

# Our Parish Handbook

## St. Alexis Orthodox Christian Church



Drawing by Stasia PenkoffLedbeck

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## **Acknowledgment**

I would like to thank the members of the Parish Council who helped with the initial previewing of this handbook: Susan Hayes, Demetra Tolis, William Brubaker, James Pepitone and Susan Egan. I would most especially like to remember Deborah Bray (Memory Eternal!) for her input. She reviewed much of this work while on her sickbed, and while her desire to see this handbook published never came to be realized, her contributions remain.

I would also like to thank Joan Skrobat and Melissa Josefiak for the critical editing, questioning and word-smithing of this handbook. I found their insights and suggestions to be truly valuable.

The intent of this handbook is to reflect the life of this parish, so I welcome each and everyone's feedback with regards to this project. How can we make the next edition better? What do we need to add or remove? What needs to be changed?

And, of course, any errors found herein are mine alone.

In Christ,  
Fr. Steven Hosking  
November, 2017

## **Preamble**

Saint Alexis Toth of Wilkes-Barre Orthodox Christian Church (established in 1994) located in Clinton, Connecticut, is a Parish in the autocephalous Orthodox Church in America, and is incorporated as a non-profit religious corporation in the State of Connecticut, as of January 27, 1998, and is duly recognized by the laws and statutes of the government of the United States.

As the local community of the Church, the Parish exists for the purpose of worshipping God according to the Holy Scriptures and Tradition of the Holy Orthodox Church, to encourage union with God among the members of the Parish, to provide religious education and charitable aid for its members and the community, and to defend, promote and be a witness to the Orthodox Faith in America. Our Church statement is as follows:

**Saint Alexis Toth of Wilkes-Barre Orthodox Christian Church is a local English-speaking community of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) on the shoreline of Connecticut.**

**The St. Alexis Orthodox Church exists to:**

- **Call all people to Christ**
- **Worship as a community**
- **Experience the joy of Christ in our lives**
- **Share this joy with those around us**
- **Educate people about the truth and presence of Orthodoxy**

**We offer the love of Christ to those in need, both in word and action.**

The Parish is part of the Orthodox Church in America and the Diocese of New England, and therefore, its organization and its administration are subject to the Statutes of the Orthodox Church in America, adopted by the Second All-American Council of October 19-21, 1971, and as amended by subsequent All-American Councils, and to the decisions of the Diocesan Assemblies of the Diocese of New England, and to the decisions of all relevant governing bodies of the Orthodox Church in America.

The Parish is primarily a spiritual body recognized by the canons and traditions, disciplines and regulations of the Orthodox Church in America. Its adoption of a civil corporate existence is done to allow it recognition in a secular world. The Parish By-Laws (available separately) attempt to reflect the letter and spirit of the current Statutes of the Orthodox Church in America.

The core of our life is centered on worship. Orthodox churches still use forms of worship that were practiced in the first century. Our worship is based, for the most part, on passages from Holy Scripture. We sing all services, joining our voices in simple harmony to ancient melodies. Musical instruments are not used in church. Services are in English. Orthodox worship is filled with repentance, gratitude and unending praise. Guests are always welcome.

Every Saturday night, beginning at 5:30 PM, we sing Great Vespers, which begins our celebration of each Sunday as a feast of Christ's Resurrection. The community assembles again on Sunday morning at 9:30 AM for the Divine Liturgy, which is a Eucharistic service. It is here that the Church finds its vocation as the very mystery and sacrament of Christ's Presence. Here we partake of the Kingdom of God in all joy and gladness. Other services are scheduled according to the daily cycle of prayer<sup>1</sup> held by the Church and the Feasts of the Church<sup>2</sup> according to the Revised or "New" Julian calendar. Come and see!

## **Introduction**

### **Orthodox Christianity<sup>3</sup>**

What is Christianity and where does the Orthodox Church fit in?

### **Christianity**

Christianity has become so fragmented that it is now almost impossible to summarize what Christians as a whole believe and still be talking about all who call themselves Christians. However, the Christian faith in the fullness of its traditional manifestation can be said to be based upon the following intuitions [beliefs] and affirmations:

1. There is “define-able,” recognizable Truth - relativism is unacceptable. (Truth)
2. Truth finds its ultimate expression in God, the One Who Is - “I am.”(Monotheism)
3. God has revealed Himself to Man, - His creature - in history in various ways and ultimately through His Son, Jesus Christ. (Incarnation)
4. God has sent His Spirit to be with us until the end of this world when we will be received into His Kingdom if we are found to be His servants. (The Trinity / Eschatology)

### **The Orthodox Church**

The Orthodox Church is the original Christian Church established by our Lord Jesus Christ upon the foundation of the Apostles - He, Himself, being the chief Cornerstone - and enlivened by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

The Orthodox Church is nothing less than the Church, founded by our Lord Jesus Christ. Although the Orthodox Church judges the soul of no man, leaving judgment solely to God, the Orthodox Church does claim that the Orthodox Church, and the Orthodox Church alone, is the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church confessed in the Nicene Creed.

The claim of the Orthodox Church to be the one and only true Church (and by extension, therefore, the one and only true religion or belief system) is based upon four factors:

1. That the Orthodox Church has maintained an unbroken historical continuity with the original Church founded by Jesus in Jerusalem. (True History)
2. That the Orthodox Church has faithfully maintained the apostolic faith “once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), neither adding to nor subtracting from it. (True

Faith/Doctrine)

3. That the Orthodox Church faithfully and rightly worships God the Father in Spirit and Truth, providing mankind with personal access to the life and grace of the All-Holy Trinity. (True Worship)
4. That the Orthodox Church has produced untold numbers of saints throughout the centuries - persons who bear within themselves in true sanctity the uncreated grace of God. (True Sanctity)

All four of these factors - history, doctrine, worship, and spirituality - are all different aspects of the fullness of the true faith. None is sufficient without the others. It is the bold claim of Orthodox Christians that only within the Orthodox Church and Orthodoxy Christianity are all four of these factors fully and correctly present.

## **Our Parish**

*(Originally written and compiled by Fr. Steven Voytovich, D. Min., edited for length)*

The Holy Orthodox Faith was planted in Kodiak Alaska by a group of 8 monks in 1794, with the building of Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church in the midst of missionary outreach to the Aleut native population. Just about 100 years later immigration of Orthodox and Uniate faithful was occurring on the East coast of the United States. Fr. Alexis Toth was assisting a number of parish communities in returning to Orthodoxy from the Unia.<sup>4</sup> Among the parishes he led in this manner was the Protection of the Theotokos Church in Minneapolis, and Holy Resurrection Church in Wilkes-Barre, PA. He was also present as the faithful in Bridgeport decided to make this move in August of 1894. He died in 1909.

In May of 1994 two related events were occurring. Fr. Alexis was canonized a saint at St. Tikhon's Monastery in South Canaan, PA. During the same month a group of 10 Orthodox faithful met with Fr. Basil Grisel from the CT Deanery, in an upper room of the local Stop and Shop store during a rainstorm, to explore the formation of a mission on the Connecticut shoreline. They were welcomed by The Rev. Martin Gibbs of the Congregational Church community in Clinton to begin meeting there for Vespers. Following a meeting in June, the small community met with Archpriest Michael Westerberg, New England Diocesan Chancellor, and Archpriest Nicholas Timpko, Dean of CT Deanery in August to discuss moving formally to mission station status.

A picnic was held at the Madison Surf Club later in August that outlined the steps that needed to occur for a mission to be established. The three essential elements were: 25 financially committed members, a permanent location to be approved by the Diocesan

Council, and names for the potential mission to be submitted to the Metropolitan. About seventeen souls had gathered to commit to establishing this mission. A majority of this group was currently attending Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Church (New Haven), and Fr. Michael Westerberg had given his blessing for these parishioners to explore the potential for the mission. Parishioners of other local communities that lived locally stepped forward, and a number of these sister parishes were very generous in supporting the mission. Holy Ghost Church in Bridgeport offered some liturgical items and vestments, Three Saints in Ansonia also donated some liturgical items, as did St. Nicholas Church in Norwich.

The community met again on September 21st at the Congregational Church. In creating a more formal community David Sizemore became the secretary, and Fr. Steven Voytovich a deanery priest originally from Holy Protection Cathedral, in Minneapolis MN, where St. Alexis first ministered in this country, joined the group in September 1994 to offer spiritual guidance when Fr. Basil could no longer continue. As directed by the diocesan clergy, a geographical name was requested. Helen Ackles offered "Clinton Orthodox Mission" which was unanimously accepted by all present. Following the presentation of a chart of the state showing where current Orthodox parishes were located and how the Clinton Mission would fill an area not currently served, this mission was given a formal blessing to assemble by Metropolitan THEODOSIUS at the 32nd Diocesan Assembly, held in Kingston, Massachusetts, October 28-29, 1994. A letter was drafted to First Selectman James McCusker, Jr., seeking assistance in locating a suitable space to rent. During its formative years as a parish community, Fr. Steven worked as a chaplain in hospital settings, where he completed training to conduct Clinical Pastoral Education, assisting in paving the way for other Orthodox Christians to engage in institutional chaplaincy.

The liturgical life of the mission was a priority even without actual rental space. On January 21, 1995, homes of the mission faithful were blessed. The evening ended with Vespers and a potluck supper at the home of Raymond and Christine Boyd. After several unsuccessful attempts to secure a semipermanent meeting space, Victor Kuziak had located a potential space at a condominium office building in Clinton near the Westbrook border. On February 25, 1995 this rental space was secured at 10 Bluff Avenue, unit 1-1-1, from Michael Salafia. The rented unit ironically had not been previously used since the building was constructed. Victor Kuziak and Marina Leonidas co-signed the deposit as we did not yet have funding through the mission.

Services began with Forgiveness Sunday Vespers on March 5, 1995. The first Divine Liturgy was celebrated on Sunday, March 26th. In April of the same year we began celebrating a regular Saturday and Sunday schedule of services, and regularly



participated in the Clinton ecumenical council of Churches, including securing a week in the rotation of serving dinner at the Soup Kitchen.

Efforts were also made in selecting the name for the mission. Of the nine names submitted, the four most favored names were: St. Innocent, Enlightener of the Aleuts, St. Jacob of Alaska, St. Herman of Alaska, St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre. During the Divine Liturgy on 04/09/95, four names were placed on the altar, then placed in the chalice with young people choosing two among them. Alexis Boyd selected St. Alexis; St. Herman was also chosen. Metropolitan THEODOSIUS selected St. Alexis from among all the names submitted. In May 1995 we were blessed with the name of St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre Orthodox Mission in time to celebrate our patronal feast day for the first time on the date of May 7th as proclaimed by the Holy Synod as St. Alexis' Feast Day!

