



## St. Christopher Hellenic Orthodox Church

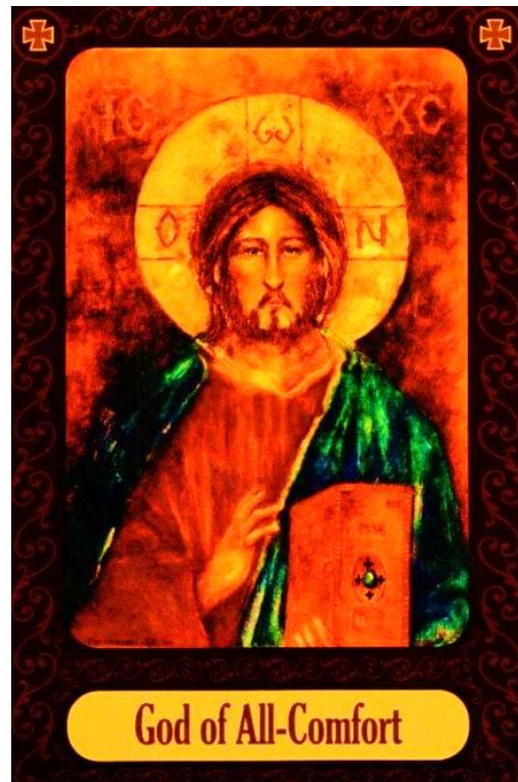
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### Pastoral Message from Fr. George, July 11, 2025



## “God of All-Comfort” – The Icon from Solitary Confinement

*As we anticipate Orthodox Prison Ministry Awareness Sunday on July 27<sup>th</sup>,  
Fr. George shares this special icon with you and your family.*

The Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM) offers this deeply moving icon called “**God of All-Comfort**” (pictured above), which was created by a prisoner named Michael who lived in solitary confinement.

The story behind the icon:

- Michael had only crayons to work with, and he used his own face as the model for Christ.
- Despite years of spiritual resistance, he eventually asked to be baptized into the Orthodox Faith.
- His icon, drawn from the depths of isolation, became a symbol of hope and transformation.

After Michael’s passing, OCPM began distributing copies of this icon to other prisoners. Many found comfort and healing through it — some even overcame years of addiction by praying with it.

The following powerful story of this extraordinary icon appeared in the 3/27/23 edition of the ***Orthodox Observer***:

When OCPM founder, Fr. Duane Pedersen, began corresponding with Michael in prison, Michael was quick to say he preferred if Fr. Duane would stop writing about God. Despite showing no indication that his heart was changing, Fr. Duane faithfully wrote to him week after week, year after year.

After twenty years of correspondence, Fr. Duane received a surprising letter. *“I want to be baptized into the Orthodox Faith.”*

But this was only the beginning. Soon Fr. Duane received something even more surprising than Michael’s wish to be baptized: Michael’s first icon. This was unlike any icon Fr. Duane had ever seen before, and not just because Michael had written it with a set of crayons, the only tools available to him.

Michael lived in solitary confinement. To paint the Face of Christ he used the only model he had: his own face. And what did Michael name this icon? *“God of All-Comfort.”*

Shortly after Fr. Duane received this icon, Michael’s health rapidly declined, and soon he fell asleep in the Lord. In the wake of Michael’s passing, Fr. Duane began printing copies of *“God of All Comfort”* to send to other prisoners, many of whom were freed from years of addictions by praying with it.

Truly, Michael’s icon speaks to all of us. Are we willing to see the face of Christ in the faces of those in prison? Are we willing to believe, as Michael did, that Christ dwells in each of us, as near to us as our own reflection? Do we sincerely believe each one of us is an icon of Christ?

*Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM) is an agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States.*

*For Orthodox Christians who have been arrested for crimes, OCPM helps them return to the Faith, offering forgiveness and reconciliation with Christ. For both Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, OCPM provides spiritual care, enabling prisoners to find hope and purpose in their lives. For more information, please visit [www.theocpm.org](http://www.theocpm.org) or follow us on Facebook and Instagram @theocpm.*

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## **Fr. George's "Prisoner Ministry Awareness Challenge" from This Past Sunday, entitled "Your Turn to Share"**

*After church services this past Sunday, Fr. George invited our faithful to consider writing an imaginary letter to a prisoner, as a means of raising our awareness of their spiritual needs and the support they need. In support, he has written a hypothetical letter from a prisoner, reflecting his tone of humility, spiritual searching, and a desire for connection with the Church.*

*After reading it, I encourage you to prayerfully write a response to the imaginary prisoner, answering issues raised in the letter. Your reply doesn't have to be long. Email your reply to Fr. George, [frgeorge@saintchristopherhoc.org](mailto:frgeorge@saintchristopherhoc.org) and specify if you approve me sharing it if time permits. Our aim is to raise awareness of the spiritual needs and ministry of Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry. **The deadline for Fr. George to receive is July 20<sup>th</sup>.***

## Hypothetical Prisoner Letter Received by Fr. George

Dear Fr. George,

I pray this letter finds you well and under the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I am writing to you from a place I never imagined I would be. The walls around me are made of concrete and steel, but the heavier burden is the one I carry inside—regret, sorrow, and the weight of choices that cannot be undone. I have been sentenced to spend most, if not all, of my life in prison. That reality is still sinking in.

I was raised Orthodox, though I wandered far from the Church in my younger years. I remember the smell of incense, the chanting of the hymns, the flicker of candlelight during Holy Week. I didn't understand it then, but now I find myself longing for it. I don't know what brought me to write you—perhaps it is the memory of midnight on Pascha, when we sing "*Come receive the light,*" and I wonder if that light can still reach someone like me.

