



St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church

Parish Resource Book

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Rt. Rev. Archimandrite Leonard Faris

His Grace Bishop JOHN
Diocese of Worcester & New England

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Worship in the Orthodox Church

Many folks leave their first Orthodox service, not sure what it is they have experienced. That's okay. The music, the painted icons, the incense, the vestments of the priest all seem a bit foreign at first. They often leave one with a sense of mystery. That is okay too. In the Orthodox Church, the transcendence of God and the beauty of worship give us a tiny glimpse of His Heavenly Kingdom. The Divine Liturgy is a reminder that our true homes are not in this world.

Orthodox services are rich in tradition and steeped in a sense of holiness. Whether it is the Sunday Divine Liturgy (the Eucharistic service), a weekday Matins or Vesper service, or one of the special services on a feast day or during Lent, the words and hymns proclaim what the Church believes.

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are essential to Orthodox worship. In the **Orthodox Study Bible** we read, *the message comes from God... that is why the Bible and the Church cannot be separated.* --Father Jack Sparks. Proclaiming God's word and interpreting the Scriptures is the task of the Church; to read, study and make the Word part of us is the task of all Christians.

The Holy Bible is in the pew rack for those who wish to follow along with the Scripture readings. The readings change from week to week and are printed in the bulletin each Sunday.

In the pew rack you will find several different books, all of which can be helpful for following the service. The red **Service Book** is the official text of the Archdiocese; many of the regular services are printed inside. You will see another booklet, called **The Divine Liturgy for Children**. Don't let the title scare you away -- it is an excellent way to follow the service, just open it to the beginning and go.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:16

Some Things You Should Know While in Church

Standing vs. Sitting

The traditional posture for prayer and worship in the Orthodox Church has been to stand. In the Orthodox "old countries", there are usually no pews in the churches. Chairs or benches on the side walls are usually reserved for the elderly and infirm. In North America, we have tended to build our churches with pews, and since we have them, we need to figure out when we may sit and when we should stand. First of all, it is fully acceptable (even preferable) to stand for the entire service. If you prefer this, it would be better to find a place closer to the back or side of the church so as not to stand out or block someone's view. When should you definitely stand? Always during the Gospel reading, the Little and Great Entrances, the Anaphora, the distribution of Holy Communion, whenever the priest gives a blessing, and the Dismissal. In many parishes, the Divine Liturgy books in the pew have suggested times when sitting is acceptable. Follow those instructions (it's probably safer than to follow what the people are doing in the first couple of rows). When in doubt, stand. It is never wrong to stand in church. [Many parishes also follow the practice of kneeling on Sundays during the Cherubic Hymn, consecration, and the "Our Father". Strictly speaking, this is not correct, because every Sunday is a "little Pascha" in which the Resurrection is remembered - hence, no kneeling. The "kneeling prayers" said five weeks after Pascha are said after the Sunday Liturgy, "reinstating" kneeling for Vespers, Matins, and weekday Liturgies only. If the tradition of the parish you are visiting is to kneel, and everyone kneels, it's better to do so than to stick out like a sore thumb. If there is a mixture of standing and kneeling, then stand.

Lighting Candles

Lighting candles is an important part of Orthodox worship. We light them as we pray, making an offering to accompany our prayers. Orthodox typically light candles when coming into the church - and that is usually the best time to light them, but there are times when candles should not be lit. It is not proper to light candles during the Epistle or Gospel readings, during the Little or Great Entrances, the sermon, and most of the times when the faithful are standing. If you find yourself arriving to church after the Liturgy has begun, a good rule of thumb to remember is - if everyone is standing, wait until they are sitting to light a candle (unless they are

sitting for the sermon, of course). Other than that it is probably all right to light a candle.

Entering the Church Late

The time to arrive at church is before the service starts, but for some unknown reason, it has become the custom - or rather the bad habit - for some to come to church late. If you arrive after the Divine Liturgy begins, try to enter the church quietly - and observe what is happening. If the Epistle or Gospel is being read or the Little or Great Entrance is taking place, wait until it is finished to quickly find a seat. If Father is giving the sermon, stay in the back until he has concluded. If in doubt, check with one of the ushers to see if it is a good time to seat yourself. Try not to interrupt the Liturgy with your entrance. By the way, the best way to avoid this problem is to arrive on time - then you don't have to wonder if it's okay to come in or not. People who come late to the Liturgy should not partake of the Eucharist!

Crossing those Legs?

