

I am interested in becoming an Orthodox Christian. What do I do?

Greetings. If you are reading this, you are hopefully contemplating learning more about the Orthodox Christian Church. This is excellent and you are encouraged to continue your journey. However, Orthodox Christianity cannot be reduced to a list of facts to compare alongside some other Church's teaching. There is no three volume "Orthodox Theology." Orthodoxy is lived experiential worship, not a scholarly and philosophical adventure. This short article hopes to serve as a guide for those who are genuinely interested in Orthodoxy.

- 1. No lunch meetings:** Many potential inquirers call up the priest to talk "over lunch." It's a nice way to meet people, but this rarely produces any worthwhile fruit. In my experience, most of the time we meet, talk facts and teachings, and then I never see the person again. At least someone gets a free lunch out of the deal...usually.
- 2. Go to Church and talk to the priest:** You cannot experience the fullness of our worship and our faith in a book or on YouTube. The only way to truly experience Orthodox Christianity is to *visit a church*. There are absolutely no restrictions on Church visits. You do not have to call or ask if you can visit; just show up! It is in the context of the worship of the Church that you can see our faith in action. Church is also where you will have your opportunity to talk with the priest in a quiet and relaxed setting.
- 3. Avoid "Talking Heads:"** The internet is full of "celebrity clergy" that spend their days on YouTube expositing their (sometimes incorrect) understandings of Orthodoxy. They are great (sometimes) as an introduction to Orthodoxy; however, just remember that some clergy have their own "version" of the faith oftentimes tainted with aberrant teachings and monastic fundamentalism. Remember this: If it sounds weird, it probably is weird and not Orthodox (tollhouses, mandatory re-baptism for everyone, "Ortho Bros.," etc.). Once you find a parish and priest that you are comfortable with, that is the person to whom you direct all your questions. If the priest can't answer your question, then he can ask his Bishop.
- 4. Read this book:** *Thinking Orthodox: Understanding and Acquiring the Orthodox Christian Mind* by Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou. It is readily available online [here](#), or you may be able to purchase a copy from our bookstore. This book explores how Orthodox Christians think theologically and how we "do" theology. It is vastly different from the classic Western Christian way of thinking. It is the first step in the "brain transplant" (as I call

it) to remove the legalistic-thinking Western brain and replace it with an Orthodox brain and *phronema*. The book also points out dangers and pitfalls that can cause one to stumble along their journey.

5. **Catechism:** Our bishops have instructed that the conversion process should last approximately one year. The exact length of time is up to the parish priest. Some people may need more than a year to make sure they fully understand the faith. Our year-long catechetical period not only teaches the fundamentals of the Orthodoxy but also provides the context for the catechumen to learn the ways of Church life and worship. Your journey to become a member of the Body of Christ includes:

- a. Orthodoxy 101: a one semester course that examines the dogmatic teachings and worship of the Church.
- b. Orthodoxy 102: a one semester course that examines Church History, the Bible, and Spirituality.
- c. Full and active involvement in the liturgical year and all aspects of parish life (not just Sundays).
- d. Learning the spiritual life of an Orthodox Christian such as prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.
- e. Selection of a Godparent for reception into the Church.
- f. First confession, a so-called “Life Confession,” with the priest.
- g. Discernment by the priest that you are ready to be received into the Church or whether more time is required.
- h. Discernment by the priest to either chrismate or baptize based on how you were received into your previous church. This decision is guided by, and obedient to, the Canons of the Orthodox Church and the bishop.

Once the above points (a-h) have been “checked off,” you are ready for reception into the Church either by baptism or by chrismation. Those previously canonically baptized in water and in the proper name of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) will be eligible for Chrismation (anointing with Holy Oil, a.k.a. “Confirmation”). Those lacking a prior canonical baptism will be baptized and chrismated as per the teachings and canons of the Church.

In Christ,

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