

Our Parish Life Handbook

A living, working document, representing the "work in progress" that parish life always is.

Saints Cyril and Methodius
Orthodox Christian Church

Terryville, CT

(Version of May 2010)

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Saints Cyril and Methodius Orthodox Christian Church, Terryville, CT

VISION – MISSION – VALUES

Our Vision: To receive, accept, make known and share God the Father's love in all its saving power, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

Our Mission: To make present in this time and place the fullness of the Orthodox Christian Faith, so that all persons might come to the knowledge of the Truth. We carry out this mission through worship, stewardship, education, nurture, fellowship, charity and outreach.

Our Values: We are traditional: We value time-honored truths and morality. We hold to long-established patterns of worship, devotion and service. We value every person, family, and community. We believe that life lived rightly has boundaries—there are things that we should do and things we should not; but within the structure provided by those limits there is the opportunity for boundless growth, creativity and joy. Indeed, we affirm this apparent paradox: that the path to true freedom and eternal blessedness is to be a servant—to be a servant of God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

Introduction

Orthodox Christianity*

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 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)

Orthodox Christianity

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 Apostles” (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.

* 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.

Our Parish

Saints Cyril and Methodius Orthodox Church, a parish of the Diocese of New England of the Orthodox Church in America, was founded in Terryville, CT, in 1908 and a place of worship for the community has stood in Terryville on the corner of Fairview and Ames Avenues since 1912. The founders were immigrants of Slavic descent from Central and Eastern Europe who came to this part of Connecticut to work in local industries. Today the parish serves Orthodox Christians of diverse backgrounds from a wide spread of towns and cities in west-central Connecticut, including Plymouth, Thomaston, Bristol, Farmington, Wolcott, Harwinton, Burlington, Torrington, Litchfield and beyond. The present church building was built in the late 1970s. The warm butternut wood interior is adorned with beautiful examples of traditional Eastern Orthodoxy iconography, including several large fresco-like pieces.

To understand Orthodox Christianity one must begin two thousand years ago at the dawn of the Christian era. In the years after Jesus' Resurrection, Apostles and missionaries traveled throughout the known world. They spread the Gospel, the Good News of life and salvation through Christ's death and resurrection. We affirm that the head of the church is no other than Jesus Christ.

Soon after the time of the Apostles five major locations were established as centers for the faith: Jerusalem, Antioch (located in present day Lebanon and Syria), Rome, Alexandria and Constantinople. These five patriarchal centers formed a cohesive whole and were in full communion with each other. In the year 1054 the Roman Patriarch (the Pope) was formally separated from this united church and five hundred years later Protestant churches began separating from Rome.

The four so-called "eastern" patriarchates (hence the term "Eastern" Orthodox Church) remained intact and are in full communion with one another to this day. Over the years other centers of the Orthodox faith emerged, joining these early patriarchates. These include Russia, Georgia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Albania, Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, Finland, the Sinai Peninsula, and even Japan, Canada and the United States.

There are some 250 million Orthodox Christians worldwide and, perhaps, as many as 6 million right here in the United States. It is the second largest Christian communion world-wide. You may be aware of Orthodox Christians with an ethnic designation such as Greek or Russian. The astonishing thing about this ethnic multiplicity is its theological and moral unity. Orthodox throughout the world hold unanimously to the fundamental Christian doctrines and moral standards taught by the Apostles and handed down by their successors, the bishops, through the centuries.

Here at Ss. Cyril and Methodius Church we are heirs of this unique and precious heritage and of the Orthodox Christian missionary efforts, sponsored by the Orthodox Church of Russia, which began in Alaska in 1794. In 1970 the Orthodox Church of Russia granted our Church in North America a decree of total self-government. The Orthodox Church in America became one of the fifteen Autocephalous (self-governing) Orthodox Churches that together make up the world-wide Eastern Orthodox Church.

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 6:00 PM we sing Vigil, which begins our celebration of each Sunday as a feast of Christ's Resurrection. The community assembles again on Sunday morning at 9:15 AM (8:30 AM in July and August) 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. Come and see!