Archpriest Nicholas Timpko, Dean of the CT Deanery, was invited in June 1995 for the election of officers. Alex Martins was elected President, Irene Forssen Vice President, Christine Boyd, Secretary, and Maureen Skuby, Treasurer. Later in June we traveled to All-Saints of North America Mission in Salisbury, as became tradition between the three missions in CT. Fr. Steven was sent to the All-American Council by St. Alexis Mission in July. By September 19, 1995, the *mission station* was elevated to *mission* status, [where as] Fr. Steven was formally attached, and finances were to be run through the deanery checking account. By the 32nd Diocesan Assembly the Clinton Mission pledged stewardship to the diocese and the OCA. We participated in the "Clinton Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service" in November 1995 for the first time, and also hosted a Diocesan Council meeting. We also participated in the Clinton Bluefish Festival in August 1995 and 1996 both to contribute to the community and to inform the community of the presence of a new church community.

We blessed the waters of Long Island Sound for the first time on the Sunday following the Feast of Theophany in 1996, and hosted our first Great Lenten Retreat. In February of 1996 we began as a regular weekly rotation of parish members in participating in the Clinton soup kitchen. Work was undertaken to develop By-Laws and our Mission Statement utilizing an MBA Thesis written by Tim Skuby, a parishioner of the Mission, that included developing a five-year mission plan. A sign was also constructed and began to be placed on Route 1 on Sunday mornings. By-Laws and our Mission Statement were completed and reviewed in early June prior to being sent to the Metropolitan for review. Metropolitan THEODOSIUS made his first formal visit to St. Alexis Mission on Saturday and Sunday, June 8 and 9, 1996. Dn. John Hopko, the Metropolitan's Secretary and Fr. Steven's classmate, accompanied the Metropolitan. A meal was held at Boyd's home on Saturday evening, and Leon's Restaurant catered lunch after Sunday Liturgy. Later in June plans were underway to lease the unit

adjacent to our current unit to ease our increasing space needs.

After a great deal of searching around the shoreline area for a permanent location, in April of 1997 we received a favorable response to our request to lease toward purchase of a property owned by Theodore and Jean Konstantino, parents of Paul Konstantino and his wife Shari (members of the parish). They purchased it originally for \$125,000, and St. Alexis Mission leased the bank property where the church was built. Later, Mr. and Mrs. Konstantino sold the property to St. Alexis Mission for \$90,000, allowing \$60,000 in equity to be added into the building process. This property is located at 108 East Main Street, next to an historic 18th home (built in 1710?) on 110 East Main Street, also part of the property. Planning began in earnest to build a church on this site for a permanent home for St. Alexis Mission. Alex Martins undertook most of the preliminary drawings which were through parishioner input. Hibbard and Rosal, Architects of Middletown, Connecticut, produced final drawings. The structure was reviewed by Barry Steinberg, a local professional engineer, of Hamden, Connecticut. Meanwhile, after our By-Laws were officially approved in March, we held our first annual meeting on November 9th, 1997. Official officers were chosen for the first time for the mission: Alexander Martins, President, Edward Hayes, Vice President, Christine Boyd, Secretary, and Shari Konstantino, Treasurer.

On November 22, 1997, the groundbreaking was celebrated for a new church building, along with a capital campaign. The service was celebrated by Metropolitan THEODOSIUS and Deacon John Hopko, along with Fr. Steven Voytovich. James McCusker, First Selectman, Clinton, CT was present, as was Archpriest Nicholas Timpko, Dean of the Connecticut Deanery. Fr. Constantine Simones of St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church, New London, came in support as well. Plans had been approved both by our Metropolitan and the Town of Clinton, and building began in earnest. Even though this was to be the mission's major focus for the coming years, outreach activities such as supporting the soup kitchen and participating in the local ecumenical services did not waver. St. Alexis community has also participated in an annual Ecumenical Thanksgiving Services.

Thanks to Michael Kuziak, a parishioner of our community, John Carmelo of Hibbard and Rosa Architects, led a group of faithful handy with hammers in laying the subfloor after the concrete was poured. Questa Building and Design was chosen to construct the church structure following approval of the plans through the Town of Clinton and by Metropolitan THEODOSIUS in the Spring of 1998. It had always been the plan to build a permanent home for the mission, and about \$30,000 had been raised by the time preparations were in place to build! The cost to build the church was just under \$200,000.

The first official service held in the new church was Forgiveness Sunday Vespers, on February 21, 1999. After the Divine Liturgy at Bluff Avenue, all the sacred articles and belongings were packed up and moved to 108 East Main Street. It should be noted that our first service in the church building was for Peter Yannatos' funeral the week prior to our scheduled official opening. He had wanted to celebrate the new church building with his family and died just prior to its completion. His family came to the funeral, completing his wish.

We were also blessed by a wonderful donation to St. Alexis. Earlier when the mission was being formed, Archpriest Michael Koblosh, then pastor of Holy Ghost Church, Bridgeport, initiated a donation of service items to the mission, some of which were used in the consecration. Now, in May of 1999, they came forward with a most special donation of the seven-branch candle stand that had stood in the original Holy Ghost Church that St. Alexis had blessed.

Later that year, on October 29-30, St. Alexis Mission hosted the New England Diocesan Assembly in our new church building. Since that time work continued on the interior. Through an introduction by then Archbishop HERMAN at St. Tikhon's, Fr. Steven met Mr. Valery Soldatov. Later Archdeacon Alexei Klimitchev, now Metropolitan HERMAN's deacon and stepson of Mr. Soldatov, introduced Fr. Steven to Ivan Roumiantsev, an iconographer. They worked together to build and paint the icon panels for the iconostas. This was an early coordinated effort between these two artists. The woodcarver and iconographer worked together to build the iconostas at St. Tikhon's Monastery, and it was transported and assembled by them and Archdeacon Alexei here in Clinton. The iconostas was installed in April of 2002 just before Holy Week. The rest of the altar furnishings were completed in May 2003.

We were blessed to receive relics of St. Alexis from Metropolitan THEODOSIUS that have been placed in the icon of St. Alexis, painted by our iconographer. He also brought relics of St. Herman and St. Raphael of Brooklyn when he made a surprise visit to St. Alexis Mission in the Spring of 2002 prior to his retirement. He also recognized Mat. Cindy Voytovich, St. Alexis' Choir Director, for years of service on the Diocesan Council with the Order of St. Innocent, Silver Class, and recognized Fr. Steven's priestly service with a Gold Cross.

A great deal of preparation preceded the consecration of the church, including semi-completion of the basement, and additional furnishing of the church. Most of the original altar furnishings, including the altar table constructed by Steven Martins, son of Alex Martins, and finished by parishioners, were donated to Christ the Savior Mission,

forming in Fenwick Island, Delaware, by relatives of Olga Kucharski from St. Alexis. On May 7th, 2004, we celebrated the Feast of St. Alexis, receiving 'parish' status, through the blessing of now Metropolitan HERMAN, and the consecration of St. Alexis Church on the following day. The celebration was celebrated by Metropolitan HERMAN, retired Metropolitan THEODOSIUS, and Bishop NIKON.

In advance of the consecration, requests were made for stones for the sealing of the top of the altar from parishes founded by St. Alexis. Jane (Varian) Smith sent a stone from the bedrock of the Holy Protection Cathedral, located in Minneapolis, MN, that was excavated when their elevator was put in. Archpriest Joseph Martin, current pastor of Holy Resurrection Church, Wilkes-Barre, not only sent a stone, but brought St. Alexi's mitre and Gospel, the latter being used during the consecration and Divine Liturgy that he also concelebrated. Fr. Vadim Pismenny, current pastor of Holy Ghost Church sent a third stone. A fourth stone was sought from St. Alexis' homeland. When that did not work out, Fr. Steven went to the Clinton shoreline with parish youth, who together selected the fourth stone.

Additional preparations for the consecration included the preparation of the first cloth to cover the altar table, prepared from material donated by Holy Ghost Church ten years earlier, with a portion of the cloth St. Alexis was wrapped in prior to his canonization sewn in over the reliquary in the form of a cross.

Rose water given by Holy Ghost was used in the water to wash the altar table. We are also grateful for the relics that were placed in the altar that included early martyrs from Palestine and the New-Martyr Grand Duchess Elizabeth of Russia.

Through God's abundant blessing, and God's love inspiring the faithful past and present to proclaim Christ to the world, this community and temple are a response to all those who have made St. Alexis their spiritual home. This temple is a beginning, not an end, pointing the way toward greater plans and goals for the future. With the dream of establishing a permanent mission on the greater Clinton shoreline being realized, it is our intention to continue moving forward with plans for outreach into the community while we grow as the Body of Christ.

The community of St. Alexis has continued to grow as a family, celebrating annual picnics and social celebrations following the Feasts of the Nativity and Great and Holy Pascha just to share in fellowship. Visitors are warmly welcomed by a community that represents generations of Orthodox faithful as well as those more recently converting.

Many have contributed toward the completion and consecration of this church, the

greater Clinton community, the New England Diocese, and the Orthodox Church in America. To those who have fallen asleep in the Lord we pray, Memory Eternal. To those still with us, we pray God grant you Many Years.

With the consecration of the church ... we celebrate the fulfillment of a dream to establish a permanent Orthodox Church on the greater Clinton shoreline. Thanks be to God!

### **For Further Information**

Every week our parish publishes paper and electronic bulletins in which can be found the parish schedule, the parish prayer list, notes and comments from the pastor, various announcements, and relevant texts from Hymnography and Holy Scripture. A monthly calendar in classic grid format is also distributed. The official By-Laws of the Parish, last amended in November 2017, are also available to all members of the parish.

### **Contact Details**

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During periods of inclement weather, changes to service and activity schedules will be posted on the parish website and Facebook page. Notice will also be posted on WFSB - Channel 3, as well as via email. Should a situation arise when a schedule change is necessary, email and a phone chain will be initiated.

### **Useful Web Sites**

**[www.stalexischurch.org](http://www.stalexischurch.org)**: Our parish's web site. Includes contact details, parish calendar, on-line edition of the parish bulletin, parish photos and more.

**[www.oca.org](http://www.oca.org)**: The official web site of our Orthodox Church in America. Includes administrative information, news, clergy and parish listings, daily scripture readings, lives of saints, liturgical materials (music, etc.), and excellent catechetical materials.

**[www.dneoca.org](http://www.dneoca.org)**: The official web site of our Diocese of New England. Includes information about the diocese and the on-line edition of the Diocesan newspaper.

**www.orthodoxfellowship.org:** The official web site of the Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America (FOCA) of which our parish has a chapter.

**www.ocf.net:** The official web site of the Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF); the official campus ministry organization of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America.

