



THE Veil

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
ST. MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

NOVEMBER 2025
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Pilgrimage to Mount Athos

DN. NICHOLAS D

Header Photo: Dionysiou Monastery as seen from a tour boat, photo courtesy of Dn. Nicholas

In early October, I had the opportunity to visit Mount Athos in Greece, also known as the Holy Mountain, the center of Orthodox monasticism for more than a thousand years. This was a pilgrimage I had dreamed about for decades, so it was the trip of a lifetime—and I'm already thinking of going back!

Fellow parishioner Jonathan C. and I joined a diverse but wholly Orthodox group organized by an Antiochian priest in Colorado, and our group of 19 included many of his parishioners and also men from California, South Carolina, Illinois, Florida, Texas, and a father and son duo from Australia. We bonded as brothers and became quite close during our pilgrimage.

The pilgrimage was arranged by Orthodox Tours, a highly regarded travel agency run by an OCA priest, Fr. Ilya Gotlinsky. Our tour guide was Ivan from Serbia, a gentle bear of a man with extensive knowledge of the monasteries, churches, and holy sites we would visit.

First, we spent two days in Thessalonica, where we visited ancient churches and venerated the relics of Saint Demetrios, patron of the city, and St. Gregory Palamas. At nearby monasteries we venerated relics of the Holy Apostle

Andrew and St. Anastasia and the grave of St. Paisios of Mt. Athos. We spent a day marveling at the monasteries of Meteora, perched high upon rock formations, where in times past the only access was by ladder or in a basket hauled up by a monk-powered capstan. The nuns at the women's monasteries were particularly welcoming.

At last, we traveled to the port town of Ouranopolis and received our official permits to enter Mount Athos. Access to the Holy Mountain is carefully controlled to preserve its monastic environment and culture. All pilgrims are obliged to arrive by ferry, and our boat—named "Panagia" for the Theotokos—was full of men from around the Orthodox world. We heard Greek, Romanian, Serbian, Russian, and English, too. If you met some of these burly guys in an alleyway, you'd fear for your life, but here we were all brothers on pilgrimage.

At our landing near Grigoriou monastery, we were met by a bus that would take us over winding and bumpy roads—hardly any of them paved—across the Holy Mountain. In four days, we visited ten monastic communities, ranging from large monasteries like Hilander and Panteleimon to the one-monk Skete of St. Sava.

(Continued on pg. 6)

“ I exchanged words
of wonder and awe with a
fellow pilgrim. “Lord, it
is good for us to be here.” ”



Saint Mary
ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Veil | Official Newsletter of St. Mary Orthodox Church | Falls Church, VA | Volume 39, Issue 7

God Grant You Many Years!

Don't see your name? Join us on Realm and fill out your profile. If you include your birthday and nameday, you'll see them here.

BIRTHDAYS

Bobby A.
Anastasia B.
Sara C.
Yara C.
Hans C.
Ileana C.
Samuel C.
Alexandra D.
Caleb D.
Dn. Nicholas
Maria D.
Svetlana D.

Stephanie D.
Kurt E.
Rebecca E.
Anthony F.
Luke F.
Allison J.
Jason R.
Ellen R.
Tatiana R.
Stephen S.
Christopher T.
Raphael Z.

NAMESDAYS

Nov. 8 — Michael the Archangel
Nov. 14 — St. Philip the Apostle
Nov. 16 — St. Matthew the Apostle
Nov. 20 — St. Andrew the Apostle
Nov. 21 — Theotokos (Entrance)
Nov. 24 — St. Catherine of Alexandria; St. Columba
Nov. 30 — St. Andrew the Apostle

ANNIVERSARIES

Jonathan C. & Anna C.
Eugene H. & Stephanie C.
Caleb & Lacie F.
Elisabeth & Warren H.

Craig & Renee L.
Jeff & Meghan M.
Nathan & Charity W.

