

Committee Reports 2026

Prospora / Litya Bread

For the majority of the year, prospora baking proceeded as normal, with most of the prospora baked by me at home. With the completion of the parish hall—which includes three dedicated baking spaces and three ovens—we began transitioning baking operations to the church in September. At that time, Jenn and Gabriel joined the prospora baking team, and we completed our first bake in the parish hall. That initial bake went well, as warm weather allowed the dough to behave similarly to prior home bakes, resulting in a consistent outcome.

A second bake was attempted in mid-December with a larger batch of 12 loaves. Due to colder temperatures and environmental differences, the prospora did not turn out as needed for liturgical use. The bread was distributed to parish families for home consumption, and none was wasted.

Since then, I have conducted two additional individual baking sessions at the parish hall to begin fine-tuning the process. This testing period is ongoing, and I anticipate completing two to three more small-batch baking sessions to further refine both the process and ingredients. The goal is to ensure consistent, reliable prospora baking in the future at our new parish hall.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dcn. Theophan Alvarez

Flowers/Decorations Committee

The Flowers/Decoration Committee seeks to beautify the temple and honor Christ in his saints throughout the liturgical cycle, paying special attention to the feasts of Christ and the Theotokos. We call ourselves “Team Pascha” and currently have the following members: Betsy, Magdalena, Bianca, Olga, Valeriya, Kyra, and Annie. We worked well together as a team between finding and purchasing flowers, coordinating adorning the icons, cross, and temple, and communicating amongst each other and clergymen. We especially want to thank everyone who contributed to Pascha in 2025 and gave of your time, talent, and treasures. A challenge we faced was financial, given the rise in the cost of flowers. We had to adapt our approach in order to maintain our budget. Our goals for 2026 include offering more opportunities for volunteers to participate in adorning the icons and beautifying the temple. We would also like to encourage anyone interested to come learn more about flower arrangement and floral design so that more people have the opportunity to participate.

Respectfully Submitted,

Annie (Anna) Morris

Greeters

Everything went well for the greeters this past year. We had four people on the committee:

Jeff, John Richards, who has started attending the Longview mission, and Terry Cowan, as well as myself. One member of the team attends another local every other week so adding another person to the team would probably be good if there is anyone interested.

Respectfully Submitted,

Harvey Durham

Custodial Committee

In 2025, the main goal of the janitorial committee was to increase access of cleaning supplies to the parish, and to share the burden of cleaning our communal spaces amongst volunteers, instead of just relying on the same people to clean each and every week. In 2026, with having the use of our new parish hall for the entire year, we want to continue to expand these goals as the parish hall space is too large to simply leave cleaning to chance. First, we are hoping to recruit enough volunteers that we have at least 3 cleaning volunteers to clean one week each month. This would be an additional person each week from 2025. Shared burdens make light work. Second, we want to systematize and standardize purchasing and storage of cleaning materials, so that all volunteers have all needed materials, at all times. Lastly, we want to identify or create a space on the church grounds for a dumpster to allow for actual trash service, as our parish is beginning to outgrow the volunteer removal process. In proper execution, we hope to ensure that St. John of Damascus church remains clean and vibrant for all future Orthodox to enjoy.

Respectfully Submitted,

Andy Ayers

Lawn Maintenance

The Lawn Maintenance team is responsible for the routine care, seasonal tasks, and ongoing problem prevention of St. John's grounds. Responsibilities include mowing, edging, trimming, and cleaning driveways and sidewalks. The team also manages watering, flower bed maintenance, small tree pruning, and cleanup of downed trees or limbs. Additional duties include cemetery cleanup and maintenance, erosion control, and other tasks necessary to keep the grounds neat, safe, and well maintained.

In 2025, the parish showed increased commitment by assisting with weekly mowing, watering, and flower bed maintenance during the peak summer months. The December parish workday was a great success, and the community is grateful to Terry Cowan for helping keep the grounds around St. John's well maintained.

Ongoing challenges included maintaining flower beds during the peak summer season, particularly with watering needs, as well as the maintenance costs and downtime associated with the zero-turn mower.

Goals for 2026 include adding additional workdays to the calendar and developing a solution for summer watering needs. The team will also plan for expansion and improvements to the cemetery and a new rose garden between the church and hall. A two-year plan will be developed to replace the mower.

Respectfully Submitted,

Matthew Kirkley

Photography / Video

Directory Committee

Goals for 2026 include updating the spreadsheet and comparing it to what Anya has on file. Then we need to get everyone to verify what is on file. Also, we need to add what we have on the last few groups of catechumens. It would be good to schedule a few Sundays to take pictures to upload to the directory. We tried having everyone do it themselves, but it did not produce many results.

