

THE CHAMPION

A Monthly Publication of Saint Athanasios Greek Orthodox Church

FEBRUARY 2026



MESSAGE

FROM FR. PANAGIOTIS

As we enter the month of February, the Church gently leads us toward the threshold of Great Lent. Before we speak of fasting, repentance, and renewed spiritual struggle, the Church invites us to begin in a very particular way: by remembering and praying for those who have gone before us in faith.

On Saturday, February 14th, we will celebrate the Saturday of Souls, offering memorial prayers for all the faithful who have reposed throughout the ages. The Church places the remembrance of the dead at the very beginning of our pre-Lenten journey because it reminds us of where this journey ultimately leads.

When we gather to offer kolyva and pray for our loved ones by name, we proclaim a truth that stands at the heart of our faith: death does not have the final word. We pray for those who rest in the hope of the Resurrection. In Christ, the grave is no longer an end, but a doorway—a passage that now opens toward paradise.

This is why the Church asks us to remember the reposed before asking us to examine ourselves. Lent is a journey toward Pascha, toward the empty tomb, toward the victory of life over death. By praying for the departed, we confess that this victory belongs not only to us, but to the entire Body of Christ, both living and departed.

As we submit names for the Saturday of Souls and stand together in prayer, let us do so with hope, hope that the same Lord who trampled down death by death will also raise them—and us—to eternal life.

May this sacred remembrance prepare our hearts for the days ahead, and may the memory of our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ be eternal!



MEMORIALS

Aspasia Koulos (3 Years)

John Constantine Koutselas (6 Years)

FUNERALS

Bill Vlahos

PARISH COUNCIL

Hello, St. Athanasios Family!

I am honored to introduce myself as our new Saint Athanasios Parish Council President. It is truly a blessing to serve a community that has contributed so much to my spiritual growth and to my family. I am deeply grateful for the trust placed in me and for the dedication of those who have served before and alongside me. In particular, I cannot thank Brian McAnally enough for his faithful leadership over the past two years and for the tireless counsel he has provided throughout this transition.

I am also incredibly thankful to Father Panagiotis for his encouragement, spiritual guidance, and confidence in me. I thank our Parish Council members for their ceaseless support, their willingness to offer long hours of service to our community, and most importantly, their great love for Christ. For those who may not realize it, the Parish Council not only steps in when volunteers do not miraculously appear, but does so with joy. It is inspiring to witness such genuine love for serving our Lord, which naturally flows into serving one another.

Lastly, I thank my husband, Rod Caniglia, for sharing his thoughts when I was first asked to consider serving in this role. As I prayed for God's discernment, feeling very much like the least worthy candidate (and still do), Rod said, "If Christ could willingly be crucified for our salvation out of His great love for us, you can serve the Church as president." I mean...when you put it that way!

On January 4th, it became official. The Parish Council met to elect the Executive Council and, as noted in the bulletin, the following members were elected for 2026. Congratulations to all, and thank you for your continued dedication to our parish: President: Anna Caniglia

1st Vice President: **Brian McAnally**

2nd Vice President: **Tracey Collins**

Treasurer: **Jim Kuncel**

Assistant Treasurer: **Mike Tsimouris**

Recording Secretary: **Nick Dagiantis**

Corresponding Secretary: **John Maniatis**

We also joyfully celebrated our Feast Day last month. A heartfelt thank you to Sherry Haralambopoulos for the beautiful florals and Tracey Collins and her incredible team, including Bessie Metrou, Jenny Perozzi, Thanea Walters, Brian McAnally, Helen Halkias, Leah Fanning and family, Pete Nassos, Pete Metrou, Philoptochos, and many other helping hands, for organizing, cooking, and preparing a wonderful Vespers refreshment offering and Feast Day Brunch for our parish.

