## Parish Handbook of St Nicholas Orthodox Church in Barrie

We are grateful for your interest in our parish and encourage you to become involved and committed. We continually pray for the Holy Spirit to inspire us to be a loving, nurturing, and witnessing Christian community.

Our Address:

 St. Nicholas Orthodox Church of Barrie, 7 Burton Ave, Barrie, ON, L4N 2R3

For more information, visit our website (in English and Russian):

 <https://www.stnicholasbarrie.com/>

This handbook was written under supervision of V.Rev. Father Ivan Shandra (<https://ivanshandra.com/> )

## 1. Introduction

### Orthodox Christianity

The Orthodox Church was founded by Jesus Christ, our Lord, God, and Savior. It is the ark of salvation and sanctification for all mankind, and the continuation and extension of Christ's prophetic, priestly, and kingly power. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Orthodox Church is the household of God with Jesus Christ at its head. The Church has struggled for two thousand years to bear witness to His birth, crucifixion, and resurrection in various cultural and historical settings.

The Orthodox Church's faith, discipline, and worship are based on **Holy Tradition**, of which the **Holy Scriptures** are primary, as well as the **Seven Ecumenical Councils** and the **Holy Fathers**. The Orthodox Church is **One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic**. The Orthodox Church is hierarchical and conciliar in form and function:

* Bishops are appointed to guide, rule, and teach their flocks.
* Priests and deacons assist them in their sacred work.

While the bishop is the divinely appointed teacher of the Faith, the entire Church membership (bishops, priests, deacons, and laity) is the guardian of the Faith. The Church is an **Eucharistic society**, with the profession of the **Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed** and the reception of **Holy Communion** being the ongoing criteria for membership.

### Catholicity of the Orthodox Church

The word **"Catholic"** means "universal, broad, extensive, and general." The Orthodox Church is a universally broad Christian body that maintains its unity in faith, doctrine, and worship with the beliefs and practices of the early Christian Church. We include the word "Catholic" in our creed to emphasize this very meaning; however, we have never been under the Pope of Rome and should not be regarded as a branch of the Roman Catholic Church.

Local Orthodox Churches are **self-sufficient Orthodox bodies** with autocephalous administrative offices. Regardless of the national name, all local churches of worldwide Orthodoxy share the same faith, teaching, and doctrines, while some traditions may vary from one church to another. We do not have any other leader for all Orthodox Christians in the world besides Jesus Christ, but are guided by Church Councils under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28). We are praying for the unity of all Christians and are bound by love for all.

### Brief History of the Orthodox Church in Canada

Orthodox Christianity in North America was first established in Kodiak, Alaska, in 1794 by Russian Orthodox missionaries with St. Herman of Alaska being one of them. Later Orthodox Christianity was also brought to Canada in the early 1900s with the wave of Eastern European immigrants. The first Orthodox Holy Divine Liturgy in Canada was served on July 18, 1897, in parish called (Old) Wostok. All these years, parishes in Canada have attempted to live the fullness of this sacramental and sacrificial tradition.

### Our Parish as a Continuation

The parish of St Nicholas Orthodox Church in Barrie continues the same mission as an Orthodox Christian community serving all people. We are members of the Canadian Archdiocese ([www.archdiocese.ca](http://www.archdiocese.ca/)) of the Orthodox Church in America ([www.oca.org](http://www.oca.org/)). The Orthodox Church in America was granted autocephaly in 1970 and is in communion with the rest of Canonical Orthodox Churches.

As members of the Orthodox Church, we are encouraged to strive to be transformed into the **Image of Christ** in our communal and personal lives. We are also encouraged to take up our cross daily and follow Him, to bear witness to His image that is in us, and manifest Him to each other and to our neighbours through our words and actions.

