



ST TIKHON ORTHODOX CHURCH

AN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

Members Guidebook

Christ is in our midst!

God in His mercy continues to bless us at St. Tikhon Orthodox Mission. Through a rich life of worship and service together, the faithful are being nourished by the teachings of the Apostolic Faith and by sacramental communion with the Word of God, the living Christ. It is clear to see that, thanks be to God, there is abundant life here.

Life in an Orthodox Church is not without difficulties. To follow Christ on the Way of the Cross, our time and energy, indeed our very lives, are demanded of us. As we pray so often together:

“Let us commit ourselves, each other, and our whole lives unto Christ our God.”

Such a total commitment requires prayer, hard work, and understanding. It is our hope that through this booklet, you can begin to gain a better understanding of life at St. Tikhon—what we do and why. It is designed as a basic introduction to church life; but it is equally important for the most “experienced” churchgoer to read.

Whether born into the Church or converted yesterday, *“by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body”* (I Corinthians 12:13), and we can only glorify God if we are one. The closer we follow these guidelines, and the better we understand their significance, the more we will be united in Christ.

As we strive to worship and serve God together in His Church, beginning with these guidelines, may He enable us, with one mouth, one mind, and one heart, to glorify Him who has trampled down death by death and granted us eternal life.

“Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27).

The Church

To begin with the most fundamental question: What exactly is a local Orthodox church such as St. Tikhon?

First, the local church must be understood as part of the “One, Holy, Catholic (universal) and Apostolic Church.” We confess in the Creed that it is the Orthodox Church that contains the unbroken fullness of the one Church founded by Christ through His apostles. Each individual Orthodox Church is in communion with the Orthodox Church through the centuries, worldwide. St. Tikhon is a parish of the Diocese of the South (DOS) in the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), which means that our spiritual roots are in the Russian Orthodox Church.

The richness of the OCA’s expression of Orthodoxy is its transcendence of ethnic boundaries. The OCA is a truly pan-Orthodox community incorporating and synthesizing Orthodox peoples from around the world. The Orthodox Church cannot be reduced to an ethnic club, nor as a community centered on preserving particular cultural customs. St. Tikhon is first and foremost Orthodox, bearing witness to the true Gospel of Christ through and to people of all types.

The Scriptures speak of the Church as the body of Christ. While the universal Church is the body of Christ, it is also important to recognize that Christ’s body is fully present in each local church.

This is so because the great mystery of the Church is “*Christ in us,*” and this mystery is realized by our communal participation in His death and resurrection—through Baptism and the Eucharist. It is precisely as a baptismal and Eucharistic community that the local church is “*the body of Christ*”.

This is a sober reality. We cannot lightly call our church “*the body of Christ.*” The very essence of Christ’s body is that it is sacrificed for the life of the world. This means that if we are His body, we too must be broken, our blood spilled daily for the life of our brothers and sisters. But this is the most difficult thing for any human to do—it is completely contrary to our woefully self-oriented mode of existence. Yet paradoxically, the Way of dying in love for our neighbor is the only path to real, joyous Life.

“For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing; but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God” (I Corinthians 1:18).

To be an Orthodox Christian means, above all else, to accept co-crucifixion with Christ in order to live in His Resurrected Life. It is taking up the cross and following Him that stands at the heart of Church life. We hope and pray that everything we do at St. Tikhon contributes to our participation in Christ’s death and resurrection, i.e. to our salvation. As we proceed here in laying out what church “membership” entails, it must be set forth with absolute clarity that it is membership in Christ that is our ultimate goal. As a united body of worshiping disciples, fed by the life-giving mysteries, faithful and obedient to the Orthodox Faith, the church community can be transformed into “*the light of the world,*” the “*fragrance of Christ.*”

The languages of worship in the church should be the language that meets the needs of the membership, so that the people may understand. As St. Paul says:

“Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified. Yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue” (I Corinthians 14:16-19).

Since we are a church located in Chattanooga, TN, the services will be in the predominant language of the people of the church, which is English, with some occasional Slavonic, Greek or Romanian etc. if the community and those to whom we are bringing the Gospel of Christ require such to embrace their faith more fully.

