

# INTERNAL STRENGTHS

**67 - LOVING & WELCOMING COMMUNITY** - Our Parish has many mixed marriages which tends to make us less judgmental, more welcoming and accepting.; Strong sense of community among parish families.; Parishioners are welcoming to visitors.; A community that is strong, supportive, and very welcoming.; Friendly and diverse congregation; All are welcome and it is truly displayed here.; Warm and welcoming community and pangari team; Strong sense of hospitality (philoxenia)—parish known for generosity and friendliness to visitors; Greek dance programs for all ages, offered in a welcoming, non-competitive environment that emphasizes fellowship, culture, and fun; Welcoming/Fellowship; welcoming; Welcoming; Openness to outsiders; Friendly and welcoming to visitors; Small community in vicinity that has grown a lot over time; Welcoming community bringing; Welcoming community with welcome kits; Collegial and friendly; Welcoming to converts and newcomers; Parish is friendly and welcoming and not cliquey; All together as one with love; Welcoming to newcomers; Strong sense of community; Welcoming coming from the Greek spirit; Everyone in community is family; The warmth of the Parish Council in terms of welcoming new members. When I first visited, I felt the care and love right away, even though I was a nervous wreck.; Our friendly, welcoming community; An attitude of welcoming/hospitality; Welcoming parish community; Warmth of the Community – approaching of “strangers” – making them feel important; Diverse Congregation: The parish attracts people from varied ethnic, denominational, and age backgrounds, making it a welcoming destination for those seeking Orthodoxy.; We are like family, very tight knit; Unified parish with genuine love and compassion for each other; close knit; Lack of significant fighting / bickering; The feeling that you’re with your family on Sundays.; Do not bring politics into things and allow people to love each other; Saint Sophia Church is very open to new people who want to serve and help the parish.; Welcoming Efforts: The pangari team greets parishioners, and a “New to St. Sophia” pamphlet is being developed to orient newcomers.; So welcoming to our visitors and new parishioners! It’s easy to start forming “real” relationships during the first visit!; Very welcoming to guests.; We are a hard working and welcoming parish; Warm and welcoming community; Board members with skill set that benefits community (i.e. law, finance); We are a very warm and friendly parish. People feel comfortable here. It is not a cliquey church.; Inclusiveness – welcoming all no matter their background, race or religion; Increased community outreach, i.e. FOCUS ministries; Welcoming and diverse parish; Friendly to visitors and new parishioners; St. Sophia’s is a more diverse and welcoming community that are active and engaged with multi-generational ties; Very welcoming & friendly congregation; An increase in service/outreach to the greater community has occurred; We are very welcoming to newcomers especially those who’s first time it is coming to church.; From my experience at St Sophia, we focus on community and make sure everyone’s included.; Welcoming environment for visitors with the warm embrace of our church family; Strong Community; We listen to the community with harmony.; From the very beginning of Saint Sophia’s church journey, we have emphasized to be “welcoming + hospitable to every one”. (humble – Greek philoxenia); We are the friendliest and most welcoming parish in the entire Philadelphia area.; Small, welcoming community; Welcoming nature of community; Welcoming community. We welcome all who want to be FULLY engaged in Orthodoxy.; Huge emphasis on Parish Safety. Measures were the direct result of a detailed assessment by the Department of Homeland Security and commitment from select members of the Parish community with deep rooted interest in security. (CCTV, Security team, blast proof glass, keyless entry, annual assessment by local law enforcement, active shooter training for Sunday School teachers, etc); Saint Sophia Church is a very welcoming parish, visitors tend to be welcomed graciously.; Saint Sophia Church tries to benefit the wider community, e.g., blood drives, support of food pantries, etc.; Strong sense of community + welcoming to others; Welcoming new members and making new visitors to feel at home.

**48 - FACILITIES & LOCATION** - The physical beauty of St. Sophia is stunning and I venture to say strikes every newcomer with awe.; New church is fully decorated; Large hall and gathering space (with new outdoor firepit), which supports parish life and can be rented out for events; Nearly 8 acres of land with lots of parking; Traditional Byzantine styled church; Beautiful church building and architecture that inspires reverence; Parents bring kids to church every Sunday and participate in all youth ministries; Facilities - beautiful church and grounds, hall; Facilities and beautiful church; Great location and accessible from every county in the area; Area is densely populated in vicinity of; Location; Great location for far reaching suburban communities; Location – easy access; We are located in a great area where it is easy to get to and reach people that come from farther away.; Safe environment for parishioners; Facilities Capacity: Parish hall from the 1980s includes a full kitchen, classrooms, and meeting space, allowing for festivals, ministries, and rentals.; Good location (as in there are few Greek orthodox parishes in the physical location of St. Sophia); Location, location, location. Conveniently located in the suburbs of Montgomery County, our closest eastern Sister Parishes are St Luke and Annunciation Church. Closest church to our west is St. Matthew in Reading, PA (Pitt Metropolis) which is over 40 miles and

