

Protection of the Holy Virgin Mary Orthodox Church



Parish Member Handbook

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Introduction

As a parish and Orthodox Christians our hearts' desire is to worship God revealed to us as Holy Trinity in spirit and in Truth; to share this fullness of Truth with all whom God may lead to His Church for their salvation. We believe the Holy Orthodox Church is that same Church comprised of God's covenant people from the beginning, presently experiencing the fulfillment of the prophecy given to the Holy Prophet Jeremiah. (Jeremiah 31:31-34) By the grace of the Holy Spirit, this Church preserves all the fullness of God's revelation without change or diminution that all may be saved and come to knowledge of the Truth.

The purpose of this parish handbook is to provide instruction on the common practice of the Orthodox Faith for all who desire to be joined to Christ through this Eucharistic fellowship of the Protection of the Holy Virgin Mary. Though there are many diverse customs and practices throughout the Orthodox Church, this resource will address how members in this community will conduct themselves as witnesses to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Characteristic of the Orthodox Church is order and authority; nothing happens within the parish without the blessing and knowledge of the Bishop and Priest. "Rugged individualism" is a value and ideal highly prized by folk born and raised in the United States. Because of this it can be difficult for a person so enculturated to submit to ecclesial authority. It is often not easy for someone raised outside of the Holy Orthodox Church to understand that obedience to God's leadership within the Church expressed through the Bishop and Priest is essential to their salvation. (Hebrews 13:17)

This parish fulfills her vocation as part of the Body of Christ within the Diocese of the South, Orthodox Church in America. The Bishop as successor to the Apostles is the Chief Pastor of each parish in his diocese. Nothing occurs in the parish without his blessing. From the Bishop flows the Apostolic succession. He along with all the Bishops of the Church, determines, according to the Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church the practice and discipline exercised within the parishes of the diocese. Each Priest within the diocese receives an antimimension from the Bishop. The antimimension establishes the parish as part of the diocese and authorizes the Priest to celebrate all the Divine services of the Church, principally the Holy Eucharist.

The Priest, appointed by the Diocesan Bishop, is the Rector and head of the parish. According to the teachings of the Church, he is the spiritual father and teacher of his flock and the celebrant of the liturgical worship established by the Church. He teaches and edifies the People of God entrusted to his spiritual care "with no partiality" (James 2:1) and sees to it that all activities within the parish serve the religious goals of the Church. No activities in the parish can be started without his knowledge, approval, and blessing; neither should he do anything pertaining to the parish without the knowledge of his parishioners and parish organs elected by them, so that always and everywhere there may be unity, mutual trust, cooperation, and love.

1. Membership in the Orthodox Church

1.1 Inquirer: Though the Orthodox Church in North America has maintained a presence on this continent since 1794, many Americans are not familiar with it. There are a number of reasons for this; one of which is the Orthodox have been very parochial over the years. The last 30 years have seen a significant change in this for the better. More and more Americans are being welcomed to visit our Orthodox churches and to become familiar with the Orthodox faith and worship. Those who desire to know more beyond the initial round of questions asked and answered upon their first visit to an Orthodox Church, we call Inquirers. In this parish from time to time, we will conduct inquirers classes. These are informational sessions designed to answer more questions and perhaps to communicate more fully the Orthodox Faith and practice. Those who believe God is calling them into a more permanent relationship with the Orthodox Church will be set apart as catechumens, i.e., learners. In the catechumenate instruction is focused on preparing an individual to become a member of the Holy Orthodox Church.

1.2 Catechumen: A person will become a catechumen through prayers offered up by the Priest prior to or after the celebration of a service of the Church, usually the Divine Liturgy. During the catechumenate, the person will read, study, attend classes prescribed by the Priest, and begin to develop a personal rule of Scripture reading and prayer. A catechumen will attend the divine worship of the church, i.e. Great Vespers, Divine Liturgy, etc. A catechumen will remain such for a year. Exceptions can be made to reduce the time spent in the catechumenate or extended as the Priest may determine. There is most definitely an intellectual element to the Orthodox faith, but more is "caught" through living the life of prayer in the Church, than "taught" by the Priest or absorbed from books. Too many people have been attracted to Orthodoxy and

its deep spiritual life, only to leave Her when the first difficulties of living the Orthodox Christian life come upon them. It is much better to take time to consider this life altering action than to rush headlong into the church only to make shipwreck of the faith.

Prior to reception to the catechumenate, with the blessing of the Priest, a person will prayerfully identify a heavenly patron; whose heavenly intercessions together with the Most holy Mother of God, their Guardian Angel, they will seek and whose manner of life they will strive to imitate. In recognition of having adopted a heavenly Patron, the catechumen will receive the name of the Saint as their own. They will have selected with the blessing of the Priest a Sponsor who will walk with them through their catechumenate, answer basic questions, praying for them and ultimately encouraging them to persevere in their journey. The Sponsor will be a faithful Orthodox Christian and of the same sex as the catechumen. During this time, the catechumen will begin the process of self-examination for a "Life Confession." Reception into the Church whether by Baptism or Chrismation will be preceded by Confession. The Priest will assist with this effort.

Also, prior to reception to the catechumenate, those who are members of secret societies will renounce before God and the Priest their membership in said society. Membership in secret societies is incongruous with membership in the Orthodox Church. We cannot withhold anything from the scrutiny of God's ordained servants.

2. The Holy Mysteries (Sacraments) of the Church

2.1 Baptism and Chrismation: In the sacrament of Baptism we die with Christ in His death, and rise from the dead in His resurrection. Holy Baptism cleanses from sin and engrafts a person into the Holy Body of Christ, the Church. Baptism consists of immersion three times in water in the Name of each person of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). In Holy Chrismation we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit by whose grace we receive power to live the new life in Christ received in Holy Baptism.

The Priest will employ the means of reception (Baptism/Chrismation) determined appropriate by Holy Tradition expressed by the Holy Synod of Bishops for the Orthodox Church in America.

For the service of Baptism, the following are required: candle, Cross to be worn around the neck (*usually provided by the Sponsor*), towel or bath robe, a garment of white and a change of clothes. Children will receive Baptism unclothed. Adults will receive Baptism wearing shorts and a t-shirt. Women may wear garments underneath t-shirt and shorts to maintain modesty.

2.2 Confession: In Confession the penitent confesses their sins to God in the presence of a Priest. Confession of sins in the presence of God's anointed is essential for working out one's salvation. Confession is often the first step in breaking the hold which sin may have on our lives. Without the presence of the Priest who bears witness to the confession, the contrition of the penitent, and who is authorized to forgive sins in God's

behalf, it remains very easy to rationalize our sins are not so bad, after all - all sin. In which case, we remain in our sins and rather than experience the regenerating, healing power of God, we limp along spiritually unhealed. The Priest will give a penance to the penitent the purpose of which is to heal and or correct that which has been broken by sin.

In this parish the Priest is Father Confessor for the faithful of the parish. His blessing must be sought and received to seek spiritual guidance from another Orthodox Priest. In the Orthodox Church the confessional is sealed. No Priest under penalty of removal from the ranks of the clergy, may disclose the content of a confession under any circumstances.

The Faithful are encouraged to approach the confessional frequently, but no less than one time per month. It is unconscionable that an Orthodox Christian bypass the confessional for any length of time. Yet, there remain Orthodox Christians who might approach the confessional on a yearly basis, and believe it or not, never.

2.2.1 Self-examination: Prior to Confession, the penitent must conduct a spiritual self-examination. Once the penitent has composed their mind, removing all distraction, they make an examination of their life to determine those sins committed against God and others. These sins they confess in the confessional. (*On the parish website, under the 'Repentance and Confession' tab, there is a guide for conducting a spiritual self-examination prior to Confession*)

2.2.2 Reconciliation: If a penitent has sinned against another person, they must make the effort to reconcile with them prior to receiving the Eucharist.

2.2.3 Restitution: If a penitent has taken something that doesn't belong to them, or they have damaged something that belongs to another, they must make restitution.

2.2.4 Penance: A spiritual task directed by the Priest to fortify the penitent in their holy struggle to overcome sin. Reconciliation and restitution would be considered penance.

