

TRANSaGRAM

December 2011

Monthly / Issue No. 11



TRANSFIGURATION GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

Fr. Stephen Lawrence, Pastor

Stewardship Appreciation Luncheon

by Cathy Koufogazos, **Trans-a-Gram** Editor

On Sunday, November 13, over 100 parishioners and family members filled the church hall after Divine Liturgy to attend a stewardship appreciation luncheon, sponsored by the Parish Council. The luncheon was held to show appreciation to the many families who step up and support our church with their time, talents, and treasures throughout the year.

Parish Council President Olivia Sintros addressed the gathering, thanking everyone not just for their attendance, but for their participation in the life of the parish. The luncheon, she said, was the parish council's way to



PHOTO BY KRIS ANDERSON

recognize and to thank the parish for their support. Olivia also thanked Simon and Effie Exarhopoulos and their entire kitchen crew for preparing a full meal that included chicken, rice pilaf, green beans, and salad.



PHOTO BY CATHY KOUFOGAZOS

A slideshow of pictures played throughout the luncheon, highlighting the many events that have taken place over the past year. From family nights to fellowship hours; from

community kitchens to Vacation Church Camps (VCC); from the Grecian Festival to the Golf Tournament: the year was filled with a vibrant parish life made possible by the commitment and participation of the stewards of the church — that is, each one of us.

Fr. Stephen spoke briefly about the importance of stewardship to the life of

the church and to our lives as Christians. He asked everyone to consider thoughtfully their commitment as stewards of the church. Referring to the budget that was just approved at the general assembly meeting the previous week, he suggested that our parish could meet its operating budget and fund its ministries next year if every steward increased their commitment by as little as \$2.50 per week — the price of one large coffee, or spare pocket change.

Everyone ate and mingled freely throughout the afternoon. Warm smiles and friendly conversations were in great abundance. The day lingered as families stayed to enjoy the moment, not wanting it to end too quickly. All in all, the stewardship appreciation luncheon was a solid success and thoroughly enjoyed by all those who attended.



PHOTO BY CATHY KOUFOGAZOS

In this issue

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Fr. Stephen continues his series on the power of stories to convey truth and remind us of who we are. This month: And Death Enters In . . .

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And Death Enters In ...

by Fr. Stephen Lawrence



Eve looked out across the fields. They should have been back by now. Just hours ago she had watched her boys walking into the distance, arguing once again. They argued too often, she thought, always in competition with each other. Just that morning her two sons had brought their offerings before God, Cain laughing as Abel stumbled under the weight of his first-born sheep. Cain carried what he always brought: some sheaves of grain from his last harvest. He never understood why Abel always tried so hard, why Abel was always so eager. Cain's annoyance with his little brother had been getting worse every year. Adam had tried talking with the boys, but they just grew further apart. And then, after lunch, Eve had noticed her two sons slipping off across the fields, arms gesturing their anger at each other as they bickered. But they should have been back by now.

When the sun began to set, Eve had had enough waiting. She and Adam set off toward the slanting light of the disappearing sun, following the erratic footprints of their two sons. The worried parents gazed across the fields, searching for the tall figures of their sons. Just as light was fading, Adam pointed to a bulging shadow at the foot of a rocky hill. Perhaps their sons had decided to sleep out in the fields again. But as they approached in the dim light, they realized that something was not right. Something else was present, something that was tragically out of place. With a shudder, Adam and Eve realized that God felt strangely absent here — as if this place had become apart from Him. And then they found Abel. He lay on the ground as if he had just fallen down, limbs tangled in a heap. But he wasn't breathing, and his body wasn't as warm as it should be. Something was terribly wrong. It took long minutes until Adam and Eve began to understand. And very short moments after that until Eve began to sob. Adam just stood in stunned silence. He looked down at the lifeless form of his child and, for the first time, truly understood God's words of warning — "You must not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, for when you eat from it, you will certainly die."

So this was Death. This is what God had tried so fiercely to protect Adam from, this is what Adam loosed when he ate of the tree. It had been so long since that terrible day when Adam had left Eden; he had almost forgotten how sad God had sounded when He found Adam and Eve hiding in their shame, how sad God had been when Adam and Eve stumbled off into the land outside of Eden. Adam remembered weeping at the entrance, knowing that he would never again know the beauty of the Garden nor the peace of walking with God through the trees. But he had forgotten to worry about Death. He had forgotten God's dire warning, "You will certainly die." And now Death had

entered in and taken Abel, swallowed him up until he was no more. Adam and Eve had no way to be prepared for the pain. And so they wept until long after the moon had risen. They wept for their son, they wept for their loss, they wept for having loosed this monstrous enemy upon their family. And when they could weep no more—when all their tears had been shed—they thought of Cain.

" God had not intended Death. He had labored to protect His Creation from Death's corruption. But He knew the risk that His gift of free will had carried. "

Weeks later Adam and Eve stood again at the grave of their youngest son. They knew now that Cain wasn't coming back. What terrible anger must have gripped their first-born son in that furious moment. What terrible shame must have gripped him when he realized that he couldn't undo that one ferocious outburst. There was no end to their grief. Indeed, Death had taken more than just Abel from them. Gone also was Cain, gone

also was innocence, gone also was security and safety. If one single death could take so much from them with such finality, what damage would Death do over the centuries to come? Their eyes were empty, their tears spent. They hadn't expected this enemy. They had no idea how to face it.

Slumped against a rock, Cain looked out across a new land. He was an exile now; never to return to the home he had known. His heart had become numbed, the ferocious anger he'd felt as he struck Abel down seemed so distant now. It wasn't just that Death destroyed life, it also consumed the living. Death gave birth to fear, to uncertainty, to insecurity. Yes, Cain's heart was numb. He hadn't expected this enemy. He had no idea how to withstand it.