In some Orthodox cultures, crossing one's legs is taboo and considered to be very disrespectful. In our North American culture, while there are no real taboos concerning crossing one's legs, we tend to cross our legs to get comfortable while sitting. Should we cross our legs in church? No. Not because it is "wrong" to ever cross legs, but rather because it is too casual - and too relaxed - for being in church. Just think about it, when you get settled in your favorite chair at home, you lean back, cross your legs, and then your mind can wander anywhere it wants to. Remember that sitting in church is a concession, not the normative way of prayer. You surely don't want to get too relaxed and let your mind wander off too much. In fact, when you do sit in church, you should sit attentively - and not too comfortably. When sitting in church, keep those feet on the floor, ready to stand at attention (which is what "Let us attend" means). Cross yourself with your fingers and hand - but don't cross your legs!

In and Out

In and out? It's a hamburger place in LA, but shouldn't be the traffic pattern by the back door during services. On some Sundays, it almost seems like we have a revolving door in the back of the church - and it is used by both children and adults. Use the restroom before coming to church. You shouldn't need to get a drink of

water during the service (especially if you are taking Communion!). Don't come to church to go to the fellowship hall ~ come to pray.

Taking restless little ones out is a different matter. If a child is disruptive, take him/her quickly and quietly out of church, just long enough to settle him down, then return to Liturgy. Follow the rules for entering late: not during readings, sermons, or Entrances.

Leaving Before Dismissal

Leaving church before the Dismissal ~ besides being rude ~ deprives us of a blessing. Worship has a beginning ("Blessed is the Kingdom...") and an end ("Let us depart in peace..."). To leave immediately after Communion is to treat church like a fast food restaurant where we come and go as we please. We live in a fast paced world where we seem to be hurrying from place to place. But in God's presence, we need to make every attempt to fight this pressure to move on to the next thing on the day's agenda. We deprive ourselves of blessings by not being still and participating in God's holiness. Eat and run at McDonald's ~ but stay in church and thank God for his precious gifts.

Blot that Lipstick!

Have you ever looked at an icon in just the right light and seen the lip prints all over it? It's disgusting, isn't it? In fact, it's downright gross. Lipstick may look fine on lips, but it looks horrible on icons, crosses, the Communion spoon and the priest's or bishop's hand. Icons have been ruined by lipstick; and even though the cross can usually be cleaned after everyone venerates it, it just isn't considerate to others to impose your lipstick on them. What is the answer? If you insist on wearing lipstick to church, blot your lips well before venerating an icon, taking Communion, or kissing the cross or the priest's or bishop's hand. Even better, wait until after church to put it on. After all, God is not impressed with how attractive you look externally ~ your makeup or clothing ~ but how attractive you are internally, your adornment with good works and piety.

Venerating Icons

When you enter the church, it is traditional to venerate the icons. Usually there are icons at the entrance to the church and many churches have icon stands in the

front as well. [Parishes that follow the Slavic tradition usually place the icons on a table (the tetapod) in front of the solea, the elevated area in front of the icon screen.] When venerating (kissing) an icon, pay attention to where you kiss. It is not proper to kiss an icon in the face. You wouldn't go up and kiss the Lord or His mother on the lips, would you? You would kiss their hand, and only if they invited you would you even dare to kiss them on the cheek. Pay attention to what you are doing. When you approach an icon to venerate it, kiss the gospel, scroll, or hand cross in the hand of the person in the icon, or kiss the hand or foot of the person depicted. As you venerate an icon, show proper respect to the person depicted in the icon - the same respect you would show the person by venerating him or her in an appropriate place. And remember, blot off your lipstick before kissing.

Talking during Church

Isn't it great to come to church and see friends and family members? But wait until coffee hour to say "Hi" to them. It just isn't appropriate to greet people and have a conversation with them during the services. Besides being disrespectful towards God, it is rude towards the other people in the church who are trying to worship. Talk to God while in church through your prayers, hymns, and thanksgiving, and to your friends in the hall afterwards.

Kiss (Don't Shake) the Priest's or Bishop's Hand

Did you know that the proper way to greet a priest or bishop is to ask his blessing and kiss his right hand? How do you do this? Approach the priest or bishop with your right hand over your left hand and say "Father (or "Master" in the case of the bishop), bless." [He will make the sign of the cross, and place his right hand over yours.] This is much more appropriate (and traditional) than shaking their hands. After all, the priest and bishop are not just "one of the boys." When you kiss their hands, you show respect for their office - they are the ones who "bless and sanctify" you and who offer the holy gifts on your behalf. So next time you greet your priest or bishop, don't shake his hand, ask for his blessing.