YOUNG ADULTS & PROFESSIONALS

2025 *Gala*

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8

COCKTAIL HOUR: 6PM
DINNER: 7PM

Join us for a dazzling evening of music, dancing, and glamour with live music and DJ, a photo booth, an open bar, and more!

Dress Code: Semi-Formal or Disco Inspired

Ss. Peter & Paul Antiochian
Orthodox Christian Church
Kogok Banquet Hall
10620 River Road, Potomac, MD



Get your Tickets
\$65 per person
Scan this QR code to
RSVP.

Contact OYAPGala@gmail.com for any questions.

FOCUS

NORTH + AMERICA

Come explore the possibility of a
FOCUS Center in the DMV!

Three opportunities to join!

- Saturday, November 8th: St. Mark Orthodox Church
◦ 7124 River Rd Bethesda, MD 20817
- Friday, December 5th: Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral
◦ 2815 36th St NW, Washington, DC 20007
- Saturday, December 6th: St. Mary Orthodox Church
◦ 7223 Roosevelt Ave, Falls Church, Virginia 22042

Schedule

- Vespers
◦ 5pm - 6pm
- Dinner, Presentation, Q&A
◦ 6pm - 8pm

Please direct any questions about the
events to info@focusna.org.

Please RSVP for which sessions
you'll attend:



Steven Christoforou
Executive Director, FOCUS

"Living a Life of
Service"





SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
26	27	28	29	30	31	1 MEMORIAL SATURDAY 3pm-4:30pm Adult Catechism I: The Faith (online only)
2 9am-11:30am Matins & Divine Liturgy 12pm-1pm: Church School	3	4	5 7pm-7:40pm Reader's Vespers 7:45pm-9pm- Financial Peace University	6	7 3pm-4pm Philokalia Book Study	8 HOLY ARCHANGELS
Office Closed Nov. 4th-20th						
9 9am-11:30am Matins & Divine Liturgy 12pm-1pm Church School	10 6pm-9pm Reel Women Movie Night	11 12pm-2pm Orthodox Clergy Council	12	13	14 ST. PHILIP/ST. GREGORY PALAMAS 3pm-4pm Philokalia Book Study	15
Office Closed Nov. 4th-20th						NATIVITY FAST
16 ST. MATTHEW 9am-11:30am Matins & Divine Liturgy 12pm-1pm Church School 6pm-8pm Men's Fellowship	17	18	19	20	21 ENTRANCE OF THEOTOKOS 3pm-4pm Philokalia Book Study 6:30pm-8pm Women's Bible Study	22 3pm-4:30pm Adult Catechism I: The Faith 5pm-6pm Great Vespers
NATIVITY FAST Nov. 15th-Dec. 24th						
Office Closed Nov. 4th-20th						
23 IOCC SUNDAY 9am-11:30am Matins & Divine Liturgy 12pm-1pm Church School	24 ST. CATHERINE 7-9pm Parish Council	25	26 7pm-7:40pm Vespers	27	28	29 11am-1pm Baptism: Shin 3pm-4:30pm Adult Catechism I: The Faith 5-6pm Great Vespers
30 ST. ANDREW 9am-11:30am Matins & Divine Liturgy	31					
NATIVITY FAST Nov. 15th-Dec. 24th						

Visit stmaryorthodox.org/calendar for the most updated event listings.

Did you miss DAF day?

LORI J. | PARISHIONER, EA, CFP

October 9th was DAF Day—a day dedicated to raising awareness about Donor Advised Funds (DAFs) and encouraging charitable giving through them (DAFday.com).

You might be wondering: what exactly is a DAF? A Donor Advised Fund is a special, tax-advantaged investment account you can establish to support the churches and charities that matter most to you.

Here's how it works:

- **Contribute:** Add cash or appreciated securities (like stocks or mutual funds) to your DAF.
- **Deduct:** If you itemize, you'll receive an immediate charitable deduction. With appreciated securities, you can deduct the fair market value (the average share price on the contribution date) and avoid paying capital gains tax.
- **Grow:** Your contributions can be invested or held in cash, and any growth is tax-free.



