για να μοιραστούμε όλοι μαζί και όσο περισσότεροι μπορούμε με αγάπη και χαρά την τιμή και την ευθύνη της διακονίας. Ο στόχος αυτός δεν είναι οικονομικός. Είναι πρώτα από όλα πνευματικός και αφορά την ουσία και τον τρόπο ύπαρξης και ζωής της κοινότητας. Θυμάμαι με μεγάλη συγκίνηση μία ενορίτισσα σε προηγούμενη κοινότητα, που διακόνησα, η οποία παρά τη μεγάλη οικονομική δυσκολία που αντιμετώπιζε, δεν παρέλειψε ποτέ την αποστολή μιας επιταγής κάθε μήνα ύψους δέκα δολαρίων. Και μας υπενθύμιζε αυτή η ευλογημένη γυναίκα την ιστορία του ευαγγελίου με τη χήρα γυναίκα, που προσέφερε μονάχα ένα δίλεπτο, αλλά ο Χριστός την επαίνεσε δημόσια για τη διάθεση της καρδιάς της λέγοντας ότι αυτή η χήρα γυναίκα έδωσε όλα όσα είχε. Ανάλογα με τη διάθεση και την προαίρεση της καρδιάς του

λοιπόν ο καθένας ας αναλάβει την τιμή να συμμετέχει στο έργο της ενορίας και να είμαστε βέβαιοι ότι ο καλός Θεός ανταμείβει με πολλαπλάσια ευλογία κάθε προσφορά.

Την ευλογία αυτή τη βιώνουμε όχι μόνο σε προσωπικό ή οικογενειακό επίπεδο αλλά και ως κοινότητα. Πόσο μεγάλη ευλογία είναι για παράδειγμα να καμαρώνουμε τα παιδιά του Ελληνικού Σχολείου, του Κατηχητικού Σχολείου, της GOYA, τα παιδιά στο ιερό, τα παιδιά του χορευτικού συγκροτήματος και όλα τα παιδιά που εκκλησιάζονται και κοινωνούν κάθε Κυριακή. Στη νεολαία μας γίνεται ένα έργο σπουδαίο, πολύ καλά συντονισμένο και οργανωμένο και το έργο αυτό είναι η ελπίδα μας και η καλύτερη επένδυση για το μέλλον. Χαρήκαμε ιδιαίτερα την παρουσία και τη συμμετοχή των παιδιών, που είχαν πρωταγωνιστικό ρόλο, στην ιστορική στιγμή για την κοινότητά μας, όταν υποδεχθήκαμε τα ιερά προσκυνήματα, την εικόνα και το ιερό επιτραχήλιο του Αγίου Ιακώβου εν Ευβοία. Χάρηκαν και τα παιδιά. Και είμαστε βέβαιοι ότι οι στιγμές αυτές χαράχθηκαν στη μνήμη τους με χρυσά και ανεξίτηλα χρώματα και θα αποτελούν πάντα μία όμορφη και συγκινητική ανάμνηση. Πόσο όμορφο ήταν όταν είδαμε τα παιδιά του ιερού να λαμβάνουν τη χειροθεσία και το όμορφο ενθύμιο τον ασημένιο σταυρό από τα χέρια του πνευματικού μας πατέρα, Σεβασμιωτάτου Μητροπολίτη Νέας Ιερσέης, κυρίου Αποστόλου! Σας παρακαλώ, αδελφοί μου, να παραμείνει η νεολαία μας ως πρώτη προτεραιότητα στην αγάπη, την προσευχή και την υποστήριξή μας.

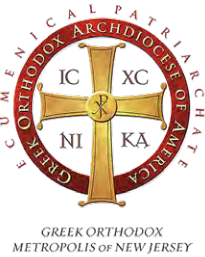
Και να, που οδεύουμε πλέον προς τα Άγια Χριστούγεννα. Οι ύμνοι της εκκλησίας μας εισάγουν ήδη σε αυτό το κλίμα και ανυπομονούμε κάθε Κυριακή να ακούσουμε τους ύμνους αυτούς. «Χριστός γεννάται, δοξάσατε»! «Η παρθένος σήμερα»! Πορευόμαστε όλοι μαζί ως μέλη της Αγίας Εκκλησίας, ταπεινοί προσκυνητές προς τη Βηθλεέμ, προς το σπήλαιο της Γεννήσεως, και είτε να αξιωθούμε να γονατίσουμε ενώπιον του προ αιώνων Θεού, που σαρκώνεται ως «παιδίον νέον».

Σας προσκαλώ με αγάπη να συνεορτάσουμε αυτές τις άγιες μέρες με συμμετοχή στη λατρεία και τις ιερές ακολουθίες. Να ενώσουμε τις προσευχές μας με τους αδελφούς μας από όλη την οικουμένη. Να ενώσουμε τις φωνές μας με τις αγγελικές ψαλμωδίες «και επί γης ειρήνη» και να προσευχηθούμε με όλη μας τη δύναμη για την ειρήνη στον κόσμο. Ειρήνη, η οποία είναι δώρο του Θεού, καρπός του Αγίου Πνεύματος, άνωθεν ειρήνη και μόνο έτσι μπορεί να γίνει ειρήνη του σύμπαντος κόσμου.

Καλά και Ευλογημένα Χριστούγεννα! Άγια Χριστούγεννα! Χριστούγεννα με τον Χριστό!

Με εν Χριστώ αγάπη,

Πρωτοπρεσβύτερος Γεώργιος Οικονόμου



SAINT THOMAS GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΗ ΚΟΙΝΟΤΗΤΑ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΘΩΜΑ



LETTER FROM THE PARISH COUNCIL PRESIDENT THE SUCCESSES OF 2025 AND THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF 2026

Dear Fellow Parishioners,

This year was very busy for Saint Thomas. We continued with our iconography and beautification of our Church with exceptional woodwork. We started the Apostolic Times publication. We organized the most successful Agora in the history of our community. We made major improvements in our buildings by replacing the roofs of the entire complex. Our Hellenic School excelled. Our Youth Ministries flourished, receiving prizes in many Metropolis competitions. Our Philoptohos is one of the most active organizations in our area in helping the less fortunate.

Then, a few weeks ago we were given by His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey the distinct blessing to host the Feast Day of St. Iakovos Tsalikis of Evia, the patron Saint of our Metropolis. The community rallied around Father Georgios and the Parish Council and in four weeks organized a flawless and highly spiritual event. Clergy and pilgrims flocked from the four corners of the Metropolis to St. Thomas to venerate the Icon of the Saint and his Sacred Epitrachelion, and ask for St. Iakovos' blessing and intercessions.

All those achievements point to the fact that St. Thomas is one of the best parishes in our Metropolis and maybe the entire Archdiocese. But with that assessment comes a great responsibility to continue to grow and succeed.

As we approach the blessed Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, let us take his example of total love and commitment to humankind, when he "emptied himself" and accepted becoming human (Phil. 2:7), and let us imitate Christ by helping our neighbors, show our love to each other and to our beloved St. Thomas. In 2026 we will be embarking in the last phase of the iconography of the interior of the Church. We will be participating in the Music and Dance Festival of the Metropolis in a major way. We will also be organizing several fundraisers to help fund the many programs at St. Thomas, like the Hellenic School, Youth Programs and charitable activities.

I am looking forward to a successful 2026 at our community.

I wish all of you the blessings of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May the great Saints that we will be celebrating in January, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus and John the Chrysostom intercede for the success of St. Thomas.

And may St. Thomas and St. Iakovos of Evia protect all of us.

**Anastasios Efstratiades
Parish Council President**

SAINT IAKOVOS OF EVIA CELEBRATION AT SAINT THOMAS

The weekend of November 21 and 22, were filled with blessings and joy as the Saint Thomas Greek Orthodox Church received the blessing and honor of His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey bringing the icon and epitrochelon to Saint Thomas for veneration. Saint Iakovos of Evia is the patron saint of the Metropolis of New Jersey and His Eminence often goes to the monastery of Saint David in Evia to venerate Saint Iakovos' relics and for prayer and solitude. Saint Iakovos has played an important part of His Eminence's life and the abbot at Saint David the the icon and vestment to His Eminence. This was to be the first time the icon and epitrochelon would be brought to a church in the Metropolis of New Jersey.

Because this was a special occasion and it was anticipated that faithful throughout the Metropolis would come to Saint Thomas to venerate the icon and epitrochelon, it was necessary to prepare for the historic visit. Father Georgios Oikonomou, Proistamenos at Saint Thomas and Anastasios Efstratiades, Parish Council President, recognized the significance of what was about to happen and that in order to provide a lasting, memorable, and inspirational experience for the Orthodox faithful throughout the Metropolis of New Jersey and the Philadelphia area, all organizations at Saint Thomas had to be involved. Father and the President met with the heads of the organizations individually which included the Parish Council, the Saint Irene Philoptochos Society, the Hellenic Afternoon School, GOYA, and the Hellenic Heritage Dance Group. Continuing to prepare for the Saint Iakovos weekend, Zoom meetings were held twice per week. Father prepared a plan for the youth to be involved which included greeting His Eminence upon arrival with the icon. Clergy throughout the Metropolis were invited to attend as well as dignitaries and honored guests throughout the Metropolis.



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A dinner was planned for Friday following the vespers service catered by Adelpia Restaurant. A more formal coffee hour was scheduled for Saturday following the Divine Liturgy hosted by the Saint Irene Philoptochos Society.

Every detail for the weekend was planned in detail. His Eminence informed Father and the President that he wanted to tonsure our acolytes and bless the acolytes from other parishes.

The church and gymnasium were prepared as well as the Saint Irene Hall to allow clergy to vest. A committee of law enforcement officers or those with law enforcement experience was formed to ensure proper security for the icon and relic. No detail was too small to escape planning and all contingencies were anticipated.

His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey arrived with relic and icon at 6:00 pm Friday November 21. Greeting him outside the church were approximately 25 priests and two deacons throughout the Metropolis and other Orthodox jurisdictions as His Eminence escorted the icon of Saint Iakovos into the



church. Thereafter the vespers service began with parishioners throughout the Metropolis, dignitaries and honored guests attending. At the end of the service His Eminence blessed the acolytes giving them a cross.

On Saturday November 22 His Eminence concelebrated with 25 priests and deacons the Divine Liturgy. At the end of the Liturgy His Eminence tonsured the Saint Thomas acolytes.

The icon and epitrochelon of Saint Iakovos remained at Saint Thomas through Sunday November 30. Father Georgios held a Paraklisis for Saint Iakovos during Thanksgiving week and then on Wednesday brought the icon and epitrochelon into the altar.

This was a memorable and very successful weekend for all who attended and for all who helped prepare for the event. May Saint Iakovos continuously intercede on our behalf and pray for the continued health and welfare of His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos and our beloved Metropolis.



FEAST OF ST. IAKOVOS OF EVIA, PATRON SAINT OF METROPOLIS OF NJ, CELEBRATED IN CHERRY HILL



His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey on November 21 celebrated the Great Vespers for the Feast of St. Iakovos of Evia, the patron Saint of the Metropolis of New Jersey, at St. Thomas Greek Orthodox Church in Cherry Hill, NJ. Photo: Courtesy of St. Thomas Cherry Hill, NJ

November 25, 2025, By The National Herald

CHERRY HILL, NJ – His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey on November 21 celebrated the Great Vespers for the Feast of St. Iakovos of Evia, the patron Saint of the Metropolis of New Jersey, at St. Thomas Greek Orthodox Church in Cherry Hill. Upon his arrival with the epitachelion vestment relic of St. Iakovos of Evia, His Eminence was welcomed by the community's presiding priest Fr. Georgios Oikonomou and 30 brother clergy of the Metropolis of New Jersey alongside Parish Council members, Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Metropolis Philoptochos, altar boys from the Delaware Valley Region and over 200 faithful. A litany celebrating the arrival of the icon and relic of the saint was held before the entrance into the church and the Great Vespers.

The icon, commissioned by the Metropolis, was

prepared by renowned iconographer Georgios Giariskanis from Thessaloniki, Greece.

In his Vesperal homily, His Eminence foremost shared that the life of St. Iakovos and that of all the new saints of the Church prove that the Holy Spirit is active in the world to this day and that our Church is a living one. This reality, Metropolitan Apostolos said, was apparent in his acquisition of the relic of the saint during his visit to the Monastery of the Venerable David in Evia, Greece. After celebrating the Divine Liturgy and sitting in the monastery's reception room, he made a request of Abbot Gabriel for one of the Saint's belongings to bring back to the Metropolis of New Jersey to encourage the faithful who now proclaimed him their patron saint. Responding to this request, Abbott Gabriel respectfully declined, explaining that the monastery only had one final article of the Saint's vestments left that had not been taken or given away. The Abbott explained

to His Eminence that he would, however, think and pray about it as he left briefly to go pray with a family who had come to ask for St. Iakovos' intercession. Returning from the chapel to the reception room, Abbott Gabriel (whose eyes His Eminence stated were somber and teary) bore in his hands the final remaining epitachelion of St. Iakovos. He proceeded to hand the vestment to His Eminence and explained to him "this belongs to you."