As we begin this Lenten season, I thank God for this extraordinary parish, for our beautiful family of parishioners, and for the saints who intercede for us, led by our patron Saint Athanasios. I also thank God for Father Panagiotis, whose love for Christ and pastoral leadership continue to guide us toward new ministries, deeper faith, and spiritual growth. May God grant us a blessed and fruitful Lent as we journey together toward Holy Week and the joy of the Resurrection.

Anna Caniglia
Parish Council President

LENTEN CONFESSION SCHEDULE



Sign up here for the sacrament of Holy Confession. If you are unavailable during any of the scheduled slots, or they are all full, please reach out to office@saintathanasios.com to find an alternative date and time.



**SCAN FOR
APPOINTMENT**

Lenten Dinners & Lectures

Join us Wednesday evenings during Lent for Presanctified Liturgy (at 6pm) followed by a community Dinner & Lenten Lecture (at 7:30 pm). Dinners will be hosted by various ministries throughout the parish and we have a great lineup of speakers planned.

February 25th

Dinner Hosted by The St. Athanasios Men's Group

Topic: ***I am a Christian, Now What?: A practical look at Fr, Thomas Hopko's 55 maxims for Christian Living***

March 4th

Dinner Hosted by The Philoptochos Society

Topic: ***Icons and Iconography with Iconographer Panayiotis Mihalopoulos***

March 11th

Dinner Hosted by The Choir & Chanters

Topic: ***The Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim by Fr. Panagiotis***

March 18th

Dinner Hosted by the Sunday School

Topic: ***2026 Oratorical Festival Presentations***

April 1st

Dinner Hosted by the Soul Sisters

Topic: ***Relics and Saints within the Parish by Fr. Panagiotis***



BIBLE STUDY

Join our Bible Study this Spring as we focus on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, exploring our Unity in Christ and life in the Church. Sessions are at 11am on the following dates:

2/11	3/25
2/25	4/1
3/11	4/22



SAINT
ATHANASIOS



PARISH CALENDAR

All services are live streamed on our YouTube Channel.

Orthros begins at 8:30am with Divine Liturgy following at 9:30am (unless otherwise noted below)

Sunday, February 1

Divine Liturgy - Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee
Tridion Begins Today
11:30 Sunday School Teacher Meeting

Monday, February 2

Divine Liturgy - Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple

Wednesday, February 4

3pm Hased House - prep & deliver

Thursday, February 5

7pm Men's Group: Small Groups

Saturday, February 7

6pm Philotochos Spring Fundraiser

Sunday, February 8

Divine Liturgy - Sunday of the Prodigal Son
11:30am Philotochos General Meeting

Monday, February 9

7pm Vespers - St. Haralambos
Holy Taxiarchai & St Haralambos Greek
Orthodox Church
7373 N Caldwell Ave, Niles, IL 60714

Tuesday, February 10

Divine Liturgy - St. Haralambos
7pm Discover Orthodoxy

Wednesday, February 11

11am Bible Study

Thursday, February 12

11am Agape Meeting
7 pm Soul Sisters: Soul Sisters

Saturday, February 14

Divine Liturgy - Saturday of Souls

Sunday, February 15

Divine Liturgy - Judgement Sunday (Meatfare Sunday)

Wednesday, February 18

6:30 pm JrGOYA Night

Thursday, February 19

9am LifeLine Screening

Saturday, February 21

Divine Liturgy - Holy Ascetics

Sunday, February 22

Divine Liturgy - Forgiveness Sunday
11:30 am Choir Rehearsal
4pm Forgiveness Vespers

Monday, February 23

5:30pm GOYA Clean Monday & Compline
6pm Great Compline

Tuesday, February 24

6pm Jesus Prayer

Wednesday, February 25

11am Bible Study
6pm Presanctified Liturgy
7:30pm Lenten Dinner and Lecture: "I am a Christian, Now What?: A practical look at Fr. Thomas Hopko's 55 maxims for Christian Living"

Thursday, February 26

6pm Joint JrGOYA & GOYA Night

Friday, February 27

6pm JOY Night
7pm Salutations to the Theotokos

Saturday, February 28

Divine Liturgy - St Theodore & the Miracle of Koliva
11am Parish Lenten Retreat

COFFEE HOUR

Coffee Hour Hosts Needed

Help to promote fellowship, community, and friendship following Divine Liturgy by hosting Coffee Hour. Consider hosting for occasions such as Memorials, Namedays, Birthdays, 40-day Blessings, etc - or no occasion needed. You can join another family or multiple people to host as well. For more information and to sign up to host a Coffee Hour, please call the office.



