

TO LOVE GOD – PILLAR TWO

Annual Parish prayers for those who have passed away over the last year.

As a community of the faithful, we should come together annually to pray for all those members of the parish who have passed away over the last year. Invite all parishioners to attend.

The service can be a Liturgy, a Moleben, or other service followed by the Panakhyda mentioning the names of those who have passed away. Hold the service at a suitable time, Sunday, or evening during the week.

The parish should host a reception following the service, to enable fellowship and offer support to the families of the deceased.

The objective of this activity is to be a caring and welcoming parish in time of loss, and to continue to show support for that loss. It is also a way to build good relationships between members of the parish and those who we would like to be members.

Plan and Execution:

- Council and pastor: set an appropriate date for this service. Provide about two months to contact the families. Some significant days for this commemoration would be the five universal Saturdays for the Dead on the Church calendar: Meatfare Saturday (day before Meatfare Sunday), Trinity Saturday (this falls on the eve of Pentecost Sunday), and the Second, Third and Fourth Saturdays of the Great Fast
- Parish volunteer or parish secretary: Develop a letter from the parish and pastor inviting the families to this event. If possible, send the letter directly to all members of the bereaved families that the Parish has addresses for and try to find missing addresses. In the letter encourage the family to invite all their family and any special friends of the deceased.
- Prepare a large candle, and as many smaller candles as necessary for each family participating in the commemoration. These smaller candles are placed on the tetrapod along with a list of the names of those who have passed away during the past year.
- Pastor: at the beginning of the service, ask each family or family representative to come forward and light the candle for their family member by taking the light from the large candle. When all candles are lit, proceed with the service.
- Pastor/parish member: at the end of the service, present the candle to each family.
- Invite all present to the reception (coffee and light snack/cake) following the service. Volunteers will be needed to make coffee and light lunch.

Recognize the anniversaries of couples married in the parish.

Using the parish register, identify all couples who were married in the parish five years ago, ten years ago and twenty-five years ago. Invite all these couples, their children, parents, and other family members to celebrate a Divine Liturgy blessing their marriages. This is a way to reconnect with couples who may no longer be attending the parish.

At the end of the Liturgy, have each couple come to the front and receive a special blessing, as determined by the pastor).

Plan and Execution:

- Set an appropriate date with adequate time to invite the couples, perhaps on the feast of the patron saints of a happy marriage, Saints Joachim and Anna (September 9), or St. John the Evangelist (May 8), who wrote on the theme “God is Love.”
- Assign a volunteer to draft a letter of invitation from the parish and pastor and find the names of the couples and their current addresses. These letters should be sent at least a month before the event. If many of the couples live some distance away, two or three months may be appropriate to allow for travel arrangements.
- Parish representatives (two or three): as each couple arrives for the Liturgy, pin a corsage on each bride and lapel flower on each groom. (Note: volunteers also purchase the flowers). At the end of the Liturgy, call the couples to the tetrapod and bless them. Alternatively, each couple could be presented with a small bouquet of flowers at the time of the blessing.
- Volunteers will be needed to host the reception following (coffee and light snacks or cake).
- Invite all parishioners to fellowship with the couples and their families.

Note that for this section, Sundays are considered feast days.

Children holding candles for the reading of the Gospel

- The children attending the Liturgy should be encouraged/invited to hold candles during the proclamation of the Holy Gospel.

Plan and Execution:

- Purchase an inventory of battery powered candles for this activity, so that children of all ages can participate without the risk of fire or the spilling of hot wax. These inexpensive candles are available at most dollar or craft stores.
- One or two volunteers, adult or older youth, invite the children to gather at the back or side of the church before the reading of the Gospel. Turn the candles on and give the children the candles to hold during the proclamation of the Gospel.
- Bring the children to encircle the tetrapod for the reading. This could be a youth project. At the Gospel reading, move the children in front of the lectern from which the Gospel is proclaimed. Gather the children just before the reading. Afterwards, collect the candles and have the children return to their pews. (Note, if the pastor has special talks for the children, he can ask them to stay up front).
- The pastor should encourage the children to participate the first few times.