Abel sat in confusion. The darkness enclosed him in a prison of silence. He remembered the argument with Cain. He even remembered his shock as he fell bleeding to the ground. And then the Darkness. He had tried to find a way out, tried to find someone — anyone — else. But he was alone, trapped in this place. Death held him and there was no one to rescue him. The emptiness and solitude filled Abel with dread. He hadn't expected this enemy. He had no idea how to escape it.

God stood at the entry to the Garden. He had stood by as Death took Abel into its prison. He had watched as Cain had wandered off into exile. He had mourned as Adam and Eve came to grips with their immense loss. God had not intended Death. He had labored to protect His Creation from Death's corruption. But He knew the risk that His gift of free will had carried. He had hoped He wouldn't have to deal with Death. But now that Death had entered Creation, God knew what to do. He had expected this enemy. And He knew how to defeat it.

Next Month: The Baptism of Creation... Noah and the Great Flood.

✠ Fr. Stephen

Thanksgiving Message

by Metropolitan Methodios (reprinted from www.boston.goarch.org)



(Editor's Note: Reprinted from November correspondence to metropolitan parishes)

As we prepare to celebrate the great American holiday of Thanksgiving, let us thank Almighty God for the many blessings that He has bestowed upon us. Indeed we are truly blessed! This year, as we “gather together to ask the Lord’s blessings,” let us be especially mindful of our brethren throughout America — those who have lost their homes and those who, together with their children, go to bed

each night with little or nothing to eat.

I thank our Parishes and Philoptochos Societies for all you do to help alleviate the pain and misfortune of our suffering brethren. I call upon you to enhance your efforts this winter by participating in local food bank programs, by supporting homeless shelters in your towns or cities, by collecting winter clothing for the needy, etc.

The entire Parish should open its embrace to our needy brethren. Everyone, including our GOYans and Sunday school children, should be encouraged to volunteer their time in order to get a personal glimpse into the suffering in our midst. I submit to you that it is not enough to make a monetary donation to a particular organization. We need to experience first-hand the tragedy faced by our fellow human beings.

Let us be mindful of our Savior’s words, “Come you blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me.” Matthew 25, 34–36.

Praying that God bless you and your families during the Thanksgiving holiday, I remain

With Archpastoral love,
METHODIOS
Metropolitan of Boston

From the Clergy Brotherhood

by Fr. Andrew George, Annunciation Church (Cranston, RI)

Plan Ahead Rightly

We live in challenging times on many fronts. A key one in December is our approach and attitude to Christmas; many Orthodox people treat it very differently than they do Easter. What do I mean? As a priest I notice great attentiveness to our Orthodox preparatory practices and disciplines during Great Lent but see modest levels of this as concerns our 40-day Christmas Lenten Season.

In our Orthodox tradition, we have a 40-day preparation season before Christmas, which begins November 15 and is intensified from December 13. This season of preparation stresses fasting and almsgiving, but it also should be used as a time to shop and wrap and not wait to the last couple of days, which exhausts us and makes us edgy; it also becomes an excuse to miss Liturgy at Christmas because “we are not ready” or we are “too tired.”

We hear continually throughout December of “this” and “that” Christmas Party. In essence, it is pre-celebrating Christmas. Our tradition is that you prepare for a feast, first through fasting. Fasting includes not just the foods we eat, but also our social activities. There is such a focus in early December for holding parties that it is to the extreme — very contradictory to our Orthodox approach. The traditional office Christmas parties aren’t terrible in and of themselves — for they are often held in the spirit of showing appreciation to people — but why must they be in early December, when the demands on our time are so strained? In our tradition, the “party time” is from December 25 onward for 12 days, when there is no fasting — not even on Wednesday or Friday. Add to this the Christmas Eve parties during the exact time of church services.

I have never heard of an Easter Eve party conflicting with church — no one would think of doing that, but why this stress on Christmas Eve parties? Again, I repeat, Christmas is a 12-day holiday; can’t we pick one of those 12 days and not the exact time of services? If it needs be on Christmas Eve, can’t it be after the service and not during the service?

We all know well that commercialism is at its highest at Christmas time. It is not bad to give gifts — after all, Christ’s Birth was a gift to us. We also have the wise men’s gifts to Him. The problem comes when we only stress the gifts, and in particular, when we only think about the gifts that we will receive. Even the concept of “exchanging gifts” is a bit weird when you think of our Lord’s teachings: “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35) We should not give a gift expecting to receive one back. Sincerity is important in giving gifts, not quantity. Add to this thought that some people never even give a “Christmas Gift” to the Church — you would think the Church should be on our “Gift List” if we are rightly living Christmas.

Innocently we do the wrong things because of the atmosphere and environment in which we live — we are Easterners living in a Western environment, and so it is that some of us have taken on the “Western style” of celebrating Christmas instead of our Eastern style. Yet for Easter (Pascha), just about all of us live it in our Eastern pattern. Why can’t more of us begin to do this for Christmas, as well? If you set your mind on it, you can do it. I urge each of you to prepare for and to live Christmas in the true Orthodox spirit: fast first, avoid early parties, be at Christmas Liturgy and prepare for Communion. THEN celebrate with your families and friends — in fact, celebrate for 12 days!



