

Sacrament Policies

Saint Mary Magdalen Orthodox Church

Communion

The Eucharist - also called the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion - is open only to baptized and chrismated Orthodox Christians who have prepared themselves with recent confession, fasting (typically from midnight the night before), and pre-communion prayers.

Younger Orthodox children are permitted to the chalice without the need for preparation required of adults. If you have questions about when to begin confession and eucharist fasting for your children, consult with the parish priest. The Orthodox Church communes its infants and does not postpone the reception of Communion till later in childhood.

If you are visiting the parish, are an Orthodox Christian, and have properly prepared yourself, it is ideal to inform the priest ahead of time that you will be visiting and desire to take communion.

If you are not taking communion, you should not approach the chalice, but you are allowed and encouraged to partake of the antidoron (blessed bread) after kissing the cross at the end of the service. Antidoron may also be given to visitors and those who are not Orthodox Christians as a gesture of hospitality.

Following the Divine Liturgy it is customary for the Prayers of Thanksgiving After Communion to be read. It is important for those who received communion to participate in those prayers either in church following the Divine Liturgy or at home later that day.

Regular and frequent Communion is encouraged. Christians should neither carelessly and without preparation approach the chalice nor unduly abstain from communion. If someone hasn't made a confession in more than 6 months they should not approach the chalice until they speak with the parish priest. Regular participation in Holy Communion is a prerequisite for voting membership in a parish.

Baptism & Chrismation

Infants and Children

The Orthodox Church practices infant baptism. Unlike other Western Christian traditions, the Orthodox Church also Chrismates (Confirms) infants. Both of these Sacraments (Mysteries) are performed together, for both infants and adults. It is customary to wait until at least the 40th day but no longer than 6 months of age, for practical reasons.

The family may select one godparent or two godparents to act as the Sponsor(s) for the baptism. As a rule, at least one of the godparents must be an Orthodox Christian in good standing and of the same sex, while the other may be an honorary godparent.

Baptisms may be performed together with the Divine Liturgy or as a separate stand-alone service. When it is not performed with the Liturgy it is very important that the parents bring the child to the Divine Liturgy for their first communion at the next possible opportunity. This should not be delayed by more than a week. At that child's first communion, they, together with their godparents and parents, are the first to receive communion.

It is the godparents responsibility to purchase a baptismal cross for the child. For a detailed checklist of what to do in preparation for an infant baptism see our *Infant Baptism Checklist*. It is also customary to make a donation in gratitude for the celebration of the baptism. This usually consists of one donation to the church, one to the choir director, and one to the parish priest. Details on suggested donation amounts are also listed in the checklist.

Adults

Unlike infants, adult converts are required to go through a period of preparation for baptism called the Catechumenate. Catechism is usually a year or longer and is begun with a short prayer and blessing following the Divine Liturgy that inducts the individual into the roles of the Catechumens. For details of this process see our *Guide for Catechumens*.

Adult candidates for baptism also choose one or two sponsors (godparents). Unlike infant baptisms which are celebrated throughout the year as needed, adult baptisms are typically performed on designated feast days during the church year. Those are Christmas, Theophany, Lazarus Saturday, Holy Saturday, and Pentecost. It is also common for adult baptisms to be performed as a group with other candidates.

Those who have never been baptized (whether they come from a Christian background or not) and those who did not receive a Trinitarian baptism, must be baptized. Those who received a Trinitarian baptism but were not confirmed (chrismated) are received into the Church by means of Chrismation alone. Roman Catholics converting to the Orthodox Faith who have received the sacrament of Confirmation do not need to repeat the sacrament of Chrismation/Confirmation. Rather, they are received by a Confession of Faith that is accompanied by a single anointing with Chrism on the forehead. Confirmation from other Christian traditions is not accepted and must be repeated.

Marriage

Weddings in the Orthodox Church are only performed for one man with one woman. One person from the couple must be an Orthodox Christian. In order for an Orthodox wedding to be celebrated the other non-Orthodox person must be a baptized Christian from a Trinitarian tradition. At least one of the sponsors, also known as the Best Man or Maid of Honor, must be an Orthodox Christian in good standing. The non-Orthodox sponsor is honorary.