**www.ancientfaith.com:** Superb Orthodox Christian on-line radio, including contributions from some of the very best Orthodox Christian preachers and teachers in the English language - supremely worth a visit, an absolute treasury of Orthodox Christian preaching and teaching. Also includes Orthodox Christian music.

**www.stots.edu:** The official web site of St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary, includes link to their press and bookstore.

**www.svots.edu:** The official web site of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, includes link to their press and bookstore.

**www.iocc.org:** The official web site of International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), the leading Orthodox Christian charitable organization in the world - the best place to donate money in response to any large-scale crises. A gift to IOCC is always appropriate.

**www.ocmc.org:** The official web site of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) an organization which sponsors foreign missions of the Orthodox Church, such as work in Africa and Central America.

## **Worship**

### **Liturgical Services**

The liturgical life of our parish represents a wonderful opportunity both within our parish community and within the broader community around us. The joy and gift of worshipping God freely and truly is something we should value highly.

The Divine Liturgy is served every Sunday morning. Great Vespers is served each Saturday evening, the eve (beginning) of Sunday. The full Sunday cycle is, again, something we should more fully keep in our parish. Indeed, the “vigil” we keep is not just the church service, but should extend from the Saturday evening services through the Sunday morning services in sober, prayerful, and quiet living.

We celebrate all the major feast days and some of the lesser ones as well. Usually the pattern for festal celebrations is that of Festal Great Vespers (with Litya) on the eve of the Feast and Divine Liturgy on the morning of the feast. We occasionally celebrate “Vesperal” Divine Liturgies on the eves of feasts in hopes of making it possible for more people who have employment and school related commitments and responsibilities on weekday mornings to receive Holy Communion on the feast days. On some occasions, when it has been hard for us, in our weakness, to serve full liturgical services for a feast day, we have served prayer services (“molebens,” “akathists”) so that the feast might be kept in some small way. Daily Matins services are also observed twice a week.

During the Nativity Fast (Advent) we add a weekday service (Compline) each week to prepare for the celebration of Christmas and during Great Lent we have a very full and fulfilling liturgical schedule that represents a tremendous opportunity for all of us to grow and develop our Christian lives of worship, praise and prayer.

### **Sacramental Life**

All parishioners are encouraged to prepare for and partake of Holy Communion at every Divine Liturgy, at the Vesperal Divine Liturgy on Feast Days, and at the Presanctified Liturgies during Great Lent. In preparation for receiving Holy Communion on a frequent basis one should receive the Sacrament of Confession *at least monthly*.<sup>5</sup> Other preparations should include attendance at Saturday evening Vespers, the reading of the Pre and Post Communion Prayers, either at home or in church, and the keeping of a Eucharistic Fast. For Orthodox Christians, it is traditional to fast from all food and drink from midnight until receiving Holy Communion at a Divine Liturgy celebrated in the morning. To receive Holy Communion at a Vesperal Divine Liturgy or a Presanctified Liturgy, you should abstain from food and drink from at least the noon hour. Please see the pastor, should you have any questions about your own individual

manner of preparation.

All active parishioners are expected to make a personal Confession at least twice a year--once during the Christmas Advent season and once during Great Lent. In addition, throughout the remainder of the year, the Rite of General Confession is offered on alternating Wednesday evenings of the month, at the Evening Prayer service. Regular communicants ought to make a personal Confession or participate in General Confession at least once a month.

Other than during Advent or Great Lent, personal Confessions are heard on Saturday evenings after Vespers, on Wednesdays during "Open Doors"<sup>6</sup> or by making an appointment with the pastor. If you would like to know more about what it means to pursue a spiritual life, please see "Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving" on the OCA web site.<sup>7</sup>

### **Communion and Confession**

It is a great temptation to talk about "minimums" in Church life. We all too often wish to reduce the Life in Christ, which ought to be of concern to us everywhere and always, to some set of "minimum obligations." So, it is with some trepidation that we enter into this discussion of Confession and Communion.

In our parish frequent and regular participation in Holy Communion<sup>8</sup> has become the norm for most of those regularly participating in the life of the parish. This is, at core, a good thing; but, we must not abuse the privilege. Privileges always come with accompanying responsibilities. For as incorrect as it might be to refuse the call to "In the fear of God, with faith and love draw near," it is at least as inappropriate to receive the Holy Things in a thoughtless manner without due care and preparation. Certainly, we ought to be receiving Holy Communion regularly and even frequently. However, we must do so with correct preparation, never feeling worthy to draw near, except insofar as our Lord's love and mercy makes it possible for us to participate in His Broken Body and Spilled Blood.

Among other things, correct preparation for the reception of Holy Communion includes, as an absolutely essential part, participation in the Mystery (Sacrament) of Holy Confession. By Holy Confession, we are here referring not to the practice often termed "General Confession," but to the traditional practice of what is usually termed private or personal Confession.

When, in times past, people did not receive Holy Communion on a frequent basis, often only approaching the Chalice once or twice a year, each reception of the Holy Things



was preceded by participation in the Sacrament of Confession.<sup>9</sup>

In February 1972, in response to the growing revival of frequent and regular participation in Holy Communion by the faithful, the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America issued an encyclical, an official letter, on the subject of Confession and Communion. This encyclical still stands as the official statement of our Church concerning Confession and Communion. In that letter, the statement was made that the norm for any person regularly approaching Holy Communion would be that the same person would participate in private, personal Confession at *least once a month*, that is twelve times a year, while also on a regular basis participating in the rite that has come to be termed General Confession. (General Confession, in this context, refers to a rite in which the priest on behalf of those gathered makes a general confession of sins. Then the prayer of absolution is read in turn personally over each person present, at which time each one is given a chance additionally to confess any other sins they might want to mention specifically before receiving absolution.)

Given these directives of our Bishops, how are we to order our lives in our parish?

The fact of the matter is that in our parish, where more than one hundred persons regularly receive Holy Communion, it would presently be quite difficult for the pastor to hear one hundred private Confessions a month. To do so with any seriousness regarding the sacrament or any depth of pastoral care towards the penitents would be nearly impossible.

So, as a concession to our weakness, and following an approach that is usual and customary presently in the parishes of the Orthodox Church in America, the following is what we endeavor to do in our parish as regards Confession and Communion:

- Those regularly and frequently receiving Holy Communion should endeavor to prepare themselves through prayer and fasting each time that they will be approaching the Chalice. This preparation properly includes attendance at the Great Vespers (or Vigil when offered) the evening before the Divine Liturgy (especially on Saturday evenings), the keeping of the evening and night before the reception of Holy Communion in a quiet, peaceful and prayerful manner, usually including the reading of certain prayers to prepare one's self for receiving the Holy Things the next morning, and complete abstinence from food and drink from midnight preceding the morning of the Divine Liturgy at which one will receive Holy Communion. If some issue or concern is particularly weighing on a person's conscience he or she should endeavor to resolve this issue, as soon as possible and before receiving Holy Communion, by seeking the pastor out for consultation. If anyone needs guidance in

the matter of preparation through prayer and fasting for Holy Communion, please see the pastor for more discussion.

- Those regularly and frequently receiving Holy Communion should also endeavor to regularly participate in the Sacrament of Confession. It seems that the rhythm that is most workable in this regard is that each faithful person who is regularly and frequently approaching the Chalice should without fail come to private, personal Confession during Great Lent and also during the Nativity Fast (Advent). This is the “minimum,” if we are so bold as to dare speak of such a thing as a minimum. Each regular communicant should also strongly consider coming for private, personal Confession during one or both of the other two major fasting seasons in the Church’s calendar, that is, the Apostle’s Fast (kept each year from the Monday after All Saints Day through to the Feast of Ss. Peter and Paul on June 29) and the Dormition Fast (August 1-14, each year). Some people who are facing particularly acute spiritual challenges in their lives may find it appropriate and helpful to confess privately and personally on an even more frequent basis. In the end, each person needs to work out a regular rhythm in this regard that is compatible both with the regular reception of Holy Communion and the particular circumstances of his or her own life. To achieve this end, “General Confession” is also offered on alternating Wednesdays of each month, during Evening Prayers (outside of a given Fasting season).
- At any time, if one falls into particular sin, one should, without delay, make an appointment and come for private, personal Confession. It is dangerous to put off participation in the Sacrament of Confession to a later time if one is either in an obvious state of sin, or carrying in one’s conscience the remembrance of a particularly weighty sin. It is especially spiritually unhealthy to put off necessary participation in the Sacrament of Confession, while continuing at the same time to approach the Chalice for Holy Communion.

As an addition to (but absolutely not a replacement for) this rhythm of private, personal Confession, we use in our parish a rite of so-called General Confession. Outside of the four major fasting seasons, on alternating Wednesdays of the month, we gather for this rite, which has already been described above. Hopefully, through the careful and prayerful use of this rite, described and blessed in the Encyclical of the Holy Synod of Bishops mentioned earlier, we will bridge the gap in our lives from general Confession to personal Confession, and thus will remain in the proper mindset of repentance and renewal as we regularly participate in Holy Communion.

## **Participation in Worship**

### **Use of Candles**

Candles are available for sale at the Candle Desk located in the Narthex of the Church. Candles are used in the Orthodox Church as symbols and offerings during the liturgical services. In our parish we use traditional 100% beeswax tapers, as well as paraffin votive candles.

In a general sense, the lighting of a candle in Church symbolizes the life of a Christian person. Until a candle is lit it is cold and hard. Once lit it is warmed and softened and then consumed by the flame. In the same way, we human beings can be spiritually “cold and hard” until our hearts and minds are “warmed and softened” by the grace of God. When we, faithful Christians, allow ourselves to become “on fire” with God’s love we can be consumed by that divine love in a beautiful and powerful way.

In a more particular and specific sense, the lighting of a candle in Church is an offering. The faithful purchase candles, thus making a monetary offering to the Church and then light those candles as an offering of prayer. The candles are set in stands in significant parts of the Church, usually near a particular icon of Our Lord, His Mother, or a particular saint or group of saints. When we offer a candle by lighting it and placing it in a particular place in the Church we should simultaneously offer a prayer. For example, we may light a candle and place it to burn near an icon of a particular saint and, at the same time, ask that saint’s intercession before God on behalf of our self or a person for whom we wish to pray. We, also, may light and place candles at the votive stand (which is located to left side ‘alcove’ as one enters the Nave of the Church) as offerings of prayer on behalf of those who are ill or suffering. Additionally, candles may be lit not only as petitions asking for God’s blessings to be given, but as prayerful offerings of gratitude for blessings already received.