2.2.5 Repentance: Metanoia – to turn away; have a change of mind that directly changes behavior. For us as Christians this means a change of mind from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. Repentance is given to us as a gift from God. Though Adam and Eve “sold out” their progeny through their sin (cf. Romans 5), God simultaneously and immediately made available to us, i.e., humanity, a way back to him through repentance. Numerous Fathers refer to repentance as a subsequent Baptism. In the first Baptism our sins are forgiven, and from that point repentance serves to wash sins away.

Archimandrite Alexei: “Dear readers, we are created for God, and only in Him do we find the paramount bliss for which our heart is constantly yearning. Nothing other than God can make our souls happy! Give man everything which he desires. He will enjoy it for a while, but afterwards he will become indifferent to it, because he feels that

something else, much more elevated, is missing..." "Disease is not the greatest evil for man, because a disease of the body endured with humility, faith and patience can cure the soul sick with sin and bring it closer to God – the greatest good for man." "And death is not frightening for the believer, because through it, as through a door, one goes to the beloved and loving God Who hath prepared for them that love Him that which eye hath not seen, nor ear hear, neither have entered into the heart of man (cf. I Cor. 2:9)." "But sin is the most wretched poverty of the heart – poverty blocking the treasure of grace. Sin is a deadly sickness of the soul, a sickness which deprives us both of the joys of earth and the joys of heaven. Sin is a terrible and most lamentable spiritual death which separates us eternally from the joy of the heavenly inhabitants in paradise and buries us in the darkness of hell." "There is no greater evil for man than sin. It destroys both the body and the soul. It makes both this life and eternal life bitter. It causes discord in families, quarrels among neighbors and disagreements among relatives. It starts the fire of malice among people. It makes the soul proud and embittered. It poisons the heart with envy. It drives out holy feelings from the breast and invites the demons to settle there. It separates us from God. It extinguishes everything bright in our hearts. It teaches us to lie, to be gluttonous and to be selfish and greedy. It makes us slander and judge our neighbors. It incites our hand to steal. It fills us with anger and rage. It whispers to us to seek revenge. It commits all outrages, debaucheries, and crimes. It causes all diseases, suffering, injustice, violence, bloodshed, and war. It has filled the souls of all of us with unbearable spiritual stench. It pours this stench into the relationships among us." "Have you asked yourself why is it so stifling in the world? Why is it hard to live? Why can we not put up with each other? The answer is: because sin has poisoned the atmosphere of life. We are all sick with sin. And if untreated body wounds emit intolerable stench, how much more terrible is the stench of sin!" (Archimandrite Seraphim Aleksiev, *The Forgotten Medicine: The Mystery of Repentance*)

St. Nektarios: "He who is unconcerned about the salvation of his soul is at risk of twofold danger: he may either be unexpectedly snatched by death or abandoned by the grace of God." The grace of God abandons the unrepentant person because this person has disregarded the wealth of God's kindness, tolerance, and forbearance... Divine forbearance is transformed into indignation, tolerance into intolerance, and goodness into repulsion." "An example of the abandonment by God witnessed in Scripture is Zedekiah, king of Judah, who was abandoned by God and handed over to destruction along with his kingdom, even though he sought the Lord's mercy through the Prophet Jeremiah and beseeched the Prophet by saying: "pray to God on our behalf" (Jer. 21:2). However, Jeremiah received a commandment from God not to pray for them, because He handed over the city and King Zedekiah into the hands of the fearsome tyrant Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonians; hence, Jeremiah did not pray for them. The city was conquered, sacked; everyone from young to old died by the sword. All of Zedekiah's family was slaughtered before his eyes. Then they plucked out his eyes, tied him in chains and led him captive to Babylon. God poured out His anger and rage on Zedekiah and the city because they mocked and disregarded the words of the Prophet Jeremiah, and they hardened their hearts from turning to the Lord (cf. Jer. 52:7-11)." "..., an evil habit is capable of rendering us incapable of repentance – which should

frighten us immensely. The habit resulting from the continual repetition of a sin becomes a natural state within man and renders itself so powerful that man is no longer able to resist it: its power has overcome even the natural law. Consequently, when habit reigns over us, we submit to it and become its slave. Free will has lost its independence permanently. Man expels his free volition, his will power is proven weak and unable to fight against the habit, and every attempt to regain the lost freedom is in vain... The person who has been conquered by habit carries out, acts, and executes as a servant, as a subordinate. Self-will has ceased; he carries out orders as instructed... Therefore, it is necessary for us to hasten to repentance before sin becomes a habit for us; because then, it is impossible for us to be saved." (St. Nektarios, Bishop of Pentapolis, *Repentance and Confession*)

St. Gregory the Great: There is more joy in heaven over a converted sinner than over a righteous person standing firm. A leader in battle has more love for a soldier who returns after fleeing, and who valiantly pursues the enemy, than for one who never turned back, but who never acted valiantly either. A farmer has greater love for land which bears fruitfully, after he has cleared it of thorns, than for land which never had thorns, but which never yielded a fruitful harvest.

St. Isaac of Syria: Repentance is given to man as grace after grace, for repentance is a second regeneration by God. That of which we have received in earnest by baptism, we receive as a gift by means of repentance. Repentance is the door of mercy, opened to those who seek it. By way of this door, we enter into the mercy of God, and apart from this entrance we shall not find mercy. 'For all have sinned,' according to divine Scripture, 'being justified freely by His grace.' Repentance is the second grace and is begotten in the heart by faith and fear. Fear is the paternal rod which guides our way until we reach the spiritual paradise of good things. When we have attained thereto, it leaves us and turns back. Why do you increase your bonds? Take hold of your life before your light grows dark and you seek help and do not find it. This life has been given to you for repentance; do not waste it in vain pursuits.

St. John of the Ladder: Repentance lifts a man up. Mourning knocks at heaven's gate. Holy humility opens it. This I say, and I worship a Trinity in Unity and a Unity in Trinity. Again: Repentance is the renewal of baptism. Repentance is a contract with God for a second life. A penitent is a buyer of humility. Repentance is constant distrust of bodily comfort. Repentance is self-condemning reflection, and carefree self-care. Repentance is the daughter of hope and the renunciation of despair. A penitent is an un-disgraced convict. Repentance is reconciliation with the Lord by the practice of good deeds contrary to the sins. Repentance is purification of conscience. Repentance is the voluntary endurance of all afflictions. A penitent is the inflictor of his own punishments. Repentance is a mighty persecution of the stomach, and a striking of the soul into vigorous awareness.

St. John Chrysostom: Let us not make ourselves unworthy of entrance into His Kingdom, for as long as we are in this world, even if we commit countless sins, it is possible to wash them all away by manifesting repentance for our offenses; but when

we have departed to the other world, even if we display the most earnest repentance, it will be of no avail. Let us then, I beg of you, recover our senses here and let us recognize our Master as He ought to be recognized.

St. Gregory of Sinai: Those who seek humility should bear in mind the three following things: that they are the worst of sinners, that they are the most despicable of all creatures since their state is an unnatural one, and that they are even more pitiable than the demons, since they are slaves to the demons. You will also profit if you say this to yourself: how do I know what or how many other people's sins are, or whether they are greater than or equal to my own? In our ignorance you and I, my soul, are worse than all men; we are dust and ashes under their feet. How can I not regard myself as more despicable than all other creatures, for they act in accordance with the nature they have been given, while I, owing to my innumerable sins, am in a state contrary to nature.

St. Paisius: Remember, O my soul, the terrible and frightful wonder: that your Creator for your sake became Man and deigned to suffer for the sake of your salvation. His angels tremble, the Cherubim are terrified, the Seraphim are in fear, and all the heavenly powers ceaselessly give praise; and you, unfortunate soul, remain in laziness. At least from this time forth arise and do not put off, my beloved soul, holy repentance, contrition of heart and penance for your sins.

