

Our Parish Life Handbook

Nativity of Christ
Orthodox Church
Youngstown, OH
(Version of July 2021)

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MISSION

Our Mission: Nativity of Christ Orthodox Church is an Orthodox Parish (MP-USA) striving to build a loving community of disciples of all backgrounds that are committed to faith in Christ our Savior through repentance and adherence to the Traditions of His Holy Orthodox Church.

VALUES

Worship

We are traditional, we believe in Orthodox Christianity, as taught by the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. The Eucharistic celebration of the Divine Liturgy is the apex of our faith which we seek to live and serve with the whole of our lives. We value excellence and seek to celebrate our services in the spirit of the Orthodox Tradition and within the context of our parish community so that all may experience meaningful participation.

Discipleship

We strive to break open the relevance of the Gospel for our daily lives. Changing and growing into the likeness of Christ is not just greater knowledge of our faith, but the experience of God Himself through His Divine Grace (energies).

Fellowship

We believe that our Baptism makes us one family in which we learn to love one another as Christ loved us. We strive to build a church culture where people are open and authentic, especially about their need to grow and change.

Service

We believe that the Holy Spirit has prepared works for us to do that will advance the Kingdom of Christ. We recognize God's call for us to serve serve both within our parish and also beyond.

Evangelization

We believe that Christ came to seek and save the lost. We heed God's command to share his name with the world. We look for the opportunity to invite disconnected or nominal Orthodox, and unchurched friends to join us.

Introduction

Orthodox Christianity¹

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 “definable,” recognizable Truth and relativism is unacceptable.
2. Truth finds its ultimate expression in God, the One Who Is..I am..
3. God has revealed Himself to Man.”His creature” in history in various ways and ultimately through His Son, Jesus Christ.
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.

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.
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.
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.
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.

¹ **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 the Saints Cyril & Methodius Orthodox Church in Terryville, CT for the use of their Parish Handbook from which we have compiled our own.*

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.

For Further Information

Weekly bulletins are published that tell the schedule, notes and comments from the pastor, various announcements. This is delivered in email format and printed for Sunday worship.

Contact Details

Nativity of Christ Orthodox Church

727 Miller St.

Youngstown, OH 44502

Telephone: 330-788-0151

On the Web at: www.nativityofchrist.ent or www.orthodoxyyoungstown.com

Useful Web Sites

www.mospatusa.com The Official website of the patriarchal Parishes in the USA. Includes information about the diocese.

www.orthodoxfellowship.org : The official web site of the Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America (FOCA).

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.hts.edu: *Holy Trinity* Seminary in Jordanville, NY, the principal centre of theological education in the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.

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.fundforassistance.org: Fund for Assistance to the ROCOR - The mission of the Fund for Assistance is to support the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, specifically, the moral-spiritual education of youth.

www.iocc.org : The official web site of International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), the leading Orthodox Christian charitable organization in the world. 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. 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. On some occasions, when a minor feast can't be celebrated we will serve prayer services ("molebens," "akathists") so that the feast might be kept in some small way. 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.

The primary liturgical language used at our parish is English, with Church Slavonic and Greek also incorporated into the services as needed.

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.

Frequent and regular participation in Holy Communion should be the be the norm as is taught in Scripture, the church canons, and by the Church fathers. 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 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. 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 response to the growing revival of frequent and regular participation in Holy Communion by the faithful, the Holy Synod of Bishops of Russia issued an encyclical, an official letter, on the subject of Communion. What follows is a summary of that statement released and approved by the Hierarchical Consultation of the Russian Orthodox Church on February 2nd/3rd, 2015, meeting at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow. The following statement is the adopted procedure that the current rector

of St. John's has adopted and wishes to promote, though pastoral accommodations may vary.

The full statement is quite lengthy and well documented. This summary contains a highly condensed version of the full statement and while containing an overview of the full document omits both documentation and detail. In addition, this is not an official summary of the original Russian version and consequently should not be read as such. A full version of the original document translated by Holy Trinity Monastery can be found at <http://jordanville.org/files/Articles/On-the-Participation-of-the-Faithful-in-the-Eucharist-Edited.pdf>.

The Mystery of the Eucharist Requires Preparation

Preparation for Holy Communion has changed over the centuries. In the early Church Christians received the Eucharist at every Divine Liturgy—in fact, it was mandatory. As the Church grew and the celebration of Divine Liturgy became more frequent the presence at these assemblies by every Christian was considered desirable but not mandatory. Today, the early practice of Communion at every Divine Liturgy still remains the ideal as a part of the Tradition of the Church.

