

**A GUIDEBOOK TO
COMMUNITY LIFE WITHIN
ST. JAMES ORTHODOX
CHURCH**



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Introduction

Membership within an Orthodox Christian parish is notably different from engagement in other organizations and diverges from membership in non-Orthodox congregations. Affiliation with an Orthodox Church encompasses unique features, independent of the specific traits associated with individual Orthodox communities.

Every community has unique traits, and St. James Church is no different. This guide shares a common vision for membership in this community.

St. James Antiochian Orthodox Church of Stillwater, OK is recognized as the Body of Christ within this community. The parish embodies the entirety of the Orthodox Faith, as delivered once and for all to the Saints by our Lord Jesus Christ. While our human limitations may sometimes prevent us from fully expressing this faith in practice, its completeness remains preserved through the abiding Presence of Christ within His Church.

From a more human perspective, St. James Orthodox Church exists due to the efforts of caring hierarchs, faithful priests, and dedicated laity, all working together to honor the legacy and continue the efforts of those who labored over the years to maintain an Orthodox presence in the city of Stillwater. St. James exists as an Orthodox community because of the sacrifices of its faithful and will only continue to exist if we follow in their footsteps.

It is our goal as a parish to honor Christ by being a community that, to the fullest extent possible, shines with the brightness of the “city set on a hill” (Matthew 5:14), the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church. Also, we desire to build upon that legacy of those faithful who gave so much of their time, talents, and treasures to make sure we have the community that we have today.

Church life is not about rights or obligations, but about receiving God’s gifts, which cannot be earned or claimed. By choosing to belong, we accept responsibility and experience abundant blessings. This understanding shapes our relationship with one another and the Orthodox Church: “O how abundant is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for those who fear thee and wrought for those who take refuge in thee” (Psalm 31:19).

Throughout Christian history, the activities of the lifestyle set before the believers fell into three categories: Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving (works of mercy), all practiced within the Community of the Church. Below are those areas of Christian activity and how we attempt to live them out at St James's.

Prayer

The Divine Services

While Prayer can take many forms, they all fall into two basic categories: corporate and personal. Corporate prayer at St. James is centered around the weekly celebration of our Lord's Resurrection with Saturday night Great Vespers and Sunday morning Orthros and Divine Liturgy. The Great Feasts of the Church Year are also celebrated along with certain celebrations of feasts of the Saints. When these fall on Tuesday through Saturday, a Vespersal-Divine Liturgy is typically held on the evening prior to the Feast. Feast Days falling on Sundays and Mondays are typically celebrated along with the normally scheduled Saturday Vespers and Sunday Orthros with Divine Liturgy. The schedule for services and all activities can be found in the weekly Sunday bulletin, the Realm Connect app, and on our website at www.since33ad.net.

In some communities, many believers attend services either exclusively or primarily on Sunday morning, but Orthodox Christianity does not lend itself well to a "once a week" approach to living the Faith. Here at St. James's all are encouraged to attend as many of the scheduled services as possible. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also," (Matthew 6:21) and in today's busy world, one of our most valuable treasures is time. If we put the treasure of our time in attending the services offered, we will find our heart planted more firmly in our Faith in God. While attending services outside of Sunday morning is increasingly difficult amid the complex schedules of work, school, activities, and other responsibilities, we look for solace in our Lord's promise that when we seek His Kingdom first, all we need will be given to us (Matthew 6:33).

Clearly, each person and each family's schedule are different, and we live differing distances from the church. There are some services that simply are not practical for every one of us to attend. While unavoidable conflicts exist, we should never fall into a mindset where one plans on not attending certain services unless, as already stated, an unavoidable conflict exists. Having an "I don't go to Vespers" or "I don't do Matins" type of attitude simply due to lack of desire to attend denies the reality that our Orthodox faith is the most important part of our lives. Our faith is lived and breathed every day and is not an activity or program one participates in weekly as one might do in a club. While the Divine Services are by no means the full extent of our Orthodox Christian life, they are the principal source for living that life even when we are not in church.

Remembering Loved Ones

In the Orthodox tradition, requests for the Church's prayers were always accompanied by an offering of some kind. The many ways to have loved ones remembered in the divine services included:

Holy Bread (Prospora) for the Divine Liturgy

This is the most common offering, which can be made for the health of the Living or in memory of the Departed. This can be done by either baking the bread (ask Father for who to contact for recipe and other details) or more commonly, by filling out the "Holy Bread Offering" sheet located in the Narthex. If parishioners will not be baking Holy Bread, they donate towards the offering of Holy Bread, commensurate with the cost of baking bread (flour, yeast, etc.) for the number of weeks one desires the names to be remembered. At the discretion of the baker, the offering can be donated to the Alms account.

Koliva (Sweetened Boiled Wheat)

This is traditionally offered on the 40th Day and One Year Memorial of a loved one's repose. Parishioners can prepare their own (see Father for recipe) or this may be prepared by another parishioner and a donation made towards it. Normally, these are held in conjunction with Great Vespers, after Divine Liturgy, or can be scheduled on the day of the anniversary of a loved one's passing.