His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey on November 21 celebrated the Great Vespers for the Feast of St. Iakovos of Evia, the patron Saint of the Metropolis of New Jersey, at St. Thomas Greek Orthodox Church in Cherry Hill, NJ. Photo: Courtesy of St. Thomas Cherry Hill, NJ

"As a Metropolis, we are indebted to the Monastery of St. David and Abbott Gabriel who through the prayers and will of St. Iakovos bestowed on us such a blessing and pillar of hope of our Patron Saint who stands and intercedes for us before the throne of God."

Before the dismissal, His Eminence gathered the nearly 45 altar boys who had come to serve during the festal vespers service and bestowed on them a special cross to be worn during their service in the altar. He prayed over them entreating the Lord that they may follow the model of St. Simon of Cyrene,

who assisted Christ on his excruciating climb up Golgotha by carrying His Live-Giving Cross. His Eminence thanked the altar boys for being present, encouraging them to continue to grow in their service to the Lord. His Eminence also thanked the parents and grandparents of the boys for their efforts in raising their children in the Church and to continue to encourage them to keep their children in the calm harbor that the Church provides.

His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey on November 21 celebrated the Great Vespers for the Feast of St. Iakovos of Evia, the patron Saint of the Metropolis of New Jersey, at St. Thomas Greek Orthodox Church in Cherry Hill, NJ. Photo: Courtesy of St. Thomas Cherry Hill, NJ

Following the dismissal of the Great Vespers, His Eminence dearly thanked, Fr. Oikonomou, the Parish Council, the community of St. Thomas and all the benefactors for making the evening possible. He thanked Archon Isidoros and Mrs. Maria Garifalakis from Portland, Oregon, whose generosity was instrumental in the construction of the reliquary and the painting of the beautiful icon of the saint. He also specifically recognized the Grand Benefactors of the evening, Dr. Spiro Spireas and Dr. Amalia Spireas (represented by their son Sotiris Spireas) and Mr. George and Mrs. Zoe Kousoulis (who made a contribution in memory of their daughter Danielle

Kousoulis). Through their generosity, the parish was able to offer a wonderful meal and reception for all the pilgrims who came to venerate the relic and icon of their new patron saint and protector.

Upon the conclusion of the Vespers, Fr. Oikonomou, Parish Council President Archon Anastasios Efstratiades and the entire Parish Council presented an engolpion with St. Iakovos' icon to Metropolitan Apostolos, honoring his historic efforts.

His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos



Stellios Lambrou



of New Jersey on November 21 celebrated the Great Vespers for the Feast of St. Iakovos of Evia, the patron Saint of the Metropolis of New Jersey, at St. Thomas Greek Orthodox Church in Cherry Hill, NJ. Photo: Courtesy of St. Thomas Cherry Hill, NJ. After the Vespers, a dinner reception was hosted with the assistance of the tireless St. Irene Philoptochos Society in the Danielle Kousoulis Center. During the reception, the community thanked the many sponsors, volunteers, ministries, and pilgrims from the communities of the Metropolis. His Eminence also thanked the iconographer Giariskanis and the woodworker, Ilias Laskou, who prepared the gold-plated case for the icon and the relic. Both Giariskanis and Laskou flew in for the weekend from Thessaloniki for the feast of St. Iakovos. Giariskanis is also the Iconographer for the new iconography work at St. Thomas that he is in the process of completing.

The Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was held on November 22 and led to more pilgrims venerating the relic and icon. The Liturgy was presided over by His

Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos with the participation of a large number of Metropolis clergy. After the Liturgy, the community held a luncheon for all in the Danielle Kousoulis Center. At the luncheon, His Eminence announced that the St. Thomas Church will have the relics for veneration from November 23 through Wednesday November 26.

His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey on November 21 celebrated the Great Vespers for the Feast of St. Iakovos of Evia, the patron Saint of the Metropolis of New Jersey, at St. Thomas Greek Orthodox Church in Cherry Hill, NJ. Photo: Courtesy of St. Thomas Cherry Hill, NJ

With much appreciation, the community is hosting a Monday and Wednesday paraklesis to the Saint and and a Liturgy on Tuesday, November 25, with the relics at the solea for more pilgrims to venerate.

Saint Iakovos of Evia Tsalikis is a modern day saint who reposed in the Lord in 1991, was canonized by our Ecumenical Patriarchate in 2017 and whose feastday is celebrated on November 22.

LITURGICAL SCHEDULE - DECEMBER 2025

| | | | |
|--|---|---|--------------|
| Πέμπτη 4 Δεκεμβρίου Thursday December 4 th | ΑΓΙΑΣ ΒΑΡΒΑΡΑΣ ST. BARBARA | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 9:00 9:30 |
| Σάββατο 6 Δεκεμβρίου Saturday December 6 th | ΑΓΙΟΥ ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΥ SAINT NICHOLAS | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Κυριακή 7 Δεκεμβρίου Sunday December 7 th | ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ Ι΄ ΛΟΥΚΑ 10 th SUNDAY OF LUKE | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Τρίτη 9 Δεκεμβρίου Tuesday December 9 th | ΣΥΛΛΗΨΙΣ ΑΓΙΑΣ ΑΝΝΗΣ SAINT ANNA | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Τετάρτη 10 Δεκεμβρίου Wednesday December 10 th | ΠΑΡΑΚΛΗΣΗ ΤΗΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΥ PARAKLESIS TO THE THEOTOKOS | Service of the Small Paraklesis | 6:45pm |
| Παρασκευή 12 Δεκεμβρίου Friday December 12 th | ΑΓ. ΣΠΥΡΙΔΩΝΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΘΑΥΜΑΤΟΥΡΓΟΥ ST. SPYRIDON THE WONDERWORKER | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Κυριακή 14 Δεκεμβρίου Sunday December 14 th | ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ ΙΑ΄ ΜΑΤΘΑΙΟΥ 11 TH SUNDAY OF LUKE | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Δευτέρα 15 Δεκεμβρίου Monday December 15 th | ΑΓΙΟΥ ΙΕΡΟΜΑΡΤΥΡΟΣ ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΟΥ ST. ELEFThERIOS THE HIEROMARTYR | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Τετάρτη 17 Δεκεμβρίου Wednesday December 17 th | ΠΑΡΑΚΛΗΣΗ ΤΗΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΥ PARAKLESIS TO THE THEOTOKOS | Service of the Small Paraklesis | 6:45pm |
| Κυριακή 21 Δεκεμβρίου Sunday December 21 st | ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ ΠΡΟ ΤΗΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ ΓΕΝΝΗΣΕΩΣ SUNDAY BEFORE NATIVITY | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Δευτέρα 22 Δεκεμβρίου Monday December 22 nd | ΑΓΙΑΣ ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΑΣ SAINT ANASTASIA | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Τρίτη 23 Δεκεμβρίου Tuesday December 23 nd | Η ΑΚΟΛΟΥΘΙΑ ΤΩΝ ΩΡΩΝ ΤΩΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥΓΕΝΝΩΝ THE SERVICE OF THE HOLY HOURS OF THE NATIVITY | Ακολουθία των Ωρών Service of the Hours | 6:30pm |
| Τετάρτη 24 Δεκεμβρίου Wednesday December 24 th | ΠΑΡΑΜΟΝΗ ΤΩΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥΓΕΝΝΩΝ EVE OF THE NATIVITY | Vespers & Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great | 7:00pm |
| Πέμπτη 25 Δεκεμβρίου Thursday December 25 th | Η ΓΕΝΝΗΣΙΣ ΤΟΥ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ HOLY NATIVITY | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Κυριακή 28 Δεκεμβρίου Sunday December 28 th | ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ ΜΕΤΑ ΤΗΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ ΓΕΝΝΗΣΕΩΣ SUNDAY AFTER THE NATIVITY | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |

LITURGICAL SCHEDULE - JANUARY 2026

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|---|---|---|--------------|
| Πέμπτη 1 Ιανουαρίου Thursday January 1 st | Η ΠΕΡΙΤΟΜΗ ΤΟΥ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD BASIL THE GREAT | Ὁρθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Κυριακή 4 Ιανουαρίου Sunday January 4 th | ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ ΠΡΟ ΤΩΝ ΦΩΤΩΝ SUNDAY BEFORE THEOPHANY | Ὁρθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Δευτέρα 5 Ιανουαρίου Monday January 5 th | ΠΑΡΑΜΟΝΗ ΘΕΟΦΑΝΕΙΩΝ: ΜΕΓΑΛΕΣ ΩΡΕΣ, ΕΣΠΕΡΙΝΟΣ -ΘΕΙΑ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΜΕΓΑΣ ΑΓΙΑΣΜΟΣ THEOPHANY EVE: GREAT HOURS, VESPERS-DIVINE LITURGY & GREAT BLESSING OF THE WATER (GREAT GIASMOS) | Ακολουθία Service | 8:45 |
| Τρίτη 6 Ιανουαρίου Tuesday January 6 th | ΤΑ ΑΓΙΑ ΘΕΟΦΑΝΕΙΑ: ΟΡΘΡΟΣ ΘΕΙΑ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΜΕΓΑΣ ΑΓΙΑΣΜΟΣ THEOPHANY: ORTHROS DIVINE LITURGY & GREAT BLESSING OF THE WATER (GREAT AGIASMOS) | Ὁρθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Τετάρτη 7 Ιανουαρίου Wednesday January 7 th | Η ΣΥΝΑΞΙΣ ΤΟΥ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΠΡΟΔΡΟΜΟΥ SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST | Ὁρθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Κυριακή 11 Ιανουαρίου Sunday January 11 th | ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ ΜΕΤΑ ΤΑ ΦΩΤΑ SUNDAY AFTER THEOPHANY | Ὁρθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Τετάρτη 14 Ιανουαρίου Wednesday January 14 th | ΠΑΡΑΚΛΗΣΗ ΤΗΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΥ PARAKLESIS TO THE THEOTOKOS | Service of the Small Paraklesis | 6:45pm |
| Σάββατο 17 Ιανουαρίου Saturday January 17 th | ΑΓΙΟΥ ΑΝΤΩΝΙΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ SAINT ANTHONY THE GREAT | Ὁρθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Κυριακή 18 Ιανουαρίου Sunday January 18 th | ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ ΙΒ΄ ΛΟΥΚΑ 12 th SUNDAY OF LUKE | Ὁρθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Τετάρτη 21 Ιανουαρίου Wednesday January 21 st | ΠΑΡΑΚΛΗΣΗ ΤΗΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΥ PARAKLESIS TO THE THEOTOKOS | Service of the Small Paraklesis | 6:45pm |
| Κυριακή 25 Ιανουαρίου Sunday January 25 ^h | ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ ΙΒ΄ ΛΟΥΚΑ 12 th SUNDAY OF LUKE | Ὁρθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Τετάρτη 28 Ιανουαρίου Wednesday January 28 th | ΠΑΡΑΚΛΗΣΗ ΤΗΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΥ PARAKLESIS TO THE THEOTOKOS | Service of the Small Paraklesis | 6:45pm |
| Παρασκευή 30 Ιανουαρίου Friday January 30 th | Η ΣΥΝΑΞΙΣ ΤΩΝ ΤΡΙΩΝ ΙΕΡΑΡΧΩΝ SYNAXIS OF THE THREE HIERARCHS | Ὁρθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |

LITURGICAL SCHEDULE - FEBRUARY 2026

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|---|---|---|--------------|
| Κυριακή 1 Φεβρουαρίου Sunday February 1 st | ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ ΤΕΛΩΝΟΥ & ΦΑΡΙΣΑΙΟΥ SUNDAY OF THE PUBLICAN & THE PHARISEE | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Δευτέρα 2 Φεβρουαρίου Monday February 2 nd | Η ΥΠΑΠΑΝΤΗ ΤΟΥ ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ THE PRESENTATION OF OUR LORD | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Τετάρτη 4 Φεβρουαρίου Wednesday February 4 th | ΠΑΡΑΚΛΗΣΗ ΤΗΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΥ PARAKLESIS TO THE THEOTOKOS | Service of the Small Paraklesis | 6:45pm |
| Κυριακή 8 Φεβρουαρίου Sunday February 8 th | ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ ΤΟΥ ΑΣΩΤΟΥ SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Τρίτη 10 Φεβρουαρίου Tuesday February 10 th | ΑΓΙΟΥ ΙΕΡΟΜΑΡΤΥΡΟΣ ΧΑΡΑΛΑΜΠΟΥΣ HOLY HIEROMARTYR HARALAMBOS | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Τετάρτη 11 Φεβρουαρίου Wednesday February 11 th | ΠΑΡΑΚΛΗΣΗ ΤΗΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΥ PARAKLESIS TO THE THEOTOKOS | Service of the Small Paraklesis | 6:45pm |
| Σάββατο 14 Φεβρουαρίου Saturday February 14 th | Α΄ ΨΥΧΟΣΑΒΒΑΤΟ FIRST SATURDAY OF THE SOULS | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Κυριακή 15 Φεβρουαρίου Sunday February 15 ^h | ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ ΤΗΣ ΑΠΟΚΡΕΩ MEATFARE SUNDAY | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Τετάρτη 18 Φεβρουαρίου Wednesday February 18 th | ΠΑΡΑΚΛΗΣΗ ΤΗΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΥ PARAKLESIS TO THE THEOTOKOS | Service of the Small Paraklesis | 6:45pm |
| Σάββατο 21 Φεβρουαρίου Saturday February 21 st | Β΄ ΨΥΧΟΣΑΒΒΑΤΟ SECOND SATURDAY OF THE SOULS | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Κυριακή 22 Φεβρουαρίου Sunday February 22 nd | ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ ΤΗΣ ΤΥΠΙΝΗΣ FORGIVENESS SUNDAY | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |
| Δευτέρα 23 Φεβρουαρίου Monday February 23 rd | ΜΙΚΡΟ ΑΠΟΔΕΙΠΝΟΝ SMALL COMPLINE | Service | 6:45pm |
| Τετάρτη 25 Φεβρουαρίου Wednesday February 25 th | ΠΡΟΗΓΙΑΣΜΕΝΗ Θ. ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ PRESANCTIFIED D. LITURGY | Service | 7:00pm |
| Παρασκευή 27 Φεβρουαρίου Friday February 27 th | ΑΚΟΛΟΥΘΙΑ Α΄ ΧΑΙΡΕΤΙΣΜΩΝ 1 st SALUTATIONS | Service | 7:00pm |
| Σάββατο 28 Φεβρουαρίου Saturday February 28 th | Γ΄ ΨΥΧΟΣΑΒΒΑΤΟ THIRD SATURDAY OF THE SOULS | Ορθρος – Orthros Θεία Λειτουργία Divine Liturgy | 8:45 9:45 |

