

the Light



AUGUST 2023
NEWSLETTER

AMEN LEADERSHIP & LOCAL CHAPTER PRESIDENTS MEETING

August 15, 2023

7:00 pm - 8:00 pm EDT - Zoom



DOMSE FALL RETREAT 2023

September 22-23, 2023

St. Elias Orthodox Church, Atlanta, GA

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Parish Spotlight

ST. PAUL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH

CLERGY

Rev. Fr. Paul Girgis

V. Rev. Joseph Shaheen (retired)

Rev. Dn. Nicholas Reid (attached)

FEAST DAY: Sts. Peter and Paul (June 29). On occasion of the Feast each year we alternate hosting the celebration of the Divine Services and a Fellowship meal afterwards to break the Fast with our sister parish St. Peter the Apostle (Fr. Hans Jacobse) located in San Carlos Park.

WEBSITE: stpaulnaples.org



[stpaulnaples](http://stpaulnaples.org)



[stpaulnaples](http://stpaulnaples.org)

St. Paul Orthodox Christian Church Naples, FL



St. Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church is about as far southwest as you can go in Florida. Go any further and you'll be in the Everglades! Located in Naples, Florida, it was established in the 1990's by groups of seasonal residents from Marco Island, Naples, and Ft. Myers. Having expressed a desire to start a parish in Southwest Florida, the V. Rev. Fr. Elia Shalhoub, Dean of St. George Cathedral of Coral Gables at the time, was contacted and became the founding priest of the parish.

Before the church was built, the community worshiped in various places: a room at a hotel, the chapel in a cemetery, and a senior citizen residence. Metropolitan PHILIP officially designated the St. Paul Antiochian Orthodox Mission of Naples, led by Fr. Basil Banyasz and Kh. Janice, as part of the Archdiocese on March 8, 1998. By Christmas 1998, the current ten-acre piece of land was purchased and the existing house on the property was converted into a church.

In September 2000, Archpriest Joseph Shaheen and Kh. Diane were assigned to the parish. At the fourth anniversary of St. Paul, Bishop ANTOUN

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challenged the attendees to “get started and raise some money so you can build a church.” That evening \$450,000 was pledged! In 2004, Bishop ANTOUN presided at the marking of the foundation, and St. Paul was honored to host the fall meeting of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees during which Metropolitan PHILIP, Bishop ANTOUN, and Bishop JOSEPH presided at the Groundbreaking Ceremony for the new church. The Vespers Service for the Saturday of Souls on Friday, February 24, 2006, was the last service in the original church. At the end of the service, parishioners began a procession to move all the ecclesiastical items from the old to the new, yet unfinished, church. On the following Sunday, Bishop ANTOUN presided for the first Hierarchical Liturgy. The beloved St. Paul Church Temple was consecrated on February 19, 2012, by Metropolitan PHILIP and a host of participating hierarchs and other clergy. In May 2017, Fr. Joe and Kh. Diane retired with a gala soiree full of friends and parishioners who wanted to thank



them for their dedication and service and wish them a long and blessed retirement.

Shortly thereafter in June of 2017, Fr. Paul Girgis was assigned to St. Paul. He arrived with his Kh. Dana and their children, and St. Paul experienced another growth spurt. In addition to receiving many converts to Holy Orthodoxy, Fr. Paul labored to create a home for Orthodox Christians of all backgrounds: Lebanese, Syrian, Russian, Ukrainian, Greek, Serbian, Macedonian, Albanian, and more. No longer did attendance expand in season and shrink in summer, it just continued to grow. St. Paul had always been known as a “part-time” parish because of the seasonality of its parishioner base but that changed a few years ago. Normal Sunday

attendance in the summer season was around forty-five people and now it is typically over one hundred thirty, while in-season attendance used to be around one hundred twenty, and now we see over two hundred each Sunday! Many families are even moving to the Naples area to be a part of the parish. In February of 2018, Deacon Nicholas Reid, Diakonissa Elizabeth, and their family were assigned to St. Paul by His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS. Their arrival added, amongst other things, beautiful chanting for the Divine Services, which has deepened the prayerfulness of our worship.

