

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."
Philippians 4:13

St. Raphael School Newsletter

January 2026



Kontakion of St. Raphael Bishop of Brooklyn

You were a guardian and a defender of the Church's teaching: you protected your flock from false doctrines and confirmed them in the true faith. O holy father Raphael, son of Syria and glory of North America, always intercede before the Lord that our souls may be saved.

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Hello, dear readers! Happy New Year and blessed feasts! We're so glad to welcome you to the January edition of our Newsletter. As we step into a brand-new year together, our hearts are full of hope, excitement, and gratitude for each one of you.

January is a gentle reminder that every day is a fresh beginning. Whether you're setting new goals, easing back into routines, or simply taking things one step at a time, we hope this month brings you peace, clarity, and little moments of joy. Thank you for being part of our community. We're truly blessed to walk into 2026 with you, and we pray this year is filled with growth, laughter, and God's loving guidance. Here's to a warm and wonderful start to the new year!

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St. Raphael School Newsletter

Prayer List

Living

Fr. Peter
Eleousa
Phyllis
Lynn
Joseph
Linda
Andrew
Amalia Romero and Family
Anna Clark and Family
Mary Kate Durka
Cantrell Family

Departed

Barbara
Joy
Suzan
Elliot
Timothy
Fr. Porphyrios
Fr. Abraham
Anna
Zane
Rebecca

"We don't shoot the darkness; we just turn the light on."
-St. Porfyrios Kavsokalyvitis

Synaxis of The Three Hierarchs



Kontakion – Tone 2

O Lord, You have received the Holy and God-proclaiming heralds, the crown of Your Teachers, / for the enjoyment of Your good things and for repose; / for You have accepted their sufferings and labors above every sacrifice, / for You alone glorify Your Saints.

Feasts of the Month

January 6

The Theophany of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

January 7

Synaxis of John the Holy Glorious Prophet, Baptist, & Forerunner

January 16

Veneration of Apostle Peter's Precious Chains

January 21

Maximus the Confessor

January 22

Timothy the Apostle of the 70

January 30

Synaxis of The Three Hierarchs: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, & John Chrysostom

Note from the Editor

Dear St. Raphael Journal readers, thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter! This wouldn't be possible without the incredible support of the SRS teachers and staff. To see more student submissions, be sure to visit the St. Raphael School Journal Website. [To submit names for the prayer list or a student submission, email the Newsletter team at raphaelschooljournal@gmail.com](#)

Check out our website [here](#)

Theodora Ciucă
Managing Editor & Website Coordinator

Contest Announcement

Honorable Mention: Story Contest Submission

by Eirene Artemis Mendoros

Every day I pray the Lord's prayer, and the words "Thy will be done." I have thoughts of stories like that of King David, whose entire life was written by God. I often feel like my story is being written by someone else – and I pray that God is writing it for me, like he did King David. This past summer was a great example of God authoring my life's story.

Last summer we planned on spending our days at our upstate home. Even more exciting was the thought that I was finally getting a dog. However, God simply said "not yet." We had issues with the home, and I was super disappointed.

Adjusting our plans, my mom started a co-op group with a bunch of homeschooling kids and moms. That change led to creating a great group of friends; I was introduced to a super soccer academy; and went on a group trip to an Amish farm. On that farm, the unthinkable happened. Without warning, we found and adopted Charlie – the perfect dog for our home in NYC!

I may not be able to tell what the future holds, but may the Lord's Will be done – it always turns out better. I'm still hopeful of returning to our home upstate and enjoying all the activities we dreamed of with my brother; like playing soccer on the grass, going on trails, swimming in the pond, and catching frogs and newts. However, I see how the Lord has blessed me and my family with amazing gifts and joyful memories. So, like King David, I will continue to think of God as a great Author, and will continue to wake up every morning and ask the Lord for His Will to be done.

Once Upon A Time

Poisons in Joffrey Part 3

By Natasha Richart

“Sylvie! Open up! It’s Dasha!”

Sylvie, a petite, pale blond, opened up her apartment door.

“Dasha, what are you doing?! You sound like a maniac. What’s wrong?”

I invited myself in and plopped unceremoniously on the ottoman.

“You know Gabrielle?”

