

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 9). It is possible for young children to remain in church throughout the service if they can be quiet and respectful. They will learn how to do this from parents and from other families learning the same thing. Many parishes have cry rooms or nurseries for those who are too small to be quiet throughout the whole of Liturgy, but we do not. However, we have the small and large halls where you can go when your child is a bit too energetic and becomes disruptive. Please remember to be respectful to those around you, and so, if your child becomes fussy or out of control remove them from the nave of the church quickly. It is not appropriate to allow a child to run down the aisles, play loudly, or carry toys that make noise. If a very young child needs a snack, make sure to clear away any leftover pieces. The child should not have anything in his mouth when he comes to Holy Communion. We never chew gum in church. Eventually, your children will be able to stay longer in the Liturgy, and it’s where they should be, but remember the reason for coming to church is to pray and worship. Children will learn this, but it takes time. Also, plan to have your children use the restroom and get a drink before church begins, and don’t allow them to come and go continually. Teach them that when they visit God’s very special house, they will need to have very special manners there.

Greeting the Priest and Bishop

In our culture, we greet one another with a handshake or a hug. However, we make an exception to this is when we greet a member of the clergy. We do not shake a bishop’s or priest’s hand; we kiss it with reverence and ask for a blessing. The proper way to do this is to approach the hierarch or priest with *right hand over left*, palms facing up, and then bow while saying, “*Master, bless*” to the hierarch, or “*Father, bless*” to the priest. If either places his hand

in yours while blessing you, this is an appropriate time to kiss his hand. We kiss his hand because we are honoring Christ, whom he represents.

Lighting Candles

It is a pious Orthodox tradition to light candles for personal petitions and intercessions when entering the church. Most parishes have designated candle stands or holders for these candles. At certain times during the service, we don't light candles—generally the same times when you should not enter the church, such as during the Little and Great Entrances, when the priest is censuring the icons and congregation or giving the homily, or during the reading of the Epistle or Gospel. Candles should be allowed to burn all the way down without being extinguished early, since the burning candle symbolizes our prayers rising to heaven and the light of Christ in our midst. Please oversee your young children when teaching them to light candles, for safety reasons. It is customary to make a donation for each candle.

Venerating Icons

It is proper to venerate (not worship) icons. The acceptable way to do this is to kiss either the hands or feet of the saint depicted in the icon, or the scroll, the Gospel book, or the hand cross a saint is holding. Please do not wear lipstick when kissing the icons since the residue will ruin them.

Receiving Antidoron (Blessed Bread)

The Blessed Bread is for all attending Liturgy. When receiving the antidoron after Holy Communion or at the end of Divine Liturgy, we try not to allow the crumbs to drop, since this is blessed bread. Children will need assistance so that they do not take too many pieces, and so they are not careless in handling the bread. After returning to your seat, you may eat the holy bread as you say the prayers after Holy Communion silently while others are communing.