- **Give:** Recommend grants to St. Mary's or another charity, and the funds are distributed directly from your DAF.

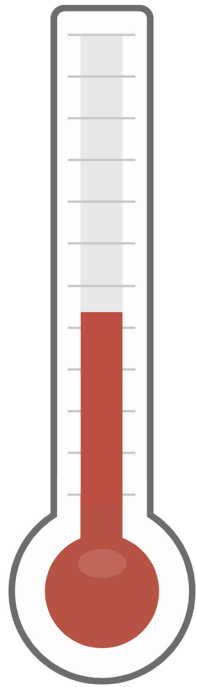
DAFs also offer flexibility in your tax planning. For example, you can "bunch" multiple years of charitable contributions into one year to itemize, then take the standard deduction the next year—while still maintaining steady support for your favorite causes. (Please consult your tax adviser for details.)

You can even personalize your DAF with a unique name and involve your whole family in the giving process.

If you already have an investment account with Vanguard, Fidelity, Charles Schwab or similar, check out their DAF options (Vanguard Charitable, Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund, or DAFgiving360, etc.). Many other providers exist as well, each with different minimums and fee structures.

Need help choosing the right DAF? Ask your financial advisor—or send me a message on Realm. Happy giving! ✕

Help Us Reach our Matching Campaign Goal



GROWING PARISH. GROWING VISION.

**WE'RE ALMOST THERE —
HELP US REACH THE TOP!**

ST. MARY'S IS GROWING,
AND WE'RE BUILDING OUR
FUTURE TOGETHER. WE'RE
NEARING OUR \$100,000
GOAL — AND RIGHT NOW
EVERY GIFT IS DOUBLED UP
TO \$20,000!

KEEP US CLIMBING!

YOUR SUPPORT TODAY
MOVES US CLOSER TO A
REVAMPED PARISH HOME!



Saint Mary
ORTHODOX CHURCH

DAVID D. | PARISH COUNCIL
PRESIDENT

St. Mary's Parish Council has spent much of this year investigating options to expand, relocate, or otherwise accommodate our growing parish. As part of our 2025 budget, we set a goal of saving an additional \$100,000 for our "war (peace?) chest", which is the pot of money set aside for whatever building opportunities God brings to us.

We are nearly halfway there, and we are excited to announce that two generous donors have offered to match your contributions up to a total of \$20,000 between now and the end of the year! As we enter the Advent season, please use this

campaign to double the impact your contribution will have. To donate, simply go to the "Give Now" tab in Realm, and select "St. Mary's Capital Fund" from the drop down menu. You can also give a check to David Dill, Ileana Ciobanu, or Chris Grindstaff.

We recognize some prefer to wait to give until we are certain of the path forward. However, we ask that you prayerfully consider entrusting the parish with your funds now, as once an opportunity arises, we may only have a short window to put in an offer or close a contract before another party beats us to it. God bless you, and we appreciate the time, talent, and treasure each of you brings to our community. ✕

Join Our Psalter Prayer Group During the Nativity Fast

LIBBY H. | PARISHIONER

St. Basil the Great says that the Book of Psalms, “frames laws for life — it is the common treasury of good teachings — for the old wounds of souls it cures completely, and to the recently wounded it brings speedy restoration; the diseased it treats, and the unharmed it preserves. The psalms take away, as far as is possible, the passions, which subtly exercise dominion over souls... and it does this with a certain orderly persuasion and sweetness which produces sound thought.”

We know that the foundations of our spiritual lives are prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. During the Nativity Fast we seem to put our primary focus on almsgiving as Christmas is a time of gift giving. During Great Lent, fasting is constantly on our minds. But we should be doing all three all year long. The Psalter Prayer Group encourages us in the habit of prayer mainly during the two longer fasts.