SUNDAY DRESS

Remember the time when people put on their "Sunday best" to go to church? In fact, dress clothes were often referred to as Sunday clothes. In some parts of the country, this is not common today. In fact, all too often, dress in church has become too casual. In all areas of our lives, we should offer Christ our best. And the same is true of our dress. We should offer Christ our "Sunday best", not our everyday or common wear. And we should dress modestly, not in a flashy way that would bring attention to ourselves. Our dress should always be becoming of a Christian - especially at church.

Children - Only young children (under 10) should wear shorts to church - and then only dress shorts. Athletic shorts, cut-offs, and spandex shorts are never appropriate church wear (for children or adults!). Shoes or sandals should be clean and tied. No one should wear T-shirts with any kind of writing on them ("This Bud's for You!" is definitely out).

Women - Dresses should be modest. No tank tops or dresses with only straps at the shoulders, no short skirts (mini-skirts), and no skin-tight dresses. Dresses should have backs and not be cut low in the front. If women wear pants to church, they should be dress pants (not jeans, leggings, etc.). Shorts of any type are not appropriate for church.

Men - Men should also dress modestly. While coat and tie are not mandatory, shirts should have collars and be buttoned to the collar (the actual collar button may be left undone, but two or three buttons undone is inappropriate). Slacks should be cleaned and pressed. Jeans (of any color) are usually too casual for church, especially ones with patches or holes. Again, shorts are not appropriate church wear.

If you're going somewhere after church where you need to dress casually, bring a change of clothing with you and change after coffee hour. Remember, use your best judgment and good taste when dressing for church. After all, you don't go to be seen by everyone else - you go to meet and worship God.

Pew Blocking

Never heard of pew blocking? It's that practice of sitting right next to the aisle so that no one else can get by to sit in the middle of the pew. Everyone has seen it. In fact, the best pew blockers come early so they can get their coveted aisle seats and then be sure that no one can get past them. The most effective form of pew blocking takes place when two

people take their places at opposite ends of the pew, occupying both the center and aisle seats. This effectively eliminates anyone else from sitting on that row. There are two solutions to pew blocking. The first is to move towards the middle of the pew, leaving the aisle seats for those coming later. And for those of you who just can't handle sitting in the middle of the pew, [or those with small children who may need to make a fast exit], take the outside aisle spot and graciously allow those coming after you to go past (by moving out for them so they can get by). Remember, pew blocking isn't hospitable ~ nor is it an efficient method of seating. So don't be selfish. Move on over towards the middle.

Don't be a pew blocker.

To Cross or Not To Cross

Anyone who has looked around on a Sunday morning will notice that different people cross themselves at different times (and sometimes in different ways). To a certain extent, when to cross oneself is according to personal piety and not an issue of dogma. But there are times when it is specifically proper to cross yourself, and times when you should not. Here is a brief list of when to cross and when not to cross:

To Cross ~ When you hear one of the variations of the phrase, "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"; at the beginning and end of the liturgical service or your private prayers; entering or exiting the church, or when passing in front of the Holy Altar; before venerating in icon, the cross, or Gospel book.

Not to Cross ~ At the chalice before or after taking Communion (you might hit the chalice with your hand); when the priest or bishop blesses saying, "Peace be to all" ~ bow slightly and receive the blessing; when receiving a blessing from a bishop or a priest (kissing the right hand of the bishop or priest is appropriate, but not making the sign of the cross).

Touching the Hem of Father's Garments

Many people like to touch the hem of Father's phelonion as he goes through the congregation for the Great Entrance. This is a nice, pious custom by which you "attach" your personal prayers to the prayer of the entrance with the holy gifts. At the same time, you need to be careful neither to grab too hard and trip up the Great Entrance, nor to push people out of the way.

Snacks for Children

You can always tell where young children have been sitting in the church. The tell-tale signs are Cheerios, and animal crackers. Parents often bring snacks and a cup of fruit juice along for children during church. And for young children (0-2 years old), this is fine. But by the time children are 3-4 years old, they should be able to make it through Liturgy without eating anything. For those children who get snacks, please don't feed them while in the line for Holy Communion (this applies to holy bread as well). They need to come to Communion without food in their mouths. One last note: try to keep the snack mess down to a minimum. The floor shouldn't be covered with crumbs! Chewing gum during Liturgy is a No-No for everyone!

