

Worship at St. George Cathedral

The Holy Orthodox Church encourages dignified behavior, proper protocol, respect, and reverence in the church temple. This is because we believe the Church is the presence of the Kingdom of God on earth. The church temple and its services are filled with God's presence, and we are to conduct ourselves accordingly.

This booklet is a guide to conduct at St. George Cathedral in Wichita, with the recognition that there are varying traditions and customs in other places among Orthodox Christians. Our fundamental conviction is that we come to church to pray and worship God above all else. That should always be the focus.

Dressing for Church

Whenever we are preparing to come to church, we should remember that we will be entering the House of God. For this reason, we dress formally in honor of our Lord – in our “Sunday best.” This means dressing modestly and appropriately, not necessarily in expensive garb. **At any age** it is inappropriate to wear shorts, pants that are too casual (jeans), short skirts, tight-fitting or transparent garments, or those with low necklines. Women should cover their shoulders; i.e., sleeveless dresses and tops are not appropriate. Although men are not required to wear a suit and tie, they are to dress in a dignified manner. Clothing with logos or printed material is inappropriate in church. Some women keep the pious tradition of covering their heads, while men and boys must remove their hats when entering the church.

Entering the Church: The Lighting of Candles

It is a pious Orthodox tradition to light candles for personal prayer intentions when entering the church. They are lit and placed in the “sandboxes” on either side of the narthex. The burning candle symbolizes the remembrance of our prayers before God, and the light of Christ in our midst. If you are requesting the intercessions of the Mother of God in particular, place the candle in the box on the left side nearer to her icon. It is customary to make a donation for each candle, as it is an offering to God. Please place your candles as far forward as possible in order to leave room for others. Parents, be attentive and assist your children when they are placing candles.

It is not proper to light candles at certain times during the service—generally the same times when you should not enter the church. These include during the Little and Great Entrances, the reading of the Epistle or Gospel, and when the priest is giving the homily or censuring the icons and congregation.

Please be aware that it is never acceptable to chew gum in church.

Entering the Church: Venerating Icons

The veneration of icons is customary in the Orthodox Church as a sign of reverence to the holy persons depicted therein. This is typically done by placing a kiss on the hands or the feet, or the scroll, the Gospel book, or hand cross in the icon – not on the face. In the post-coronavirus environment, many prefer simply to bow or make a gesture of kissing without actual contact. Please do not actually kiss the icon when wearing lipstick.

Entering the Nave

Please do not attempt to enter the nave at the following times, during the:

- Little or Great Entrances
- Epistle, Gospel, Homily
- When the priest or deacon is censuring
- Trisagion Prayers, Anaphora, Lord's Prayer

When our ushers are positioned in front of the center aisle this is an indication that it is not an appropriate time to enter. Please wait until they move to proceed to your seat, and do not attempt to go around them.

If an occasional problem occurs and you arrive late to the Divine Liturgy, please enter the church as quietly and reverently as possible. Parishioners arriving after the Trisagion Hymn are kindly requested to proceed to the balcony rather than the nave.

The Divine Liturgy

The Orthodox Church has a wide variety of liturgical services. Pre-eminent among these is the Divine Liturgy, the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. The Liturgy begins when the priest intones, "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." It is a matter of respect and reverence to be on time for the beginning of the Divine Liturgy. Arriving late not only impairs one's prayerful focus, but causes a distraction for others.

Those arriving after the chanting of the Gospel are not to approach the chalice for Holy Communion. The faithful are actually highly encouraged to arrive during Orthros, before the Divine Liturgy begins. This will ensure that one will be settled in plenty of time without becoming a distraction to others.

Standing and Sitting during the Divine Liturgy

It is the custom of some Orthodox Christians to stand throughout the entire Divine Liturgy, as well as during other services. If you choose to stand while the majority of the congregation is seated, please do so near the back or sides so that you do not block the view of those seated behind you. Children should be guided to stand at the proper times along with their parents.

Sitting is permitted in the Divine Liturgy at the following times: during the chanting of the troparia and kontakion after the Little Entrance; during the chanting of the Epistle; during the homily; after the Great Entrance at the petition “Let us complete our prayer unto the Lord,” and during the chanting of the Megalynarion (hymn to the Theotokos) following the consecration of the Holy Gifts.

Receiving Communion

Please approach the chalice with arms crossed, eyes down, and your mind on Christ, not looking around at others. When at the chalice, as the spoon approaches, tilt your head back, open your mouth wide, and allow the Holy Gifts to be dropped in. **Do not** close your mouth on the spoon. After receiving, return to your place in the same manner as when approaching: arms crossed, eyes down, and mind on Christ. Then pray the prayers after Holy Communion while others are communing, or commune silently with Christ in your heart. Do not occupy yourself by watching others receive communion.

Special Considerations during Liturgy

- **Refrain from socializing during the Liturgy.** Save your greetings and conversations for the fellowship hall. We are in the Liturgy to address God with our prayers and worship, not to socialize with others.
- **Use of cell phones is never appropriate in church.** If you have a professional reason to carry a phone for emergencies, **keep it on vibrate**, and sit near the exit so that leaving for an emergency will not be a distraction to others. Otherwise, turn it off before entering the sanctuary.
- **Refrain from reserving seats.** Allow others to sit as they come into the church, and especially make room for visitors so they will feel welcome.
- **Proper posture** — One should not be casual during the Divine Liturgy. It is improper to cross one’s legs or to throw back one’s arms over the pew. Keeping your feet on the ground also enables you to remain attentive and to stand when necessary. Stand with your hands by your side, on the pew in front of you, or held together in front of you. Never stand with your hands in your pockets.