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about an hour drive. East access from major highways.;Very inviting atmosphere. We have one of the nicest churches in the area.; Our beautiful, inspiring house of worship; Beautiful Byzantine Church; The Church & Hall / Kitchen Facilities; Land – Ability to Grow the facilities; Modern Sanctuary: Built 12 years ago with full Byzantine iconography, the church is a beautiful worship space that communicates Orthodoxy visually.; Modern Sanctuary: Built 12 years ago with full Byzantine iconography, the church is a beautiful worship space that communicates Orthodoxy visually.; Our church campus is a true blessing. Our church building is sizeable with beautiful iconography plus the acoustics are fabulous! We have a church hall large enough to hold events with a robust kitchen and even serve as a temporary church when needed. Plus, we have the classrooms and offices all under one roof. Parking is abundant! Now, we have a beautiful fire pit in addition to a garden.; Beautiful church temple and land.; Beautiful grounds/Iconography; The Church has a lot of land.; Members of the church belong to different demographics.; Beautiful Byzantine-style church; Beautiful Byzantine Church with plenty of room for new families; Beautiful church building, inside & outside, with traditional byzantine architecture & iconography; The Greek Orthodox liturgical beauty and the breathtaking beauty of our church building; We have a great location – with plenty of parking – visible on Trooper Road and near main roads. Easy to find us.; Saint Sophia church is a beautiful Byzantine structure with beautiful Byzantine iconography.; We are a small intimate church, which makes it easier to make better and longer lasting connections that make a difference to peoples lives.; We have an amazing church building with a unique egg tempera frescoe paintings, I call it the “mini-sistine chapel of valley forge”; Beautiful Byzantine church that attracts interest and attention; Physical plant (buildings) that are in overall good shape and not in need of significant repairs; In range to pay off mortgage and dedicate the church; Parish council eager to work + benefit our church.

**35 - CLERGY** - Our Priest, is also a convert, which can reduce the perceived barriers to entry to newcomers. He also works very hard to explain our faith, with words and also with his actions.; Priest Stability: Historically, priests assigned to St. Sophia have remained long-term, creating continuity and trust within the parish community.; Father Symeon is very welcoming to every question and if he doesn't know the answer he's always willing to find the solution/answer.; Devoted clergy, chanters and choir.; A priest who is down-to-earth and serious about being a good spiritual father.; Energetic priest with a focus on education, worship and fellowship while utilizing all three as a framework for strengthening our community and helping us to grow in our faith; Young priest; An enthusiastic convert priest appeals to new converts; Welcoming Priest; ; Fr. Symeon as our priest: personable, approachable, and able to connect with parishioners of all ages, especially young adults and catechumens . Unique perspective as a convert to Orthodoxy, enabling him to articulate the faith clearly to those from other Christian traditions , particularly valuable in catechism and outreach; Father is doing a great job making sermons more education; Fr Simeon and his patience, loving, and working well to lead properly; Younger priest open to new ideas; Young priests willing to chase; Fr Symeon; Devoted clergy and chanters; Father Symeon's attempts (as his tenure prolongs) to add more services (like Saturday night vespers) to the church's schedule. To tack onto this point, the constant Catechism classes are very beneficial to anyone who attends.; Father Symeon's willingness and attention to get to know everybody at a personal level, and his willingness to always have a meeting with you if you need it.; Our energetic, younger priest; A Young, Energetic Priest: The current priest is 38 years old, unmarried, and uses creative, accessible metaphors in sermons that make theology relatable to parishioners of all ages.; Senior Parea: Father Symeon is a perfect fit for Saint Sophia. He is so patient and really Intune with how to communicate in a loving and fun way. It is this type of approach that will help parishioners to “hear” and act accordingly.; Knowledgeable, devoted, energetic priest.; Young priest – energizing youth; Fr. Symeon who interacts amazingly well with all generations an personalities; We have a young dynamic priest who is working with the youth of our parish. As such we are getting inquirers and catechumens who are becoming a part of the Church.; Strong leadership and commitment within Parish Council and Youth Ministries; Young, energetic priest with new ideas to engage with our young adults; Younger, open to new ideas, Priest; Priest—compared with other parishes; solid theologian; Solid leadership; Young people getting involved mostly because of Fr. Symeon's influence; Parish priest has a talent with encouraging young adults to join Orthodoxy.