Handling the Holy Bread

After taking Holy Communion and at the end of the liturgy, it is traditional to eat a piece of holy bread or antidoron - the bread that was left over after Holy Communion was prepared. While antidoron is not Holy Communion, it is blessed bread and as such, should be eaten carefully so that crumbs don't fall all over the place. After taking Communion or kissing the cross at the end of the Divine Liturgy, take one piece of antidoron (you don't need four or five pieces) and when you return to your seat or get to a place where you can stop for a moment, eat the bread trying not to drop crumbs. If you want to give a piece to someone else, go ahead and take an extra piece - don't break yours in half (it produces too many crumbs). And monitor your children as they take the antidoron and teach them to eat it respectfully.

A Final Thought

North American society in the late 20th century is rather casual in its approach to life. Don't allow this prevailing attitude to enter into your Orthodox Christian piety. There are surely a lot of other areas that could be covered here. Much of church etiquette is based on common sense and showing respect for God and others. Always remember that you are in church to worship God, the Holy Trinity. The priest says, "With the fear of God and faith and love, draw near." Let this be the way you approach all of worship.

LITURGICAL LIFE: THE WORK OF GOD'S PEOPLE

The Sacraments of Initiation: Churching of a Mother and Child

Traditionally, forty days after a baby's birth, the mother brings the child to church. Because of the holiness involved in giving birth, and in imitation of our Lord's entrance into the temple on the fortieth day after birth, a mother waits forty days before entering into her normal daily routine, of which Communion is an integral part. A mother who has given birth has participated in a godly act involving the Holy Spirit and "touching" her to the Holy Trinity. In awe and blessedness she waits the customary forty days.

Recently, however, contemporary mothers have resumed their normal routine far sooner than forty days. If a mother is able to go to the shopping mall, a restaurant, to work or to any other "secular" setting prior to the end of the forty days, it seems unusual to forbid the mother from attending church as well. Therefore, locally we have received mothers and children prior to the end of the traditional forty day period.

The family should contact the priest prior to the service in order to arrange for the churching ceremony. At the end of the Matins, the priest will meet the family at the back of the nave and offer the prayers for the mother and child. He will take the child in his arms and lead the family to the front of the church to complete the service.

Baptism ~ Chrismation ~ Communion

Parents should notify the priest immediately upon the birth of a child so that he may visit the family and say the prayers for the birth and naming of a child.

Baptisms and Chrismation can occur at any time during the church year, even during fasting periods; however, if a baptism occurs during a fasting period, hosts should consider the type of food served at any meal following the baptism, especially during the Great Fast, and of course, on most Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the year.

At the time a family schedules a baptism the church office will provide a letter with instructions to prepare for the sacrament. The packet will also include envelopes for gifts to the church, the celebrant, the chanter, as well as a \$10 check payable to the "Antiochian Archdiocese" for the baptismal certificate. (The parents or the candidate will receive the baptismal certificate directly from the Antiochian Archdiocese stating that the person

has canonically entered the Orthodox Church.) If the parents of an infant or if an adult candidate for baptism is not a pledged member of the parish, it would be an opportune time to make a financial commitment to the parish.

All candidates for Holy Baptism need godparents. The godparent (sponsor) in Baptism is a guarantor to the church that the candidate for Baptism will be brought up in the Orthodox faith; therefore, s/he must be a member of the Holy Orthodox Church. No one can guarantee that which he himself does not possess. No priest is permitted to accept a sponsor who is not Orthodox.

All godparents (sponsors) must be Orthodox Christians in good spiritual and financial standing in his/her own parish. Any person who has excommunicated himself from the Church, for any reason, is forbidden to stand as sponsor or witness. Sponsors must receive the Sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion at the Divine Liturgy before they stand at a baptism. Ideally, there should be both a godfather and a godmother; however, if this arrangement is not possible, there must be at least one Orthodox godparent, preferably the same sex as the baptized. In addition to this necessary sponsor in baptism, parents of the baptized may request a non-Orthodox Christian as "witness" to the sacrament. Such non-Orthodox persons are welcome as witnesses but not as sponsors.

At the time of the baptism the godparents of an infant should bring a clean, white towel for the baby. After the candidate has been baptized, he or she should be dressed in clean, white clothes as symbols of the robe of salvation. It is customary for the godparents to provide a gold cross for the baptized, showing that the child is a Christian and protected by the Cross of Christ. Some godparents may also wish to give the child specially decorated baptismal candles.

Finally, any clergyman other than the pastor whom the family wishes to have present at any service of the church must be invited by the local pastor.

The Reception of Converts

We, the Orthodox Church, claim to be the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ. If we are indeed "Catholic," we must be eager and ready to serve all of God's people, and to welcome all of God's people into His community. It is our sacred duty to

preach the Word of God and to help others discover the truth that we have found in Christ.

