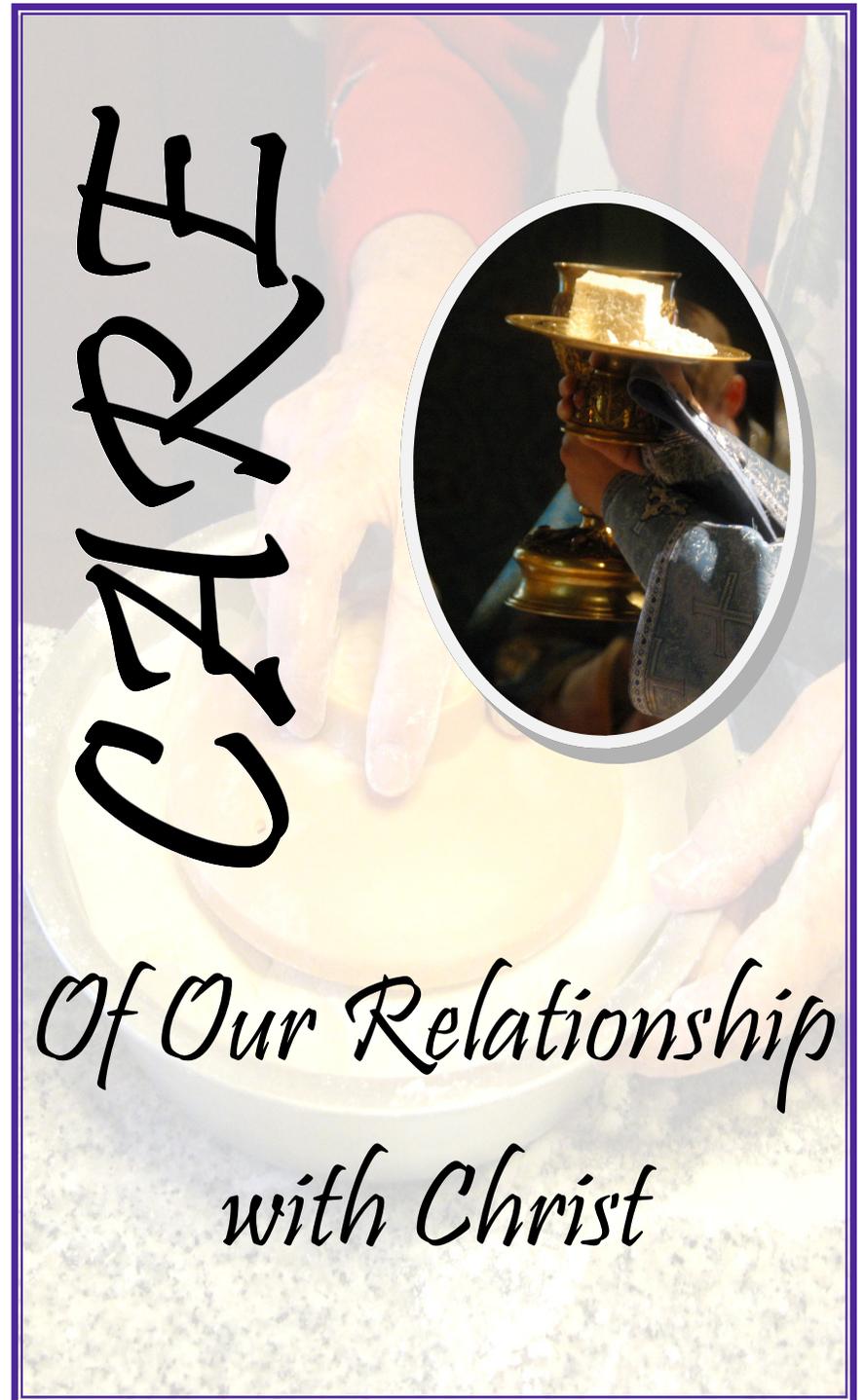


*Thine Own of  
Thine Own,  
Offering unto Thee,  
on behalf of all,  
and for all...*



