

How to Interact with Your Orthodox Priest

NB: The following applies mainly to pastors but may also apply to other clergy as applicable.

YOU CAN EXPECT OF YOUR PRIEST:	YOU CANNOT EXPECT OF YOUR PRIEST:
Serving liturgical services	Serving the feasts, style, music, etc., you prefer
Serving the sacraments (Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist, Confession, Unction, Marriage)	Serving sacraments as you would prefer them (style, scheduling, liturgical details)
Teaching the Orthodox Christian faith	Altering teaching to suit the times / preferences
Administrative oversight of the parish	Functioning as CEO, secretary, handyman, custodian, social planner
Visiting your home for house blessings	“Come by any time”
That he be friendly to you and your family	That he fulfills your social needs
Visiting you in the hospital for prayer & unction	Knowing you are in the hospital without contact
Spiritual advice about dealing with sin	In-depth, extended counseling, especially of a psychological nature
Advice with relationship difficulties	That he will solve your relationship problems without sustained commitment from you
That he will help you develop spiritual discipline	That he will manage your spiritual life for you
That he will pray for you	That you don't have to pray because he's praying
That he will keep confessions confidential	That he will help you hide secrets from your family or the authorities
That he will get back to you when you contact him	That he get back to you immediately, especially if it is not an emergency matter
That he will be available in an emergency, i.e., someone dying or near death	That he will be available any time to talk to about anything at all
That he will lead a moral, blameless life	That he will be perfect, never have a bad day, etc.
That his wife will participate in parish life	That his wife will be a leader in parish life
That his children will participate in parish life	That his children will be different from any other children in the parish

YOUR PRIEST CAN EXPECT OF YOU:	YOUR PRIEST CANNOT EXPECT OF YOU:
Prioritizing parish life over social and other non-essential events	That you never are absent due to employment, illness or even an occasional non-essential event
Regular participation in liturgical services, at bare minimum every Sunday Divine Liturgy	Attendance at every service the parish celebrates
Participation in parish education	Coming to every single class
That you will be educating yourself in the faith	That you will be studying high-level theology
That you will keep a daily prayer rule	That you will be praying to the same extent as a monastic
Regular participation in confession	Telling him every detail of your life that is not about confessing your sins
That you contact him when you are sick	That you never “bother” him except when sick
That you will respect his off-duty time, which is his time of rest and for his family	That you will never contact him during time off if you have a genuine emergency (i.e., imminent death)
That you strive to be moral and upright	That you will never fall into sin
That you will be friendly with him and his family	That you fulfill his social needs
That you get his counsel for major moral and life issues	That you get his permission for everything you want to do
That you be obedient to what he asks of you	That you accept micromanagement of your life
That you serve in at least one capacity in parish life	That you are involved in every ministry of the parish
That you assist him in his ministry and develop your own ministry	That you do the work that is appropriate only for the priest
That you will pray for him	That you will be responsible for his problems
That he will be appropriately compensated at a standard of living basically average to the parish	That he will become wealthy from parish service
That he will be respected as the leader and father of the parish and not treated like an employee	That everyone will like him

When to Contact the Priest

Sickness and Death

Sickness: If you or someone in your family is sick enough to be checked-in to the hospital, you should contact the priest to ask for a visit and prayer. He may anoint you with holy unction. If the illness is very serious (i.e., with the potential for death), he may also hear your confession and give you holy communion. If the illness is not life-threatening, it is normal to expect a visit within a day or so.

Impending death: Contact the priest immediately – day or night – when the threat of death is known (i.e., from medical personnel). If the priest is in the middle of serving a liturgical service, he will probably not be able to respond immediately but otherwise should be available. If he does not answer, leave a message so that he can know as soon as possible. If the person is still living, he will ideally hear his confession, anoint him with holy unction and give him holy communion.

Imminent death: If the person is about to die in the very near future (e.g., “could be today,” “matter of hours,” “very soon now”), contact the priest immediately – day or night. He will come and may (depending on whether the person is awake) hear confession and give holy communion and will likely anoint with holy unction. He may also say a prayer asking that God would release the soul from the body.