Converts from religions that do not practice Baptism or which do not baptize in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, **MUST** enter the Church through the Sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation, and Holy Communion following a proper period of catechetical instruction and preparation (usually six to twelve months) affirmation of the Orthodox faith, and the Sacraments of Chrismation and Holy Communion.

When a candidate schedules a Chrismation the priest will provide instructions to prepare for the sacrament. The packet includes envelopes for gifts to the church, the celebrant and chanter, as well as a check to the Antiochian Archdiocese for the certificate. If the adult candidate for Chrismation is not a pledged member of the parish, it would be an opportune time to make a pledge commitment.

The Mystery of Holy Communion (and Confession)

As the spiritual father of the parish, the priest is the "Guardian of the Chalice" and must both encourage the faithful to receive Holy Communion regularly and protect the sacrament against those who have not prepared for participation in the sacrament or are barred from reception for some grave reason. He must not knowingly impart the sacrament to those who have not received absolution through the Sacrament of Penance from a canonically ordained Orthodox priest.

Under no conditions may the priest impart the Holy Eucharist to a non-Orthodox. Likewise, an Orthodox Christian may not, under any circumstances, receive Holy Communion outside the Orthodox Church. By doing so, especially consciously, an Orthodox Christian places himself/herself in a technical state of excommunication from the sacraments of the church. If an Orthodox Christian receives Holy Communion almost weekly, s/he should participate in the Sacrament of Penance at least four (4) times per year during the traditional fasting seasons. If an Orthodox Christian receives Holy Communion less regularly, s/he should participate in the Sacrament of Penance each time.

Although the Sacrament of Penance (Confession) is a separate event from the reception of the Eucharist, many of the faithful associate the two sacraments. Due to constraints of time

and distance most of the faithful "take Confession" prior to one of the divine services (or following Great Vespers on Saturdays.) However, it is possible to make an appointment specifically for this purpose at any time, especially if there is a specific issue or problem that may require a more in-depth exploration. The faithful are also free to choose a father confessor other than the pastor as

long as they notify him of their relationship. As for children, they typically begin making their confession in the third grade; the "how to" part can be discussed with a church school teacher or the pastor.

Orthodox Christians keep a Eucharistic fast before receiving Holy Communion. The fast includes abstention from food, liquid (including water) smoking and marital relations for a time dependent upon the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. The following guidelines apply:

- If the Divine Liturgy will take place *in the morning*, the fast begins at midnight of the previous night.
- If the Divine Liturgy is an *evening service* (or at a Pre-Sanctified Liturgy in Lent) the fast begins following an early and light mid-day meal.
- Children should begin keeping the fast no later than age ten (10). If they are unable to keep the fast, they should nevertheless not eat any food in church and should eat a lighter than usual breakfast.
- There is a dispensation from fasting for medical reasons or circumstances of advanced age or infirmity. If you have any questions or concerns, please ask the parish priest or your spiritual father.

Holy Matrimony

Anyone wishing to be married at Saint George Orthodox Church should expect to meet with the pastor several times and to participate in a rehearsal. Couples should consult the pastor before making plans (including plans about time, date and location of a reception.) At the time a couple schedules their marriage ceremony the church will provide a letter with instructions to prepare for the sacrament. The packet will include envelopes for gifts

to the church, the celebrant and the chanter, as well as a check to the Archdiocese for a marriage certificate.

As Holy Matrimony is only possible between consenting and responsible adults, the couple must make a pledge commitment to the parish before preparations will proceed. If neither the groom nor the bride is a pledged member, the parish will require at least one year's pledge payment in advance and a continuing commitment. Members in good spiritual and financial standing in other Orthodox parishes who wish to continue their membership there will be asked to make an offering to Saint George for use of the facilities (church and/or hall).

In cases where the bride or groom has been previously married and divorced, it will be necessary to apply for a dispensation to marry a second time. The parish priest will direct the couple through the application process for a dispensation. The divorcee will need to provide a statement

concerning the circumstances of the divorce, a copy of the divorce decree and an application fee, payable to the Archdiocese, for each divorced party to cover administrative costs.

If a divorce, God forbid, should occur, the Orthodox Christian undergoes a period of penance before being restored to the sacramental life of the church. During this period of penance s/he may not receive the sacraments, including Holy Communion, serve as a godparent, or serve in leadership positions in the church. This period of penance varies depending on the circumstances surrounding the divorce.