EVENT SCHEDULE

December 2025

**SUN
07**

- Bake Sale for kids cancer research.
 - Saint Thomas Parish Council Elections.
- @Danielle Kousoulis Cultural Center following the D. Liturgy

**TUE
09**

St. Irene Philoptochos Christmas Dinner. 6:30pm
@The Mansion on Main Street, 3000 Main St, Voorhees
Township, NJ 08043

**SAT
13**

Greek Orthodox Metropolis Of New Jersey Annual Christmas Concert. 6:00pm
Kimisis Tis Theotokou, Holmdel

**THU
18**

Greek Orthodox Metropolis Of New Jersey Christmas Tree Lighting. 6:00pm.
215 East Grove Street Westfield, NJ 07090-1656

**SUN
21**

Saint Thomas Greek Orthodox Church,
Christmas Pageant . following the D. Liturgy

**WED
31**

New Year's Eve.
@ Saint Thomas Greek Orthodox Church,
9:00pm

January 2026

**FRI
02**

Greek Orthodox Metropolis Of New Jersey Vasilopita Celebration @St. George Greek Orthodox Church
1101 River Rd, Piscataway, NJ 08854

**SUN
11**

Saint Thomas Greek Orthodox Church
Vasilopita Celebration, following the D. Liturgy

EVENT SCHEDULE

SAT
24

AHEPA Hellenic History Tournament
@Danielle Kousoulis Cultural Center

SUN
25

THREE HIERARCHS CELEBRATION
St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church – Upper Darby, PA

FRI
30

AHEPA Honors Anastasios Efstratiades
Dinner Dance @Adelphia Restaurant, 1750 Clements
Bridge Road, Deptford, NJ 08096 (856) 845-8200

February 2026

SUN
01

Godparents Sunday
@Danielle Kousoulis Cultural Center following the D. Liturgy

FRI-SUN
13-15

Metropolis of New Jersey Youth Music & Dance Festival (MDF)
Sheraton, Philadelphia

SAT
21

IKARIOTIKO Dinner Dance, 8:00pm
@Danielle Kousoulis Cultural Center

March 2026

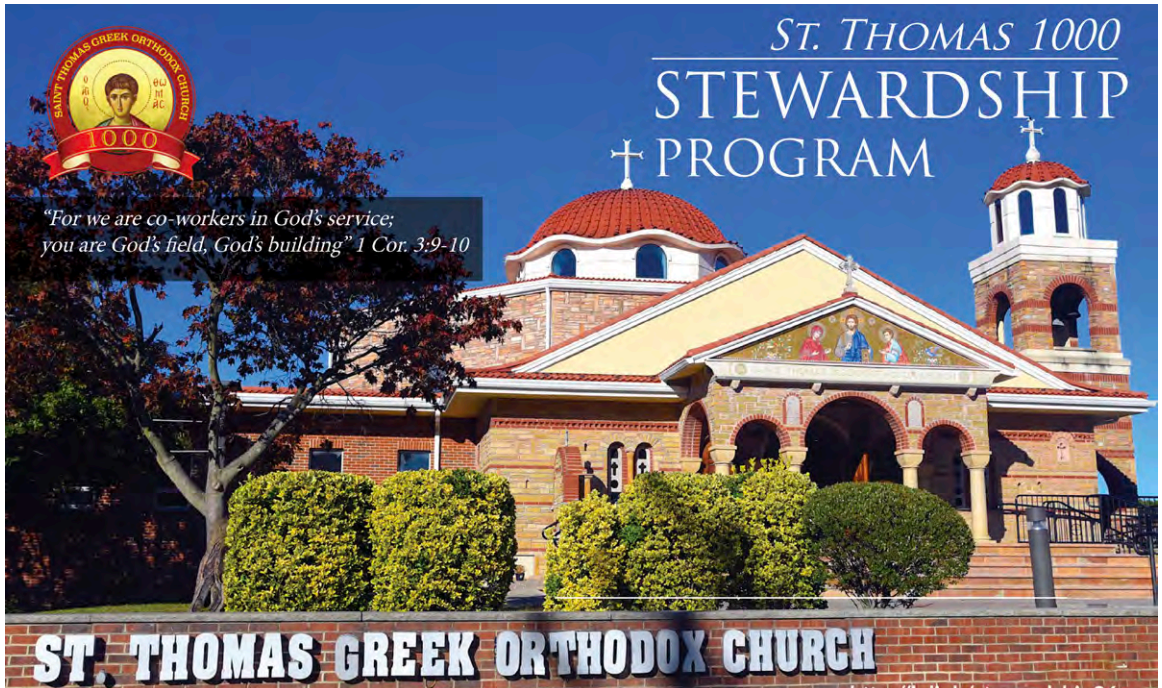
SUN
08

General Assembly
@Danielle Kousoulis Cultural Center following the D. Liturgy

SUN
08

TALENT SHOW AND TELETHON
@Danielle Kousoulis Cultural Center 6:00pm

STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM 2026



Saint Thomas has been blessed with many good stewards who have been giving in order to proclaim the message of Christ. We all support our Church from the gifts that God has bestowed upon us. Some provide financial support, others contribute in kind from their talents, but most give both their talent and treasure. This is the true meaning of "Yours from Your Own," our 2026 Stewardship Campaign. We all give from what God gave us. For that reason, we encourage you to continue being a steward of Saint Thomas or, if you are not a steward yet, to join this flock of Christ which has been growing and serving His Church.

All Orthodox Christians are united with Christ through the sacraments, or mysteries, of the Church and through our faithful offering of our entire selves to Jesus Christ. The Parish is a community of Orthodox Christians, an "Ekklesia" (which in Greek means "gathering"). We all gather together to worship. In order to keep

the Ekklesia alive we need material resources to meet the needs of the many ministries that the Church supports.

St, Thomas needs for everyone to increase the stewardship level so we can meet the ever-increasing expenses of keeping the doors of the Church open. Please keep in mind that monetary stewardship donations are kept in the strictest of confidence. We rely upon pledges to better plan our annual operating budget (the 2026 budget approved by the General Assembly for fair share is \$530,000).

To that end, we developed a more flexible 2026 Stewardship Program to provide parishioners with new ways to meet and increase their commitment. Below are suggested amounts of stewardship. Of course, if you can contribute a higher amount we will appreciate it.

The Saint Thomas Stewardship Committee

How do we get to 1000 Stewards?

Pass this message along to your family and friends ! Each of you is a steward of Saint Thomas. Reach out to all within your circles...to keep them in the fold, to bring others back, to introduce, reintroduce and to reinforce that Saint Thomas is the protector of each of us, our loved ones , families and friends.

Be apostles. Each of us play an integral roll in stewardship.

Take a program from the narthex and a card and give to a loved one.

Forward this brochure on your cell phones and social media.

Explain the great works we do as an extension of the body of Christ.

STEWARDSHIP FAIR SHARE: \$1,000 or \$85 per month

- In order to meet our financial obligations, the suggested minimum contribution is \$1,000.

SPONSOR FOR A DAY: \$3,000 (Average Daily Operating Expense)

- Sponsor a unique 2026 calendar day (or half day) to honor a loved family member's Name Day or Memorial. Your name and honoree will be presented In the Weekly Bulletin.

PAYMENT PLAN DIRECT PAY:

- Many of you give annually and others periodically. For those who wish to make periodic payments, any amount can be set up as a monthly payment made directly from your bank by going online by scanning the following QR Code.
- You can always send a check payable to Saint Thomas Greek Orthodox Church to the Church Office

<http://b.link/stewardship26>



SAINT THOMAS ICONOGRAPHY PROJECT

2026 Brings "For The Ages" Iconography to Conclusion, Transforming our Church Proper

At Saint Thomas Greek Orthodox Church, we are nearing the culmination of a remarkable journey—the completion of our "For The Ages" Iconography program. This ambitious project, which began 2 years ago, is not merely an artistic undertaking but a spiritual and cultural milestone for our congregation. In late winter 2026, the final icons will be installed, completing what will surely become the most significant collection of Byzantine Iconography in the tri-state area and among the finest in the Western Hemisphere.

Through Your Love, Our Spiritual Journey Began

The vision for this Iconography program began as a way to deepen the spiritual life of the parish and to enhance the worship experience for all who gather within the walls of Saint Thomas. Iconography has long been a central element of Orthodox Christian tradition. Icons are not just religious art; they are windows into the divine, tools for meditation, and a means of connecting with the heavenly realms. The goal of the "For The Ages" program was to create an environment that not only reflects our Orthodox faith but also engages with our rich cultural heritage, ensuring that future generations of worshippers would have the opportunity to encounter these sacred images.

The Scope of the Project

The scale of the program is awe-inspiring. When completed, Saint Thomas will house 150 icons, each meticulously crafted and installed by what has been recognized as amongst the most skilled iconographers worldwide. These icons, which depict scenes from the Bible, the lives of saints, and key moments in the history of Christianity, will adorn every corner of the church, from the altar to the back of the church. Every icon tells a story, a story that spans centuries of testimony to The Great Church of Christ. The process of commissioning these works has been a true labor of love, requiring collaboration between iconographers, clergy, and parishioners alike.

The final phase of the project, set for late winter 2026, will bring the last of these sacred images into place. With the installation of the final icons, Saint Thomas will stand as a testament to the power of sacred art in the life of the Church. The completed iconography will not only be a visual feast for the eyes but also a deeply transformative spiritual experience for all who enter the church.

A Spiritual and Cultural Treasure

When the "For The Ages" program is complete, Saint Thomas Greek Orthodox Church will undoubtedly have the most prolific collection of Byzantine Iconography in the region. The beauty and depth of this collection will stand as a living, breathing testament to our Orthodox faith and heritage. It will not only serve as a place of worship but as a spiritual treasure for visitors, pilgrims, and scholars from near and far. The program has already garnered attention and admiration of the timeless beauty of Byzantine art and its power to transcend cultural and geographical boundaries.

The completion of this project will place Saint Thomas among the premier churches for Byzantine iconog-



raphy in the Western Hemisphere. The icons we have installed and will soon install will help elevate our community's understanding of the Orthodox Christian faith, providing a source of inspiration for prayer, reflection, and personal growth. The collection will be a resource for those seeking to learn more about Orthodox iconography and its profound theological significance.

The Impact of "For The Ages"

The impact of the "For The Ages" program extends far beyond the walls of Saint Thomas. By undertaking such a significant project, our parish has reaffirmed its commitment to preserving and promoting Orthodox Christian traditions in a contemporary world. In an age where much of religious life is becoming increasingly digital and transient, the Iconography program represents a return to the eternal, connecting each of us and allowing a closer relationship through prayer to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The program has also been a unifying force within the parish. Parishioners have come together to witness the transformation of their sacred space and to contribute to a project that will stand for generations. Each icon is a reflection of our community's collective faith, and the installation process has allowed us to deepen our understanding of both the art and the spirituality behind it.

A Legacy for Generations

As the final icons are set to be installed in 2026, we can look back with pride at all that has been accomplished. The "For The Ages" Iconography program is not just about creating beautiful works of art; it is about building a lasting legacy of faith. It is about ensuring that future generations will have the opportunity to experience the beauty and depth of Orthodox iconography, just as we do today.

Saint Thomas Greek Orthodox Church will remain a place where the sacred and the beautiful meet, where each icon is a window into the divine and a reminder of the eternal truth of our faith. The completion of this program marks the beginning of a new chapter in the life of our church—a chapter filled with beauty, spirituality, and an enduring connection to the divine.

DISCOVER THE MEANING OF OUR CHURCH ICONS

By Protopresbyter Georgios Oikonomou, Ph.D.

I warmly welcome all of you to this new series of lessons that we are beginning at our Church of Saint Thomas, to explain the significance of the holy icons painted on the walls of our church.