In September of 2017, only two months after the Girgis family's arrival, Hurricane Irma swept through Southwest Florida. That following Sunday, Fr. Paul noticed the head of St. John the Forerunner, in the icon of Theophany, was beginning to peel off the wall. It was not something that could be ignored; a significant part of his head was hanging down in the eastern arch of the nave. Oddly, there was no water damage or moisture to explain this occurrence. Regardless of why, Fr. Paul met with

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the iconographer, John Filippakis, to repair the mural. This meeting was God's will as a great momentum began for the next six years to complete the iconography in the parish. Unexpected and unsolicited gifts, many of them anonymous, came pouring in. With God's help, this year we will finish the final installations behind the altar and complete the iconography project. Continuing with the beautification of the parish, a bishop's throne, a memorial table, several candle stands, a baptismal font and a chanters' stand, beautifully carved and imported from Greece, were also donated by parishioners. By the mercy of God, an anonymous donation covered 100% of the cost for a traditional Byzantine-style chandelier (Polyeleos and Xoros) and four smaller polyeleons for the four arches in the Nave. Currently we have five church bells being manufactured at a belfry in Virginia, which were anonymously donated in memory of a loved one.

Why so much talk about beautification? In Dostoevsky's words, *"Beauty will save the world."* We have seen the fruit of that pursuit—real beauty—here in the parish. We don't mean simply making the Temple of God "look nice,"

but rather through traditional Orthodox Christian aesthetics, beauty in fact elevates the spirit of man to aspire to new heights—tearing it free from the chains of worldly and temporal pursuits so it may embrace eternal things—the Kingdom of God! It is absolutely critical to offer thirsty souls a place to come and be showered with the Divine Grace of God through beautiful worship. A place that is sacred, orderly, peaceful, prayerful, and beautiful to all the human senses—especially spiritual vision! We have such beautiful and hardworking souls here at the parish. It truly is like a village! We have a thriving group of youth, committed and serious young adults, wise and experienced seniors, a harmonious Parish Council, an enjoyable Men's Fellowship, as well as tireless and hardworking Antiochian Women. Glory to God for all things!

From the humble seed planted by Fr. Elia Shalhoub, passed on to Fr. Basil Banyasz, watered and nourished by Fr. Joseph Shaheen and now under the love and care of Fr. Paul Girgis and through the fatherly and God-given protection of His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS, St. Paul in Naples has flourished into a growing, spiritually vibrant, youthful parish. As a testimony

to this growth, the first year of our Annual St. Nicholas Day Celebration (2017) had five children in attendance, with three of them being Fr. Paul's children. This last year, we had over seventy children come to celebrate St. Nicholas with an Akathist, story time with Fr. Paul, and a fellowship dinner afterwards. For the first time ever, just this year, the parish sent almost twenty children to Camp St. Thekla. Such a joy! To accommodate the growth and especially for the protection, preservation, and education of the children, St. Paul has made plans to add a Fellowship Hall and is currently completing Phase 1 of the project and fundraising for Phase 2. A large active Youth Program has been established and the formation of a *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* atrium for our youngest is underway. This hall will not only allow us to host people for the most meaningful events of our lives: baptisms, weddings, hafllis, slavas, mercy meals, and feasts of the Church, but also give us the space needed for our children's programs. Preserving The Faith *"once delivered unto the saints"* (Jude 1:3) is at the core of our parish life.

For each one of us and our families,

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Clergy Wives

By Sh. Shell Keim | All Saints Orthodox Church, Raleigh, NC

I have been thinking about how to begin this article for months. I kept coming back to "Behind every great man there is a great woman..." but that is not always true. I know there are great men throughout history who are the exception to this saying. So how do I begin an article about showing our respect and love for the many great women who stand, not behind, but beside our clergy?

Clergy wives come in different types; there are no two exactly alike. I have met clergy wives who are calm, quiet, and introverted. I have met clergy wives who are extroverted and involved in every aspect of church life and who draw energy from being in the thick of the ministry. Usually though, they are somewhere in between, ready to serve in ways that aid us all, but would also like to close the doors, sit down with a nice cup of tea (or drink of choice), put their feet up and rest.