FOOD PANTRY



Thank you to everyone who generously donated food to our Pantry! Your contributions make a real difference in the lives of our community members who need it most. We are so grateful for your kindness & support. 2025 totals - Money donated - \$1,010. Food - 1,541 lbs!

Please donate food that is Healing to the Hungry - Lean Proteins (Saturated Fats), No Sodium, Low Sugar Fruits, Whole Grain Items. No dented cans or open packaged foods. Expired food can not be accepted. This month's request is:

Peanut Butter, Jelly and Soup

Please contact Betty Roussos at bettyroussos@yahoo.com with any questions.

PHILOPTOCHOS

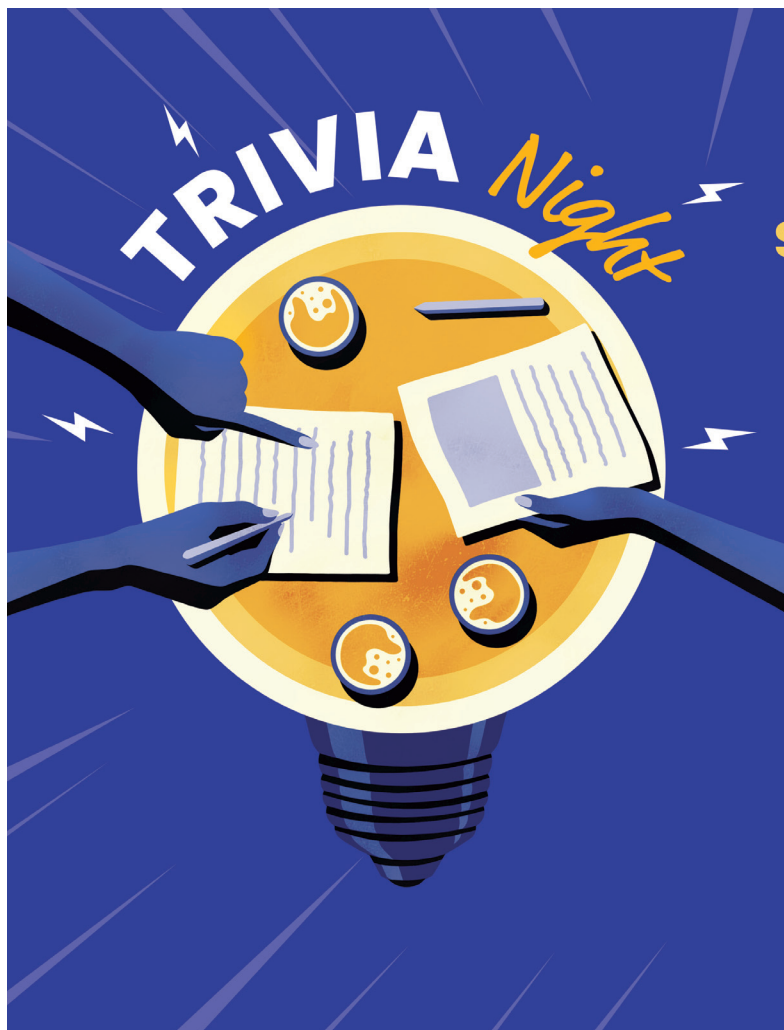
We kicked off the new year with our annual Vasilopita Throwdown. Thirteen bakers, representing 9 ministries or committees, were represented. Congratulations to Tracey Collins, winner of the cake category, and Elli Koulos, winner of the bread category! Thank you to all the participants: Thanos Prokos, George Manos, Elena Fanning, Mariana Cotromanes, Sophia Galanis, Lena Dracopoulos, Presbyteria Nichole, Margo Prokos, Kellie Procopos and Nick Dagiantis. We raised \$775 for St. Basil Academy and youth-related ministries.