### Short history of our Parish

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church in Barrie began its humble existence in 2018 as a Mission of Christ The Saviour Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Toronto, when a small group of faithful Christians gathered together to pray and seek the blessing of God. With the fatherly guidance and blessing of His Eminence, Archbishop Irénée of Ottawa and the Archdiocese of Canada, our community was officially established as an independent parish of the Orthodox Church in America in 2019. On May 26 of that year, our Parish Constitution and By-laws were formally adopted and blessed, marking not only the beginning of our official life, but also a new chapter of spiritual growth and service in the city of Barrie. Since those early days, the parish has continued to grow in faith, love, and unity, bringing together people of different ages, cultures, and nationalities into one family in Christ. In July 2025 our parish has moved into a new church building, now located at 7 Burton Avenue, Barrie.

At this point we would like to mention and thank all the priests who helped our Parish in its spiritual journey (in loose chronological order): V. Rev Fr. Vasily Kolega, V. Rev Fr. Ivan Shandra, Rev Fr. Ivan Semchyna, Rev Fr. Dmitrij Goncharov, Rev Fr. Vadim Tchukanov, Rev Fr. Evhenii Perepolkin and V. Rev Fr. Anatoly Fesyk

### For Further Information

Please find other valuable information on our website at [www.stnicholasbarrie.com](https://www.stnicholasbarrie.com/)

## 2. Worship

### Liturgical Services

At the centre of our parish life is the celebration of the **Holy Divine Liturgy**. At the Divine Liturgy, we rededicate our lives, encounter the Word of God, offer the Holy Gifts, and partake of them for the healing of our soul and body. The Divine Liturgy is celebrated every Sunday at 10:00 a.m. The Divine Liturgy is preceded by the reading of the **Third and Sixth Hours** at 9:30 a.m.

* **Reading of "Hours"** is an ancient Christian tradition carried on by the Church from the time of the Apostles (Acts 3:1). This short service that precedes the Service of the Divine Liturgy prepares the faithful for the Liturgy and helps to maintain a prayerful atmosphere in church.

**Great Lent**, as well as three other fasts (**Christmas fast, Sts. Peter and Paul Fast, and Dormition of the Theotokos Fast**), is an opportunity for all Orthodox Christians to examine their Christian life and to come closer to God through prayer, fasting, alms-giving, and participating in the services. Lenten services include **Great Compline** with the **Canon of St. Andrew of Crete** during the first week of Lent, as well as the **Lazarus Saturday, Palm Sunday, and Holy Week** services leading up to the Paschal celebration.

The celebration of **Holy Pascha (Easter)** includes the paschal procession and Divine Liturgy. After the Paschal Services, "baskets" of paschal food prepared by parishioners are blessed.

### Sacramental Life

All parishioners are encouraged to prepare for and partake of **Holy Communion** as often as they can. In preparation for receiving Holy Communion, one should participate in the **Sacrament of Confession (repent)**. Other preparations include the reading of the Pre-Communion Prayers either at home or in church. For Orthodox Christians, it is traditional to fast from all food and drink from midnight until receiving Holy Communion at a Divine Liturgy celebrated in the morning. However, an exception can be made for young children and those with health issues. Please speak to the Priest if you have any questions about your own personal manner of preparation.

### Altar Servers

Devout men serve at the Altar during the Church services. Also, young men have a unique opportunity to serve God's Church by becoming altar servers. This ministry helps our young men develop leadership skills and responsibility, as well as being a peer ministry to one another. If your son is interested in becoming an altar server, he should contact the Priest.

### Readers

Readers are essential to the proper celebration of all services. If you (both men and women) are interested in this valuable ministry, can sing on pitch, and are prepared to commit to being on a reading schedule, contact the Priest.

### Conduct in Church

Upon entering the church, we should preserve a prayerful environment by not engaging in idle talk or inappropriate discussions. The Church building is for prayer and worship, and we must respect it as such. By humbly and quietly entering the church, we respect this holy place and people's intention to pray. During the service, we try to maintain a prayerful atmosphere.

After the service, we must exit with thankful thoughts, being grateful to God for the opportunity to attend a worship service. In everything else, we must exercise respect and Christian love for all.

### Singing

In Orthodox tradition, we use only the vocal abilities of the people for our services (singing). The use of musical instruments in Orthodox worship is avoided because of the differences between the two practices' targeted points.

