

MAY 2016



Voice of St. George

**SAINT GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
OF THE DESERT**

74-109 LARREA ST., PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA



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MID-PENTECOST

This year the Feast of Mid-Pentecost will be celebrated on Wednesday, May 25, 2016. It is a "movable feast day," meaning that the date on which it is celebrated depends of the date of Easter from year to year.

Mid-Pentecost commemorates the mid-point between the celebration of Pascha and the celebration of Pentecost. Within this season the feast of the Ascension of Christ is also celebrated (this year, June 9th).

Mid-Pentecost mirrors the Old Testament commemoration known as the Feast of Tabernacles, which commemorates the mid-point between the time when the Hebrews, under the slavery of Pharaoh, placed the blood of the lamb on their door posts at the beginning of Exodus *and* the time when they entered the Promised Land.

The Gospel reading for Mid-Pentecost tells us of Christ preaching in the temple "in the middle of the feast." At this time, Jesus was confronted about why he healed a man on the Sabbath at the pool near the Sheep Gate (the account of which is read in the Gospel on the Sunday preceding Mid-Pentecost). This opened the way for our Lord to speak about the Law, as well as the hypocrisy of those who know the Law and do not follow it, noting that they are to be merciful as God is merciful. *"If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with Me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well?"* (St. John 7:25).

With this, we learn that Christ our True God is indeed the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and the Law.

Mid-Pentecost is a transition from our release from the bondage of death, through the Resurrection of Christ, to our entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven—and the Church is the Kingdom of Heaven on earth through the grace of the Holy Spirit (the celebration of Pentecost). As noted previously, within this time-frame, the Feast of our Lord's Ascension is celebrated

The Ascension of our Lord is important to us, because we are reminded that Christ ascended to Heaven "to prepare a place for us." (St. John 14:2). With the Ascension, our humanity is taken up to God's Kingdom in the Person of Christ Who is fully God and fully Man. As such, He is our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16 and 9:15). In addition, as our Lord ascended to the Heavenly Kingdom, He will return in

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glory to judge the living and the dead. Finally, the Ascension is significant for us to cleave to the Gospel with assured faith. The Biblical Scholar, Wayne Jackson, writes: *"The ascension of Christ presents a problem for the opponents of Christianity. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, or if He somehow survived the ordeal of Calvary and died later, surely the Lord's enemies would have vigorously sought to reclaim His body, thus nullifying the 'resurrection' story. With such a 'trophy' Christianity could have been crushed in its infancy...The lack of evidence indirectly supports the record of the ascension; there was no earthly corpse."* ("Ascension of Christ: A Most Significant Event", www.christiancourier.com).

Mid-Pentecost presents for us the ideal image of our relationship with God and our fellow human beings. Fr. Seraphim Rose tells us as follows: *"This feast continues the celebration of our Lord's Resurrection, emphasizing His Divine nature and glory; for it was proper to no one but to God to conquer death. At the same time, it reminds us of the approaching Descent of the Holy Spirit and prepares us for it, teaching us to find in Christ our God the Source of life and grace Who is He Who sends the Holy Spirit (St. John 16:7). We are to become ourselves not merely recipients, but even givers of the gifts of the Holy Spirit: 'Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture says, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water' (St. John 7:38)."* ("Thirst for the Holy Spirit: On the Feast of Mid-Pentecost", sermon by Fr. Seraphim Rose, May, 1965).

This is a season in which especially we are all reminded of our eternal destiny with God. On Wednesday, May 13, 2009, the Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Philaret spoke from the pulpit, saying: *"St. Ambrose of Optina warned that the era of the Antichrist will arrive and the Church will endure such tribulations as no one has ever before known...At the same time, whoever bows their heads under Christ will learn that His burden is light and will immediately feel free – that the yoke of Christ does not choke; to the contrary, it eases our life...The Christian should not grow downcast in spirit. Recall how approvingly the Lord, in the Book of Revelation, speaks to the angel of the Church of Philadelphia: 'Because you have kept the word of My patience (His Divine Word), I also will keep you from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon the world (Rev. 3:10).'"* +FR. THEODORE

PHILOPTOCHOS

KNITTING

PROJECT



On May 4th Christina Kundanis and Rhonda Latkovic visited **City of Hope** to distribute the **handmade knitted items** that were made by ladies of our **Philotochos Society**.