The Psalter Prayer Group is active during the two major fasting periods of the year to help develop the habit of prayer necessary for every Christian. You can choose to commit to the both Nativity Fast and Great Lent (total of 80 days a year) or simply either one (40 days).

Individually, we pray a different kathisma of the Psalter each day during the fasting period. (The book of Psalms is broken into 20 kathismas) If you join us, you will be assigned a kathisma to pray the first day of the fast. Then each day you prayed the succeeding kathisma until you have prayed through the entire Psalter twice. Because each participant begins with a different kathisma, as a group we pray through the Psalter each day. And at the end of the fast, you will have prayed the entire Psalter twice while our group as

a whole has prayed the Psalter 40 times. To finish our prayer sessions, we pray for all those others who are in the group.

There are many different Psalters to choose from, however, you do not need a Psalter to join us. When I send out the assignments I will include a table that tells you which individual Psalms are in each kathisma so you can just use your Bible if you wish.

You can choose any time of day to pray the Psalter — some like to do this first thing in the morning, others before bed. But you could decide pray during the day, while sitting in the car waiting for a child to finish a soccer practice, or even while waiting in a doctor’s office. The goal is to incorporate prayer into your daily activities. God willing, this will ignite a desire for more time in prayer!

For the Nativity Fast, we begin on 15 November and pray our last kathismas on 24 December. If you wish to join those who are praying during the Nativity fast you must go two things. First, join the Psalter Prayer group on Realm and then respond to the sign-up which I will post on the group around 24 October. Not everyone in the Realm group chooses to participate during every fast, so I only include on the list those who have committed to pray during the fasting period. Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving - Col 4:2 ✕



CELEBRATING IOCC'S WORK

IOCC Sunday | November 23, 2025

Please consider a gift to support IOCC's worldwide humanitarian work, or visit ioccsunday.org for more ways to get involved, and help spread awareness about IOCC in your parish and community.



“ It would be better for the sun to fall from its orbit, than to neglect reading the Psalter, for it is of great benefit to study the Psalms, and to read the Psalter diligently. For all spiritual books are profitable for us, and grieve the demons, but there is none like the Psalter. - St. John Chrysostom

”

We prayed in ancient churches before miracle-working icons of the Theotokos—and in one we sang “The Angel Cried.” We drank from a holy spring near the sea where the Theotokos arrived to claim the Holy Mountain as her garden. At two monasteries, we were blessed to speak with monks about their lives dedicated to Christ. The tour also arranged a boat trip to the peninsula’s southern tip, so we were able to see many more monasteries and monastic huts by sea. A highlight was participating in Vespers and Divine Liturgy—and receiving the Eucharist—at the tenth-century Protaton church in Karyes, the administrative capital of Mount Athos.



Photo: The tour group at Meteora in front of Valaam Monastery, photo courtesy of Dn. Nicholas

For me, of all the profound spiritual experiences of this trip, perhaps the most intense occurred at a special chapel for relics at St. Panteleimon monastery. Laid out for our veneration was the most amazing collection of saints’ relics imaginable: Saints Silouan the Athonite, John of Kronstadt, John the Baptist, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Nicholas of Myra, the Apostles Luke, Andrew, and Thomas, and of course St. Panteleimon. These were not small particles like we have at our parish, but major pieces of the sanctified bones of these holy ones. After venerating and praying to each of these saints, I exited the chapel in a daze, my knees almost buckling, my lungs close to hyperventilating. I exchanged words of wonder and awe with a fellow pilgrim. “Lord, it is good for us to be here.”

My advice to all Orthodox men: don’t wait until you’re old like me to make this pilgrimage. For many years I always said, “Someday”—but did nothing until Diakonissa Cathy pushed me to sign up for this trip. I am so grateful for this experience. Don’t wait! Don’t worry if you’re still “young in the faith.” We had men in our group who had been chrismated just this year.