Parish Assembly Report

by Nick Pappas, Parish Council Secretary

The fall Parish Assembly convened November 6 at 12:15 p.m. after the fellowship hour in the church hall. After nominating Charles Mitsakos as moderator, the assembly took the following actions:

- Accepted the minutes of the May 15 Parish Assembly as presented by Parish Council Secretary Nick Pappas.
- Accepted a report by Treasurer Konstantinos Kalabokis on the 2011 operating budget through September, which showed income of \$228,750.11, expenses of \$196,164.70 and a balance of \$32,585.41. The report also stated that all parish accounts overseen by the Parish Council totaled \$215,648 as of November 1.
- Adopted the council's proposed operating budget for 2012 of \$335,774, an increase of 6.6% over the current year. The only change made to the budget was an increase of \$1,000 in candle expenses, as suggested from the floor by Harry Stamas.
- Approved a motion from the floor by Christian Zouzas to transfer \$20,000 from the profits of Grecian Festival 2011 from the festival checking account toward the principal of our mortgage.
- Accepted the mortgage elimination report, as presented by coordinator Susan Pappas, which showed 73 families and individuals had donated \$17,335 toward the annual program so far this year. The amount needed to meet our mortgage obligation each year is \$38,400. Susan also reported that the

parish has reduced the mortgage from \$902,000 to roughly \$300,000 during the past eight years.

- Accepted a report by Fr. Stephen that primarily encouraged parishioners to increase their stewardship contribution next year by \$2.50 a week. Based on our average pledge of \$400, that alone would cover the budgeted \$28,000 increase in stewardship income for 2012.
- Accepted a report by Parish Council President Olivia Sintros, which emphasized many of the positive things that have occurred during the past year, including the work done by many of our ministries, as well as opening our doors more to our neighbors in the community.
- Approved the nomination of six parishioners for the Parish Council in 2012, as presented by Board of Elections Chairperson Georgia Dristiliaris: William J. Arvanites, George J. Bertos, James A. Demetri, Stephen George Nicholaides, John Vaporis and Christian Zouzas. Since there are only six candidates for six two-year seats, there will be no need for a full-fledged election in December.
- Adjourned the meeting at 2:40 p.m., after a closing prayer by Fr. Stephen.

All written reports presented during the assembly will be available on file in the church office.

Annual Choir Conference

by Toula Sparages

An Open Letter from Toula Sparages, MBFGOCM Conference 2011 Guest Conductor (posted at www.boston.churchmusic.goarch.org).

November 2011

Dear Fellow Church Musicians:

It is with a great deal of gratitude and love that I send this letter to all of you who participated in this past weekend's Choir Conference at the Annunciation Church, Dover, NH. We sang FOR THE GLORY OF GOD and I KNOW He was pleased to hear us!

I was very happy to see many familiar faces and also some wonderful young faces whose friendships I will treasure.

Thank you all for your patience with me and for your love of church music. It was an honor and a privilege to be your director, and one that I will treasure. Though we were fewer in number this year, our singing pleased His Eminence and he congratulated me during the luncheon and wanted me to extend his thanks to all of you for your efforts.

I hope, through it all, you learned something to take back to your own choirs and to grow in your understanding of our beautiful Divine Liturgy. We are so blessed to be Orthodox Christians!

A very special thank you goes to Siroun and her remarkable choir/church members who made this past weekend such a success! We are all aware of the time and effort and planning that goes into such an endeavor. God Bless her and her great committee.

Looking forward to seeing many of you again soon.

Musically yours,
Toula Sparages

Editor's Note: The following people from our parish attended this year's Choir Conference: Marc and Sandra Gulezian and family (Stephanie, Olivia and Zachary Gulezian); Thea Tully, her daughters Evanthea and Katherine, and her mother Eva Dukakis (who enjoyed her granddaughter's singing in the Youth choir); Melanie Pappas (who sang with the choir during Divine Liturgy) and Arthur and Toula Sparages.



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People in the News

by Cathy Koufogazos, Trans-a-Gram Editor

NH Press Association honors Nick Pappas with Lifetime Achievement Award

Excerpted from www.nashuatelegraph.com from Friday, October 14, 2011.



CATHY KOUFOGAZOS

Editorial page editor Nick Pappas, who has held a host of jobs in his 23 years at the Telegraph, won the organization's Lifetime Achievement Award.

Pappas, whose tenure at The Telegraph includes stints as business editor, city editor, managing editor and executive editor, has overseen the opinion pages and editorials since 2008. His nomination letter for the Lifetime Achievement Award noted that despite the fact his career began when typewriters could still be found in newsrooms, Pappas has consistently led the paper in online publishing and experimentation.

"He established an electronic reader advisory network ... has moderated live online discussions with readers, and he Tweets daily to The Telegraph's breaking news feed," noted the letter.

We congratulate Nick for being awarded this great honor and achievement.

FableVision Holiday Shopping

Are you looking for fun gift ideas that are also educational? Does saving money also help? Look no more! Philoptochos board member and FableVision Learning Ambassador Karen Mitropoulis is spreading the word about FableVision Learning, a company that offers award-winning products that help all learners reach their true potential with fun and inspiring books, DVD's, and software. Visit www.fablevisionlearning.com to view and to shop for their products online. At checkout, use promo code **FABFALL20** to save 20% on your order (minimum required), and enter Karen's ambassador code **AMBMITR** in the message area above payment method. Offer valid through December 31.



Save the Date: December Family Night

Join our Transfiguration Family on Friday, December 16, from 6:00 - 8:00 p.m., for our Gingerbread House Tradition! Pizza and refreshments will be served. Submit your completed registration form and donation of \$15 by Monday, December 5.

For more information contact:

- Elizabeth de la Torre at elisavetd@comcast.net
- Cassandra Floor at cassandrafloor@comcast.net
- Melanie Pappas at melanie.pappas@gmail.com.



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CHURCHEVENTS



December 2011

TRANS aGRAM



Reflections

by Olivia Sintros, Parish Council President

Editor's Note: This month's Reflections is a copy of the President's Report presented at the November 6 Parish General Assembly.

I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank Fr. Stephen, our spiritual leader and our friend, for his unconditional love for all of us.