By the 4th Century the practice of fasting before receiving Communion was introduced and by the 12th century the discipline of receiving Holy Communion was preceded by a discipline of preparation that included fasting, the examination of conscience before a spiritual father and the reading of a special prayer rule.

In practice and under monastic influence the preparation for Holy Communion became more stringent which led some Christians to abstain from communion for long periods of time citing their unworthiness. This consequence is undesirable and decried by many contemporary teachers such as St. Theophan the Recluse and St. John of Kronstadt.

Preparation Requirements

The preparation requirements before Holy Communion are defined by the regulations of the Church and *applied to each individual by their confessor* who should take into consideration the frequency that they commune, their spiritual, moral and physical state and the external circumstances of their life. The goal of preparation is not mere fulfilment of formal requirements, but rather the acquisition of a penitent state of soul, forgiveness of others, reconciliation with our neighbors, and uniting oneself to Christ through the Holy Mystery. Fasting and prayer are only means to help us achieve this inner state.

1 . Fasting, as prescribed before Holy Communion can differ depending on a person's circumstances. This particularly applies to situations of illness, disease, medication, physical condition, pregnancy, age, environment, or spiritual strength. Fasting can be mitigated or set aside altogether by one's confessor if sufficient reason exists. The standard today is that anyone who communes at least twice a month should observe the ordinary fasting periods (i.e. Wednesdays and Fridays, etc.) may approach the Chalice with no additional fasting other than the Eucharistic Fast from midnight until Communion. In the case of a Pre-sanctified liturgy served in the evening than fasting should takes place at least 6 hours prior to Liturgy.

The Eucharistic Fast in not applied to infants and very young children, those who must take

medication or food in the morning, pregnant or nursing women. Marital relations are abstained from on the eve of Communion.

2. There are many pious practices in our Russian Church regarding prayerful preparation or Communion. None of them are obligatory in their entirety though there is a need to pray prior to receiving the Eucharist. These pious prayer rules should not be a hindrance to the reception of communion but an aid. Prayerful preparation for Holy Communion should include *a doable personal rule of prayer* on a weekly basis. Prayers of personal preparation may be adjusted by *one's confessor if required*. Preparation also includes attendance of services (Vespers, etc.) that precede the Liturgy at which one receives the Holy Mysteries. There are excusable reasons for missing the prayer rule and/or service before Communion which are evaluated by one's confessor.

3. A communicant should not be late for Divine Liturgy and certainly not arrive after the Gospel reading. In addition, a communicant should hear or read the thanksgiving prayers before leaving the church.

Confession

A person preparing for Communion should examine their self for the sins which they have committed since their last confession and repent (turn away) from them. In accordance with the practice of many parishes and the Statement by the Russian Synod, a confessor may allow a layperson to partake of the Body and Blood of Christ several times over a short interval without confession before every Communion [**Our parish practice is once per month**]. This, of course, does not include situations in which an individual has committed serious (grave) sins or they perceive a need for confession. 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 a priest out for consultation. If anyone needs guidance in the matter of preparation through prayer and fasting for Holy Communion, please see the rector to discuss this subject.

Children and Communion

The manner of preparation for Communion by children is determined by the parents in consultation with their confessor, and depends on the individual circumstances of the child. Children should be brought to Communion whenever they are present at Divine Liturgy and both parents, where possible, should receive Holy Communion along with them. Children should be receiving Communion on an empty stomach by the time they are seven (7) years of age. In addition, they begin to recite a short prayer rule before Holy Communion at this age. The first confession before Communion is made according to canon law when the child is ten (10) years of age. However, in the Russian tradition this often occurs earlier at age seven (7).

Conclusion

The Eucharist is the central Sacrament of the Church. It should not be avoided through sloth or over pious feelings. The Eucharist unites us to Christ and to each other into one body ("...and unite all of us who partake of the one Bread and the one Cup, one to another..." Liturgy of St. Basil), we must not consider Communion as solely an individual and private religious act, which depends entirely on one's personal desire, piety and preparation. Thus, regular Communion must be just that communal and its

frequency is necessary for our salvation, for, in accordance with the words of our Lord: *...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:53-54)*

Use of Candles

Candles are available for sale 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 vigil 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 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.

