

Instructions to Church Readers

*St. Vladimir Church, Ann Arbor, MI**

Compiled in accordance with the teaching of the holy fathers and ascetics, according to the directions of the church Typicon and on the basis of the Russian Orthodox Church's centuries-old experience in the Divine services.

Translated by Daniel Olson from *The Orthodox Divine Services, Practical Guidance for Clerics and Laity*, pp. 182-187, which took it from a 1956 typewritten publication by G. Shimansky, an instructor at the Kiev Theological Academy.

READ REVERENTLY, WITH THE FEAR OF GOD

1. A God-fearing reader ought always to remember that he is proclaiming doxologies and prayers for himself and for all who are praying in church, where God Himself, His immaculate mother, the angels and the saints are always invisibly present. The Lord, the Knower of hearts, knows the feeling and attitude with which the reader performs his obligations.
2. A God-fearing reader knows that those standing in church also notice his mistakes, his inattention, etc., and that they may be tempted thereby. That is why he does not allow carelessness; he fears thereby to anger God. For it is said in Scripture: "Cursed is every man that doeth the Lord's work with carelessness..." (Jeremiah 48:10). When reading words of prayer in the holy church in the hearing of all the faithful, we carry out God's work; therefore, read reverently and decorously, distinctly and unhurriedly.

PREPARE CAREFULLY FOR READING

3. One must prepare carefully for the reading which he must execute: he must familiarize himself with it well in advance and read the text thoughtfully, paying attention to the pronunciation of the words, the accents, and to the contents, so as to read correctly, consciously and in a way that makes sense. If you read badly, do not be too lazy to practice reading in Slavonic³ often, and read the appointed reading several times and ask someone else, who is knowledgeable, to check you.

READ IN A WAY THAT MAKES SENSE

4. Read so that first of all you yourself understand what you are reading, and so that the prayers and psalms that are read penetrate your heart.

5. At the same time, do not forget the people standing in church, and read so that the people understand you, so that they too, together with you who are reading, would pray and glorify the Lord with one mouth and one heart: It is even for this purpose that we assemble in the holy church.

6. When reading in church, always remember that by your lips the prayer of all who are present is uttered and raised up to the throne of God, and that each word uttered by you ought to penetrate the hearing and the soul of each one praying in church.

READ UNHURRIEDLY, DISTINCTLY AND PRECISELY

7. Therefore, do not hurry when reading the holy prayers, and do not demean the prayers by hurried reading; do not anger God. Hurried and indistinct reading is not apprehended by the hearing, the thought or the heart's feeling of the hearers. Such reading and singing, according to the words of the holy Hierarch Tikhon of Zadonsk, is "complaisance for the lazy, heartfelt sorrow and sighing for the good, and temptation and harm for all who come (to church)."

8. In order not to deprive all those praying of the possibility to pray reverently, a God-fearing reader will not read quickly and carelessly to please a few. For he understands well that many are disturbed and tempted by a reader's carelessness and may even leave the church. Persons, then, who are inclined to sectarianism or in general are inclined to see shortcomings in Orthodoxy, having heard careless and irreverent reading and singing in our churches, may even fall away altogether from Orthodoxy into sectarianism or grow altogether cool towards the faith. In this way, through the fault of careless readers and singers, our Orthodox divine services, churches, clergy and Orthodoxy itself are subject to dishonor, while those praying are deprived of prayers abundantly rich in content and of religious and moral edification.

In view of this, the church reader ought not to allow fast reading that passes over to carelessness, and ought not to fulfill the requests of those who require him to violate his duty to read piously. For "we ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

9. In order to know for oneself at what speed it is appropriate to read, it is essential to read with a comprehension of what is being read, and not mechanically, and not to pay attention to the external side of reading, but rather to the content -- at the same time to pray for oneself in one's soul.

One must learn to read freely, without strain, so that while reading there would be no difficulties in pronouncing the words, abbreviations (titlos) and accents, in the choice of pitch and the volume of the voice, in the raising and lowering of the voice, etc; briefly speaking, so that attention would be distracted as little as possible by the very technique of reading, but would be more concentrated on the meaning of what is read and its heartfelt apprehension by the reader.

10. One must read in such a measured way that the hearers succeed in apprehending by thought each word of the prayer and in feeling it with the heart. Such a feeling in the reverent reader is acquired when he himself tries to pray attentively with the mind and the heart in church and at home. Then he will find out by experience that during rapid reading it is impossible for those praying to succeed in catching the content of the prayers and to pray with the mind and the heart.

While reading, one should avoid the other extreme; one should also not drag out the reading without need!