2.3 Holy Eucharist: Reception of the Holy Eucharist in the Orthodox Church is for Orthodox Christians only.

2.3.1 Preparation: When we look at the various “practices” of preparation for the reception of the Holy Eucharist among Orthodox Christian churches, we discover that they include many things in common; confession of sin (*in this parish no less than one time a month*), repentance (*a broken and contrite heart God will not despise...*), fasting, prayers, and reconciliation with others. Fast from all food and drink from midnight until after reception of the Holy Eucharist. Married couples will abstain from marital relations the night prior to reception of the Eucharist. Smokers will abstain from smoking. If you are ill and taking prescribed medication, discuss with the Priest. Women during menses and men having had a nocturnal emission the night previous ought to abstain.

2.3.2 Reception: Having made proper preparation to receive the Holy Eucharist, an Orthodox Christian approaches the Chalice with arms crossed on their chest. We do not make the sign of the Cross at the Chalice prior to reception out of concern for accidentally hitting the Chalice with our hand. It is appropriate for the communicant to say their Baptismal name at the chalice. If the Priest has an assistant at the chalice with a communion cloth, allow them to gently dab your lips. If an assistant is not present, carefully wipe your lips using the Communion cloth held by the Priest. Receive the Antidoron and consume it being careful not to crumble it. If crumbs fall to the floor, please pick them up and dispose of them in a place out of doors where people will not walk or trample. If you have lipstick or lip balm on your lips, please remove it prior to receiving the Holy Gifts; we should not kiss the Icons or blessing Cross with lipstick or lip balm on our lips.

2.3.3 Post-Communion: Having received the Holy Eucharist, we should remain following the veneration of the Cross for post-Communion prayers. If we must depart the temple immediately following the veneration of the Cross, then say post-Communion prayers at home.

Note: for additional guidance about confession refer to the booklet “Confession and Communion in the Orthodox Church,” December 2005.¹

2.4 Holy Matrimony: Marriage ordained by God between a man and woman is a Holy Sacrament in the Orthodox Church. An Orthodox Christian ought to marry an Orthodox Christian, at least one who professes faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and has received trinitarian Baptism. An Orthodox Christian may not be united with non-Christians and or non-Trinitarians (e.g., Mormons, Jehovah Witness, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, etc.) unless they freely desire to become an Orthodox Christian. If an Orthodox Christian enters a marriage with a non-Christian and or non-Trinitarian, they excommunicate themselves from the Church. Be advised, contracting a union before a legal authority (e.g., Magistrate, Justice of the Peace) does not constitute marriage in the Orthodox Church. An Orthodox Christian contracting such a union excommunicates themselves from the Church. Ideally a person will marry once in their life; “...till death us do part.” The Orthodox Church recognizes that at times married persons are unable to remain united due to circumstances which may pose a threat to one or both persons. For instance, one of the partners may be physically abusive. One of the partners may have engaged in infidelity. Though the Orthodox Church considers marriage truly holy, for the sake of the safety of all concerned divorce is permitted. An Orthodox Christian divorced may enter a second marriage, after the Bishop has reviewed the circumstances for the divorce and has given his blessing for a second marriage.

Orthodox Christians desiring marriage should come to the Priest and express their desire to be married. The Priest will provide initial guidance and counsel on the preparatory process. There will be a time of instruction provided to the couple by the Priest to address; couple communication, problem resolution, finances, Orthodox family life and other topics as may be determined appropriate. The couple will not set a date for the marriage celebration without discussing with the Priest.

In days gone by abstinence was the norm and went without saying but must now be stated as it does not appear to be self-evident to many Orthodox young people or adults, sexual intercourse before or outside of marriage is sin; always has been. Where sexual immorality is being practiced between unmarried folk it must stop. Cohabitation without the benefit of marriage is also sin and must be put to an end. If there is a refusal to put sin away, marriage will not be celebrated in the Church.

The couple will select what in our Western world are called maid of honor and best man, i.e., sponsors. These need not be Orthodox Christians, but they must be Christians

¹ <https://orthodoxclarksville.org/onconfessionandcommunion>.

having received Trinitarian baptism, professing right belief in the Holy Trinity and faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Prior to the wedding, all Orthodox participants in the wedding will receive the Holy Eucharist during the Divine Liturgy having prepared appropriately to receive.

Sunday following the Divine Liturgy is the most appropriate time to celebrate the Sacrament of Marriage. Sunday evening is an appropriate time as well for a reception and celebration. A blessing from the diocesan Bishop is necessary to celebrate a wedding on Saturday. If the blessing is given for a Saturday wedding the reception would need to conclude by sunset as the faithful begin their preparation for attendance at the Divine Liturgy the following day.

At no time can non-Orthodox clergy participate in the celebration of a Holy Sacrament of the Orthodox Church. Non-Orthodox clergy are welcome to attend the marriage in the Orthodox Church and will sit among the faithful.

Many who read this treatment on marriage may be perplexed by the many rules. If the treatment seems perplexing know that it is such because of the struggle between the Orthodox faith, delivered by God once and for all to the saints and the condition(s) presented by the society in which we live, formed not directly by God but comprised by the attitudes, behaviors and actions of people not necessarily living in obedience to God through the Church. The Church, her Bishops, Priests and faithful, strive to apply the Apostolic Tradition of the Church in such a way that it remains uncompromised and yet exerts every effort to keep the Orthodox faithful within Her fold. At the heart of the Church's decision-making process is the salvation of the faithful. For the Orthodox this salvation is found in the Church, the source of grace necessary for salvation.

2.4.1 Items for the Marriage service: two marriage candles; common cup with wine; kerchief with which to tie the hands together if this is a familiar custom to the couple; two rings; marriage crowns or wreaths.

2.4.2 Times when Marriage cannot be Celebrated in the Orthodox Church: From a practical standpoint, there are certain times when a marriage cannot be celebrated: evenings before Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the year (because Wednesday and Friday are fast days in the Church); Saturday evenings throughout the year (because of one's preparation to receive the Holy Eucharist at the Divine Liturgy Sunday morning); evenings of the twelve Great Feasts or patronal feast of the parish; during the course of all the fasts - the Great Forty Day Fast, Apostles' Fast, Dormition Fast and Nativity Fast; from the Sunday of Meatfare to the Sunday of Cheesefare; during the course of Bright Week; from the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord (Dec 25) through the Feast of the Synaxis of St. John the Baptist (Jan. 7); on the evening and day of the Beheading of the St. John the Baptist (Aug. 29); on the evening and day of the Elevation of the Holy Cross (Sept 14). The optimal time identified by the Church to celebrate marriage is Sunday after the celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

2.4.3 Divorce: Divorce is not something which the Church takes lightly. The biblical norm is one marriage for a lifetime. Life, however, doesn't always follow the ideal. Life is oftentimes "messy." But God is more than able to assist us to "clean up the mess." And to do so in such a way that we are helped in our struggle to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling."

The Bishop or Priest may direct a penance for the recently divorced Orthodox Christian. This is not a punishment, but a corrective with a view to healing the soul, and spirit. The Bishop or Priest as part of the penance may require the recently divorced Orthodox Christian abstain from the chalice for a time. Again, not a punishment. Divorce delivers havoc on the soul in such a way that a person recently divorced may find it extremely difficult to capture and maintain the right heart and mind to receive the Eucharist for the remission of sins, unto life everlasting, not for judgment or condemnation.

2.4.4 Second and Third Marriage: The Orthodox Church permits marriage after divorce not to exceed three. A fourth marriage is not permitted. The blessing of the diocesan Bishop is necessary for an Orthodox Christian to enter marriage following divorce. The petition to the Bishop will include a clear statement of repentance from the divorced party, whether he/she is considered the culpable one in the divorce, and a clear statement that the reason he/she desires to enter a second marriage is that it is considered necessary for his/her salvation. The petition is made through the Priest to the Bishop. Should the request be blessed by the Bishop, the protocol outlined above for marriage in the Orthodox Church will be followed. If this is the second marriage for both persons, then the order for a second marriage will be used. If this is the first wedding for the other person whether they are Orthodox or not, the order for a first marriage will be used.