Membership at St. Tikhon Orthodox Christian Church

There are expectations involved in Church life. On the one hand, people expect the Church to be there for them in their times of sickness, joy and sorrow; to baptize, marry and bury, to bless and sanctify their homes; to teach, counsel, and serve them, guiding them into the Kingdom of Heaven. At the same time, the innumerable blessings of being part of the Church come with certain responsibilities, i.e., expectations of us. It should be understood that these blessings are intended for churchgoers who are dedicated and active—for “members in good standing.”

Who do you think could be described as a member in good standing with the church? Of course, the first condition is:

- An individual must be baptized/received into the Orthodox Church, and must be living in a manner befitting an Orthodox Christian, devoted to spiritual discipline and growth in Christ.

But beyond this, what should be the expectations for members? Stated simply, a member in good standing is someone actively giving of their “*time, talent, and treasure.*” This is a true member of the community.

Therefore, a “member in good standing” of St. Tikhon meets these requirements:

- Worship—Regular participation in the liturgical life of the church.
- Service—Involvement in church work, such as church school, singing, reading, care for the sick, upkeep of the grounds and facilities, etc.
- Stewardship—Active commitment to the offering/pledging program. (This is expected of anyone over 18 and not in school or the military).

Liturgical Life

Membership in the Church demands a complete reorientation of our life’s rhythm. To “repent” means to change one’s mind; the backbone of a life of repentance is changing from a worldly pattern of life to one immersed in the life of the Church. This begins at the most basic level: our schedules. Our personal and family calendars should strive to be synchronized with the Church cycle given to us by God.

Every moment belongs to God, and an Orthodox Christian should experience the transformation of all time into *sacred* time. This only happens when we are totally committed to a liturgical life, when our daily rhythm is governed by the pulse of the Church calendar. Through the cycles of prayer, fasting (which helps liberate us from sin and enables us to pray), and feast days (which center our life on Pascha); liturgical life redeems our time and fills it with the light of Christ.

We are thankful at St. Tikhon that we can celebrate the Resurrection every Lord's Day. We also strive to move closer to the full cycle of services ideal for us as Orthodox Christians in our community. Currently we provide [with a few exceptions] the following:

- Weekday Liturgy or Vespers Liturgies, and Vigils—major feasts
- Vespers—Readers Vespers on Wednesdays, Great Vespers on eves of Feasts and all Saturdays.
- Divine Liturgy—All Sundays

In light of the importance of the liturgical cycle, members of St. Tikhon should devote themselves as much as possible to the worship taking place in the community.

Baptism/Chrismation

An individual is brought into the living body of Christ as one of God's children by the sacred rite of initiation, Baptism. Separated from God as by our own sin, we are not automatically "sons" of God. A son in Biblical terms is the one who receives the inheritance of his father. The great gift of God is that through being baptized into Christ, we are adopted into His Sonship, becoming sons and co-heirs to His inheritance in the household of the Father.

"For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:26-27).

When we are baptized into the Orthodox Church, it is not simply an entrance into a particular religious society or ethnic club. It is to put on Christ. This is why we are called "Christians"—it means "little Christs."

Immersion in the water symbolizes this mystery of putting on Christ—being totally submerged into Him. That ultimately means our incorporation into Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. To be baptized is to die and rise with Christ: to be freed from the sting of sin and death and to enter a life-giving union with God in His Son. Our dying is our rebirth—we emerge from the water reborn.

As St. Cyril of Jerusalem described it, baptism is both our “tomb and womb.” In St. Paul’s words from the Epistle reading for baptism:

“We were buried there with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3).

Baptism in the name of the Trinity is inseparably linked with the accompanying rite of Chrismation. The newly baptized is anointed with holy oil, called chrism, as the seal of the Holy Spirit. As we are anointed on every part of the body with the sign of a cross, the chrism marks us with the imprint of the One who now owns us.

This sacrament should not be thought of as separate; it is the organic fulfillment of the mystery of Baptism. The Orthodox Church permits some converts to the Faith who have already been baptized in the name of the Trinity to have their initiation “made complete,” with simply the rite of Chrismation, but this is ultimately up to the Bishop.

