

JAN/FEB 2026

ST. SOPHIA GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH



DIRECT ARCHDIOCESAN  
DISTRICT

# the testament



# the testament

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## PARISH OFFICE HOURS

**MONDAY-FRIDAY**

**9:00 AM - 5:00 PM**

(518) 489-4442



# parish council

## PRESIDENT

MICHAEL CHRISTAKIS

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## PARISH COUNCIL MEMBERS

YIANNI GOOGAS

ROBERT HAHN

CHRISTINE HARVEY

KEATHER PAPA

PETER PAPPAS

GEORGE PAPPIS

MARIA PIDGEON

BESSIE SOKARIS

MARK STEVENS

SULTANA VARVAROUSIS

ANASTASIA VASILAKOS

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THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF  
ST. SOPHIA IS A PARISH UNDER THE  
SPIRITUAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL  
SHEPHERDING OF HIS EMINENCE  
ARCHBISHOP ELPIDOPHOROS OF  
AMERICA OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX  
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA, UNDER THE  
JURISDICTION OF THE ECUMENICAL  
Patriarch of Constantinople.



# adult ministries

## ST. SOPHIA SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE

GEORGIA MELAS, COMMITTEE CHAIR

FROSINE STOLIS

JAMES STOLIS

HELEN TOMASO

CHRISTINE PRUDENTE

FOTI RANTZAKLIS

## CHOIR

HARRY ERMIDES

## PHILOPTOCHOS

DEMETRA XYTHALIS VANN

## MAKARIA

DORA MOKHIBER

ELAINE SOKARIS

## SENIOR CITIZENS

JAMES STOLIS

# FR. PAT'S INSIGHTS

In my first year as a seminarian, I learned about the Triodion Period. Unaware of the term, I asked what this was. It was explained to me by an Upper Classman that the Triodion meant "Three Odes." I, therefore, interpreted that to mean there were three hymns offered.

All I was given was a translation of the word. There was much more depth to be associated with this special time in our Church life. The Triodion is a liturgical period which leads us to and through Great Lent, and ultimately to the passion of Jesus and His Resurrection. Several aspects of preparation are repeated year after year through the weekly Gospel lessons offered every Sunday. The main focus of Lent is generally placed on repentance and forgiveness, but the path of this Period is intended to help us transition into a fasting mode and a personal change easily and without parallel.

The first Sunday of the Triodion, the Evangelist Luke introduces us to two men attending services in the Jewish temple. They are living, breathing, and praying in earnest, but they are opposed in the aspect of prayer. The second week, we meet a small cast of characters, not unlike ourselves, who react to a premature inheritance granted by the father to his sons in the story of the Prodigal Son. What a way to start us off towards our journey to Lent.

Each story has a main theme which every year serves to remind us of our relationship to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The first is the story of the Publican and the Pharisee will be the main focus of this edition of The Testament. Here we have two men praying in the Temple, but not quite as we would expect. The Publican or tax collector, in the time of Jesus, was not a very respected individual. The normal operation of collecting taxes from the people was to literally extort money from the people to pay the Roman conquerors, the ruling Jewish leaders, in this case, Herod the Great, and to multiply their own personal wealth by squeezing and tyrannizing the poor into submission. They were disliked by the government and the people alike. They were cunning and ruthless and were without friends other than their cohorts in tax extortion and worse were Jews who preyed upon Jews for their own economic gain.

A Pharisee, on the other hand, is a God-fearing man, whose practice is to pray and care for the spiritual welfare and of the people. The sect was powerful and well organized, well endowed, and respected. These two men would come together in the Temple to pray, but the conundrum is about to unfold.

The Pharisee, in our story, enters into the Temple, takes a place of prominence to oversee the worship and spies the Publican. Immediately, his indignation and pride becomes apparent. He is indignant, because the tax collector has the temerity to come to pray or maybe to prey in the Temple, while he, himself, is the perfect example of dedication to the Temple. He attends services often, contributes to the Temple generously and prays earnestly, while that tax collector standing among us is a useless, clueless, and trifling individual who has no business being here.