**18 - CULTURE & HERITAGE** - New converts embrace Hellenism and the cultural aspect of our parish; Greek School programs for both children and adults, fostering language and cultural connection; Devotion to preserving Greek culture; The church promotes our ethnic and cultural identity.; Greek Language, the language of the Bible, fortifying the history of the ancient church; We are not a Capital G Greek church. English is spoken often during Liturgy and there are folks from many different ethnicities here.; Devoted to preserving Greek culture; Sunday and Greek school is strong; Dedicated funds for full time Psaltis in Byzantine music; Adult Greek school; Our current ministries and Greek school; Cultural

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Programs: Greek School and adult Greek dance support language, culture, and intergenerational identity, while also serving as points of entry for new families.; Orthodox/Hellenic Networks: Links to AHEPA, Archons, and IOCC strengthen credibility and provide opportunities for parishioners to connect with broader Orthodox initiatives.; Orthodox/Hellenic Networks: Links to AHEPA, Archons, and IOCC strengthen credibility and provide opportunities for parishioners to connect with broader Orthodox initiatives.; We have remained true to the practice of the Greek Orthodox faith; We celebrate our Greek culture and heritage and should continue to do so, you don't need to be born Greek to benefit from all this culture offers and be a vital part of it; Appropriate mix of English with the Greek in the services.; Rich cultural heritage with established traditions that draw visitors and potential future stewards; Growing young adult ministry and Greek school for all ages; We have an excellent Greek educational program for both children + adults.

## **17 - YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS** - YAL aged parishioners have become united and enthusiastic;

Engaging and impactful catechism classes; Growing young adult presence; Larger young adult group; Influx of young adults, including kids coming back and seekers; Engagement of a handful young adults in some of the engagement ministries like focus; The involvement with the Young Adult League is increasing.; Youth Programs; Social Events to create bonding among adults and youth; Extremely engaged Young Adult group; Lots of young families with young children attend on a regular basis; Established Ministries and Groups (JOY, HOPE, GOYA, YAL, Sr. Parea, Philoptoxos, etc.); Many young adults have returned post-college & some young adults who now are employed in the area attend St. Sophia (& we have some local college students attend St. Sophia); Embarrassing YAL and providing a runway to take over parish event and operations.; Influx of young adults; Growth in interest of younger people; Influx of young adults. Both Cradle Orthodox and Seekers.

## **14 - DIVERSITY & INCLUSIVITY** - I believe one of the core Strengths of our Parish is that we

are so diverse. We truly represent Orthodox Christians from all backgrounds not just in America but around the world.; Demographic diversity; Divers backgrounds of people; Professional diversity in experiences; Diversity of p[arishioners and backgrounds; Demographic cross-section among parishioners (e.g., families, couples, singles, seniors & non-Greeks); During coffee hour, I found it very easy to strike up a conversation and befriend everyone, especially in the beginning when I was new and people wanted to know my story, up to now, where I'm very involved in the church, and the friendships and family are growing deeper.; The diverse family of like minded people; Diversity; Diverse parishioner base from age, marital status, ethnicity, professional experience, and background (converts or cradle).; Diversity; We have a diverse demographic of parishioners, allowing for all to serve.; Pluralistic congregation; We have a strong mix of people of all backgrounds and are not just Greeks only. We are orthodox first, meaning our faith comes first over being just Greek culture.; Diversity; Multiple lay-led ministries cover diverse demographics (choir, Philoptochos, food ministry support, pangari, cultural programs).

## **13 - OUTREACH & SERVICE** - Outreach via the fairs and YouTube streams, and a decent

website.; Our expanding outreach ministries; Communication – all forms, telephone, word of mouth, email, social media & mailings; A fair amount of ministries available for people of all ages within the parish; Small but mighty parish making a significant contribution to our local and global community; Recent increase in outreach ministries – blessing of the pets, FOCUS, welcome kits at Pangari, Backpack program, etc.; The addition of FOCUS Philadelphia, led by parish council president John Pogas, which is currently based out of our church. It gives more opportunity to people who WANT to do the good work.; Food Mission Partnership: Hosting FOCUS Philadelphia positions the parish as a hub for local outreach, giving visibility and missional credibility in the wider community.; Core group of volunteers that show up ready to contribute to every event (and slightly overutilized); Community Outreach (FOCUS and Philoptochos philanthropies); ~ Philoptochos Ministry: A thriving chapter anchors parish philanthropy, women's fellowship, and service projects, providing steady leadership and community presence.; Increase in outreach meeting Focus, backpack ministry.