Please note the following guidelines for Baptism/Chrismation at St. Tikhon Orthodox Church:

- There must be reasonable certitude that the person to be baptized will be raised in the Orthodox Faith. (It is not enough if a person merely wants their child baptized for the sake of custom).
- The candidate must have at least one sponsor/godparent, and this person must be a practicing Orthodox Christian. If the sponsor is from another Orthodox parish, a letter from the sponsor's parish priest must verify he/she is in good standing with the Orthodox Church. Sponsorship is a serious responsibility, a promise to do everything possible to ensure that the person (child or adult) continues in the Faith. St. John Chrysostom warned: *"You, the sponsors, have learned that no slight danger hangs over your head if you are remiss."*
- Preparation for Baptism/Chrismation on the part of the sponsor(s) will include participation in Confession and Holy Communion, prior to the baptism.
- All candidates for Baptism/Chrismation over the age of 12 must receive "catechesis", or instruction in the Faith, as the priest deems necessary.
- The priest will not baptize in individual homes except in the case of an emergency.
- Please speak with the priest to determine a date and specific requirements for the baptism.

More information is available on the mystery of Baptism, and on the items and preparation that will be needed for the service.

Churching of Mother and Child

As soon as the mother is ready to leave her home following childbirth (usually close to 40 days) to do shopping, eat at restaurants, go to work, etc, the first thing she should do is return to the church with her child to give thanks to God and be “Churched.”

The rite of Churching welcomes the mother back into the community after being separated during her participation with God in the holy act of birth. It also introduces the child “*in the midst of the congregation*” for the first time. This is done around the 40th day to reflect the offering of Christ in the Temple on the customary 40th day of Jewish law.

The Divine Liturgy / Holy Eucharist

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven, if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever, and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:51).

At the very center of our worship is our weekly celebration of the Resurrection, the Divine Liturgy. We gather on Sunday, which is not the Sabbath, but the Lord’s Day, the day on which the Lord conquered death. Pascha is the center of our year and our life, and each Sunday we celebrate that Paschal mystery. The way we celebrate is to gather as God’s Church (ecclesia—those who are called out) and perform the common work (liturgia) of God’s people, which is primarily to offer thanksgiving (eucharistia). In the process of our giving thanks, we receive both admonishment and nourishment, neither of which we could survive without. This is the joy of the Divine Liturgy.

The Lord admonishes and nourishes us through the entirety of the Divine Liturgy, and these two facets are always together. We are never fed by God without also being challenged. This occurs in the two major features of the Divine Liturgy: the hearing of Scripture (Liturgy of the Word) and the partaking of the Eucharist (Liturgy of the Faithful).

These two ‘halves’ are knit together and dependent on each other; they are both an encounter with the Word of God, Jesus the Christ.

We must first be fed and confronted by Christ through the Gospel proclamation, the Good News which exposes how we are not conformed to Christ. The sermon helps this to happen, bringing the Gospel to bear concretely on our lives.

Then, confessing our faith in this Gospel and our intention to more fully unite ourselves with the Crucified One, we proceed to the chalice to be nourished by His body and blood. But again, this nourishment is simultaneously a merciful chastisement: it is an opportunity for the judge to heal us before we face the dread Judgment.

Thus we pray for our partaking to be *“not unto condemnation or judgment, but to the healing of soul and body.”* It will be unto healing, to the extent that we surrender to the One with whom we commune, and are willing ourselves to be broken in love for God and love for our neighbor.

“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord” (I Corinthians 2:27).

Preparation for Communion

This is a most serious matter. The following guidelines should be carefully considered and observed:

- The first requirement is for a person to be a baptized Orthodox Christian. The importance of the Eucharist’s connection to Baptism cannot be understated. In communion, the faithful renew their baptism into the Eucharistic body of Christ.

•Regular attendance at Divine Liturgy is essential. If you miss Divine Liturgy for a mundane, unworthy cause, you should not partake without going to Confession. If you haven't been to Church in awhile, you should go to confession before receiving.

•You should not commune if you are late to the Divine Liturgy. The Eucharist is not a dispensed dosage of grace to be taken at our convenience, in isolation from the whole work of the service. In light of the statements above, you should strive to be there before the Gospel is read in order to partake.

•Communicants should strive to prepare by praying at the Saturday evening Great Vespers with regularity. This is really the beginning of the Lord's Day.

•You must fast from all food and drink from, minimally, midnight Saturday. Of course there are exceptions, for reasons of health, pregnancy, etc. This should be discussed with the priest.