Artoklasia (Special Service of Supplication)

The five loaves of specially sweetened bread and wine can be offered for the Living. This service typically done during Great Vespers on Saturday. See Father for more details on this offering.

Donations of Liturgical or Other Permanent Items

A list of needed items can be requested from the Priest and a donation for the cost of their purchase can be made in honor or memory of a loved one. While we appreciate the effort to remember our loved ones, our community does not indicate the identity of the donor on any donated items by placing plaques or other identifying information (Matthew 6:2-4).

Personal Prayer

Distinct from our communal prayer in the Divine Services, the Church offers us limitless opportunities for personal prayer, even to the extent of praying "without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Orthodox Christians are encouraged to pray daily, following a discipline called a Rule of Prayer, established with the guidance of one's Spiritual Father. The core of each person's Prayer Rule are Morning and Evening Prayers. These daily times of prayer should include prayers drawn from the liturgical services as given in a variety of Orthodox prayer books, but should also include personal supplications and thanksgiving, and a time for both contemplative prayer (the Jesus prayer) and simple silence.

Assuming our personal prayers are "no one else's business" is a denial of who we are: "though many, (we) are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Romans 12:5). Our personal prayer is never "private" or "separate." We pray together daily, as members of each other, to the One God, only from different locations. For this reason, members of our community are not simply expected but depended upon to maintain a life of prayer even when we are not gathered for communal prayer. We all rely on each other's prayers to remain firm in our Faith.

The Sacraments of Confession and Communion

The sacramental life of all Orthodox Christians involves the regular participation in the sacraments of Confession and Communion. While different standards have been practiced in different eras and places, the Antiochian Archdiocese practices frequent reception of Holy Communion.

Receiving the Sacrament assumes that we have prepared for it, including a fast being maintained (see "Fasting" below), prayers of preparation, and a recent offering of one's Confession. "Recent" can best be defined as a Confession being offered during or around the current or previous fasting season. There are four fasting seasons each year so generally one's confession should be offered approximately four times each year.

At our parish, we maintain the early Church's practice of a Fellowship Meal (following the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and certain other services as announced. Meals are coordinated by our Fellowship Teams which are scheduled to take turns providing the meals each week. Occasionally, meals occur as a general Potluck, in which everyone is asked to bring something to share. After joining St James's, you and your family are asked to serve on one of these teams.

Fasting

“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24). Jesus never spoke more plainly in telling those who choose to follow him what it takes to do it, and fasting is excellent practice at denying ourselves. The practice of fasting dates to Christianity’s roots in Judaism. In our attempt to be faithful Orthodox Christians, each person or family must decide to what extent they are able to practice the Church’s full prescription for fasting, in consultation with one’s Spiritual Father. A detailed calendar and guide to fasting can be found in the Resource section of our parish website.

Community Level of Fasting

While our personal fasting discipline may vary, those bringing food to share on fasting days are asked to refrain from including items with Meat or Dairy Products.

The Weekly Fasts

The early Christians moved the Jewish Monday and Thursday fasts to Wednesday and Friday to commemorate our Lord’s betrayal and crucifixion. We keep these as days of fasting, except when the fast is superseded by a Feast. There are also specific seasons or days of commemoration where fasting is prescribed or suspended. An annual calendar is distributed in December of each year and shows fasting days for each month.

The Seasons of Fasting

We also continue the early Church’s practice of seasons of fasting to precede certain celebrations. They are:

- Great Lent (the 40 days prior to Holy Week)
- The Apostles Fast (varying in length and beginning the Monday following the First Sunday after Pentecost and concluding on the Feast of Ss. Peter and Paul, June 29)
- The Dormition Fast (August 1–15)
- The Nativity Fast/Advent (November 15 to Christmas)

Fasting in Preparation for Holy Communion

In preparation for the reception of the Eucharist in the Divine Liturgy, a total fast (NO FOOD OR DRINK) is prescribed. For morning Liturgies, this fast should begin no later than midnight the night before. For evening Liturgies, total fasting should begin after a light meal, taken as soon as possible at noon.

Variations to this are assumed for those needing food or water due to health issues, pregnant or nursing mothers, and young children. Those who plan to commune but feel they have a legitimate reason to eat or drink during the time of the total fast should do so only with the blessing of the Priest.

Stewardship

One result of a life of prayer aided by a fasting discipline is a life lived in service and sacrifice to the other—be that spouse, child, friend, enemy, neighbor, and stranger. We are called by God to receive His love, and having received freely, to “freely give” (Matthew 10:8). This giving can take many forms: time, attention, care, friendship, support, or money, but all are expressions of love—God’s love, received from Him and passed on to those around us.