The hubris is magnified as each pronouncement is determined and expressed by the God-fearing representative. His indignation and pride are not just silent, but shared with God.

The Publican, on the other hand, is prayerful and humble. He makes no value judgments against anyone, but prays silently, with his head bowed in "fear of All-Mighty God" and asks for forgiveness. What a turn around. The man we expect to pray for the welfare of people and forgive, is just the opposite of what we would expect. He is the chosen one, the protector and sincere servant of the Lord, but not today, and probably not yesterday, or tomorrow, He is judgemental and prideful proclaiming his virtues. That behavior and action is not what prayer is.

Prayer is personal. It is for guidance, comfort, and forgiveness. The Pharisee's shortcomings were exposed by his deliberate affrontry. The Publican, however, is prayerful and mindful of his shortcomings and seeks guidance, and most of all, forgiveness. Our lesson is to look towards this situation and determine our actions while attending church, or for that matter, walking down the street. We are not Christians to prop ourselves up against one another. Everyone who walks into our place of worship should never be in attendance to make a comparison, but to seek guidance, forgiveness, and love from the Lord.

We should find a way to internalize and be a part of the service. Read the prayers, chant the hymns, follow the priest, pray silently. Prayer should never be a comparison, but an individual introspection looking at our soul. It is challenging, but very rewarding. And the story of the Publican and the Pharisee should serve as our reminder. That's why we read it every year! We fall and then we are brought back to our spiritual reality. What a story! Pray earnestly and keep the Lord in focus.

We will soon find ourselves at the doorstep of the Triodion. It is more than just three odes, it is an introduction and a movement towards salvation, and it is both personal and corporate. I pray we all can tune in and find our spiritual self, effect the changes which Lent will demand in the coming months, and rejoice in the Lord.

# CHEESEFARE SUNDAY LUNCHEON

Sponsored by Saint Sophia Youth

**FEBRUARY 22, 2026 • 12:00 PM**

## **TICKET PRICES**

**Adults: \$15**

**Youth 6-17: \$5**

**Children 5 & under: Free**

tickets on sale during coffee hour

# PARISH COUNCIL PRESIDENT



As we begin a new year, I am especially grateful for the sense of community that defines St. Sophia. Our parish is strengthened by longstanding traditions that bring us together, care for one another, and remind us who we are. One such tradition—the **Senior Holiday Dinner**.

This gathering reflects the deep respect we hold for **our seniors** and the care we take to support one another across generations. Events like the Senior Holiday Dinner can only take place because of the leadership and dedication of parishioners who generously give their time and energy. Just as importantly, these traditions are intentionally passed on to our youth. For years, our young people have helped serve this meal, learning the values of service, hospitality, and community. In time, our hope is that they carry these lessons forward—continuing the tradition themselves. The regular and intentional integration of our young people into parish life is one of our greatest strengths and a source of real hope for the future of St. Sophia.

On behalf of the Parish Council, **thank you** to all of our amazing volunteers who helped make this year's Senior Holiday Dinner possible. Your generosity and leadership embody the very best of our parish.

As we look ahead to the year before us, I would also like to recognize those who serve our parish through Parish Council leadership. Please join me in offering sincere thanks to **Lainie Christou** and **Maria Vasilakos** as they conclude their terms on the Parish Council. We are deeply grateful for their years of loyal service, thoughtful leadership, and commitment to St. Sophia.

Congratulations to **Christine Harvey, Rob Hahn, Peter Pappas, and Mark Stevens** on their reelection to the Parish Council. We are thankful for their continued willingness to serve and for the experience and continuity they bring to this important work. I also extend a warm congratulations and welcome to **Keather Papa** and **Bessie Sokaris** on their election to the Parish Council. We look forward to their leadership, perspectives, and service in the years ahead.