Congregational and/or choir singing is a part of prayer. In singing, we neither perform in front of God and people nor do we try to stimulate one's feelings, but participate in communal prayer. In choral singing, we are able to keep our minds strictly on prayer and worship without being distracted by the performance of the instruments.

The use of musical instruments, however, is not prohibited by the Orthodox Church; we are free to use them during church concerts, private gatherings, or simply to sing praises to God outside of worship.

While instrumental music targets the human soul only, choral singing involves our body, soul, and spirit.

"In the Orthodox Church, prayer is understood as ontological union with God through humility and not merely a conversation with God."

### Language

Orthodox Christians believe that God has no partiality and does not prefer one human language over another. In our worship, we use Slavonic as the main language because at the moment it is the language of the majority of our parishioners; however, you might hear some short parts of the service done in the English language as well. All readings from the Bible and most important parts of our worship we always try to do in both Slavonic and English.

### Liturgical Objects and Practices

Specially designated buildings (churches), icons, candles, vestments, incense, bell ringing, etc., are used to emphasize and broaden our experience of **Heaven on Earth** and to aid us in concentrating on eternal (out-of-this-world) things. All Liturgical objects have a useful meaning in experiencing the Church:

* **Church buildings** (or churches) are built in a way that is similar to how the Temple of God was built in Jerusalem. Every church is visually divided into three major parts: the **Porch**, the **Nave** (or church), and the **Altar or Sanctuary**.
	+ The **Porch** or **Vestibule** was appointed in early times for the Catechumens or learners and for the penitent. Here they listened to exhortations and instructions, and also here they prayed.
	+ The **Nave** or the Church is appointed for the faithful worshippers, where they stand or sit (if they need) during services. The Nave is adorned by numerous **Icons**, i.e., pictures of the members of our heavenly Christian family.
	+ The **Altar** or **Sanctuary** is usually built on the eastern side of the church building and represents the **Holy of Holies** with the Altar Table at the centre as the **Throne of the Lord**. In our tradition and out of reverence for this holy place, only ordained Bishops, Priests, Deacons, and devout men who were appointed to the service at the altar can enter it and be present there. The Sanctuary is the place where the Holy Eucharist is mystically prepared through the descent of the Holy Spirit.
* **Vestments**, as the special garments of the clergy during services, are to remind us about the **King of All** (Rev. 1:13) who will come to judge the world, Whom the Bishop or Priest manifests, and highlight the out-of-this-world character of priestly service.
* **Icons** are painted or pictorial images of Christ, the Angels, and the Saints that serve several purposes: to educate about the faith and about Orthodox teaching on Salvation; inspire us to holiness; and bring us to the reality of God's Kingdom, portraying heaven on earth. The images themselves are not worshipped but honoured (or venerated) because of the reality they put us in contact with. The true honour belongs to those portrayed in the Icons, while worship is given to God alone!
* **Iconostasis** (or Icon-screen) is a wall covered with Icons that visibly divides the Sanctuary or Altar from the Nave. This came into practical use mostly after the **Seventh Ecumenical Council** that defined Orthodox Christian teaching about Icons. The purpose of the Iconostasis is to remind us about heaven, where we are all called to share God's Kingdom with Jesus Christ and all His Saints, as well as to serve as a highlighting feature for the Holy Sanctuary (Altar), where the Altar Table represents Christ's Throne. The Iconostasis has three doors: two on the sides, called **deacon doors,** and one in the middle, called **Royal Door or Royal Gate,** through which Christ as the Only True Royalty is mystically carried in Holy Things (Offering) by the Priest.
* **Candles** are used during Orthodox Services to express warmth of devotion and prayer as necessary attributes of worship and as symbols of the light of Christ. In times of persecution, candles served to give light for the people during secretly conducted services in catacombs and were considered gifts or offerings to God. In the Orthodox Church, we still add this very meaning to the use of candles.
* **Incense** is an aromatic substance burnt in the censer during services (Exodus 30:1-5). Incense is used before the most important parts of the Orthodox Services to point to their significance. The Priest or deacon censes the Holy Altar, Icons on the Iconostasis, and all present people. Because each one of us was created in the image of God and the Son of God accepted human nature as His own, censing is symbolic of the grace of the Holy Spirit shed upon all mankind. The censing also signifies that the prayers of the faithful will be taken up into heaven in a manner much like the smoke from the incense is rising.
* **Bells** call the faithful to worship as well as emphasize important parts of the services so that those unable to come could join the faithful in prayer in their homes or on the road by turning their hearts and minds to God. Bell ringing can be heard before the beginning of various services, during the singing of the Creed and Hymn to the Theotokos in Church, and during funeral processions. Faithful members come to recognize the different styles of ringing for different occasions.
* The **Orthodox Cross** is the cross with three bars. The top bar is symbolic of the writing nailed to the Cross above the head of Jesus Christ. The middle part is the actual bar that His hands were nailed to. The bottom bar represents the footrest and is put in an angled position with the right end pointing up to remind us about the thief who was crucified on the right-hand side of Jesus Christ and to remind us about his sincere repentance.