•A prepared person must have been to Confession recently. Frequency is established individually with the priest. The OCA guidelines suggest monthly Confession for frequent recipients of the Eucharist. If you have not communed in a while, it is highly encouraged to first go to Confession. *Note: unless the pastor discerns reason for an exception, he will serve as each member's spiritual father/ confessor.*

•Sometime on Saturday or on Sunday morning, you should pray the Prayers of Preparation. These can be found in most prayer books. Also pray the Prayers of Thanksgiving, which are chanted in our community after the liturgy has ended.

•Perhaps most important of all, you must seek to be at peace with everyone before taking Holy Communion. Our Master taught that we cannot offer our gift (which is Christ Himself) at the Altar if our brother has something against us; we must first be reconciled. You must, therefore, seek and give forgiveness before receiving the Eucharist.

While we strive to commune in a worthy manner, we ourselves are never worthy. “Holy things are for the holy,” the priest exclaims; and our immediate response is: “One is holy; One is the Lord, Jesus Christ.” By God’s grace alone, we partake of His holiness, and receive a foretaste of the Kingdom.

Marriage/Weddings

The Proto-presbyter Thomas Hopko writes, “Jesus taught the uniqueness of human marriage as the most perfect natural expression of God’s love for men, and of his own love for the Church.”

Marriage in the Church is a sacrament, a mystery through which we participate in the life of God. Human love alone cannot sustain a life-long commitment of sacrificial love between two naturally self-centered people. This problem is only overcome in Jesus Christ, who on the cross proved His love for His bride, the Church. In a Christian marriage, within His Church, *“the Holy Spirit is given so that what is begun on earth does not ‘part in death’ but is fulfilled and continues most perfectly in the Kingdom to God.”*

We have gotten very unorthodox in our approach to marriage, prying the sacrament away from its true context in Church life. Affected by the individualism of our day, we can be tempted to think of our wedding as a private affair that we can personally customize, and sometimes even treat the ceremony as a show for our family and friends. This approach can divorce marriage from its sacramental nature.

Marriage in the Church is reserved for those Orthodox who embrace it as the beautiful and joyous reflection of the mystery of Christ and the Church. Guidelines for getting married at St. Tikhon Orthodox Church are as follows:

- Based on the conditions above, the priest will determine whether a couple is eligible for marriage in the Orthodox Church before a date can be set.
- A minimum of 6 months-1 year notice is required to set a wedding date, with exception as needed.
- Premarital counseling with the priest or one appointed by him is required.
- At least one of the persons getting married must be an Orthodox Christian and a member of St. Tikhon in good standing. The other party, if not Orthodox, must be a Christian in good standing with their church (*Speak to the priest about specific norms for "mixed marriages."*)
- At least one of the sponsors (usually the best man/maid of honor) must be a committed Orthodox Christian. Sponsors who belong to another Orthodox parish must ask his or her pastor to write a letter stating he/she is in good standing. The non-orthodox witness must be a practicing Christian in good standing with the Christian Community he or she attends.
- At the rehearsal all participants should be appropriately dressed for entering the Nave of the Church.
- The wedding date must be cleared with the priest. The proper time is Sunday afternoon, with some exceptions. Given that the liturgical day begins at the Vesper Hour (sunset), weddings are not permitted at the following times:

- On the eves of Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the year;
- The eves of every Sunday
- On the eves of the Twelve Great Feasts, patronal feast of the church,
- Eves/days of the Feast of the Elevation of the Cross (Sept 14th), the Beheading of John the Forerunner (Aug 29th), during Great Lent, including Cheese Week and Bright Week; i.e., Meat Fare Sunday through Thomas Sunday, and during the Nativity Fast (Nov 15 through Dec 25);
- During the Saints Peter & Paul Fast (variable through June 29);
- During the Dormition Fast (August 1 through 15).

•Only Orthodox hymns prescribed by the rubrics are permitted.

•In the case of candidates who have been divorced, the process of reconciliation with the Church is done through the priest. All necessary information is submitted to the diocesan bishop in writing for his final approval.

•Our faithful must keep in mind the sacredness of an Orthodox wedding and should not engage in any activity at the reception which would bring scandal to our Church.

