

# Caring for our Church



Caretakers of God's Creation

Consistory Office of Youth & Young Adult Ministry  
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA



## Session 7 – Youth/Teens

One thing I loved about being a parish priest was the fact that I could go into the church at any time and “putter around” in the altar. As we all know, only ordained people are allowed into the altar area, and one of the consequences of this is that it’s the priest’s responsibility (helped by a deacon or sub-deacons if he’s lucky) to make sure that everything within the altar area is in good order, clean and polished, well-organized, etc.

Just as the priest has a responsibility to make sure the altar area is “ship-shape,” all the faithful are responsible for the support, upkeep, maintenance, cleanliness, and the beauty of the Church as a whole. Caring for God’s Church is an important aspect of caring for God’s creation.

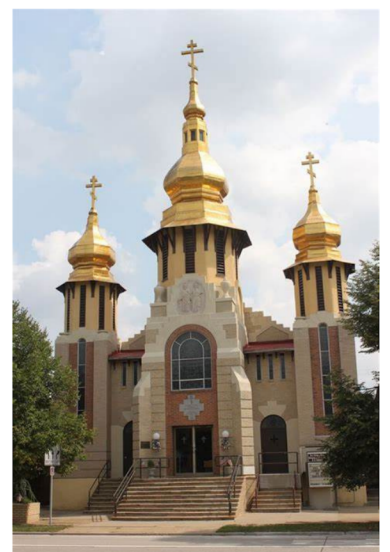
What is the Church? Many of the early Christian writers explain that the Church is ancient, and that it was created by God as a gift for us. One of St. Paul’s favorite descriptions of the Church is as the Body of Christ, which reminds us that the Church, like Christ, is both divine and human.

An even more interesting question is “Who is the Church?” We understand that the Church is a community of people, which might narrowly refer to the people in my parish, or be expanded into wider and wider circles to include the faithful of my diocese, my metropolia, my patriarchate, all Christians, even (potentially at least) all people everywhere (there is a wonderful saying that goes something like this: “For some bishops the diocese is their world. For others the world is their diocese”). One thing we can say for sure: the Church is you, and the Church is me.

Besides being the Church, you and I have something else in common – we are both priests. This might sound weird, but hear me out. The Old Testament priests were anointed with blessed oil, just like we are at our chrismation.

The job of the priest is to receive God’s gifts and offer them back to God. This is also something we both can do. This idea is usually called “The Priesthood of All Believers,” and is even referred to in the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great where he says that Jesus has made each of us the member of “a royal priesthood.” This doesn’t mean that just any one of us can put on vestments and serve the Divine Liturgy, but it does mean that each one of us is responsible for the care of God’s Church in our own particular way, using the particular talents and gifts which God has given us.

So how can I care for the Church? This will depend upon what the Church needs and what I can give. Just as each one of us has a body and a soul which need to be cared for, the Church has physical and spiritual needs which must be met.



**St. Peter & Paul  
Ukrainian  
Orthodox Church of  
Carnegie, PA**

# Caring for our Church

## Session 4 – Teens – page 2

Caring for the physical needs of the Church might involve landscaping (another old saying says that you can tell the spiritual state of a monastery by the physical state of its garden), building maintenance, finance and administration, cleaning, and tidying inside and outside, etc.



Caring for physical needs of the Church also means caring for its members, visiting the sick, elderly, and infirm, helping the poor, feeding the hungry, offering emotional support to fellow parishioners, etc.

Caring for spiritual needs of the Church might include praying for fellow-parishioners, leading parish educational programs or bible studies, transporting people to church for worship, praying that God will send pious and holy leaders, bless the community with concord and mutual love, etc.

Caring for the Church will always involve some degree of sacrifice, it is always a unique and personal offering of ourselves, our talents, our gifts. It is a priestly act. Just as “puttering around” in the altar was a joyful activity for me, by offering the gift of yourself for the needs of the Church you can experience the joy of being a caretaker for the “Bride of Christ,” His Church.



St. Paul's favorite descriptions of the Church is as the Body of Christ, which reminds us that the Church, like Christ, is both divine and human. He used this metaphor to relay significant truths about the church and to help believers better understand the value of diversity within the church.

Paul wrote this to the church of Corinth: “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.” (1 Corinthians 12: 12-31).



# Soul Care

## Session Four – Teens



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### Wrapping it Up! Praxis Suggestions:

**Depending on your age and ability, here are some ideas of how you might be able to care for God's Church:**

1. **Greet attendees in the foyer.** There is nothing like a warm welcome and a smiling face to give both parishioners and guests the message that we are happy to see them.
2. **Sell candles at the entrance.** Youngsters will provide a cheerful and helpful service while they practice their arithmetic!
3. **Distribute the church bulletin, prayerbooks, community announcements.** This service may be combined with the other foyer tasks that welcome attendees to our parish.
4. **Attend or Lead Church (Sunday) School.** The lessons of a Christian education are the most important lessons that any child will ever learn.
5. **Serve in the Altar.** In order that the services are properly conducted, especially when marking great feasts, boys and young men are invited to assist their clergy by acting as altar servers.
6. **Sing in the choir, or become a cantor.** Adults, young people, and even children with an interest in music are encouraged to participate in the choral responses during the service.
7. **Conduct and count collections.** Both adults and youth can participate together, as it's an opportunity to learn about giving and sharing as well as understanding the needs of the parish.
8. **Participate in Youth Sunday.** Where parishes are able to designate a "Youth Sunday" once a month (or more often), provide the children and young people with additional important responsibilities such as reading the epistle, leading the congregation in singing "The Creed", "The Lord's Prayer" or other hymns, holding candles for the Gospel reading and taking up the collection, etc.
9. **Help decorate the Church with flowers.** Whether it is by offering flowers from our own gardens, organizing a schedule for parishioners to bring flowers from their own garden, or making sure that flowers are obtained from a florist for important feast days, flowers are an important and beautiful offering.
10. **Help clean and maintain the interior of the Church.** In addition to the weekly vacuuming and cleaning, from time to time, candle stands need to be polished, chandeliers need to be cleaned, icons and windows need to be dusted, pews need to be sanitized and polished, etc.
11. **Help with gardening and grounds maintenance.** Maintaining a beautiful appearance, with well looked after grass, shrubs, trees and flowers will let people know that the parish church is loved and cherished by its members. This is doubly important where the parish grounds include a cemetery; we honour the departed by properly tending their gravesites.
12. **Organize or participate in charitable activities within the greater community.** Jesus teaches us that we will be judged based upon whether or not we fed the hungry, gave shelter to the homeless, clothed the naked, visited the sick, etc. If your parish already organizes or participates in such charitable activities take part as you are able. If not, talk to your priest and/or council members to discuss how the parish might extend their ministry to the local community. We best show our love for God by manifesting His love to others.