As we enter the new year, I also encourage you to remember to make your **2026 Stewardship Pledge**, if you have not already done so. Your faithful support helps ensure that St. Sophia can continue to thrive—sustaining our ministries, preserving our traditions, and strengthening the sense of community that means so much to all of us.

May the coming year be filled with fellowship, good health, and renewed purpose as we continue to care for one another and grow together in faith.

In Orthodoxy,

*Michael N. Christakis, Ph.D.*

# 2026 STEWARDSHIP

## 2026 Stewardship Pledge Campaign

As we begin our 2026 Stewardship Pledge Campaign, we invite you to prayerfully reflect on the blessings God has given you and on the role St. Sophia plays in your life. Stewardship is a meaningful expression of our faith—one that calls us to offer our time, talents, and financial resources in gratitude and in service to our parish community.

St. Sophia is more than a place of worship; it is a living, intergenerational community rooted in faith, tradition, and care for one another. Because of the faithful stewardship of our parishioners, we are able to sustain our ministries, preserve cherished traditions, support those in need, and welcome future generations into the life of the Church.

Your stewardship pledge provides the foundation for everything we do as a parish. It allows us to plan responsibly for the year ahead, maintain our facilities, support our clergy and staff, and continue offering programs and ministries that strengthen our community and deepen our faith.

As the pledge campaign begins, we ask you to take time to consider how you can support St. Sophia in the coming year. Pledges may be made online, in person, or by mail—whichever is most convenient for you. To pledge online, please visit:

**<https://bit.ly/Stewardship26>**

Every pledge—at every level—matters and is deeply appreciated. In the weeks ahead, we will share more about the impact of stewardship and the many ways it supports our parish life.

# PHILOPTOCHOS

## *Spaghetti & Meatball Luncheon*

*Sun. Jan. 25th, 2026*

Following church during  
coffee fellowship

*Suggested Donation:*

\$15 for Adults

\$10 for children 13 and under

All Proceeds donated to:  
Angelo Bousbouras Recovery  
Journey Fund



# PHILOPTOCHOS SOCIETY

Happy New Year!



I hope everyone had a healthy and very Merry Christmas! 2025 was a great year for Philoptochos. We were successful in fundraising enough to assist many causes with the continuing rising cost of food, heating, gas and housing. People need all the help we can provide.

We continue to support:

Regional Food Pantry  
Children's Café  
Saint Vincent's Food Pantry  
Backpack foods program for kids  
Family Promise  
Grassroot Givers  
Double H Ranch  
Ronald McDonald House

Just to list a few.

I would like to say a BIG THANK YOU to everyone that helped this Holiday season with the "Giving Tree". We were able to help 5 families this year! I appreciate and am grateful for your continued willingness to help those in need. We are truly one big family!

Saint Barbara's Day party was a success once again. Marcella Panza and Pia Lascaris did a beautiful job organizing it for the children. The kids that attended had a wonderful time making crafts, balloon animals, enjoying magic tricks, and visiting with Santa!

Thank you to Kathryn Sokaris and her crew for making Vasilopita for the New Year. Beautiful job once again.

Have a wonderful and Healthy 2026!