Death: If the person has died, contact the priest immediately – day or night. The priest will come to the bedside of the person who has died and serve a memorial (usually brief) for the resting of his soul right next to the body. No communion or anointing with unction may occur after the moment of death. The priest will discuss the funeral arrangements and also subsequent memorial services in church. *NB: Cremation is not permitted for Orthodox Christians.*

Babies

Pregnancy: Ask him for prayer if you are expecting. Ask his advice on naming your child, as it is traditional and very beneficial to name your child after a saint or saints, who will assist your child as patrons throughout life.

Miscarriage: Contact the priest if you miscarry your baby. There are special prayers for healing and for the resting of the child’s soul.

Birth: When the baby is born, contact him right away for the First Day Prayers, usually said in the home or hospital where the baby has been born. He will return for the Eighth Day Prayers, which is when your baby will receive his name and become officially a catechumen (preparing for baptism). *NB: Sometimes these prayers are said together.*

Forty-day Churching: The child is brought to church on the fortieth day (sometimes the closest Sunday) for prayer for both him and his mother (Day 1 is the birthday). The forty days are for the mother to stay home for recovery from birth and to bond with her child. If mom and baby are going out and about before forty days are up, contact the priest for churching.

Baptism: Ask to schedule the baptism any time after the forty days is complete. Do not choose a date and make plans (family, travel, catering, etc.) without first talking to the priest. *NB: Emergency baptism is possible if the child is born and may die imminently. Contact the priest immediately, day or night, and he will come to baptize the child. If he cannot come in time, any layman may baptize the child by anointing him with water and saying, “The servant of God NAME is baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” If the child lives, the priest will come chrismate him.*

Marriage

Engagement: Contact the priest for prayer. Some traditions have a ring-blessing prayer that can be said at an engagement (sometimes at a special party).

Wedding: Do not choose a date and make plans (family, travel, catering, etc.) without **first** talking to the priest. You will be expected to spend time doing pre-marital preparation (usually a series of classes) before the wedding. And many dates throughout the year are not appropriate for weddings.

Marriage: Your priest is there to help coach you on being married. Do not hesitate to ask for help, and don't assume that you know what you're doing! If you've never been married before, you probably don't. And if you *have* been married before, if you got divorced, it might be an indication that you needed some help.

Other Times to Contact the Priest

New Home: Get your new place blessed before you move in (or at least soon after). We then bless homes every year after Theophany (Jan. 6).

Business: New one? Old one? Get that place blessed, just like your home gets blessed.

New Car / Boat: Get that thing blessed! We've got special prayers for that. (On that note, we've got them for gardens, beehives, etc. If you build it, use it, etc., we probably have a blessing prayer for it.)

Scheduling Confession: Some priests have "office hours" for walk-in confessions, but some may do appointments only. Making an appointment is never bad and usually best for everyone, especially if you think it might need to be a long one. Try not to ask immediately before a service.

Going on a Trip: If you're taking a journey, there are prayers for safety and protection whether traveling by land, sea or air. (Are you an astronaut? Give the priest some time to look that one up...)

Theological, Liturgical and Moral Questions: He's there to guide you, so ask away. If he doesn't know, he'll find out.

Ministry Ideas: Priests want to hear your ministry ideas, but be prepared to have your idea received as volunteering yourself!

Greeting the Priest

Ask His Blessing: When you see the priest, touch the ground with your right hand, then hold your hands flat, palms upward, right on top of left, saying, "Father, bless!" (for bishops: "Master, bless!"). He will give you a blessing, then you kiss his right hand. *NB: When writing a letter or email, begin with "Dear Father FIRSTNAME," then, "Father, bless!" Do not ask deacons for a blessing. A handshake will do.*

Addressing the Priest: He should be called *Father FIRSTNAME* or simply *Father*. Nicknames are not appropriate, and calling him by his first name alone is reserved to his wife, other family or possibly certain close friends.