Respectfully Submitted,

Connie (Catherine) Russell

New births, Condolences, Graduation and Meal Train

This year the new births, condolences, graduation and meal train committee has helped support the parish through contributions, hospitality and support in times of joy and grief. We are happy to report that our parish is flourishing with young adults, new babies but saddened with the few souls that have passed this year. Our hope and plan for the year ahead is to establish a closer knit parish to come along side our parishioners in their season of joy and sorrow, through contributions, hospitality, and support.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rebekah Rae

Women's Group

The goal of the Ladies' Group is to further the unity and connection of women within our parish through good works, service of the church, and fellowship.

Accomplishments this year include establishing a once a month fellowship time for ladies, started a ladies email chain, and hosted a holiday fundraising bake sale (which brought in over \$1,000) to raise funds for new tables and chairs for our fellowship hall. Hopes for the future - to reinforce connection and community within our church among the ladies and better establish our gifts of good works to support our parish.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rebekah Rae

Men's Group

The Men's group is for fellowship in informal and social settings to get to know each other better and support each other. In 2025 our most successful meeting was at TrueVine brewery with beer, pizza, and sitting around tables outside talking and enjoying each others company. It was also helpful that Father David joined us.

I believe the main goal for 2026 should be more frequent meetings. We aimed for quarterly and more might possibly allow everyone a chance to attend some of the meetings.

I enjoyed performing this function but I would like to give another of our men a chance to take the lead!

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael C Williams, MD

Benevolence Committee

The Benevolence Committee at St. John's collects items and/or donations to help people in the parish and our surrounding community, with an emphasis where possible on smaller underserved communities. We encourage others to give alms to those in need by running item collection initiatives during our fasting seasons.

This year was a great start on building a culture of benevolence.

During Lent, around 500 shelf stable items were collected and donated to the Philadelphia's Blessing food pantry in Whitehouse, TX. During Nativity, we collected 10 case and 13 packs of diapers, 5 cases and 21 packs of wipes, 2 cases and 41 packs of snacks for the East Texas Crisis Center in Tyler. While those who participated were overwhelming in their generosity, participation rates remain a struggle. So in the future we hope to encourage others to see alms giving as an integral part of the fasting seasons.

Our goals for 2026 are to increase participation rates in our parish to give to those in need.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jenn Ayers

Anniversary Planning Committee

The 20th Anniversary committee was established in 2025 to plan for and carry out a 20th Anniversary celebration in November, 2026. Members of the committee are Philip Letzo, Betsy Letzo, Terry Cowan, Katelin Carnes, Magdalena Porter and Xenia Durham. Our first meeting was held in May, 2025. Since that first meeting, we were able to accomplish several critical first steps. The event will take place on Sunday, November 8, 2026. A suitable venue and caterer have also been reserved. Our goals for 2026 include working closely with the Parish Council to establish a budget as we move forward with event details. Save the date!

Respectfully submitted in Christ,

Phil Letzo

Church School

The Church School program at St. John's has continued to grow over the past year. We currently have 57 children in grades K-12 on our class rosters. We were able to add new teachers this year and expand our classes, which has been a blessing.

Teachers for the 25/26 school year include:

Primary (K/1) – Betsy Letzo

Elementary (2/3) – Michelle Stuckey

Upper Elementary (4/5) – Donna Alonso

Intermediate (6/7) – Austin and Elizabeth Wright

Junior/Senior High (8-10) – Terry Cowan

11/12th graders are invited/encouraged to join the Catechumens' class

The schedule of classes for the year were distributed to parents so they can plan accordingly. We meet following coffee hour between 12:30-1:00. Our teachers work very hard to provide age appropriate and Christ centered, Orthodox based lessons. Our greatest challenge has actually been attendance of the children. Our goal for the rest of the year is to see more regular attendance.

Here is a list of the remaining classes in 2026:

Jan. 11 and 25

Feb. 8

Mar. 1, 15 and 29

Apr. 19

May 3 and 17

Respectfully submitted in Christ,

Betsy Letzo

Young Adults

Our hope for the Young Adults Group is to provide a relaxed atmosphere for hanging out and hopefully building some lasting friendships. Whether it's playing games in the Parish Hall, going out to dinner or doing something cool in town, we just want to spend time together. For young adults 18+ and those young at heart!

Respectfully Submitted,

Samantha (Syra) Stoner