Our clergy are called to serve and that is what they do. They dress in black, are on call 24 hours a day, and serve us all, week in and week out. We, the laity, are called to support them and pray for them. Clergy wives are called to serve with them, support them and pray for them, while they also manage their homes and families, often have careers, and care for their own spiritual well-being. It can be overwhelming, joyous, exhausting, and salvific all in a single week!

For those who are called to the priesthood or the diaconate, these women who they choose to walk alongside them are very important. You may see these women covered in sauce, wearing an apron in the kitchen, or trying to wrangle a few young children in the nave because their husbands are always behind the altar. They sometimes work tirelessly outside the home to support their families while their husbands serve

the church. It takes all types of women to do these amazing things and they are not perfect.

They often see the sadness of the church firsthand. They sometimes must endure those who choose to attack the church and the very clergy they love most. Forgiveness is hard for all of us and day after day of serving can wear anyone down. Clergy wives are in it for the long haul. They don't choose their parish; it is chosen for them. They don't get to escape the worries and politics of the church by going home. These women are on the front lines of service every day.

If you recall, I said earlier that being a clergy wife is salvific. Salvation is hard but that is our goal. Whether we are called to wear black and be in the altar every time the doors are open, or to wrangle kids in the nave, or to make the coffee, or to pray for our priests, we are all called to be part of

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the body of Christ. The eye is not more important than the hand or the foot, but each part needs the other to be whole (1Cor. 12:17).

You may ask what you can do to support our clergy wives. Well, here are some tips:

1. Know their name and greet them.
2. Thank them for their sacrifice and prayers.
3. Ask them if they need anything that week or month, then do it! It is hard for them to ask, so make sure it gets done.
4. Remember them on Mother's Day or their birthday or their anniversary.
5. MOST IMPORTANTLY, pray for them every day. They are not perfect, they are being saved just like the rest of us, so be kind, forgiving and pray for them.

Clergy wives give us their greatest treasures: their husbands, who serve us, and their families as our role models. Let us all be grateful for their salvific work and sacrifices.



OFFICER INTRODUCTION

YAF (Young Adult Fellowship)

DOMSE YAF HEAD: Bryce Kirk
St. John Orthodox Church | Memphis, TN



DOMSE YAF

Greetings DOMSE! My name is Bryce Kirk, and I was recently appointed as the new president of the Young Adult Fellowship (YAF) for our diocese. Briefly, I wanted to give an introduction about who I am. I came into the Orthodox Church in 2017 when I was in college at the University of Arkansas. Before then, I had been a Protestant my whole life and while I was at college, I found myself wanting something more. After a journey that spanned several months, I ended up at St. Nicholas Church in Springdale, AR and was chrismated in late 2017. After finishing graduate school, I moved to Memphis, TN, where I am currently a member of St. John Church.

The Young Adult Fellowship exists to help cultivate relationships for young adults with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is done through participation in the Church through attending holy services, partaking of the sacraments, receiving education at Parish Life Conferences & spiritual retreats, and encouraging them to build community with one another. Since coming into the Church nearly six years ago, I have met countless young men and women who have the desire for communion with God and with one another. The mission for YAF is simple: to bring us all closer to Christ and His Church, as well as to one another. Community is foundational to our Christian faith, and it is my hope that we can all come together to grow our communities for the Glory of God.





Camp St. Thekla

By Sueanna Alter | All Saints Church, Raleigh, NC



Hello DOMSE! Thank you for supporting our camp this year and sending us your children as campers and your young adults as our staff. This was our biggest year of camp ever, with over 160 campers each session, and over forty staff serving them. It was a huge effort by all our staff to pull together and sacrifice their time and effort for the spiritual growth of our campers, and we are extremely grateful to them.

This year our campers enjoyed a Christian Education curriculum taught by our counselors, based on the Book of Genesis and the many types of Christ which can be found in those pages. They learned about the connections between those figures and the rest of the Bible in our Biblical Connections activity and spent time with our session priests and Bishop Nicholas in "Ask Sayedna" and "Ask Abouna." Each group of campers got to spend time on our ropes course, and the very oldest campers scaled the Alpine Tower, a huge structure that takes great courage to conquer. At the end of the week, our oldest and youngest campers took on the Creek Hike together and helped each other navigate the rushing waters and slippery rocks. They had a ton of fun getting to know each other!