READ WITH PAUSES THAT MAKE SENSE

11. In order that the content of the words of prayer that are read would be more easily apprehended by those praying in church, one must separate each sentence (phrase) from another by a small pause, slightly drawing out the voice. In the sentence itself, one should also make pauses (retardations) that enhance the sense, by them dividing definite meaningful groups of words one from another.

12. For beginning readers who still do not have sufficient experience and skill, it is recommended that pauses that enhance the sense during reading be made according to the punctuation marks in the text: commas, colons and periods. At commas, one should make briefer pauses; at periods and question marks -- longer pauses (drawing out the voice).

READ CORRECTLY, IN THE CHURCH WAY

13. While reading, the pronunciation of the words ought to be Slavonic, i.e., each letter in a word should be pronounced just as it is printed: for example, "tverdyj" and not "tvjordyj" (in the Slavonic language there is no letter "jo"), "otets," and not "atets"; "vek," and not "vik"; "ego," and not "evo" or "jovo"; "ubogago," and not "ubogovo." However, here, as also in other instances, there are no rules without

exceptions. Thus the words, "aggel," "Loggin," "Pagkratij," are articulated: "angel," "Longin," "Pankratij."⁴

14. While reading in Slavonic, one should pay attention to the accents and the titlos (abbreviation marks), in order to pronounce the words correctly.

15. One must keep to the ancient manner of church reading. While reading, one should not artificially shade or underscore, as it were, the meaning of what is being read. In church reading, worldly, artistic expressiveness is inappropriate. One needs to read without pouring out one's own feelings through modulations and changes of voice; one should not impart tenderness, emotion, sternness or any other personal feeling. Even more, assumed feeling ought not to have any place: the church reader is not an actor. Let the holy words of prayer act on the hearers through their own spiritual merit. The desire to impart one's own feelings and experiences to others or to affect them by changes of voice is a sign of conceit and pride (Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov).

16. One must read in one's natural voice, and not in an assumed one. One should not read in low pitches: The reading then turns out muffled, inaudible, and the reader quickly becomes tired. For reading, one needs to take the pitch of the tone closest to the pitch of his natural voice while singing.

17. One needs to read simply, evenly, in a chanting voice (as if half singing), on one pitch, with small raisings and lowerings of the voice (one tone or half tone). Thus has it been accepted in the Orthodox Church from the earliest times.

18. One must read in a moderate voice and not weaken it or increase it too much, but make it so balanced that all the words clearly reach the hearing of each one who is praying. It is self-evident that the larger the church is or the more people there are, the more essential it is to amplify the voice, but in no way to turn it into a shout.

19. The reader ought to stand erect before the book, without bows, and read without shifting from foot to foot, without putting one foot to the side; he ought not to sway his body, he ought to let his arms hang freely; he ought not to shake his head; he ought to read unhurriedly, but also not draw it out; he ought to pronounce the words precisely, distinctly (with clear diction and correct articulation, making pauses that enhance the sense within the sentence itself).

If the reader is reading at a stand (analogion), he ought to watch that the cloth cover on the stand lies straight and not crookedly, and to pick it up if it should fall down.

LEARN TO READ WELL

20. If one of the readers does not know something, he ought to ask the cantor¹, the director, or one of the clergy beforehand. For, after having begun to read, it is already awkward to learn, to search for what is necessary or to rely on prompting. Every mistake, every delay produces confusion in those present and distracts them from prayer.

21. It happens that even a good reader is always crudely mistaken about something: This is because from the first he had incorrectly read or incorrectly understood. Therefore, it is better to check oneself and, certainly, not to be offended, but to be grateful if someone else points something out. Ask someone else (the cantor¹ or a very knowledgeable reader) to listen to your reading and to point out mistakes, which in the future you should try not to repeat.

DO NOT BE VAINGLORIOUS; READ WITHOUT EMBARRASSMENT OR TIMIDITY

22. Vainglory usually seizes the best readers, especially when preference over others is given to them, or when they are only beginning to read in church. It is only possible to overcome it by self-reproach and by the consciousness of the fact that one's abilities and voice are given by God, and we ought to use them for good, for we shall give an answer to God concerning their use. And why exalt ourselves if we are fulfilling what is due to God?

23. It is especially necessary on the kliros for readers and singers to avoid every kind of envy and malevolence among themselves; but on the contrary, one must rejoice that others too are laboring for the church to the glory of God.

24. Readers, especially young and beginning readers, should overcome in themselves unnecessary embarrassment and excessive timidity while reading in church. We are reading prayers before God and to God and ought to read in spiritual self-collectedness, not thinking about how people are looking at me or what they are thinking about me.

TAKE CARE OF THE CHURCH BOOKS

25. Treat with reverence and care the divine service books, in which are located the hymnody and prayers written by the holy fathers according to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. These are not simple books, but holy books, precious treasures of the whole Church's centuries-old, inspired, prayerful creativity.