### **Choir**

The Parish Choir leads the singing and chanting of the responses at the Divine Services. Membership in the Parish Choir is open to every member of the parish. The Parish Choir is led by the duly appointed Choir Director who is appointed to that position by the Pastor. In order to fulfill their duties to the best of their ability the Parish Choir holds regular rehearsals as scheduled by the Pastor in consultation with the Choir Director.<sup>10</sup>

The Choir does not sing instead of the gathered faithful, nor are they performing a concert of liturgical music. The Choir’s role is to lead the singing and chanting. Indeed, all the faithful people are expected as they are able to sing the responses at the Divine Services. After all, many parts of the services are well known to all who regularly

participated in the Church's worship and, thus, we ought to all be able to participate fully, which include praising God with our God given voices.

### **Altar Servers**

The altar servers are young men who, at the discretion and by appointment of the Pastor, serve in the altar during the Divine Services. In order to serve as an altar server a young man must be a fully participating member of the parish, which includes regular participation in the sacraments of Confession and Communion and regular attendance at Divine Services.

### **Attendants**

The attendants are men and women (of all ages) who, at the discretion and by appointment of the Pastor, perform certain duties in the Nave of the Church during the Divine Services. In order to serve as an attendant a person must be a fully participating member of the parish, which includes regular participation in the sacraments of Confession and Communion and regular attendance at Divine Services. Duties at this time include participating in the procession with icons during the Great Entrance during Liturgy, distribution of the post-communion bread ("antidoron") at the Divine Liturgy and the lighting of the beeswax tapers, as well as monitoring burning candles and extinguishing and cleaning up candle stubs from the candle holders.

### **Readers**

Readers are the "voice" of the church during certain portions of the services. The holy order of the Reader upholds the spiritual responsibility for the care of the spoken words or Holy Scripture. In societies where most people are unable to read the Scriptures, the office of the Reader provides the most regular exposure to the Word of God outside the Gospel and Epistle readings. In societies where literacy has flooded the human heart and mind with disharmony, noise, and confusion, the sacred responsibilities of the Reader are even more critical, since by the prayerful and holy exercise of his ministerial responsibilities, the Reader offers the Holy Scriptures as a correcting balm, and a healing of the spiritual hearts of the faithful.

## **Pastoral Services**

All pastoral services provided by the parish priest are in conformance with the Tradition of the Holy Orthodox Church, and the guidelines provided by the Synod of the OCA<sup>11</sup> and the Diocese of New England<sup>12</sup>.

## **Baptisms**

The practice of Baptism<sup>13</sup> is not uniquely Christian. Many religions have the rite of ritual washing. Almost always this washing symbolizes renewal, of dying to an old way of life and being born again to a new way of life. For Christians, Baptism takes on new and particular significance. It no longer remains merely a sign of moral and spiritual rebirth. Rather, it is understood to be the act of a person's death and resurrection in and with Jesus Christ. When a person is baptized he or she acknowledges himself or herself to be a follower of Jesus Christ. He or she acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord, God and Savior and commits himself or herself to live in function of that confession of faith.

In the Orthodox Church, Baptism is immediately confirmed by Chrismation,<sup>14</sup> the anointing of the newly baptized person with specially blessed oil called "Chrism." Christians understand this marking or sealing with Chrism to confer upon the one being chrismated the gift of Holy Spirit. As the Church was given the gift of the Holy Spirit on the Feast of Pentecost, so too the newly baptized is given the gift of the Holy Spirit of God, in order to live the new life in Christ received in Baptism. Finally, following Baptism and Chrismation, the newly baptized is admitted to Holy Communion - union in and with God through the receiving of the broken body and spilled blood of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, by partaking of the eucharistic elements, consecrated bread and wine. In the Orthodox Church, children are baptized and chrismated and given Holy Communion as infants. Children are understood to be able to be fully members of the Church from infancy insofar as they are brought up and guided in the faith by faithful adults, usually their parents.

Given this understanding the following specific points can be made about the Orthodox Church's present practice of Baptism:

- Baptism in the Orthodox Church implies that the person being baptized wishes to be a practicing member of the Orthodox Church, confessing Jesus Christ as King and Lord. In the case of a child, Baptism implies, at minimum, that at least one of the child's parents is committed to raising the child as a Christian, in the Orthodox Church.
- Since Baptism involves a commitment to Christ and His Church, it follows that the

sponsors (often called "Godparents") of the one being baptized are themselves Orthodox Christians. (After all, a person cannot sponsor another person for membership in an organization in which the sponsoring person is not himself or herself a member!)

- Though it is now traditional to have two sponsors at a Baptism, the formal requirement is that there be one sponsor of the same gender as the person being baptized. This sponsor must be a practicing Orthodox Christian in good standing that has appropriately prepared himself or herself for this awesome responsibility particularly by means of Confession and Communion. The fitness of the chosen person to serve as sponsor must be confirmed by the priest who is the pastor of the parish in which the Baptism is taking place.
- As long as this basic requirement of one same gender, practicing, Orthodox Christian sponsor is fulfilled, it may be possible, with the prior permission of the priest, for others to serve as "honorary" Godparents. (The Church allows this as a concession to the realities of present life - it is not formally encouraged.) At a minimum, however, these "honorary" Godparents must self-identify as Christians, even if at the present time they are not actually living out their faith. These "honorary" Godparents will be allowed to participate in the Rite of Baptism in ways that will be determined in advance by the priest. Such participation may include holding the child during the portion of the Rite that comes before the actual Baptism. The spoken responses required of the Godparents during the Rite, such as the acceptance of Christ and the reading of the Confession of Faith (the Creed) must be performed by the actual Orthodox Christian sponsor.

Regarding the specific occasion of a Baptism the following points should be noted:

- The time and place of the service are to be determined in consultation with the priest. Normally Baptisms take place at one of two times - immediately before the celebration of the Divine Liturgy on Sunday mornings, which is the ideal, or on Saturday afternoons before the celebration of the Lord's Day (Sunday) Vespers service. Both of these times are acceptable because they allow for the person receiving Baptism and Chrismation to then participate in the celebration of the Sunday morning Divine Liturgy and to receive Holy Communion. Why be baptized if you are not then going to participate in the central act of the Church— the Divine Liturgy and the reception of Holy Communion?
- The newly baptized Christian is brought to Holy Communion by his or her sponsor or sponsors and, if possible, by his or her parents. All those receiving Communion must

have prepared themselves appropriately. There are cases and circumstances that do not allow all these people to accompany the child to Communion (the pastor will make this determination), but the primary sponsor must be prepared to bring the newly baptized to Communion and to himself or herself also receive Holy Communion. When approaching Holy Communion for the first time the newly baptized person should be wearing his or her Baptismal gown and be accompanied by his or her lighted Baptismal candles. (The gown and candles are discussed in further detail later in these notes.)

For the Baptism itself the following should be provided by the sponsors, the family, the person coming for Baptism himself or herself (in the case of an adult), or other interested and helpful persons:

- A Baptismal cross: Often this is provided by the sponsor. Usually this is a small cross of gold or silver hung for the occasion of the Baptism on a thin, long white ribbon of sufficient length to be easily placed over the newly baptized person's head during the course of the service. Among Orthodox Christians of Slavic descent these crosses are often fashioned according to the so-called "three-barred" pattern. The priest can help you with obtaining an appropriate cross. (It is traditional for a duly baptized Orthodox Christian to wear a cross - often this very same cross - for the rest of their lives as a sign of their commitment to Christ and His Church. This is not always practical in the case of children, but is a practice that should be encouraged, as the person grows older.)
- A Baptismal gown: This garment is also often provided by the sponsor, though parents and grandparents sometimes help with this. This garment should be long enough to cover the newly baptized person's whole body and should be pure white in color. The person being baptized should not be brought to church for the Rite of Baptism already dressed in this garment. Rather the Baptismal gown is put on during the service, as part of the Rite, after the actual Baptism takes place. This garment should be used only for purposes connected with Baptism. (In some Orthodox Christian families there is a traditional garment handed down from generation to generation used for the Baptisms of all the children in the extended family.)
- Baptismal candles: During the service the one being baptized and/or his or her sponsor or sponsors hold candles. These candles can simply be the normal golden-colored beeswax candles used during all Church services, which are easily obtained at the Church. Sometimes, however, specialized candles, often white in color and appropriately decorated are provided by the sponsor or family of the person being baptized.

The day of the Baptism:

- All gathering for the Baptism should be present at the Church no later than twenty minutes before the appointed time of the service so that any last minute concerns might be addressed.
- The Rite of Baptism in the Orthodox Church usually takes about fifty minutes. This is longer than in some other Christian denominations, but in the Orthodox Church the full traditional rite is kept from the earliest days of Christianity. Those not familiar with the service should be aware, especially in the case of the Baptism of an infant, that the service does involve the child being completely disrobed and dipped entirely in the Baptismal font. The Orthodox Church follows the most ancient customs regarding Baptism and, therefore, does not usually baptize by pouring or sprinkling, but rather places the person being baptized fully into the Baptismal waters, just as St. John the Baptist baptized our Lord, Jesus Christ, in the waters of the Jordan River.
- In the case of infant Baptism, upon arrival at Church, the child should be disrobed until he or she is wearing only a diaper. The child will then be wrapped in a large, clean, white towel that is provided by the parish church.<sup>15</sup> The child is then held by the sponsor who is not of the same gender for the first part of the service. Pre-Baptismal prayers and rites will then be performed, including an anointing with oil (this is not yet Chrismation - that occurs after the actual Baptism - but a separate anointing). Then the child will be baptized. The towel at this point should be given to the sponsor of the same gender as the child being baptized. This same gender sponsor will receive the child from the font after the priest has baptized the child. Following the Baptism, the child should be wrapped warmly in the towel and dried off. Then the priest will give the Baptismal garment and the robe to the child. Then the child may be dressed in the Baptismal robe and a fresh diaper (only—nothing else should be placed on the child yet, such as undergarments or socks, these can be added after the service). For warmth the child might also be wrapped loosely in a receiving blanket. It is a good idea for the child's mother to help with this dressing and, perhaps, if the child is distressed, take a moment to comfort the child before the service continues. Once the child has been dressed and comforted, then the child should be returned to the sponsor of the same gender for the rest of the service. The rest of the service includes the anointing with Chrism, the cutting of a tiny bit of the child's hair as a first offering to God (so-called "tonsure"), and the sponging off of the Chrism. Finally at the end of the service the child will be "churched." In this very brief rite the priest takes the child to the front of the Church and presents him or her to God. The child's mother should then come forward and receive the child from the priest. This concludes the service



and then the child may be fully dressed. Part of his or her attire for the rest of the occasion (for example, the reception or any other following festivities) should be the Baptismal gown.