It’s not an easy trip—pilgrimages generally involve sacrifice—but visiting Mount Athos is uniquely rewarding. The holy Fathers there pray for all of us, for the whole world, all the time. For those who can, it is good for us in the world, however briefly, to join them in this holy place and get a glimpse of their life in Christ. ✕

From Founder to Future: Build and They Will Come

ELAINE P | ST MARY’S FOUNDING MEMBER

In almost 40 years, we have grown from 25 adults and a handful of children to a vibrant parish of more than 220 members—over 100 children, including 33 infants and toddlers, 14 teens, and 16 catechumens with almost 200 people attending liturgy each week! From a part-time priest and three altar boys, we now have a full-time priest, three deacons, and more than 15 altar servers. The building we purchased in 1996 is truly bursting at the seams.

As a founding member, I am astounded by how quickly our parish has grown. In the fall of 1986, Armand Scala—the visionary who championed an English-speaking Orthodox church—gathered 25 faithful Orthodox Christians to form a mission parish. In February 1987, we celebrated our first Divine Liturgy with

three altar boys and one other child in the congregation.

At first, we met at Dunn Loring Methodist Church, then moved to the library of St. Philip’s Catholic School. Each week we labored in love to transform the school library into a holy Orthodox worship space. Early each Sunday, Fr. Alexander, our first priest, would set up the altar while parishioners unfolded chairs and assembled the iconostasis—two large freestanding wooden panels with icons of Christ on the right and the Theotokos with Child on the left. Parishioners brought food, and we shared fellowship in the hallway. Then we packed it all away, ready to do it again the next week!

I was a single parent at the time of our founding. My son, Kurt, served as an altar boy. Today, I am a grandmother to three beautiful girls. *(Continued on back page)*

Connect DC 2025: A Weekend of Worship, Learning and Fellowship

JAMES T. | CONNECT 2025 LEAD ORGANIZER

The annual Connect Orthodox Conference for Young Adults (ages 21-39) was held October 3-5 this year at the J.W. Marriott in Washington, D.C., bringing together Orthodox young adults for a weekend of fun social events, engaging speakers, and worship services. Now in its eighth year and under official sponsorship of Orthodox Youth Ministries (OYM), the conference moves to a different city every year and for the first time came to the DC area. This provided an amazing opportunity for members of our parish to be involved in a major national event, make meaningful connections and engage in fellowship. I had the privilege of being selected as this year's event Lead Organizer, which gave me the opportunity to witness firsthand this incredible opportunity for Orthodox young adults.

Connect DC drew more than 120 young adults from across North America (a record for recent years), with more than two-thirds being from outside the DMV area and some coming from as far away as California and Canada. 75% of participants had never attended a Connect conference before, showing the growing interest of young adults to be a part of national events where they can meet like-minded Orthodox Christians. Attendees represented all major Orthodox Jurisdictions, roughly 30% OCA, 30% Greek, 15% Antiochian, 15% Coptic, 5% Other, and 5% Catechumens/Inquirers, showing broad interest from diverse Orthodox communities.

The program started on Friday, with starting with an afternoon tour of the Smithsonian icebreakers and evening prayers at the hotel. These were followed by a dinner social at Clyde's, a DC restaurant scene staple, and a keynote speech from Father John Parker, the Dean of St. Tikhon's Seminary at set the stage for the conference's theme of Calling, drawing inspiration from Ephesians

4:1-3 "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

On Saturday, participants heard from several more speakers including Father John, Katrina Bitar (Director of Operations for FOCUS North America) and Daniel Bein (a hospital chaplain and trauma counselor). Each speaker gave their perspective on how young adults can find their Calling in Christ and use their unique talents and abilities in His service. The speakers were then joined by our very own Father David and Preoteasa Stephanie in a Q&A panel, fielding questions from the young adults. After the panel, Father David was joined by Deacon Ken Liu (also dual-hatted as OYM's representative to the event) and Subdeacon Nicholas Jones in leading an evening Vespers service. Especially exciting was the inclusion of the veneration of relics of recently canonized St. Olga, which Metropolitan Tikhon gave his blessing to bring to the event. Following Vespers attendees broke into small groups for dinner at local restaurants and returned for a nighttime Dance Party (with a photobooth provided by our very own Sara C.).

