



Crossroads

The Monthly Newsletter of the Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross

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Orthodox Common Sense and a Few Other Things

[Note: This reflection was offered in last summer's Crossroads, but as we prepare to begin the new liturgical year I thought it might be useful again.]

by Fr. John

In some churches these things will be clearly stated as soon as you walk in the door, either posted on a wall somewhere or within a brochure. Other times the pastor will continually speak about them during the sermon or one will be reminded in the parish bulletin. I personally do not like having to be a liturgical or spiritual policeman or a nag. I usually hate to remind people about basic matters of church "protocol" that should be obvious. But after 22 years in our parish there are some things that probably need to be said more clearly, so that there is no misunderstanding.

Primarily I think that we often forget that
- The Church is a Special Place and our worship is time that we spend before God.

My boys played Little League baseball across the street from an Orthodox Jewish synagogue and each Saturday throughout the day men, women, and children would cross through the grounds on their way to worship (they are not allowed to drive on Saturdays). They all were dressed appropriately, one might even say formally.

Back when we were at St. Mary of the

Lakes chapel, one of the nuns asked me, "What do you do to get your community to dress so well? Our Catholic people always come dressed so casually?" I told her, "I tell our community not to come to church dressed like Roman Catholics." Of course, I was only joking and never in fact ever said anything like that to any of you. But while by Catholic standards we apparently were doing great, I would suggest there are some ways that even we could improve.

The point is that we want to find a respectful and appropriate way of coming and worshipping God. Here's what I suggest:

Appearances: It might not be necessary to come as formally as Orthodox Jews with all the hats, long dresses, and dark suits, but women and especially our young girls (or their parents) should be conscious of low necklines and the length of skirts that may work better at school dances, perhaps. Shorts, except for summer church school and for younger children, should not be worn on Sundays. Neither, however, should

men and boys wear jeans or tee shirts. I also think that by that time they are teenagers it would be appropriate not to wear sneakers at Sunday services.

Being on time: I have always been amazed that people who would probably never be late for work think nothing of coming continuously (sometimes for years) late to church. It's impossible to be focused for worship if you constantly come late, are stressed out from trying to rush, or simply don't care enough to be on time.

Entering the church: When entering an Orthodox church one does not simply come in and enter a pew, but should venerate the center icon and the other two icons in front (perhaps purchasing and lighting a candle, while offering a prayer). This would ideally take place before the service starts, but it is also acceptable to do this during the early part of the service. However, one should not be venerating icons and lighting candles around the time of the reading of the epistle or the gospel, nor when the pastor is ready to preach the sermon. If one should arrive this late, then it would in fact be better to just enter a pew or wait until the sermon is finished.

On what to do during the censuring before the liturgy starts: Though it does not always take place in our parish (due to the length of adult education class or of confessions before the liturgy), if a priest or deacon censes the altar and the church **before the service** begins then the congregation should stand during this censuring. They may sit down once the deacon or priest returns to the altar.

Little Children and the Liturgy: We love to welcome families and their children in our worship and for the most part we can

tolerate some shuffling about. We, in fact, fear a time when the "holy noise" of our children would be missing; it would be reflective of a church that does not contain within it new life. But there are moments when it is not only acceptable, but appropriate to take the children out of the service, especially if they are acting up during the sermon or the announcements at the end. Also, we appreciate when parents are considerate about what kinds of items they bring to keep their children occupied during the services. Generally, it would be good to have illustrated prayerbooks, guides to the liturgy, or scriptural stories (I can help you find these things). Please try to limit coloring items and avoid things that are hard (which cause noise when banged) or are musical.

