

Welcome, and thank you for bringing your group to visit an upcoming service at our church!

### Introduction

Eastern Orthodox worship may seem unusual and perhaps even unapproachable to the first time visitor. This packet contains some materials to help you prepare your group for your visit. On the day of your visit, one or more of our parishioners will be present to welcome you, assist you, and answer any questions you or your group may have. You do not have to fend for yourselves. Nevertheless, we hope this information packet will *raise* as many questions as it answers in advance.

This folder contains the following in Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) format:

- *First Visit to an Orthodox Church: Twelve Things I Wish I'd Known*, by Frederica Mathewes-Green (fmg.pdf);
- *A Taste of Glory*, by Paul Meyendorff (glory.pdf);
- liturgy.pdf, a sample chart for studying similarities between your service and ours;
- quotes.pdf, a sampling of quotes on community worship.

The Mathewes-Green article is a practical introduction by a convert to some of the less familiar aspects of the Divine Liturgy (our church *does* have pews, kneelers, and an organ, however). The more serious Meyendorff article covers the historical and spiritual aspects of the Liturgy as seen by a visitor. If possible, we suggest you have your group members read these articles in preparation for your visit.

In addition, we strongly recommend that you and your group visit our website to help you prepare for your visit. The URL is

<http://stgeorge.ia.goarch.org/>

and the site provides many links to other sources of information about the Eastern Orthodox Church. A compressed copy of this packet is also available for download on the site. Our website will provide background information about our church building and our history, but reading about the worship experience isn't the same as actually participating in it. More about this later.

If possible, we ask that you arrive at least 45 minutes to an hour before the posted time for the beginning of the Divine Liturgy (which usually begins at 10:00 AM on Sunday, 9:00 AM on certain weekdays.). This gives our guides time to introduce you to the church, the Divine Liturgy, some customs and what these customs symbolize. It also allows time to answer any questions or concerns that you and your group might have about the service.

*Note -- Incense is used during the service. If the incense causes breathing problems for anyone, it is OK to step out of the nave for “fresh air.”*

After the service, we ask that the group remain quiet — the congregation won't be absolutely silent after the service, *but they will keep their voices at a respectful level.* We ask that you do the same. After the congregation has left, your group will have an opportunity to participate in a question and answer session with your guide(s) and with our priest, Fr. Basil Hickman. You will also have an opportunity to take a closer look inside the nave. There is a lot to see and to ask questions about. You are also welcome to join the congregation in the Parish Hall for coffee hour following the service.

### The Liturgy

We use the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom most of the year. This liturgy is named after its author and has been used, essentially unchanged, for over 1600 years. It is a condensed version of two older, longer liturgies: the Divine Liturgy of St. James (the oldest known Christian liturgy, still celebrated on St. James' Day in Jerusalem) and the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil (celebrated at our church every Sunday during Great Lent and on the feast day of St. Basil). What you will participate in is very ancient — some parts of the Liturgy even preserve memories of the Roman persecutions, while other parts preserve remnants of ancient Jewish and Jewish-Christian practices. If you are Christian, this service is therefore part of *your* religious heritage as well as ours. Because of this, we want to emphasize the *similarities* between services and give you a sense of how your own services evolved. To this end, we've included a sample chart ([liturgy.pdf](#)) comparing our liturgy to the Lutheran liturgy as given in the current *Lutheran Book of Worship*. This chart was prepared for a recent visiting Lutheran confirmation class and each part of the Lutheran liturgy is keyed to a corresponding part of our liturgy. In some instances, the same part may occur at a different time in each service (for example, “The Peace”). The chart hits the major points of both services, but there are other similar features as well. We suggest having your group watch for these features as they observe our Liturgy.

*If your church is a non-Lutheran (or non-ELCA Lutheran) faith tradition, we invite you to provide us with an outline of your regular Sunday service. We also wish to demonstrate how your own services evolved and what we share in common. The Lutheran service in this packet is provided merely as an example. We would like to include your service in the next update of this packet. You can also use this example to design a model that fits your own needs. Please use your **regular or traditional service** as a model, not a “seeker's service” or “contemporary service.”*

Greek and English are both used in the service. There is no religious reason or requirement for using Greek — the Divine Liturgy is performed in the common language of the people, and always has been. Liturgy, in fact, means “the work of the people.” In Greece, the Liturgy is performed in Greek. In Russia, it's performed in Russian. In a mission church in Alaska, it's performed in Inuit, Tlingit, or any of the local Athapaskan dialects. In Beirut, the language is Arabic. In Tokyo, it's performed in Japanese. In Uganda, it's chanted in any of a number of native African languages. And so on. For

most of our parish's history, the common language of the immigrants who founded this parish was Greek. As the number of English-speaking members increased over the years, we increased the use of English. Currently, the service is approximately 50% Greek, 50% English. Greek is retained as a part of our church's immigrant heritage. The liturgy books in the pews contain bilingual Greek and English texts.

*We do not have a scaled down "seeker's service" or "contemporary service." What you will see is what we do on a typical Sunday morning. This is who we are.*

### Food for Thought

Some thought questions for your group:

1. What is worship?
2. Why do we gather on Sunday to worship as a community instead of simply sleeping in and worshipping privately on our own time?
3. Can we think of a church service as being one long prayer? Why or why not?
4. What other forms can prayer take? Can prayer even be nonverbal?

One of our goals is to have our visitors leave with a deeper understanding and appreciation of *their own* worship and prayer practices as well as getting a taste of Orthodox worship and prayer practice. As mentioned earlier, we do this in part by showing visitors that our service is also a part of their religious heritage.

In addition, we try to establish a common frame of reference between our faith traditions. As an example, we've included a selection of quotes (quotes.pdf) as part of an exercise designed for the Lutheran confirmation class mentioned earlier. The quotes include both Lutheran and Orthodox writers (with one Presbyterian ringer tossed in just for fun) talking about question #2. On the surface, our intent was to show how two different faith traditions arrived at *almost indistinguishable* conclusions about the "why" of community worship. On a deeper level, we hoped to get them thinking about *why they themselves participate in worship* — a question that we all wrestle with and share in common regardless of faith tradition.

*As with the services, we are looking for more quotes on this theme from theologians of other faith traditions. We invite you to submit some quotes for inclusion in the next update of this packet. Please use the passages in the quotes file as a guide for length and thematic content.*

Again, we look forward to your visit and we know you will find it worthwhile!