- Regarding photography and videography: One person should be chosen to take photographs and one other to take video. There should not be excessive numbers of people crowding around to do this, as this is extremely distracting and not particularly pious. Usually if the two members or friends of the family acknowledged to be best equipped to do this will take responsibility for this task everyone is pleased by and can share in the good results. At the close of the service and during any following festivities there will be plenty of time for everyone else to take pictures and video.
- If any Church facilities are desired for the purposes of a reception this should be discussed and arranged well in advance with the priest.

#### Final Notes:

The Gospel tells us that Christian activity is marked by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. It is, therefore, appropriate for all participants in a Baptism (the one being baptized, the sponsors, the family) to prepare themselves through prayer. It is also appropriate that they would fast. Fasting implies not simply restrictions in diet, but primarily means that in the days preceding the Baptism, those involved would seek to live and act in a moderate fashion concentrating on preparing themselves for the occasion. Specific questions about this can be discussed with the priest.

Baptism begins a person's life in Christ, and in His Church. Therefore, the one being baptized, his or her sponsors and his or her family are truly obliged by God to ensure that the Baptism is not simply a one-time event, but rather that it is the beginning of a process of Christian life and participation in the fullness of the life of the Orthodox Christian Church. Baptism is a gift and a privilege. Acceptance of Baptism carries with it responsibilities. Let us be mindful of this reality.

## Marriages

Marriage<sup>16</sup> in the Orthodox Church is the sacramental union between one adult man and one adult woman, united by God for eternity. The Church only blesses marriages on the grounds that the couple wishes to be united in Christ. The Church does not bless marriages to legitimize sexual relations and/or the children stemming from those relations, for social/societal reasons, or for legal reasons. Also, the Church does not bless marriages between persons of the same gender or between children<sup>17</sup> or between a

child and an adult.

In order for a marriage to be valid there are a number of conditions that must be met.

Among them are the following:

Both parties to the proposed marriage must freely consent to marry. One cannot validly marry under compulsion. God values, nurtures and honors the freedom He has given us.

At least one of the two prospective partners to the marriage must be a practicing Orthodox Christian, regularly confessing and communing in the Orthodox Church. It is the norm that at a time close to the marriage the Orthodox Christian parties to the marriage participate in the Sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion.

If one of the parties to the marriage is not an Orthodox Christian then he or she must be a validly baptized Christian who has not rejected Christ and, indeed, willingly confesses the Lordship of Jesus Christ. So-called "mixed marriages" in which only one party to the marriage is an Orthodox Christian are blessed in the hope that one day the non-Orthodox partner will join the fullness of the Orthodox Church.

The prospective bride and groom may not be related in any way (blood or spiritual) that precludes marriage. There are degrees of relationship that preclude marriage. For example, one may not marry a sibling or a closely related cousin.

Strictly speaking, marriages other than first marriages are not encouraged by the Church. Widows and widowers are, in particular, encouraged to remain faithful to their departed spouses. Nevertheless, trusting in God's mercy and compassion, under certain circumstances subsequent marriages are permitted. The pastor will question the prospective parties to marriage to determine if either one of the prospective partners has been married previously and, if so, how many times and under what circumstances. Obviously, those previous marriages must be ended before another marriage can be entered into. If there has been a previous marriage or marriages, documents substantiating legal divorce must be presented to the pastor and the pastor must examine the reasons for the dissolution of previous marriages. Second marriages are usually allowed. Third marriages are sometimes allowed. Fourth marriages are never allowed. The decision to allow second and third marriages is not the pastor's, but rather the diocesan Bishop's. He must provide the blessing for those marriages to take place.

The prospective bride and groom ought to desire to have children. It may happen subsequent to marriage that they are not able to have children, but they must be open to the gift of procreation. The prospective bride and groom must agree that all children of a marital union blessed in the Orthodox Church are expected to be baptized and raised

as Orthodox Christians. The procreation of children is not the only reason for marriage, but it is certainly a wonderful fruit of the union of marriage.

(At this point, it should be mentioned that the Church does not bless sexual relations outside of or before marriage and that this activity, technically termed "fornication," is even considered to be an impediment to marriage. Why come to the Church to have your marriage blessed by God if, in fact, you are already living after the fashion of married people!)

The primary sponsor/ witness of the wedding couple (either the "best man" or "maid/ matron of honor") must be a practicing Orthodox Christian in good standing in his or her parish community and that if he or she is married, he or she must have been married in the Orthodox Church.

Marriages in the Church must take place in the Church building, following the set order of the Orthodox Church's traditional Rite of Marriage at a date and time determined in consultation with the pastor. The Order of the Service, that is the Rite of Marriage, is set by the Church. Before a date and time is set for a marriage or any arrangements for marriage are made, such as the rental of a hall for the reception, etc., these things must be discussed with the pastor. Dates and times are subject to the norms of the Church—there are many days on and times at which marriages cannot be performed. For example, marriages may not be celebrated during the Church's fasting seasons and on Saturday afternoons and evenings throughout the year. The pastor will guide the prospective couple in the selection of an appropriate date and time for their wedding. Marriages in the Orthodox Church are usually celebrated on Sunday afternoons, the prospective couple having participated together, to the degree possible, in the Sunday morning Eucharistic Divine Liturgy that same Sunday morning in the parish where the marriage will take place later that same day.

The parties to the marriage must adhere to all relevant civil laws pertaining to the licensing and registration of marriages.

Both parties to the marriage must agree to and participate in pre-marital guidance with the pastor of the parish. This means they must be willing to meet with him at prearranged times. This process of pre-marital guidance may include the commitment to read and discuss with the pastor various materials provided by him.

(For further details and elaboration to these statements about Marriage, please see the Orthodox Church in America's Diocese of New England's Diocesan Guidelines for Marriage.)<sup>18</sup>

## **Anniversaries of Marriage**

On the occasion of significant anniversaries of marriage, after consultation with the pastor, it is possible to arrange for the celebration of a Service of Thanksgiving. This service is not a "renewal of vows," but rather an expression of gratitude to God for blessings given and received. Upon request made to the pastor a copy of this service is available for review.

## **Funerals**

The Funeral Service<sup>19</sup> of the Orthodox Church is for practicing Orthodox Christians, those who regularly participated during their lives in the sacraments of Confession and Communion and who, at the time of their deaths, were in communion ("good standing")<sup>20</sup> with the Church.

The order of services for the funeral of an Orthodox Christian may follow one of two patterns. Which pattern is followed will be determined at the discretion of the pastor, following consultation with the family of the departed. Departures from these patterns require the blessing of the priest.

In our parish the more usual pattern is as follows: On the eve of burial, usually in the evening, a memorial service is sung over the body of the departed. This usually takes place at the funeral home, though it may happen, with permission, that the body of the departed is brought to the Church for this service. Then, on the day of burial, the Funeral Service is sung in Church, over the body of the departed, and is followed by burial. A memorial supper usually follows the burial.

A second possible pattern is as follows: The body of the departed is brought to the Church on the eve of the day of burial and the Funeral Service is sung at that time. Then, the next morning, the day of burial, the Divine Liturgy is celebrated in the presence of the body of the departed. Then the burial and memorial supper follow, as usual and customary. This practice may be followed as long as the liturgical calendar allows for the celebration of Divine Liturgy (Divine Liturgies are not celebrated on Lenten weekdays) and as long as the family members of the departed are members of the Orthodox Church who have prepared themselves to receive Holy Communion on the day of burial.

The Funeral Service takes place in the Church and—in keeping with traditional Orthodox Christian practice—the casket is to remain open until the end of the service

when it is formally "sealed" with reading of the assigned prayer from the Funeral Service and the accompanying blessing of Holy Water.

The Funeral Service follows the Church's set order for this Rite; nothing may not usually be added or deleted to or from the service. During the service, the sermon will be delivered by the pastor. Any other remarks may be delivered only by persons who have received the blessing of the pastor and who have submitted their remarks to him for his approval.

Funerals are not to be served and the bodies of the departed are not to be brought to the Church on Sundays (that is from late in the day on Saturday until the evening on Sunday) or on major feast days of the Church. This is also the case on Holy Friday, Holy Saturday, and Pascha Sunday.

The burial of departed persons other than practicing Orthodox Christians may take place as follows.

- In the case of a person who was an Orthodox Christian, but not in communion with the Church at the time of his or her death for reasons of willfulness or discipline, the burial and solemnities preceding it are to take place at and from the funeral home. The priest, vested in stole (epitrachelion) only, may serve a memorial service including the reading of scriptural readings for the dead.
- Non-Orthodox persons may be buried by the pastor from the funeral home. An appropriate memorial service may be served by the priest at the funeral home before burial.

There are some special cases that should be mentioned.

In the case of a person who has committed suicide the Orthodox Church usually does not allow the full funeral rites to be followed, since suicide is a rejection of life, which is a gift we have been given by God. Nevertheless, special pastoral considerations may allow a determination to be made, in consultation with the Bishop, to permit the use of the Funeral Service.

The practice of Freemasonry constitutes an impediment to full communion with the Church. Thus those Orthodox Christians who chose to be Freemasons, when they die, if they have not repented and returned to the communion of the Church, are not buried from the Church with the Church's full funeral rites. They may be buried from the funeral home as described above in the sections concerning the burial of those not in communion with the Church.

Cremation is not an accepted practice in the Orthodox Church and cremated remains

are not to be brought to the Church. Cremated remains may be prayed over and buried only after consultation and direction from the Bishop.

(For further details and elaboration, please see the Orthodox Church in America's Diocese of New England's *Diocesan Guidelines for Funerals*.)<sup>21</sup>

## **Memorial Services**

Memorial Services ("Panikhidas") are served by appointment on Saturday afternoons before the celebration of the weekly Saturday evening Parish Great Vespers. On those Saturdays designated in the Church calendar as "Memorial Saturdays," a general memorial service commemorating all departed faithful Christians is served. During Great Lent, since we do not serve the Divine Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts on Friday evenings, we instead have the practice of serving Daily Lenten Vespers with additional memorial elements, as during Great Lent most Saturdays are designated as Memorial Saturdays.

Please note that in the Orthodox Christian tradition Sundays are given over to the commemoration of the Resurrection and thus Memorial Services are not generally served on Sundays.

## **Unction**

The express purpose of the sacrament of holy unction is healing and forgiveness.<sup>22</sup> Since it is not always the will of God that there should be physical healing, the prayer of Christ that God's will be done always remains as the proper context of the sacrament. In addition, it is the clear intention of the sacrament that through the anointing of the sick body the sufferings of the person should be sanctified and united to the sufferings of Christ. In this way, the wounds of the flesh are consecrated, and strength is given that the suffering of the diseased person may not be unto the death of his soul, but for eternal salvation in the resurrection and life of the Kingdom of God.