I would like to thank the financial team in the names of Kon Kalabokis, George Bertos and Nick Kouloungis, who spent tireless hours since last January counting, depositing, check-writing, number-crunching, and reporting.

I would like to thank Nick Pappas for capturing our every meeting with the accuracy that only a newspaper man can achieve.

Finally, I would like to thank Christian, Angela, Corrine, Carl, Dean, Cesar and Greg for all the love and support they have offered as parish council members this year.

It is easy to complain about all that needs to be done. It is easy to complain about people who do not do what WE think they should be doing. Let's face it — it is easy to be negative. I stand before you this afternoon with positive news. Positive because we are traveling in the right direction. We are attempting to execute the ministries mapped out for us by our Lord and Savior.

Following last May's Parish Assembly, the Evangelism Ministry team, under John Vaporis, opened our doors for the first time in a city program titled "Doors Open Lowell."

The Ministry Team, under the direction of John Dristilaris and Dean Proyou, hosted for the first time Community Kitchens on May 31 and October 11, with another one scheduled for December 14. Community Kitchen offers us truly the opportunity to break bread with our neighbors.

The Youth Ministry hosted The Ten Commandments, our 18th Vacation Church Camp in July, with 100 campers in attendance. In September, Patty Vaporis came on board as our Youth Director. Under Patty's direction, we have recently had a GOYA Lock-In; we officially opened the newly-designed GOYA Room; and we presented Pirates and Princesses for our Hope and Joy children.

The Fellowship Ministry team, under the direction of Susan Pappas, has hosted a Parish Feast Day Picnic, a Welcome Back to Sunday School Cook Out, and a Stewards Appreciation Luncheon. Fellowship has also instituted a Transfiguration Dance group for children; they practice every Monday evening.

The Discipleship Ministry attempted to pilot a Greek Language program this summer that fell flat, due to the teacher's inability to complete the session. We also hosted in September a presentation by Catherine Varkas of the Palm Harbor Montessori School in Florida, who spoke with the Sunday School teachers regarding her new Orthodox Catechesis model and spoke on "Teaching Our Children to Experience Prayer".

Thanks to Presbytera Kelley, the Mommy and Me Ministry (ages 40 days to 4 years) is already a resounding success that takes place each Sunday morning following communion.

Family Night Ministry got off to a slow beginning, but will begin again in December with Gingerbread Night on December 16, and possibly a Family Game Night on January 20.

In May, the Parish Council accepted with regret the resignation of organist Marc Gulezian, who played so beautifully for us for eight years. We accepted in August with pleasure our new organist Kristina Yopez. The choir this fall gained two young voices in the persons of Ariana Kouloungis and Michelle Oakland.

The Events Ministry presented the very successful revival of Grecian Festival, under the chairmanship of John Dristilaris and Christian Zouzias. The Transfiguration Golf Classic, another very

Continued on page 9

PARISH COUNCIL



Treasurer's Report

by Konstantinos Kalabokis, Parish Council Treasurer

Account Summary (as of November 4, 2011)


| Account | Balance |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Altar Fund | \$2,883 |
| Festival Checking | \$21,536 |
| General Checking | \$43,328 |
| Mortgage Elimination | \$14,115 |
| Money Market Savings | \$133,786 |
| | \$215,648 |

If you have any questions, or are interested in helping, please contact me at treasurer@transchurch.org.



TRANSaGRAM December 2011

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Parish Council Report

by Nick Pappas, Parish Council Secretary



The Parish Council met November 7 and took following actions:

- Discussed but took no action on whether to sponsor a Grecian Festival next year or to wait until 2013. The council expects to make a final decision when it next meets in December. The Parish Assembly approved an operating budget for 2012 that contains a \$25,000 income item for special events.
- Voted to donate \$200 to the Ladies Philoptochos Society to support the upcoming 58th annual Benefit Tea on December 4.
- Agreed to host the annual district seminar for Parish Council candidates on November 28 at 6:30 p.m. in the church hall. The

meeting is mandatory for all council candidates, though members not up for re-election this year are encouraged to attend.

- Agreed to host the Metropolis' annual Christmas gathering for clergy and their families on December 27 in the church hall.
- Scheduled a council overnight retreat for the weekend of January 27-28 at the St. Methodios Faith & Heritage Center in Contoocook, N.H.

The council will next meet December 5 at 6:30 p.m.

Stewardship Report

by Olivia Sintros, Stewardship Reporter

December 11 has been designated as Stewardship Sunday. The 2012 Stewardship Ministry theme is "Abide in Me". Prayerfully, by the time you read this article, the 2012 "Abide in Me" Stewardship Campaign will be well underway. We abide in Jesus Christ when we follow His example to love, serve and support the Church, which is His body. Once again, a grateful thank you to those who have successfully completed their 2011 pledge; and thank you to those who give weekly and will fulfill their pledge by December 25. If you simply forgot, please put the Church at the top of your list during this season of giving. It is not too late! We are grateful, as indicated in the numbers below, that funds received to date have almost met our budgeted goal, and that the total pledged has exceeded our budgeted goal. While this is positive information, please consider that the financial goal of

true Christian Stewardship is to meet the operating expenses of the Church and to allow fundraising profits to support additional ministries. Currently, our average family pledge is approximately \$400 per year, which allows us to meet approximately 50% of our operating budget. While contemplating and completing your 2012 commitment card, please seriously consider weekly giving and/or online giving

May you and yours have a blessed Christmas season.

As of 10/31/11

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Participating stewards to date: 357..... | |
| Total pledged:..... | \$149,528 |
| Received to date:..... | \$135,108 |
| Budgeted goal: | \$142,000 |

Mortgage Elimination Program

by Susan Pappas

In 1998, 16 parishioners formed a committee that was to oversee the building project for the church. With the co-chairmen having been appointed by the Parish Assembly, the committee began many years of diligent work. Though there were a few changes on the committee, their drive and dedication never faltered.

