

# The Path to Orthodoxy

There are various stages that one might find him or herself in the process of looking at the Orthodox Church as a possible home.

## **Visitor**

Probably the first best step in discerning the possibility of becoming Orthodox is to visit a parish—come and see our worship, our community, our way of doing things. It is likely to be different than other places you may have experienced. Our churches are adorned with iconography, the services are mostly sung, and we use incense in our worship. It is a sensory experience and can only be experienced live.

## **Inquirer**

A returning visitor is one who is inquiring more about the faith and practice of the Orthodox Faith. There is an interest, but many questions remain. At St. Elias, we have a visitor's/inquirer's table at each of our campuses for coffee hour. This is a great place to begin inquiring about the faith. At some point in this, a visit with one of the clergy can be helpful to answer questions.

## **Catechumen**

Once one has discerned that he or she would like to become Orthodox, an interview with the pastor is in order. The pastor (Father David) wants to get to know each of our catechumens—and it is important for them to meet him as well. As one is embarking on joining a church family, it is only natural that the one who presides over the community knows each person entering the Church. This meeting is a great time to ask questions as well as letting the pastor know about your faith journey.

Prior to the meeting with the pastor, the prospective catechumen will submit an online form with information about him or herself.

# The Catechumenate

You are embarking on the most significant journey of your lifetime. St. Cyril of Jerusalem told his newly made catechumens,

“Already the sweet smell of blessedness is upon you, O you who are being enlightened; already you are gathering invisible flowers for the weaving of heavenly crowns. Already the fragrant aroma of the Holy Spirit has breathed upon you. Already you have come to the entrance hall of the king’s palace. Let it be also that the king leads you inside.”

Entering the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church is a gift of God to us and not something to be taken lightly. As we cooperate with God, he cooperates with us, leading us to grace upon grace.

The following are some things to consider and make a part of your life that you may receive and maintain the grace given to you in baptism and/or chrismation.

## **Prayer Rule**

One of the first things to do is pray daily. Use a Prayer Book (start with the Pocket Prayer Book available in our parish bookstore) and try to do morning and evening prayers. Be sure to work with one of our priests to develop a rule of prayer in your life that works for you.

## **Liturgical Life**

The liturgical life of the Orthodox Church is an essential part of our lives as Orthodox Christians. All catechumens are expected to participate in regular liturgical participation for a minimum of six months prior to reception into the Church. All catechumens should attend and be familiar with all the major services of the Church: Divine Liturgy, Vespers, Orthros, Great Compline, Presanctified Liturgy, Akathist Hymn, Little Compline, Hours, Paraklesis Services. In addition, all catechumens are expected to complete at least one Lenten/Paschal cycles before reception.

## **Fasting**

The Orthodox keep a rule of fasting that dates back to apostolic times. Most Wednesdays and Fridays are fast days, meaning we limit the amount and types of foods we eat. We also have four major fasting seasons in the Church. A significant part of our spirituality is based in the Fasts of the Church, and as such, is an essential part of our life in the church. We ask all catechumens to embrace the fasts of the Church as a part of their preparation.

## **Confession**

Each catechumen must go through a life confession prior to reception in the Church. Ideally, this is done early in the catechumenate with regular follow-up confessions during the time of preparation. This is essential as we see the church as a hospital for the healing of our souls. Choose one of the priests to be your confessor and go to him each time. The prayer of absolution will take place when you are received into the Church.

## **Stewardship**

Part of the Christian life is proper stewardship of our time, talents, and treasure. All catechumens should submit a Stewardship Card to the Church. Exceptions can be made for students who have no income, but most can give something. It is only through the gifts of our community that the parish can exist. We get no outside funding from the Archdiocese or other sources. Please, give sacrificially. You can ask a priest more about this and how to make this

## **Reading Material and Podcasts**

Get all reading material, podcasts, and online resources approved by one of our priests. There is a lot of information out there on the internet—of greatly varying quality, and some is just plain wrong. Some books, while excellent resources, are meant for monastics and those further along the path.

Be familiar with Father Thomas Hopko's **How Can I Know** twelve conditions for those seeking truth as well as his 55

Maxims on the Spiritual Life. Both can be found on our parish website on the Adult Education page.

Read the New Testament daily, even if it is only a few verses. Take your time to consider what is said. If you don't understand something, don't worry about it and keep reading, putting into practice what you do understand.

Read other books as recommended to you by the priests.

### **Sponsor**

You will need a sponsor (godparent) into the Church. A sponsor is someone already Orthodox who can help you become more integrated into the life of the Church. They can answer questions about the faith and help you get adjusted to the Orthodox life. Start looking at possibilities for a sponsor soon in the catechumenate process, if not before becoming a catechumen. You should clear your choice of sponsor with the pastor or one of the priests. Your sponsor is typically the same sex as you. Because they already have a relationship with all members of the parish, the parish clergy do not typically act as sponsors for those entering the Church.

### **Catechism Classes**

The parish runs a set of catechism classes starting in September each year that run until the week Thanksgiving and then beginning again after the Great Feast of Theophany (January 6). The classes will end usually in mid-February as we prepare for Great Lent. All catechumens are expected to participate in these classes. We can provide recordings if one or more class is missed.

### **Final Interview**

Prior to reception into the Church, the catechumen will have a final interview with the pastor or one of the priests he appoints. We will work together to see if you are ready. We don't want to rush anyone in the catechism process.