

**Christ the Savior Holy Spirit Orthodox Church**  
**Pastoral Directives for Liturgical Etiquette**  
**COMPLETE EDITION**

September 27, 2023

Dear Parish Faithful,

**Liturgical Etiquette in the Church**

*"But all things should be done decently and in order." (I Cor. 14:40)*

Periodically, I like to send out a reminder about our liturgical etiquette or discipline while in church. Especially now, with so many new faces in the church still learning the ways of Orthodox liturgical worship. I am certain that this can be helpful to our new inquirers and others. And I need to do this periodically based upon my own observations while serving in church, and thus noticing how some of this can be forgotten over time. A certain liturgical discipline has nothing to do with an empty formalism or legalism. It is about respecting the sacred space in which we worship as a community. Perhaps the timing is good as we are now in the Church New Year and moving toward the Advent Season and the Feast of the Nativity. Think in terms of the petition: *"For this holy house and for those who enter with faith, reverence and the fear of God ..."*

**"It is Time to Begin the Service to the Lord"**

The Liturgy is meant to be experienced from the opening doxology – "Blessed is the Kingdom" - to the final dismissal. Arriving on time allows for that full liturgical experience. Here is how I characterize being "late."

Arriving after the opening doxology – "Blessed is the Kingdom" – one is *late*.

Arriving after the Little Entrance, one is *rather late*.

Arriving after the Gospel, one is *very late*.

Arriving after the Great Entrance, one is ???

\*\*\* Arriving after the Gospel for a "reason *not* worthy of a blessing" means that one is not prepared to receive Holy Communion and therefore one should not approach the Chalice. We commune first with the Word of God and then we commune with Christ in the Eucharist. Arriving after the Gospel is simply too late for receiving Holy Communion.

## **“Let Us Stand Aright! Let Us Stand With Fear”**

Once we enter into the Anaphora with the above exclamation, every effort should be made to limit any movement in the church; meaning, primarily, that no one should leave the church until the consecration of the Holy Gifts. I assume that people leave the church primarily in order to use the restroom. I fully understand what that means for our children. I am not promoting any “accidents!” Parents need to make that call. However, it is best *not* to leave when the priest is outside of the altar area blessing, speaking, reading or censuring. Try and at least wait until the priest re-enters the altar area. If the priest or deacon is censuring, try and wait until the censuring is completed before moving toward the door. It is difficult to “hit” a moving target! Upon re-entering the church from the hall, the same principle applies: wait until the priest returns to the altar area before going back to your place.

## **Food and Drink**

Obviously(!) there is no eating or drinking in the church that is allowed. That includes no drinking of water. I will still occasionally discover a gum wrapper on the floor(?). Gum chewing is not allowed.

## **Bodily Posture**

The whole person – spirit, soul and body (I Thess. 5:23) – is engaged in worship. Our bodily movements or postures in a subtle or not-so-subtle way reflects an inner vigilance – or lack of vigilance – while worshipping in church. We are “at home” in the church as the church is actually our “home away from home,” but we want to avoid being too casual. In other words, we want to respect the fact that we are present and worshipping in the sacred space of the church. The church is other than an auditorium or theatre; or a casual indoor venue; or a place to gather and “socialize” within a religious setting. Therefore, the following bodily postures are inappropriate in the sacred space of the church and need to be avoided at all time:

- + Crossing of the legs while sitting
- + Hands stuffed in one’s pockets
- + Arms stretched out over a pew while sitting
- + Wearing of short pants, tank tops and logo shirts

## **Blessed Bread and Visitors**

It is best not to take the blessed bread that we partake of after receiving the Eucharist to a visitor. I understand the impulse to show hospitality. But, they may think you are

taking them Holy Communion. That is very much the case with my XU students. Some of them will tell me in class that they were unsure about “taking Communion.” That puts them in an awkward situation, and it is misleading if any non-Orthodox visitor thinks that they just received Holy Communion. All of our visitors are encouraged to receive the blessed bread (*antidoron*) following the Liturgy. Please feel free to invite them to come forward for that.

### **Receiving Holy Communion**

When we approach one of the two available chalices for the reception of the Eucharist, we need to avoid all talking and socializing while in the “Communion line.” All attention and focus is ahead toward Christ, Whom we will meet and receive when we step up to the Chalice. Folding one’s arms across the breast is a gesture of humility and compunction as we approach the Chalice, and is strongly recommended.

### **Post-Liturgy Discussion**

Unless you have a reason to be elsewhere – Church School teacher, setting up or preparing for the Fellowship Hour – everyone who is going to stay for that fellowship needs to remain in the church for the post-Liturgy discussion. No one should be roaming the church hall, “killing time” until the Fellowship Hour.

Please accept and respect the above as “pastoral directives.”

It is a privilege, a gift, and a joy to be in church for any liturgical service, and especially for the Divine Liturgy on the Lord’s Day. Let us respond with love and respect within the sacred space of the consecrated temple of our worship.

Please direct any further questions, topics or concerns to Fr Steven.