Funerals and Memorials

“With the saints give rest, O Christ, to the soul of thy servant, where sickness and sighing are no more, neither sighing, but life everlasting.” (Funeral Kontakion)

Funerals

The following guidelines for funerals should be followed:

- There are no Sunday burials. The Orthodox Church does not permit funerals on the Lord's Day, because the day is set apart exclusively for the celebration of the Resurrection in the Divine Liturgy. (For this reason, normally there should be no memorial services on Sundays).
- At funerals, there can be no eulogies by non-clergy, and no songs or other additions to the prescribed Orthodox service. Remarks by family or friends are appropriate at the reception.
- Rather than flowers which quickly die, donations to the family or church are encouraged.

Memorials

- For anyone buried from St. Tikhon, a memorial will be held automatically on the 3rd, 9th and 40th days, as close to the exact day, the day of passing considered the 1st day.
- On the 40th day, it is traditional for the priest to bless the grave.
- Holy Wheat (koliva) may be offered at any memorial.
- There is never a fee for a memorial service.

Visitation of the Sick

Caring for the sick and needy is a job belonging to more than just the priest. Christ calls every one of his followers to love those who are suffering. We each have a special duty to minister to our fellow members in *"the household of faith."* In the same way that individual sin affects the whole body of Christ, so does illness. St. Paul tells us, *"If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it"* (I Corinthians 12:26).

For this reason, it is very important that every member of St. Tikhon contributes to the care for the sick through prayer and acts of mercy. One of the priest's primary tasks is indeed the visitation of the sick:

- The pastor will visit the sick and suffering as much as possible; but only the seriously ill will be visited on a daily basis.
- For you or your loved ones to be visited, it is imperative that an immediate family member call the priest. He cannot depend on word of mouth which is often unreliable. Holy Unction is given to the seriously ill. *“Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord...”* (James 5:14).

House Blessings

On January 6, Orthodox celebrate the Feast of Theophany (the shining forth of God), commemorating the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by John the Forerunner. In this great feast, we celebrate the initial appearance of Jesus as the Messiah, *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29), as John identified Him. At the baptism of Christ, He was also revealed to be one of the Holy Trinity, in the descent of the Spirit as a dove and the voice of the Father announcing

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

A main feature of the Feast of Theophany is the Great Blessing of Water, and the tradition of having our homes blessed with the water. We need to understand the deep meaning of this practice. Christ’s immersion in the Jordan River represents His immersion into creation itself, at the same time foreshadowing His immersion into the tomb. The core of our Faith is that the Son of God took on corruptible human flesh to die and trample down death, liberating and transforming the whole cosmos, restoring the original goodness and holiness of all creation. Water is the most essential element of this redeemed creation. In consecrating it on Theophany, we claim the entire cosmic renewal. By having ourselves and our homes blessed with this water, we renew our own baptism into Christ’s work of redemption, begging Him to “shine forth” and fill our lives and homes with Himself.

Regarding the blessing of the homes of the faithful at St. Tikhon:

- The priest will bless homes during the Theophany season (between Theophany and Great Lent)
- The blessing of the home is a joyous occasion, yet one we should take seriously, with prayer and preparation. It's best that televisions and radios be off, and the family (at least one member!) should be present and attentive. Explain to your children the meaning of the ritual, including Theophany.
- Be sure to have ready a candle, an icon, a bowl of water, and a list of those you wish the priest to pray for.
- Special attention is given to families new to St. Tikhon or with new homes. If you are in one of these groups, call the priest to set up a time.

Stewardship and Charity

In the Gospels, Jesus commands us not to worry about what we will eat or drink. In the same way the birds are fed and the lilies are clothed, so our heavenly Father will take care of us. And here in America, we are blessed with far more than we need. As Christians, we are called to live our lives Eucharistically, in thankfulness.

If we are truly thankful, and we recognize that nothing belongs to us, it is all the Lord's and we are His stewards, then we will give. The primary way we give is to/through the Church. Giving to the Church should not be perceived as contributing to the "organization" and those working for it. The local body of Christ manifests God's love in providing for the needy both within and outside the Church. In giving, we help maintain the Church, and we entrust the Church with the task of finding and giving to those in need. The earliest Christians did the same—the Acts of the Apostles describe how

"all who believed were together and had all things in common, and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:44-45).

For the Church and charity to run smoothly, we must give regularly. Jesus Himself did this, in obedience to the Temple law of tithing. Although we are out of the habit, “tithing” (10%) should be our standard as well.