There were many information sessions held for parishioners to ask questions of the committee for an understanding of the project ahead. On June 17, 2001, the day of the groundbreaking, there was much excitement and enthusiasm in the air.

For the next three years, as the work on what was to become The Transfiguration Family Life Center began, many fundraisers were held. There was the Mortgage Avoidance Drive, Brick Legacy Campaign, Friends of the Looking Glass, Mosaic Icons, The Top Fifty, and the Business Community Drives. There also were Golf Tournaments, Food Fairs and Festivals to help raise money for this project.

In 2004, the Mortgage Elimination Campaign began. The concept was to ask each parish family to contribute \$300 a year, outside of their stewardship, for 10

years, with the hope that if 300 families participated, we could erase the mortgage in eight to 10 years. Parishioners could give less if they were not able to give the \$300, or more, of course, if they could. They could pay monthly if that worked out better for them, or they could pay the \$3,000 all at once. Gratefully, nine families took advantage of that option.

The goal was to have as much parishioner participation as possible, since everyone enjoys the use of the Family Life Center in some capacity.

When the Mortgage Elimination Campaign began, only 149 of the parish's more than 400 families participated. Unfortunately, through the years since, that number has steadily declined to the 73 families we have participating in 2011.

On the plus side, when the campaign began in 2004, the mortgage was close to \$902,000. During the last eight years, through the hard work of the faithful parishioners, more golf tournaments, food fairs, festivals and memorial donations, we have brought the mortgage down to about \$300,000.

The 2011 campaign began in February, and reminder letters went out in August. Of the 73 participating stewards this year, \$17,335 has been raised, and \$3,355 has come in from memorial donations. The average donation is \$237 per family.

This income alone of \$20,690 is not able to sustain the monthly payments that total our mortgage obligation of \$38,400 for the year.

The alternative is to have many more fundraisers asking parishioners for their time, talents and treasures. While this is a great way to improve the fellowship of our parish, many parishioners seem not able to give more of their time. It would be great to have more families participate in the campaign and show their support of this wonderful addition to the Transfiguration Church.

Many of our parents and grandparents were responsible for the groundbreaking and building of the original church building, and they were able to burn the first mortgage through their efforts. Let us make them proud and show our love and dedication to the continuation of what came from their hearts.





Philoptochos Society

by Soula Spaziani, Philoptochos President

Philoptochos has been very busy preparing for the holiday season. Our outreach ministries and fundraising activities provide support to our church, local community, the metropolis and even the nation. Grateful thanks to our members and parishioners who support our efforts to provide a brighter holiday to those in need.

Meetings

November Meeting: On November 14, we held our board meeting, immediately followed by our general membership meeting, with 27 ladies in attendance. Many thanks to all our members who came out this Monday evening to discuss and plan our busy holiday season of fundraising events, donations and commitments. We voted to send \$950 collectively to our National Philoptochos commitments of Ecumenical Patriarchate, National Sisterhood of Presbyteres Benevolent Fund, UNICEF, and General Medical Fund. We also voted to support our local Salvation Army with a donation of \$150. We also voted to resurrect the "Family Yard Sale" which will be held in May 2012. Please keep us in your heart and mind as you do your holiday and

PHOTO BY DEBBIE CHRONOPOULOS OF HOLY TRINITY



Front row left to right : Sophia Cakounes, Angela Hastings, Soula Spaziani, Sophia Quinn, Nikki Stounaras, Pat Mahoney, Corrine Dubay, Olivia Sintros, Joanne Kalabokis. Back row left to right: Ann Bertos, Joan Tsoukalas, Melanie Pappas, Susan Pappas, Ellen Dobi and Pres. Kelley Lawrence.

spring clean up and set aside any items you'd like to donate for our yard sale.

Ladies Retreat: On October 28 and 29, ladies from our parish and area parishes gathered together at the St. Methodios Faith & Heritage Center in Contoocook, NH for a lovely weekend of sisterly love and fellowship, with the theme "Strengthening the Bonds of Sisterhood". Many thanks to Pat Mahoney for organizing and developing this very enriching experience. Our very knowledgeable and enthusiastic speakers, Ms. Nikki Stounaras (from HC/HC) and Chrysanthi Tiggis (from the Center), inspired a wonderful exchange. Many thanks to Director Michael Sintros and the entire staff of the Center for their *philoxenia*.

Outreach and Fundraisers

Fall Calendar Raffle: Congratulations to our winners, drawn on November 20; names will be listed in next month's issue of the *Trans-a-Gram*. Thank you to Elizabeth de la Torre and Ellen Dobi for coordinating this effort.

Christmas Card: Watch your mail for a beautiful card with our church families' Christmas greetings. Thank you to all who participated and to our coordinators, Corrine Dubay, Ellen Vercontaire and Sophia Quinn.

Apple Pie Sales: Thank you to all who purchased Thanksgiving apple pies. The proceeds from this project will help purchase the book bags for our Literacy Project. Grateful thanks to Georgia Dristiliaris for coordinating this very worthwhile project with our members and the GOYA.

Visiting Angels: With the holiday season approaching, let us remember those who are in nursing homes or are shut in. Please contact Christine Faneros at 978-265-7249 or the church office to offer your time to visit. These visits will certainly brighten the holiday season for our shut-ins. The

Council of Churches will be celebrating a Liturgy at D'Youville Manor, where some of our parishioners reside, on Saturday, December 10 at 10:00 a.m. Please join us.

Literacy Program: We will be collecting books throughout the year and kindly ask for donations of new or gently used books to support and promote literacy in a local elementary school. Collection bins are located in the upper and lower lobbies of the church.