First and foremost, I would like to explain why we venerate these holy icons and adorn our churches with them, especially since throughout the ages there have been periods when the importance of holy icons was disputed. One question is from what time we actually begin to venerate and honor holy icons. So, we will tell a story that took place in very ancient times, in the era of Christ Himself. It is about the very first icon of Christ, which was not made by human hands but was miraculously given to us.

In Edessa of Syria, there was a king named Abgar whose wife had fallen gravely ill. He tried everything to cure her, called the best doctors and wise men of that time, and promised them anything they needed if they could heal her. But no one could.

King Abgar heard about Jesus and that He could heal the sick. So, he wrote a letter and sent messengers to find Jesus and deliver it. The letter asked Jesus to come and heal his wife and even invited Jesus to come and live in his land if His own people mistreated Him.

When the messengers reached Jerusalem, it was the time when Jesus had already been betrayed by Judas, arrested, and was on the way to His crucifixion. As He was on the road to Golgotha, the messengers met Him. Jesus asked for a cloth to wipe His face, and His image was miraculously imprinted on it. He told them to give this image to their king. When King Abgar's wife was blessed with it, she was healed.

This icon is called the Holy Mandylion, the first icon of Christ. Since Christ Himself allowed His image to appear this way, it is a strong reason why we venerate holy icons.



Icon of Abgar holding the mandylion, the image of Christ (encaustic, 10th century, Saint Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai)



St. Luke the Evangelist

It is also worth mentioning that Saint Luke the Evangelist, author of the third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, was one of the earliest iconographers. According to sacred tradition, he painted several icons of the Theotokos. It is said that the Virgin Mary herself saw these icons and blessed them, saying, "May the grace of him who was born of me be with these icons." This historical testimony adds depth to our understanding of iconography.



The holy fathers of the seventh ecumenical council

It is not just art; it is a holy tradition with apostolic roots filled with divine grace and spiritual presence. Also, just a few Sundays ago, we celebrated the Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 787 AD, which affirmed that honoring and venerating icons is not idolatry. We do not worship the materials of the icon but honor the person depicted. And so, the veneration of icons is established in the tradition of our Holy Church.

We have two main types of icons: portable icons and frescoes. In our lessons, we will explain the beautiful frescoes in Saint Thomas Church.

Now, let us move on to the main part of our presentation after this general introduction about the veneration and significance of holy icons in the history and tradition of the Orthodox Church. The first icon

we will analyze is the icon of Christ the Pantocrator, which is always found in the dome of every church. When we lift our eyes upward, we see the beautiful image of Christ the Pantocrator painted in the dome.

The word Pantocrator means "the One who holds all," the One who rules over everything. It is no coincidence that He is depicted in the dome, which symbolizes the heavens, yet is also connected to the earth. The dome is not suspended in isolation; it rests upon and is united with the earthly structure. This shows that Christ is the One who reigns over all, sees all, blesses all, yet is not cut off from us. The very architecture of the church represents this unity of heaven and earth, the mortal and the immortal, the temporary and the eternal. When we enter the church, in a mystical and sacramental way, we enter the eternity of our all-good God. Christ is, of course, the second person of the Holy Trinity, the only begotten Son and Word of God, who existed before all ages and came down for our salvation. He taught us, worked miracles, and gave us His holy teachings in the Gospels. We are grateful to Him because He protects and blesses us.

So, Christ the Pantocrator is depicted in the dome, and we must lift our eyes upward to see Him. Sometimes people ask, "Where is God? Why do I not see Him?" But to see God, certain conditions must be met. As Christ Himself said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." We must pray and lift the eyes of our heart to the heavens to behold our Lord Jesus Christ the Pantocrator. We must always remember that God is the One who holds all authority, and this divine authority is not to be confused with human authority. We do not look to earthly rulers for our ultimate salvation, for true salvation comes only from God.

Surrounding the image of Christ the Pantocrator in our church, we can also read the powerful words from Psalm 80: "O Lord, O Lord, look down from heaven and behold, and visit this vineyard, and perfect that which Your right hand has planted." This prayerful verse reminds us that the Church, the vineyard of



the Lord, belongs to God alone. It is planted by His right hand, sustained by His grace, and constantly in need of His loving visitation. When we look up at Christ in the dome, we not only see our Creator and Savior, but we also echo this heartfelt plea: "Lord, come, visit us, protect us, and help Your Church flourish." These words around the Pantocrator are not decorative, they are a living prayer offered by all of us, the faithful, to our heavenly King.

As we gaze upon the face of Christ the Pantocrator in the dome, we notice something striking: His eyes. They are not harsh, but neither are they simply soft. One eye often appears to express mercy, while the other reflects justice. This dual expression is intentional. It reminds us that Christ is both the merciful Savior and the righteous Judge. His gaze searches

our hearts, not to condemn us, but to awaken us. He invites us to live a life of repentance and spiritual awareness. His eyes are not distant, but deeply present — looking into the soul of each one of us, calling us to return to Him with sincerity.

It is also meaningful that the Pantocrator is placed in the highest, most luminous part of the church — the dome. The dome itself symbolizes the heavens and eternity. It is round, without corners or end, reminding us of the everlasting kingdom of God. Light often enters through windows around the base of the dome, illuminating the face of Christ from above. This light is not just architectural — it is symbolic of the divine light that enlightens the souls of the faithful. Just as physical light flows from the dome

into the entire church, the presence of Christ should radiate into our hearts, our homes, and our lives. The icon of the Pantocrator, high above us, reminds us that our lives must be oriented upward — toward heaven, toward truth, toward the face of Christ.

We can also see surrounding the Pantocrator the holy angels depicted. This symbolizes the phrase in the Divine Liturgy, “the One who sits upon the Cherubim.” The throne of God is supported by the

holy angels, who are, according to Holy Scripture, ministering spirits sent to serve. These angels are God’s creations with special roles, whether in worshipping God or revealing His will. For example, the Archangel Gabriel was sent to announce to the Virgin Mary that she would become the Mother of God. Angels also have a personal role in each believer’s life. From the day of our holy baptism, we are each given a guardian angel who accompanies us, blesses us, and protects us throughout our lives until we return our souls to the Lord.

Now, let us talk about the Gospel that Christ the Pantocrator holds. The Gospel is the law and the guide for our lives as Christians. The very word “Ευαγγέλιο - Evangelion” in Greek means “good news.” It’s not just about rules or restrictions, but about leading us freely closer to God and experiencing a taste of paradise. The Gospel is there to guide us into freedom and a deeper relationship with God, and we must understand its significance and make it a part of our lives.

Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, let us not allow this holy image to remain just a part of the decoration of our church. Let it become part of our daily lives. Every time we enter the church and lift our eyes to Christ the Pantocrator, let us also lift our hearts. Let us ask Him to watch over us, to correct us, to strengthen us, and to bless us. Let His gaze be our compass. Let His Gospel be our guide. And let His kingdom be our goal. For the one who looks upon Christ with faith, humility, and love will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. May the image of the Pantocrator reign not only from the dome, but from within our very souls.

Finally, as we look at the prophets depicted around the dome, we see how they connect the Old and New Testaments, showing that Christ is the fulfillment of the prophecies. This will be the theme of our next presentation, where we will delve deeper into the role of the prophets and what they teach us. Let us always remember that Christ the Pantocrator is the One who holds all, and the angels and prophets around Him remind us of His eternal kingdom and His love for us all.



Christ Pantocrator from Saint Catherine's Monastery in Sinai

JOURNEY TO NICAEA

On November 26 through December 1, 2025, the Greek Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church celebrated together the 1700 Year Anniversary of the Nicene Creed. Saint Thomas Greek Orthodox Church was represented by Archon George G. Horiates and his wife, Lisa Horiates. The visit to Turkey and Nicaea commemorated the first Ecumenical Council which set forth the Creed which is at the crux of our Christian beliefs.

The week-long series of events centered also on the feast of Saint Andrew the First-called Apostle, brother of the Apostle Peter and patron of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew welcomed His Holiness Leo XIV to our sacred center of Orthodoxy. The joint recital of the Creed we use today unadulterated in the Orthodox church, reaffirmed the desire to continue the walk with firm determination on the path of dialogue, in love and truth. As successors of the two Holy Apostles, the founders of the Church, the witnesses keenly felt the ties of spiritual brotherhood which obligate us to work diligently to proclaim the message of salvation to the world.

Divinely inspired by the action of the Holy Spirit, the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea strengthened ecclesiastical unity. This was precisely the meaning





of the visit and participation of the Catholic Church and Pope Leo XIV to the Venerable Patriarchal Church of Saint George where he was welcomed by His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew during the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of Saint Andrew.

The Imperial City and the World witnessed a historic 1700 Year Journey to Nicaea. A joint declaration consistent with today's world was issued by Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Leo. "The goal of Christian unity includes the objective of contributing in a fundamental and life-giving manner to peace among all peoples. Together we fervently raise our voices in invoking God's gift of peace upon our world. Tragically, in many regions of our world, conflict and violence continue to destroy the lives of so many. We appeal to those who have civil and political responsibilities to do everything possible to ensure that the tragedy of war ceases immediately, and we ask all people of good will to support our entreaty."

Archon George and Lisa Horiates were joined by numerous global religious leaders, representatives of

governments, non-government organizations and pilgrims world wide. Saint Thomas Greek Orthodox Church was honored to have been represented at this landmark moment, reaffirming our support of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and in witnessing people of all nations, ethnicity, backgrounds and languages together in peace and unity.



INTERNET ORTHODOXY OR ECCLESIAL ORTHODOXY?

By Protopresbyter Georgios Oikonomou, Ph.D.

Two young visitors walked into St. Thomas Church in Cherry Hill early on Sunday, November 30, when our Church commemorates the Feast of Holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called. They came with open hearts, seeking a deeper connection to the Orthodox Christian faith. They were not the first. Since the beginning of the year, fifteen visitors like them have crossed the threshold of our parish, each longing for a more authentic connection with Christianity. Each one confessed that their journey began online.

They had spent time exploring the internet, trying to trace the roots of the Christian church and hoping to find in Orthodoxy what their hearts had not found elsewhere. This growing phenomenon is undoubtedly a blessing, yet it is also a challenge and potentially a danger.

This trend has been discussed in many recent articles, and it has been thoroughly explored in the book "What I Was Looking to Find" by Peli Galiti Kyrvasili, published in Greece by "En Plo".

In this reflection, however, I wish to turn our attention to a specific aspect of the issue: the role of the internet as a strange, impersonal "missionary" that suddenly undertakes apostolic work without accountability, oversight, guidance, or pastoral responsibility.

A striking example of this unregulated environment is the countless social media groups titled "Ask About the Orthodox Faith," where anyone—well-intentioned or not—publicly offers opinions and answers theological questions. These groups generate confusion, inconsistency, and a general atmosphere of spiritual chaos.

This problem does not only concern non-Orthodox seekers; it primarily concerns many of our own Orthodox faithful. Many baptized Christians were never systematically catechized, studied the sources of their faith, or learned the inner life of the Church. Now, they search for answers on questionable websites or, more recently, through artificial intelligence.

They then appear on the screens of strangers as self-appointed defenders of the faith—confessors, apologists, and "guardians of tradition"—yet they advocate a version of Orthodoxy that they have neither lived nor studied nor truly loved. They present a faith that is strict, condemning, and ultimately opposed to the Gospel and the Holy Fathers.

Is the internet, then, something evil? Certainly not. It can be a powerful tool for the spread of the Gospel. However, this can only happen if it is rooted in the life of the Church, guided by proper ecclesiology, and framed by clear pastoral boundaries. Ideally, access to theological material online would be mediated through one's parish—a closed, accountable environment in which the priest knows his flock.

Without such boundaries, however, the digital world becomes a stage for constant violations—actions undertaken beyond one's pastoral boundaries—which are contrary to the Second Canon of the Second Ecumenical Council and many other Holy Canons.

Consider, for example, the not-uncommon situation in which someone challenges his confessor during the sacrament of Confession: "But a monk online says something different..." "This other priest on YouTube teaches otherwise."

However, confession is not a counseling session. It is a holy mystery. Priests who hear confessions do so with the blessing of the bishop and with pastoral discretion, humility, and love, asking for God's Grace. As St. Sophrony Sakharov teaches, the spir-

itual father offers a sacred "first word"—an inspired pastoral offering extinguished when replaced by the opinions of online guru-like figures.

Some of these online voices are truly luminous and spiritually uplifting. But others are foolish, fanatical, and spiritually dangerous. Some promote an imagined purity and generate anger toward priests, bishops, archbishops, and patriarchs. They consider themselves superior—more spiritual, more orthodox, and more righteous than their spiritual fathers. They see themselves as saviors of Orthodoxy.

Often, these attitudes border on pathology. Yet the commandment of God is clear: "Honor your father." Even if our spiritual father makes a mistake, what should our Christian response be? To insult him? To curse him? To declare him a heretic?

It is tragic and sorrowful to see so-called "Orthodox warriors" online attacking their own clergy with hateful insults and accusations of betrayal. The irony is profound. If their priests were truly heretics, they themselves would not have valid sacraments because they received baptism, confession, and holy communion from those same priests.

The harm caused by the internet in this respect is immeasurable. The answer is not to flee the digital world, but rather to ground ourselves firmly in the living tradition of the Church.