On receiving Holy Communion: There are slight differences from parish to parish in the understanding of what is expected in coming to receive Holy Communion. When visiting another church it should not be assumed that the same Eucharistic understanding exists there. So as not to be embarrassed one should try to talk to the priest in advance and identify oneself as a regular communicant and request if it is possible to receive Holy Communion at that liturgy. The Sacrament of Holy Confession is provided as a means of spiritual examination and healing. While it is not required in our parish that a person come to Holy Confession each time before receiving Holy Communion, it is assumed that the person is coming to church and to Holy Communion regularly. If one breaks either practice over the period of a few weeks for a reason "not worthy of a blessing," that is, if one just does not feel coming or just wants to do something else, then it would be appropriate to begin receiving Holy Communion again by coming to the Sacrament of Holy Confession. Examples

of legitimate reasons for missing the liturgy would include: you have been away due to illness, travel, work, you must care for someone else, or have no way of attending services. Everyone is asked to come to Holy Confession at least seasonally – during Advent, Great Lent, or at other times when the need arises. See me if you are confused about any of the above. Preparatory materials for coming to Holy Confession are available in the vestibule.

What to do while other people are receiving Holy Communion: We have never been extremely strict on when to stand and sit during the divine liturgy (in most traditional Orthodox countries such as Russia and Greece where the churches do not have pews – most people stand throughout the whole service – there are usually some chairs just for the elderly or infirm). But once the chalice is brought forward, then during that time one should stand and remain standing while the reception of Holy Communion is taking place, unless there is some physical inability to do so, being bored or tired are not considered such.

On Preparing for the Reception of Holy Communion: I recently heard of a church where the priest has asked the parishioners not to chew gum all day after a liturgy, because a small piece of Holy Communion could get stuck to the chewing gum. I do not think that we have to go that far, but nevertheless it is not appropriate to be chewing gum during the liturgy.

The subject of preparation before receiving Holy Communion is not meant to be legalistic, but to affirm the need, to the extent individually possible and appropriate for each of us, to create or prepare a place sometimes difficult to fit in some activities that get planned on Sunday morning. But if we allow our children to miss the liturgy continuously because of these activities what kind of priorities

for the reception of the Lord in our heart and life. We are called to fast from eating at least from midnight the evening before (unless you are required to eat or take medicine), married couples should abstain from sexual activity on the evening before a liturgy, and those who smoke should not do so before the liturgy (stopping in general wouldn't be bad either!)

The celebration of the Sunday liturgy always raises the question as to what we do on Saturday and how this day prepares us for the celebration of the eucharist. Orthodoxy seems difficult to many people because it is often “counter-cultural” to what society considers normal. This especially becomes obvious when we are asked to look more seriously at what we do on Saturdays and Sundays. Is Saturday night, in particular, the busiest evening of the week in that we stay out or up late, making it difficult for us to get to church on time, if at all? Do we ever think that as expressed within the Bible and maintained still within Judaism and by the Orthodox Church, the day begins with the evening before? At the Saturday Great Vespers service the liturgical materials – the hymnography, theme or themes, as well as the tone of the next day are already presented. So does Saturday evening ease down in a peaceful way that prepares us for the experience of the Sunday liturgy and communion with Jesus Christ or is it the day of the week that ends as more of a collapse or a distraction?

I realize that due to our inability to serve more than one Sunday divine liturgy (in theory if we had an additional priest and a second altar, or an extension to our present altar we could serve a second liturgy) it is

are we teaching them? What should we assume that they will later teach their children about the “needful thing”? How do we expect them to develop the experience of God if we rush them through the church “part” in order to get to what we might consider as the more important parts of the day? Moreover, how does the experience of coming to church and of receiving the Eucharist influence our lives? How do we speak to and about our families and other community members after the liturgy? How do we act? Does it make any difference in our behavior at all?

The above comments I believe are part of what I would consider Orthodox Common Sense. If you disagree, then let’s talk about it.

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UPCOMING MEETINGS

- **COMMUNITY LUNCHEON - SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 13 at 9AM**
- **CHURCH OUTSIDE CLEAN-UP FOR THE FALL FESTIVAL SEPT 13 – 9 AM**
- **ST. HELENA’S GUILD MEETING – SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 14, at 8:30.**
- **INREACH/OUTREACH MEETING – date to be announced**
- **PARISH COUNCIL MEETING – WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 17, 7 PM**
- **CAREGIVERS’ MEETING – to be announced**

THE BEGINNING OF OUR FALL/WINTER TIME SCHEDULE WILL TAKE PLACE ON SUNDAY OCTOBER 5, with the Divine Liturgy starting at 10:00. This will also mark the beginning of Church School and Adult Education beginning at 9:15.