Our COH contact was **Laura Castillo**, a recreational therapist for the 5th & 6th floors that contain the adult cancer patients, many who are undergoing bone marrow and stem cell transplants. Christina and Rhonda, along with Laura, another therapist, Edwin, and nurse, Jennifer, helped to distribute the items. Everything was loaded into a wagon and we went room to room to give the knitted items to the female patients. (See photo). They were so appreciative of the gifts and in all cases their emotions were overwhelmingly grateful! They were able to pick the color and item they wanted as we had over 40 individual items for them to choose from. One patient allowed us to take a photo of her and her mother wearing the knit headbands they chose! (See photo). Finally, we were able to leave the quilts and knit throws that were made with Laura to distribute them to the children cancer patients since COH allows only limited access to the children's cancer floor. (See photo).

As a former cancer patient at COH, it was so wonderful to be a part of this Philoptochos Project and give back to the patients, like me, who are undergoing treatment for cancer. I would like to express my appreciation to the Ladies of Philoptochos for taking on this project and to those wonderful ladies that made the knitted, crocheted, and quilted items for the patients. This project brought a smile to all!

– RHONDA LATKOVIC,
Philoptochos Knitting Project

Photographs on the next page – -->

PHILOPTOCHOS KNITTING PROJECT



Laura Castillo with Christina Kundanis at the City of Hope with the knitted Philoptochos items for patients.



At the City of Hope, a cancer patient embraces her mother as they model the Philoptochos knitted caps and blankets



Rhonda Latkovic, Knitting Project Chairperson, Christina Kundanis and Laura Castillo at the City of Hope with the knitted items for cancer patients.

2016 ENDOWMENT FUND RESULTS

The Saint George of the Desert Greek Orthodox Church Endowment Fund realized a modest gain of 1.12% for the 1st Quarter 2016 bringing its total balance to **\$276,778.21**. There were total donations of \$150.00 for the 1st Quarter.

Our current Asset Allocation follows the Fund's By-Laws as shown below:

-Domestic Equities-	\$130,198.56	48%
-Domestic Fixed Income-	\$121,523.22	43%
-International Equities-	\$ 19,575.21	7%
Cash & Equivalents-	\$ 5,481.22	2%

Domestic Equities rose .25% for the quarter vs. a 0.83% Benchmark because of broader diversity investments in our fund. The International Fund lost -2.53% for the year vs. -3.01% against the Benchmark due to Euro Zone and PAC-Rim low growth. Fixed Income grew 2.73% vs. a 1.37% Benchmark.

The Resource Group, who manages the fund, assesses a 1% Advisory Fee which amounted to \$685.93 or .25% of the current balance which is the rate charged to charities serviced by the group vs. their standard 2% fee. All funds are "No Load" meaning the funds do not charge an administrative fee.

I investigated other management firms during the quarter. Citibank will charge 2% of the balance and invest 100% in Fixed Income Bond Funds. Wells Fargo will do the same.

Although there is volatility in the market, The Resource Group feels the proper course is to maintain the exposure to risk assets. They still like the odds of Equities outperforming Fixed Income.

– NICK LATKOVIC,
Endowment Fund Chairman

HOLY WEEK

This year, Holy Week Services at St. George were especially inspirational for all of our parishioners due to the excellent and heart-felt singing of our parish choir, led by **Annette Laskaris**. The liturgical hymns sung by the choir throughout Holy Week were truly a great blessing.

In addition, we thank God for the wonder chanting of our Church's Holy Week Troparia by **Deaconess, Krisann Kontaxis**, whose chanting style was both melodic and, above all prayerful.

Let us not forget the **Readers** who read the Holy Week Scripture passages with great piety, led by **J.J. Richards**. The Readers were: **Matushka Gloria Lehman, Louise Dobbs Barringer, Annette Lewis, Eve Meek, Emily Tcharos, Angelo Veroulis, Tina Veroulis and Eva Canakis**. At the **Agape Vesper Service** on Sunday, May 1st, the Gospel passage was read in different languages other than Greek and English. **Emily Tcharos** read in **French**; **Doug Lyons**; read in **German**; **Deacon Euthym** read in **Latin**.

We were also blessed by two **Myrrh-bearers**, who lovingly adorned the Epitaphio with flowers on Holy Friday night: **Melina Hawkins** and **Eleni Castrale**. As always, the Epitaphio was beautifully decorated by the ladies of our parish, led by **Lula Valissarakos**. In addition, Holy Week individual icons were decorated by **Eva Canakis**.

ICON PROJECT

Fr. Ted and Deacon Euthym are heading up a project to add icons to the interior of our church temple. Iconographer Bruno Salvatore, who installed our mosaic icons, will be meeting with Fr. Ted and Deacon Euthym this summer to develop plans to include more mosaic icons to be installed around the icon of the "Platytera" behind the altar table and at the arch-way leading from the sanctuary into the narthex. Donations for the installation of these mosaic icons will include the cost of the icon as well as a contribution to our parish general fund.