Sylvie rolled her eyes.

“Wait, is she the one who hates our guts?”

I ignored the sarcasm.

“She wants to kill you.”

Sylvie didn’t say anything for a second, as if she was giving me the chance to laugh and say that I had been joking.

“You’re very funny Dasha, you know that right?”

“I heard them talking, in a closet at the studio. They were calling you a victim, and they were talking about wearing gloves and then I think they saw me, and then Gabrielle said something about two victims and now I think they want to kill us both and maybe we should leave the country or get fake IDs or go into the Witness Protection Program or at the very least

call the President and say we’re about to die or maybe we could...”

Sylvie threw a pillow at me to shut me up.

“Be quiet or you might pass out from lack of breath.”

When I didn’t say anything else, she continued.

“I still find it hard to believe that Gabrielle has it in for me. Why just me and not you?”

“You got Giselle in Giselle for the performance next month.” I said.

“And remember how when we first met her years ago, she had said that her dream role had always been Giselle?”

I had been dealing with a fractured ankle during auditions so I am not in the production. Sylvie fingered a copy of a Nancy Drew book on the couch beside her. She had been obsessed with Nancy Drew since the first time I had met her, back in third grade and when she looked up, there was a mischievous smile playing on the corners of her mouth.

“Let’s set a trap.”