Tithes and Offerings

Properly speaking, our Almsgiving is given based on the need of those we encounter and is distinct from our offerings to the Church. The earliest practice of giving in the early Church was a brief time in the Apostolic age when ALL of one’s belongings were offered to God, and “laid at the Apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:35). It wasn’t long before a return to tithing, as inherited from Christianity’s Jewish heritage, became the Church’s tradition. In the practice of tithing, the members of the community of Faith commit to its material sustenance and its charitable works by an offering of ten percent of one’s income. While every household has different financial circumstances, we should all strive to cultivate a Christian perspective on the responsible use of money and resources for the Kingdom of God. The booklet entitled “Tithing” by Fr. Richard Ballew offers a comprehensive treatment of the subject, and a copy is given to each new member upon joining our church for their education and inspiration.

Many contemporary Orthodox Christians are unfamiliar with tithing due to a variety of historical influences. Traditionally in the Orthodox Church, we never have dues or other minimum donations required for membership in the Church. Rather, each member is encouraged to see themselves as stewards—not of our own belongings, but of what belongs to God and has been placed in our care.

Our community of St. James has been blessed greatly by God with a beautiful space for worship and the services of a resident priest, which are a blessing that contribute to the health and growth of our community. It should not go unnoticed, however, that the Lord accomplishes this through the tithes and offering of our members and families. Since it was by sacrificial tithes and offerings that God has blessed us thus far, we uphold this goal for all our members, knowing that this step of faith is a blessing to all who take it. The Priest is available for further information and to answer any questions or concerns.

Whether through a full tithe, one that exceeds it, or one that works towards it, every adult member of the community bears the blessing of the responsibility to financially support our community. This financial support allows us to maintain the gift of the community entrusted to us and allows us to grow in the future.

Currently, stewardship is made through the Realm Connect App. The preferred method in setting up your account would be to choose an ACH withdrawal from your checking account. You can also set it up with a debit or credit card. If you need help, please see the priest for information on how to get started. Also, if you prefer, you can donate cash or write a check and leave it in the plate located at the entry into the nave.

Almsgiving Fund

Our parish maintains a fund to be used for those in need, whether within our parish community or “outside” our parish. Donations to this fund can be placed in the locked Candle Box located beside the candles in the

narthex. All donations for candles are used to (1) buy the candles and (2) use any excess funds to help the poor. All members of the community are encouraged to donate regularly to this cause. Guidelines are in place to direct benevolence distribution in a responsible manner that is consistent with financial transparency. For questions about parish guidelines, please see Father or a member of the Parish Council.

Ministry Opportunities

There are several organizations and ministries within our church, in which members can offer their time for the support of the church and its specific activities. In addition to offering of their financial resources, all members are encouraged to offer a portion of their time to be involved in at least one of these teams, as part of the mutual support of all members in doing the work of the Church. For more information on joining any of these groups, ask for the team's coordinator or see Father for more information. As of this writing, the following comprise our organizations and Ministry Groups:

Adult Education

Educational opportunities are shaped by limited space and members' busy schedules. If you would like a class on a specific topic, let Father know; sessions can be arranged in person or via Zoom on weeknights or Saturdays. Catechism classes take place Sundays after Agape Hour and are open to all.

Almsgiving

Almsgiving includes acts of service to those around us. Activities have included food distribution at Our Daily Bread of Stillwater, clothing drives for Birthright and, fundraisers for specific local or organizations such as Orthodox Christians for Life and the International Orthodox Christian Charities.

Altar Servers

In other times in church history, a cadre of Subdeacons would assist the clergy in serving the Divine Services. In the absence of sufficient numbers of Subdeacons in the modern era, young men serve in their place as "acolytes" or Altar Servers. Here at St. James, boys from about the age of eight are invited to serve in this role. They must undergo initial training and subsequent follow-up training, usually held once each year. The Altar Servers are led by our Subdeacon and will be divided into teams. The members of each team are encouraged to serve during their assigned week in all services from Saturday evening through any services on the following Saturday morning. Standard dress for Altar Servers would ideally include a white or solid light-colored, collared shirt, along with dark pants, socks, and shoes. Servers should arrive no later than 10 minutes prior to the service start time to adequately prepare to serve.

Choir

Our Liturgical Choir is comprised of both choral singers and those trained in the art of Byzantine Chant. Participation in the Choir is open to all members who commit to both regular attendance at services, as well as participation in weekly choir rehearsals, in addition to other rehearsals required for special feasts and seasons such as Christmas and Holy Week.

Church School

Under the guidance of our Church School Director, church members serve as teachers for our Sunday morning Church School program. The age range and class levels of students is dependent upon their number in any given school year. Typically, we have participants from pre-school through high school. Parents are encouraged to bring their children to church school regularly as it provides a foundation for their spiritual life in the Orthodox Church as adults.

Custodial

Volunteers ensure that all publicly accessible areas of the church are clean and ready for the parish to use. Typical responsibilities include vacuuming, sweeping, or mopping common areas, cleaning the Fellowship Hall for Sunday use, sanitizing surfaces, and restocking items, such as toilet paper, paper towels, soap, or other supplies. Occasionally, volunteers serving in this ministry may perform minor repairs, such as changing light bulbs. They also assist with preparations for events, such as weddings or funerals.