26. Therefore, it is essential to treat the church books very carefully, and not to tear them, not to soil them, but to leaf through them carefully and accurately, not to bend the pages, not to lick one's fingers while turning the pages, not to make one's own pencil and ink marks and corrections (*note: at St. Vladimir's PENCIL marks are allowed, but NEVER ink pen marks*).

While reading with a candle, one should not move it along the lines, lest wax begin to drip on the book; but it is better to hold the candle to the side, to the right or to the left, whichever is more convenient.

May the Lord bless good and diligent readers and singers who love God's work, and may He help them become better, so that they might be vouchsafed to hear from the Lord the desired words: "Good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25:21). And you, the careless and lazy, do not forget the words of the prophet: "Cursed is the man that doeth the Lord's work with carelessness" (Jeremiah 48:10).

PREPARATION AT HOME FOR THE CHURCH SERVICE⁵

The intelligent, sober, honest and religious cantor¹ will consider it his sacred duty to prepare himself at home for the church services. For this purpose, he will take church books home (*note: at St. Vladimir's ONLY with a blessing from one of the directors or the Rector*), and in his free time he will read from them those things that he will be reading in church during the divine services. There, he has the full possibility both to follow the whole order of the service and, through attentive, unhurried reading and repetition, to make sense out of what is read, feeling all its power. Then -- as is self-evident -- his reading and singing in church will be correct, intelligible, animated, understandable to everyone, beneficial and pleasant, as indeed they ought to be.

Translator's notes:

1. Literally, "psalmist" ("psalomshchik" in Russian), in the sense of "a precentor, singer, or leader of music in the church" ("Webster's New Twentieth century Dictionary").
2. This instruction has been translated from "The Orthodox Divine Services, Practical Guidance for Clerics and Laity" (Saint Petersburg: SATIS Publishing House, 1996), pp. 182-187, which took it from a 1956 typewritten publication by G. Shimanksy, an instructor at the Kiev Theological Seminary.
3. While this instruction was originally compiled for readers using Church Slavonic, its provisions are generally applicable to any language.
4. There is a need for a similar treatment of pronunciation problems in the English language.
5. Translated from "The Orthodox Divine Services, Practical Guidance for Clerics and Laity," op. cit., pp. 181-182.

**Please note that although the male pronoun is used here throughout, these instructions are equally as applicable to women who read as they are to men.*

Translator: Reader Daniel Olson" daniellector@hotmail.com

*From: <http://www.orthodox.net/ustav/instructions-to-readers.html> &
<http://www.roca.org/oa/157/157k.htm>*

Addendum: Thoughts about the office of Reader in the Orthodox Church

My son, the first degree of the Priesthood is that of Reader. It behooveth thee therefore, to peruse the divine Scriptures daily, to the end that the hearers, regarding thee may receive edification; that thou in nowise shaming thine election, mayest prepare thyself for a higher degree. For by a chaste, holy and upright life thou shalt gain the favor of the God of loving-kindness, and shalt render thyself worthy of a greater ministry, through Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom be glory unto ages of ages. Amen.

From the Service for setting apart of a Reader

... It is truly a great honor for a person to take the holy books such as the Epistles into his hands and read them to the people when they are congregated in the church. His voice must be clear. The words must be heard perfectly and the diction of the reader must show a person who believes in what he reads that he feels and is moved by them. They are words that have unimaginable grandeur. They are words that embody life and strength inside them. They are the heavenly seed that God continues to sow in the hearts of people. ...

From the writings of Bishop Augoustinos of Florina (Orthodox House of Worship)

Those who read the Psalms and the Daily Offices, that is, Vespers, Matins, and the Hours, should prepare in good time and find the troparions and kontakions of the day beforehand, so as not to make mistakes during the reading in church and not to have to stop to look for troparions and kontakions and thereby spoil the spirit of prayer. The reader should stand straight, with his hands at his sides; he should read without hurrying and without dragging, and he should pronounce the words clearly and distinctly. ...

In reading the Apostle (Epistle), one should on no account shout excessively or indecorously, out of vainglory. On the contrary, one should read in a natural voice, reverently, distinctly, majestically, without that exertion which is offensive both to the ear and the conscience, so that our sacrifice of praise may be acceptable to God, lest we offer to God only the fruit of our lips (Heb 13:15), and offer the fruit of our mind and heart to vanity, while even the fruit of our lips is rejected by God as a polluted sacrifice.

From the writings of Bishop Ignatius (An Offering to Contemporary Monasticism, The Arena)

From: <http://www.orthodox.net/ustav/reader.html>