Already, there are Orthodox faithful from our

own parish as well as from other parishes who have expressed enthusiasm regarding this project. More details will be provided in the near future.

THE SCRIP PROGRAM

From the Scrip website, we learn about how the Scrip Program can certainly help our St. George parish:

"In addition to weekly collections, events, and product sales, your church could raise money with a no-sell program such as Scrip fundraising.

Scrip requires no extra time or money to be spent. Families simply do their weekly shopping with scrip gift cards and, in turn, raise money for your church. A Scrip provider, the Great Lakes Scrip Center, can assist your church with enrolling families and purchasing the gift cards.

As soon as they order a gift card, a rebate will go directly to your church, and families will use that gift card in place of a credit card or cash. Scrip fundraising is easy, time-effective, and families will also benefit from helping their church while they make everyday purchases.

There are many options for fundraising for your church. Remember to keep your congregation's interests at the center and communicate how important fundraising is for the life of your church." (website: www.shopwithscrip.com)

Presvytera Petula Pantels has offered to chair this program and lead in this effort. She will be appointing others to help, as well. Indeed, the membership of our Parish Council is enthusiastically looking forward to working with Presvytera in implementing the Scrip Program in our parish.

When families in our parish place orders for scrip, they pay full face value for the gift cards. Families use it for as much of their shopping as they can, and with over 700 retailers available.

More details will be presented in the very near future.

PARISH LANDSCAPE PROJECT

As you probably have seen, our desert landscape conversion project was just completed during Holy Week. The landscape company who won the bid process and did the work was Valley-Wide Services, Eddie Ortega. (See photo). The front and driveway side of the church is now done in desert plants and ground cover. The sprinkler controls were totally replaced with new, updated equipment, and additional outdoor lighting was added.

In addition, the planter box & wall to the right side of the back courtyard was cleaned out of weeds and replanted with roses and bougenvilla. The parking lot islands will be freshened up after a sprinkler repair is completed in the near future.

We will be "tweaking" the landscape over the next week or so, adding additional plants, a couple of concrete benches, and a few other minor adjustments.

The area located near the bell tower was purposefully left free of plantings as we are anticipating a memorial wall to be added to this section later this year. More information on this project will be available soon.

In all, the new desert landscaping cost **\$15,450.00**. We received four donations from parishioners totaling **\$1450.00**. Coachella Valley Water District approved our completed project on May 2nd, which qualifies us for a rebate of approximately **\$3500.00**. In addition, we will save **\$200.00** per month in landscaping fees and **\$120-180.00** in water and penalty fees per month. Annualized savings are approximately **\$4000.00** per year. With these savings, the project will basically pay for itself in less than 3 years! And we can all be grateful to be good stewards of God's wonderful resources here on earth!

—SPIRO ATMOS & RHONDA LATKOVIC,
Project Coordinators.



To the left: Eddie Ortega our landscaper is pictured silhouetted against the white north wall of our church temple.



Pictured to the left: The front "yard" of our church property, with the landscaping project completed.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA GREEK FESTIVALS IN MAY & JUNE, 2016

May

St. John the Baptist OC Greek Festival

When: May 20-22, 2016; Fri., 3-10 pm, Sat., 12-10 pm, Sun., 12-10 pm. Address: 405 N. Dale Ave, Anaheim, CA 92801. Contact information: www.stjohnanaheim.org, (714) 827-0181

St. Nicholas Valley Greek Festival

When: May 28-30, 2016; Sat.-Mon. 1-9 pm
Where: Address: 9501 Balboa Blvd., Northridge, CA. Contact information: www.valleygreekfestival.com, (818) 886-4040

June

St. George Greek Festival

When: June 3-5, 2016, Sat.-Sun. 11 am - 10 pm
Address: 10846 Downey Ave. Downey, CA 90241. Contact information: www.stgeorgedowney.org, (562) 862-6461

**ST. GEORGE
GOLF
TOURNAMENT
MAY 6-7, 2016**

Photo to the right: Dr. Steven Steele won the "Hole-in-One" award at this year's golf tournament - a brand new Civic Honda for Dr. Steele and \$15,000 for our St. George Greek Orthodox parish. Dr. Steele is depicted in the center of the photograph. To the left, Dr. Jim Christopoulos; to the right, Dick Ziegler



Golf Tournament-Saturday, May 7th at Desert Willow Golf Resort: "Ladies and Gentlemen, start your engines!"