This means having a personal relationship with one's parish priest, reference to the bishop and archdiocese, joyful obedience to synodal decisions, humility, and not placing ourselves above everyone else.

It is astonishing how quickly people with little or no theological education—armed only with an "Internet Orthodoxy"—turn with hatred and fanaticism against their clergy. They label themselves apologists while standing at the very edge of schism. They dream of a church made up only of the "pure," ex-

pellent anyone who does not mirror their imagined spiritual perfection.

However, our authentic faith is rooted in mercy and love. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ prayed for the unity of his disciples, reflecting the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At every Divine Liturgy, we pray, "For the unity of all."

How, then, can we despise people of other Christian traditions? How will we receive them with love when they knock on the door of our churches, as those two young men did last Sunday? Should we drive them away as "heretics"? Did Christ reject the Canaanite woman because she was pagan? Did he reject the Samaritan woman because she belonged to a heretical sect?

Whenever we reject those outside the Church, we imitate Jonah, who cared nothing for the salvation of the Ninevites simply because they were not his fellow Israelites. Yet God taught Jonah, and through him, us all, that every human being is God's child and bears His image.

The growing interest in the Orthodox faith is a tremendous blessing and a great responsibility. We must not allow the anonymous internet to perform our missionary work for us because it will likely cause more harm than good. Instead, with the blessing and guidance of our bishops, we must consciously labor within our parishes to help sincere seekers encounter Christ and his saints through the holy mysteries and authentic ecclesial life.

Life in Christ transforms the human person, carrying him like a pilgrim aboard the spiritual ark of the Church toward salvation. However, Internet Orthodoxy often leads to spiritual shipwreck because it lacks the ecclesial foundation that can steady the soul in the midst of a storm.

2025 AGORA, SAINT THOMAS' MOST SUCCESSFUL FESTIVAL EVER



The 2025 Saint Thomas Agora held on October 9, 10, 11 and 12 was one of the most successful festivals ever held at the Saint Thomas Greek Orthodox Church. The 2025 Agora grossed almost \$350,000. The festival chaired by Vice President-Agora Stathis Karadonis and Nick Kostiou provided the leadership needed for the major success that was the hallmark of the 2025 festival. Each section had a section chair who handled staffing providing the necessary volunteers along with the time that they would work. Demetrios Rozanitis provided the lighting and electrical work and worked tirelessly to carry out this giant task.

There were more than 20 vendors who sold their wares throughout the festival. Most vendors were in the gymnasium inside the Danielle Kousoulis Hellenic Cultural Center, and the Saint Irene Philoptochos Bakery was in the center of the gymnasium. The idea of the set-up this year was so that the entire festival was on one floor, and no one needed to navigate the steps to the second floor of the Kousoulis Center.

The Bakery run by the Saint Irene Philoptochos had the thousands of pieces of Greek pastries and cookies baked by the Saint Thomas women of the Philoptochos led by Philoptchos Chapter President Rania Pappas, sold inside as well as all the Greek pastries sold in the Outside Bakery.

There were lines everywhere for the delicious Greek dinners sold in the Taverna cooked and baked by local restaurants and prepared onsite by the kitchen staff led by George Pappas. The Taverna was chaired by Vicki Christodoulou who with her staff dished out the mouth-watering Greek dinners to customers who were waiting with great anticipation. Patrons could compliment their meal with a selection of Greek wine or Mythos beer or a domestic or craft beer. As a before or after dinner drink there was ouzo and brandy. Patrons could of course purchase their favorite gyro or souvlaki with Greek French fries sprinkled with generous amounts of feta and pepper. And of course, everyone, wanted Loukoumades, chaired by Peter Kousoulis.

The thousands of people attended the Agora came throughout the Philadelphia area. Both Greek and non-Greek alike enjoyed the culture and cuisine of the Agora. They enjoyed the dancing of the young people of the Hellenic Heritage Dance Group constantly asking those who were working what time the young people were scheduled to dance and then enjoyed dancing themselves in the Taverna to live Greek music.

Agora patrons also enjoyed seeing the inside of the Saint Thomas Greek Orthodox Church and the new iconography as they listened to Father Georgios Oikonomou explain the icons and the Church itself. The highlight of the Agora was when His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey attended the Agora, watched the Hellenic Heritage Dance Group, and enjoyed the wonderful food of the Agora.

The Agora success was topped off with a highly successful 50-50 raffle chaired by George Horiates who organized the raffle and encouraged all to buy and sell raffle tickets. Although the raffle had many winners, the true winner was the Saint Thomas community who received the net proceeds in support of the Saint Thomas Building Fund monthly mortgage payments.

The success of the 2025 Agora could not have happened without the support of all the volunteers who worked thousands of hours before the Agora and during the Agora. The glory and success of the Agora is not just the culture and religious aspects but is due to the parishioners of Saint Thomas pulling together as one in support of their beloved Church.



SAINT IRENE PHILOPTOCHOS

What a Blessed Ecclesiastical New Year this one has been so far! September started with various and multiple commitments and responsibilities for our Philoptochos Ministry. From the Cherry Hill Food Pantry session to the church mailing assistance, to the Agora baking, we can certainly say that September was quite busy!

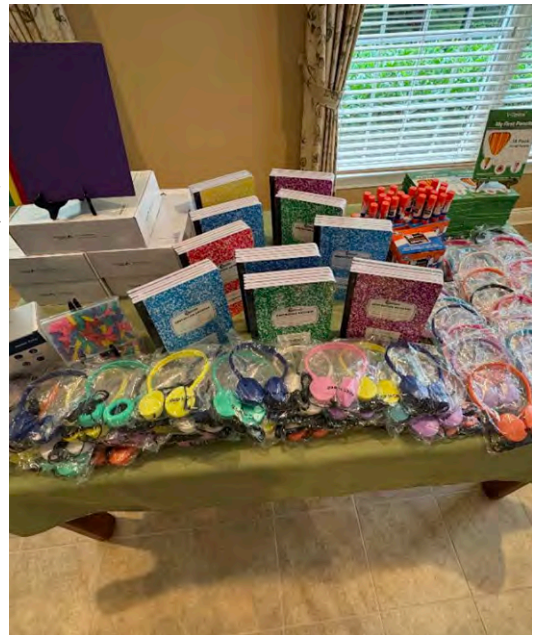


On Sunday, September 7th, the Sunday before the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, we were blessed to celebrate the first Divine Liturgy with our new Spiritual Advisor and St. Thomas Parish Proistamenos, Reverend Protopresbyter Georgios Oikonomou. This first Divine Liturgy filled the church with faithful, music, and heartfelt AXIOS as parishioners embraced Father Georgios, Presvytera Anastasia and their children Ioannis, Stella, Grigorios, Arsenios and Loukas. Καλώς ήρθατε Πατέρα Γεώργιε! Καλή Αρχή with the blessing of our Lord, our Panagia and our Patron Saint Thomas. St. Irene Philoptochos co-hosted the

“Welcome Celebration” in the “Danielle Kousoulis” Center afterwards.

Continuing with Operation Classroom, the ongoing project that our National and Metropolis Philoptochos Societies encourage all chapters to support we were extremely blessed to provide \$1,500 worth of basic school supplies for the students at H.B. Wilson School in Camden, NJ. The mission of this program is to offer support to students and teachers of schools that have underfunded or underserved populations. The supplies included composition books, pencils, erasers, extra-large triangle pencils, electric pencil sharpeners, headphones, pocket folders, glue sticks, rulers and crayons. Our sincere gratitude to our chairperson, Donna Kolodziejczak. We are excited to WELCOME Helen Gioulis as a co-chair to the Operation Classroom Program. We hope and pray that with God's grace we will be able to continue to adopt this program and assist the Camden area schools through our fellow parishioners, Angela Boldurian and Koula Kotsedakis.

On Sunday, September 14 we were blessed to celebrate the



Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross. Our Church looked beautiful, and everyone received a sprig of blessed sweet basil, a fragrant reminder of the Life-Giving Cross of our Lord. Father Georgios along with Father Florin conducted the “Swear In” of our Philoptochos Board for the 2025-2027 term. May we have the blessing and protection of His Cross, a witness to hope, strength, and our Lord Jesus Christ unfailing love and May the victorious CROSS power guide our lives with strength, hope, health and love

On Sunday, September 21st, we had a Trisagion Service for Elaine Kyriacou, the great benefactor of St. Irene Philoptochos. May Her Memory Be Eternal! Αιώνια αυτής η μνήμη! Elaine donated her annuity to St. Irene Philoptochos to make scholarships available. The scholarships are awarded annually according to merit and financial need of the applicants.

The St Irene Philoptochos “IT’S ALL GREEK TO ME” Cookbook is now available and is sold during Sunday Coffee Hour. There are 137 illustrated pages of recipes from our parishioners. Recipes from our Original Greek Cookbook have also been included. Preorder requests can be sent by email to lizloudon@comcast.net. The price of the Cookbook is \$25 and would make a great Christmas gift. We would like to express our gratitude to the “Mighty Liza Duo”, Liz Loudon and Liz Sevast for all the hard work and great efforts with the cookbook, and all our members and parishioners for providing us with their favorite recipes!



Almost every day of September was dedicated to the Agora baking that kept us busy making all the Greek delicious pastries that are such a big hit! Koulourakia, paximadia, kourabiedes, pasta flora, melomakarona, galaktoboureko, baklava, ravani and karidopita – all homemade and made to perfection! October found us in the kitchen of the “Danielle Kousoulis” Center, finishing up the baklava making and baking! “Many hands make light work” and with that being said, we were able to make 60 full trays and in addition to that, 5 more trays of our famous galaktoboureko! We also made and baked Ravani aka Greek Semolina Cake is a traditional Greek dessert with a delightful citrusy flavor and a unique, soft, fluffy texture. It is made with fine semolina, it looks like sponge cake and is soaked in a sweet, citrus-infused syrup that gives it a fresh, tangy taste. If you love walnut desserts, Karidopita is a must-try. This traditional Greek cake, soaked in syrup and flavored with cinnamon

and cloves, is soft, moist and full of flavor. It's the perfect dessert for any occasion!

On Sunday, October 5th, our beautiful St. Thomas church was decorated for our Patron Saint's Name Day. We were honored to welcome visiting clergy from the area for the Vespers and hold the refreshments reception after. A beautiful tribute to our beloved Άγιο Θωμά that always protects, guides and enlightens us. Many years! Χρόνια Πολλά!

The Saint Thomas Greek Agora Festival was on October 9, 10, 11 & 12! Hundreds of visitors came and experienced the tastes, sights, and sounds of Greece right here in Cherry Hill! From the authentic Greek food to the delicious homemade pastries, the traditional music & dancing, the many vendors it definitely was fun for the whole family! OPA!

THANK YOU to all our tireless volunteers who worked so hard at the various stations during our 2025 GREEK AGORA. Your help baking, setting up and working over the weekend made this annual event another success for OUR St. Thomas! A special thank you to our AGORA baking chair, Popi Stamatiades, Stacy Chryssofos and all of the indoor bakery volunteers, to Ourania Melissaratos and the cutting room ladies, Tasso Fakinos - the geek and man of all trades, and of course Luis, our janitor and his cleaning team! Till October 2026... Και του χρόνου!

On Saturday, October 25, 2025, Deacons and Diaconate candidates gathered at St. Thomas in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, for the Annual Metropolis of New Jersey Diaconate Retreat presided by His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey. St. Irene Philoptochos assisted with the lunch preparations and serving. Thank you to the board member ladies who assisted on that day!

November 2nd was Philoptochos Sunday —a day dedicated to honoring the extraordinary philanthropic work of the Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society, founded in November 1931 by Archbishop Athenagoras. St. Irene came together on Philoptochos Sunday, in faith and fellowship with a heartwarming Outreach Project - 100 bags with essential meal items for the economically challenged students of Delair Elementary School in Pennsauken Township. As Father Georgios said, that was a heartfelt expression of



Christian love and compassion, and a day filled with gratitude, community, and our shared mission to make a difference. Thank you to all who joined us in honoring the heart and soul of Philo-ptochos.

Congratulations to this year's St. Irene Philoptochos Ambassador Honoree, Sophia Hanos! A well-deserved award for Kyria Sophia and were so happy to be able to congratulate her in person on Sunday, November 2 at the Metropolis of New Jersey Ambassador Awards Banquet!

[Sophia Hanos has been a proud parishioner of St. Thomas Greek Orthodox Church since 1967. Born in Ano Hora, Greece, she immigrated to New Jersey and married her beloved husband, Jerry Hanos, at St. Thomas in 1969. Over the years, she has celebrated many family milestones within the parish, including the baptisms of her two children and her grandchildren. A devoted member of the St. Irene Philoptochos for decades, Sophia has generously served in many ways, including holding the position of Trea-



surer for four years. She especially enjoys baking and volunteering at coffee hour and the annual festival. Outside of Philoptochos, she is an active board member of the St. Thomas Maturity Club. Sophia remains deeply grateful for the love, faith, and community that St. Thomas has provided for her, making St. Thomas her home away from home. Sophia is humbly honored to have been nominated for this year's Philoptochos Ambassador Award.]