The following guidelines concerning the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony come from The Priest's Guide published by our Archdiocese:

1. Marriage is forbidden between collateral blood relatives to the Sixth Degree, e.g., first cousins; or between spiritual relatives to the Fourth Degree, e.g., godchildren with their sponsors at Baptism.
2. Understanding that the liturgical day begins at the Vesper Hour (sunset), the celebration of marriage is prohibited at the following fasting times:
 - a. Every Wednesday and Friday, the eve of every Sunday and Great Feast throughout the year.
 - b. Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross (September 14)

- c. Commemoration of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist (August 29)
 - d. During the Advent Fast (November 15 - December 25)
 - e. During Great Lent, including Cheese Week and Bright Week, i.e., from Meat Fare Sunday through Thomas Sunday, and
 - f. During the Dormition Fast (August 1-15)
3. The Sacrament of Marriage must be administered in a church building and not a private home. In cases where both parties are Orthodox, they should receive the Sacrament of Confession and Holy Communion prior to the wedding day.
 4. No priest may officiate at the marriage of a divorced person without the express approval of the Metropolitan. In cases where a priest is called upon to perform such a service he must report it to the Metropolitan in writing, not by telephone, in the matter outlined in the Guide.
 5. Before performing a marriage, the priest must ascertain that a civil license has been issued to the couple.
 6. The Betrothal and Marriage (Crowning) are one united Sacrament and must be celebrated together. They must never be separated.
 7. One priest is not allowed to officiate at the marriage of many grooms and brides at the same time. Each couple must be married at a separate service.
 8. The prayer for the removal of the crowns must be performed at the end of the Divine Liturgy following the couple's honeymoon.
 9. When both parties of a marriage were previously married and then widowed or divorced, the Rite for Second Marriage must be used.
 10. No songs are permitted to be sung during the service except those Orthodox hymns prescribed by the rubrics. All other music is forbidden at the service.
 11. Any invitations to other clergymen must come from the pastor.
 12. Any printed material distributed at the wedding must be approved in advance by the pastor.
 13. Orthodox may participate as witnesses and attendants in marriages solemnized in other Christian churches. Similarly members of other confessions may be permitted to act as attendants at Orthodox weddings; however, they may not act as witnesses in the explicit sense of "paranympchos" or best man.
 14. Certificates of marriage are issued from the Archdiocese headquarters. Each record of marriage which is submitted to the Archdiocese headquarters is to be accompanied by a check in the amount of \$10 for processing.
 15. The dresses of the bride and bridal party should be respectable in length and cut and must either cover the shoulders or include the use of an appropriate covering in church.

Mixed Marriages

1. Because marriage for Orthodox Christians is life in Christ, only those who accept and follow Jesus Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, may be married in the Orthodox marriage service. Anyone not baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity would not be able to be married in the Orthodox Church or to marry an Orthodox Christian. In the same way an Orthodox Christian may not marry a non-Christian or marry in any other church without placing him/herself in a state of excommunication.
2. Should an Orthodox Christian choose to marry a non-Christian, there is a possibility of reinstatement to the sacramental life of the church following an extensive period of penance and sacramental excommunication. If the Orthodox member continues to participate in the liturgical services and other aspects of church life, raises any children in the Orthodox faith and otherwise manifests a Christian life, s/he may apply for a dispensation for reinstatement to the sacramental life of the church. All such decisions are the sole responsibility of the Metropolitan Archbishop.
3. All of the elements that non-Orthodox Christians in other denominations look for are incorporated into our liturgical service, yet the inverse is not true. In recognition of this fact, the "Catholic-Orthodox Conference" recommends that mixed marriages between Roman Catholics and Orthodox take place in the Orthodox Church. A Roman Catholic person marrying in the Orthodox Church would not be excommunicated from his/her Church, but an Orthodox marrying outside the Orthodox Church would excommunicate him/herself.
4. The Orthodox-Catholic Conference also recommends that an Orthodox and Catholic couple study both the Orthodox and Catholic faiths, and after much prayer, study and discussion, choose to practice their faith as a united family.
5. An Orthodox Christian cannot receive Holy Communion at any non-Orthodox Church or ceremony.

When Someone in Your Family is Ill

If you or a member of your family is ill, please call the priest and let him know. There are no powers of ESP given to the priest at ordination! It is your responsibility to notify the priest.

If someone at home or in the hospital wishes to receive the Sacrament of Holy Unction (Holy Oil - the sacrament of healing and forgiveness), or the Sacrament of Holy Communion, s/he should request them. As a guardian of the sacraments, the priest wants to give freely what God offers freely, but always with the conditions of seriousness,

understanding and preparation. Because a priest will not want to embarrass the ill person into receiving the sacraments unwillingly, he will wait for the person to request them.