During the afternoon program, our campers played camp classics like Angle Ball, Nine-Square in the Air, and of course Gaga Ball. Older and younger campers enjoyed water activities like Water Ziplining, Wet Willie Water Slide, and chilling out at the swimming pool. Some older campers went on the

Cascades Hike, featuring a fabulous (and jumpable) waterfall, while some went to the giant Lake Park, which is full of inflatable fun. The afternoon activities culminated in the Angle Ball Challenge at the end of the week, where campers faced off against the staff in an epic battle. Unfortunately, during the second session, the challenge was canceled due to a sudden storm, but I think we all agree that staff would have been victorious!

Our evenings were full of fun activities, like learning to line dance on Western Night, putting on our best retro attire for the Decades Dance, winning tickets at Tournament Night, and singing camp themed songs at Serenade Night. Our week finished with a wonderful slideshow of all our best moments at camp, and more than a few tears were shed, but campers were overjoyed to see their parents the next morning at checkout day.

At camp we also have the unique joy of celebrating daily services together, with Orthros and Vespers in the morning and evening of each day. We were also blessed to celebrate a hierarchical liturgy on Thursday of each session, where the campers got to see their bishop in action at the altar. These experiences sanctify our time at camp and enrich our relationships by bringing us back to God each day.

Thank you to the parents who entrusted us with your children, thank you to the campers for wholeheartedly embracing camp and all that it has to offer, thank you to our staff for striving tirelessly to make it all happen, and thank you to our clergy for leading us so prayerfully towards Christ. We hope to see you all again next year!



DOMSE College Scholarship

In 2021, the Diocese of Miami & the Southeast established an annual DOMSE Scholarship program for the purpose of recognizing high school graduates as they pursue their higher education. We applaud those young adults that have applied for this opportunity from DOMSE. It is good to know the future of DOMSE is in good hands with such amazing and intelligent youth! We pray that all the applicants spread the light of Christ to everyone that they encounter in their college experience. The number of applicants this year was six (nine in 2022 and three in 2021). We need to spread the word that scholarships are available from DOMSE...encourage your graduating seniors to apply for this wonderful opportunity.

This year, our Diocese was able to award \$2500 college scholarships to two of our DOMSE Teens. With the blessing of His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS, the DOMSE Scholarship Committee is excited to announce the 2023 Judges Choice recipients of the DOMSE College Scholarship.



The first recipient is Mary Williams from St. John Church in Memphis, TN. Mary is attending Mississippi State University, pursuing a degree in Kinesiology.



The second recipient is Julia Sheridan from Archangel Gabriel Church in Lafayette, LA. Julia is attending the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, pursuing a degree in Physics.

CONGRATULATIONS to both young ladies! Keep a lookout for the upcoming DOMSE 2024 Scholarship application at DOMSE.ORG, where we are expanding the DOMSE scholarship to THREE applicants for 2024. Please let your parish teens who are seniors know about this wonderful opportunity to apply for assistance in attending college next year.

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this beautiful parish has become a safe haven of protection against the evil days we live in, a spiritual hospital for our healing, and an absolute ark against the wildest tempests. Now the necessity of expanding the “ark” has become even more apparent. The faithful attendance at ALL services, day-to-day participation and help, countless baptisms, thirsty souls becoming Catechumens preparing for holy illumination, and the great multitude of children have absolutely “supercharged” our humble parish. Having recently celebrated our 25th Anniversary, the St. Paul family has everything to be thankful for in this church that is teeming with loving, active people—and that is filled with and surrounded by beauty. Please come visit!

Glory to God for all things!





Words from Sayedna Nicholas

As you may or may not know, Camp St. Thekla (CST) concluded its two sessions with a record number of campers and a record number of staff. The feedback from parents and campers has been that it was the best camp we have ever had! Is it any wonder? Through the Grace of God, a tremendous amount of effort, time, talent, treasure, and experience were invested in planning and executing both sessions of camp. The Administrative Committee, for over nine months, and the staff, who started working weeks before camp, have labored for free as an act of love for CST and to give back to current campers experiences that will last a lifetime. This generous giving, God willing, shall continue to help shape cohorts of campers in the Southeast conforming to Christ's teachings and the Orthodox Church. As we start the cycle of planning again, we begin with Winter Camp (WAMP) simultaneously with summer camp. If you think camp is for campers only, you would only be half correct! The young adult staff is continuing to be formed, once again, to learn further about how to work sacrificially and how to show agape love to the campers and each other in accordance with the Christian virtue of selflessness. It is clear that the hand of God is at play in our diocese and especially at CST. Let us Glorify Him!