On Tuesday, November 11, we held our monthly get-together, "A Grateful Gath-

ering" in the spirit of Thanksgiving, the season for giving thanks and supporting those in need. Following our meeting and refreshments, we assembled Ham & Cheese Sandwiches for Cathedral Kitchen in Camden. November is also the month that we collect "Hats, Mittens/Gloves & Scarves" that will help the students of H.B. Wilson Elementary & Early Development Schools stay warm this winter!

With the blessings of His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey, Saint Thomas has been chosen to celebrate the feast of the patron of our Metropolis, Saint Iakovos of Evia, on November 21 and 22. This will be a major undertaking with hundreds of visitors hosted for the services, dinner on Friday evening and coffee hour on Saturday after liturgy. This year's celebrations will have the special blessing that His Eminence will present St. Iakovos' epitrachelion for the faithful to venerate.

The Annual Christmas Card for the parish is a wonderful tradition since besides being able to extend Christmas greetings to all your friends in the parish, it is very convenient and much less costly. The proceeds of this project are offered to the long list of charitable and benevolent projects of the St. Irene Philoptochos. Make sure you submit your entry by Sunday, December 14th.

One of the most beautiful traditions is the decoration of the Altar area and the Church with poinsettias plants during Christmas. These plants, at \$10.00 each, may be donated either "IN MEMORY OF" or "IN HONOR OF/FOR THE WELL BEING OF" your loved ones. Your order must be placed by Sunday, December 14th.

The St. Irene Philoptochos Society is taking orders for Vasilopites (New Year's Bread), a very special blessing from the Agia Skepi/Holy Protection Monastery Bakehouse. You can place your order on Sundays at the Philoptochos table or you can call Tulla Sandilos @ 856-375-3607 or Stacy Chryssofos @



856-816-7456. Deadline to place your order is December 7th! Pick up will be on Sundays, December 21st & 28th after church, at the “Danielle Kousoulis” Center.

TIS THE SEASON - CHRISTMAS DINNER, KEFI & FELLOWSHIP – We have planned our Annual Christmas Dinner once again and we are promising an evening of fun, great pareia and camaraderie among fellow members and friends in the spirit of Christmas and the festive season! This year the dinner will be held on Tuesday, December 9th at “The Mansion” in Voorhees, NJ and starting time is 6:30 pm. The evening includes entertainment by DJ Maki Melissaratos, visit from Santa/Agio Vasili and 50/50 raffle! For reservations and your meal choice, please contact Roula Criaris @ 609.744.3365 or Peggy Christis @ 215.990.5781. All ladies and gentlemen are invited to attend!

During this Nativity period, the St. Irene Philoptochos is continuing our support of the Atlantic City based ‘Covenant House’. Once again, this year we chose to show our love and support by providing items of need with an ‘Angel Tree’. Please look for the ‘Angel Tree’ during coffee hour where hanging are individual cards with a specific need for a teenager/young adult and some of the families of the shelter, on Sundays, 11/30 and 12/07. Please select one, note your contact information on our sign-up sheet associated with the number on the back, and return your item to the Philoptochos room no later than December 14th.

We wish all our Philoptochos members and fellow St. Thomas parishioners a Blessed Nativity Season and a very Happy New Year, filled with abundant happiness, health and all God’s blessings! Πολλές ευχές για Καλά Χριστούγεννα και Καλή Χρονιά με υγεία, χαρά και κάθε ευλογία!



AMBASSADOR AWARDS 2025



The 2025 Ambassador Awards Dinner was held on November 2 at the Adelphia Restaurant. His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey conferred the Parish – Community Ambassador Award for Saint Thomas to Vasili and Angeliki Kolovos for their tireless and unending support for the Saint Thomas Greek Orthodox Church. Vasili and Angeliki have donated their time, talent and treasure for many years to Saint Thomas often allowing the parish to host various events at their restaurants without cost. Not only are they active members of the parish but their children and grandchildren are as well. The Saint Thomas Greek Orthodox Church is blessed to count them as parishioners and the Community Award is most deserving.

The Senior Award was given to Louis (Ilias) Kaliamouris the President of the Saint Thomas Kali Pareia. Louis has been an active member of Saint Thomas for many years and continues to be active as the President of this outstanding organization. Often times the men of Kali Pareia are working in the kitchen at various events including the Agora. Last year, Louis was proud to see his grandson George receive the award for Ambassador of Faith and this year George, was equally proud to see his grandfather receive the Senior Ambassador Award. Louis' love for Saint Thomas over the span of many years has not gone unnoticed and he is deserving of this award.

As was seen in the Philoptochos article (pages 36-37), Sophia Hanos was awarded the Philoptochos Ambassador Award for Saint Thomas. Sophia has served in various capacities in the Saint Irene Philoptochos Chapter at Saint Thomas. Her dedication to the values of the Philoptochos over the years and her tireless work at Saint Thomas made her deserving of this recognition.

Karoline Kokolis was awarded the Ambassador Award for Youth Worker (page 46) as the GOYA Advisor at Saint Thomas. Karoline has maintained the tradition of having the most active GOYA in the Philadelphia area and is deserving of this award.

Saint Thomas is proud of the youth who were honored (pages 44-45): Mariella Gasparinatos – Ambassador of Love (Service); Simeon Poulathas – Ambassador of Faith (Worship); Maria Katsikis – Ambassador of Peace (Fellowship); Andrea Stablopoulos – Ambassador of Hope (Witness).

To all those honored, AXIOS AXIOS AXIOS!



ST THOMAS YOUTH MINISTRIES



Orthodox Faith Sunday School Picture Day

We thank Kyrio Stelios Lambrou for generously donating his time and talents to capture our youth and our OFSS team



If you have a Tot – 12th Grader and are not currently receiving email updates about the youth, please reach out to St.ThomasGOCYouthMinistry@gmail.com



ST THOMAS YOUTH MINISTRIES



Orthodox Faith Sunday School Picture Day





ST THOMAS YOUTH MINISTRIES Cross Divers 2025



"Senior" Divers

Vasiliki Horiates - Grade 12
Nicholas Tripolitis - Grade 11

"Junior" Divers

Erin Compton - Grade 9
Michael Poulathas - Grade 9





ST THOMAS YOUTH MINISTRIES



Kid Mission 11.1.2025 @ Saint Demetrios



Our JOYans (and some HOPE), under Ms. Stephanie and Mr Zach's guidance, put together and performed a pilot for an Orthodox Christian TV show. Their show was called Faithful Friends.



Inspired by FRIENDS, with an Orthodox Christian twist! Their hard work was rewarded with a festive afternoon at LAUNCH trampoline park. BRAVO!



ST THOMAS YOUTH MINISTRIES



Ambassador Awards 2025



Mariella Gasparinatos - Grade 12 **Ambassador of LOVE (Service)**

Mariella has been an active and devoted member of the Hellenic Heritage Dance Group for many years, performing at numerous events and proudly representing her culture. She volunteers her time baking for the group's annual Christmas cookie bake sale and assisting with the Agora festival. She gives back to her community by working as a counselor at the St. Thomas Summer Camp, serving as a mentor and role model for the youth.

At school, Mariella is a member of the Senior Leadership Program and serves as president of both the Latino Cultures Club and the Chess club. Her induction into the National Honor Society and the Spanish National Honor Society highlight her academic excellence and commitment to service. This recognition means a lot to her and she is honored to accept.



Simeon Poulathas - Grade 12 **Ambassador of FAITH (Worship)**

From a young age, Simeon has made Saint Thomas his second home. A devoted student of the Orthodox Faith Sunday School and Greek School, he graduated as Salutatorian and faithfully serves as an Altar Boy, Reader, and Aspile chanter. He loved HOPE and JOY and is now a GOYA officer. He participates in DVYC Basketball, Sights & Sounds (Greek & English play, choral speaking, and piano), the Hellenic

Heritage Dance Group, volunteers at the AGORA, and as a counselor at St. Thomas Summer Camp. An Honor Roll student and inductee of the National and History Honor Societies, Simeon is founder and president of his school's Greek Heritage Club and a dedicated mentor at Sports Unity. He is especially proud of earning 1st Place in the GOARCH Hagia Sophia Essay Contest submitted in Greek and cherishes traveling with his family to their beloved Chios, throughout Greece, Constantinople, Asia Minor and Europe, visiting sites tied to our faith and heritage. He is honored to have received this recognition.



ST THOMAS YOUTH MINISTRIES



Ambassador Awards 2025



Maria Katsikis - Grade 12 **Ambassador of PEACE (Fellowship)**

Maria is a member of the National, Business, and Spanish Honor Societies, President of both the Hellenic Society and Helping Hands Club, and captain of the Swim Team at Lenape H.S. She works part-time as a swim instructor, including teaching children with special needs. Maria is deeply rooted in her Greek heritage and Orthodox faith.

A lifelong member of St. Thomas, graduate of HOPE, JOY, and Greek School (with honors). She is active in Orthodox Faith Sunday School, Hellenic Heritage Dance Group, and president of GOYA. She has participated in Sights and Sounds, GOYA Olympics, GOYA Soccer Tournaments, Gospel Reading at the Agape Service, diving for the Holy Cross, volunteering at the St. Thomas Agora, and other service projects. Maria has earned 1st place in the Junior and Senior Divisions of the local St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival and is honored to serve this year as the Ambassador of Peace and Fellowship.



Andreas Stabilopoulos - Grade 10 **Ambassador of HOPE (Witness)**

Andreas, a sophomore at Cherry Hill East High School and lifelong member of St. Thomas and their Orthodox Faith Sunday School, has served in the altar for over six years. Andreas graduated Valedictorian from St. Thomas Hellenic school. He has participated in HOPE, JOY, GOYA, the Hellenic Heritage Dance Group, the St. John Chrysostom

Oratorical Festival, Sights and Sounds, community service projects, and served as a CIT at the church camp. At school, he is a member of the Hellenic Heritage Club and has been involved in theater performances. Andreas was honored with the CHE Character Award last year, reflecting the same values he lives out in his parish community. He remains a true witness to his faith & hope even through life's challenges, continuing to demonstrate kindness & active involvement. He is deeply honored to receive the Ambassador of Hope Award.



ST THOMAS YOUTH MINISTRIES



Ambassador Awards 11.2.2025



Congratulations to Mariella, Maria, Simeon, and Andreas! We pray they will continue to live lives lead by LOVE, PEACE, FAITH, and HOPE! AXIOI!



We congratulate our Youth Worker recipient, Karoline Kokolis and thank her for her hard work on behalf of the Youth of Saint Thomas and beyond! AXIA!



Thank you to the GOYAnS who came to support our Ambassadors!





ST THOMAS YOUTH MINISTRIES



DVYC GOYA Fall Retreat @ Camp Innabah, 11/14 – 11/16



This year was our first year with our Iconostasis in a chapel at camp. What a blessing to have the full size icons!



Saint Thomas' representatives



The focus: Love Thy Neighbor. Father Symeon challenged us to think how we can love our neighbors and lifted up Saint Maria of Paris as a role model for us all. She truly loved all of God's children to the end.





ST THOMAS YOUTH MINISTRIES



DVYC GOYA Fall Retreat @ Camp Innabah, 11/14 - 11/16



There were speakers, games, discussions, opportunities for confession, meals, a dance, free time, and SO much fellowship!



Saint Iakovos Celebration + Youth Sunday 2025

Saint Thomas was blessed to host Saint Iakovos' Name Day services here and we thank the youth who participated in these Holy events. We had the joy to finish the weekend with our annual Youth Sunday celebration and outreach project card making.





ST THOMAS YOUTH MINISTRIES



Saint Iakovos Celebration + Youth Sunday 2025

This year, our parish is fulfilling wish lists for 3 families and providing necessities, gifts, cards, and visits for those Families in need. We are also providing goods for Foster the Family's "Stuff a Stocking" initiative. This ensures teens in care will receive something special for Christmas. These projects can't happen without participation! The families of our youth along with the Youth Ministries, Philoptochos, and Greek School PTO have been working to fulfill the lists. Scan the QR codes to see how you can help.



Each class helped themselves to the craft materials and made personalized cards for our recipients. They made some very beautiful and thoughtful cards! Bravo to our kids. May we all make a point to emulate and to cultivate the thoughtfulness and altruism in them. Beautiful!



Some young people

One aspect of Youth Sunday is our GOYAns having the opportunity to read to the younger classes and be an assistant teacher for a day



went on pre-Thanksgiving deliveries to our families in need. If you would like to be part of the December deliveries and or visits- please scan the QR code to sign up!