## 3. Pastoral Services

The following is a general overview of the pastoral services available. Note that there are many other needs for which Orthodox Christians can ask for the assistance of their priest. It would be wise to talk to the Priest in every particular instance.

### Home Blessings

All parishioners have the opportunity to renew their dedication to Christ in their homes by having their homes blessed each year during the Feast of **Theophany** (starting January 19). At this feast, the Service of the **Great Blessing of Water** is served, after which the sanctified water is taken to bless our homes.

Generally, the schedule for home blessings is organized in advance of the feast. If you would like to have your home blessed sometime during the remaining part of the year (i.e., new home), please contact the Priest.

Your home should be prepared for the blessing in the following way:

* An icon or cross, a lighted candle, and a bowl of sanctified water blessed at the current year's Feast of Theophany should be placed on a table covered by a clean tablecloth (white if possible). Sanctified water will be provided if you were unable to bring some from the church.
* Turn off all stereos, televisions, appliances, and other distractions.
* Lights should be turned on in all rooms if it is dark.
* All family members should plan to be home for the blessing. All who are present should stand by the table where the service takes place and participate in the prayers.
* The first names of immediate family members and those for whom special prayers are to be offered should be clearly printed on a sheet of paper, with a clear distinction between the living and the dead.

**Baptisms**

All baptismal arrangements are made by contacting the Priest.

### Weddings

Preparations for the Sacrament of **Holy Matrimony** are to be made by contacting the Priest before determining the date or planning a reception. Generally, weddings are NOT performed during the **Nativity Fast, Great Lent, the Apostles' Fast, or the Dormition Fast**.

### Memorials (Panikhidas)

Memorial Services (**Panikhidas**) are usually celebrated on Saturdays, but this is not the rule. If you would like to have your loved ones remembered at a Memorial Service, speak to the Priest about arranging a service. Memorial Divine Liturgies are also held at other times throughout the year according to the liturgical practices of our Orthodox Church (40-day service, 1-year Service, etc.). If you would like your loved ones remembered at these services, contact the Priest.

### Hospital & Shut-In Visitations

The Priest is available to make hospital visitations or home visits to "shut-ins." He must be notified whenever someone is sick or has been hospitalized, since local hospitals do not inform him when parishioners are admitted. Arrangements can be made by contacting the Priest.

## 4. Education

Education is one of the fundamental goals and activities of every Orthodox parish. We must be educated in our Faith and the Holy Scriptures to equip us in our day-to-day lives as we serve God. We therefore desire to provide education for all ages.

Full set of educational services in our Parish including adults and kids educational programs are currently under development. Please contact the Priest for more details.

## 5. Social Activities

Social events and activities are are important means of bringing our parishioners together. Parish Council is working on exact details of such activities. Please refer to our web site [www.stnicholasbarrie.com](https://www.stnicholasbarrie.com/) for up to date information.

## 6. Stewardship

**"Stewardship"** is the management and caring for the property and affairs of another. Since everything we have is on loan to us from God, we are called upon, as servants of God, to be wise and faithful stewards of all that we have. Our entire life is a gift from God!