Leaving summer camp, everyone looks forward to next year's sessions as campers, or new staff, who just completed their last year aging out of camp. Another typical characteristic of everyone leaving camp is being exhausted and needing a short recovery by sleeping in and resting before resuming life outside of camp in anticipation of next year's adventure at CST!

Another event that starts and ends in July in odd years is the Archdiocese Convention, which is being held in Phoenix, AZ. It will be a week full of events and meetings presided over by His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X. There will be an article on the convention in the September issue of The Light.

In the meantime, we shift gears to the Fall Retreat, which will be held at St. Elias Church, Atlanta, GA, on September 22nd through the 24th. I look forward to seeing everyone at the retreat as we explore more spirituality and gain wisdom to advance our journey in becoming God like.

**May God bless you and may
the Holy Trinity protect you all!**

+BISHOP NICHOLAS



Theology Editor's Corner

It was a blessing and a joy for me to be able to serve at Camp St. Thekla this year as a session priest. I had never been to one of our Antiochian camps before, and I did not know what to expect, but the experience has shown me just how important the camping program is as a ministry of our Archdiocese.

From the very first day, His Grace Bp. NICHOLAS, Fr. Alex Mackoul, and the counselors and volunteers built up excitement by individually welcoming each camper. And during the first evening program, when Fr. Alex called out – “Camp St. Thekla... Welcome home!” – everyone went wild. That first day was a joyful homecoming for so many, but are our Antiochian camps really another home for our kids?

Home is the place where we are safe and loved. It is where we are nurtured as we continue to develop into our whole selves. It is where we receive the resources and support to be able to stand strong in the face of every struggle, hardship, or trial that might come to us from the outside. Given this, our camps do seem to check a lot of the boxes.

For what makes Camp St. Thekla so special is that gives our kids the opportunity to unplug from their devices and their normal pressures, and to see that their Christian faith is the center of a full and fulfilling life. At camp, church services in the morning and the evening connect the campers to God in prayer, Christian education feeds their minds and helps them to know God better, and challenging activities and enjoyable events allow them to push their limits and to build lasting friendships with other Orthodox kids from throughout the Diocese. Finally, they can talk through things with their counselors, the priests, and even the bishop every step of the way and receive their care and support.

When we drove away from the camp at the end of the week, the four kids from our church spent at least the first two hours talking about all their favorite moments. And even though it was their first year at camp, they all agreed that they would be coming back again next year. Then, later the next week, my daughter told me that Camp St. Thekla really is her second home.

Glory to God for all that He is doing in the lives of our kids through Camp St. Thekla and the other camps and for all the staff and volunteers whose dedication and faithfulness make them possible!

Upcoming Events

AUGUST

AMEN LEADERSHIP AND LOCAL CHAPTER PRESIDENTS MEETING

August 15, 2023

7:00 pm - 8:00 pm EDT - Zoom

AMEN VIRTUAL BIBLE STUDY

August 17, 2023

7:00 pm - 8:00 pm EDT - Zoom

SEPTEMBER

AMEN VIRTUAL BIBLE STUDY

September 21, 2023

7:00 pm - 8:00 pm EDT - Zoom

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September 22-23, 2023

St. Elias Orthodox Church, Atlanta, GA

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2023 FALL RETREAT

Hosted at St. Elias Orthodox Church,
Atlanta, GA

September 22 - 23, 2023

Break out sessions

Guest speakers

DOMSE Jeopardy

Movie & popcorn

Fellowship time

Raffle

Child care



“Thy Word is a Lamp Unto My Feet”

Psalm 118:105

IF YOU HAVE ARTICLES OR SUGGESTIONS FOR THE LIGHT NEWSLETTER, PLEASE EMAIL THEM TO DOMSENEWSLETTER@GMAIL.COM

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