House of Hope: Slots are still available for serving dinners to mothers and children at the House of Hope. We are looking for volunteers to cover December 22 or 29, and June 27, 2012. Please contact Iris Malliaros 978-452-1363 or Iris-Malliaros@uml.edu.

Adopt-a-Family: Philoptochos is coordinating with Community Teamwork of Lowell to help brighten the Christmas season for deserving Lowell area families. Many thanks to our board members, Ann Bertos, Joanne Kalabokis, and Susan Mitchell, who will be looking for volunteers during coffee hour this month to help provide gifts. Monetary donations are also gratefully accepted.

"The WinterGreen Tea": The 58th Annual Benefit Tea will take place on Sunday, December 4 at 2:00 p.m. Our chairman Ann Tavoularis and committees have planned a special and festive afternoon of fellowship and philanthropy to kick off the holiday season. In the spirit of giving, we are asking guests to bring a new or gently used book in support of our Literacy Program. Many thanks to all for supporting our largest fundraiser of the year. Proceeds support our church, local ministries, and metropolis and national commitments.

Acknowledgements and Coming Attractions in 2012

Membership Drive: Welcome, welcome to our newest members Magda Siotas and Noulé Demetri! In January, we will be renewing

Continued on page 11





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Someone said one Sunday during the offering, “Here we go again! There’s always a plate.”

The person was right in one way and wrong in another. There is not one plate — but two! One plate is man’s; the offering plate that is passed to us every Sunday. The other plate is God’s. And that is the paten, the “diskos”, the plate that carries the Precious Body of our Lord during the liturgy. Two plates — not one!

God gives first. He gives us our body, mind, life, health, talents. On the paten — the plate of God’s mercy — He gives us Himself as the Bread of Life, the manna from heaven. He gives forgiveness, strength, courage. He gives victory over sin and death. He gives eternal life. “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which he lavished upon us” (Eph. 1:7–8). God gives. He lavishes upon us the riches of His grace. That is the meaning of the first plate — the paten.

The second plate which is passed every Sunday — the offering plate — represents our response to the first plate. We are invited to give in gratitude for God’s generosity, for His limitless forgiveness and mercy. The emptiness of the offering plate represents the aching needs of the world which we are called upon to assist.

It represents also the great spiritual hunger that exists in the world — the God-shaped vacuum in every heart that only Christ can fill.

We give, but He gave first. Two plates — not one! However much we give, it will never be more than just a minute fraction of what we receive from Him.

There’s always a plate! Indeed there is! Not one but two. First God’s, then man’s.

The God who came to us at Bethlehem continues to come to us today. He comes to us through that first plate, the paten which

symbolizes His total giving to us. He comes through the Sacrament of Baptism to bestow upon us the holy kiss of His love, to call us His very own. He comes through the Sacrament of Chrismation to fill us with His presence, to make our bodies temples of His Holy Spirit. He comes through repentance and the Sacrament of Confession to cleanse us of sin, to restore in our souls “the peace of God that passes all understanding.” In every liturgy He comes to us as the Word of God, bringing words of eternal life through the Scripture readings and the sermon. Through the Sacrament of Communion He comes to be born again and again in the shabby stables of our hearts. He comes constantly through prayer. He blesses our marriages as He did that in Cana of Galilee. He stands by our sick bed, laying His healing hand upon us through the prayers of the priest. He comes again and again in so many, many ways through the many ministries of His Church. He comes with healing and forgiveness; He comes with strength and guidance. He comes and when He comes, as the Bible says, “the blind see, the lame walk, and the prisoners are set free.”

Every year at this time as we are invited to renew our weekly stewardship pledge, we are challenged to re-consider prayerfully our weekly gift to Him Who is God’s Great Gift to us. It is through our gift that God will be able to continue His forgiving, healing, liberating, empowering, transfiguring, loving ministry through the Church. For God, Infinite though He be, has chosen to work through us, through our gifts, to continue His saving work in the world today.

Many of us are careful to set aside funds for our retirement IRAs, 401(k)s, etc. Yet how long will these last? — Ten, maybe twenty years? The question is:

- What are we setting aside for our eternal future?
- What are we investing in God, in eternity?
- How many of us who are quite well-to-do on earth (and most of us Americans are) may end up paupers in heaven?

St. John Chrysostom said once, “A rich man is not one who has much, but one who gives much. For, what he gives away remains his forever!”

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

The thought comes to me quite often that there will come a time for each one of us when we shall no longer be able to give. When death comes, our giving will be over. For all eternity God will be doing the giving to us. So, the time for us to give is now. The time for us to love is now. The time for us to share what God has given us is now.

Give as you would if an angel

Awaited your gift at the door.

Give as you would if tomorrow

Found you where giving was over.

Give as you would to the Master

If you met His loving look.

Give as you would of your substance

If His hand your offering took.

For, it is indeed His hand! The tray in which we place our offering every Sunday is not a tray but His hand — the nail-pierced hand of my Savior “Who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Amen.

Reflections

(continued from page 6)

successful event, was revived and chaired by Angela Hastings.

We as a Parish have reached out to our neighbors by partnering with A Coalition for A Better Acre, the Murkland School, and the Merrimack Valley Food Bank.

Our Communication Ministry Team continues to keep us informed at every turn. A special thanks to Melanie Pappas and the ever-growing web site, to Cathy Koufogazos and the terrific new look of the *Trans-a-Gram*, and to Derek Piper’s church e-newsletter.

I would be remiss if I did not thank Past President Patricia Mahoney and newly elected President Soula Spaziani for all they do and continue to do in the name of Philoptochos. Philoptochos is now planning their 58th Benefit Tea, coordinating apple pie baking with our GOYans, and unrolling their Christmas “Adopt-a-Family” project through Community Teamwork Inc.