Each year, we are advised to pledge our time, talent, and treasure. The purpose is to seek the involvement of each parishioner as a **"partner in ministry"** in at least one of our parish ministries, as identified below. Each ministry has certain areas of responsibility that, together with all other ministries, make up our entire parish life.

By submitting part of your time, talent, and treasure to our ministry(ies), you will be able to match your talents to a need within our parish life. Ultimately, your involvement will add value to your life, as well as strengthen the life of our parish community.

We should strive not only to support our parish financially but also with our time and talent as well. Only through actual and active involvement can we bear witness to our commitment to serve God and to serve our neighbour as Jesus Christ loves and serves us. We ask each parishioner to accept this challenge and offer their God-given gifts of time and talent to God in order that we as a parish may fulfill our mission of spreading His Word.

Our financial commitment enables us to plan and budget for the expenses and programs for the upcoming year, and enables us as individuals to set goals for ourselves as well. The amount we give to the church is entirely our choice. Whatever is decided to be given, let it be our expression of thanksgiving to God, Who has created us, blesses us with the material needs required for our nourishment, and continues to love us beyond measure. Please contact our treasurer for further information. A personal receipt of your offerings will be given or mailed to you. You may use this for tax reporting purposes if you desire.

### Wills

Through estate planning, you can remember the church in your will by donating some of what God has blessed you with during your life.

## 7. Parish Ministries

### 1. Liturgical Ministry

The **Liturgical Ministry** includes altar servers, readers, and Communion assistants. This ministry is responsible for assisting with all liturgical services and the preparation for and clean-up after services, as well as decorating the temple for feast days and special seasons (cross decoration, etc.).

### 2. Choir Ministry

The **Choir Ministry** commits to providing venerable and appropriate singing during services in church and at any other functions that require the choir's presence. Attending regular choir practices is an essential part of this ministry.

### 3. Stewardship Ministry

The Stewardship Ministry is:

* responsible for maintaining the current membership list;
* developing and implementing programs to encourage parishioner commitment of time, talent, and treasure;
* committed to the wise use of available resources.

### 4. Fellowship Ministry

The **Fellowship Ministry** is responsible for encouraging social interaction among the members. This includes supervising the lunch teams and potlucks, coordinating food preparation for special events, and planning social events, funerals, and memorial meal preparations.

### 5. Outreach Ministry

The **Outreach Ministry** is responsible for devising and implementing programs to help new members and inactive members integrate into the parish, developing materials and activities to reach out to those outside our parish, and following up with communication with guests to our parish.

### 6. Hospital Ministry

The **Hospital Ministry** is responsible for coordinating help for those in hospitals, nursing homes, and senior lodges, sending or taking flowers/cards, etc., to those who are in the hospital on behalf of our Parishes.

If you are a parishioner and have not yet involved yourself in one of the ministries and require further information, please see our Executives.

## 8. Becoming a Member of Our Parish

If you are new to our Parish and would like to become a member, you may do so by purchasing a parish annual membership. You may request information that would help you in understanding what it means to belong to our Parish.

If you are considering becoming an Orthodox Christian, please speak to the Priest. He will assist you with your journey and, with the assistance of our parishioners, make your integration into our parish life a joyful, spiritually-rewarding experience.

To become a parishioner of our Parish, you are requested to:

* Partake of the Sacraments of **Confession** and **Holy Communion**.
* Purchase an Annual Membership and complete a personal data questionnaire for parish membership.
* Identify your talents and how you could help our parish in its journey to proclaim, teach, defend, strengthen, and preserve the Orthodox Faith.

## 9. Frequently Asked Questions

### a. How should I dress for attendance at services?

While we welcome anyone to "come as they are," there are some principles that guide the way we dress for attendance at services in Orthodox churches.