Choir

The Parish Choir leads the singing and chanting of the responses at the Divine Services. The Parish Choir is led by the duly appointed Director who is appointed to that position by the Pastor. As a rule, 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 invited 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. There are two times in the Divine Liturgy that all are expected to sing, at the profession of the Creed and the Lord Prayer.

Altar Servers

The altar servers are men and boys of all ages 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.

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: 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.

Application Form: All infant Baptisms will require an application to be submitted by the Parents. This application can be found on the parish website or by requesting one from the rector.

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.

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 follow this pattern.

In our parish the 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.

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.

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.

Those who are using the services a funeral home should keep in mind:

- The coffin should be wooden, so that the body of the departed Christian can naturally return to the earth. Plastic coffins are not suitable for this.
- Christians if possible are not to be embalmed, as embalming hinders the natural process of the return of the body to the earth.
- A cross is placed over the grave of an Orthodox Christian. Certain municipal cemeteries may not allow standing monuments, but only flat tiles. In this case, it is necessary to ensure that there is a cross depicted on the tile.

Memorial Services & Molebens

Memorial Services (“Panikhidas”) are served by appointment on Saturday afternoons before the celebration of the weekly Saturday evening service (weekday services are also available according to the priest’s schedule). On those Saturdays designated in the Church calendar as “Memorial Saturdays,” a general memorial service commemorating all departed faithful Christians is served though we will commemorate individuals as needed.

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.

“Molebens” or Prayers of supplication are served by appointment for specific intentions. It is also common for us to serve Molebens for the start of the School year.

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).

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 Blessings

The Annual Blessings of Homes takes place each year following the Feast of Theophany in January. We will try to bless as many homes on one day as possible. If that day is not good for your schedule then you will need to individually schedule a time with the priest. 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, DVDs, 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.

Education

Church School Education

Currently, we offer Sunday school lessons on a rotating schedule for our children.

ABUSE TOLERANCE

Nativity of Christ Orthodox Church has a zero tolerance for abuse in ministry programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every staff member and volunteer to act in the best interest of all children in every program.

Under no circumstances will a person be allowed to work with a minor in any capacity, if such person has been (i) convicted of or pled guilty to any criminal charge involving either child sexual or physical abuse, or (ii) charged with a crime involving illegal sexual behavior, whether toward a minor or an adult.

Any inappropriate conduct or relationship between an adult and a minor will be confronted immediately and investigated. Prompt warnings must be issued when appropriate, and the situation monitored very closely. Any adult worker’s services will be terminated immediately for continued violations of such warnings, or for a single violation of sufficient gravity.

In the event a staff member or volunteer observes any inappropriate behaviors (i.e. policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse or neglect (physical, emotional, or sexual) it is that individual’s responsibility to immediately report their observations to the priest or child safety committee member.

ENFORCEMENT

Nativity of Christ Orthodox Church staff members and volunteers are charged with the diligent enforcement of all Church policies. Violations of these policies are grounds for immediate

dismissal, disciplinary action, or reassignment from Children's Ministry positions for both volunteers and staff members. Final decisions related to policy violations will be the responsibility of the Rector or Parish Council.

While there is no universally accepted definition of child sexual abuse, the following description has been adopted: sexual abuse involves contact or interaction between a child (under age 18) and an adult, when the child is being used for sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or another person when the perpetrator is in a position of power, influence or control over the victim. The term sexual abuse is applied any time a child is engaged in a sexual situation with an adult.

CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATION

In the event that the alleged incident of child sexual abuse implicates a church worker (paid or volunteer), that person shall be removed immediately from any further church-related contact with children for the duration of the investigation. Should the investigation conclude that the accused person did commit an act of sexual abuse toward a child, that person will be permanently barred from any further church-related work with minors and/or asked to leave the parish. Reporting to the police authorities will be made as necessary.

Adult Education

Adult Education consists of periodic lectures and teaching series as scheduled by the rector.

Library

Our parish is blessed with a good collection of books on the Orthodox Faith. The collection of items from is particularly good.

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 Meal

On Sunday mornings, following the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, we have a Parish Lunch to which all are invited. It is hosted by weekly teams. The fare is usually simple but is enjoyed by all. We ask a small donations from participants to defray the costs plates, utensils, cups, etc.

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, usually with the goal of raising funds

to help meet the costs of a specific parish project. The Sisterhood is vital to the upkeep and beautification of our parish.

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.

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? Let us look at the scriptures to see what the Old Testament prescribed.