*Of Our Relationship  
with Christ*

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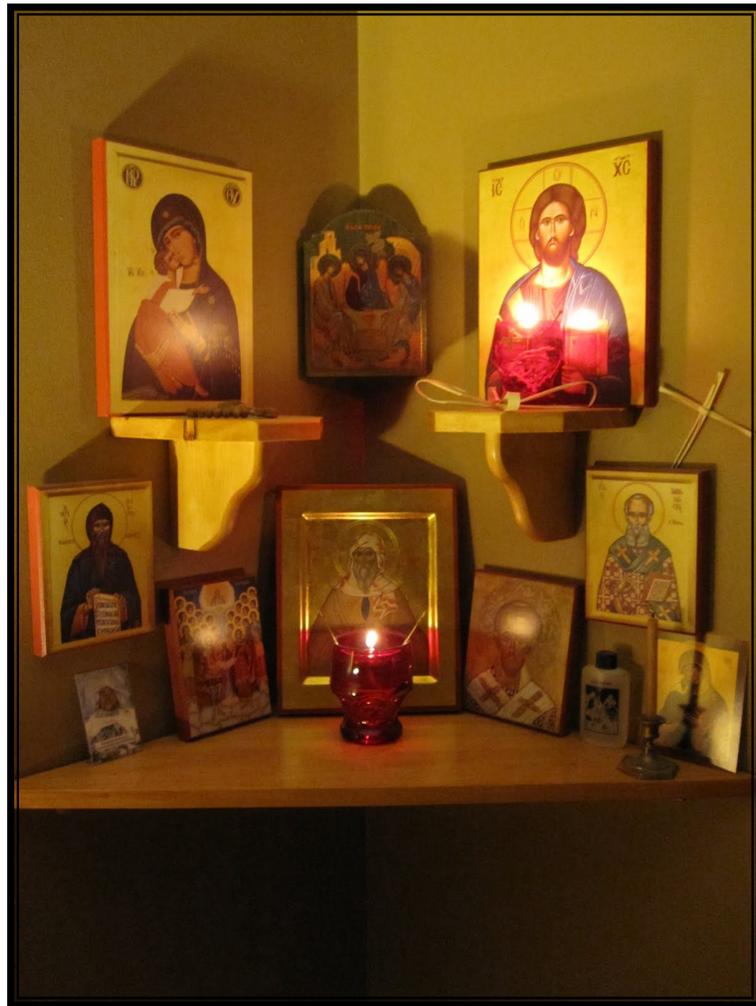
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As Orthodox Christians, we see the world differently than others. Many times in this world “religion” is something you do. For us, Orthodoxy is a way of life. It permeates every aspect of our lives: how we act, what we say, what we eat, how we spend our time, the list goes on. Orthodoxy is a complete way of life grounded in the Holy Gospel and the tradition of the Church. The Icon corner, or home altar, reminds us that even our “normal” life at home should be an extension of the Life of the Church. Every member of the Orthodox Church should have a special place set aside for this purpose. If you have any questions, please see your parish priest for guidance.



## *Episcopal Council & A Call to Stewardship*

“At this beginning of the Church’s liturgical year, let us all rededicate ourselves and each other to Christ our God. Let us be constant in prayer, in liturgical worship, and in every good work. Let us cheerfully and joyously dedicate the time talents and financial resources given to us to the building up of Christ’s Body, His Church, and of His Kingdom as good stewards of God’s gifts. The opportunity to express our love for the Church and for good stewardship is before us each day in our local parishes and dioceses, including the newest diocese of South America, which we have been helping to establish through our Central Church fund for South America. Let us never grow weary in well-doing, even as God so richly ceaselessly pours out His grace and gifts upon us.

“Invoking upon you the mercies of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit, through the prayers of the Most Blessed Theotokos, of St. Sava the Enlightener and Teacher of the Serbian people, and of all the saints,

Your Fervent Intercessor before the Lord,

His Grace,  
the Right Reverend LONGIN  
President of the Episcopal Council  
of the Serbian Orthodox Church  
in North America

## Care of Our Relationship with Christ

*It is proper and right to sing to You, bless You, praise You, thank You and worship You in all places of Your dominion; for You are God ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever existing and eternally the same; You and Your only begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit. You brought us from non-existence into being, and when we fell, You raised us up again. You did not cease doing everything until You led us to heaven and granted us Your Kingdom which is to come. For all these things we thank You and Your only begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit for all things that we know and do not know, whether seen or unseen that have been bestowed upon us. We also thank You for this Liturgy which You are pleased to accept from our hands...*

God makes Himself known to us through His Loving Son. And then, His Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, does everything for us, for the sole purpose of bringing us back to His Father. All He asks is that we become a part of Him through Holy Baptism, Holy Chrismation and partaking of the Holy Eucharist. “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him” (John 6:56).