We must prayerfully establish a fixed portion for our offering, and commit this amount to the Church in the annual pledging program. This portion is “off the top,” not the bottom; which is to say, it is our best, representing the whole which belongs to God. It is not the amount that counts, but that we truly give what we can which is always more than we think. Our Lord praised the poor widow who gave only two coins, saying she gave more than the rich who gave proudly.

To reiterate what was set forth previously: in order to be considered a fully active member of St. Tikhon participation in the Stewardship Program is required. Anyone whose financial situation makes this difficult has only to speak with the priest, and nothing further will be said.

For all others, an annual financial pledge is expected. Again, this should not be seen as “paying dues.” We cannot offer our whole lives to Christ without offering of our treasure for the sake of the Kingdom. Christ demands our whole being and nothing less. Here are other specifics regarding stewardship and charity:

- The budget process is a way we as a community set our goals and priorities. Pledging to the budget is an expression of faith, trusting that God is working through us as a community.
- The Mission Council shall establish funds for the earmarking of gifts.
- Church property serves to aid us in our ministry and should never become an end unto itself.
- We express appreciation for contributions and gifts, but we do not assign attributions to them in the form of plaques or public recognition, which encourages pride rather than humility (Matthew 6:1).

- Special donations (icons, vestments, furnishings, etc.) must be approved by the priest or the Parish Council to ensure that it meets our needs and fits with our liturgical style before the church can take possession.
- St. Innocent does not oppose fund raising per se. However, should the church community deem such an event appropriate, the Mission Council must direct all proceeds to charity.
- Our tithe as a community is also tithed. The church directs 10% of its budget to the diocese.

“If anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and in truth” (I John. 3:17-18).

Clergy

The priest/rector is assigned by the Diocesan Bishop and represents him in all ecclesiastical matters. The priest/rector is responsible to the local bishop. The clergy follow strict guidelines to keep the unity of the Church.

Here are some of them:

- The priest/rector presides at all services, unless he designates otherwise.
- The priest/rector is the pastor (shepherd), spiritual father and confessor of the church community, unless otherwise communicated.
- If you wish for another priest(s) to assist in a wedding or baptism, the invitation must go through the pastor.
- If you wish another canonical Orthodox priest to celebrate a Sacrament, ask the priest/rector to invite him to assist.
- Under no circumstance will another priest be asked to preside in place of the priest/rector.

- **Mission Council**

The council consists of the priest/rector and appointed representatives. The priest/rector is the presiding officer and the only permanent member of the mission council.

- It is important to recognize the nature and purpose of the mission council. It is often thought that the mission council is responsible for the “material” operation of the church, leaving the “spiritual” ministry for the priests. Part of their role is certainly to ensure that physical needs are provided for, by managing funds, facilities, etc., but this task is not separate from the spiritual ministry in the Church—such labor of love is equally “spiritual,” if it contributes to the good of the community.
- The mission council should not be seen as a governing body or business committee, but as a group of individuals who assist the priest in building up the body of Christ. Council members therefore must be spiritually active, and exemplary in church attendance and stewardship. A candidate for service on the church council must:
 - have been a member of the church for at least one year;
 - be in church on Sunday 85% of the time, attend the feasts of Nativity and Pascha, attend the celebration of other major feasts
 - be in union with the teaching of the faith, which means frequent confession as established by the priest, and frequent reception of the Holy Mysteries
 - work toward tithing of their income to the general budget and the good of the church
 - actively pursue spiritual development and growth through the deepening of personal prayer life, reading of Scriptures, the Church Fathers, and other spiritual books related to the Orthodox faith as determined by the priest.

A Guide to Parish Etiquette:

St. Tikhon Orthodox Church is parish in the Diocese of the South of the Orthodox Church of America. When people travel around to different communities there are many customs and local traditions.

Some are cultural; some are pious customs. The following etiquette is for the community of St. Tikhon but could also be understood to reflect the general ethos of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA). The goal of having a general Church etiquette is not to strike fear in people, but rather to inform people of the common practices of our Church. In the modern OCA, it is not uncommon to find many sincere, devout people who were never informed about basic Church etiquette whether they were born and raised in the faith or came into the Church later in life.

This guide is meant for personal reflection, not as a means of judging others. Keep in mind that there are different traditions even among the Orthodox faithful. We come to church to pray and worship God above all else, and that should be our only focus.