Here, Maria and Stella are visiting with Kyria Evangelia, Kyria Anastasia, and Daniel the family bird





ST THOMAS YOUTH MINISTRIES



Upcoming Dates to keep open

- **12/21 – The Nativity Pageant**
 - If a child wishes to participate, please make sure they sign up & attend practices!
- **1/25 – Oratorical Festival Practice Run**
 - If a child wishes to participate in the festival, they must present on 1/25 (to coaches)
 - It's never too early to start writing!
 - Youth 3rd – 6th are invited to Elementary Division
 - 7th – 9th Junior Division
 - 10th – 12th Senior Division
- **2/1 – Godparents' Sunday**
 - A wonderful opportunity to worship and receive with God family and enjoy brunch after
- **2/6 – Family Night**
- **2/26 – Local Oratorical Festival + reception**
- **3/7 – JOY Bible Bowl & DVYC Oratorical**
- **3/14 – Backup date for DVYC Oratorical**
- **3/21 – Sights & Sounds @Holy Trinity Wilm.**
- **4/4 – Saturday of Lazarus D.L. + retreat**
- **4/12 – PASCHA**
- **4/18 – Vespers for Saint Thomas Sunday**
- **4/19 – Saint Thomas Sunday**
- **4/27 – Deadline to register Graduates**
 - All 2026 Graduates whether high school, trade school, college, university, or other
- **5/2 – Metropolis Oratorical Festival**
- **5/3 – Family Night**
- **6/5 – HOPE + JOY end of year event + 6th Grade Sendoff**
- **6/7 – Orthodox Faith Sunday School Graduation + Picnic**
- **6/14 – Scholarship Recognitions**

SAINT THOMAS GOYA



GOYA Board

President: Maria Katsikis,

VP: Dominic Eleftheriou,

Treasurers:

Simeon Poulathas & Michael Nazarides

Recording Secretary: Olga Tsoplakis,

Corresponding Secretary: Adriana Buonamici

Historians:

Nicholas Tripolitis & Georgie Kokolis

GOYA FRAPPE STAND AT THE AGORA



GOYA Fellowship Trip to Treetop Quest Philly



SAINT THOMAS YOUTH MINISTRIES FUNDRAISER

OCTOBER 30, 2025



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NOVEMBER – FEBRUARY EVENTS:

- 11/2/25 Ambassador Awards
 - 11/4/25 Basketball Practice
 - 11/9/25 Basketball Games – St. Thomas vs St. Luke / St. George Cathedral
 - 11/11/25 Basketball Practice
 - 11/13/25 Prepare sandwiches and serve to those in need w/ FOCUS
 - 11/14-16 DVYC GOYA Retreat
 - 11/18/25 Basketball Practice
 - 11/23/25 Youth Sunday at Saint Thomas
 - 11/23/25 Basketball Games – St. Thomas vs. Holy Trinity Egg Harbor Twp
 - 11/25/25 Basketball Practice
 - 11/30/25 Basketball Games – St. Thomas vs. St. George Media
 - 12/2/25 Basketball Practice
 - 12/6/25 DVYC GOYA Nativity Retreat at Saint Thomas
 - 12/7/25 Basketball Games – St. Thomas vs. Holy Trinity Wilmington
 - 12/9/25 Basketball Practice
 - 12/13/25 GOYA Christmas Caroling
 - 12/14/25 Basketball Games – St. Thomas vs. St. Luke / Holy Trinity Wilmington
 - 12/16/25 Basketball Practice
 - 12/29/25 GOYA Christmas Trip to New York City & Radio City Rockettes Show
 - 1/3/26 DVYC GOYA Basketball Quarter-Finals
 - 1/4/26 DVYC GOYA Basketball Semi-Finals
 - 1/6/26 Basketball Practice
 - 1/11/26 DVYC GOYA Basketball Finals
 - 1/18/26 GOYA Basketball Tournament Weekend at Wilmington
 - 1/20/26 Sights and Sounds Practice
 - 1/22/26 GOYA Service Project with FOCUS
 - 1/23/26 Sights and Sounds Practice
 - 2/1/26 DVYC GOYA Basketball All Star Banquet at St. Demetrios Upper Darby
 - 2/3/26 Sights and Sounds Practice
 - 2/6/26 Sights and Sounds Practice
 - 2/10/26 Sights and Sounds Practice
 - 2/13/26 Sights and Sounds Practice
 - 2/14-16 MDF
 - 2/17/26 Sights and Sounds Practice
 - 2/20/26 Sights and Sounds Practice
 - 2/24/26 Sights and Sounds Practice
 - 2/26/26 GOYA Service Project with FOCUS
 - 2/27/26 1st Salutations & Oratorical Festival, Sights and Sounds Practice
-

Saint Thomas Hellenic School PTO



The Saint Thomas Hellenic School PTO Board has been hard at work this year planning on various events for the 2025-26 school year. The newly elected Board Members as of September 2025 are as follows:

Effie Maltabes-President, Sophia Christoforatos-Vice President, Elli Kontanidis-Treasurer, Magdalini Dimitrakis-Recording Secretary, Fragista Lagonik-Corresponding/Social Media Secretary, Christina Paxinos-Member at Large, Angela Delimetas-Member at Large, Maria Rassoulis-Member at Large and Angela Kanos-Member at Large.



On September 11, 2025, the Saint Thomas Hellenic School PTO kicked off the new school year with a Coffee Meet and Greet social event in the Saint Irene Hall. The event was created to welcome new families to our Hellenic School Community and reunite with our current families after our summer break. The PTO offered various refreshments to our parents. The PTO Board and parents welcomed Father Georgios to the Saint Thomas community who was also in attendance.

A new monthly event, PTO Treat Days began this school year for the Hellenic School students. The students were given a treat from Mister Softee on the first day of Greek School on September 8th after the Agiasmo Blessing. On October 2nd, the students had Lollipop Day. Each student was given a bundle of Lollipops at dismissal. The students were very excited and look forward to seeing the PTO each month on Treat Days!

We would like to thank all of our Hellenic School parents who volunteered during Coffee Hour for the month of October. Your time and donations are very much appreciated. Thank you to Joanna Stabliopoulos, Angela Kappatos, Sophia Christoforatos, Elli Kotanidis, Fragista Lagonik, Elina Gavras, Corrina Tyris, Angela Delimetas, Magdalini Dimitrakis, Angela Kokolis, Mary Hatzicostas, Christina Paxinos, Sareen Barbouletos, Dimitra Tasiopoulos and Candace Antonopoulos.

Our Hellenic School has many exciting events ahead. Keep monitoring your email, our social media pages or sign up for instant Remind alerts.



ΠΛΟΥΣΙΑ ΣΕ ΣΥΓΚΙΝΗΣΕΙΣ Η ΓΙΟΡΤΗ ΤΟΥ ΟΧΙ ΣΤΟ ΤΣΕΡΙ ΧΙΛ



Του Δημήτρη Τσάκα

ΝΕΑ ΥΟΡΚΗ. Πλούσια σε συγκινήσεις, σε νουθεσίες και διδαχές ήταν η μαθητική γιορτή του Ελληνικού Απογευματινού Σχολείου της κοινότητας του Αγίου Θωμά στο Τσέρι Χιλ της Νέας Ιερσέης, για την 85η επέτειο του Όχι και του Έπους του '40, που έλαβε χώρα το απόγευμα της Δευτέρας, 27ης Οκτωβρίου 2025.

Πρωταγωνιστές της εορτής ήταν οι μαθητές, όλων των τάξεων, οι οποίοι ξεδίπλωσαν το ταλέντο τους στην ζωγραφική, στην υποκριτική, καθώς επίσης και στην ωδική, και οι οποίοι απέσπασαν τα ευμενή σχόλια των γονέων, των παππούδων, των μελών και των στελεχών της μεγαωνύμου κοινότητας.

Η διεύθυνση του Σχολείου εξέδωσε ανακοίνωση στην οποία μεταξύ άλλων αναφέρεται:

Το πνεύμα της ελευθερίας και της μνήμης ζωντανεύει στο Ελληνικό Σχολείο Αγίου Θωμά τη Δευτέρα 27 Οκτωβρίου, καθώς μαθητές, δάσκαλοι, γονείς και μέλη της κοινότητας συγκεντρώθηκαν για να γιορτάσουν την επέτειο της Ημέρας του ΟΧΙ.

Στην αίθουσα εκδηλώσεων παρουσιάστηκαν τα έργα τέχνης των μικρών μαθητών, οι οποίοι εξέφρασαν δημιουργικά την υπερηφάνειά τους προς τιμήν της εθνικής εορτής. Η εκδήλωση, μια επί πλέον απόδειξη της ακλόνητης αφοσίωσης του προσωπικού του σχολείου και της υποστήριξης της κοινότητας, ανέδειξε τη δέσμευση του σχολείου στη διατήρηση της ελληνικής κληρονομιάς και στην ενστάλαξη της πολιτιστικής υπερηφάνειας στη νεότερη γενιά.

Οι μαθητές ανέβηκαν στη σκηνή με υπερηφάνεια και ενθουσιασμό, αφηγούμενοι ιστορίες

ηρωικών πράξεων και ιστορικών γεγονότων.

Τα ποιήματα που απήγγειλαν και τα τραγούδια που τραγούδησαν, όχι μόνο προκάλεσαν συναισθήματα, αλλά και ένα αίσθημα υπερηφάνειας και νοσταλγίας για την Ελλάδα στους παρευρισκόμενους.

«Ο εορτασμός ήταν μια ισχυρή υπενθύμιση της σημασίας της μετάδοσης παραδόσεων, γλώσσας και εθίμων στις νέες γενιές, διασφαλίζοντας ότι το πλούσιο μωσαϊκό της ελληνικής κληρονομιάς θα διαρκέσει στο χρόνο», καταλήγει η ανακοίνωση τύπου.





METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY DIACONATE RETREAT

The First Annual Metropolis of New Jersey Diaconate Retreat under the direction of His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey was held Saturday October 25, 2025 at the Saint Thomas Greek Orthodox Church. Father Emanuel Tsarnas, deacon at the Saint George Greek Orthodox Church in Ocean, New Jersey organized the Retreat with the direction of His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos. The Retreat was held for those ordained as deacons in the Metropolis, those waiting for ordination, those who were students in the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Theological Seminary Diaconate Certificate Program and those interested in attending

the program.

Father Emanuel Tsarnas gave a brief history of the Diaconate Program at Holy Cross and also what being a deacon entails. He then introduced His Eminence to speak. His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey spoke positively and praised the diaconate program saying that the diaconate was a vital part of the Orthodox Church. He instructed everyone to study the Liturgy prior to serving and to follow the Liturgicon. His Eminence thanked everyone for attending and was pleased with the turnout.

Following lunch special guest Father John Chrysavgis, Arch Deacon of the Ecumenical Throne spoke to the attendees concerning where the diaconate was headed to in

the Orthodox Church. Father John has been a deacon for 41 years which he said is usually a steppingstone to the priesthood. He said that most Orthodox are not used to a deacon in the services, however, the deacon is part of the tradition of the Church. The deacon's calling is service in the Church much the same as when the Apostles ordained and laid hands on the first deacons in Acts Chapter 6 when Stephen and five others were made the first deacons. Father John noted that Saint Athanasios was a deacon at the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea. Today the deacon is the mediator between the ordained clergy and the laity as they move inside and outside the altar during services. The deacon today stands during the Liturgy "within earshot" of the Theotokos asking for her intercession and supplication. Moreover, deacons are vital in their service to the Church as they teach at Holy Cross Theological School, are the Youth Advisors, Chaplains and serve in the International Orthodox Christian Charities and Orthodox Christian Mission Center.

The Diaconate Retreat was a blessing for those attending and all are looking forward to the Diaconate Retreat next year.



Stellios Lambrou

“THE ST. THOMAS “KALI PAREA” ENJOYS ITS 19th YEAR!”



The “Good Company” is a free-wheeling get-together of Greek-American men, mainly retirees, that meet once a week “cafe-style” to drink their coffee, and to share their pleasant company and discuss issues of interest. The language is Greek. Everyone is welcome, every Wednesday at 10am-12noon, especially new members, that are received with great pleasure! The “Kali Parea” (Καλή Παρέα) started 19 years ago in November, with three friends: Chris Vranas of Mt. Laurel, George Kousoulis of Haddonfield, and Chris Sivas of Cherry Hill, meeting for coffee at the Moorestown Mall.

They soon invited and attracted many more, and it was not long afterward that they moved their

“kafeneio” to a small room in the basement of St. Thomas Greek Orthodox Church at Cherry Hill, NJ. This get-together became so popular that the original meeting room was not large enough, so it was moved to its present location, at the St. Irene Hall of the same basement. At this unique social gathering, there thrives a culture of sharing historical perspectives, humorous jokes, educational tidbits, fond memories of Greece, and the experiences of becoming Greek-Americans.

Over the intervening years, this unique group has thrived, with the current number being 44 members. Each weekly gathering often exceeds 30 people, especially through the Fall through

Spring, when many return from their annual visit to “The Homeland, Greece.” Their roots come from throughout Greece, including the Ionian and Aegean islands, the mainland North and South, and the Peloponnese.

Most were born in Greece, and came to America as young men, seeking their fortune in the “New World,” met the difficult challenges of young immigrants, and became successful businessmen or professionals, family men, and community leaders. They love their mother country, but also share a deep affection for their second “Patrida,” the USA.

As is to be expected, as most members are of retirement age, over the passing years quite a number have been called to join their maker, and thus over 20 of the original group are fondly remembered. We are happy to have two of the founders, George and Chris, with us. Although the “Kali Pareia” remains – on purpose – unofficial, so as to maintain its loose, free-wheeling “cafeneio style” existence, it has in

63
fact become a recognized and respected part of the Greek community. It is always a pleasure to be joined, at the Wednesday meetings, with St. Thomas' recently welcomed Priest, Fr. Georgios Oikonomou, who enjoys the company and contributes to the discussions.