We will be working with the Hesed House Ministry on Feb. 4th to cook and serve dinner. Thank you in advance to everyone who has signed up to help with this event.

Trivia Night is coming up on Saturday, Feb 7th! Test your knowledge of obscure facts and join us for an evening of fun and games. Tickets are \$25 per person. New this year, we will have a dessert raffle! Contact Samantha Dulles at ssdulles@yahoo.com to reserve your place. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to the Sisterhood of Presvyterias Fund and the Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry.

All members are encouraged to join us at our next general meeting, Sunday, Feb. 8th after Liturgy. We will be discussing a number of activities we have planned during Lent.





SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7

JOIN US FOR AN EVENING OF FUN AND TRIVIA

WHEN: DOORS OPEN AT 6:30 PM
TRIVIA STARTS PROMPTLY AT 7 PM
WHERE: ST. MATTHEW HALL
COST: \$25 PER PERSON (TEAMS OF 8)

BRING YOUR OWN FOOD & DRINKS!

WE'LL HAVE A DELICIOUS DESSERT LIVE AUCTION!

A PORTION OF PROCEEDS WILL BENEFIT THE SISTERHOOD OF PRESVYTERAS FUND AND ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN PRISON MINISTRY

GATHER YOUR TEAM AND COME SUPPORT A GREAT CAUSE!

STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship ... "Buying Christ a cup of coffee each week"

Throughout 2025, we introduced the topics of Stewardship Independence and Our House. We would like to expand on these two topics and connect them to our 2026 Stewardship Campaign ... Rise Up and Build ... Building Up the Body of Christ.

As we begin 2026, many of our Stewards have asked an important question: How are my Stewardship Treasures used? To put it simply, your contributions support the life and ministries of our Parish. If you look at the Parish's 2026 expense budget, what becomes immediately evident is that your Stewardship directly sustains and strengthens "Our House"—our spiritual home, our ministries, and the work we are called to do together.

The budget information also highlights our ongoing journey towards Stewardship Independence to decrease our dependency on external revenue sources. In 2025, Stewardship covered 49% of our Parish's total expenses. For 2026, our goal is to increase that support to 56%.

Reaching this Stewardship Independence milestone requires a collective increase of \$48,000 in Stewardship commitments. When spread across our Parish family, this amounts to an average increase of \$156 per Steward for the year—or simply \$3 more per week. In other words, the step we are asking each household to consider is equivalent to the cost of one cup of coffee each week.

As you prayerfully prepare your 2026 Stewardship commitment, we invite you to reflect on this small but meaningful offering. Consider it as "buying Christ a cup of coffee each week"—a simple gesture that, when multiplied across our community, strengthens the foundation of our Parish and supports the ministries that bless us all.

With gratitude for your continued love and support,

The St. Athanasios Stewardship Committee
Pete Nassos, Elli Koulos, & Jim Kund

COLLEGE MINISTRY



Zoe Kohler

Zoe Kohler is attending the Ohio State University at Columbus, Ohio. Her major is in "Linguistics", and she expects to graduate in May 2026. Her favorite classes so far have been "Romance Linguistics" and "Greek 1101". After graduation, Zoe's plan is to move to Europe and find a non-profit or policy job relating to improving the morality and overall sustainability of environmental and or food practices. In the longer term, Zoe plans to continue working in Europe, instilling more ethical and sustainable food/animal/environmental practices for companies and publishing related books. The Orthodox Church Zoe attends while at College is the "Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral". What she likes most about the Saint Athanasios Parish is that it feels like a big family; no matter how much time has passed since last talking to a member of the Parish, everyone remains friendly, close knit, and communal.