Weddings cannot be performed for persons who are related (by blood or between godchildren and godparents) or who are still married to someone else. Weddings are also not performed for couples where one or both of them has been previously married, unless a dispensation (*economia*) has been given by the bishop.

The Orthodox persons who are being married must, in order to schedule a wedding date, be in good standing with the parish they belong to. "Good standing" means regular church attendance and communion, recent confession, and practicing good financial stewardship.

Weddings are not performed during fasting seasons (Lent, Holy Week, Apostles Fast, Dormition Fast, Nativity Fast), on weekly fasting days (most Wednesdays or Fridays), and some other fasting and feast days. Exceptions to this require episcopal approval. Additionally weddings if celebrated on Saturdays must be celebrated early enough in the day so as to not conflict with preparations for Sunday worship such as Saturday evening services.

Given these restrictions, the couple should before they set a date or make plans with other vendors contact the parish priest and set a date for the wedding with the church. It is also required that the couple undergo pre-marital counseling prior to the wedding. This can be done with the parish priest or with a third-party and should be arranged early in the wedding planning process.

Confession

At a minimum an Orthodox Christian should confess four times a year. More frequent confession is encouraged. The parish priest can help determine the proper frequency for you.

If you have questions about how to prepare for confession, or speak with the parish priest.

Confessions can be heard before or after a service, or by appointment. They are typically heard before or after Vigil or Vespers on Saturday evenings. They may also be heard before the Divine Liturgy.

Unction

The service for Unction (anointing) is administered to Orthodox Christians for the healing of soul and body. It is served on an as-needed basis, and is sometimes served for larger gatherings, as in Lent or Holy Week.. Some parishes or monasteries will serve it on a regular basis, such as once a month. An Orthodox Christian can request an Unction service. This is usually done for more extreme health circumstances and may be repeated.

Unction is a sacrament only open to baptized Orthodox Christians who have prepared themselves with confession. Other forms of non-sacramental anointing may also be requested for Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike.

Funerals & Memorials (*Panikhida*)

When a loved one is very near death or has just passed away the priest should be contacted to say special prayers for those occasions. As soon as possible the parish priest should be contacted to coordinate funeral arrangements. Funerals are not permitted on Sundays and are as a rule served with an open casket. Exceptions to this rule require Episcopal approval. The Orthodox church forbids cremation.

It is common to serve the funeral service in the morning followed by the burial and reception, with a viewing and panikhida the day prior. It is also common for the funeral service to be performed in the evening with viewing and a panikhida service earlier that day and/or the day prior and a Divine Liturgy held that next morning followed by burial and a reception.

Remembrances and speeches by family and friends are reserved for the reception, not the funeral service itself. It is customary and encouraged for the family of the departed loved one to make a donation for the funeral service. This involves one donation to the parish, one to the celebrating clergyman, and one to the choir director. For details on suggested donation amounts see below.

It is customary following the burial for the departed loved one to be remembered on the 40th day and on the 1 year anniversary of their death with a memorial service (*panikhida*). A memorial is then served every year on the anniversary of their death. These are most properly served on Saturdays before Vespers or Vigil. They may also be performed on Sundays following the Divine Liturgy if needed. It is common to make a donation to the church for serving a memorial.

If a non-Orthodox person is in need of a burial the family or friends should contact the parish priest to discuss what kind of prayers or service can be offered.

SUGGESTED DONATIONS AMOUNTS FOR SACRAMENTS

Funerals

For Clergy	\$200-\$500
For Cantor	\$150-\$300
For Church	\$250-\$750

Memorials	\$50-\$100
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Weddings

For Clergy	\$200-\$500
For Cantor	\$150-\$300
For Church	\$250-\$750
Premarital Counseling	\$50-\$100 per session

Baptisms

For Clergy	\$200-\$500
For Cantor	\$150-\$300
For Church	\$250-\$750

*An inability to make a donation within the ranges listed above should never be a barrier to the sacraments. Each person ought to give generously and in proportion to their means whether that is from a place of abundance or need. Inability to make a typical donation can be dealt with confidentiality by speaking with the priest.