Sunday, the group worshiped together during Divine Liturgy at St. Sophia's Greek Orthodox Cathedral followed by lunch and wrap-up presentations

given by Katrina Bitar and Spyridoula Fotinis (of the Assembly of Bishop's Inter-Parish Associations agency). The event wrapped up with a tour of the DC monuments and some group photos at the Lincoln Memorial.

Overall Connect 2025 was a resounding success and I am truly grateful for the opportunity to have led this year's planning team. In a society and era when many people of all generations are increasingly disconnected from their spiritual lives, it was truly inspirational to see so many eager young adults spend their time and effort to explore their faith and seek camaraderie with fellow Orthodox Christians. Special thanks to Father David, Deacon Ken, Subdeacon Nicholas, and all parishioners who supported Connect...your support was critical to the success of this year's event! I highly encourage all young adults to attend Connect in future years, and all parishioners to contribute financially to ensure the sustainability (and reduce costs from attendees) of the conference and other OYM initiatives for Orthodox Young Adults. ✕



Photo: Connect DC 2025 participants celebrating Divine Liturgy at St. Sophia's Greek Orthodox Cathedral, photo courtesy of James T.

Kurt serves on the parish council; he was married here, my daughter-in-law Lily was chrismated here, and my three grandchildren were baptized here. Three generations of our family now worship together at Saint Mary's.

Our current building has come a long way, too. As a former Methodist church, it needed to be made "Orthodox." Our iconostasis was a gift—one parishioner drove his truck to another state, dismantled the structure, brought it back to Falls Church, and rebuilt it to fit our altar area. A dynamic beautification project followed, adding hand-painted icons across the interior walls, arched frosted windows, and deep blue accents. Fundraisers and generous bequests enabled us to purchase the Roosevelt Street house which gives us additional space to use. Eventually, we burned our mortgage in celebration!

When Father Alexander returned to full-time military service, Father David and his wonderful family joined us, and we continued to grow and flourish.

What a blessing it has been to see God's hand in all we have become. May God continue to guide Saint Mary's as new people join our church family and we prepare for a larger worship space. May He grant that my grandchildren be married here, and their children baptized here. And may He bless you with several generations of your own family worshipping together in this sacred space. ✠



Saint Mary
ORTHODOX CHURCH

GROWING PARISH. GROWING VISION.

Support our year-end
matching campaign!



WE ARE OVERCROWDING.

YOUR DONATION HELPS
MAKE OUR PARISH
ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL.

Act now in Realm → Giving → St. Mary's
Capital Fund



Get tickets for "Sound & Fury: Music at the Edge of Silence," presented by Levine Music

Join our own parishioner, Luke Ratcliffe for a presentation of "Sound & Fury: Music at the Edge of Silence," a powerful program of 20th-century works shaped by war, exile, and resilience, featuring music by Claude Debussy, Sergei Prokofiev, Poldowski, and Cesar Franck. This concert features Holly Nelson on violin, and St. Mary Parishioner, Luke Ratcliffe, on piano. Scan tickets for this must-see concert, December 6th @ 7-8:30pm or visit: <https://tinyurl.com/mru7n9hr>



THE Veil

The Official Newsletter of the Protection of the Holy Mother of God Orthodox Church
Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America, Orthodox Church in America (OCA)

Hierarchy: Archbishop NATHANIEL of Detroit | Parish Priest: V. Rev. Dr. Fr. David G. Subu
Deacons: Protodn. Peter Danilchick, Dn. Nicholas Dujmovic, Dn. Kenneth Liu | Choir Director & Head Chanter: Sdn. Nicholas Jones
Subdeacons: Eugene Huang, Nicholas Jones, Bogdan Maxim, Anthony Freude | Parish Council President: David Dill

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