2.4.5 On Childbearing and Childbirth: The bringing forth of a child is a wonderful and awesome miracle of God. The birth of a child is in many ways the fulfillment of marriage between a man and a woman. God commanded that in marriage the two, husband and wife, will be one flesh; from this blessed union of man and woman, one flesh, a child comes forth. As with all the blessings of God, asked for and received, it is our responsibility to envelope the blessing in prayer. Childbearing and childbirth are no exception. In the same way we bring ourselves, our relationships, our material blessings as offering to God in His temple, so too we offer up to God every facet of childbearing and birth. The Holy Orthodox Church prescribes for the faithful the manner in which we are to fulfill this responsibility.

Before a child is conceived, husband and wife in their common life together continue the prayers offered in the marriage celebration for children to be born of their union; that their children will love the Lord their God with their entire being. That they would grow up to be spiritually strong men and women of God, mighty in His Spirit, dedicated to Him in all things and to His Holy Church. When a child is conceived, this good news should be shared with the Priest so that he can offer along with the prospective parents prayers of thanksgiving and petition for a safe and healthy pregnancy.

Upon the birth of the child, the Priest should be called with the good news. If all is well and mother with child discharged from the hospital, the Priest should be called to the home to offer prayer for the mother and child. As part of this prayer service, it is also appropriate for the Priest to offer up prayers for the naming of the child. If mother and/or child are weak or ill and required to remain in the hospital, the Priest should be called to the hospital to make the necessary prayers and ministrations there.

In the Orthodox Church, children are given a Christian name, the name of a saint who will be their Holy patron throughout their lives. Parents should prayerfully review the saints commemorated in the Church on the eighth day from the birth (birth date being day one). From this list, parents select the saint to be their child's heavenly intercessor and give to their child the saint's name. The child will be called by this name in the Church, home, and society.

On the fortieth day from the birth, mother and child come to the temple for the appointed prayers. Though concession can be made in the length of time the mother remains absent from the worship of the community, she is encouraged to wait the entire 40 days in imitation of our Most Holy Mother of God, who waited the prescribed 40 days from the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ before coming to make offering to God in the temple for herself and there to present her son.

Unfortunately, not every child conceived lives to see the light of day. Why this happens is oftentimes a mystery known only to God. At other times, through the influence and attack of Satan, a mother believes the lie it is necessary to abort her child. Though these instances are substantively different, the mother in both circumstances suffers and must be ministered to; the Church has no desire to see Her beloved children suffer beyond what is necessary for their salvation. When a mother miscarries her child, the Priest needs to be called that consolation and prayers may be offered. Likewise, a mother who aborts her child and in time realizes her sin calls the Priest that appropriate care and prayers may be offered. On the Sunday closest to the 40th day from the miscarriage or abortion, the woman comes to the temple that prayers may be offered in her behalf.

Raising children to be faithful Orthodox Christians is no easy task; it truly does require a community. To this end, Holy Church blesses the selection of sponsors, or traditionally referred to as godparents. The godparents have a serious responsibility to share in the Christian education and formation of their godchild. This is not a position to be filled by family members or friends who have no desire to live a faithful Orthodox Christian life. Ideally, each child will have two godparents, a faithful and devout Orthodox Christian man and woman. At the very least, one godparent is required and should be the same sex as the child, a faithful and devout Orthodox Christian.

The parents will discuss with the Priest the date to celebrate their child's Baptism. Historically, children of devout Orthodox parents were baptized on the eighth day from birth. In the Orthodox Church the eighth day has spiritual significance. Our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the eighth day of the week, Sunday. The number eight is

the number of the heavenly and eternal kingdom of God which will be ushered in fully by our Lord Jesus Christ at His second coming. It is into this Kingdom we are spiritually born through the Holy Mystery of Baptism. It was on the eighth day from birth boys were circumcised under the Old Covenant, but now Baptism fulfills circumcision. (Colossians 2) Interestingly, on the phelonion of the Priest (Russian style) there is traditionally found an eight-point star, indicative of the Priest as celebrant of the Holy and Royal Banquet of the eternal Kingdom of God. Archeology has also unearthed baptismal founts shaped octagonally, i.e., eight sided.

If it is decided to baptize the child on the eighth day from birth, the godparents bring the child to the temple. Mother remains at home in observance of her 40 days. If the child has not already received a name, the prayers at the naming of the child will be offered prior to the Baptism. The Godparents will then bring the newly illumined servant of God to the next celebration of the Divine Liturgy for reception of the Holy Eucharist.

In contemporary practice, to permit the presence of the mother at the Baptism, it is celebrated in conjunction with the mother's return to the temple upon completion of her 40 days. In this case, Sunday is the most appropriate day to celebrate Baptism as this is the day of Resurrection and in Baptism the child celebrates their own personal Pascha, resurrection with Christ, the new birth. In this case, the Sunday following the 40th day from birth is most appropriate as the 40-day prayers for mother and child can be said before the Baptism and the child Churched immediately following. Having received Holy Baptism and Chrismation, the newly illumined servant of God, Orthodox mother and father, Orthodox godparents come forth at the celebration of the Divine Liturgy to receive Holy Communion. This of course presupposes all have properly prepared themselves to receive the Holy Eucharist.

2.4.6 Exhortation by the Priest to the Sponsor(s) after the Baptism of an Infant: O pious and Christian sponsor: Through the grace and compassion of God the Lover of Mankind, Who desires that all men be saved, today spiritual birth by water and the Spirit has been accomplished in the temple of God. Concerning such, the Lord Christ Himself has given us this law of birth, saying to Nicodemus: "Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." And after the Resurrection He Himself made a promise about this to His disciples, saying: "All power is given unto Me in Heaven and on earth. Go, therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Today the newly illumined servant of God N. has been baptized in the name of the All-holy and Divine Trinity and was born spiritually. He (she) that before was a child of darkness, is a child of light; he (she) that was a child of wrath, is a child of the grace of God; he (she) that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, abides in light, in the land of the portion of the Saints, and is written in the book of the living. Because of this, Angels are rejoicing, making festival in the church, and, as usual, they have great joy over one sinner who repents, as they consider a man desiring to be written to their rank. We also rejoice who have strived today in church, for a new rod has been grafted to the True Vine, Christ the Lord, which, having been brought to life by the enrichment of His grace

will bear a cluster of virtues. And it is meet to rejoice at your piety, for you have received from the divine font this child of grace and light as a spiritual rod, and you have been made for him (her) a spiritual father (mother) with a commission and reception on earth: to become a father (mother) now to him (her) through the grace of the Lord Who lives in Heaven. And for you as spiritual father (mother), it is meet to understand, that it is necessary to have fatherly (motherly) love, in order to keep the child given you turned toward God, all the days of your life. And when the Lord will give the child the ability to put his (her) mind to good use, then you shall instruct him (her) in the Orthodox-Catholic Faith, all its ordinances, in which he (she) will come to know everything that is necessary through piety for salvation and to keep it undefiled: and to lead him (her) to a life, as is meet, according to the Christian calling. Yes, for now he (she) that is illumined by the rays of grace through spiritual birth, has been given into your arms by me, a sinner: that he (she) that was in darkness, after rebirth will stand before the Heavenly Father in another age, as pure as today, and in soul, whiter than snow, from the bath of regeneration. Thus, undefiled, and unblemished by the action of the serpent which comes from the flesh, he (she) shall stand before the sincere Judge, Who will render to each according to his deeds. And clearly today, through your lips the cursed Satan was cast out and all his activities; and God the Creator of all adopted him (her), who by grace acquired spiritual birth, and was clothed as a member of the Church of Christ with the confession of the True Christian Faith. Thus, all the days of his (her) life let him (her) remain in the One Faith without parting from the Church, and in the grace of adoption by the immutable God. Let him (her) never turn aside to the works of the evil Satan and let him (her) ever stand opposed to him. And with the help of God he (she) shall be revealed as a mighty destroyer of all his snares, as a soldier of Christ, strengthened by the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit in the war against him. And after such God-pleasing struggles, he (she) shall receive from the Originator and Judge of struggles labor in the Heavenly Kingdom – the great blessedness of life eternal. If, by your guidance and piety, the newly illumined infant who has been counted worthy of your patronage makes haste to act worthily, he (she) will not be deprived of a fitting inheritance by the Lord God. For your love made manifest to your spiritual son (daughter), which is love for another, he (she) will be beloved of the Heavenly Father, for “God is Love.” For soul-profitting instruction, he (she) will be guided by the straight path of the commandments of the Lord that he (she) may proceed into the land of eternal life. As do you yourself, so I pray warmly and from the heart, with true desire, unto God Who gives you this child, that after many years he (she) may, with gladness, inherit it.