1. **Neat, clean, and not too casual.** We live in a culture that has become very casual in dressing habits. This will naturally reflect on our way of dressing. Nonetheless, if we think about what we are participating in when we gather as the Church, particularly for the Divine Liturgy, then we should "dress up," as we would if we were going to meet some important person or were to attend some very special event. After all, when we gather as Church, we offer ourselves and one another in worship, together with all the saints, the Holy Mother of God, the Apostles and Prophets, the Martyrs, the angels, and all our brothers and sisters, both living and departed, and we "ascend to heaven" to receive the precious and holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our clothing should reflect our understanding that what we are engaged in is important to us and special, and, therefore, we dress in our good clothing that is neat, clean, not too casual, and not our everyday or common clothing. The fact that the clergy and all servers wear special vestments when serving is a reminder to all of us that the clothing we wear is important.
2. **Modest.** All clothing, for men and women, should be modest.

### b. When do I stand or when may I sit during the Liturgy?

The traditional posture for prayer and worship in the Orthodox Tradition is to **stand**. However, some may not be able to stand for the entire time and are welcome to sit during certain times. You should definitely stand for the beginning "**Blessed is the Kingdom...**"; during the **Little Entrance** (when the Gospel Book is brought out in procession); when the **Gospel is being read**; during the **Great Entrance** (when the gifts are brought out in procession); during the **Anaphora** (the Offering of ourselves and gifts to the Lord); during the distribution of **Holy Communion**; during the **Lord's Prayer**; whenever the priest gives a blessing; during the censing; and the **Dismissal**.

### c. Why do we light candles, and when is it appropriate to light them?

The lighting of candles has always been a part of Orthodox prayer and worship. We light a candle and offer a prayer before the icons of Saints, the Mother of God, and our Lord. We ask for mercy from God for our loved ones, both the living and the departed, and ask for the intercessions of various saints before whose icon we light them. The best time to light our candles is when we enter the Temple. We should not light candles during the times when we are to be standing (see above question b).

### d. How do I prepare for receiving Holy Communion?

The following are some of the things that should be done when preparing for the reception of Holy Communion:

1. **Prayer.** The **Prayers in Preparation for Holy Communion** (found in any good Orthodox Prayer Book) should be read the evening or morning before receiving Holy Communion.
2. **Fasting.** All should fast from food and drink from at least midnight the evening before receiving Holy Communion. Infants and small children are not expected to fast completely (speak to the Priest if you are not sure what your children should do). If you have a medical condition or are taking medication that requires food or drink, you should only consume what is necessary. Husbands and wives should abstain from sexual relations on the eve before receiving Holy Communion, as well.
3. **Repentance or Confession.** We must be sure to repent of all known sin before receiving Holy Communion. We should be regularly making Confession of our sins to Christ in the presence of the priest and receive absolution. There is no fixed frequency for confession in the Orthodox Church, including the Orthodox Church in America. The ideal frequency is determined by the individual and their spiritual father (priest), though many choose to confess monthly, especially before communing on a weekly basis. The Orthodox Church requires confession for those who infrequently receive Holy Communion, and the practice of frequent confession is encouraged as a tool for spiritual growth and repentance, not merely a requirement for communion.
4. **At peace with one another.** The receiving of Holy Communion requires that we be at peace with one another. If we have broken relationships, we must forgive and ask for forgiveness and be reconciled to one another before we receive.
5. **Remembering our unworthiness.** We must always remember that we are never worthy to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord. All that is listed above to help us to prepare for receiving should make us aware of our unworthiness and not make us think that, having done these things, we now deserve Holy Communion. We always and only come to receive it because we are invited by the Lord, and it is given to us as a Gift. It is never "our right," we can never earn it or be worthy of it. The words said by the priest calling us to receive it remind us that we should come, "**In the fear of God and with faith**." This must be the way we draw near.

### e. Why do we cross ourselves, and how do I make the sign of the Cross?

Making the sign of the Cross can be traced in the writings of the early Christian writers back to the second century and is referred to as the **Seal of Christ** and as a sign of victory.

Put together the thumb and the first two fingers of your **RIGHT** hand. The other two fingers close on your palm. We put three fingers together because we believe in the Holy Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. With your three fingers joined together, touch your forehead and say "**In the name of the Father**". Then, touch your chest saying "**and of the Son**". Then, your right shoulder says "**and of the Holy Spirit**", and then touch your left shoulder saying "**Amen**" and put your hand down.