### CHRIST THE TRUE VINE

Christ chooses to work through us as we become partakers of Him. At the Last Supper with the disciples, He declared, “I am the Vine and you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in

him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). It is only when a branch is connected to the vine that it even has the possibility of bearing fruit. Thus, it is only when we are intimately connected to the Vine of Christ that our branches can possibly bear fruit.

So, how do we care for our relationship with Christ’s Vine so that

## CARE of Our Personal Prayer

### The Family Icon Corner - The Home Altar

By Rev. Fr. Timothy Hojnicky

As Orthodox Christians we are taught that while our churches are sacred and of great importance, the home is often called the “first Church.” After all, we do spend much more time in our homes than we do at Church. This means that like Church (but to a lesser degree) this is a place where God is present and an icon corner, or home altar, serves as a testament to this reality.

The origin of the home altar is said to have originated in the Early Church during times of persecution. People had no church building to worship in, and the home altar was the place the faithful assembled to offer their prayers in secret. Today in modern times, the home altar should be the heart of a household where the family comes together often to pray.

Traditionally the icon corner is set up in a specific way to inspire us and guide us in our time of prayer. Usually, icons of the Lord Jesus Christ (on the right) and the Mother of God (on the left) are arranged in a prominent place, much like in Church. They should have an eminent place at the top of the designated area. Under them could be icons of the patron saints of the family, the saints of their krsna slava, or feast day with particular spiritual importance. On a small table, or anoly (analogian) a Bible or prayer book can be put for easy access during prayer time. Sometimes holy water will be present in a container saved from the Theophany blessing, and a small hand censer to burn incense. In front of it all usually hangs a lamp with a light that in some places burns continuously, or in most cases is lit for prayer times. All of this should be in a special area. It should not be hidden somewhere, but in a place where all can see and be reminded of the presence of the Lord in our lives.

kitchens at home after using them; and we probably would not cook in a dirty kitchen. Nor would we serve our food upon dirty plates. So, it stands to reason that the most important spiritual food in which we can partake, Holy Communion, should be prepared and served with the utmost care as well.

This means that the entirety of the Temple: the Altar, the Sanctuary, the Nave and the Narthex should be kept spotless. We never should walk into a Church and see cobwebs in the corners and crumbs on the carpet. In the same manner, when we are truly caring for our Life in Christ, neither should we leave the dirt of sin to defile our soul—but should regularly “clean house” through preparing for the Holy Mysteries of Repentance and Communion!



The rewards of cleaning both our Church and our souls are plenty—there is no joy like that of an unburdened soul free to worship God!

## CARE OF THE LITURGY

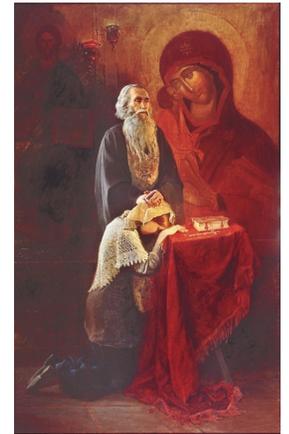
Each of us, as Christian Stewards, is called to an intense and loving relationship with God through participating in the Holy Liturgy. This relationship has an infinite potential for growth. However, its growth is limited if we do not care for our participation in the Divine Work of the People. Ensuring that loving care is given to liturgical movement, liturgical music and liturgical space helps us to care for the Holy Liturgy. And we all have unique and special gifts given by God to offer in this most important work—in this pinnacle of the Life of Christ!

*“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 4: 10-11).*

we may be fruitful?

We know that we must first be initiated into that relationship through Holy Baptism and Repentance. It was for this reason that St. John the Baptist was sent to preach repentance in preparing the way of the Lord. And this repentance must be lived throughout our lives—strengthened through prayer and fasting.

Then, we must receive the Holy Eucharist as often as possible to nourish that relationship. As St. Paul said, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). And as we know, when we participate in Christ’s Death, we also participate in His Resurrection. St. John Chrysostom reminds us of the immense benefit of partaking of the Holy Mysteries of Christ. It makes possible the remission of sins, the forgiveness of transgression, the communion of the Holy Spirit, the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven, AND boldness toward God (*Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*).



## BEARING FRUIT

When we nourish this relationship with Christ the Vine, we increase the possibility of bearing fruit. We are the branches through which the True Vine must bear fruit. How do we bear fruit?