2.5: Holy Unction: God in His compassion and love for humans provides a means for healing by His grace through Holy Oil. The Epistle of St. James tells us if any are sick let them call for the presbytery, i.e., Priests, of the Church. These will offer prayers for the healing of the sick and anoint them with oil.

The one to receive Unction will prepare themselves by Holy Confession and reception of the Holy Eucharist. The Priest will provide the oil and wine for the Sacrament which will normally take place after celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Feasts of the Holy Unmercenary saints such as Saints Cosmas and Damien provide the optimal occasion for celebration of the Sacrament. Holy Wednesday as well has become the most

common occasion to celebrate the Sacrament. The sick receives the Sacrament only once for one illness.

Some people unfortunately mistake this Sacrament with “last rites” as administered and understood in the Latin Church when death is imminent. This Sacrament is for healing, not preparation for death. It can be ministered when death is imminent but not as preparation for death, but rather with faith for healing.

3. The Orthodox Christian Home and Holiness: Orthodox Christian practice over millennia has shown itself sufficient to transform Orthodox Christians into the likeness of Jesus Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit - daily personal prayer, daily family prayer, fasting according to the discipline and rhythm of the Church, almsgiving, daily reading of Scripture and other Orthodox spiritual literature, regular confession, regular reception of the Holy Eucharist (implicit is observance of the discipline to properly prepare for reception of the Eucharist), icons in the home (i.e. in each room, with a family icon corner in one room).

The family is often referred to as a little church in Orthodox Christian writing. This is a very powerful image for establishing the proper atmosphere within which all family members are encouraged to keep their focus and attention on God. In a practical way this means we make every effort to keep out of our homes those things which desecrate the Holy Temple of God within which the Church worships. We would never think of broadcasting a program in the sanctuary of the temple that would cause us to blush with embarrassment. Likewise, such a program should not be broadcast in our homes. If use of the internet takes us to sites which are sinful, disconnect from the internet. It is really a lie of Satan that we “need” the internet. At the very least accountability safeguards must be in place to assist with safe navigation of the internet.

3.1 Icons: It is appropriate for each room in the home to have an icon. It is customary as well for Orthodox families to maintain an icon/ prayer corner. The icons in the icon corner augment icons of Christ and the Virgin Mary. In addition to icons of Christ and the Virgin Mary, those of the patron saint of the individual should be hung in their room.

3.2 Personal rules of prayer: Prayer for the Orthodox Christian is like oxygen for the body. It is a means God has given to us to enjoy communion with Him at every moment of the day and night. It is a means given by God to transfigure us into the likeness of Christ. As such, every Orthodox Christian must have a rule of prayer. The parish Priest will provide this to you. It is always best to have a small, manageable rule rather than a long rule which will over time fall into disuse. From this manageable rule, a person will be prompted by the Holy Spirit to occasionally spend more time in prayer. This is the exception and does not become the rule. The rule exercised obediently, moves us to prayer daily, habitually. Time will come when we don't feel like praying; but as Orthodox Christians we do not pay heed to our feelings informed by laziness. At times we realize we must force ourselves to do what is right; in time our feelings, emotions will follow.

3.3 Christian Education: It is the responsibility of parents to teach their children the Faith. The Church may supplement this with Church school or Summer Vacation Church School, but the parents will be held responsible to teach their children. Family prayer time is a great opportunity to provide children with instruction. It doesn't need to be an entire lesson, but something small, a bite size spiritual morsel. Children must accompany parents for worship. When the people of God gather to pray, and worship children must also be present. From this experience of worship, children will ask questions of their parents. Feeding our children on the lives of the saints is essential. Cynicism and doubt will enter the child's adolescent experience all too soon (this doesn't need to be inevitable). It is imperative parents feed their children on the heroes of the faith; accounts of the lives of the saints will sustain the child when confronted by the indifference, doubt, and cynicism in the world.

4. Language, Local Customs, Liturgical Practice: The Orthodox Church has always understood the need to translate the Scriptures and Holy Services into the language of the indigenous people of a given territory. When our Lord commanded His disciples to take the Gospel to all people, an implied task was to communicate the Gospel in a language comprehensible to those to whom the Gospel is proclaimed. The principal language in the United States is English. Therefore, the principal language to communicate the Gospel in the United States must be English. This does not preclude the use of other languages as circumstances may influence, but these languages will have a supplemental role and not be the primary language used in worship and parish activity. The parish Priest with the blessing of the Diocesan Hierarchy will determine which languages are used in worship and at what point.

The liturgical practice of the Orthodox Church in America is that received from the Russian Orthodox Church. This does not preclude the incorporation of services or practices unique to other Orthodox Churches. One of the most precious characteristics of the Orthodox in America is the tremendous cultural and linguistic diversity present. Therefore, the Orthodox Church in America will reflect this diversity. ***The prayerful objective is to take all that is good and consistent with Holy Tradition within the diversity of practice and see a Holy Spirit Synthesis for the Church in America. This includes the musical tradition which will emerge over time.***

5. Praying in an Orthodox Church: A devout and pious Orthodox Christian is such because they strive by the grace of God to live out the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ every day of their life in all their relationships and in their work. Foundational to the Orthodox Christian life is prayer, Scripture and spiritual reading, fasting, almsgiving, reconciliation with others and frequent participation in the Holy Sacraments of Confession and Eucharist. These foundational practices prepare the Orthodox Christian for profitable involvement in the Divine Services of the Church.

When an Orthodox Christian comes into the temple to pray there is a proper etiquette to follow to maintain the sanctity of the Holy Temple for the collective worship and prayer of the Community. St. Paul tells us that in the Church all must be done decently and in order. We do not follow our own impulses and ideas, but rather conform ourselves to

the cherished and proven discipline of the Church. When present in the Temple, we conduct ourselves calmly and refrain from unnecessary speech with our neighbor. Following the Divine Services, we have occasion to greet and speak with each other fully. Before and during the Service we are focused on God.

Children must be brought along developmentally within the services of the Church. Of course, the services are long to expect a toddler or child to stand motionless, speechless throughout. Mom, Dad or other faithful with the child may need to move about during the services. In which case, remove the child or children from the temple. They may need to stretch their legs in the social hall or the nursery, or even take a lap around the temple. We the faithful without small children should never make parents of small children feel uncomfortable or unwelcome because they have an active child. Though it can be frustrating to listen to a crying child during the divine services, we need to prayerfully treat these moments as opportunities to exercise patience, love and prayer for child and parent. Fr. Schmemmann of blessed memory referred to the sound of children in the Church as “Holy Noise.” As long as we hear “Holy Noise” in the Church, God will bless us for the future.

5.1 Bows, Prostrations, Prayers, Sign of the Cross, Lighting Candles: Provided below are some of the traditional practices of the Orthodox Church concerning how one should pray in Church. As Priest I am not a legalist and will not make an issue of the matter if someone does not follow these practices to the letter.

An Orthodox Christian walking by an Orthodox Church makes the sign of the Cross in reverence for our Lord Jesus Christ who is present on the Altar of every Orthodox Church in the Reserved Sacrament housed in the Tabernacle.

The sign of the Cross is made with the right hand; thumb, index and middle fingers pressed together at their tips with the ring and pinky fingers folded together in the palm. In this configuration, we bring our hand up and touch the forehead, then move our hand to the stomach, then to the right shoulder and finally the left shoulder. We do not make the sign of the Cross with open hand. With our hand configured as indicated we bear witness to our belief in the Holy Trinity as well as the two natures of Christ, divine and human, perfectly united in His Person.

Upon entering the temple, three bows are made in the entrance way to the Nave. This is done by making the sign of the Cross and bowing from the waist bringing our right hand down to touch the floor (bow to the floor) or as close as we can get given our age and physical condition. With the first bow is prayed, “Thou hast created me, O Lord, have mercy on me;” with the second bow is prayed, “O God be merciful to me a sinner;” with the third bow is prayed, “Countless times have I sinned, O Lord, forgive me.”