In ancient Israel, the Law of Moses instituted the “tithe,” also called the offering of the “first-fruits”. “Tithe” is merely the Old English word for “tenth” or 10%. Israel ’s tithe was an assessment of one-tenth of all produce. Usually this portion was rendered from the first harvested of the crop, hence the tithe of “firstfruits”. The proceeds were devoted to the maintenance of the Temple and support of the priesthood. (Num. 18:24, Deut. 12:11, and 26:12).² The Law of Moses also called for special tithes to be collected for certain feast days as well as offerings specifically for the poor.

Now, many in our Orthodox Church would contend that these prescriptions of the Old Testament is no longer binding on Christians today. If you believe that is the case, then how do we Orthodox understand the obligation to be stewards of God’s gifts. An insight into the answer of this question might also be found scripture in the words of our Lord Himself:

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)

So according to the New Testament scriptures which can hardly reconsidered on- binding on us today, 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 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

² Tithes and firstfruits by Fr. Dimitri Cozby

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 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 (2Corinthians 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. In fact, we follow a false God, that known as Mammon in the Gospel. If, however, we instead "die" to the things of this world if we are not "owned" by the things we actually live. We live because we are doing the will of God, which, for us, is life.

Further St. Paul teaches us that: *“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”* (2 Corinthians 9:7) While encouraging the believers to give generously, the Apostle Paul didn't want them to give beyond their means, "reluctantly or under compulsion." He wanted them to rely on their inner convictions. So giving today will look a bit different in the Church than in the Old Testament Israel, for those that have little are called to be like that of the poor widow who gave all she could though it was small. For those that have been blessed with more financial gifts, they should as the Lord says in the Gospel of St. Luke, “Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.” That is, make your wealth a vehicle and tool for salvation. In doing so both people fulfill their vocation.

That vocation is to accept and embrace the call to steward God's creation on His behalf and to His glory.

3 Principles of Stewardship

Let us now talk about what this could look like in application with certain principles of planned figures.

1. Planned Giving

- **Planned giving** (designating money in their budget to give)
- **Priority giving** (giving to God first before other expenses)
- **Percentage giving** (giving a percentage, not a dollar amount)
- **Progressive giving** (increasing the percentage regularly)

2. Wills and Bequests

Please consider leaving a gift to the parish 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.

3. Time and Talents

The Church 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. Fundraising efforts, liturgical service, volunteer cleaners, those that labor on parish maintenance and those that do missionary outreach. Stewardship incorporates using our time and talents for these purposes and to God's glory.

Parish Administration

By-Laws of the Parish

This content of this Parish Life Handbook reflects the STATUTE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 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 statutes are a more permanent document. Therefore, in case of discrepancies between the Handbook and statutes, the the statutes take precedence.

Rector

1. Every parish shall be headed by the Rector of the church appointed by the Diocesan Bishop for spiritual guidance of the believers and administration over the parish clergy and the parish. The Rector shall be accountable to the Diocesan Bishop for his activity.

2. The Rector shall be responsible for the correct celebration of the divine services in accordance with the Statute of the Church, as well as for the church sermon, religious and moral state and proper education of the parish members. He must conscientiously discharge all liturgical, pastoral and administrative duties determined by his office in accordance with the established canons and the present Statute.

3. The responsibilities of the Rector shall include:
 - a) guiding the clergy in fulfilling their liturgical and pastoral duties;
 - b) supervising the condition of the church building, its interior decoration and the availability of all objects necessary for divine services in accordance with the requirements of the liturgical rubrics and instructions of the Church authorities;
 - c) caring for correct and reverential reading and singing in the church;
 - d) caring for the exact abiding by the instructions of the Diocesan Bishop;
 - e) organizing catechetical, charitable, public and educational activities of the parish;
 - f) convening and chairing the sessions of the Parish Meeting;
 - g) suspending with sufficient grounds the implementation of the decisions of the Parish Meeting and the Parish Council on the matters of doctrinal, canonical, liturgical or administrative and economic nature with subsequent referral of the matter to the Diocesan Bishop for consideration;
 - h) supervising the implementation of the decisions of the Parish Meeting and the work of the Parish Council;
 - i) representing the interests of the Parish in the bodies of state power and local self-administration;
 - j) submitting to the Diocesan Bishop directly or through the Dean the annual reports on the state of the parish, the work carried out in the parish and his own work;
 - k) maintaining the official church correspondence;
 - l) keeping a liturgical journal and safe-keeping the parish archive;
 - m) issuing certificates of baptism and marriage.

