

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! I am writing today to share with you some important changes that you will see around the church in September. All of these changes are an effort to make guests and members feel welcome.

First, I would like to share with you the new mission statement for St. John of Damascus Church. This was approved by the Executive Board, Fr. John and Bishop John.

ST. JOHN OF DAMASCUS MISSION STATEMENT

We worship and glorify God, by loving and caring for each other, providing a safe, thriving, life-long home, from which we spread the teaching and good works of our Orthodox Christian Faith. Being God's stewards, we celebrate our faith by:

- participating fully in the sacramental and liturgical life of the church.
- responding to the needs of all by living the message of the Gospel through outreach to each other and to the community at large .
- fostering our God-given talents as stewards to strengthen God's church.

(Romans 15:17) "Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

As you drive into the church parking lot, you will notice improved signage that lets the community know we are an Orthodox Church. The Hall rental signage will be more appropriately located so as not to draw attention away from the fact that first and foremost we are a Christian Orthodox Church. As you pull in further, you will notice that the signs telling people not to park or trespass or not do anything else have been removed. Also, the signs inside the church letting people know when it is not appropriate to enter have been removed. We want to convey the same message but in an appropriate way so that we are instructing people in what they can do and what is expected that they should do without excluding them from anything we want them to participate in. In retrospect, we were telling people over and over what they *couldn't* do.

When you walk into the church, you will be welcomed by Greeters – a number of people have volunteered, and we are seeking even a few more volunteers, please see John Haddad or Rita Gwinn. There are new welcome cards in the pews which will provide useful information about the church, the Divine Liturgy, common prayers, and recommended readings. The Greeters' Ministry Team has done a great job in getting all this information to us, please thank them when you see them if you feel it is appropriate. I personally believe this is a great improvement! These are some things we always did in the past, and let slip away from us as a family, and some new things. As we re-introduce this I always think of Helen Hamwey, the greeters and ushers was something she always urged me to start again.

We are in the process of scheduling a series of workshops with our area clergy to engage in more discussion about our faith. I'm excited about this opportunity to interact with each other, our sister parishes and our clergy on these topics.

- Marriage - a seminar for couples preparing for marriage is scheduled October 5-6 at the church. Led by Bishop John.

- “What is the Eucharist?” led by Bishop John
- “Interaction with other Christians.” led by Fr. Timothy Ferguson
- “Sharing your faith with others.” led by Fr. Antony Hughes

These are what we have, so look for more information to follow, and we will continue with more as time goes on, so if you have ideas about seminars you would like to hear please contact myself or Fr. John with your ideas.

During Liturgy, we are reinstituting a traditional Orthodox Practice: the Kiss of Peace. Just before the creed and after Fr. John says, “Let us love one another with one accord,” we will exchange the kiss of peace (or the handshake if you prefer). The way that works is Fr. John will face the parish and say, “Christ is in our midst,” to which you respond to him, “He is and ever shall be.” Then you turn to your neighbor to your right and left, possibly front and back, and have the same exchange.

Finally, just before communion, Fr. John has changed the way he introduces communion to embrace those that are not ready to receive.

As you can see, we are going to be trying a lot of new things. Some will say, “we’ve never done things that way before,” others will embrace the change and run with it, the choice is yours, all I ask is that you give change a try. As always, I welcome and encourage you to share your thoughts, and I look forward to a bright future for our church. I promise to keep you up to date through the newsletter, the web site, email, and Facebook. May God Bless you and your family!

Yours in Christ,

Alan Cardoos
Chairman, Executive Board