*We bear fruit for Jesus Christ when follow His example and love, serve and support the Church which is His Body. When we abide in Him, we express this through generosity and devotion, especially in our financial stewardship and acts of personal generosity. Bearing fruit in the world is the visible result of our abiding in Christ (Fr. James Kordaris, GOA Stewardship Director).*

Now comes the hard part of caring for our relationship with Christ:

### *Are we bearing fruit?*

Do we humbly and thankfully offer all that we are and all with which we have been blessed? Or, do we engage in destructive behavior, gossiping about those around us, and working to divide rather than unite Christ's Body?

It doesn't matter how great or small our gifts—God takes everything that we offer Him purely and multiplies it in order to feed His people.

Lest we fail to realize where it all comes from—Christ, as the Vine, provides all that we need. He nurtures those branches that bear fruit. He gives them all that they need and more. And, He does it freely and lovingly.

One of the most important ways in which we care for this relationship with the Vine of Christ—with He who makes us whole—is to see Stewardship as a way of life. We are called to help others see the truth of this way of life. We are all blessed with influence over those in our lives and everything we say or do has an effect: it either helps or it hurts.

When we help others to strengthen their connection to the True Vine, we help them to bridge the gap between liturgy and life, between the love of Jesus on the cross and our daily lives, between our beautiful theology and the practical stewardship to which we are called.



Another important aspect of caring for our relationship with Christ is to be pruned. If we truly want to bear the Fruit of Life, then we must take the time and make the effort to analyze our lives. To paraphrase J.R.R. Tolkien, are we spread too thin, like too little butter over too much bread? Are we overextended?

If so, it's time to simplify. As Christ told Martha after she complained that her sister wasn't helping serve, but rather just sat at His feet, "One thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion,

participating in the Choir, as a Cantor, or both. This leadership should be one of service (as all Christian leadership truly is), dedicating oneself to God through practicing and preparing this musical gift as an offering. Choir members should make every effort to attend rehearsals and to prepare for the singing of the Liturgy. Cantors should prepare the hymnography and have rehearsed it so that it might offer glory to God and not distraction. God's gift is only 'potential' until it is actualized in practice.

However, as was aforementioned: we are all called to respond and sing the Holy Liturgy. In fact, the Divine Liturgy may not



even be served if there is no one to respond. It is essential that there be at least one or two to respond to the clergy's petitions ***or the Liturgy may not be served.*** This point is reinforced by the fact that the first active verb in the entire liturgy of St.

John Chrysostom is sung by the people during the Anaphora: "We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, O Lord, and we pray unto Thee our God."

## LITURGICAL SPACE

The praise and worship of God as it is accomplished in the local community takes precedence in the life of a Steward of Christ. It is the means by which we are empowered to act as Christ's Body—the Church. Thus, the space in which the Divine Liturgy is realized must be offered the utmost loving care. We treat the Church Temple the same way that we treat our own bodies: as the Temple of the Holy Spirit that it is.

We clothe it properly, adorning it with proper vestments covering the Holy Altar, Table of Oblation and liturgical stands. We clothe it with the Majesty from on High with the Holy Icons upon the Iconostasis and Walls. We clothe it by vesting those serving at the Altar or at the kliros/pojac with the appropriate robes as well.

We ensure that the Temple is clean for every Liturgy. We clean our



entering before the Liturgy begins. Not fifteen minutes late. Not just before the Holy Anaphora. Not just in time for antidiron/naphora at the end of the Liturgy. A dance is greatly disrupted if it is interrupted it as it is going on—as is the

Holy Liturgy. When we make a Life in Christ a priority, we ensure that we begin on time.

The Divine Liturgy officially begins at the proclamation of the Deacon: “it is time to begin the service to the Lord.” However, there is the liturgy prior to the Liturgy called “Proskemia” or, the Liturgy of Preparation. It is during this time that the priest prepares the offering. It is also at the end of this preparation that the entirety of the Church—the Temple, the offering, and the people—are incensed and blessed.



Care of liturgical movement also means that we are paying attention to what is going on at the Holy Altar. We are to ensure that there is no reason to rush, nor to move in an unusually slow manner, but to maintain a regular, joyful and prayerful pace. For this reason, we must allow adequate preparation. Again, it is important to remember that there is a rhythm present in the Divine Liturgy.