Pictured above: to the left, Chris Maletis; to the right, George Argyros, Golf Tournament chairman.

Congratulations to the winners of this year's St. George Golf Tournament on May 6-7, 2016 at Desert Willow Golf Resort in Palm Desert.

The winners of the Friday Tournament, stroke-play, are:

- 1st Place: Ted Wilson
- 2nd Place: Fr. Ted Dorrance (St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, Portland, Oregon)
- 3rd Place: Olef Barka

The winners of the Saturday Tournament, scramble format, are:

- 1st Place: Deacon Euthym Kontaxis, M.D., Michael Kontaxis, Chris Maletis, Craig Castrale

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Dr. Steven Steele with his wife, Lynanne, and tournament team-mate, Josh Braun.



The "Golf Tournament Saturday Lamb Dinner." George Argyros and Vasili Papadopoulos gather participants for dinner.

ST. GEORGE GOLF TOURNAMENT, continued

2nd Place: Nick Speliopoulos, Bill Stevens, Ken Schwoerer, Neil Macchlis

3rd Place: Dr. Steve Steele, Dr. Jim Christopoulos, Dick Ziegler, Josh Braun

The Golf Tournament featured a steak dinner on Friday night, May 6th and a traditional Greek lamb dinner on Saturday night, May 7th. Both dinners were held at our parish hall.

Stand out performances in helping to make this year's St. George Golf Tournament a success were given by:

George Argyros, Chairman

Nick Speliopoulos Lula Valissarakos

Vasili Papadopoulos Tasia Richards

Elias Doubaratzis Tina Veroulis

John Petalas J.J. Richards

Nick Kaperonis Doug Lyons

Jim Christopoulos Carol Lyons

PLANNING COMMITTEE

Members met on Tuesday, May 3rd, under the chairmanship of **Dr. Michael Long**. The Planning Committee members in attendance were: **Christina Long, Presvytera Petula Pantels, Anne Boukidis-Michas, Nick Kaperonis, Jim Christopoulos, Doug Lyons, Spiro Astmos.**

The format for the meeting was that of a "Brainstorming session," with members expressing various ideas to secure a future of increased parish growth and ministries.

The committee noted that planning needs to include ways and means to increase the membership and income stream for the parish.

SACRAMENT OF HOLY CHRISMATION

Congratulations to **Joan Fakinos**, who became an Orthodox Christian through the Sacrament of Holy Chrismation on **Holy Saturday, April 30th** during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. **Tina Veroulis** is her Godmother. Many blessings to Joan Fakinos, Tina Veroulis and their families.

PARISH COUNCIL UPDATE



1. Landscaping project: **Rhonda Laktovic** shared that, per her feedback from parishioners, The landscaper will be adding more flowers and benches to the project. She expects it to be completed within the next week. We have received \$1,450 of donations toward this project.

2. Festival Cooking: An issue came up from the city inspectors prior to our festival that we could not cook or serve food on surfaces that could not be wiped down; that means that we would not be able to cook and serve on the back lawn. **George Argyros** is following up with the city, hoping that we can find a way to serve food for two days of the year.

3. Long-Range Planning Committee: **Dr. Michael Long**, Chairman of the Long-Range Planning Committee is preparing to present a report to the June meeting of the Parish Council.

4. Church "fixes:"

a. The main front door to the church does not close on its own as the base panel beneath the door has lost screws and the openings are stripped, not allowing for new screws to simply be put in. **Spiro Astmos** has been looking into solving this issue.

b. During Holy Saturday midnight services/Sunday morning Divine Liturgy, a small group of individuals were using the \$1 candles in the church, instead of the \$5 candles, which were equipped with the "wax dripping cups." Because of this the new pew where they were sitting and the one in front has excessive wax drippings. **Lula Valissarakos** will look into getting the wax out.

5. Questionnaires: Rhonda Latkovic has just now received all the National Church Development Survey Questionnaires from the participants. We will be receiving evaluation/feedback in the near future.

AHEPA NEWS



Congratulations to our brother AHEPAN, **Dr. Steve Steele** for his "hole in one" and winning a new car, as a golfer participating in the St. George Annual Golf Tournament. This win also brought in **\$15,000** for the Church, AXIOS! The historical shot was witnessed by AHEPA brother **J. J. Richards** on the winning hole at **Desert Willow Golf Resort**. As a Chapter, we are proud to see so many AHEPANS supporting the church Fundraiser/Dinner.

