

A Guide to Proper Etiquette in Church

Sts. Joachim and Anna is Christ's church—it belongs to Him, so just as Christ calls all to Himself, all are welcome at Sts. Joachim and Anna. However, we live for God and for each other. With that in mind, all who come are expected to abide by certain standards of behavior, dress and expression.

A Prayerful Environment –

On entering church, remember that we are gathering for prayer and worship. Please keep talking to an absolute minimum, quiet, and only about what is absolutely necessary. We will have time for casual conversation after the service is over. Remember that there are already others gathering who are offering prayer to God and preparing themselves for the service.

Cell phones should be turned off. At a minimum, they should be on silent—not vibrate. We come to church to “lay aside all earthly cares,” as expressed in the Cherubic Hymn. As much as possible, turn your attention to God and set aside the distractions of the world for the short time you are in church.

The normal posture during worship is standing. Chairs are provided for those who have a need to sit. If you are physically capable of doing so, you should stand, however. It is also entirely acceptable to stand throughout the service. There are no points in Orthodox worship where you *must* sit, including during the homily. We do not kneel or make prostrations on Sundays, the weekly celebration of the Lord's Resurrection. Rare exceptions to this rule will be explained by the priest.

Dress –

Whenever we are preparing to come to church, we should remember that we will be entering the House of God. This requires that we dress modestly and with reverence. Generally this will mean that we want to wear our best clothing. Normal business attire is a good standard, though there's nothing wrong with dressing up, as long as it is modest.

At any age it is not appropriate to wear *shorts, jeans or other clothing with rips and holes, short skirts, tight-fitting or transparent garments, garments with low necklines, or strapless tops.* **Do not wear** clothing such as T-Shirts with sayings or commercial decorations. Men should remove any hats or head coverings, while women traditionally cover their heads.

Again, we are coming to church to worship God and to share the church with our brothers and sisters in Christ and all who may be seeking Him. All that we do should be with the thought of encouraging and caring for our neighbor. If our attire will be a distraction or discouragement, we should change it.

Timeliness –

Generally, we are all able to get to work and school on time; why should coming to church be any different? While it's always possible that there will be something that slows us down, just as sometimes happens with work, there is no reason to be careless about arriving on time for services. If you do arrive late, do not come into the midst of the congregation when the priest, other clergy or servers are in the middle of the church enacting some part of the service. This includes the Entrances, readings of Gospel, Epistle or Old Testament, or, if you are quite late, distribution of Communion. Use common sense and have respect for the actions of the service and the prayerful work of those already in church.

Coming forward to light or extinguish candles –

Just as with entering the church if you are late, the same rules apply for coming forward to light or put out candles. Please do not do so during the Entrances, readings of Gospel, Epistle or Old Testament, or distribution of Communion. If a candle burns very low, don't worry; that's why we have it in the sand.

Holy Communion –

Holy Communion is open to those Orthodox Christians who have prepared themselves through prayer, keeping the Eucharistic fast from at least midnight prior to communing, and a discipline of regular confession. Visitors are asked to speak with the priest before the service if they wish to receive Holy Communion to discuss all the above considerations.

If you come late to church, then you should not come to Communion if you have come in later than the Gospel reading.

Lipstick –

Lipstick should be removed before kissing icons or any other sacred object of veneration, the priest's hand, and, above all, before receiving Communion.

Children –

We love children! They are our lives and the life of the growing church. However, please keep in mind the following:

- If toys or books are helpful to extend the patience of very young children, please be sure that they are soft and quiet.
- Children should be trained, little by little, to keep the fast before Holy Communion. By about age seven, most children should be able to keep something close to an adult Eucharistic fast. Snacks in church for very little ones are acceptable, but please keep them contained and quiet.
- Little children often make some noise, and that is to be expected—and we rejoice in their sweet voices. If their voices, however, begin to overwhelm the worship of the church, please take them outside for a time to calm them.

Receiving the Antidoron (prosphora) after Communion –

The antidoron (which means, “instead of the gifts”) is traditionally reserved for cleansing the mouth along with a sip of wine after receiving Holy Communion. It was also given to Orthodox who had kept the fast but for some reason were not able to receive Communion. After taking Communion, please take a single piece of the antidoron and have a bit of wine. Do not take additional pieces to distribute to others at this time. During the post-Communion prayers, as all are invited forward to venerate the Cross, the priest will distribute antidoron at his discretion.

Political speech –

Archbishop Peter has directed his clergy to refrain from public political speech. We who worship here partake of and participate in the ministry of Christ to the world and amongst ourselves. This temple is the place where we most clearly enter the Kingdom of God. We are beyond politics here. While the teachings of Holy Orthodoxy may lead us to certain political positions as we live in society, here in church, we do not engage in political expression. Archbishop Peter has said that he will not suffer one soul in his care to be lost because of the divisiveness of politics. Your

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