I ask you: “Are we progressing positively?” “Are we headed in the right direction?” “Do we need more commitment and involvement?”

I hope you answered YES to all of the above.

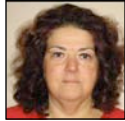
My grandson Luke often asks, “*Yia-Yia*, why are you going to church again?” I’d like to think that the answer is the same for all of us — for love.

And the greatest of these is LOVE — Love for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Love for our family, Love for our Orthodox Faith, Love for Hellenic culture, and Love for all of us as a church family. It is our commitment of Time, Talent, and Treasure that will enable us to continue to be positive, and to follow the road laid forth for us as members of the Body of Christ.



Parish Committee Reports

Various Contributors



Sunday School

by *Connie Gkolias*,
Sunday School Director

The Sunday school children and staff would like to thank everyone again for their support and help with our annual brunch.

Our icon sponsorship drive is almost filled — there are only 10 left for sponsorship! Please see Connie or Hariklia on Sunday if you would like to sponsor one; the cost is \$20 per icon.

December is here, and it's a very special month — the birth of our Lord. Our children will present our annual Christmas pageant on Saturday, December 24, after Divine Liturgy; refreshments will also be served. Please come and support our children and view their spectacular performance as they work very hard to present the pageant to everyone. We always need to support our children — the future of our church.

On behalf of the Sunday school children and staff, we wish everyone a very Merry Christmas holiday season, with love and peace for all.



Youth Activities

by *Patty Vaporis*,
Youth Director

In October, our family night fellowship began at St. George's Church. The youth enjoyed dinner and an up-close and personal experience during the animal show.

Our lock-in, which took place later that same evening, was well attended. The GOYAnS that attended had an excellent time. I am quite sure they will be returning for our next overnight event. They thoroughly enjoyed the new GOYA room. As a matter of fact, there appears to be an overwhelming group of

younger children looking for the same hang-out experience. I will be working on that during these next few months.

For the month of November, our children participated in the VCC Advent Camp. This always proves to be a successful ministry. At the conclusion of the day, our GOYAnS were invited to participate in the apple pie baking event sponsored by Philoptochos. There is some conversation about GOYA reclaiming this ministry for the following year.

During the third week of November, we had our first GOYA sounding board. This is an opportunity for the group to get together during regular Sunday school time to contemplate a relevant question concerning their Christianity. It also offers a time for them to communicate amongst themselves in an open format. They all looked forward to it and really enjoyed it.

The Hope/Joy Princess & Pirate event was held a week later than planned, due to the weather. There was face painting, cookie decorating, and wand and sword making, to name a few of the activities. The children had a scavenger hunt, and they had an opportunity to explore parts of the church in a different light. They all ran in teams, found the treasure, and had fun.

Please see me if you have any questions or comments.



Fellowship Hour

by *Susan Pappas*,
Fellowship Hour Coordinator

There have been no sponsors since October 16.

If you would like to sponsor a Fellowship Hour in honor of someone, for a special occasion, or in memory of a loved one,

please contact Susan at 603-886-4717 or at smpappas16@yahoo.com

The cost is still \$50. You can also supplement the refreshments with your own special treats.

Help Wanted

Volunteers to serve coffee during the Fellowship Hour on Sundays. You can serve with family and/or friends. It involves about one hour of your time. What a wonderful way to meet and greet our parishioners while providing a valuable ministry to our parish. For more information, please contact Susan at 603-886-4717 or smpappas16@yahoo.com.



Choir

by *Louis Stamas*,
Choir Director

Congratulations to Toula Sparages and Marc Gulezian, who served as director and organist, respectively, of the Metropolis of Boston Federation of Greek Orthodox Church Musicians Choir at their annual conference last month! See Toula's article on page 4.

Our Transfiguration Choir has been blessed with the addition of two young ladies, and we couldn't be happier to have them! Michelle Oakland and Ariana Kouloungis have both been doing a great job since joining us in October. We hope this is the beginning of a trend! We could use more members of any age, male and female. Please see me any Sunday after Divine Liturgy, or call me at 978-732-8524, if you have any questions. Our rehearsals are on the first and third Tuesday of every month.

The Choir wishes all of you a Merry Christmas!



George A. Malliaros
Attorney at Law

1794 Bridge Street
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Tel: 978 452-6641
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Contact Information

Church

Secretary: Jeanne Brady
 Address: Father John Sarantos Way,
 Lowell, MA 01854
 Telephone: 978-458-4321
 Fax: 978-458-8726
 Church e-mail: info@transchurch.org
 Web page: www.transchurch.org
 Office hours:
 Secretary: Mon.-Fri., 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.;
 Priest: Mon.-Thurs., 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.,
 or by appointment

Priest

Father Stephen Lawrence
 Telephone: 978-973-2098
 E-mail: frstephen@transchurch.org

Bookstore

Sandra Gulezian
 Telephone: 978-649-3387
 E-mail: mngulezian@comcast.net

Facebook

URL: www.facebook.com/transchurch

Trans-a-Gram

Editor: Catherine Koufogazos
 Telephone: 978-957-5330
 E-mail: transagram@transchurch.org

Web Site

Webmaster: Melanie Pappas
 Telephone: 978-337-1329
 E-mail: webmaster@transchurch.org