In the Orthodox Church there are numerous customs and traditions that are important parts of our worship. Some of these customs are universal to the Church, while some may vary from parish to parish, or cultural tradition. The following addresses questions most often asked by those new to the faith, and even those not so new...

Standing vs. Sitting

The traditional posture for prayer and worship in the Orthodox Church is to stand. In many Orthodox Churches there are no pews. Chairs or benches on the side walls are reserved for those who need them, i.e. the elderly, infirm, pregnant mothers, etc.

When in doubt, it is always acceptable to stand for the entire service.

Regardless if you stand the whole service or not, there are times when one should definitely stand:

- The beginning of the service: “Blessed is the Kingdom...”
- The Entrances: with the Gospel and later, the Chalice
- Gospel Reading
- The Creed, the Lord’s Prayer

- The Anaphora beginning with “Let us stand aright” through the Hymn to the Theotokos
- The distribution of Holy Communion, i.e. the Body and Blood of Christ in our midst, through the end of the dismissal.

Whatever parish you are in, when in doubt, follow the pattern of those around you. Follow the advice St Monica received from St Ambrose when she asked about fasting rules in Rome. “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” During the sermon, please do take a seat.

Lighting Candles

Lighting candles is an important part of Orthodox worship. We light them as we pray, making an offering to accompany our prayers. In the Orthodox church, we typically light candles upon entering the church, or after venerating the icons.

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. When venerating (kissing) an icon, pay attention to where you kiss. It is not proper to kiss an icon in the face. When you approach an icon to venerate it, kiss the gospel, scroll, or cross in the hand of the person in the icon, or kiss the hand or foot of the person depicted. And remember to blot off any lipstick or chapstick before kissing.

When Entering Church

Getting kids ready, fighting traffic, etc can all make arriving to church on time difficult. 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 enter the church. If Father is giving the sermon, please come in, but stay in the back until he has concluded.

If you end up arriving late (especially after the Gospel) you should generally refrain from partaking of the Eucharist that day as “proper preparation” for Holy Communion typically includes the hearing of the gospel.

Crossing One’s Legs

Generally, we tend to cross our legs to get comfortable. Is it “wrong” for us to cross our legs in Church? It’s less about it being “wrong” and more about it being maybe a little too casual—or maybe a little too relaxed—for being in the presence of God. When we get settled in our favorite chair at home, we lean back, kick up our legs, and allow our minds to wander. This is the opposite of what we want to do in Church. Our goal is to remain attentive (i.e.: “Let us attend”) at all times. Distractions will always seek to keep our minds and hearts away from God, so if we seek to do what we need in order to keep that from happening.

If you need to sit, try to do so in a way that keeps you attentive and not too comfortable that our minds wander off of the “one thing necessary.”

Talking During Church

It’s always nice to see friends you haven’t seen in awhile, or to welcome visitors who haven’t visited before. With the exception of helping a visitor through the service, try to save conversation for the fellowship hall, inviting guests to visit there. Instead, while you’re in church greet each other quietly, and try and listen and participate in the service.

Kiss (Don’t Shake) the Bishop’s and Priest’s Hand

The proper way to greet a bishop or priest is to ask his blessing and kiss his right hand. How do you do this? Approach the bishop or priest with your right hand over your left and say “Father (“Master,” in the case of a bishop), bless.” This is appropriate and traditional, rather than shaking their hands. When you receive such a blessing it is Christ Himself who offers the blessing through the hand of the priest or bishop.

Sunday Dress

Though God does not demand us to “dress up” for Him (as though He is in any way impressed by our external appearance), how we dress can be a reflection of how we feel. If we dress too casually, our attitudes might reflect this casualness in our worship. We should dress modestly, not in a flashy way that brings attention to ourselves.

Some Guidelines:

- **Children:** Only young children are allowed to wear shorts to church—but preferably not athletic shorts, cutoffs, or “spandex”. Tennis shoes that “light up” should probably be avoided, especially for altar servers, in that they draw attention away from prayer.
- **Women:** Dresses, skirts and pants are all appropriate, just be sure they are modest.
- **Men:** Shirts with collars and clean pants/slacks are always good choices. Again, shorts are to be avoided, particularly on Sunday morning.

The above guidelines may be adjusted for services outside of Divine Liturgy, i.e. Vespers. It is always preferable to be in church for prayer, then to not come at all for mere lack of a change of clothes—as may be the case when coming from a Saturday outing, work, or work-party, etc. Finally, this is not a call for someone to buy a whole new wardrobe just to be a part of the Church! Use your best judgment and good taste when it comes to Church. You don’t go to church to be seen by people—you go to present yourself before, and to worship, God.