Facilities

This ministry of St. James assumes responsibility for oversight of all building improvement projects and for the ongoing maintenance of our buildings and facilities. Members at all levels of experience are always needed as we attempt to keep expenses down by coordinating as much of the work in this area to be done by members of our community.

Greeters

Greeters stand at the entrance in the narthex and welcome parishioners and visitors to St. James. A partial list of responsibilities includes offering a bulletin and liturgical texts and providing helpful information to visitors and parishioners. This information may include basic questions about the service, location of restrooms and inviting them to sit at the Visitors' Table during Agape Hour.

Grounds

Members of the community are needed to care for external property at St. James. This ministry is responsible for enhancement of the flower beds, trees, and signage. This ministry is an important part of enhancing our public facing identity to visitors and the community.

Antiochian Women's Fellowship

The Women's Fellowship is intended to promote the spiritual growth of its members, as well as provide opportunities for fellowship and service, regardless of age or marital status. As an organization, they work together to support one another as Orthodox Christians, as well as enhancing community life in the parish. The "backbone" of many churches' activities are the women of the church, and our community is no different. All women of our community are encouraged to be active members of our Antiochian Women's Fellowship, where in addition to many acts of support of the church's functions they serve as coordinators for Church beautification (preparing flowers and other decorations for special church feasts), Holy Bread Baking, Koliva Preparation (sweetened wheat prepared for Memorial services for our Departed).

Antiochian Men's (AMEN) Fellowship

The AMEN Fellowship is intended to promote the spiritual growth of its members, as well as provide opportunities for fellowship and growth, regardless of age or marital status. As an organization, they work together to support one another as Orthodox Christians, as well as enhancing community life in the parish. The Fellowship will also be available, as needs arise, to assist with repairs or other projects, either at the church or in the homes of parishioners. Additionally, they work to support the priest and ministries, working towards building an Orthodox Christian community committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF)

Our OCF has varied in its level of activity based on the number of Orthodox studying at Oklahoma State University. Activities have included teachings, social functions and question and answer sessions with our Priest. The main function is to integrate any students into the life of the church. This team supports the local OCF with transportation, food, and other logistical help (added) and they meet weekly.

Outreach/Evangelism

This team seeks to make the community surrounding our church aware of her presence and offering programs by which new people can be made aware of the presence of the Orthodox Church in Stillwater. The main activities are biannual retreats which are advertised to the public in hopes of spreading the news of Orthodox Christianity here in our city, and the maintaining of our website.

Parish Council

The Parish Council handles church maintenance and supports the Priest's ministry. Members attend monthly meetings and participate in committee work as needed. Nominations are submitted to the priest in November, and each January, one new member is elected and/or one is appointed to a three-year term at the annual All-Church Meeting

Youth Group (Teen SOYO)

Monthly Pre-Teen and Teen activities are led by adult leaders who support parents in raising Orthodox Christian youth. The program encourages participation in Diocese and Archdiocese events—like Bible Bowl, retreats, youth gatherings, and summer/winter camps at Camp St. Raphael—to help integrate young people into the wider Church beyond Stillwater.

Joining St. James Orthodox Church

Moving From Another Orthodox Parish

Orthodox Christians moving to the area who wish to join the parish should notify their previous church of the membership transfer and inform the Priest of their intention to join. In some instances, the Priest may communicate with the clergy from the former parish regarding the transfer request. Members of St. James are expected to participate regularly in church activities such as prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, and to support the parish through stewardship of time, skills, and financial contributions. If circumstances arise that make this difficult, members are encouraged to discuss their situation with the Priest.

Receiving Non-Orthodox into the Orthodox Church

Our Good and Loving God “desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). St. James Orthodox Church seeks to bring as many of our neighbors as possible into the saving presence of Christ as lived in the Orthodox Church. All members of the Parish are to therefore be actively engaged in the evangelistic outreach of the Faith through the invitation of friends, neighbors, and the people we meet in our daily life of work, school, and commerce, as well as being welcoming and hospitable to all visitors.

When a visitor has returned regularly to participate in the life of our community, and has engaged in a period of serious inquiry, we consider them an “inquirer” or “seeker.” We don’t have any expectations from them but rather seek to offer hospitality to them. Should they come to a place in which they wish to be enrolled among the Catechumens (learners) of our community, they may be prepared for reception into the Church. This is done by asking for the blessing of the Parish Priest to be made a Catechumen. Should the pastor judge that the inquirer is well-prepared to do so, he will appoint a time to read a prayer of enrollment during a Divine Liturgy. At this point the inquirer has moved past the “inquirer” or “seeker” stage (which is roughly equivalent to courtship or dating) and has made a definitive decision to become an Orthodox Christian (like moving from courtship to engagement).