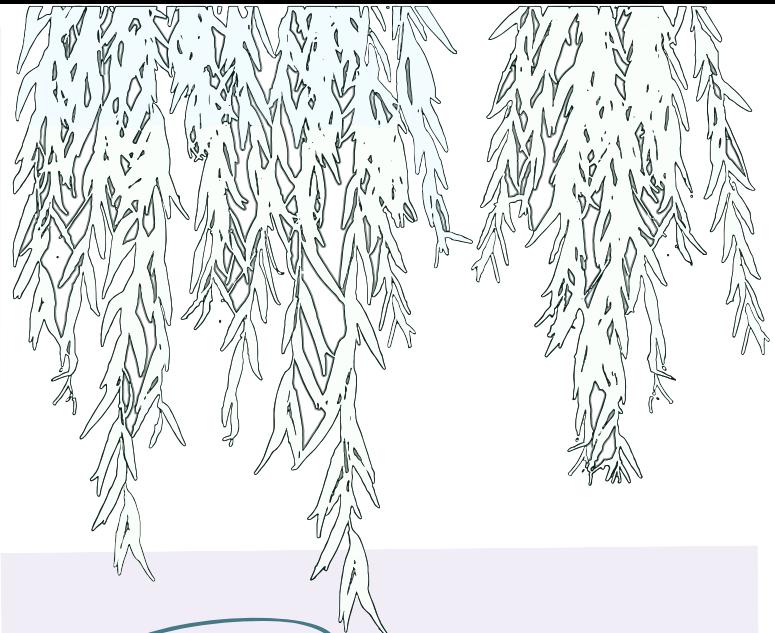
Advertisement



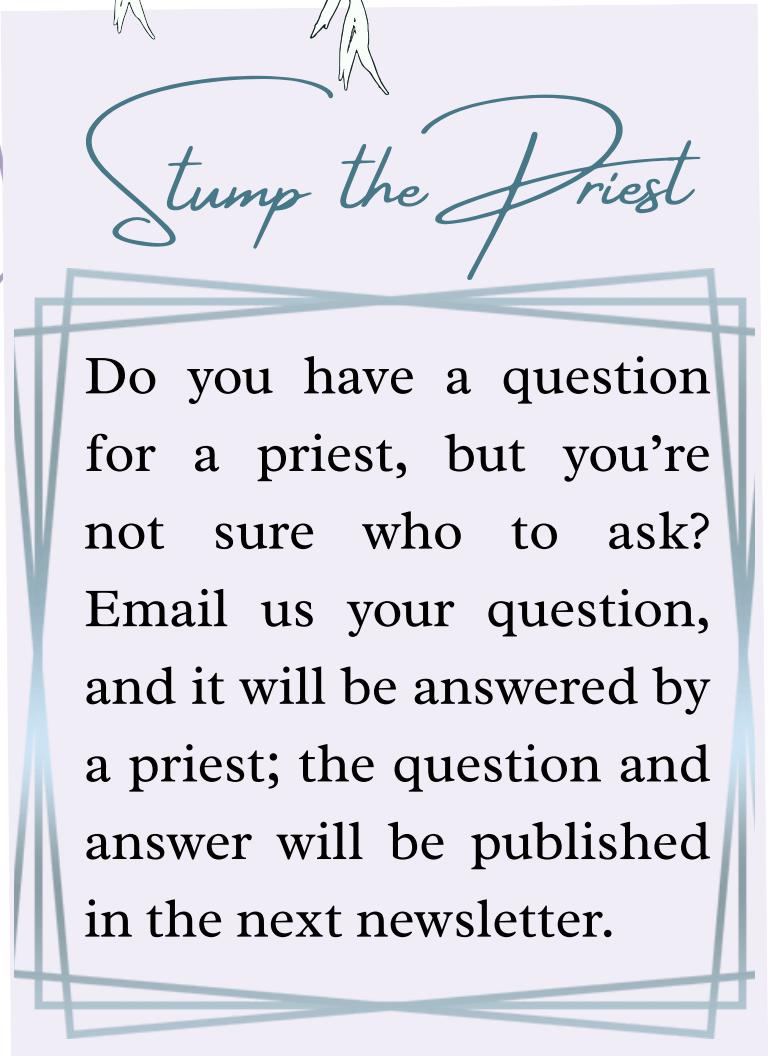
Publish your work!

Send us your poetry, artwork, photography, creative writing, and essays to be published in upcoming issues of our newsletter!

Email us at:
raphaelschooljournal@gmail.com



Stump the Priest



Do you have a question for a priest, but you're not sure who to ask? Email us your question, and it will be answered by a priest; the question and answer will be published in the next newsletter.

Mary's Poetry Corner

Marooned

By Mary Kjendal

If left upon an island,
Unknown to every man,
I'd trace a cross upon the sand
And live as best I can.

I would not have a worry
Nor any earthly care;
I could pray without a hurry,
For God must know I'm there.

A day that I feel saddened
By living all alone,
I could not help feel gladdened
When recalling all I own.

The sky, the endless page of blue
The rolling, trolling sea –
Although it all is twixt us two,
It all belongs to me!

The time of day and all of night
Is mine to do what will;
I live inside God's knowing sight,
And so, my heart is still.

Short Story Corner

The Old Sailor

By Seraphim Weaver

Not so long ago, in Puerto Rico, there was a small house. Every evening, the children sat in a circle around their grandfather to hear stories. And one night, as they sat around him, they asked him what story they would hear. He took a sip of beer, and said, "Have I ever told you about the time my ship was wrecked?" When they told him they had never heard about the time his ship was wrecked, he was very surprised and told them so; then he began.