*Demetra Xythalis Vann*

Demetra Xythalis Vann  
Philoptochos President

# January 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 New Year's Day Office Closed	2	3	
4 Sunday before Epiphany Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Vasilopita Parish Council Oath of Office Sunday School	5 Small Agiassmos Divine Liturgy Eve of Theophany 10:00 am Men's Basketball 6:30 pm	6 Great Agiassmos Holy Theophany Divine Liturgy 9:30 am DOP 6:30 pm	7 St. John the Baptist Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Knitters 12:15 pm OPA-cize 6:30 pm	8	9	10 Greek Language & Culture Academy 9:00 am Divine Liturgy Gloversville 9:30 am
11 Sunday after Epiphany Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Sunday School AHEPA 12:00 pm	12 Men's Basketball 6:30 pm	13 Senior Program 12:00 pm Philoptochos 6:30 pm	14 Knitters 12:15 pm OPA-cize 6:30 pm	15 Illuminations 6:30 pm	16	17 St. Anthony Divine Liturgy 10:00 am
18 12th Sunday of Luke Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Family Worship Sunday - No Sunday School	19 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Office Closed Men's Basketball 6:30 pm	20 Senior Program 12:00 pm	21 Divine Liturgy in Schenectady St. Neophytos 9:30 am Knitters 12:15 pm	22	23	24 Greek Language & Culture Academy 9:00 am
25 15th Sunday of Luke Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Sunday School Philoptochos Spaghetti & Meatball Luncheon	26 Men's Basketball 6:30 pm	27 Senior Program 12:00 pm Illuminations 6:30 pm	28	29	30	31 Three Hierarchs Divine Liturgy 10:00 am

# February 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee: Triodion Begins Today Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Sunday School	2 Presentation of the Lord Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Men's Basketball 6:30 pm	3 Senior Program 12:00 pm DOP & Philoptochos Valentine's Party 6:30 pm	4 Knitters 12:15 pm OPA-cize 6:30 pm	5 Illuminations 6:30 pm	6	7 Greek Language & Culture Academy 9:00 am Sons & Maids Valentine's Dance 7:00 pm
8 Sunday of the Prodigal Son Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Sunday School	9 St. Haralambos Divine Liturgy 5:00 pm Men's Basketball 6:30 pm AHEPA 7:00 pm	10 Senior Program 12:00 pm OPA-cize 6:30 pm	11 Knitters 12:15 pm OPA-cize 6:30 pm	12	13	14 1st Saturday of Souls Divine Liturgy 9:30 am
15 Judgment Sunday (Meatfare Sunday) Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Family Worship Sunday - No Sunday School	16 Presidents' Day Office Closed Men's Basketball 6:30 pm	17 Senior Program 12:00 pm OPA-cize 6:30 pm	18 Knitters 12:15 pm OPA-cize 6:30 pm	19	20	21 2nd Saturday of Souls Divine Liturgy 9:30 am
22 Forgiveness Sunday Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Sunday School Cheesefare Sunday Luncheon	23 Great Lent Begins Compline 5:00 pm Illuminations 6:15 pm Men's Basketball 6:30 pm	24 Senior Program 12:00 pm OPA-cize 6:30 pm	25 Presanctified Liturgy 9:30 am Knitters 12:15 pm OPA-cize 6:30 pm	26	27	28 3rd Saturday of Souls Divine Liturgy 8:30 am Greek Language & Culture Academy 9:00 am



## Greek Dance & Exercise Class at St. Sophia's

# *Come Join the FUN!*

Wed.'s at 6:30pm

## *Winter Session Starts Jan. 7th, 2026*

**NO Experience or RSVP required, Walk-ins Only**

### **\$7 per week**

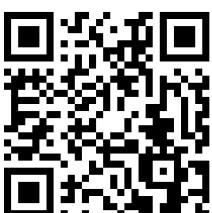
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will be donated to



**Over \$5000 donated locally since 2024**

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**Weekly Class at:**  
St Sophia Greek Orthodox Church Hall  
440 Whitehall Road, Albany, NY



**SAINT SOPHIA GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH  
440 WHITEHALL ROAD  
ALBANY, NY 12208**

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St. Sophia Mission Statement – St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church, Inc. is a not-for-profit religious community under the leadership of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, through the auspices of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople whose mission is to: (1) maintain, practice, and proclaim the Christian Orthodox faith, enhancing the spiritual growth of its communicants; (2) develop and operate programs, activities, and services for the Parishioners which serve and further the religious educational, cultural, philanthropic, and social ministries of the community as well as to protect and continuously develop the physical buildings and religious property as deemed necessary; (3) dedicate the promotion of Christian Fellowship and values between the evolving diversity of cultures and its people.