It is expected at this juncture that the new catechumen informs in writing any religious body in which they were previously a member their desire to be removed from the membership of said body. If they have not already done so, the Catechumen will begin the formal process of catechesis, which includes appointed times of group instruction supplemented by individual time with the Priest. Should the Catechumen die before reception into the church, they would be buried as an Orthodox Christian. Though not full sacramental members of the Church, Catechumens are expected to fulfill all the other responsibilities of being a member of St. James as stated throughout this guide, with the only exception being participation in the sacraments. The decision of whether a convert is received by Baptism and Chrismation or simply Chrismation will be made by the Priest, who will follow the Archdiocesan guidelines.

In the early church when many converts were coming from pagan backgrounds an extensive three-year catechesis was necessary. Contemporary catechesis in America is often focused on the instruction of Christians from non-Orthodox backgrounds and may take less time. Our Metropolitan Archbishop has established the length of catechesis in our parishes as no less than one year, but this duration presupposes that the catechumen will be actively engaged in the process of learning and assimilation to Orthodox modes of belief and living, especially with frequent attendance at the Divine Services and catechism classes and may be extended as the pastor sees fit.

Each Catechumen will be given a Sponsor, a specific member of the Church whose responsibility will be to assist the Priest in the guidance of the Catechumen, both before and after their reception into the Church. The Sponsor is not a spiritual guide but is a resource for the candidate in their assimilation into the Orthodox Faith. The Priest, in private consultation with the Catechumen, makes the selection of the Sponsor. Catechumen should not ask someone to be their sponsor without first discussing their potential choice with the parish Priest.

In addition to being a resource, the Sponsor's responsibility at the time of the reception into the Church also includes providing a baptismal cross, a baptismal candle, and provide the payment of the Baptism/Chrismation Certificate Fee, currently \$25 made payable to the "Antiochian Archdiocese."

Spiritual Fatherhood and Confession

One of the treasures of Orthodoxy is that each Christian is offered the care of a Spiritual Father. He is available to hear one's Confession but is also available to offer Spiritual Direction: advice and encouragement to each Christian based on their unique circumstances. He is shepherd, coach, cheerleader and sounding board for setting and maintaining a Rule of Prayer and for dealing with the challenges living an Orthodox spiritual life. You are encouraged to call upon your Priest for both Spiritual Direction and/or Confession, whether at the same time or different times.

In some cases, one's Spiritual Father is not the parish priest. In cases such as this, it is the responsibility of the spiritual child to receive the blessing of both one's Spiritual Father and the Parish Priest to have this arrangement, and the Parish Priest will stipulate how the spiritual care will be shared.

Times for Confession

Confessions are usually heard on Saturday evenings following Great Vespers. In extreme circumstances, the priest may be contacted directly or by phone to make an appointment during the week. Given the schedule of weekend church responsibilities, these appointments are usually made on Tuesday through Friday. Parish Priests typically take a weekday as a day off, as weekends are filled with church-related responsibilities. Currently, your priest attempts to keep Mondays free for personal and family time, and your cooperation with this is much appreciated.

Administration

Governance

As an Orthodox parish, we are governed by the hierarchy of the Church. In our case, that means the Metropolitan Archbishop of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, and the Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America who assists him, as well as the Pastor assigned to the community to represent them. At this time, the office of Auxiliary Bishop is vacant and we are served by an Archiepiscopal Vicar appointed by the Metropolitan.

Locally, our community is also served by our Parish Council who act as the stewards of the parish's resources and the responsible body for its temporal maintenance. Parishioners are allowed to attend Parish Council meetings but remain silent. Please be aware that the members of the Parish Council represent parishioners and can present your concerns to our leadership team. As the representative body of the parish, council members and the clergy discuss items at monthly Parish Council meetings. Parishioners do not usually participate unless specifically asked by the leadership team of St. James.

Additionally, every year on or around the last Sunday in January, all of the parish's members in good standing (those adults current in both their sacramental life and in their stewardship of the community) meet in an annual General Assembly, in order to approve the annual budget, elect a member to the Parish Council for a three-year term, and hear from the Pastor, the Parish Council Chair and the organizations and ministry teams of the parish as they reflect on both the preceding and following ecclesiastical and fiscal years.

Use of Church Facilities

The Church, Parish Hall and grounds of St. James are available to all members and guests during scheduled services and activities, and all are invited to come on the grounds at any time for prayer or meditation. Personal use of the Parish Hall can be arranged by making a request from the Priest. Church property (tables, chairs, liturgical items, etc.) may not be removed from the parish for use by members of St. James unless previously approved by the Priest.

While no fee is required to use the Parish Hall, donations for its use are gratefully received. All other needed information is included on the application form.

Guidelines for Leaders of Ministries at St. James

All our work has the potential to build up the Body of Christ, but in a community of individuals with different personalities, we also have potential to unintentionally hurt feelings and cause difficulty. With both of those possibilities in mind, the following guidelines are offered with hopes of maximizing the effectiveness of our common work.

Goals

Good results are almost always the results of having a good plan and executing it well. The goals of your ministry or group should be decided with a thorough process appropriate for an activity of Christ's Church. At the least, annual goals should be set with a regular check of plans and activities against those stated goals.