## **12 - DEDICATED & HARD WORKING PARISHIONERS & STAFF** - Saint Sophia

Church has a solid core of people who are dedicated to its success.; Hardworking; Hard working; Hardworking and dedicated parishioners; Many hard workers in the parish; We do a lot of good things even though we are considered a "smaller" parish; We've survived this far...; We may be a small parish but a mighty one!!!; Dedicated parish; Deeply committed core parishioners. Even though the parish is small, the dedication of its members has allowed it to accomplish much more than its size would suggest. The parish fosters a sense of family and closeness and these personal connections make parishioners

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feel seen and valued.; There is also a core group of parishioners who are dedicated to serving the Church.; Dedicated Staff: Office and facilities staff provide administrative and logistical stability, enabling clergy and council to focus on ministry.;

**11 - MUSIC, LITURGICAL RESOURCES & WORSHIP** - Professional musician will arrive shortly to become our full-time chanter; Liturgical Resources: Liturgy books are widely available, and services align with the GOARCH Digital Chant Stand, reinforcing standardization.; Liturgical Resources: Liturgy books are widely available, and services align with the GOARCH Digital Chant Stand, reinforcing standardization.; Reliable Support Infrastructure: Staff and volunteers keep operations smooth, enabling both liturgical and non-liturgical ministries to thrive.; Some chanters are knowledgeable; The number of visitors that come to Divine Liturgy is increasing, and many of them come back.; Strong Identity and Tradition the parish preserves a rich liturgical life and a deep connection to Orthodoxy.; The choir/chanters do a great job; Streaming services helps with engagement; Increased English chanted by chanters – can understand the responses; Worship at Saint Sophia Church is ordered, timely and lively.

**10 - VARIOUS MINISTRIES** - Robust and active parish life, with many events and an updated, comprehensive bulletin; Established ministries of all ages; Ministries; Active ministries and plenty of activities / events: easy for parishioners to get involved with such variety; The Adult Dance Group is increasing, and they hold practices regularly.; Sign-up Genius for events; We have ministries established; Intergenerational core with established ministries of all ages; Many programs for families.; Breadth of Ministries: Senior paraea that meets each week.; The seniors' group offers fellowship and pastoral connection, while serving as mentors and storytellers of parish history.

**8 - LAY LEADERSHIP** - Evolving Parish Council: The council is diversifying and aligning members' skillsets with ministry needs, showing intentional governance and long-term planning.; Our current leadership who all get along; Parish leadership has an excellent relationship with the metropolis and hierarchy; Church leadership is very committed to parish; Our parish leadership; A GOD CENTERED desire to do good works and live our faith. This is the heart of many who serve in ministries (both members and officers). The willingness of this group to serve sacrificially (time resources, leadership) provides stability.; Leadership is very committed to the parish.

**6 - FINANCIAL STABILITY** - Small group of stewards continue to be a financial safety net for the parish; Our ability to work towards financial goals and achieve them; Financially stable; Energy of committed stewards; Financial Solvency; Successfully servicing new church debt.

**6 - GREEK FESTIVAL** - Saint Sophia's Greek festival brings our parish members + other volunteers closer together to work for the betterment of our church community + surrounding communities. Our local friends always look forward to coming to support us.; Annual Greek Festival that strengthens community ties and raises parish visibility; Everyone works on Greek Festival to raise visibility; The annual festival and craft fair, which drives not only consumers to raise the church revenue, but also shares Greek culture and, more importantly, offers church tours to the non-Orthodox so they can better understand our faith.; Reputation for excellent festivals; Festivals.

**6 - CATECHESIS & SPIRITUAL FORMATION** - Education – I learn something new about our faith every Sunday; Faith is nurtured through different activities such as FOCUS and the different education lessons.; The sermons, always poignant; Catachumen classes are strong and filled with great information.; Catechism classes; Religious education seems to be growing steadily at Saint Sophia Church.; Catechism classes are excellent.

**3 - GROWTH** - Growth; Our growing parish; We embrace our religion and help it grow.

## ONE OFFS

- ~ Keeping Christ at the center of everything we do;
- ~ Saint Sophia Church is a quietly pious parish, its religiosity does not put one off.;
- ~ We embrace technology to help with communication and ease of operations of the parish.;