The Mystery of Holy Unction (Oil)

Only Orthodox Christians may receive the Mystery (Sacrament) of Holy Unction. The church generally celebrates this sacrament on Holy Wednesday evening; however, the priest may administer the sacrament to any member of the Orthodox Church who has fallen ill at any time. The church celebrates this sacrament for healing and forgiveness of sins but does not practice what is commonly known as "last rites" or "extreme unction."

When a Parishioner Dies / The Funeral Service

The priest should be notified immediately upon the death of a member of the parish. Whenever possible, prayers for the departed soul should be offered before the body is moved to a funeral home. (If a loved one dies, who is not a member of Saint George, you are encouraged to contact the priest to let him know of your loss and to ask for prayers from the community).

The priest will coordinate the times of the services with the family and the funeral home. It is permitted to have the funeral service in the evening; this allows for more family and friends to attend the service (rather than just a wake.) The family may then gather the following morning for burial.

The hosting of a meal of mercy is done at the discretion of the family, usually at a nearby restaurant. If a family prefers to use the parish hall and have a meal catered, this must be cleared with the priest (there will be a fee for use of the hall and additional custodial work).

The Archdiocese has additional guidelines for funerals which are listed here:

1. It is strictly forbidden to have the casket of the departed open in church at the funeral. The casket may be open at the home, funeral chapel or parlor, where the last viewing may occur.
2. We remind all the faithful to remember the departed by special offerings to the church or to a charitable institution rather than by the purchase of floral tributes which soon decay and are forgotten.

3. Laymen may not make a speech or preach a eulogy or sing songs for the departed in church. Laymen may make verbal tributes at the funeral home, graveside or meal of mercy.
4. Any person baptized in the Orthodox Church who has fallen away from the church (without having joined another religion) may receive the Funeral Service of the Orthodox Church in the home, funeral chapel or parlor as a Christian act of mercy. If the family requests a burial from the church itself, the parish will request the equivalent of one year's pledge prior to the arrangements.
5. The church does not bury non-Orthodox according to the rite of the Orthodox funeral service.
6. It is customary to offer honoraria to the church, all celebrating clergy, the chanter and the custodian.
7. The Orthodox Church does not practice cremation for the faithful. Cremation does not show proper respect for the body which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. In the Orthodox burial service, we anoint the body with oil and pay it great respect. Many of the relics of the saints still work miracles centuries after the death of the saint. Because of the Orthodox theology of the body and death, the Church will not celebrate the funeral service for someone who has been or is going to be cremated; however, the priest may say the Trisagion prayers of mercy at the funeral home or the cemetery as long as there is still a body to pray over.

Memorial Services

The Orthodox Church teaches the catholic nature of the Church; i.e., the Church is universal and all-encompassing, and its membership includes all the faithful -- living and departed. Scripture enjoins us to pray for one another. Just as we offer prayers for each other, we should offer prayers for those who have passed into eternal life. Liturgically, we remember our departed loved ones by:

Holy Bread

The priest will place a particle of bread on the diskos before the Divine Liturgy and will remember your beloved at the Great Entrance and in the silent prayers following the

consecration of the gifts. This is the most important way of remembering our departed loved ones.

Trisagion Service

This service is most often done the Sunday after the funeral (or at three or nine days after the death), forty days, six months and one year. Other times may be requested. It is customary to offer bread and memorial wheat / koliva, especially at forty days. Consult the priest for guidance.

Memorial Gifts

It is appropriate for a family to offer a gift to the church at the time of a memorial. Gifts include contributions to specific funds (scholarship, church school etc.) or dedication of liturgical items. Families must speak with the pastor prior to the purchase of a memorial gift.

One more important note: Many people erroneously believe that they should not come to Church during their period of mourning. On the contrary, the bereaved family should look to the church all the more during this period for strength, patience, courage, comfort and hope.

House Blessing and Other Services

The rich liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church includes a variety of services, and blessings. For example, each year after the Feast of Theophany (January 6) the priest will bless the homes of parish families. The priest will bring holy water from the church to sprinkle, and thereby sanctify a home. It is a good opportunity for the whole family to have some time with the priest.

In America it is a custom to bless graves and offer prayers for the departed on Memorial Day in May. If a member purchases a new car, there are appropriate prayers. If one is to travel on a great journey, he or she should ask the priest to bless those travels. There are many other occasions during the year in which the faithful should not hesitate to make the church a part of their “everyday life.” Simply ask the priest about these times, and when appropriate offer him an honoraria or gift. There are not set amounts, but consideration should include the nature of the occasion and the preparatory work involved in the service.