## LITURGICAL MUSIC

This rhythm is made manifest in the exchange between clergy ordained to serve at the Holy Altar and those leading the people in responding, be they cantors or a full choir. The liturgical music of the Holy Liturgy provides the vehicle through which we human beings may join in the Song of the Angelic Host sung at the throne of God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

We are all musicians in the Divine Liturgy, for we are all directed to “make a joyful noise unto God...” Those who have received musical gifts are called to help lead the rest of the congregation by

and that will not be taken away from her.”

Mary knew who was important: Jesus Christ. She chose to make Him a priority and everything else was secondary. She cut back on unnecessary things in order to dedicate more of herself to her relationship with Christ. If we allow Him, God, the Vinedresser, will prune us so that we may bear better fruit, just like Mary.

Many times, when we truly look at our relationship with Christ’s Vine, we see that we are overgrown. We can become like bushes outside of an abandoned property. That’s when it’s time to pray to God to help us to prune our lives—to make them more manageable. That’s when it’s time to ask God to transform our lives and to re-shape our branches so that they might bear Life-Giving Fruit unto His Glory.

*And then, after we pray, we take action:*



**We make a list of areas in our life where we are OVERGROWN.**

- *Do we take the time to read the Scriptures daily?*
- *Do we ensure that we take time to pray?*
- *Do we take enough time for our family?*
- *Do priorities as listed monetarily in our checkbook match those as we list them when we speak of them to others? (Do we give more money to Comcast or DirecTv, or to the Church?)*
- *Do we ensure that the number one focus of our talents is on the further development of Christ’s Holy Church?*
- *Do we take time to care for our bodies?*
- *Care of our diet?*
- *Care of the Ministries of the Church?*
- *Care of one another?*
- *Do we care for our environment?*

Then, we prioritize and prune back, where we are able, so that we might free up time to dedicate it to God's Glory.

Become a prudent and wise manager of God's Gifts—in order to protect and cultivate them. So that when God calls us back to Him, we may offer back all of the things coming from Him. We are to cultivate in order to return to God that with which He has blessed us.

### ***Christian Stewardship is:***

- *Care of our relationship with Christ.*
- *Care of our Holy Orthodox Faith...learning how to be a responsible and concerned caretaker of Christ's Church; it is learning how to enjoy Church life and be happy in Church work, for in Her dwells the fullness of the Spirit of God.*
- *...our active commitment to use all our time, talent and treasure for the benefit of humankind in grateful acknowledgment of Christ's redeeming love.*
- *...caring for the needs of others.*
- *...offering one's self to God as He offered Himself to us.*
- *...what a person does after saying "I believe...", as proof of that belief.*
- *...devotion and service to God and His Church as persons, as families, as diocese, as national Church and as Church universal.*

Life in Christ is never a bed of roses. He promised pruning. But if we respond to the Gardener's tending as fruitful branches, yielding the sweet wine of virtue, we have the joy of knowing that He chose and appointed us to go and bear fruit—in good times, in bad times, and in eternity.



# *Care of The Divine Liturgy*

*We also thank You for this Liturgy which You are pleased to accept from our hands though there stand by You thousands of Archangels and hosts of Angels, the Cherubim and Seraphim with six wings, many eyes, who soar aloft, borne on their pinions, singing the triumphant hymn, shouting, proclaiming and saying, "Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord of Sabaoth, Heaven and earth are full of Your Glory! Hosanna in the Highest!"*

The Holy and Divine Liturgy is the pinnacle of a Life in Christ—of the Life of a Steward. It is the hard work of those set apart by God to serve at His Holy Altar. The Grace of the Holy Spirit enables us to participate in this work—even though there are a multitude of hosts to serve God. Human beings can accomplish no greater work than to participate in this work of Christ which unites us to Him—and in so doing to the Holy Trinity.



Stewardship is taking seriously the enormity, the profundity and the richness of this unifying Gift of God—the Holy Liturgy. Therefore, we should treat such important work with the utmost respect and care. This treatise will enumerate ways in which we may exercise our love for God and good Stewardship of the Divine Liturgy by examining three separate areas of liturgical movement, liturgical music and liturgical space.

## **LITURGICAL MOVEMENT**

The movement of the Divine Liturgy is the eternal Dance of Isaiah—a joyous motion celebrating the Love of God present in our Lord, Jesus Christ. And, like any dance, we must be there on time to begin properly. The care of liturgical movement begins with