"It all began one cloudy morning, when I was readying my boat. All the other sailors told me not to go sailing, but I was an untried sailor then, and I didn't heed their warnings. I told them the clouds looked fine and a couple of hours later, after I was a long way from shore, the clouds began to look like a storm. I began to feel nervous, and I began to head back. Eventually it began to rain, the wind began to blow, and the sea began to churn. The storm lasted for hours and I was blown way off course. After what I suppose was three hours, the wind was still blowing, the sea was still churning, and the rain was still falling. The waves began to toss my little boat around. I remember seeing an island somewhere nearby, right before my boat smashed against a rock. Something must have hit my head because I couldn't recall how I had gotten on the beach of an island. Some time must have passed, too, because the storm had passed, and it looked like it was late evening. After a while of lying in the sand, trying to remember what had happened, I decided to get up and explore. I walked for a long time, hoping to find a source of fresh water, and I found a small trickle of a waterfall some time later. After a while I began to feel hungry and went to a strip of palm trees and found a coconut in the sand. It was hard to crack it open, but I finally got it open by sharpening a stick on a rock, sticking it into the ground, and hitting the coconut as hard as I could on the sharpened point. It tasted good and the coconut water was refreshing. I walked around the island for a long time to see what I could use to my advantage. After a while, it began to get darker and darker, so I was in need of a place to sleep. Eventually I found a tree in the middle of the island and made it comfortable by making a nest of dried leaves and moss. Some time in the night I woke up to the realization that I was falling. The wind was knocked out of me when I hit the ground, but I still got back up and climbed to my nest in the tree. (I must admit, I grumbled a whole lot, too.) When morning arrived, I ate a coconut and decided to find better sleeping accommodations; so I explored the island some more and found out it was a bigger island than I thought. At some point, I discovered a small stream that led to an abandoned village. It was almost completely gone, so all I was able to scavenge from it were a few boards, nails, a small, thin coil of rope, some wire, and a small knife. With the boards and nails, I made a small platform with rails in my tree so that I wouldn't fall out of it in the middle of the night. I was able to twist the wire until it broke and form it into a hook which I attached to my rope and tied it to a long straight stick to make a fishing rod of sorts. Later that day, I went fishing, and caught a small fish that I cooked over an open fire. Over the next month or so of being stranded, living like this, I ate so much fish that I can't eat it anymore. After a year or so, just when I was getting used to the idea of being stranded like this for the rest of my life, a large sailboat made anchor just off the shore. I waved and yelled until they sent a rowboat to come see what was making all that noise. By then, I must have looked a sight, because when the man who was rowing saw me he gave a small jump. I told him what had happened to me and he asked me how long I had been here. I told him I didn't know, but it had been a long time since I wrecked. They told me they would take me back to my home, so we boarded the ship, and within an hour I was back home. I thanked the men, and walked through the port for a while. When the sailor who warned me not to go sailing saw me, he dropped the basket of fish he was carrying, and said, "Is it really you?" I told him the whole story and he, in return, told me the whole village had thought I had been killed, and that they had held a memorial meal for me. I also told him I would never again sail with a cloud in the sky, if at all. And that is the story of how I got stranded on an island and got rescued. And the moral of the story is, listen to those who know more than you. Now, take my advice, and go to bed."

The End.

Theosis Through The Arts

Through the Fog: Returning to the Light of Christ

By Iván Stepanowich

A man stands on a path with a candle in his hand. It is lit, but its glow is unnoticeable in the light of day. He feels called to move towards the rising sun. A warm breeze blows and he takes his first step—

“If we take but one step toward Him, He comes a thousand steps toward us.”

—Saint John Chrysostom

Christ is in our midst! I hope that this note finds you well as we start another new year! When we are new to the faith, moving towards God can feel effortless, and His presence abides everywhere. But due to our fallen human nature, we often fail to notice it.

As the man walks along the path, it becomes more and more difficult to traverse. It narrows and steepens, filling him with a sense of uncertainty. His legs become tired and he struggles to move forward; the air is still. A fog descends all around him—his candle a faint light amidst the gloom. The warmth of the sun, blotted out by the darkening haze.

Our faith can waver because of the many things in our lives that draw our attention. We may think that we are on our own, that God is not looking out for us. It can lead us into a space of confusion and doubt as the struggles of our lives lead us away from Christ. However, we must not think that there is no hope—because Christ is always with us, even if the fog of our sin surrounds us, He is still present. Our candle may flicker or dim, but it can never go out; the sinner can always repent.

The path is almost invisible—the encompassing gloom draws nearer still; he takes one last step. His gaze sinks to the ground, stripped of intent. Whether it was a gust of wind or something from within him, he turns around and looks at the path behind him—remembering those days when he felt connected to God. He feels a crushing weight in his chest as he realizes his mistakes. He calls out to God with tears—he is afraid. Then, he takes a step forward into the mist, a renewed faith filling his heart as his foot hits the ground. The fog surrounding him lifts in an instant; a bright light blinds him. When he regains his sight, he looks up to see the sun, shining its light down upon him.

When we fail we must get up again, because if we don't we will lead ourselves into despondency. But even a person who has, can still escape. Because like the man in the story, if we call on Christ with faith, He will lift us up. We will then see that He was waiting there for us the whole time. If we are patient and steadfast, God will give us the strength we need in order to continue on our spiritual journey. One step towards Him may seem small, but He in turn makes a thousand towards us. May the Nativity of Christ our God shine upon us all. God save you.

In Christ, Iván.