On **Sunday, May 15th**, in honor of National AHEPA Sunday, we awarded the finalists for the AHEPA 528 **Fr. Theophilos, Theophilos Memorial Scholarship**. We are proud to announce this year's four outstanding finalists:

– **Depy Karlis** has once again met the **STEM** (Science--Technology-Engineering-Math) scholarship criteria, receiving the **\$1,000 "George Olympios Scholarship"**.

– **Alec Steele** and **Stephanie Christopoulos** are both recipients of the **"Pericles Educational"** award and are receiving **\$750.00**.

– **Katrina Storton** received the top scholarship of **\$1000 for the St. George Educational Award**.

We are very proud of each of these amazing young people. They set an example for other students to follow and positively represent themselves, their parents and this community in the best light. Contributions given in support of the AHEPA 528 **Fr. T. P. Theophilos Memorial Scholarship Fund** are always appreciated. Contact our AHEPA 528 website: www.ahepa528.org. **THANK YOU, to everyone, for all your continued support to the Fr. T. P. Theophilos Memorial Scholarship.**

Looking Ahead...

June 23 - July 23, 2016— An opportunity for study at a fully accredited U.S. University. Information is available on the AHEPA 528 website: www.ahepa528.org. The deadline for applications is **May 31, 2016**.

Summer 2016; We are planning to have representation at the **2016 AHEPA Western Regional District Convention hosted by District 20 on June 23-26, 2016**. The following month the **Supreme convention will be held in Las Vegas, Nevada, taking place between July 24-29**.

November 6, 2016. We look forward to supporting the **Veterans Day Celebration** (Veterans Day 2016 is Friday, November 11th.)

November 12, 2016 - This year, the Thanksgiving Dinner will be hosted by AHEPA chapter 528 *and* Philoptochos at St. George Church. Save the date from now!

Many Thanks to all.

– **WYNN STORTON**,
AHEPA District 20 Governor &
Chapter 528 Secretary



Pictured above are the families of students who were awarded the Fr. T. P. Theophilos Memorial Scholarships: from left to right: Bess, Constantina and Vasili Karalis (on behalf of Depy Karalis); Jim, Stephanie and Gloria Christopoulos; Harry Loukatos, AHEPA President; Ana, Katrina and Wynn Storton, District 20 Governor. Missing: Dr. Steven and Lynnanne Steele and Alec Steele (to be included in future newsletter).



On AHEPA Sunday St. George AHEPANS gathered to honor out-going President, Harry Loukatos.

MEN'S DAY RALLY

The **Men's Day Rally** held at our St. George parish on Saturday, May 14, 2016 was a tremendous success. Speakers included the following: **Fr. Krikor Zakaryan** (St. Garabed Armenian Apostolic Church); **Bishop Shannon Mallory** (Bishop of the Anglican Church); **John Jimenez** (Director of Birth Choice of the Desert); **Blaine Mack** (World War II Veteran, USAF, Retired). Excerpts from one or two of the presentations will be included in future parish publications. Below are pictures from this year's Men's Day Rally.



Anglican Bishop Shannon Mallory (to the left) noted: *"Instead of using things to love people, we use people to love things."*



Fr. Krikor Zakaryan, from St. Garabed Armenian Apostolic Church (to the left) explained that it is a mistake to understand temptations lightly; falling to temptations has far-reaching effects on our relationships with others.



Lt. Coronel Blaine Mack, USAF, retired, spoke about the decline of moral values over the last few generations. The Greatest Generation is one with respect for America and for others vs. today's sense of self-centeredness.



Defense Attorney John Jimenez (to the left) explains that love for God and neighbor is the basis of all law. In today's age, it is critical to walk with God and place the highest value on the dignity of human life.



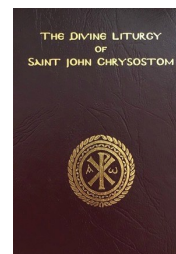
Brother AHEPANs from our home Chapter 538 attended the Men's Day Rally. From left to right: J.J. Richards, Harry Loukatos, Chapter President, and Nick Krespis



In the photo to the left: Pres. Petula Pantels, right, and Outreach Chairperson, Louise Dobbs Barringer, left, who made the Men's Day Rally a success.

ARCHDIOCESE DIVINE LITURGY BOOKS

The newly printed Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Divine Liturgy Books are now available. This is the official Liturgy Book for use in all parishes in our Holy Archdiocese.



Through this summer, our St. George parish will begin using this text of the Divine Liturgy. The "pew" edition of this publication of the Liturgy is available from our Holy Cross Seminary Book Store at **\$9.50 per copy**.

Donations for acquiring 200 copies for our parish will be a great blessing, keeping in mind that each book will "Property of St. George."