4. The Rector can have a vacation and leave his parish for a while exclusively with the permission of the Diocesan authority received in the prescribed manner.

The Parish Meeting

1. The Parish Meeting headed by the Rector of the Parish, who is chairman of the Parish Meeting ex officio, shall be the highest governing body of the parish. The Parish Meeting shall include the clergymen of the parish and the laymen who regularly take part in the liturgical life of the parish and who are worthy of participation in the parish affairs by virtue of their commitment to Orthodoxy, their moral standing and experience of life. They shall be over 18 years, not under suspension or standing trial by an ecclesiastical or civil court.
2. The acceptance into the membership of the Parish Meeting and the withdrawal from it shall be made by the decision of the Parish Meeting on the basis of a petition (application). In the event that a member of the Parish Meeting is considered to be at odds with his position, he can be removed from the Parish Meeting by its decision.

In the event that the members of the Parish Meeting deviate from the canons, the present Statutes and other regulations of the Russian Orthodox Church or violate of the statute of the Parish, the memberships of the Parish Meeting can be changed completely or partly by the decision of the Diocesan Bishop.

3. The Parish Meeting shall be convened by the Rector or at the instruction of the Dean or other authorized representative of the Diocesan Bishop at least once a year.

The Parish Meeting convened for election or re-election of the members of the Parish Council shall be held with the participation of the Dean or any other representative of the Diocesan Bishop.

4. The meeting shall be held in accordance with the agenda presented by the chairman.
5. The chairman shall preside over the sessions in accordance with the adopted rules of procedure.
6. The Parish Meeting shall be entitled to take decisions if no less than half of its members take part in it. The resolutions of the Parish Meeting shall be adopted by a simple majority vote. In the event of a tie, the chairman (Rector) shall cast the deciding vote.
7. The Parish Meeting shall elect from among its members the secretary who shall be responsible for the minutes of the session.
8. The minutes of the Parish Meeting shall be signed by the chairman, the secretary and five elected members of the Parish Meeting. The minutes of the Parish Meeting shall become effective upon approval by the Diocesan Bishop.
9. The resolutions of the Parish Meeting can be read out to the parishioners in the church.
10. The Parish Meeting shall be responsible for:
 - a) preserving the inner unity of the Parish and promoting its spiritual and moral growth;
 - b) adopting the civil Statute of the Parish, amendments and additions to it to be approved by the

- Diocesan Bishop and become effective upon the registration with the state;
- c) admitting and excluding the members of the Parish Meeting;
 - d) electing the Parish Council and the Audit Commission;
 - e) planning financial and economic activities of the Parish;
 - f) providing for the safety of the church property and care for its increase;
 - g) adopting the plans of expenditures, including the amount of allocations for charity and religious educational purposes and submitting them to the Diocesan Bishop for approval;
 - h) approving the plans and examining the design and budget documents for construction and repair of church buildings;
 - i) considering financial and other reports of the Parish Council and reports of the Auditing Commission and submitting them to the Diocesan Bishop for approval;
 - k) approving the staff list and determining the upkeep of the members of the Parish Clergy and the Parish Council;
 - l) determining the order of disposal of the parish property under the conditions stipulated by the present Statute, the Civil Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Statute of the Diocese, the Statute of the Parish and also by the current legislation;
 - m) attending to the availability of all objects necessary for the canonical celebration of the divine services;
 - n) attending to church singing;
 - o) submitting petitions from the parish to the Diocesan Bishop and the civil authorities;
 - p) considering the complaints brought against the members of the Parish Council and Audit Commission and submitting them to the Diocesan Administration.

The Parish Council

1. The Parish Council shall be an executive and managerial body of the Parish meeting and shall be accountable to the Rector and the Parish meeting.

2. The Parish Council shall consist of the Chairman – the churchwarden, his/her assistant and the treasurer. The Parish Council shall be elected from among the members of the Parish meeting for the term of three years. Re-election is unlimited. The Diocesan Bishop shall approve the election of the Chairman of the Parish Council or appoint the Rector or another person to this office by his decree with the inclusion of this person in the Parish meeting.

The Diocesan Bishop shall be entitled to relieve a member of the Parish Council of his/her work, if he/she violates the canons, the provisions of the present Statute or of the civil Statute of the Parish.