Zoe enjoys watching ice skating. Her hobbies are playing piano, reading, listening to records playing tennis and ice skating. Her favorite season is Summer, as she enjoys how lively nature is during this season. Her favorite restaurant while at College is the "Comune". When at home, she loves to visit Rakkan Ramen.

BOOK STORE

As Orthodox Christians, we welcome our Great Lent on Monday, February 26, with our thoughts about how to prepare nutritious Lenten meals. Our Bookstore has several cookbooks to help with healthy choices including Food, Faith, and Fasting: A Sacred Journey to Better Health; Fasting as a Family: Planning and Preparing Delicious Lenten Meals; and The Festive Fast: A Guide to Olive Oil and Vegetarian Cuisine. Consider buying the St. Euphrosynos the Cook icon to guide your kitchen cooking, also available in our Bookstore. Stop in soon!

FOOD FAITH *and* FASTING

A Sacred Journey to Better Health

RITA MADDEN, MPH, RDN



MEN'S GROUP

Thank you all for your support and participation in this ministry.

For those of you that may not be familiar with us, we are a Group of Orthodox friends who gather to share their experiences about life, their philosophies, values and ideas. We meet to provide charity, support, mentoring and build fellowship among the Orthodox community of men in the western suburbs.

Lives of the Saints

Our January session was a big success with the Soul Sisters. A large turnout by both groups allowed us to have meaningful discussions about St. Paisios and our lives. The final "Lives of the Saints" session will be on Thursday, February 5. Come join us as we focus on different saints across the centuries, uncovering their stories, struggles, and enduring impact on the Church and world.

NFL Watch Party

A great crowd for a great game! We watched the Chicago Bears beat the Green Bay Packers at Draft Picks in Naperville. Good food and drinks helped us calm our nerves until the final whistle. Our next watch party will be for March Madness. Stay tuned for more details.

Food Pantry

Each month, our church collection of donated food needs to be delivered to local food pantries. We need volunteers to transport our donations. If you are interested, please contact us for more information.

You can like and follow our Facebook page by searching for "Men's Group of St Athanasios Greek Orthodox Church" We welcome men (21+) to join us as we grow our mission. If interested, please contact Spiro Hountalas (naperspike@aol.com), Peter Metrou (pnmlawyer@aol.com) or Nick Dagiantis (ndagiantis@gmail.com).



HESED HOUSE



Hesed House ministry will be preparing and serving dinner to Hesed House guests on April 1st. Prep and cook to begin at St Athanasios kitchen around 3pm. Food will then be driven to Hesed House in order to prepare for their 7pm dinner service. If interested, please contact Bill Collins, btc@sbglobal.net, for details as well as Hesed House volunteer



CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

I hope you and your loved ones had a blessed Christmas and are enjoying a healthy, happy New Year. As we begin the year, we would like to briefly reflect on what our community accomplished through the Capital Campaign and share our goals for the year ahead.

During 2025, 34 generous donors helped us raise \$81,550 for Phase Two of the Capital Campaign. In addition, as a community, we fulfilled our commitment to set aside the mortgage payments we were previously making. These savings totaled an additional \$75,384, for a total of \$156,394. As a result of these efforts, we were able to complete one of the four Capital Campaign projects, the landscape renovation. Although in 2025 we fell short of our annual Phase Two fundraising goal, we had a very good year. Thank you to all!

As we move forward thru 2026, let us resolve to continue building on this momentum and to achieve our Phase Two goal of raising \$125,000 per year for the next several years. As the year continues, I encourage you to visit our web site to find out how you can support the Capital Campaign. Let's work together to strengthen Saint Athanasios for future generations.

Phil Nassos & Mike Tsimouris
Capital Campaign Committee



JOY

FEB. 27, 2026 | 6:30 PM

JOY Night

More information and RSVP in Band

JR GOYA

FEB. 18, 2026 | 6:30 PM

More information and RSVP in Band.