Once entrance is made in this manner take up a prayer book for the service and candles to be lighted before the icons. Having done this, we venerate the icon of the Virgin Mary or of the Feast or Saint whose memory we celebrate on the analogion near the candle table. We venerate icons in the following manner – make the sign of the

Cross with bow to the floor as prescribed above two times, kiss the icon, and conclude with the sign of the Cross and bow to the floor. Candles may be lighted and placed in the appropriate container. Customarily we light candles for those living and departed. Lighting a candle for the living we pray, "Save O Lord and have mercy on Thy servants..." Lighting a candle for the departed we pray, "Remember O Lord the souls of Thy departed servants..." Having completed this action, move to a location in the temple to prepare for worship.

5.1.1 Prior to Divine Liturgy: The Third and Sixth Hours of the Church will be read. During this time, we do not pray our own prayers but attentively pray along, silently, with the Hours.

We stand during the opening prayers through "Come let us worship God our King, ..." When the Reader begins the Psalms, we may sit until the time of the threefold "Alleluia..." at this point we remain standing to the end of the hour.

After "Come let us worship..." for the Sixth Hour we may sit once more for the chanting of the Psalms.

During the Hours we make the sign of the Cross with bow to the floor once at "Blessed is our God...", each time we hear, "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal...", once at, "For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory...", three times at, "Come let us worship God our King...", three times at Alleluia..."

We make the sign of the Cross with a bow at the waist at all exclamations glorifying the Holy Trinity, "Glory to the Father..."

In our parish people will come forward for Holy Confession before and during reading of the Hours. If you see someone confessing, please refrain venerating the icons or standing close to the confession area until after the individual is done confessing. If from where you are standing you can hear any of the confession, please excuse yourself to the back of the chapel.

5.1.2 During the Divine Liturgy: At the censuring for the beginning of the Divine Liturgy we bow to the Priest when censed; we do not make the sign of the Cross.

We make the sign of the Cross with bow to the floor at, "Blessed is the Kingdom..." During petitions of the litanies, it is appropriate to make the sign of the Cross, in this way we make the petition our own.

We make the sign of the Cross with a bow to the floor at the Thrice Holy: "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal..."

We make the sign of the cross with a bow from the waist at the beginning of the Epistle and Gospel readings; likewise, when blessed by the Priest with the Gospel, blessing Cross, Icon, and Chalice.

When the Priest censes the Temple for the Gospel reading and for the Great Entrance, we bow to the Priest when censed; we do not Cross ourselves.

At the beginning of the Creed, “I believe in One God...,” the faithful make the sign of the Cross.

We make the sign of the Cross with bow to the floor once at the words, “Take eat...;” once at the words, “Drink of it, all of you...,” once at the words, “Thine Own of Thine Own...,” and once at the words, “Holy Things for the Holy...”

When the Priest blesses the faithful with his hand, the faithful respond with a bow from the waist and do not make the sign of the Cross. At the words, “Peace be unto all,” “The blessing of the Lord be upon you,” “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...,” “And may the mercies of our great God...,” the faithful bow to the Priest but do not make the sign of the Cross.

During weekday celebrations of the Divine Liturgy, except for those times prescribed by the Church, the sign of the Cross with a full prostration (kneeling and touching the ground with the forehead) is made at the following times: at the beginning of the hymn, “It is meet and right to worship the Father...” (*remain on knees*), after the hymn, “We praise Thee, we bless Thee...” (*remain on knees*), after “It is truly meet to bless thee O Theotokos...” (*at the conclusion of this hymn rise up*), at the exclamation, “And make us worthy O Master that with boldness and without condemnation...” (*remain on knees through the end of “Our Father...”*), at the bringing forth of the consecrated gifts, “In the fear of God, with faith and love...” (*prostrate and get up*), at the elevation of the gifts following Holy Communion, “Always, now and ever...” (*prostrate and get up*).

At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy and other services of the Church when is said, “More honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare...” we make the sign of the Cross with bow to the floor once; when the Priest says, “Glory to Thee O Christ our God and our Hope...,” the faithful make the sign of the Cross with bows to the floor three times.

At the service dismissal, “May Christ our True God...,” we make the sign of the Cross without bow once.

When leaving the temple, the faithful, standing at the entrance to the nave and facing toward the Altar, make the sign of the Cross with bow to the floor three times.

5.1.3 Additional Guidance for Bows and the Sign of the Cross: At the reading of “Vouchsafe O Lord to keep us this evening...,” at the beginning of the Great Doxology (sung at Matins), “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace...,” we make the sign of the Cross with bow to the floor three times. The sign of the Cross is made without bowing, three times at the “alleluia” of the Six Psalms (read at Matins).

On Sundays and likewise from the day of Holy Pascha until Vespers on the day of Pentecost and from the day of the Nativity of Christ until Theophany and likewise on the day of Transfiguration and on the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (except before the Cross), the Holy Apostles utterly forbid kneeling and prostrations concerning which St. Basil the Great testified in a letter to the Blessed Amphilochios. Thus, also the First and Sixth Ecumenical Councils established; for Sundays and other feasts of the Lord serve as reminders of our adoption by God, according to the word of the Apostle: "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son" (Galatians 4:7); for it is not proper for sons to make servile adoration. (Orthodox Prayer Book, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY) Occasional Prayer Services

5.2 Occasional Services

5.2.1 Molieben/ Paraklesis: Prayer service of supplication offered up for just about any occasion you can think of, e.g., inclement weather, when much rain has fallen, drought, devastating epidemic and death bearing pestilence, ruinous pestilence of livestock, to the Most Holy Theotokos for every spiritual affliction and circumstance (i.e., Small Paraklesis to the Theotokos), for the new year, beginning of instruction for children, beginning of every good work, those who are about to travel, those who are ill, thanksgiving to God for answer to prayer and/or deliverance. If you desire a prayer service of supplication, ask the Priest.

5.2.2 Artoklasia: A brief service of intercession and thanksgiving to God according to Greek Orthodox practice made with an offering of five loaves of sweet bread usually sprinkled with powdered sugar. Artoklasia may be served following Great Vespers or Divine Liturgy. If you desire an Artoklasia, ask the Priest. The prayer at the blessing of the bread also makes provision for wheat, wine, and oil. The faithful are encouraged to bring these items to be blessed.

5.2.3 Slava: A brief service of intercession and thanksgiving to God made with bread, wine and Koliva according to the Serbian Orthodox practice; may be celebrated in the Temple or at home. The Slava is usually celebrated in conjunction with the Feast Day for the Patron Saint of the family.

5.2.4 Blessing of Bread, Wheat, Wine, and Oil: These blessings are often celebrated in conjunction with a Holy Day of the Church at Great Vespers when an All-night Vigil is served. Faithful are encouraged to bring the bread, wheat, wine, and oil for blessing. The bread will be made according to the recipe for Proosphoron without the seal; five small loaves (fist sized) are preferred. The wine will be the same variety as that used in Holy Communion. The oil is Olive.

5.2.5 St. Phanourios: On August 27, bread is blessed in commemoration of St. Phanourios with intercessory prayers for those bringing the bread; this bread and/or Koliva may be brought also in commemoration of any Saint in the Church with intercessory prayers offered up for those who bring the offering.

5.2.6 Memorials: Koliva is frequently offered in conjunction with Memorial Services and Trisagion Prayers for the Departed. The wheat expresses our belief in the Resurrection from the dead. As our Lord states, “Verily, verily I say unto you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and die, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bringeth forth much fruit” (St. John 12:24). Koliva may also be offered at the celebration of a Feast Day for a Saint.

5.2.7 Home Blessing: It is customary for Orthodox Christians to have their homes blessed; really as often as the need may arise, but at least annually and this at the Feast of Theophany.

5.2.8 Personal Use of Blessed Oil: Use of olive oil, blessed in the Church, received from the lampadas which burn before Miracle Working Icons and the Relics of the Saints is encouraged. Oil blessed for the Sacrament of Holy Unction is not to be taken home nor used for a purpose other than the Sacrament itself. The Priest will properly dispose of oil blessed for Holy Unction.