Epistle Reading

Any members of the parish, not just the choir, can alternate reading the Epistle from a set location with a microphone (in larger parishes) or in front of the tetrapod (in the middle of the congregation (in smaller parishes or with personal microphones). Give readers instructions regarding how to read the Epistle (e.g., slowly and enunciating clearly).

Plan and Execution:

- Volunteer coordinator: Obtain a list of parishioners who agree to read the Epistle. Sets up a schedule for each of the readers, so they can prepare for their turn.
- Coordinator or pastor: provide the readings to the readers in advance, monthly or quarterly, or direct them to a location where they can find them on the Eparchy website or elsewhere.
- Pastor: take a few minutes with all the readers to explain how to introduce and read the Epistle. Readers can ask questions, at this time, and become comfortable with reading the Epistle.
- Focus on, and encourage, older youth and young adults to do the readings.
- The goal is to have readers eventually learn how to sing the Epistle, although this should not prevent anyone from reading the Epistle – as long as it is done clearly with proper pronunciation and enunciation.

Feast Day Activities

Make every effort to celebrate feast days with services in the evening, because many parishioners, especially youth, are unable to attend services for the feast during the day.

Plan and Execution:

- Encourage youth and children to participate in the blessing and distribution of holy water on Theophany. Ask older youth to pour the blessed water into small cups for participants to consume after the blessing.
- Have a supply of small glass or plastic bottles on hand so each child assisting at the blessing (even if they are just standing around the tub of water during the blessing) receives this special bottle of holy water.
- Do the same with feasts where candles, flowers or fruit are blessed.
- Pastor: provide information about each feast and the significance of the blessing of the candles, flowers or fruits prior to the feast and encourage the children to attend.
- Include an icon or picture depicting the feast in the parish bulletin for smaller children to color and discuss the feast with their parents (see Pillar One). For example, once candles are blessed, the older children can take a candle lit by the priest back to the congregation to light the candles of the congregation, demonstrating how the Holy Spirit spreads across the church from the Altar.
- Following the blessing of flowers, the Parish can hold a pizza reception for all parishioners.
- Following the blessing of fruits, the Parish can host an ice cream party for all parishioners.
- This emphasizes the importance of the day and each parish should endeavour to make feast days special, particularly for the children.

Paska for Shut Ins

To love God involves reaching out to those who can no longer participate actively in parish life, so that they continue to feel part of the parish community. This is an activity that creates or strengthens bonds within a parish community, by demonstrating that shut-ins are still a respected part of the parish.

This activity consists of preparing an Easter basket, having it blessed and delivering the basket

to each shut-in known/identified to the parish. Normally this would happen on Easter Sunday (Pascha), although some parishes have their blessing service on Holy Saturday. The entire parish can be involved in this project. Adult members can prepare paska and other foods. Involve youth in making and baking the paska and preparing the baskets. Meet on Saturday morning to prepare the baskets. Bless the baskets after the Resurrection Liturgy or early on Saturday afternoon where this custom exists, allowing time for volunteers to deliver them to the assigned shut-ins. The cost is minimal. This project allows for team building within the Parish.

Alternatively, assign specific shut-ins to specific families who can prepare a basket for the shut-in, have it blessed and deliver it to the shut-in on Holy Saturday afternoon or Easter morning.

Plan and Execution:

- Assign a volunteer at the beginning of Lent to gather the names of all shut-ins in the parish who are living alone or in institutions and are unable to attend Liturgies. The pastor or sisters in the parish may know of some. This list should remain confidential and shared only with those who will be visiting. Volunteer: follow up with each shut-in or their caregiver to identify any dietary restrictions and other limitations associated with each shut-in.
- Volunteers: organize or purchase the foods required for the baskets. This may involve a “baking bee” for paska, or volunteers may agree to bake paska for this project. Purchase small baskets from dollar stores at a low cost or at an even lower cost following Easter for next year.
- Volunteers: meet on Holy Saturday about an hour before the blessing of Paska in the parish (or for a special blessing of Paska if the parish does not bless Paska on Saturday) and prepare each basket. Tag each basket with the shut-in’s name, address, phone number, and any dietary restrictions. Prepare each basket according to these instructions. Use a small candle for each basket during the blessing and include it in the basket. If the blessing and distribution of the baskets takes place on Easter morning, the baskets can still be prepared on Holy Saturday, but they will have to be kept in the refrigerator until the following day.
- Prepare the baskets with as many of the traditional foods as permitted by the dietary restrictions. Note that portion size should be appropriate for one person for one meal (with some left-over paska and butter).
- Shut-ins in institutions should also have a tag on the basket explaining that the basket is blessed food. The caregivers may not be familiar with our traditions and may not appreciate the need to respect the basket and its contents. Some institutions may require a tag on the basket identifying the ingredients of the foods. This is a conversation the volunteer compiling the names of the shut-ins needs to have with the institution.
- A few days before the blessing, inform those who will be delivering baskets who the recipients of the baskets will be. After the baskets are blessed, volunteers deliver the baskets to each shut-in and visit the shut-in for as long as they are able to tolerate a visit. This again can be a family project that involves the youth.
- Families delivering baskets on Sunday morning may share in the meal, by at least having some paska with the shut-in.
- To affirm to the shut-ins that they are still valued members of the parish community and have a role to play in the parish, you could provide them with a list of parishioners who have requested prayers for their particular intentions.

Outreach to Shut-ins

Plan and Execution:

- Assign a volunteer to gather the names of all parishioners living alone or in institutions who are no longer capable of attending Liturgies. Encourage families and friends to make the parish aware of these individuals.
- Members of the parish should be encouraged to visit these individuals on a regular basis, whether or not the shut-ins have family nearby. A group of Parishioners (2-3) can come together one or two afternoons a month and visit one or two shut-ins.
- A volunteer tracks the location of all shut-ins and makes that information available to those who wish to visit. The shut-ins' privacy has to be respected, so this should not be a "public" list. The volunteer contacts family and members of the parish to ensure that the shut-in is able to have, and wants, visitors.

The parish may "adopt" a local senior's institution in the area and volunteers organize and present regular social activities, such as visiting evenings to spend time with all those in the institution, bingo nights, sing-along afternoons, etc. A volunteer arranges appropriate activities with a local institution.

The parish may wish to have families who have a heart-felt desire to do so "adopt" elderly or shut-in members of the parish, especially if those elderly or shut-ins do not have family in the area. The family regularly visits their "adopted" baba or dido and provides assistance with activities such as shopping, etc.

As our society ages, we need to find ways as parishes to keep those who are no longer able to actively participate in the parish life a sense that they are still a valued part of the parish. Sister Laura does this outreach in Calgary and has given presentations about how to visit the elderly, the hospitalized and institutionalized and those in hospitals or institutions. There are also other resource people who can be engaged to provide some "how to" sessions to those interested in undertaking this ministry.

Communion to Shut-ins

Parishes located in towns or cities with hospitals and care facilities should arrange to have communion brought to members of their or surrounding parishes. This ministry should be done by volunteers properly trained to do so.

Plan and Execution:

- Volunteer or parish secretary: compile requests for providing communion to specific individuals. Provide this list of names to the pastor and Eucharistic minister on Sunday morning.
- Pastor: place the required pieces of Eucharist in the pyx.
- Eucharistic minister: take the communion after the Liturgy (along with the kit that includes a spoon and linen, etc.) to those that requested it. The individuals on the list can be ongoing or as requested, depending on the situation. To facilitate this activity, a deadline for receiving names is necessary, to allow for organizing the Eucharistic ministers. The details are a matter for each parish and pastor to address.

In larger parishes, on a rotating schedule Eucharistic ministers can be assigned hospitals or care facilities in their neighbourhoods, and shut-ins in their area to reduce the travel involved.

The pastor is responsible for providing the communion kit and ensuring that those taking communion to shut-ins understand the process, and the prayers that should be said prior to giving communion. Also, some instruction is necessary regarding the shut-ins or elderly person's ability to consume the communion.