Meetings

To achieve each ministries' goals, regular meetings should be held of both the leadership of the group (if a leadership team exists), and the group itself. The frequency of these planning meetings will vary by group, whether monthly or more or less frequently. Notes of the meeting's decisions should be taken and promptly shared to keep plans moving forward and to act as a "road map" for work to be done between meetings.

Schedule

To allow for participation and accommodate varied, busy schedules, meetings should be set as far in advance as possible—preferably over a month in advance and never shorter than a few weeks, and always in consultation with anyone expected to be there prior to setting the date and time. A regular meeting time (i.e. the 2nd Wednesday of the month) is always preferred as future conflicts can be avoided. If meeting at St. James, a first step in setting a date should always be to consult with the Priest to check both his and the church's schedules to avoid scheduling conflicts. Meetings should have a set beginning AND ending time and the convener of the meeting should make every effort to respect everyone's time by conducting the work within that time frame, and by lovingly reminding participants of the importance of arriving and beginning on time. Maintaining a beginning or ending time increases participation in scheduled meetings.

Location

The first choice for the location of any meetings should always be the church, but another location may be desirable depending on where participants live. Selecting a meeting location other than the church should be done only with a specific purpose and should be a public location. If you have any questions or concerns about a potential meeting location, please consult with the Priest.

Recruiting

Getting involvement of other members of the community is one of the most important functions leaders serve. Be on the lookout for new talent that can be added to your efforts, and then ask for their help! Having specific duties and limited timeframes will allow people to make an informed decision about their commitment.

Communication

No one will benefit from your organizational work unless good communication takes place both within your group and to the whole community. Take the initiative to communicate well and often. In addition to your personal conversations, phone calls and emails, you are encouraged to take advantage of the following means of getting the word out:

Sunday Commemorations

If you have Orthodox family/friends whom you want the prayers of the Church, submit their names to Father no later than Thursday by email. Designate who are the “living” and who the “departed” ones. They will be prayed for in the Great Entrance and in the Proskomedia Service. Those who donate for the Blessed Bread, should also include the names of those being remembered and the reason they are honored.

Weekly Email & the Realm Connect App

If you would like to send out an announcement to the parish through email, please send the text of your announcement to the Priest by Wednesday at 10 AM to be included. Please note, your announcement may be edited for content if needed. Everyone is encouraged to utilize the **Realm Connect App** for Breaking News, Prayer Requests, Directory of Members and Catechumens, and Online Donations. See Father if you need help in getting connected.

Announcements in Church

To ensure an announcement is made after the Divine Liturgy and/or put into the Sunday Bulletin, email it to the Priest by Thursday of each week. The Priest will approve and have the appropriate person make their announcement in church. If an announcement is given to the Priest on Sunday via an Altar Server or Greeter, please note, your announcement may or may not be given verbally.

Bulletin Board

While not a good primary method of communication, the bulletin board can serve as another reminder for events and information. Please remove your group’s information when it becomes outdated. Please note, your announcement may not be posted to the bulletin board without prior approval from the Priest. Unapproved materials will be removed.

Funds

Some ministries have budgeted funds from the church’s General Fund. If your group would like to request either an unbudgeted expenditure or an expenditure not specified in the budget, approval must first be given by the Parish Council. The Council meets the second week of every month, with the agenda being set a week prior to the meeting.

To request funds, please ask the Parish Council Chairperson if the item can be added to the agenda. You may attend the meeting to request funds or submit a written request.

Budget

Requests for items to be included in the budget must first be presented to the parish Treasurer by December 1 of each year, for inclusion in the proposed budget. The proposed budget must be approved by the Parish Council at its January meeting, and then proposed for adoption by the General Assembly of the parish, held on or around the first Sunday in February. Your group's proposal should break down the total amount requested into specific activities or expenditures and should also include any income the group hopes to generate.

Reimbursements

Only funds previously authorized by the Parish Council, or the relevant organization are eligible for reimbursement. Original receipts are required. If the donor does not wish to be reimbursed, a Gift-In-Kind receipt can be given for tax purposes upon request to the Treasurer.

Handling of Funds

All cash and checks should be kept in a place and manner approved by the Parish Treasurer. Cash should never be left unattended and/or unsecured. Counting of funds should always be done by two people, who will place the counted funds in an envelope, write the date and purpose of the collected funds on the envelope and sign over the sealed envelope flap.

Keys

Certain roles require a physical or digital key to the Church and Parish Hall to fulfill their duties. Parish Council, Clergy and Ministry Leaders can have a permanent code. To do so, they must also enroll in and complete the Archdiocesan Youth Protection Policy (YPP). The Deacon is the YPP Coordinator. All other use of the facilities may be granted a temporary code on as an-needed basis by the Priest. (see [Use of Church Facilities, p. 13](#)).