5.3 Guidance on Dress: Orthodox faithful are directed to dress appropriately for their presence in the Temple. We dress appropriately and in our best as an act of worship to God; it is never appropriate to bring to God second best. Shorts for men and women are not appropriate. We dress modestly and tastefully being careful not to draw undue attention to ourselves by what we wear and the manner in which we wear it.

Concern over how Orthodox Christians ought to dress goes back to apostolic times. Saints Paul and Peter in their epistles addressed such “mundane” issues as appropriate dress for the Christian. We hear so often among people of various denominational stripe “O, it doesn’t matter what you wear to church. The main thing is that you are there.” Or “God isn’t concerned with what you wear. He’s more concerned about your heart.” As is often the case with observations that people make, each comment contains some truth with which I cannot dispute. However, I have rarely if ever heard the discussion framed by what I believe to be the appropriate consideration and that is worship.

St. Peter writes, “Coming to Him as a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy Priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (I Peter 2:4-5). The central act in worship to God is to make an offering. And, not just any old offering, but in fact the very best that one has. After all, was not the offering of Abel accepted over that of Cain? Abel brought the very best of his flock to God. Cain did not bring the best of his harvest. If we apply the line of reasoning expressed in the above paragraph to Cain and Abel we would have to say, “Hey, the main thing is that Cain brought an offering. It really didn’t matter that it wasn’t the best that he had.” Scripture and the whole tradition of the Church teach us otherwise. What we offer to God must be the very best. In the early Church, the faithful brought bread and wine to church. From that which was brought a selection was made of the best bread and wine for the Eucharist. The rest was shared among the people, those who had giving to those who did not have.

One of the themes of the Old Testament Prophets concerns the matter of the heart in worship. Through the Prophets God called His people to repent of the empty ritual their worship had become. They fulfilled the letter of the law by bringing their offering to the temple, but they did not bring their best and their hearts were far from God. They would bring their offering, leave the temple, and continue to live lives of debauchery, idolatry and in their business practice, exploit the widows and orphans.

The corrective as preached by the Prophets and echoed in the pages of the New Testament is for all of us to first make an offering of ourselves to God. St. Paul writes, "I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service (i.e., worship)." (Romans 12:1) Do we not regularly pray in the Divine Liturgy, "Commemorating our most pure, most blessed and glorious Lady, Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, with all the saints, let us commend ourselves each other and all our life unto Christ our God."

What we wear to worship does matter to us as human beings. Not only is what we wear an expression of what is in our heart, it also has an impact on forming and reinforcing our character. It should not escape our notice that the Divine Liturgy service book begins with the entrance and vesting prayers for the clergy. Is this by accident or a matter only for the Priest? The answer is no. It has application to all of us. The difference is the order is reversed for the laity. The Priest says prayers before entering the altar and then prayerfully vests; the laity prayerfully vest at home and upon entrance to the Temple say their prayers. We must take to heart as well the manner of clothing in which the Priest is instructed to vest. It is ornate and beautiful. We would be embarrassed as a people to have our Priest celebrate the Divine Liturgy in vestments which were soiled or full of holes. If we take our cues from how the church does business, we will be alright. However, we often fail to make the application from what we see presented in the Church to our own lives.

Part of the reason for this is self-will. Our human nature adversely impacted by our own sin wants its own way. It resists the effort made by the person or others to bring it under control. How often do we think to ourselves and sometimes hear "who does that person (i.e., the Priest) think he is to tell me how I ought to dress, etc., etc., etc. ..."? Is this not in fact an expression of misguided self-will? The Church teaches us that the road to salvation begins and is characterized by the repentant effort to bring my will back into conformity with God's will through obedience. This means we have to practice self-denial; we must by the grace of the Holy Spirit cut off self-will.

In conclusion, let me make this very simple. When coming to worship, remember Whom it is we worship and dress accordingly. As an act of worship to God, offer yourself and the best you have to Him; dress modestly and comfortably keeping in mind the discussion above. Someone asked me recently, "what if I come to church in bib-overalls?" If it's the best you have, wear bib-overalls.

5.4 Receiving the Blessing of a Priest or Hierarch: Approach the Bishop or Priest with right hand cradled in your left hand, palm up and say, for a Bishop, “Master bless;” for a Priest, “Father bless.” We do not make the sign of the Cross prior to receiving the blessing. It is customary to ask for a blessing the first time we greet the Bishop or Priest and then at the last meeting of the day.

6. Lenten Seasons

6.1 Great Lent: is a time of spiritual renewal. Spiritual renewal cannot take place without cutting off self-will. Our ego, pride, vanity, or however else you want to name it or describe it stands as our greatest enemy in the working out of our salvation. Another way to understand this is the difference between being God-centric versus ego-centric. We must learn how to make our will conform to God; to obey Him and His commandments; to embrace the truth of who He is as revealed to us in His Church. God, our Maker, and Creator, has revealed Himself to us through His Son Jesus Christ in His Holy Church. When God commands, it is for us to obey. As always, our Lord Jesus Christ sets the example. As the Father fulfilled the plan of salvation for all mankind, His Son Jesus Christ complied with and carried out to the most exacting detail all that the Father required. Jesus said, “Thy will, not mine be done.”

So, how to cut off self-will? Obey the commandments of God, specifically the Gospel commands. Fast, not only from those foods identified by the Church, but also from all those activities and practices which are soul-destroying; or those activities which steal us away from prayer and good works. Find a way to give to those not only in need, but who may hate us. If we are observing Great Lent properly our “flesh” (i.e., our pampered self that wants only its own pleasure and comfort) will cry out in agony, “How can you be treating me this way. I want, I want, I need, I need...”

If we were to rely on our own strength to accomplish this feat, we would all undoubtedly fail. Praise be to God he has given to us His Holy Spirit by whose grace we are saved and empowered to do all that which God has given to us for our salvation. “Choose you this day whom you will serve.”

7. Gifts to the Temple

7.1 Prosporon: With the blessing of the Priest, faithful are encouraged to make and bring the Prosporon for the Divine Liturgy. There are numerous methods in preparing the Prosporon; at the very least the following requirements must be followed. Ingredients for the Prosporon must be pure, white flour, water, and yeast. A small amount of salt may be permitted. The making of Prosporon is bathed in prayer, Psalm reading, Spiritual singing, and hymnody. It is very appropriate to recite the Jesus Prayer and or Psalms committed to memory such as Psalm 50.

7.2 Wine, Incense, Candles: With the blessing of the Priest, faithful are encouraged to purchase and bring for use in the Temple, sacramental wine, incense, and candles. Wine must be made from Concord grapes and be sweet; there are some brands which

have been used successfully in our Churches. The Priest can guide you in this process. Incense ought to be purchased from Orthodox outlets; a number of Orthodox Monasteries make quality incense.

7.3 A Word on Offering: A dominant characteristic of Orthodoxy is Offering. We make offering to God of many things; all as expressions of Thanksgiving to God for His bounty and blessing. Throughout the Church year we are encouraged to make offering to God, beginning with ourselves. This after all is the life of repentance, to continually offer ourselves, each other and all our life unto Christ our God.

7.3.1 A Brief List of What to Offer and When: At Theophany (January 6) water is blessed though it is often provided for us by the Church. At the Meeting of Our Lord in the Temple (February 2) we bring candles to be blessed. At the Entrance of Our Lord into Jerusalem (Sunday before Pascha) we bring Palms (or Pussy Willow branches) to be blessed. At Holy Pascha we bring cheese, flesh meats to be blessed. At Holy Pascha Holy Artos is offered, blessed, and shared with the faithful on Bright Saturday. At the Transfiguration (August 6) we bring grapes (and fruit) to be blessed. At the Dormition of the Theotokos (August 15) we bring flowers and fragrant herbage to be blessed. We also bring various breads for occasional services as outlined above.

7.3.2 Proper Disposition of Blessed Items: All items blessed and not consumed must be disposed of in a proper way. If there is any doubt or question, consult the Priest. Items blessed in need of disposal may be burned and the ashes buried in a place where no one will walk, or ashes scattered in a river. Water left over from the previous Theophany may be given to plants. Bread and food blessed but not consumed may be left out for the birds in a place people will not trample; otherwise, these too should be burned, and the ashes disposed as indicated. If you do not have a place to burn, arrange with the Priest for proper disposition.