ENVIRONMENTAL DAY, SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 14: Bartholomew, the Ecumenical Patriarch, has declared that September 1, the beginning of the Orthodox New Liturgical Year, should be a time for reflection on the Environment. We have planned our own Environmental Days over the past few years (with themes such as the significance of water and the “carbon footprint), and this year our celebration will take place within the context of our parish feastday, the Elevation of the Cross, on SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 14.

Fall Festival- September 27 & 28 2008:

As you know, the Fall Festival is our largest fund raiser and our church depends on the income to supplement our yearly income. Won’t you help by pitching in and consider the following tasks-

- ❖ Making and donating a basket for the Basket Raffle or gift cards.
- ❖ Purchasing cases of soda/water.
- ❖ Donating your time if only for a few hours during the 2 day event.
- ❖ Recruiting donations from local/national chains.
- ❖ Baking your favorite recipe for the baked goods table.
- ❖ Coming to food preparation workshops.

Please see Val Olesnovich or Liz Gibbons if you have any questions.

Let’s Work Together

We at OCHC have the opportunity to do some really great things together. We have the Fall Festival, the start of Adult Education, the start of Sunday school, and the initiation of our Church Library coming up soon. With the busy life we all lead, it's easy to get distracted and lose the ambition to help out at Church. We have a terrific group of smart, talented people at OCHC. Many of you spend long hours working for our Church, and I thank you all for your efforts. It would be great to see more Parishioners get involved with our groups and activities. There are many groups that could use help. The Church Choir, St. Helena's Guild, Inreach/Outreach, the Sunday school program, the Library, and the Teen Group, could all use help this year. Even an hour of your time here and there would be a big help in making our Church a stronger and more noticeable organization in the community.

One of the benefits of joining one of these groups is the chance to get to know other members of our Church. Some of my family's best friends are members of OCHC. Being the Warden of our Church for the past 6 months, I have had the opportunity to get to know more of you and am very impressed with your hard work, good ideas, and willingness to get things done.

In conclusion, I would ask that we all try to get involved with a group or activity at OCHC. I think we owe it to our children to show them that getting involved and working with others, is very rewarding, and can also be a lot of fun. So, talk to the organizers of these groups and ask how you can help, and let's work together.

Thank you for your help,

Gary Mosser
Warden

SUMMER CHURCH SCHOOL PROGRAM: Though we were not able to have our children's program this year, we were able to offer our teen session. On Monday, Fr. Stephen Siniari talked with the kids about prayer and the spiritual life (see the reflection by Julia Mosser below). The kids worked around the church on Tuesday, weeding and cleaning the grounds. On Wednesday and Thursday we helped at **PHILABUNDANCE**, the largest food bank in our area, sorting bread at their warehouse near the stadiums and bagging several thousand pounds of pasta at their main site in North Philadelphia. We didn't just work, but went bowling, played miniature golf, and ended the week with the feast of the Dormition on Friday and a pizza party. Thanks especially to Natalka Weismantel for her help in providing transportation.

Who Are You to Pray?

by Julia Mosser

For a man who walks the streets at night, looking for children to save, and sometimes gambling with his own life on a day-to-day basis, Father Stephen Siniari is a surprisingly composed individual. He possesses a kind of quiet solace, a mannerism not usually found in today's electrified world. During this week of Summer Church School, the Youth Group of Holy Cross had the opportunity of meeting Fr. Siniari and listening to him talk about Prayer, its meaning, and the work he does at Covenant House. While what he and his son together do there is touching and admirable, the thing that touched me the most was his talk with us about prayer and its meaning. He gave us four points to focus on and to build within ourselves:

- 1) Ask to be able to pray
- 2) Be “Real”
- 3) Find Silence within yourself
- 4) Keep it short and simple