Father, I don't ask for pity. I know what I've done. But I do ask for guidance. Is there still a place for someone like me in the Church? Can a man who has wasted so much time still find repentance? I read the Scriptures when I can, and I find comfort in the Psalms—especially when David cries out from the depths. I feel like I'm in those depths now.



If you have any prayers, readings, or words of encouragement, I would be grateful. I want to learn how to pray again. I want to understand the feasts and fasts, and how I might live a life of repentance even here, behind bars. I know I may never walk freely again, but I hope my soul can still be free.

Please pray for me, Fr. George. My name is Ody, and I am trying to find my way back to Christ.

With respect and hope,

Ody [Prison ID 8699283162]

### **“A Call to Action” Scheduled for This Sunday**



***“Cast your nets at His word.” – Luke 5:5***

As Christ stood on the shore and called His disciples to trust and act, so He calls each of us today. In the sacred rhythm of Orthodox life, our gifts are nets—woven through prayer, tradition, and love—ready to be cast into the waters of ministry. Beginning this Sunday

which we have named “**A Call to Action**”, let us not hesitate, but respond with faith, knowing that in obedience, the catch is always abundant. If you’re away, check our website when you return.

## **Discover Your Gift. Serve with Joy. Build Up the Body of Christ.**

Beloved Parish Family,

Have you ever wondered how your unique talents—your voice, hands, heart, or skills—can become a sacred offering to the Church? This summer, we’re opening wide the doors of ministry, and inviting YOU to take part in the beautiful work of parish life.

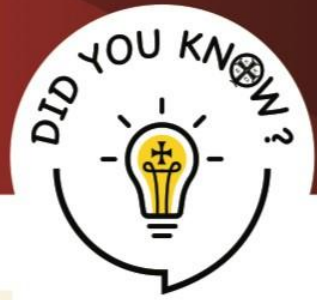
With over **80 opportunities** across liturgical service, youth and family engagement, outreach, hospitality, education, and more, there’s a place for everyone to offer their gift. Whether you sing, teach, greet, organize, mentor, bake, troubleshoot tech, or simply care deeply—you belong here.

### ***New or unsure where to begin?***

Check out our **Parish Ministry Interest List** where you can easily explore options and let Fr. George know what calls to your heart. *Beginning this Sunday, you can pick it up at church or view it on our website from home.*

Let your faith find expression in service. Let your joy take root in community. Let us build God’s Holy Church—together.

***“Each one has received a gift.  
Use it to serve one another...” – 1 Peter 4:10***



## THE TRUTH ABOUT THE RAPTURE

July 8



Did you know the idea of the “Rapture” is not Biblical?

The popular “Rapture” theory — where believers suddenly vanish from the earth before a time of tribulation — is a recent invention. It was first promoted in the 1800s by John Nelson Darby, an Anglican clergyman. In the early 2000s, the Left Behind TV series popularized the apocalyptic theory of the “Rapture.” It claimed that Jesus would take Christians up to Heaven before His Second Coming, leaving non-Christians behind on earth for seven years of “great tribulation” (Revelation 7:14), in which the Antichrist reigns. But no one ever taught this for the first 1,800 years of Christianity.

Those who support the Rapture often point to 1 Thessalonians 4:17 — “we will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord” — but the Apostle Paul is clearly speaking about the Second Coming, not a secret event before it. He says the dead in Christ will rise first, and then those alive will join them to meet the Lord: this is the Resurrection and the Final Judgment — not an escape from it.

Jesus also warns in Matthew 24 that His coming will be after tribulation, not before it. The idea that Christians will be taken away while unbelievers are “left behind” isn’t supported by the Holy Scripture. The word used for “left” (ἀφίεται in Greek) actually means “released” or abandoned.

For 2,000 years, the Orthodox Church has taught one Second Coming, one Resurrection, and one people of God. The Rapture isn’t part of that — and never was.

God desires all His people, both the living and the dead, to live with Him forever when the Second Coming takes place.

Send us your questions at: [religious@goarch.org](mailto:religious@goarch.org)

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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA  
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION



Be sure to guard in your heart the joy of the Holy Spirit, and do not allow the evil one to pour out his bitterness. Beware! Beware, lest the Paradise that exists in you turns into Hell.

St. Nectarios of Aegina

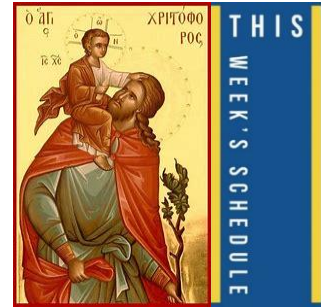
**Focus on your partner's strengths – not their flaws. No one is perfect. What you focus on magnifies. See their good. Celebrate their beauty. Speak their greatness aloud. A loved partner becomes even better.**

# Join Us Often with Your Family

## **Saturday, July 12<sup>th</sup>**

9:00 Philoptochos – Rolling Day

2:00 Sacrament of Baptism - Todd Bryan



## **Sunday, July 13<sup>th</sup> – Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council**

8:00 Orthros

9:00 Divine Liturgy, Memorial Service, A Call to Action & GreekFest Update, followed by Memorial Brunch offered by Gail Ericsson

12:00 Parish Council Meeting

## **Saturday, July 19<sup>th</sup>**

8:30 Philoptochos – Koulourakia Day

## **Sunday, July 20<sup>th</sup> – Sixth Sunday of St. Matthew**

7:45 Orthros

9:00 Divine Liturgy & Memorial Service, followed by Memorial Brunch offered by Philoptochos

11:00 Philoptochos Board Meeting

*Come, and be strengthened in your witness of Orthodoxy through regular worship, fellowship, and service with us.*