Church Etiquette

The following article by Fr. David Barr has been adapted for use at our parish by Fr. Mark Wallace. All are encouraged to do their part in upholding the sanctity of our worship by following these guidelines. In the Orthodox Church, there are some customs and traditions that are important parts of our worship. Some are cultural; some are pious customs. Some are essential, some are not. From time-to-time, we need to address some of these various etiquette issues to inform our communities how we can best understand each other and work together to worship the All-holy Trinity.

Standing vs. Sitting

The traditional posture for prayer and worship in the Orthodox Church has been to stand, as we come to church to stand in God's Presence. In the Orthodox "old countries," there were usually no pews in the churches. Chairs or benches on the side walls are usually reserved for the elderly and infirm. In North America, most parishes have tended to build our churches with pews. At St. James, we embrace the "old country" approach with chairs along the side walls. So, everyone stands for the entire service except during the homily when you can sit. All who can stand should stand during the Gospel reading, the Little and Great Entrances, the Anaphora (the prayers of consecration of the Gifts), the receiving of Holy Communion (whether by the clergy or laity), whenever the priest gives a blessing, and the Dismissal. With the limited seating available in our parish, the seats along the walls of the church should be left open for the sick, elderly or our guests.

Lighting Candles

Lighting candles is an important part of Orthodox worship. We light them as we pray and to make an offering to accompany our prayers. Orthodox typically light candles when coming into the church—and that is usually the best time to light them, but there are times when candles should not be lit. It is not proper to light candles at any time that we should avoid moving around the church: during the Six Psalms at the beginning of Matins, during the Epistle or Gospel readings, during the Little or Great Entrances, and the sermon.

Entering the Church Late

Arriving at church before the service begins is recommended. If you arrive after the Divine Liturgy starts, enter quietly and observe the proceedings. One should not receive Communion if entering during the reading of the Epistle or Gospel. During the Little or Great Entrance, it is customary to wait until these portions have finished before finding a place to stand. If a sermon is in progress, it is generally advised to remain at the back until it concludes. For guidance, consult with the Greeter in the back of the church regarding an appropriate time to find your place in the nave. Minimizing disruptions during the Liturgy is encouraged. Arriving on time helps ensure that you do not interrupt the service or left wondering when to enter.

Crossing Those Legs?

In some Orthodox cultures, crossing one's legs is taboo and considered to be very disrespectful. In our North American culture, where there are no real taboos concerning crossing one's legs, we tend to cross our legs to get comfortable while sitting. Should we cross our legs in church? No. Not because it is "wrong" to ever cross legs, but rather because it is too casual—and too relaxed—for being in church. Just think about it, when you get settled in your favorite chair at home, you lean back, cross your legs, and then your mind can wander

anywhere it wants to. Remember that sitting in church is a concession, not the normative way of prayer. You surely don't want to get too relaxed and let your mind wander off too much. In fact, when you do sit in church, you should sit attentively—and not too comfortably. When sitting in church, keep those feet on the floor, ready to stand at attention (which is what “Let us attend” means). Cross yourself with your fingers and hand—but don't cross your legs!

Entering and Exiting the Church

In N Out? Yes, it's a hamburger place and it shouldn't describe the traffic pattern of the doors during services. On some Sundays, it almost seems like we have revolving doors with both adults and children going in and out of the church. Please use the restroom before coming to church. You shouldn't need to get a drink of water during the service (especially if you are taking Communion!). Don't come to church and then slip out to the Parish Hall—come to pray.

Blot That Lipstick (and Lip Balm)!

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

Venerating Icons

When you enter the church, it is traditional to venerate the icons. Usually there are icons at the entrance to the church and many churches have icon stands in the front as well. When venerating (kissing) an icon, pay attention to where you kiss. It is not proper to kiss an icon in the face. You wouldn't go up and kiss the Lord or His mother on the lips, would you? You would kiss their hand, and only if they invited you would you even dare to kiss them on the cheek. Pay attention to what you are doing. When you approach an icon to venerate it, kiss the gospel, scroll, or hand cross in the hand of the person in the icon, or kiss the hand or foot of the person depicted. As you venerate an icon, show proper respect to the person depicted in the icon—the same respect you would show the person by venerating him or her in an appropriate place. And remember, blot off your lipstick before kissing.

Talking During Church

Isn't it great to come to church and see friends and family members? But wait until coffee hour to say “Hi” to them. It just isn't appropriate to greet people and have a conversation with them during the services or during the dismissal. It is perfectly fine to offer a quick greeting, but conversations should be avoided until after exiting the church. Besides being disrespectful towards God, it is rude towards the other people in the church who are trying to pray and worship. Talk to God while in church through your prayers, hymns, and thanksgiving, and to your friends in the hall afterwards.

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

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

Church Dress

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

Children

Only young children (under 10) should wear shorts to church—and then only dress shorts. Athletic shorts, cut-offs, and spandex shorts are never appropriate church wear (for children or adults!). Shoes or sandals should be clean and tied. No one should wear T-shirts with any kind of writing or pictures on them.