For Further Information

Every week our parish publishes the weekly bulletin in which can be found the parish schedule, the parish prayer list, notes and comments from the pastor, various announcements, and relevant texts from Holy Scripture. A bi-monthly calendar in classic grid format is also distributed. A pictorial directory has been produced on an occasional basis, as well. The official By-Laws of the Parish, last amended in November 2008, are available to all members of the parish.

Contact Details

Saints Cyril and Methodius Orthodox Church
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Terryville, CT 06786-6329

Telephone: (860) 582-3631

On the Web at: www.terryvilleorthodoxchurch.org

Email: saintcyril@snet.net

Useful Web Sites

www.terryvilleorthodoxchurch.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: 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: 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.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.

www.skete.com: The best on-line source for Orthodox Christian icon reproductions (mounted icons). They also offer some original iconography.

www.gallerybyzantium.com: The best on-line source for Orthodox Christian jewelry, such as baptismal crosses, Pascha egg pendants, etc. Gallery Byzantium has a strongly established history of providing extremely high quality work.

www.istok.net: The best on-line full-service Orthodox Christian supply store. Based in Canada, Istok primarily offers items made in Russia. This site is worth a visit if only to browse.

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. Vigil (which in our parish's practice is Great Vespers with the reading of the Resurrectional Matins Gospel inserted before the final dismissal) 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 Vigil 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.

During the Nativity Fast (Advent) we add a weekday service 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.

Confession and Communion

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 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 bad 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. But 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.

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 Vigil 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 me out for consultation. If anyone needs guidance in the matter of preparation through prayer and fasting for Holy Communion, please see me so that we might discuss the subject.
- 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 Apostles’ 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. Over-scrupulosity, however, should also be avoided. 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.

- 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, usually on the fourth Saturday of each month, after Vigil, 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 personal Confession to personal Confession, and thus will remain in the proper mindset of repentance and renewal as we regularly participate in Holy Communion.

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. (Note: Traditionally, oil-burning votive lamps are used in the Orthodox Church. However, many years ago our parish opted to use the paraffin votives, probably for reasons of convenience.)

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 Memorial Table (which is located by the large Crucifix situated in the front left corner of the

Nave of the Church) as offerings of prayer on behalf of the departed. 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.

Seven-Day Vigil Candles

We are presently burning three seven-day vigil candles each week in our Church: One on the Altar Table, a second hanging over the Holy Doors, and a third on the Memorial Table. The candle on the Holy Table burns in vigil besides the Reserved Sacrament. The vigil candle over the Holy Doors burns as a general intercession on behalf of the parish. The Vigil candle on the Memorial Table burns in memory of all the departed faithful. (Sometimes, at the discretion of the pastor, an additional seven-day vigil may be placed elsewhere in the Church as a special expression of either prayer or gratitude for blessings received.)

To defray the cost of burning these large seven-day vigil candles, you may deposit monetary offerings in the box provided for this purpose located next to the Memorial Table by the large Crucifix situated in the front left corner of the Nave of the Church. You may include with those monetary offerings written requests for special prayers to be offered on behalf of the living and/or the departed during the Preparation of the Holy Gifts that Fr. John performs before each celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Envelopes for this purpose are available at the Candle Desk in the Church Narthex.

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. At the time of this writing, our parish is blessed not only with a Choir Director, but also an Assistant Choir Director.

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.

Helpers

The helpers are young women 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 a helper a young woman 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 distribution of the post-communion bread ("antidoron") at the Divine Liturgy and the lighting of the beeswax tapers at the singing of "O Gladsome Light" at the Service of Vespers.

Pastoral Services

Baptisms

The practice of Baptism 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, 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) Vigil. 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 Christians 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.
- Those attending and participating in the Baptism should be appropriately dressed for the occasion. This is a solemn and prayerful occasion and should be treated as such by our attire and demeanor.
- 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. 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. Finally, almsgiving implies that those involved would seek at this time to share their bounty with those in need, as a way of appropriately marking this occasion. In this context it is entirely appropriate to make a donation to the parish church in which the Rite of Baptism will be taking place. Also, if special efforts have been made to gather a choir to sing responses for the service, the members of the choir should be thanked and remembered appropriately. 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.