GOYA

FEB. 23, 2026 | 5:30 PM

Clean Monday & Compline

JOINT JR GOYA & GOYA

FEB. 26, 2026 | 6:30 PM

Bardwell Night

More information and RSVP in Band.



AGAPE MINISTRY

Agape had a wonderful time at our January meeting. Thank you to Chuck Curcuras who spoke to the group about Medicare. It was a very informative presentation. Please join us next month on February 12th at 11am at church. We will be having a Koliva workshop! Please come and learn how to make Koliva!



SPIRITUAL GROWTH



WALKING WITH THE SAINTS

Join us for Soul Sisters & Men's Group, gathering to be inspired by the lives of the saints. Each session will include prayer, discussion, and fellowship as we discover how these holy men and women can guide our own walk with Christ. Meetings: 7:00pm - 8:30pm in St. Matthew Hall.

MEN'S GROUP

2/5 - SAINT LUKE THE SURGEON

SCAN TO REGISTER



SOUL SISTERS

2/12 - SAINT OLGA OF ALASKA

SCAN TO REGISTER



Weddings
Baptisms
Christmas
Easter



dahliawb.com

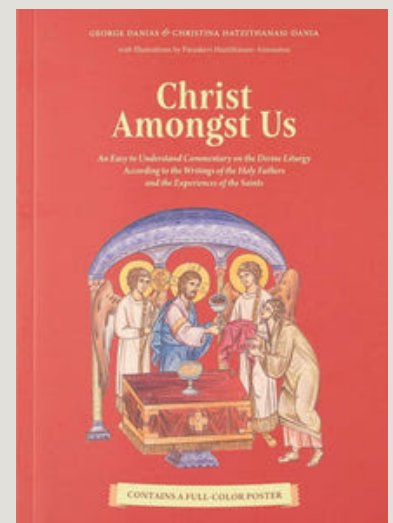
630.596.6826

DID YOU KNOW...?

The Small Entrance

Approaching the Holy Table, the priest takes the sacred Gospel in his hands and exits from the north door of the iconostasis. The faithful follow the gospel as if it were the Savior Himself-now he is appearing for the first time to preach the divine word. The sacred Gospel represents Christ Himself! As the Priest comes to the Solea, he secretly prays to the Lord, asking that He command His angels and archangels to join the people of God, and so celebrate with them, that all may praise the Lord together(...). By means of the Prayer of Entrance, the Priest beseeches God for the people, so that they may experience the mystery of the angels presence and co-celebration-to experience it in the very same way that our God-bearing Fathers experienced it!(...). The Small Entrance concludes with the elevation of the sacred Gospel and the exclamation: Wisdom! Arise! It is as if he is telling us: "Christ and His Gospel are the true wisdom. Let us be attentive" Finally the priest enters the Sanctuary through the Beautiful Gate, and the people chant the appointed hymns of the day.

Pages 37,38 "Christ is Amongst Us" by George Danias & Christina Hatzithanasi-Dania with Iconography by Paraskevi Hatzithanasi-Anthonatou



Book is on sale
in the bookstore



“At Saint Athanasios, I want to see younger generations of parishioners become involved! Don’t be nervous. Step in to volunteer and assist others or bring in new ideas to keep our wonderful parish going. Your help is needed now!”

Otherwise, we aren’t going to accomplish anything or grow. The dedicated older generations are getting even older. We need to get out. But who is going to step in to volunteer?”