It is indeed the case that death inevitably comes to man. All must die, even those who in this life are given a reprieve through healing in order to have more time on the earth. Thus, the healing of the sick is not itself a final goal, but is merely "instrumental" in that it is given by God as a sign of his mercy and as a grace for the further opportunity of man to live for him and for others in the life of this world.

In the case where a person is obviously in the final moments of his earthly life, the Church has special prayers for the "separation of soul and body." Thus, it is clear that the sacrament of holy unction is for the sick-both the physically and mentally sick-and is not reserved for the moment of death. The sacrament of unction is not the "last rites" as

is sometimes thought; the ritual of the anointing itself in no way indicates that it should be administered merely in “extreme” cases. Holy unction is the sacrament of the spiritual, physical, and mental healing of a sick person whatever the nature or the gravity of the illness may be.

In the Diocese of New England, a full service of Holy Unction is celebrated on the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent. Sanctified oil from this service is carried back to the parish by its priest and is used to anoint the faithful as necessary.

### **Hospital and Shut-in Visitation**

Whenever a parishioner is hospitalized the pastor makes every effort to visit that person, promptly and regularly. These visitations will always have as their main purpose the saying of appropriate prayers on behalf of the hospitalized person. These visitations may include, at the pastor's discretion, participation in the holy sacraments, especially the sacraments of Confession, Communion, and anointing with holy oil (Unction).

Shut-ins, both in institutions and at home, are also visited on a regular basis and certainly during the four fasting seasons of the year (Great Lent, Advent, the Apostles' Fast and the Dormition Fast). These visits always include time for prayer and, at the pastor's discretion, participation in the sacraments.

Please be reminded that because of civil privacy laws the only way you can be sure that the pastor is aware that a person is hospitalized or in another health care facility such as a skilled nursing or rehabilitation facility is if the person in question informs the pastor of his or her situation or officially authorizes another person to let the pastor know on his or her behalf. Please do not assume that the pastor knows that you are in the hospital or another health care facility. Make sure that he has been told if you want him to know about your situation.

### **Home Blessing**

The Annual Blessings of Homes takes place each year following the Feast of Theophany in January. The pastor will contact those who have requested home blessing to set up an appointment to perform this service.

When the Priest comes to bless your home, the following should be arranged: A table should be set in a central place, covered with a clean, preferably white, tablecloth. Often the dining room table, cleared of nonessential items, is used for this purpose.

On this table should be placed:

- A candle in a candlestick, lighted. This candle will be used by a member of the household to lead the priest through the house during the service of blessing.
- A bowl filled with Holy Water that was blessed during this present year's celebration of Theophany.
- An icon, if the place where the table is does not have one visibly nearby.
- A list of names of the living and departed members, relatives and friends of the household whom you wish to have mentioned during the service of blessing.

During the brief service of blessing the following points should be observed:

- All electronic audio and visual equipment, computers, etc., should be turned off.
- All members of the household should be gathered, standing at the table where the service will begin. Non-Orthodox and /or non-believing members of the household are asked to be respectful during the service or, if they are not able to do so, to absent themselves respectfully.
- Pets should be appropriately secured.
- The doors to each room of the home should be opened and, if necessary, lights should be turned on throughout the house. A member of the household should be selected ahead of time to lead the priest through the house during the blessing. This person should have determined his or her route ahead of time and should carry a lighted candle during this portion of the service. Children usually enjoy being invited to do this task. More than one child can certainly participate in this part of the service, if they so desire.



## **Ministries**

### **Group Ministry**

Studies have shown that parishes function much more effectively and the spiritual development of parishioners is much more significant when members of the parish participate in activities in small groups. Therefore, to help foster bonds among parishioners and to improve the educational and fellowship opportunities within our parish community, active parishioners are joined together into one of five ministries. The ministries are *Administration, Liturgical and Education, Evangelism and Outreach, Fellowship and Stewardship, and Building and Grounds*. Ministries of the Parish of St. Alexis should always reflect the Mission Statement of the Parish, if not in specific reference to, then implicitly. All ministries and activities undertaken by the Parish should be in compliance with the Statutes of the Orthodox Church in America (<https://oca.org/statute>), the Diocese of New England (<http://dneoca.org/official.html>) and the By-Laws of the Parish.

It should be noted that all ministries are related and mutually support each other; no objective of a given ministry is ever accomplished without the support of the entire community.

### **Ad Hoc Ministries**

As circumstances arise, specific ad hoc ministries may be formed. These ministries will address the specific needs of the community outside the typical 'operations' of the parish.

### **Clergy Care**

One of the objectives of this ministry is to build greater mutual understanding and trust between the clergy couple/family and the parish family.

### **Administrative Ministry**

The Administrative Ministry is headed by the parish priest and has as its members the President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and two Members-at-Large of the Parish Council. The Administrative Ministry oversees all long-term projects and goals, as well as daily operations of the parish. To effectively and efficiently achieve this, the Administrative Ministry oversees and coordinates the activities of the other parish ministries. This ministry also is responsible for coordinating all parish communications including the publications to ONE Steward, Sunday bulletins, telephone communications (including the "telephone chain"), community communications, press releases and annual reports. In addition the Administrative Ministry coordinates all major projects of the parish. This ministry is responsible for representing our parish to

the Annual Assembly of our New England Diocese and to the triennial All American Council of our Orthodox Church in America, through representatives that are selected during the parish's Annual Meeting.

### **Buildings and Grounds Ministry**

Our parish is blessed to have a large tract of beautiful property. Its maintenance and that of the buildings fall under the jurisdiction of the Buildings and Grounds Ministry. This ministry is responsible for organizing and coordinating volunteers for the Spring and Fall Cleanups, securing all contracted maintenance services, coordinating volunteers for basic maintenance tasks, and proposing to the Parish Council any necessary repair work, improvements, or equipment purchases. If you are interested in volunteering your services or if you have any questions, please see the chairperson of the Building and Grounds Ministry.

This ministry is responsible for the general maintenance and upkeep of the properties of the parish including the grounds, structures and facilities of the parish. Any expenditures pursuant to the fulfilling of this ministry's responsibilities should be approved by the Vice President, in conjunction with the Treasurer. Anyone may bring a request for funds to the Council in general for discussion.

This ministry is also tasked with providing a list of projects for the Council to undertake, particularly with regards to those projects that need special funding or budget line items (e.g. having the sanctuary floor sanded). It is suggested that a timeline for these projects also be determined.

### **Fellowship and Stewardship Ministry**

This ministry is tasked with providing for the needs of the parish community, beyond maintenance of the facilities. Stewardship and Fellowship are combined as a 'single' ministry because, together, they reflect the needs and objectives of the entire community.

*Christian Stewardship* is nothing less than God's call for us as His people to assist in managing the affairs of this earth with Him. We are called to be "friends of the Bridegroom" and "co-workers with the Lord." Our Stewardship consists of making responsible decisions about our time, health, talents, relationships, property, and all that makes up our lives. (<https://oca.org/parish-ministry/stewardeducation/stewardship-terminology>)

In the same way, *Christian Fellowship* is the response of the community to the needs of the community family, not just 'coffee hour' but also responding to the needs of the sick, the shut-in, and perhaps even those in need of other assistance (e.g. financial).

**Essential Questions:**

- How is this parish addressing the needs of its constituency; both while they are at the parish and when “at home”?
- Is there a need for specific ‘responses’ that members can undertake and participate in so as to provide support to the community? If so, what are they?
- Is there need for more education with regards to what ‘stewardship’ and ‘fellowship’ really mean?
- What are the parish’s strengths with regards to stewardship and fellowship? What are its weaknesses?

Healthy fellowship among parishioners is an essential part of a thriving parish community. To help foster closer ties among parishioners while simultaneously developing a more effective, efficient, Christ-centered church environment, our parish relies on a number of small groups in ministering to our larger parish family. The ultimate goal is to encourage personal Christian growth that begins with involvement in parish life and evolves into a genuine commitment to parish life.

The Stewardship Ministry develops programs intended to increase each parishioner’s commitment of time, talent and money. The Treasurer is responsible for the maintenance of all records of individual financial gifts of parishioners.

**Sunday Morning Coffee Social**

On Sunday mornings, following the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, we have a Parish Coffee Social Hour to which all are invited. It is hosted by weekly hosts who sign up in turn to host the event. The fare is usually simple—coffee, juice, bagels with toppings, a few pastries or cookies, but is enjoyed by all.

**Liturgical Ministry**

The ministry of *Worship* responds directly to the needs of the community with regards to leaning more about our Faith and living to accomplish the Lord’s commandments to love God with all our heart and soul, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Certainly implicit with education is “worship” (the liturgical life of the church).

Central to liturgical life (and also education) is the Choir.

**Essential Questions:**

- What can be done to insure the consistency of the choir, music and services?
- Is there a more effective means to ‘presenting’ the music to the choir?
- Is there a need to provide specific and consistent rehearsal schedules?

- How do we provide consistent educational opportunities for children and adults alike?
- What (if any) specific educational topics should be addressed?
- How do we improve the attendance of mid-week services?

The Liturgical Ministry is headed by the pastor. It coordinates the liturgical life of the parish. The scheduling of and preparations for all services and liturgically-related programs fall under this ministry. This includes the choir, altar servers program, liturgical readers program, and all other aspects of lay participation in the Divine Services. This ministry works to ensure the coordination of all liturgical activities. The Liturgical Ministry is also responsible for the publication of the many liturgical service books used in the parish.

### **Outreach and Evangelization Ministry**

This ministry is tasked with meeting the needs of the larger community in which the parish of St. Alexis finds itself, with material and spiritual responses. Outreach and Evangelism are combined as a 'single' ministry because, together, they reflect the specific needs and goals of the greater community of Clinton, and indirectly neighboring communities.

"Desiring to respond to the call of Christ, to Baptize all nations, and with a love for all of our sisters and brothers in Christ to bring them to the fullness of God's call, we have begun to implement parts of a program that helps us visibly witness for Christ, sharing His message with others." (<https://oca.org/parish-ministry/witnessmission/outreach>)

#### **Essential Questions:**

- How is the parish addressing the needs of the greater community? Is this a consistent or inconsistent approach?
- Are there seasonal issues which can be addressed? If so, what are they, and how does the parish work to address these needs?
- Is there need for more education with regards to what 'outreach' and 'evangelism' really mean?
- What are the parish's strengths with regards to outreach and evangelism? What are its weaknesses?

One of our responsibilities as Orthodox Christians is to take up His Cross and spread The Word of God. The Outreach and Evangelization Ministry is the ministry within our parish that "reaches out" to the local community, guests, new parishioners, and even established parishioners. Its role is to make St. Alexis an inviting parish and to make all who enter our doors feel part of our Christian family.