OFFERING GIFTS AT SAINT GEORGE

Stewardship

While guidelines have existed in the past for establishing minimum contributions for voting membership at Saint George Church, we as Orthodox strive for the maximum instead of settling for the minimum.

A Stewardship drive is conducted near the end of each calendar year. Pledge cards for members or new members are always available. We ask each family to make a monthly or quarterly donation based on income. Please pray and give due consideration before making a pledge. Your church depends on your support, but the emphasis in Christian giving is on the believer's need to thank God for life and salvation. If this is a topic you are uncomfortable with, or don't fully understand, please speak with the parish priest; he will be glad to help.

The Holy Bread of Oblation (the Prosphora) and Other Gifts

It is an honor to be able to make and / or offer the Holy Bread of Oblation. If you wish to offer the Holy Bread, simply fill in your name in the notebook in the parish hall. The cost is \$20.00. More than one individual or family may offer the bread for a Liturgy. At Saint George we have a team of Holy Bread bakers who supply the Prosphora (holy bread) so you needn't worry about baking.

The sheet contains lines for you to provide a list of names of both the living and the departed, who will be remembered at the divine services. (If you bake, and would like to make the bread on a rotating basis, just ask.)

Gifts to established funds are also encouraged. There are several memorial accounts and a parish scholarship. Unless otherwise designated, special donations are directed to the "Long Range Account" which is set aside for future projects not covered in the annual operating budget. The report of the Parish Meeting each year lists the various funds and their balances.

Other gifts include flowers, first-fruits, seven-day candles or communion wine. These donors should sign the notebook page, noting the occasion for the gift (in thanksgiving, as a memorial, for a Name Day etc.) The cost for two vases of flowers is \$50. The florist will be contacted on your behalf and delivery arranged.

The seven-day votive candles are \$5 each, a donor may sign up for a candle in the notebook or purchase a candle before a service from an usher. Envelopes are available in the narthex and parish hall for anyone to use. There are three types, one for your regular stewardship gift, one for remembering the departed and a third which can be used for a variety of occasions, such as baptisms, Name Days, anniversaries and so forth.

Coffee Hour

One of the important ministries of the parish is the fellowship we share with our brothers and sisters -- the weekly coffee hour is an ideal way to get together and share. The time after Liturgy is also an opportunity to reach out to visitors and prospective new members. It is the task of everyone to make welcome those who are new to the parish.

The coffee hour is hosted each week by members of Saint George, often the same individuals or families who are offering holy bread or other gifts (though it is not an obligation.) The notebook in the hall has a space to sign-up to be a host. When a memorial is served for a loved one at Liturgy, the family will usually host the coffee hour. If you would like to be a host, but are unable to do the work, there are parish organizations who will sponsor it on your behalf for a donation -- you will need to make these arrangements directly with them.

Coffee hours need not be elaborate or fancy (unless you personally choose to put out some extra goodies or serve a meal.) As a rule of thumb, the hosts provide light refreshments: The hosts are responsible for food, juice, creamer for coffee etc. The church provides the coffee and paper products. Please note, the parish follows strictly the fasting rules for coffee hours and other meals. The host family is responsible for cleaning the tables and kitchen (including the coffee urns) after the coffee hour (the custodian cleans the floors as part of his regular work.) If linen cloths have been used to cover the tables, they must be washed and returned to the church within the week.

Communications

Keeping everyone up to date is an on-going part of church life. The Sunday bulletin, the mailings, e-mail, website and phone calls are our usual ways of communicating. So, make sure we have up-to-date information.

The parish maintains copies of the Constitution and By-Laws (which detail procedures for electing Parish Council members, voting at annual meetings etc.) In the archives we have parish histories, ad-books from conventions and conferences, records of sacraments, minutes from meetings and electronic files pertaining to church business. The pastor or a Parish Council member can advise you on the best way to access these documents.

New to Lowell? New to Orthodoxy?

If you are reading about Saint George Church or Orthodox Christianity for the first time and you have questions, or would like to be part of our community, please contact the church. If you have been part of another parish or perhaps have moved to the area, let us know that too. Mail, telephone, fax or email us -- just let us know about you and your family and how to get in touch with you. Our priest will be glad to chat with you. We'll also be happy to provide you with reading materials so that your inquiry into this ancient faith may bear much fruit.

In all things be thankful. -- Ephesians 5:20