Weddings

Marriage 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 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 must 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 as he sees fit. 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*. Among

other places, the *Diocesan Guidelines for Marriage* are available on the official Internet Website of the Diocese of the England.)

At the present time at Saints Cyril and Methodius Church, Terryville, CT, the following is the usual order of pre-marital guidance. Each session will last about 90 minutes, but may be shorter or longer, as deemed fit by the pastor.

Pre-Marital Counseling at Saints Cyril and Methodius Church, Terryville, CT:

Session One: Basics of the Orthodox Christian Faith—What does the Orthodox Church teach about God, the world, human beings, salvation, the Church, eternal life, and more? Marriage is not lived in a vacuum, so we must not discuss it without having some idea of the teachings of the Church about life in general.

Session Two: What Orthodox Christians Understand and Teach about Marriage—The world sees marriage in many and various ways, but how does the Orthodox Church understand marriage?

Session Three: The Couple's Expectations of Marriage—Are we of one mind about marriage and what it means to be married, what it means to be husband and wife?

Session Four: What is Love—How is love expressed and received?

Session Five: Leaving and Cleaving—How do we deal with and relate to our families when we, through wedding and in marriage, have become a new family?

Session Six: Communication as a Key to a Good Marriage—How do we communicate with one another in Marriage?

Session Seven: Decision Making in Marriage—How do we manage our lives on a day-to-day basis? How do we make decisions? How do we work together in marriage as partners and helpers?

Session Eight: Managing our "Stuff": Money and Things—How do we manage the material side of marriage? How do we manage money and possessions?

Session Nine: Sexuality in Marriage—What does the Church teach about sex and, particularly about sex in marriage?

Session Ten: Reflection—A time to reflect back over the previous sessions and to tie everything together.

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 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") 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 over the body of the departed is sung in Church, 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. Items 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*. Among other places, the *Diocesan Guidelines for Funerals* are available on the official Internet Website of the Diocese of the England.)

Memorial Services

Memorial Services ("Panikhidas") are served by appointment on Saturday afternoons before the celebration of the weekly Saturday evening Parish Vigil. 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 PreSanctified 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.

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 Apostle's 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 convalescent home 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 radios, stereos, televisions, VCRs, computers, etc., should be turned off.
- All members of the household should be gathered, standing and appropriately attired (neat, clean casual clothing is fine, but no dirty work clothes or T-shirts with slogans, etc. should be worn), 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 respectfully absent themselves.
- 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.
- It ought to go without saying, but when the time comes for the visit of the priest, the house should be in "bless-able" condition, not necessarily pristine, but neat and presentable.

Parish Cemetery

Our Parish has a Parish Cemetery, which is located off of East Plymouth Road, Terryville. The Parish Cemetery operates under its own by-laws, procedural rules and administration. For further information, please contact the Cemetery Chairperson (usually referred to as the "Cemetery Sexton") or the Pastor.

Education

Church School Education

We use a graded classroom approach to parish education. We have three classes covering school ages ranging from "pre-K" through to the 8th grade. (Older children, those of high school age, participate in our parish's Adult Education program, described below.) Church School Education takes place on Sunday mornings in the fall, winter and spring, beginning at 8:30 AM and ending in time for the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, which starts at 9:15 AM

Adult Education

Adult Education takes place on Sunday mornings, at the same time as Church School sessions. Adult Education is led by the pastor. Of late Adult Education sessions have consisted of reading from the writings of Orthodox spiritual writers and then commenting on and discussing those writings, seeking to be edified by them

Bible Study

Our weekly Bible Study meets for an hour and a half once a week except during Great Lent and the Nativity Fast. We read books of the Bible in their entirety, commenting on and discussing those writings as we proceed through the text. These study sessions are led by the Pastor. This has been a fruitful program for those who have participated in it.

Library

Our parish is blessed with a good collection of books on the Orthodox Faith. The collection of items from St. Vladimir's Seminary (SVS) Press is particularly good, as the parish is a member of the Seminary's Press Club and receives copies of all new publications from SVS Press at a sharply discounted rate. We also have a quite comprehensive collection of Church School materials.