- Sia Panos

by Penny Panayiota Deligiannis

Sia Panos happily remembers, “When I was 19 years old in 1962, I met John Panos (who was 29) in our birth village of Levidi, Greece. That same year, I married John and came to America because his business was located in Grants, New Mexico. For thirteen years, we lived there raising sons Paul (born in 1965) and Steve (born in 1969) until we decided to sell the business. John had lived in New Mexico for twenty years before deciding our family should move to Illinois since most of his family lived here. During the summer of 1975, we moved to Illinois. In July 1976, we bought Oakwood Restaurant in Naperville. In January 1977, we moved into our Naperville home. **After moving here, my family became stewardship members supporting our new mission parish, Saint Athanasios Greek Orthodox Church, when it was originally located at 228 East Galena Boulevard in downtown Aurora.** Although we were busy running our restaurant, we attended Divine Liturgy bringing our kids. I reconnected with my former high school classmate Dena Deligiannis (a Founding Member) whom I knew from Levidi. We remembered each other from school—we are friends all of these years! **The years we attended elementary school - high school in Greece, our dedicated teachers taught us our Greek Orthodox religion. These classes were mandatory. Sunday School didn’t exist in Greece. From detailed school lessons, we learned and read about our rich Greek Orthodox Faith and Traditions! Some of us have decided to apply these vital lessons learned in our daily lives.”**

“Fr. John Chakos arrived in 1977 serving our young parish. He used to stop by our restaurant to eat. He mentioned that I should become involved with Saint Athanasios’ Ladies Philoptochos Society. He suggested to president +Harriet Hountalas that she talk to me. This is how I first got involved—I became a Philoptochos member in 1978,” reveals Sia. Then, Fr. Bill Cassis arrived in 1980—he asked Sia to serve as the Philoptochos president (1983-1984). During Fr. Chris Constantinides’ tenure, Sia was the Philoptochos vice-president. President +Zoe Chioles couldn’t complete her term so Fr. Chris asked Sia to step in and again serve as the Philoptochos president (1987-1988). **“I believe in my Greek Orthodox Faith and Church! I just follow it. I enjoy Divine Liturgy services. When I come to church, it makes me feel good. Deep inside, I know that I should believe in Jesus’ words, His promises, Panagia and the Saints—following the Gospel teachings and doing the right thing!”**

“For decades, John cooked food for many lunch and dinner celebrations/fundraisers supporting Saint Athanasios. **My beloved John felt very close to the Church—he loved our parish, parishioners and Faith! We would prepare the food at our restaurant and put it in our car’s backseat to deliver. We also started to prepare and deliver large quantities of rice to our Greek Food Festival held at the Kane Country Fairgrounds.** I was in charge of the baking team up until my husband died. One Saint Athanasios dinner dance, I had to cater to 250+ people. John couldn’t come to assist me as he had to cater another party at our restaurant. I told the organizers ‘Bring parishioners to help me and I’ll do it.’ I took over cooking the prime ribs. For the Aprokriatiko dances (2022-2024), I cooked all of the fish.”



Panos Family

“During 2010, John said he wasn’t feeling well. We didn’t want him to suffer in any way. I told him ‘Don’t cook the rice at our Greek Food Festival.’ John exclaimed ‘I will do the rice until I die!’ Determined, he prepared the rice for that Festival. He passed away on March 1, 2011. In life, we’ve faced a lot of challenges.

The worst period was when John got sick—no recovery. I knew my husband wasn’t going to make it. **I’ve always had Faith in God and the love of my family!**,” confesses Sia. **“I’m very thankful to all of the parishioners who were good to me, came to visit me and brought us food. We received support from this whole community! I appreciated that very much!”**

With sincerity, Sia exclaims, **“Become involved! It’s a nice experience to be in the company of Orthodox Christians.** When we get together at our parish to cook or bake desserts, you will learn how to make delicious Greek food. **You will meet other volunteers and laugh together! I always feel welcomed and good at Saint Athanasios. To Everyone...I can’t say Thank You enough!”**

**Ευτυχισμένος Ο Καινούριος
Χρόνος 2026 και Καλή Χρονιά!**

Happy New Year in 2026 and good years to come!



MODERN STEAKHOUSE WITH A GREEK ACCENT.

Beyond our delicious line-up of Prime Steaks, Chops, and Seafood, we offer an authentic selection of Greek Specialties, including Whole Oven Roasted Branzino, Lamb Racks & Greek Potatoes, Classic Pastitsio, and much more. Check out the **Greek Classics** on our menu for all your favorite Mediterranean flavors.

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SATURDAY
OF SOULS



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