Women

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

Men

Men should also dress modestly. While coat and tie are not mandatory, shirts should have collars and be buttoned to the collar (the actual collar button may be left undone, but two or three buttons undone is inappropriate). Slacks should be cleaned and pressed. Jeans (of any color) are usually too casual for church, especially ones with patches or holes. Again, shorts are not appropriate church wear. More formal attire is always preferred for Divine Liturgies, as this is the Banquet of the Kingdom. Footwear should reflect our presence in God's house and not a beach or locker room, so no flip-flops, please. If you're coming from somewhere before church or going somewhere after where you need to dress casually, bring a change of clothing with you and change. Remember, use your best judgment and good taste when dressing for church. After all, you don't go to be seen by everyone else—you go to meet and worship God.

To Cross or Not to Cross

Anyone who has looked around on a Sunday morning will notice that different people cross themselves at different times (and sometimes in different ways). To a certain extent, when to cross oneself is according to

personal piety and not an issue of dogma. But there are times when it is specifically proper to cross yourself, and times when you should not. Here is a brief list of when to cross and when not to cross:

To Cross

- When you hear one of the variations of the phrase, “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”
- At the beginning and end of the liturgical service or your private prayers
- Entering or exiting the church, or when passing in front of the Holy Altar
- Before venerating an icon, the cross, or Gospel book

Not to Cross

- At the chalice before or after taking Communion (you might hit the chalice with your hand)
- When the priest or bishop blesses saying, “Peace be to all”—bow slightly and receive the blessing
- When the priest is censuring—bow slightly
- When receiving a blessing from a bishop or a priest (kissing the right hand of the bishop or priest is appropriate, but not making the sign of the cross)

Touching the Hem of Father’s Garments

Many people like to touch the hem of Father’s phelonion as he goes through the congregation for the Great Entrance. This is a nice, pious custom by which you “attach” your personal prayers (like the woman Jesus healed with the issue of blood) to the prayer of the entrance with the holy gifts. At the same time, you need to be careful neither to grab too hard and trip up the Great Entrance, nor to push people out of the way. And be sure to help your children so that they observe these guidelines as well.

Snacks for Children

You can always tell where young children have been sitting in the church. The tell-tale signs are graham cracker crumbs, Cheerios, and animal crackers. Parents often bring snacks and a cup of fruit juice along for children during church. And for young children (0–2 years old), this is fine. But by the time children are 3–4 years old, they should be able to make it through Liturgy without eating anything, and by the time they reach seven (the age of their first confession), they should begin fasting on Sunday morning for Communion (or at least make an attempt at fasting by cutting back on the amount of breakfast and eating “fasting”-type foods—talk to your priest about this). For those children who get snacks, please don’t feed them while in the line for Holy Communion (this applies to holy bread as well). They need to come to Communion without food in their mouths. And one last note: try to keep the snack mess down to a minimum. The floor shouldn’t be covered with crumbs after service. Chewing gum during Liturgy is a No-No for everyone!

Toys

Toys are designed as distractions for children, and therefore the opposite of what we want for them in church. We should never underestimate a child's ability to worship—in some ways they are MORE able than adults! When children are small, a picture book of saints or other aspects of the Faith may be a good, short-term supplement to their experience of the Liturgy, but they will learn how to be in church by practicing.

Handling the Holy Bread

After taking Holy Communion and at the end of the liturgy, it is traditional to eat a piece of holy bread or antidoron—the bread that was left over after Holy Communion was prepared. While antidoron is not Holy Communion, it is blessed bread and as such, should be eaten carefully so that crumbs don't fall all over the place. After taking Communion, take one piece of antidoron (you don't need four or five pieces) and when you return to your place, eat the bread trying not to drop crumbs. If you want to give a piece to someone else, go ahead and take an extra piece—don't break yours in half (it produces too many crumbs). And monitor your children as they take the antidoron and teach them to eat it respectfully. After the Dismissal, all may come forward to receive the holy bread from the priest. It is appropriate, but not required, to kiss his hand, if the blessing cross is not offered.

A Final Thought on Church Etiquette

North American society in the early 21st century is rather casual in its approach to life. Don't allow this prevailing attitude to enter your Orthodox Christian piety. There are surely a lot of other areas that could be covered here. Much of church etiquette is based on common sense and showing respect for God and others. Always remember that you are in church to worship God, the Holy Trinity. When the priest or deacon says, "With the fear of God and faith and love, draw near" let this be the way you approach all of worship. If you do, you will probably have good church etiquette.

Conclusion

The information contained in this guidebook is intended to be just that—a guide to allowing you and our entire community to get the most out of our involvement in the life of the Church. Like all guides, there are times that call for adjusting, but these should be made in consultation with the parish priest rather than having all members assume a different standard can apply to them. Your priest is available to you for questions, concerns, doubts, or even disagreements with anything contained herein. It is preferable to discuss such issues rather than allow concerns to become opportunities for division. All aspects of our church life are for our salvation, and when seen in that light, can be edifying aspects to our communal journey to the Kingdom of God. May each moment of each day bring us one step closer to His Kingdom. Amen!