In order to achieve these goals, this ministry works on developing strategies and materials to reach out to our local community and assists the Administrative Ministry with publicizing the life and activities of our parish through available media e.g. Facebook, the parish web site, and ONE Stewards. This ministry maintains contact with local colleges in an effort to reach out to those students who are Orthodox or who are interested in Orthodox Christianity.

## Clergy Care

While the Diocese of New England does provide guidelines for clergy compensation<sup>23</sup>, this ministry goes beyond merely what the parish provides its in terms of monetary and related benefits.

*Understanding the Clergy Family* by Kerry Pappas<sup>24</sup>

The priest and his wife and family experience some unique blessings and challenges in their lives, which many of the faithful are unaware of. For the purpose of this brief article, these will be presented as a list of what clergy families wish the members of the parish knew about them. This list is derived from the results of numerous research studies on clergy wives/couples/families and anecdotes of clergy family life experiences.

- We consider it a privilege and an honor to serve Christ and His Church.
- We have a unique relationship to the parish that no one else experiences; our husband's/father's workplace is also our family's place of worship, fellowship, and community.
- We receive great joy from the opportunities you give us to love you and to serve you.
- We want you to embrace us as members of the community.
- We are human and experience all of the same joys and sorrows you experience.
- We are not always "at the top of our game"; we, too, have good days and bad.
- We are in this struggle to grow in Christ with you, and we want you to walk beside us as we strive to walk beside you.
- We need to be encouraged.
- We are not perfect; in the community however, our mistakes are sometimes more visible than those of others.
- Please forgive us our sins and failings.
- Please respectfully tell us if we have hurt or offended you in any way.
- We often live far from our extended families and feel isolation, even loneliness.
- We are sometimes overwhelmed by the responsibilities of ministry.

- We sometimes struggle with sharing our husband/ father with you.
- Our husband/ father sometimes has to miss important events in our lives because of his responsibilities at church.
- We need time for our personal lives, our marriages and our children just as every family does.
- It is OK that we do not always agree about everything.
- If you have something to say about our husband/ father, talk to him directly; please do not criticize him in front of us.
- Please accept that sometimes we have to say no. Sometimes we feel as if we are living in a glass house; please respect our privacy as a family.
- Please do not hold up our children to a different standard than the other children in the parish.
- We love you.
- Ordained ministry in America is a stressful and isolating vocation.

We, clergy and laity alike, share many of the same joys and challenges of life. However, ordained clergy are set apart within the community in order to lead worship, preach the Gospel, teach the Orthodox faith, co-administer with the Parish Council, pastor those in need, and supervise ministry, mission, and outreach. May God grant that we continue to work together toward mutual understanding and cooperation for the glory of His Kingdom.

## Stewardship

In the most literal meaning of the word, a "steward" is a person employed to manage another person's property. Stewardship, therefore, is the process by which we care for that which is not ours on behalf of the person to whom it belongs.<sup>25</sup>

When we consider the place of the human being in God's creation we find that humans have been called to be stewards of the whole creation. The first words of the Bible concerning human beings confirm this insight:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Genesis 1:26-28)

The very first calling of the human being is to "have dominion" over God's creation. Human beings have been given stewardship of that which is not theirs, but God's. We will answer to God for how we exercise this dominion, this stewardship. We alienate ourselves from God by consuming the good things of His creation, rather than caring for them. Remember this parable told by our Lord, Jesus Christ:

And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him, and put him with the unfaithful. And that servant who knew his master's will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating. Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more. (Luke 12:42-48)

Notice in the parable that much will be expected of those to whom much has been given. We have been blessed in the Church to know the fullness of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Certainly much will be expected of us. Notice, also, how proper stewardship is the measure of a faithful servant. We are all servants of God. We must

accept that designation and make sure that we are faithful stewards.

Faithful stewardship concerns absolutely and completely those things that we "have."  
Hear this parable of our Lord:

And Jesus told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:16-21)

In this parable God asks us the question: "The things you have prepared, whose will they be?" The answer is that they never were ours and never will be ours. All that we "have" is from God. Listen to the witness of Holy Scripture, here from the Book of Psalms:

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep. (Psalm 127:1-2)

God provides us with both the means and opportunities to "possess." Since the things we treat as being our own are not actually not ours, but God's, we must steward them, that is, care for them, in a manner in accordance with the will of God and not just to satisfy our own desires.

However, the point is even broader. For our stewardship does not encompass only material possessions. It involves much more than that. Hear again the words of our Lord:

I tell you, on the Day of Judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matthew 12:36-37)

God has given us everything, not just the possessions we have outside ourselves, but also the capabilities we possess within our persons—our intellect, our physical strength, our very being. We will answer to God for our stewardship of these things, too.



What then is required of us, right now, in the concrete sense? An insight into the answer of this question might also be found in the words of our Lord:

And Jesus sat down opposite the [temple] treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living." (Mark 12:41-44)

God requires of us everything—all that we have and all that we are. To give only what is left over—"out of our abundance," as the Lord puts it—is not sufficient. The "minimum" required of us (our "dues") is everything, all that we have. Giving is something we should notice because it costs us—it should actually impact our standard of living. In another place in Holy Scripture, our Lord reinforces this point:

And a ruler asked Jesus, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said, "All these I have observed from my youth." And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." But when the man heard this he became sad, for he was very rich. Jesus looking at him said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" But Jesus said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." (Luke 18:18-27)

How these words challenge us! Who among us can say that we do not "become sad" like the questioner of Jesus when we hear them? We must be thankful for the mercy shown to us by Christ in His words "what is impossible with men is possible with God." Each of us must also allow our conscience to be troubled and ask ourself: What is my attitude towards this passage of the Gospel? Do I struggle to accept it? Or, do I try to find ways to say that it does not apply to me? Do I truly seek to use all that God has blessed me with in accordance with His will? Or, am I as yet unable to accept this high calling—the call to stewardship—upon which my eternal salvation apparently depends?

What is a practical first step in the right direction? How can I begin to bring myself into

accord and agreement with the Gospel? How do I become a steward, that is, a person who understands and accepts that I am only caring for that which is someone else's and do not in fact possess anything that I can truly call my own? The following passage from the Old Testament's Book of the Prophet Malachi may strengthen us in this regard and give us the courage and resolve necessary to (re)dedicate ourselves to a life of stewardship:

From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?' Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How are we robbing You?' In your tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me; the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, [see then] if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. (Malachi 3:7-10)

Malachi lived among the people of Israel centuries before God fully revealed Himself to His People in the person of His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, two thousand years ago. Yet, Malachi was already called to remind the people that they had stepped away from God and from what God had taught them regarding their responsibilities towards Him. The people are not giving God what he deserves. They are "robbing" Him. But, we must notice God's promise in the words of His prophet, Malachi. He tells the people, "return to me, and I will return to you." He tells the people that if they only would "bring full tithes," that is if they would only give God what He deserves, that He, in return, will pour out "an overflowing blessing." He even tells the people that they are to "put [Him] to the test" through their giving and to see how richly He will bless them in return.

St. Paul in his Second Letter to the Corinthians summarizes in one small phrase what our attitude must be in regard to the things of this world: "as dying, and behold we live," he says (2 Corinthians 6:9).

What does this mean? It means that if we are only living for the things of this world we are already dead because we are not fulfilling the calling for which we were made by God. If, however, we instead "die" to the things of this world—if we are not "owned" by the things that we have made the mistake of thinking are ours—we actually live. We live because we are doing the will of God, which, for us, is life. To do God's will in all things is to fulfill the vocation to which God has called us. That vocation is to accept and embrace the call to steward God's creation on His behalf and to His glory. This for us is life and light and joy and peace.

Let us, therefore, commit ourselves with courage and resolve to fulfill our calling to Christian stewardship.

### **Annual Stewardship Pledge**

Our parish does not have "dues." The word "dues" implies some sort of mandatory membership fee. We require no such thing. Rather, we ask that every member of the parish make an honest assessment of what is possible and proper and then give as they are able. We remember, as related in St. Mark's Gospel (Mk. 12:41-44), how Christ honored the poor widow's tiny contribution to Temple treasury, for she gave all that she had. We all receive more from the Church than we can possibly give. After all, salvation is a free gift of God—it cannot be bought! Membership in the Orthodox Christian Church is determined by active participation in the sacramental life—participation made possible by a life of repentance and love in response to the sacrifice our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ made for us on His Holy Cross. It is not a financial matter.

Nevertheless, we do have the practical need and definite responsibility of providing for the financial needs of the Church, in general, and our parish community, in particular. To meet this need and fulfill this responsibility, the faithful members of our parish all make an annual pledge of financial support. Those blessed with wealth are particularly accountable and answerable for being generous and supportive.

While a guideline is provided and the real need is made clear, "dues" are not imposed. Rather, the parish asks us each person for a freewill gift, a generous gift offered in love, responding to God's love—a gift that, hopefully, goes far beyond the mere payment of a fee or tax and far beyond the mere fulfillment of an obligation.

The guideline is this: give a first portion, percentage gift. This means, whatever our gross annual household income, that we pledge ourselves to make a contribution to our Church based on a percentage of that income. This contribution is honored with the first place in our personal or household budget. We make such a commitment even if we are retirees and the living we receive is in the form of pensions, Social Security, interest from investments and funds drawn from savings. We certainly do this if we are wage earners.

If each one of us makes a commitment to give at least 5% of our gross annual income to the Church, we should certainly be able to meet our financial needs. A 5% contribution is half of the Biblical tithe, which is 10%. Also, such a contribution is not all that much when we consider that everything we like to think of ourselves as "owning" is from God and is to be used to help ourselves and others grow closer to God! There is nothing we

have that has not been made possible for us by the love and grace of God.

A “stewardship form” can be found at the back of this handbook. It can be copied and used with your stewardship pledge to the parish.

### **Restricted Funds**

At this time our parish does not have an endowment; however, we do have a number of restricted funds that are destinations for giving above and beyond our stewardship pledge.

### **Wills and Bequests**

Please consider leaving a gift to Saint Alexis Orthodox Church when you make your estate plan. Part of estate planning is having a valid will—every person should have a will so that they and not others will determine how their assets are used and by whom following their passing from this life. You can remember the church in your will, giving back to God some of what He has blessed you with during your lifetime. Another part of estate planning is making of significant gifts and donations to worthy causes before the time that one's will comes into effect. A planned gift is a wonderful way to leave a legacy and often offers significant tax benefits. Please see the Pastor or Parish Treasurer if you have any questions about planned giving.