8. Illness and Death: When an individual is seriously ill, hospitalized or near death, call the Priest. It is critical for the individual, friend, or family member to intentionally contact the Priest. Too often people go to the hospital and assume the Priest knows they are there or that they are sick. Never assume the Priest knows unless an intentional effort has been made to contact him. Prayers for the sick can be offered any time and just about anywhere. Name of the sick will be remembered by the Priest at Proskomedia, during the Divine Liturgy, when conducting the Molieben for the sick. If death is imminent, the Priest will make preparation to bring the Holy Eucharist. The Sacraments of Holy Confession and ministrations of the Reserved Sacrament can take place at home or in the hospital. The Priest will hear the confession and minister the Reserved Sacrament; this is an ideal opportunity to then celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Unction.

8.1 On Prayers for the Departed: The Orthodox Church prays for its faithful departed, that God will forgive them their sins and have mercy on them. In Christ, death has been transformed from alienation, separation from God to the very means of passing over from the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant. In the same way we would pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ present with us in this life, so too we continue to pray

for them as they pass from this life into the fullness of all life in Christ Jesus our Lord. The Orthodox Church does not comment dogmatically on what happens to the soul after death. Each person's eternal destination is known only to God; as such we the faithful, out of love for our departed brothers and sisters, continue to pray that our Lord forgive them their sins committed in this life and that He would be merciful to them on the dread day of His judgment when He executes complete and absolute justice upon each and every person who has ever lived. Prayers for our Orthodox departed may be offered practically at any time. There are times when the Church community is called upon to specifically remember our departed and times when prayers are to be offered for the newly departed.

8.2 On the Death of an Orthodox Christian: As an Orthodox Christian draws closer to death, the Priest will pray for the Parting of the Soul from the Body. At the time of death, the Priest will pray the Office for the Departed. On the eve of the third day, a memorial service will be offered at the funeral home. On the third day, the faithful departed will be brought to the Temple where the Divine Liturgy will be celebrated followed by the Funeral Service. Following the Funeral Service procession will be made to the cemetery where the Trisagion for the Departed will be offered.

A memorial service will be served for the departed on the 9th day, the 40th day and then on the anniversary of their death. The departed will be added to the Priest's list of commemorations and will be remembered at the Proskomedia and prayed for specifically on the days determined by the Church to remember all the departed of the Orthodox Church (Saturday of Meatfare, Trinity Saturday (before Pentecost), 2d,3d,4th Saturdays of Great Lent, Day of Rejoicing (Tuesday following St. Thomas Sunday). There are also two days on which a memorial service is celebrated for our departed soldiers, who have died in battle. The first of these is celebrated on the feast of the Beheading of the Holy Prophet Forerunner and Baptist John, August 29. The other memorial service for departed soldiers is on the Saturday (St. Demetrius Saturday) before October 26.

8.3 Additional Considerations: Celebration of the memorial service as outlined above is for departed Orthodox Christians. Non-Orthodox Christians departed may be remembered with the Trisagion for the Departed but will not be remembered at the Proskomedia or during the Divine Liturgy. Non-Communicant Orthodox Christians (this is an oxymoron if I ever heard one), having made the choice to not be united with Christ through reception of the Holy Eucharist through their life cannot be buried from the Temple.

For subsequent observances of the anniversary of death following the First anniversary of death, the individual or family member requesting prayers should indicate to the Priest whether they desire the Trisagion Prayers for the Departed offered following the Divine Liturgy on Sunday or in the evening on the anniversary of the death.

Koliva/ Kutiya – is customarily offered at the memorial service and Trisagion Prayers for the Departed.

Generally, memorial services are not permitted on Feast Days or from the Nativity of Christ to Theophany, and from Palm Sunday to the Sunday of St. Thomas. This rule is generally relaxed by “economia,” however, in the case of the First, Third, Ninth and Fortieth Days of death, and the anniversary of death. If the First Day of death occurs on Pascha itself, the memorial service is not served until after Vespers).

On the first week of Great Lent, Passion, and Paschal Weeks, and likewise on the other weekdays of Great Lent, memorial services generally are not celebrated.

Commemoration of the departed is made on the Saturday of the Second, Third and Fourth Weeks of Great Lent, i.e., on the Soul Saturdays. If on weekdays of Great Lent there occurs the Third or Ninth days of death, then the memorial service for the newly departed is served on the Soul Saturday nearest it. On the Fortieth Day, however, the memorial service is served in the temple, although in the evening.

Reading of the Psalter: In the Orthodox Church there is the pious custom of the reading of the Gospel over the body of a reposed Hierarch or Priest, and the Psalter over the body of a reposed layman until the burial and in memory of the one that has reposed after the burial. The reading begins after the conclusion of the Office at the Departure of the Soul. The reading is done standing, but, in certain cases, due to the weakness of the one reading, it is permitted to read sitting.

Burial Service for the Non-Orthodox: Orthodox clergy are sometimes called upon to perform a burial service for non-Orthodox Christians. This can be done under certain instances and only with the blessing of the diocesan Bishop.

Members of Secret Fraternal Organizations: Only the prescribed services for the departed faithful will be celebrated. Family must know no additional rituals will be permitted, nor will any symbols, pins, insignia, etc. of the organization be allowed in or near the casket. Faithful Orthodox who are members of these organizations must make a choice between which order to follow; either that of the Church or of the organization.

9. Stewardship – Giving: The Orthodox Christian knows all of their life, everything of which their life subsists is given as gift from God; He is the Creator and author of life. He is life itself. We receive life as His gift. It therefore follows that the creature returns to the Creator an offering of that with which they have been blessed - time, talents, and treasure. It is right that we should designate specific times for God, prayer, and worship; it is right that we should employ the gifts, talents, and ability He has given to us in His service; it is right that we should return to God a portion of treasure He has given to us. By living our lives in this manner, we do our part to make present the Kingdom of God in this world. The offerings of the faithful brought to God in worship fulfill the command of our Lord to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, baptizing all people and nations.

It is not appropriate that the work of our Lord Jesus Christ be fulfilled with the time, talent, and treasure of those who are not numbered among the faithful. There has grown up with Orthodox in this country an inappropriate method of raising money

through festivals, bazaars, dances and raffles or games of chance; events which bring in the treasure of other people, not necessarily the faithful. The work of God is supported or executed by the time, talent, and treasure of the faithful. When we prayerfully consider what we will return in offering to God and fulfill that consideration by doing, then the work of God is blessed.

10. Relationship to the larger community of faith: As an Orthodox parish we are united with every other Orthodox parish through our Bishops; as such we belong to the community of faith constituted within the diocese and through our Bishop in communion with their fellow Bishops, the entire Church on this territory and throughout the world. We are called upon to contribute a portion of our treasure to the diocese and to the national church. We are blessed that in the Diocese of the South not only are individuals encouraged to tithe but the parishes tithe to the diocese. In this way, the Diocese may assist small mission parishes get established by helping to fund a full-time Priest.

We confess the Church is conciliar; God reveals Himself in the community that bears His image. We therefore gather occasionally to deliberate on issues which confront us as Orthodox Christians at the parish level through the parish meeting, at the diocesan level through the diocesan meeting and at the national level through the All-American council.

11. Monasticism: The heart of the Church on earth is monasticism. The prayer, the worship, the conduct of the Orthodox Church is monastic at its heart. Where there is a vibrant monasticism there you will find a vibrant Orthodoxy. We pray for our monastic communities; we visit our monastic communities; we contribute to the building up and planting of monastic communities. In times of peril facing the Church, the monastics carry the day for the Church.

12. Missions and Charity: For the faithful living in the world being engaged in missions and charity is a responsibility. In the name of Christ, we extend to others food, clothes, shelter, hospitality, love, a cup of cold water; whatever is within our power to provide those who may be in need. It is our responsibility to spread the Gospel; to do what we can to plant Churches throughout this country and throughout the world.