Additional Pious Customs

- **Crossing oneself**—It is always appropriate to cross oneself at the mention of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; when glory or blessedness is ascribed to God; when entering or leaving the church; when passing in front of the altar; when venerating an icon, the gospel book, or the cross; and at various times for personal petitions.
- **It is not necessary to cross oneself** when the priest is giving a blessing or censuring the congregation. One may simply bow to receive the blessing.
- **Do not cross yourself after receiving communion** until stepping away from the chalice. There is great risk of bumping the chalice and causing spillage.

- **Kneeling**—It is customary at St. George Cathedral to kneel at the Consecration of the Holy Gifts. However, kneeling is prohibited during the Paschal season—from Pascha until the Kneeling Vespers Service on Pentecost—in honor of the Resurrection.
- **Prostrations**—Prostrations are a pious practice in the Orthodox Church. Prostrations are liturgically appropriate in various services throughout the Church year, most especially during the weekly services of Great Lent.

Children in Church

Christ said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14). It is desirable for young children to remain in church throughout a service if they are kept quiet and respectful. If a child starts screaming or becomes unruly, please quickly remove him to the cry room or chapel until he settles down. Occasional childish noises are not a problem, but always be careful to “shush” the child, and remind him to be quiet. If your children cannot be quiet throughout the Liturgy, it is best to stay in the cry room. When in the cry room, remember you are still in church. Unnecessary talking and playing should not take place there. Do your utmost to be attentive to the service.

Breastfeeding should not take place in the nave. There is a nursing closet in the cry room. Avoid bringing snacks for children unless absolutely necessary. Please clean up any crumbs. In any case, a child should never have anything in his mouth when coming to Holy Communion. It is never appropriate to allow a child to run down the aisles, play loudly, bring toys into church, or play with cell phone or tablets. Don’t allow them to come and go unnecessarily, and so try to make sure they have gone to the bathroom before entering the church. Remember, children belong in church, along with the rest of the parish family.

Receiving the Antidoron or Holy Bread

When consuming the Holy Bread after the Divine Liturgy, do not allow the crumbs to drop, since this is blessed bread. Please take only one piece as you pass by the table, so that there will be enough for everyone. If there is bread left over after everyone has received, you may take as much as you wish. Children will need assistance so that they do not take too many pieces, and so that they are not careless in handling the bread.

Leaving Church

The respectful protocol is to leave the church only after the dismissal. The exception is for Church School students and teachers who depart following the reception of Holy Communion. It is not acceptable to be in the church hall, kitchen, or an administrative office during Liturgy unless absolutely necessary. Those who leave early deprive themselves of the final blessing. Before departing the service please check the area around you and ensure that the liturgical books are placed back properly and that any personal items are picked up. After walking to the back of the nave of the church, it is customary to face the altar, bow, and make the sign of the cross.

Greeting the Priest and Bishop

In the aftermath of COVID-19, people have become much more concerned about touching when greeting. It is customary to greet a bishop by placing one's right hand over the left, palms facing up, and then bow while saying, "Master, bless". The same can be done when greeting a priest **when the bishop is absent**. If either places his hand in yours while blessing you, it is customary to kiss his hand, though this practice is in abeyance due to infectious concerns. In that case, simply bow.

Many Orthodox Christians have become accustomed to greeting a married priest with a "Middle Eastern" kiss on the cheek. Like the above, this practice has been deferred as result of the pandemic.

Photography in the Church

Whenever professional photography will take place during a service at St. George Cathedral, the photographers must consult with the priest prior to the service. Parishioners also must exercise great discretion when taking photos during a service, e.g., do not approach the altar, the baby during a baptism, etc. Avoid the use of flash. Keep a respectful distance from the clergy and those directly involved in the service.

Fellowship and Coffee Hour

Sunday coffee hour after the Divine Liturgy is a longstanding tradition at St. George Cathedral. It is a time for fellowship among our people and for welcoming guests and visitors. Be eager to welcome newcomers as this shows hospitality, will help them feel comfortable, and potentially encourage them to make a return visit to our parish. With that in mind, please take a modest amount of food (e.g., one doughnut) to insure that everyone is able to partake. Please do not take food and drink outside the Fellowship Hall.

Children in Coffee Hour

Coffee hour is also an important time to provide our children an example of good manners and God-pleasing behavior. Parents should monitor their children's actions and behavior during coffee hour. In particular, watch that your children do not hoard sweets.

Note that it is not acceptable (and dangerous to our elders) for children to run in the Fellowship Hall or hallway. Parents should direct their children to the gym or playground areas to run and play. They should also teach their kids to pick up their mess or trash in the Fellowship Hall, or the parents should do so themselves if the children are too young. Leaving it for others to clean up is uncharitable.

Thank you for being mindful of these protocols when attending services at St. George Cathedral!