Catechesis

By request or (especially in the case of those preparing for entrance into the fullness of communion with the Church) at the initiative of the pastor, personal, one-on-one, education and catechesis sessions are scheduled, as deemed necessary. In addition, catechetical, educational articles and inserts are often included in and with the weekly parish bulletin.

Fellowship

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. We ask a small donation from participants to defray the costs.

FOCA (Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America).

Our parish has a Senior FOCA Chapter. The FOCA is the successor organization to the FROC (the so-called "R' Club"), which is an official fraternal organization of the Orthodox Church in America. In our parish, the FOCA Chapter involves itself in both fellowship and service projects. For example, each year on Super Bowl Sunday, the FOCA runs a "soup and sub" event whereby soups and submarine sandwiches are sold to raise money to help fund the FOCA's charitable endeavors. The FOCA has also sponsored fellowship events such as outings to minor league baseball games and bowling outings.

Sisterhood

All female members of our parish are members of the Parish Sisterhood by virtue of their membership in the Church. The Parish Sisterhood takes on occasional events, such as the Festival of Tables, usually with the goal of raising funds to help meet the costs of a specific parish project. In the past, Sisterhood projects have raised Funds for parish projects ranging from new carpet in the Nave of the Church to supporting the Parish Scholarship Fund.

Stewardship

Financial

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.

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—some large, some small. 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 need is to support an annual parish expense budget that at the time of this writing is between \$155,000.00 and \$160,000.00. In recent years, we have had about 100 adult members capable of making a pledge. So, if we “do the math,” we understand the need.

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.

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. These include the Memorial Fund, the Charity Fund and the Scholarship Fund.

The Memorial Fund: The Memorial Fund consists of monies that have been donated in memory of departed loved ones. The money in the Memorial Fund is restricted for use to purchase items for the beautification of the Church.

The Charity Fund: The Charity Fund consists of monies that have been donated to the Church with the restriction that the money be used for purely charitable purposes. An ad hoc committee consisting of the Parish clergy, Parish Lay President, and Parish Treasurer receive applications and make disbursements from this Fund.

The Fr. Nicholas Kiryluk Memorial Scholarship Fund: The purpose of the Scholarship Fund shall be to distribute yearly Scholarship Grants (“grants”) of money to students who are members of Ss. Cyril and Methodius Orthodox Church, Terryville, CT, and who have made applications for those grants that have met with the approval of the Scholarship Committee (“the Committee”) according to the stipulations established by the official *Guidelines and Conditions of the Scholarship Fund*. (The official *Guidelines and Conditions of the Scholarship Fund* is a separate document that defines the Scholarship Fund.)

Wills and Bequests

Please consider leaving a gift to Saints Cyril and Methodius 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 Saints Cyril and Methodius 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.

Parish Administration

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 board of trustees of the parish as a legal corporation. The parish council is composed of the following: the rector, acting rector or priest-in-charge; all other assigned priests and deacons; four elected officers (the parish council lay president, the treasurer, the corporate/recording secretary and the financial secretary); six elected at-large members; and three appointed members. The executive board is composed of the rector, acting rector or priest-in-charge, all other assigned priests and deacons, the parish council lay president, the treasurer, the corporate/recording secretary, and the financial secretary.

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 parish cemetery and community center 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

rector, and any issues that are strictly reserved to the parish assemblies); to work with the rector to prepare, approve, maintain and implement a handbook of parish life.

Parish council meetings are held once each month, July and August excluded, provided that the business of the parish can be maintained during those two months without a meeting. Generally these meetings take place on the first Monday 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 rector is the presiding officer over all council meetings, the lay president, with the rector's blessing, may act as chairman or, in his absence, the lay vice president. Opening attendance of any seven members 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.

The rector and the lay president of the parish council will appoint persons in the parish to chair various committees in the parish, with the exception of the cemetery committee, whose chairperson is appointed by the parish council. It is the responsibility of each chairperson to appoint the other members of his/her committee and to make regular reports to the parish council concerning the work of the respective committees. The rector and the lay president of the parish council are *ex officio* members of every committee. Neither the chairperson nor the members of any committee need be members of the parish council.

BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE PARISH

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 Saints Cyril and Methodius 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 your care.