



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF CHICAGO

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΣΙΚΑΓΟΥ

Protocol No. 02/25

Reawakening the Evangelical Spirit of our Holy Metropolis of Chicago

To the Reverend Clergy and Beloved Faithful of the Holy Metropolis of Chicago,

Grace and peace be with you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has called us to be His disciples and witnesses to all nations.

Our Lord's command to His disciples was clear and urgent: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you* (Matthew 28:19–20). This divine commission was not given for a single time, a single place, or a single people. It is an eternal mandate for all Christians, and it rests upon us today.

The Orthodox Church stands upon the unshakable foundation of Holy Tradition, the Holy Scriptures, and the teachings of the Fathers. We must remember that what has been passed down to us is not a relic to be admired but a living reality to be practiced. The early Church understood this deeply, as St. Paul proclaimed: *I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win as many as possible* (1 Corinthians 9:19). The Church is not meant to exist as a closed circle of believers but as a lamp shining on a hill, inviting all to come and partake of the light of Christ (Matthew 5:14–16).

We find ourselves in a moment much like that of the early disciples. They faced the temptation to restrict faith in Christ to their own immediate community. Yet the Holy Spirit compelled them to break boundaries, cross cultures, and open their hearts to the entire world. In a similar manner, St. John Chrysostom admonishes the Church not to limit its scope:

Do not say, 'It is impossible for me to influence others.' If you are a Christian, it is impossible for you not to influence others. Let us not trifle with ourselves. The light of a Christian cannot be hidden. A lamp shining so brightly cannot be hidden. (Homily 20 on Acts)

To live this mandate faithfully, we must align our worship with the evangelical mission of the Church. Worship is not a passive experience for the faithful but the heartbeat of our life in Christ, the place where heaven and earth meet. Within this sacred space, we must continuously intercede for those who are seeking Christ and for those who are preparing to join His Body.

Yet this intercession is not limited to prayer; it must extend to the way we embody Christ's love. A welcoming spirit within our parishes is integral to this mission. When newcomers attend our services — perhaps stepping into an Orthodox Church for the first time — they should feel embraced by the warmth of Christ's presence, reflected in the hospitality of His people.

Liturgical Petitions and Prayers for Catechumens

The Divine Liturgies of St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil provide for this in the petitions and prayers for catechumens. These sections of the Divine Liturgy, often overlooked or omitted in some parishes, are not mere historical relics. They are a vital part of our tradition, reminding us that the Church is always in the process of growing, always welcoming new members into the fold.

Moreover, the preservation of these petitions and prayers in the Presanctified Liturgy alone often creates confusion because there seems to be an inconsistency between our Lenten practices and those the rest of the year. If we were to retain these elements more consistently throughout the liturgical year, the faithful would naturally come to see their place during Holy and Great Lent and understand their purpose as part of the Church's ongoing mission to welcome and prepare those seeking entrance into the Body of Christ.

With this in mind, **beginning on Sunday, February 2, 2025 (the Feast of the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple) through the end of Bright Week, we will offer the petitions and prayers for catechumens in every parish of our Holy Metropolis of Chicago.** This great feast of the Lord commemorates the moment when the Christ child was brought to the Temple and revealed to Simeon and Anna. It is a feast of revelation, inclusion, and promise, marking Christ's fulfillment of the Law and His opening of the Covenant to all peoples.

During this period, we will accept the feedback of clergy and the faithful to discern how these petitions and prayers have enriched overall engagement in the life of the Church. Guided by your experiences, we will evaluate and make any necessary adjustments to ensure that these practices continue to serve the spiritual life of our parishes effectively. After giving prayerful consideration, you may share your experience directly to the Metropolis through email, or by speaking to your parish priest or regional Vicar.

Things for Clergy to Keep in Mind

While the early Church once practiced the physical departure of catechumens immediately after these petitions and prayers, our current pastoral context calls for a different approach. Today, catechumens are not to be asked to leave or depart at this point in the service.

Instead, they remain among the faithful, participating as witnesses to the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, which they are journeying toward. This inclusion serves as a reminder that the Church embraces those who are still on the path of preparation, inviting them ever deeper into the life of Christ.

Additionally, I ask our clergy to offer the prayers for the catechumens audibly and in their rightful order during the Liturgy so that seekers, inquirers, catechumens, and the faithful can better understand their meaning and recognize our shared calling to participate in the life of Christ.

Things for Chanters and Choirs to Keep in Mind

Integral to our liturgical experience are the church musicians – our chanters and choirs. They impart to us our faith’s theological truth through beautiful melodies and hymns. They also help the faithful walk in unison by setting a steady rhythm and pace for our worship. They are urged to work collaboratively with the clergy to make the necessary adjustments to the hymnology.

Things for the Faithful to Keep in Mind

Every baptized and chrismated Orthodox Christian must regularly re-engage with their faith, continually learning and growing. We are all catechumens and neophytes in the sense that we can never exhaust the depth of our faith, nor cease to grow in the love and knowledge of God. By renewing this mindset, we experience God’s transformative grace in ever-deeper ways. I urge you seek ways to grow in your own faith as you offer prayers for those preparing for initiation into the Body of Christ.

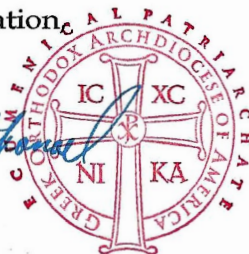
Beloved,

Change is never easy. It can make us uncomfortable, especially when it involves modifying practices to which we have grown accustomed. Yet, as St. Gregory the Theologian teaches, *The grace of the Spirit is in constant motion, and so must we be. Change is not the destruction of what was, but the fulfillment of what is to come* (Oration 2.22). The Church is a living body, not a museum. To pray for and embrace seekers and inquirers is not to betray our faith but to live it more fully.

With paternal love and admiration,



†NATHANAEL
Metropolitan of Chicago



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