We usually cross ourselves every time before and after each prayer, on entering and on leaving the church, when we venerate the Cross, Bible, or icons, and every time we call the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### f. Why do you honour (venerate) Mary, the Mother of the Lord, in such a special way?

Among the saints, a special position belongs to the **Blessed Virgin Mary**, whom Orthodox revere as the most exalted among God's creatures, "**more honourable than the cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the seraphim**." Note that we have termed her "most exalted among God's creatures." Orthodox Christians venerate or honour the Mother of God, but in no sense do we regard her as a deity, nor do we assign to her the worship due to God alone!

In the Orthodox Church, the three chief epithets applied to the Virgin Mary are:

* **Theotokos** (Mother of God), assigned to her by the **Third Ecumenical Council** (Ephesus, 431 AD).
* **Aeiparthenos** (Ever-Virgin), assigned by the **Fifth Ecumenical Council** (Constantinople, 553 AD).
* **Panagia** (Most-Holy), a title that is accepted and used by all Orthodox.

(Belief in the Perpetual Virginity of Mary may seem at first sight contrary to Scripture, since Mark 3:31 mentions the "brothers" of Christ. But the word used here in Greek can mean half-brother, cousin, or near relative, as well as brother in the strict sense.

The term **Theotokos** is of particular importance as we honour Mary because she is the Mother of our God. We do not venerate her in isolation, but because of her relation to Christ. Thus, the reverence shown to Mary, so far from eclipsing the worship of God, has exactly the opposite effect: the more we esteem Mary, the more vivid is our awareness of the majesty of her Son, for it is precisely on account of the Son that we venerate the Mother.

Among all God's Creatures, she is the supreme example of **synergy** or **cooperation** between the purpose of the deity and the free will of a human. God, who always respects human liberty, did not wish to become incarnate without the free consent of His Mother. He waited for her voluntary response: "**Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to your word**" (Luke 1:38). Mary could have refused; she was not merely passive, but an active participant in the mystery.

The glorification of Our Lady belongs to the Church's inner Tradition only - it is not a dogma!

### g. What function do priests and laity have in the Orthodox Church?

Orthodox Priests and Bishops (clergy) are not put in, nor are they viewed in a position above the lay members of the Church! Both terms "clergy" and "laity" are positive and are not put in opposition to one another, but are parts of the same Salvific ministry of the Church.

Although clergy (as ordained members of the Church) have some exclusive obligations and authority within the Church (see Chapter 1, Introduction), they are not considered to be a higher class. Their authority is based on the authority given them by Jesus Christ and His Church. No priest or bishop can teach his own teaching apart from or contrary to that of the Church! Therefore, ordained for special ministry, priests and bishops have authority in the Church for as long as they preach and exercise the truths of the Church themselves.

The **Office of Priesthood** is respected among the Orthodox believers for the nature of its origin, gifts, and power that come from Jesus Christ directly. Clergy manifest (not represent) Christ within the community of the faithful. Jesus promised to be with us till the end of the world (Matt. 28:20). Therefore, we believe that His presence among us is real, and clergy only manifest His real presence in the church. Clergy have no power besides that given from God and cannot do anything in the Church on their own that would contradict the Church.

The **laity** is a non-ordained part of the Church membership, a **"royal priesthood"** (1 Pet. 2:9) whose ministry is equally essential for the Church's well-being. All our services are served by the Church (clergy and laity together). Clergy are first and foremost members of the royal priesthood, members of the people of God, the Church, or simply laity (1 Pet. 2:9), and only then can they be ordained. According to their priestly duties that come with ordination, bishops and priests preside during worship services that the entire church takes an active part in. In Orthodox Tradition, it is not only the clergy that serve, but **WE all serve, WE all worship together**. Although we have different gifts, we are equally important for the mission of the Church, just as different members of our body are equally important for our physical stability (1 Cor. 12).

Give glory to God for everything!

Come and experience the Church! You are cordially invited to attend our church service to give thanks and praise to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Join us for fellowship and sharing of a meal together following the service.

*Written under supervision of V.Rev. Father Ivan Shandra*

*(* [*https://ivanshandra.com/*](https://ivanshandra.com/) *)*