Parish Council Members

President

Olivia Sintros
 H: 978-475-5805
 C: 978-902-6152
osintros@comcast.net

Vice President

Christian Zouzias
 H: 978-256-9717
 C: 978-257-3360
z@greek.us

Treasurer

Konstantinos Kalabokis
 H: 978-649-4352
 C: 781-354-5996
kkalabokis@gmail.com

Assistant Treasurer

George Bertos
 H: 978-957-8253
 C: 978-423-2339
lisclean@comcast.net

Assistant Treasurer

Nick Kouloungis
 H: 978-256-3739
koulclan@comcast.net

Secretary

Nick Pappas
 H: 603-886-4717
 C: 978-852-8825
npappas05@comcast.net

Cesar de la Torre

H: 978-455-8626
 C: 781-953-6033
cesar.delatorre@gmail.com

Corrine Dubay

H: 978-649-0258
 C: 978-621-4617
ccdubay@charter.net

Gregory Floor

H: 978-455-3231
 C: 801-455-7155
gregoryfloor@mac.com

Angela Hastings

H: 978-649-8708
 C: 978-902-9602
angiefhastings@verizon.net

Carl Maib

H: 978-459-8986
 C: 978-337-1280
carl@maib.us

Dean Proyous

H: 978-692-1432
 C: 508-577-4008
goldengreek1@comcast.net

Philoptochos Report

(continued from page 8)

memberships and also sending invitations to all ladies of our parish to join our group. Please consider offering your time and talents in the spirit of sisterhood, camaraderie and philanthropy.

Vasilopita and Family Dinner: Our traditional Gold Coin celebration and Family Dinner will be held on Sunday, January 8, 2012. We will start collecting names on Sunday, December 11. The donation is \$20.00 per piece. A new twist this year: This wonderful tradition will be combined with our Family Dinner. Lunch will be served immediately following Liturgy on January 8, and Vasilopita pieces will be distributed during

this time. The proceeds of this event are earmarked for St. Basil's Academy, one of our national commitments.

PICTURE SUBMITTED BY JOAN TSOUKALAS



Next Meeting: Our next general membership meeting will be on Saturday morning, January 14, 2012, at 9:30 a.m. We will enjoy breakfast together, followed by the meeting at 10:30 a.m.

A Final Word: On behalf of the Transfiguration Philoptochos, we wish you and your families a blessed and joyful Holiday Season!

Wonderful past Philoptochos memories: front row left to right are Mary Sampos, Georgia Dellazanos, Father John Sarantos, Cleo Mavrogianis. Back row, Angie Rigs, Elaine Lazouras, Betty Balamotis.



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Services, Sacraments and Calendar of Events

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Sunday Services

Orthros: 8:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.
Divine Liturgy: 9:30 a.m.

December 4, December 11, December 18,
December 25

Trisagias Names

Please submit names of your departed loved ones and the month in which they passed away so that Fr. Stephen can offer a *Trisagion* on the anniversary of their entry into the Kingdom of God. Each month we will commemorate those who have fallen asleep in that month. No donation is required.

Save the Date

Bible Study

December 7, 14, 21 (Wednesdays): Bible Study, 10:00 a.m.

Sunday School

December 19 (Monday): Sunday School Teachers' Meeting, 7:00 p.m.

Family and Youth Activities

December 16 (Friday): Gingerbread House Family Night, 6:00 p.m.

December 18 (Sunday): GOYA Sounding Board

December 24 (Saturday): Christmas Pageant and Family Gathering, 11:00 a.m.

Vacation Church Camp (VCC)

February 25, 2012 (Saturday): Lenten Camp, 9:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

April 13, 2012 (Friday): Holy Friday Retreat

July 23–27, 2012 (Monday–Friday): Vacation Church Camp

Sunday Epistle and Gospel Readings

12/4/2011

Matins: [Mark 16:9–20](#)

Epistle: [St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians 3:23–29; 4:1–5](#)

Gospel: [Luke 13:10–17](#)

12/11/2011

Matins: [Luke 24:1–12](#)

Epistle: [St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians 3:4–11](#)

Gospel: [Luke 14:16–24; Matthew 22:14](#)

12/18/2011

Matins: [Luke 24:13–35](#)

Epistle: [St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 11:9–10; 32–40](#)

Gospel: [Matthew 1:1–25](#)

12/25/2011

Matins: [Matthew 1:1–25](#)

Epistle: [St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians 4:4–7](#)

Gospel: [Matthew 2:1–12](#)

Special Services

December 6 (Tuesday) *Divine Liturgy, 9:30 a.m.*
(*St. Nicholas*)

December 9 (Friday)..... *Divine Liturgy, 9:30 a.m.*
(*Conception of the Theotokos*)

December 10 (Saturday)..... *D'Youville Manor Christmas Divine Liturgy, 10:00 a.m.*

December 12 (Monday) *Divine Liturgy, 9:30 a.m.*
(*St. Spyridon and St. Peter the Aleut*)

December 19 (Monday) *Willow Manor Christmas Divine Liturgy, 10:00 a.m.*

December 23 (Friday)..... *Royal Hours, 9:00 a.m.*

December 24 (Saturday)..... *Divine Liturgy (Eve of the Nativity of our Lord), 9:30 a.m.*

December 27 (Tuesday)..... *Divine Liturgy, 9:30 a.m.*
(*St. Stephen*)

Philoptochos

December 3 (Saturday): 13th Biennial Children's Medical Fund Luncheon, Old Greenwich, CT

December 4 (Sunday): 58th Annual Benefit Tea: "The WinterGreen Tea", 2:00 p.m.

January 8, 2012 (Sunday): Vasilopita and Philoptochos Family Dinner

January 14, 2012 (Saturday): Breakfast and General Meeting, 9:30 a.m.

Other Church Dates

December 5 (Monday): Parish Council, 6:30 p.m.

December 11 (Sunday): GOYA Planning Council, 12:00 p.m.

Outreach and Special Events

December 14 (Wednesday): Community Kitchen, 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Sacraments

Baptisms

None

Funerals

None

Weddings and Marriage Blessings

October 15: Jill Asimakopoulos and Steve Sentementes, sponsor Daniel Furman



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