When we first started, Fr. Stephen turned to the adults sitting on the side and asked how they begin their prayers. The answers were uniquely different: Keep my family safe. Let us be able to travel and come home safely. Gratitude. He gently stopped them there, looked us all in the eye and said, “Who are you to pray? Who are *you* to ask for something from God?” We all sat there slightly nervous. He smiled. “That’s why the first thing we need to pray for is the ability to pray. To find the right words to humble ourselves and ask for help.” He continued on. Using a popular phrase, he caught us off guard. “The next point is to be ‘real.’” He explained that we have to be ourselves and nothing else when praying. We have no one to impress, no shoes to fill. Our objective is to only be ourselves through and through.

Fr. Stephen then explained his third point: Find Silence within ourselves. In today’s fast-paced, never stopping world, silence is something nearly impossible to find, our heads are always buzzing, buzzing, buzzing. To completely turn off everything inside is almost unheard of. If you find it hard to clear your head, Fr. Stephen told us, don’t worry. The most experienced people can get only *three seconds* of silence before thoughts start popping back into their head.

Fr. Stephen’s last and final point was added almost as an afterthought. Once we had taken pictures and were saying our goodbyes, he said: “Can I add one more thing before I leave?” All of us were mildly surprised. “Make sure when you pray, you keep it short and simple in the beginning.” He then went on to explain that we should make a short, approximately three minute prayer, and get that down pat. Then, once we have it, we can build on it, making it better and better.

It’s always a joy and a pleasure to listen to Fr. Siniari talk. Through his own experiences in life, he helps other people grow and mature in a spiritual sense. He’s a constant reminder of how we, as Orthodox Christians, want to live our life on a day-to-day basis.

FROM LT. COL. WAYNE DESCHENEAU: wayne.descheneau@iraq.centcom.mil

Father John,

I visited your wonderful parish on August 3rd on my way to Iraq. I just wanted to let you know that I arrived safely and am settling in as best I can given the environment. I also wanted to once again thank you and everyone I met that day for your generous hospitality. The warm welcome you gave me made me immediately feel like a long time member of your church family. It was truly a refreshing visit for me. Several folks asked for my mailing address which is:

Lt Col Wayne Descheneau
MNSTC-I/CAFTT
Phoenix Base
APO AE 09348

May God continue to bless you and all those who have the good fortune of crossing paths with you!

Sincerely,
Wayne Descheneau

[Note: I asked him if there were any particular items we could send to him. We will begin gathering travel size cans of shaving cream and disposable razors. His response was:]

Prayers for everyone here are most welcome and most needed. We have the basic necessities and are well fed, however, travel size cans of shaving cream and disposable razors would be helpful as we travel about in convoys or helicopters.

As I suspected, Orthodox services are a bit scarce in Iraq due to the limited number of priests in the military. I had a lead on an Orthodox priest who came to my area in Baghdad once a month. But when I attempted to make contact with him, I discovered he has left Iraq already. I am sure we'll have someone available around Christmas. In the meantime, on Sundays, I will listen to the CD your choir director gave me.

Thank you,
Wayne

ST. HELENA'S GUILD:

- **COFFEE HOUR - Back to the Basics** – We are asking everyone to please keep it simple when you are hosting. We greatly appreciate all that you do- but please stick to the basics. Bagels/bread/cookies/veggies/fruit – it's just to help us refuel our bodies after the fast- it's not meant to be a full meal. We don't want anyone to feel put out and or feel they have to compete. Contact **Marie Clifton (856-482-1059)** if you want to host one of those week or if there has been a change in your coffee hour. ****Special note:** we have a few parishioners that are highly allergic to nuts, please label items if possible or keep all ingredient labels if purchased. Please don't be offended if we ask you to remove certain items from the table.** As always your generous donations are greatly appreciated as they help defer the cost of the supplies for coffee hour.
- **ACME GROCERY RECEIPTS** – Remember to save your grocery receipts from **ACME only**. Place them in the little bag on the bulletin board. We do all the leg work.
- **FESTIVAL PREPARATION: September 5 & 6**-Pierogies. Sign Up Sheets located in the Social Room. We are asking for anyone in the church who has even an hour to help on any of these dates. If you want to make a donation, contact Kathy Bisaga (856-983-3349) or Diane Vozdovic at (609-288-6833)

Thanks to all who helped during the Stuffed Cabbage Session.