Making the Sign of the Cross

A person looking around on a Sunday morning may notice that different people cross themselves at different times. To a certain extent, when to cross oneself is a matter of personal piety and not of dogma. However, there are times in the service when crossing oneself (thumb and first two fingers touching each other, third and fourth fingers folded into the palm: touching head first, to stomach, right shoulder to left) is called for:

- To cross: when you hear one of the variations of the phrase “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”; before venerating an icon, Gospel, or Cross; entering and exiting the temple; during the Trisagion [Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal]; at “Glory to Thee O Lord”; when passing before the Altar.
- Not to Cross: (only bowing of the head): when blessed with hand (as in “Peace be unto all”), or censed. In receiving a blessing from a bishop or priest one does not make the sign of the Cross beforehand. “In this way ought we to distinguish between reverence toward holy things and toward persons”.

Snacks for Children

Parents often bring little snacks for young children. This is fine as long as it is discreet and quiet and the parent sees to cleaning up any leftovers.

By the time a child reaches age 7 they are mostly capable of fasting the entire morning of Holy Communion (or at least cutting back on breakfast).

For those children who do require snacks during service, please refrain from feeding them, even a bottle, while in line for Communion, as they ought to come to the Holy Mysteries without food already in their mouths. Chewing gum is never a need in church.

In and Out

Certainly parents should have ready access to the doors to take small children out if they are distracting or need a short break—for this reason the doors are to be accessible, i.e. let us avoid the temptation to congregate around the back door, and challenge ourselves to move forward into the Nave.

What do I do during the Censings?

There are many local customs dealing with the censuring of the Church. In some places people move to the center of the Church and in others they stay where they are.

Here at St. Tikhon people should move away from the walls while the priest is censuring. In general, while the priest or deacon is censuring people should stop venerating the icons in the center of the Church.

Talking During Church

It is not appropriate to greet people and have a conversation with them during the services. This is especially true while in line for the Holy Eucharist. It is not appropriate for anyone to have conversation during communion, either before or after receiving the Eucharist. While it is a hospitable act to offer friends and visitors a piece of antidoron at this time, it is not the occasion for visiting or catching up with one another.

While waiting to receive communion, we ought to be in a state of prayerful preparation, after receiving, in a state of prayerful gratitude, and if not receiving, repenting and praying quietly—or else singing along with the communion hymn. It is likewise inappropriate to begin to chat during the prayers of thanksgiving. Talk to God while in church through your prayers, hymns, and thanksgiving, and to your friends in the hall afterwards.

Preparing for Communion

Part of the preparation for receiving the Holy Eucharist is fasting. Orthodox Christians are expected to fast at least from 12 midnight until they receive the Holy Mysteries unless medically unable. This fast includes abstaining from all food and drink. It is also expected that the married faithful will abstain from adult relations on the evening (from Vespers on) before receiving the Holy Eucharist.

Leaving Before the Dismissal

Leaving church before the Dismissal deprives us of a blessing. The Liturgy has a beginning ("Blessed is the Kingdom...") and an end ("Let us depart in peace..."). 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. It is important to stay after Communion to complete our prayer and thank God for his precious gifts to us.

Handling the Holy Bread / “Antidoron”

After taking Communion, at the end of the Divine Liturgy, and at Vespers with a “Litya” or “Blessing of Bread”, it is traditional to eat a piece of holy bread or antidoron—the left-over bread from which Holy Communion was prepared and various commemorations made.

While antidoron is not the Body and Blood of Christ, it is blessed bread, and as such, we should take precaution to eat it carefully so that crumbs don't fall to be trampled underfoot. Monitor the children as they take the antidoron, teaching them to eat respectfully.

Final Thought

Most church etiquette is based on simple common sense and a respect for God and others. We are in church to worship God in Holy Trinity. The priest announces, “In the fear of God, with faith and love, draw near.” If we approach our lives and our worship together with this in mind, then we will be people of proper church etiquette.

Also, it's good to remember we're a part of the Body of Christ. A family that seeks to live in harmony and so, do all things in love. As St John the Theologian reminds us “If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

-1 John 4:20-21