Several of its members, with experience in restaurants, are part of the core of the volunteers that man the kitchen and/or serving at various community functions, including the annual “Agora” (Greek Food Festival,) the monthly Maturity Club's luncheons, and supporting and being members of other social organizations of the St. Thomas Church. The “Kali Pareia” supports the Church itself, as well as to the various philanthropic societies such as the Philoptochos, and others. Together with the Maturity Club, the “Kali Pareia” co-sponsored one of the Saints of the recently completed iconography project of St. Thomas Church at Cherry Hill.



HELLENIC HERITAGE DANCE GROUP



The Hellenic Heritage Dance Group had a joyful presence at this year's Agora, performing throughout the weekend and sharing authentic folk dances from many regions of Greece, highlighted by their beautiful handmade costumes.

In December the group is holding its Annual Holiday Pastry Tray Sale, our main fundraiser. Each tray includes 30 pieces of assorted Greek pastries (Baklava, Melomakarona, Kourabiedes, Pasta Flora, Koulourakia and Paximadia), gift-wrapped and perfect for family, friends, and coworkers. Trays may be picked up on Sunday, December 14, in the Danielle Kousoulis Cultural Center between 12:00–2:00 pm.

For orders or information, please contact Marianthe Melissaratos (856-495-3026), Margarita Zografos Vrettos (856-520-1814), or Kathy Zografos (856-524-1246). The Hellenic Heritage Dance Group warmly thanks all who helped bake and wrap the pastries and all who continue to support our dancers. Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year!

Hellenic Heritage Dance Group

New Member Registration



The registration period for new dance group members will be January 1st through January 14th

Girls must be 12 years old / boys must be 11 years old by December 31, 2026 and paid members of the St. Thomas Parish

First practice for new dancers will be held on January 14th at 5:30 pm

Registration Forms are available by emailing st.thomashhdg@gmail.com

Forms must be received by Wednesday, January 14th

For more information please contact:
Margarita Zografos Vrettos (856-520-1814) or
Kathy Zografos (856-524-1246)



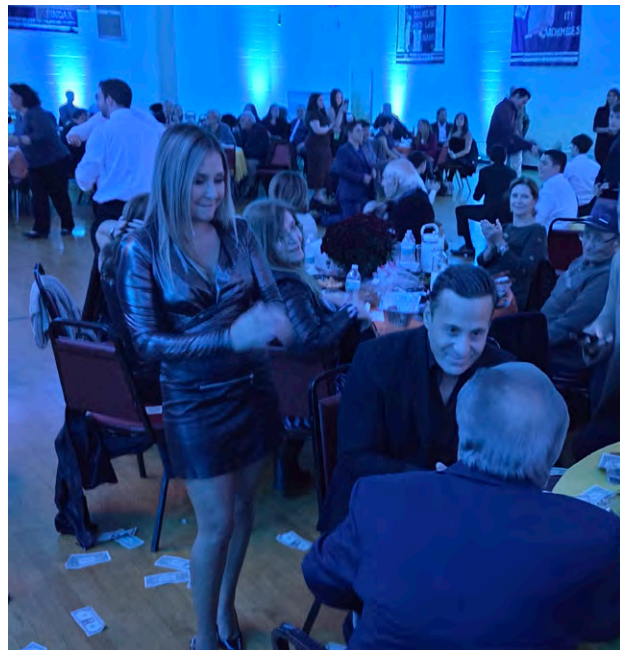
BOUZOUKIA NIGHT by AHEPA

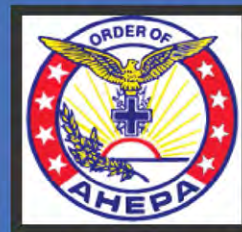
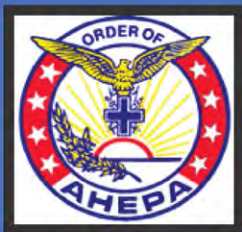


On Saturday, October 24, 2025, AHEPA hosted BOUZOUKIA Night. Bouzoukia music is a vibrant genre of Greek popular music centered around the bouzouki, a string instrument. It is a fundamental part of modern Greek culture, found in everything from traditional gatherings to modern nightclubs called bouzoukia. The event was held at the Danielle Kousoulis Center's Hall and featured Yianni Papastefanou and his Orchestra.

The chair of the event was Bill Kalavrouziotis and he and his crew cooked souvlakia on charcoal pits all throughout the night.. Ahepa President Taso Malapetsas thanked the attendees and sponsors as the proceeds went to Ahepa's iconography pledge of \$100,000. The community's President, Anastasios Efstratiades, was brought forward as well to express the appreciation of the parish to the local Ahepa members as supporters of many of his parish fundraising initiatives. More importantly, the entertainment and club like atmosphere brought forward many of the younger members of the community to dance all night including the Hellenic Heritage Dance Group, GOYA, Sons of Pericles and Maids of Athena.

BOUZOUKIA Night was an opportunity for the community to wind down and enjoy each other's company on the heels of another successful AGORA festival. Many in the community danced the night away and quite a few parishioners also took their turn at the microphone leading traditional Greek song standards. With such a successful event and turnout, AHEPA pledged to continue BOUZOUKIA Night as an annual event.





AHEPA 2026 MID-ATLANTIC HELLENIC HISTORY TOURNAMENT

ARE YOU READY TO SHOWCASE YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF GREEK HISTORY?

Who: All students in grades 8-12
Playing in three (3) member teams
(Hellenic heritage not required)

When: Saturday January 24, 2026 @ 9:30 am

Where: St. Thomas Greek Orthodox Church
615 Mercer Street
Cherry Hill, NJ 08002

LEARN ABOUT GREEK HISTORY, FROM THE TIME OF AGAMEMNON TO PRIME MINISTER TSIPRAS, AND COMPETE FOR PRIZES!!

How:

- Register your team through your local AHEPA Chapter
- Study the Hellenic history book provided to you
- Compete against other teams by answering Jeopardy-style questions

1st Prize: \$1,000 FOR EACH MEMBER OF THE WINNING TEAM

2nd Prize: \$500 FOR EACH MEMBER OF THE SECOND TEAM

Sponsored by: AHEPA | Camden Chapter No. 69

For more information, please contact: Steven Marmarou, PDG | AHEPA District No. 5

P: (609) 206-9447 | E: marm1025@gmail.com

Cosmas Diamantis, PCP | AHEPA Camden Chapter No. 69

P: (856) 220-2779 | E: cosmasdiamantis@ahepa.org

AHEPA CAMDEN CHAPTER 69
celebrates and toasts
our
AHEPAN of the Year

ANASTASIOS EFSTRATIADES, Esq.

*Friday, January 30, 2026
7pm Cocktails, Dinner
and Dancing
\$100*

Adelphia's
Clements Bridge Road
Deptford, NJ



*Donations accepted- proceeds benefit Saint Thomas Greek
Orthodox Church*

DAUGHTERS OF PENELOPE – NIKE CHAPTER #230

The sisters of Daughters of Penelope, Nike Chapter #230, have had a very active start to the year at Saint Thomas.

During our St. Thomas 2025 AGORA, the ladies faithfully staffed the outdoor bakery, offering pastries and treats with their usual warm hospitality. Their hard work helped make the AGORA a success and supported the ministries of our parish.

Members also took part in a Walkathon at Cooper River to benefit IOCC, witnessing to the Daughters' commitment to philanthropy and service beyond our parish community.

Nike Chapter #230 is pleased to announce the 2025–2026 officers:

Andrea Tsapralis – President
 Melissa Giambanis – Vice President
 Maria Pappas – Recording Secretary
 Bonnie Stylianos – Treasurer
 Christine Onken – Assistant Treasurer
 Amani Mazahreh – Corresponding Secretary
 Barbara Inglessis – Assistant Corresponding Secretary

We congratulate the new board and thank all the sisters for their continued dedication to faith, fellowship, and service.



Apartments At Saint Thomas News



As of August 2025, a new board has been elected at the
Apartments at Saint Thomas.

It consists of the following members:

Dimitrios Rozanitis, George Horiates, Efstrathios Karadonis, Charles Sandilos, Anastasios Efstratiades, Bonnie Bolton-Stylianios, Martina Harris, Christine Onken, and Anthony Velahos.

Dimitrios Rozanitis, President

Address

621 Mercer Street Cherry Hill, New Jersey 08002

Phone

(856) 448-4121

Email

manager@stthomas.prd.net

The Saint Thomas Choir



For more than fifty years, the Saint Thomas Choir has stood in the pews not to perform, but to serve the Divine Liturgy. Their voices join those of the priestesses and faithful, helping our whole community enter more deeply into the beauty of Orthodox worship. In our Church, music is not entertainment; it is a continuation of the Byzantine chant tradition and the choral singing that Greek faithful have patiently shaped in America over the past century; a shared act of prayer.

This ministry remains one of the most “Saint Thomas” things about our parish. Our singers are parishioners—youth, parents, and grandparents, not paid professionals. Every voice is a gift freely given, an offering of time and talent to God. Over the past year we were blessed with new members, most of them youth, whose fresh energy has brought new joy to our choir family. Seeing multiple generations singing side by side is a reminder that the praise of God belongs to every age.

That spirit of service and joy has also reached beyond our walls. Last February, the Saint Thomas Mixed Youth & Adults Choir participated in the Metropolis of New Jersey Music and Dance Festival (MDF) in Philadelphia, offering a moving performance and representing our parish with dignity and warmth. This year, God willing, our choir will once again take part in the 2nd Metropolis of New Jersey Music and Dance Festival on February 13–15, preparing a new program of liturgical music as a witness to our living faith and tradition.

If you feel drawn to this ministry, whether you are experienced or a complete beginner, there is a place for you. Your prayers, your presence, and your voice can help all of us sing “with one mouth and one heart” to the glory of God.

Sacraments and Remembrances

In this section of our newsletter, we will be sharing important milestones in the lives of our parishioners—celebrating the sacraments of Baptisms, Weddings, and honoring those who have passed. We invite you to join us in offering your prayers and support as we celebrate these special moments of faith and remembrance within our Saint Thomas family.



Baptisms

9/13/25- Calliope Lynn Padin
 9/13/25- Valentine Luca Rapposelli
 9/20/25- Theodore Aaron Reeves
 9/20/25- Zayn Naser Mazahreh
 9/20/25- Ayla Naser Mazahreh
 10/5/25- Cassandra Haines
 10/18/25- Violeta Fitton Langton
 10/18/25- Penelope Ann Davis
 10/18/25- Aurora Iris Romero
 11/9/25- Christos Constantine Cocordas
 11/15/25- John Leavitt Arhontoulis
 11/29/25- Athena Vardaxis

Chrismations

9/28/25- Alyssa A. Zito

Weddings

9/7/25- Luis D. Mena Villegas/Konstantina I. Logotheitis
 10/4/25- Andrew Karolidis/Stella M. Pratsinakis
 10/18/25- Etan J. Pfeiffer/Demetra Fotiou
 11/8/25- George Riginos/Alyssa A. Zito
 11/22/25- Matthew A. Horiates/ Kiriakoula M. Gregor

Funerals

9/12/25- Kathleena S. Lavdas
 9/19/25- Joanna A. Savvides
 9/23/25- Maria Kontos
 9/30/25- Helen Sosangelis
 11/12/25- Konstantinos Lyras
 11/24/25- Maria Doulis- Patterson

SAINT THOMAS GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING



SUNDAY MARCH 8, 12:00pm

**Danielle Kousoulis
Cultural Center**

ST. THOMAS GOT TALENT TELETHON



• LIVE **TALENT SHOW.**
SUNDAY, MARCH 8TH

DANIELLE KOUSSOULIS **CENTER** & YOUTUBE STREAM
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• TO PARTICIPATE **PLEASE CALL THE OFFICE** FOR MORE INFORMATION •

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ATHERAS CHAPTER 12 CORDIALLY INVITES YOU TO
THE ICARIAN DINNER DANCE STARRING

VIOLETA IKARI

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2026
DANIELLE KOUSOULIS GREEK CENTER

Featuring

SERGIANI

GREEK MUSIC BAND

WITH

ZACHARIAS HORIATIS
CHRIS PAPSON
Bouzouki

STAVROS SKYRIANOS
Violin


VASILIS VASILIADIS
Laouto

YIANNIS POLITIS
HELIAS MAKRYNOS
Guitar

DIMOS TSIGKAKOS
Toubeleki



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TICKETS: \$90

STUDENTS W/ID: \$50

CHILDREN (5-12): \$25

For ticket reservations of 10 persons,
please contact dance chairmen
Theologos Horiates: (856) 366-3830
George Horiates: (856) 986-8972

DOORS OPEN AT 8PM

Danielle Kousoulis Greek Center at
St. Thomas
Greek Orthodox Church
615 Mercer St,
Cherry Hill, NJ 08002





Book Your Free
Exam Online!



Hello, Saint Thomas Community!
We recently opened our doors near you.

Stop by our new office and ask us about:

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LAS VEGAS**

STGOC PRESENTS

2026

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Celebration

WEDNESDAY, 31ST DECEMBER

CASINO GAMES & LIVE MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

NEO KYMA



DJ MAKIS

DOORS OPEN @ 9PM | ADULT TICKET : \$150 | YOUTH: \$50 | GAMES & PRIZES

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