### **Time and Talents**

Our parish depends on the time and talents of volunteers who do so much to meet the needs of the parish on a daily basis, in all its aspects. Gratitude is especially directed to the volunteer cleaners who help clean the church. We are grateful for and to those who have cooperated with the system in place for identifying persons to clean the church and, especially, to those who have actually worked hard to help keep the church clean.

As a community, we clean the church building, keep up the building and grounds, do grounds-keeping, snow removal, etc., ourselves, thus relieving the parish budget of the obligation to set aside funds to pay others to do this work. (At the time of this writing, however, we do pay for a landscaper to come in and mow the lawns once a week.) All the same, our parish deeply depends on the labors of volunteers. Please consider volunteering your time to help meet the day-to-day requirements of keeping up our physical plant and grounds.

We strongly suggest that every faithful member of St Alexis Orthodox Church consider it part of their personal commitment to the parish to volunteer a portion of their time and talents to the maintenance and building up of the parish.

Some of the many opportunities available include (but are not limited to):

- Serving as a church school teacher or substitute
- Singing in the choir
- Being a Reader
- Assisting with the coffee hours
- Volunteering for parish cleanups
- Volunteering to participate in any of the parish's ministries or *ad hoc* committees
- Volunteering to help in any of the scheduled Soup Kitchen days
- Donating food to the Shoreline Pantry food bank
- Helping with parish maintenance
- Serving as a host for any "extra-church" program e.g. special fund raisers
- Driving elderly parishioners to church
- Assisting with the lighting of candles and the collection of offerings
- Holding the communion cloth at liturgies
- Welcoming guests
- Decorating the church for major Feast Days
- Inviting and bringing new people to our church
- Visiting the hospitalized and homebound

## **Parish Administration**

According to the Statutes of the Orthodox Church in America<sup>26</sup> (Article XII, Section 1b), the organization and administration of a parish are subject to OCA Statutes, the statute or By-Laws of the Diocese,<sup>27</sup> and the parish By-Laws<sup>28</sup> approved by the Diocesan Authority. The Orthodox Church in general and The Orthodox Church in America in particular are hierarchical in structure.

## **Resources for the Prevention of Sexual Misconduct<sup>29</sup>**

The Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America approved and issued a revised Policy, Standards, and Procedures on Sexual Misconduct<sup>30</sup> at their Fall 2013 Holy Synod meeting. This policy is now in force in the Church. It is the goal of the entire Church to provide a safe and healthy environment for all of the faithful of the Orthodox Church in America. The Church laments the sin of sexual misconduct, and will not tolerate sexual misconduct by its clergy or any layperson.

To further the prevention of sexual abuse of children, the Holy Synod has approved a training program by the non-profit organization Darkness to Light.<sup>31</sup> The training program, Stewards of Children [SOC],<sup>32</sup> is available for free to all those who are required to take the training.

**To confidentially report a case of misconduct please use the toll-free number 855-398-2600. All calls will be confidential.**

## **By-Laws of the Parish**

This content of this Parish Life Handbook reflects the By-Laws of the Parish, which in turn regulate the administration of the Parish. Whereas this Parish Life Handbook is a living, working document, subject to change on a regular basis in response to the day-to-day realities of parish life, the By-Laws are a more permanent document, which can only be modified by means of a rigorous process involving all members of the parish and requiring the blessing of our Diocesan Bishop. Therefore, in case of discrepancies between the Handbook and By-Laws, the Parish By-Laws take precedence. Copies of the Parish By-Laws are available to members of the Parish upon request.

## **Parish Council**

The Parish Council is the council of stewards for the parish (and the board of trustees as a legal corporation). The parish council is composed of the following: the pastor, acting

pastor or priest-in-charge; all other assigned priests and deacons; six officers, each elected for a three-year term, who then rotate through a yearly calling at one of the following positions (the parish council lay president and vice-president, the treasurer, secretary and two members-at-large) Each of the parish's ministries is headed by a member of the council as well as a lay-representative.

The competence of the parish council is: To implement the decisions and resolutions of the All- American Councils of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), the OCA Diocese of New England and of the parish assemblies; to see to the cleanliness, maintenance and upkeep of all parish buildings and property within budget limitations; to prepare an annual estimated budget for approval at the annual parish assembly, and to ensure the limitation of actual operating expenses within that budget; to manage the real property of the parish and to keep accurate records of securities, bank balances and other funds of the parish; to examine and prepare all matters to be brought before the parish at a parish assembly; to see to the needs of the church school and the choir; to approve donations or gifts to or from the parish as deemed necessary; to manage the Red House and church building in accordance with the rules and regulations adopted by the parishioners at a parish assembly; to see to all matters affecting the general life of the parish (excluding liturgical or pastoral issues, which are the particular competency of the pastor, and any issues that are strictly reserved to the parish assemblies); to work with the pastor to prepare, approve, maintain and implement a handbook of parish life.

Parish council meetings are held once each month. Generally these meetings take place on the second Thursday evening of the month. Parish council meetings are open to all voting members of the parish, but voting on any issue is restricted to members of the parish council. At its discretion, the council may deem it necessary to hold closed meetings, restricted to parish council members. While the pastor is the presiding officer over all council meetings, the lay president, with the pastor's blessing, may act as chairman or, in his absence, the lay vice president. Opening attendance of any five members (including the pastor) constitutes the quorum for a parish council meeting. A simple majority vote of all those members in attendance decide all issues brought before the council, though significant efforts are made to reach consensus before a vote is called for. Our parish is committed to administrative transparency and as such the minutes of parish council meetings, together with copies of reports (financial, etc.) presented at parish council meetings, are available to any voting member of the parish, upon request.

Occasionally, the pastor and the lay president of the parish council will request persons in the parish to volunteer to chair various ministries in the parish. It is the responsibility of each chairperson to coordinate the other members of his/her ministry and to make

regular reports to the parish council concerning the work of the respective ministries. The pastor and the members of the parish council are ex-officio members of every respective ministry. Neither the chairperson nor the members of any ministry need be members of the parish council.



## **Education**

While not a specific *ministry* unto itself, Education is ultimately the responsibility of the entire parish community. The first and primary source of education within the Church are the services themselves. Regular attendance at services and participation in the Liturgical Cycle of the Church are the foundation of learning within the parish.

Specific education programs for adults and children's education programs are offered as demand and interest warrants. An Inquirer's Program is offered on a as needed basis.

Education of the youth of the parish is undertaken by parishioners (with the blessing of the pastor) who volunteer their time to develop and deliver lessons that are deemed timely and necessary by those teaching and the pastor. However, a parish education program is only as viable if there are participants. Parents should make concerted efforts to insure that their children are present, not only for service, but also for church school (which follow Sunday Liturgy) during the school year.

Adults should also make a concerted effort to attend any programs or studies offered to them as well. Learning doesn't end with graduation from high school.

## **How to become a Member of our Parish**

If you are interested in becoming a member of the parish or if you are considering becoming an Orthodox Christian, please speak to the pastor. He will assist you with your journey and, with the assistance of the parishioners, will endeavor to make your integration into parish life a joyful, spiritually-rewarding experience.

To become a parishioner of Saint Alexis Orthodox Church, you are requested to:

- Be or become an Orthodox Christian
- Complete a personal data questionnaire for parish membership
- Partake of the Sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion
- Make a financial pledge for the current year
- Commit yourself to use a portion of your time and talents on behalf of the parish so that you might then enrich your life and, at the same time, help the parish in its journey to proclaim, teach, defend, strengthen, and preserve the Orthodox Faith, by giving back to God some of the time and talent He has entrusted in our care.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-daily-cycles-of-prayer>

<sup>2</sup> <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-church-year>

<sup>3</sup> Much of this section “Orthodox Christianity” is taken from Clark Carlton’s book “The Faith: Understanding Orthodox Christianity,” (Regina Press, Salisbury, MA, 1997, ISBN 0-9649141-1-5), especially pages 19 and following. Throughout this Handbook, we are also indebted to the writings and teachings of (among many others) Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware), Archbishop Dmitri (Royster); Fr. John Behr, Fr. John Breck, Fr. Thomas Hopko, Fr. Paul Lazor, Fr. John Matusiak, Fr. John Meyendorff, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, and to the anonymous Monk of St. Tikhon’s Monastery who compiled the book, “These Truths we Hold,” published in 1986 by St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, South Canaan, PA.

<sup>4</sup> To learn more about the life of St Alexis, please visit any of the following sites:

<https://oca.org/fs/st-alexis-toth>

[http://www.jordanville.org/news\\_140513\\_1.html](http://www.jordanville.org/news_140513_1.html)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHqx5pKy7\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHqx5pKy7_s)

<sup>5</sup> Either in the form of “general” or “private” confession

<sup>6</sup> “Open Doors” is a period of time set aside on Wednesday afternoons in which the church is open for personal prayer, reflection or conversation with the pastor.

<sup>7</sup> <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/spirituality/prayer-fasting-and-almsgiving>

<sup>8</sup> <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/holy-eucharist>

<sup>9</sup> <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/penance>

<sup>10</sup> [https://dneoca.org/guidelines\\_choir\\_directors.html](https://dneoca.org/guidelines_choir_directors.html)

<sup>11</sup> <https://oca.org/PDF/official/clergyguidelines.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://dneoca.org/official.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/baptism>

<sup>14</sup> <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/chrisamation>

<sup>15</sup> The parents, in consultation with the parish priest, may provide their own towel if such is desired.

<sup>16</sup> <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/marriage>

<sup>17</sup> As defined by Federal, State and Local statute.

<sup>18</sup> [https://dneoca.org/guidelines\\_marriage.html](https://dneoca.org/guidelines_marriage.html)

<sup>19</sup> <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/funeral>

<sup>20</sup> “Good Standing” refers to a parishioner who was receiving Communion and Reconciliation (confession) at least once a year and were in attendance for services and gave to the parish of their time, treasure or talents.

<sup>21</sup> [https://dneoca.org/guidelines\\_funerals.html](https://dneoca.org/guidelines_funerals.html)

<sup>22</sup> <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/holy-unction>

<sup>23</sup> <https://dneoca.org/clergycare.html>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.goarch.org/-/clergy-couple-care-ccc->

<sup>25</sup> <https://oca.org/reflections/archbishop-mark>

<sup>26</sup> <https://oca.org/statute>

<sup>27</sup> <https://dneoca.org/official.html>

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/l38d8zrgcg8urs/AADy61AmhKaINT\\_qjvEf1-cNa?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/l38d8zrgcg8urs/AADy61AmhKaINT_qjvEf1-cNa?dl=0)

<sup>29</sup> <https://oca.org/about/sexual-misconduct>

<sup>30</sup> <https://oca.org/PDF/sexual-misconduct/2014-04-PSP-Sexual-Misconduct.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.d2l.org>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.d2l.org/education/>