3. In the period between the sessions of the Parish meeting the Parish Council shall:
 - a) implement the decisions of the Parish meeting;
 - b) submit the plans of economic activities, annual plans of expenditures and financial reports to the Parish meeting for consideration and approval;
 - c) be responsible for the safety and proper maintenance of the church and other buildings, constructions, premises and adjacent territories, the plots of land belonging to the Parish and all the property which the Parish owns or uses, and keep records;
 - d) purchase the property necessary for the parish and keep inventory books;
 - e) solve current economic matters;

- f) dispose of the financial assets of the Parish with the consent of the Rector and under his control and keep records;
- g) provide the Parish with the necessary property;
- h) provide the members of the Clergy of the Parish with living accommodations in the event that they need them;
- i) in agreement with the Rector and in accordance with the list of staff hire workers and employees;
- j) take care for the safety and beauty of the church, for maintaining decent order during the divine services and processions with the cross;
- k) maintain contacts with the bodies of state authority, local government, public associations and citizens;
- l) take care for providing the church with all objects necessary for the proper celebration of the divine services.

4. The members of the Parish Council may be removed from the Parish Council by the decision of the Parish meeting or by the order of the Diocesan Bishop, if there are sufficient grounds.

5. The Chairman (Rector) of the Parish Council – the churchwarden (president) shall represent the Parish Council in business, financial, economic and administrative matters as well as in court and shall issue powers of attorney in case of necessity.

Note: The Parish meeting shall be entitled in case of necessity to charge any member enjoying full rights to deal with the civil organizations and to defend the interests of the Parish in court.

6. The Rector may be elected Chairman of the Parish Council with the blessing of the Diocesan Bishop.

7. All official outgoing documents of the Parish shall be signed by the Rector and the Chairman of the Parish Council – the churchwarden. In the event of the Rector being Chairman of the Parish Council, the treasurer shall be the second signatory.

8. Bank and other financial documents shall be signed by the Chairman of the Parish Council and the treasurer. In civil legal relations the treasurer shall act as chief accountant. The treasurer shall keep records and keep financial assets, donations and other contributions and compile annual financial reports. The Parish shall keep accounting reports.

9. In the event that the Parish Council is re-elected or the Diocesan Bishop changes its composition, and also if the Chairman of the Parish Council is re-elected, dismissed by the Diocesan Bishop or dies, the Parish Meeting shall set up a commission of three members, which shall draw up a statement on the availability of the property and financial resources. The Parish Council shall accept material assets on the basis of this statement.

10. The responsibilities of the assistant chairman of the Parish Council shall be determined by the Parish meeting.

11. The responsibilities of the treasurer shall include the discounting and keeping of the sums of money

and other donations, the keeping of account-books, carrying out of financial operations at the instruction of the chairman of the Parish Council within the limits of the budget and compiling the annual financial reports.

The Auditing Commission

1. The Parish meeting shall elect from among its members for the term of three years the Auditing commission of the Parish, which shall consist of the Chairman and two members. The Auditing commission shall be accountable to the Parish meeting. The Auditing commission shall audit the financial and economic activities of the parish, the safety and stock-taking of the property and its proper use, make annual inventory, audit the entering of donations and revenue returns and expenditure. The Auditing commission shall present the results of the auditing and the appropriate proposals to the Parish meeting for consideration.

In the event that the abuses are revealed, the Auditing commission shall immediately inform the Diocesan authorities.

2. The right of auditing the financial and economic activities of the parish and parish institutions shall also belong to the Diocesan Bishop.

3. The members of the Parish Council and the Auditing commission cannot be close relatives.

4. The responsibilities of the Auditing commission shall include:

- a) regular audit, including the inspection of the availability of money, legality and regularity of the expenditures and the keeping of the expenses book by the parish;
- b) supervision of the property;
- c) annual inventory;
- d) control for the collect-boxes and donations.

5. The Auditing Commission shall compile acts on the auditing and present them at the regular or extraordinary sessions of the Parish meeting. In the event of the abuses, lack of property or money and the revealed mistakes in the keeping and registration of financial operations, the Parish meeting shall take appropriate decision. The Parish meeting is entitled to bring an action in court with prior consent of the Diocesan Bishop.

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 Nativity of Christ Orthodox Church, you are requested to:

- Be or become an Orthodox Christian
- Provide personal data to parish
- Partake of the Sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion
- Make a financial offering to the church each year as outlined in the section on planned giving.
- 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.