Monday, **September 22** – Borsch Preparation – Festival – Helpers Needed-Contact Ellie Kuzma.

PARISH COUNCIL MINUTES – from Wednesday August 20, 2008

The parish council meeting took place on August 20th and was held in the Church social hall. The meeting convened with the singing of “Oh Heavenly King.” The monthly financial report was presented by our church treasurer Richard Wagar, and indicated a negative balance in the checking account. The negative balance resulted from a decrease in donations and has been attributed to decreased summer church attendance. The capitol improvement fund has also been underfunded for this same reason. Richard Wagar also reported the bank used the wrong mortgage rate in calculating the latest mortgage payment and has over charged our church for four months. Therefore the bank will refund the balance to our church this month. We will refinance our mortgage because the monthly payment for our current adjustable rate mortgage has increased. Richard Wagar researched many options for a new mortgage and presented them to the parish council. The most favorable option is 6% lock-in for 5 years with a 25 year term, and is expected to save our church \$365.24 per month. We will have the option to refinance after 5 years. After some discussion, the parish council approved the new mortgage.

Father John reported that Owens-Mills will print a new church brochure at no cost as part of their original contract with us; and Father John asked the parish council for input for the new brochure. The new church brochures will be placed in the church vestibule and be available to all visitors and inquirers. The **Diocesan Assembly** will take place at Saints Peter and Paul Church in South River NJ on September 15. Father John asked for volunteers for a lay delegate and observer. Richard Wagar volunteered to attend as either the delegate or observer. The All-American Council will take place in November and Eugenia Skuby will attend as she is a member of the Preconciliar Commission. Father John asked for someone to volunteer as a delegate for the All-American Council. The parish must approve this delegate by a vote, and the vote will take place on **Sunday, September 21**. Father John also reported that Deshi and Ayub are currently in the Ukraine visiting their family. Unfortunately their return trip to the United States has been delayed by immigration problems with her older son, Islam, whom she hopes to bring back with her. Because of the delay with Deshi’s return, her September rent will not be paid on time. Father John asked if the church would pay Deshi’s rent for September (for which we will be reimbursed upon her return), and the parish council agreed to do so.

Church School and the 10:00 am start time for the Divine Liturgy will resume on Sunday October 5th. Margaret Little will be the Church School Activities Coordinator, but will not be teaching. Her responsibilities will be shared by Barbara Mosser, Kim Rommen, and Maureen Sapnar. Bob Flanagan has finished organizing the new church library and many good books are now available to our parish. The final street repair on Wilkins Station Road left over from the original church construction is almost complete.

SPECIAL PARISH MEETING – SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 21 at the end of the liturgy for the sole purpose of electing a parish delegate to the All American Council.

RESPONSIBILITIES for September, 2008

COFFEE HOUR:

September 7: Svitlana Lane & Victoria Stephens
14: Giovanni Family
21: Caroline Graham
28: Fall Festival

October 5: Maureen Sapnar

READERS

September 7: Gene Dubiago
14: Greg Sapnar
21: Julia Mosser
28: Mark Skuby

October 5: Diana Pasca

ALTAR SERVERS

September 7: Stephen Shimchick & Brendan Detwiler
14: Matthew Brook & Ethan Detwiler
21: David Hamaty & Robert Graham
28: Paul Clifton & Anatoly Lane

October 5: Eli Nugent & Paul Abdallah

COMMUNION USHERS

September 7: Alexandra & Magdalena Plachuta
14: Julia & Lauren Mosser
21: Kristina Zanghi & Faye Nugent
28: Alexandra & Madalena Plachuta

October 5: Julia & Lauren Mosser