Reflection of the Month

Saint Paisios of Mount Athos and His Encounter with Georgakis

By Elizaveta Durka

Saint Paisios the Athonite was born on July 25th, 1924, in the village of Farasa, Cappadocia (modern-day Turkey). His parents, Prodomos and Evlogia Eznepedis, named him Arsenios. On August 6th, 1924, he was baptized by Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian, the revered spiritual father of Farasa, who became his godfather. Saint Arsenios blessed the child to follow in his footsteps as a monk, foreseeing his future path.

Soon after, political tensions between the Greek citizens of Farasa and the Turks forced the entire village into exile. The Eznepedis family resettled in Konitsa, Epirus, where young Arsenios grew up. From childhood, he displayed a deep love for creation and served faithfully as a church chanter.

During the Greek Civil War, Arsenios was drafted into military service. Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, he was assigned as a radio operator, sparing him from direct combat. After the war, he chose to leave worldly life behind and entered monasticism on Mount Athos.

Life on the Holy Mountain was marked by hardship. The Devil sought to disturb his peace, yet Arsenios persevered, immersing himself in prayer and fasting. Guided by Christ, the Theotokos, the saints, and his spiritual father Papa Tikhon, he grew in holiness. In his early thirties, he was tonsured into the Holy Schema and received the name Paisios. He was blessed to behold the uncreated light on several occasions, each vision drawing him closer to theosis—the ultimate relationship and union with God.

Over time, Saint Paisios became known for his wisdom, spiritual counsel, and the miracles attributed to his prayers. Pilgrims flocked to him for guidance, and his words carried both simplicity and divine depth. He reposed on July 12th, 1994, and was canonized by the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople on January 13th, 2015.

Among the many accounts of Saint Paisios's life, one of the most striking is recorded by Yanni Kotzampasis in *From Tibet to Mount Athos to Elder Paisios*. It tells of a young boy named George, or Georgakis. At the age of two, George's grandfather had left him in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery, dedicating him to its practices. For fourteen years, George lived immersed in that life.

At sixteen, however, he traveled to Mount Athos, where friends hoped Saint Paisios might help him. Initially, George was defiant. He mocked the saint, claiming he was stronger than God. To prove his power, he shattered a massive boulder with a wave of his hand. Saint Paisios, calm and smiling, handed him a small stone, making the sign of the cross over it. "Break this one," he said. George tried with all his strength, but the stone remained unyielding.

Humbled and frustrated, he stormed away—yet he returned again and again. On one occasion, George was violently attacked by the Devil, enraged by Saint Paisios's prayers for him. Through this suffering, George began to see the truth. With the saint's intercessions, he finally turned to the light of Christ. His heart was transformed, and he dedicated his life fully to Christ.

"O ye faithful, let us honor Pāsios, the offspring of Phárasa, / the glory of Athos, emulator of the Holy Ascetics of old, and equal to them in honor; / O grace-filled vessel, who hastens speedily to the pious faithful who cry out: / "Glory to Him Who strengthened thee. / Glory to Him Who crowned thee. / Glory to Him Who, through thee, worketh healings for all."

Through the prayers of the Holy Fathers, of our Most Holy Mother the Theotokos, and of Saint Paisios of Mount Athos: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us and save us. Amen.

Meet the Newsletter Team!

Theodora Ciuca



Managing Editor

"I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me."

-Philippians 4:13

Mary Kjendal



Co-Managing Editor

"A rose does not speak, but its fragrance travels far in silence."

-St. Theophan the Recluse

Natasha Richart



Column Writer

"All grown-ups were once children... but only few of them remember it."

-The Little Prince

Sebastiane Archer



Column Writer

"Prayer is the place of refuge for every worry, a foundation of cheerfulness, a source of constant happiness, a protection against sadness."

-St. John Chrysostom

Elizaveta Durka



Column Writer

"Write me of hope and love, and hearts that endure."

-Emily Dickinson

Iván Stepanowich



Column Writer

"All that is gold does not glitter, Not all those who wander are lost;"

-J.R.R. Tolkien

Seraphim Weaver



Column Writer

"Some believe that it is only great power that can hold evil in check. But that is not what I have found. I've found it is the small things, everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keeps the darkness at bay. Small acts of kindness and love."

-Gandalf the Grey