

GENERAL BEAUTIFICATION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

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Lighting: Church lighting should be in the 2700 Kelvin range for the best warm tones, so look for bulbs that have “2700K” printed on the packaging. Avoid “daylight” bulbs—these are 5000K and will give a cold, blue cast to your church. LED 2700K bulbs are available in many varieties at www.1000bulbs.com.

Cleanliness: The church environment needs to be kept clean and free of cobwebs, dust, and dirt. Routine cleaning is a must, but I also recommend an annual deep clean with the following tasks—

- Flooring professionally cleaned according to manufacturer recommendations (carpet, stone, marble, tile, linoleum)
- Woodwork should be oiled with orange oil or similar protective product
- Wax stains should be removed from chairs, pews, and carpeting (see www.kwvestments.com, Care tab).
- Brass polished
- Textiles gently vacuumed to remove accumulated dust (for intricate textiles like an epitaphios, use a micro vacuum attachment like those used for computers)
- Ceilings and light fixtures dusted to remove cobwebs
- Altar server robes and altar cloths checked for tears and/or stains and repaired or cleaned

Narthex: The narthex should be well-maintained, clean, and orderly. Nothing is more off-putting to a visitor than coming into a narthex that is dirty, cluttered, outdated, and therefore uninviting. Here are some suggestions for these areas—

- Beware of too much clutter in these areas. Keep paper items to a minimum; too many brochures, pamphlets, and posters upon entering a church present a frenetic first impression. Remember that the narthex is the “transition” zone from the outside world to the nave and aim to make it orderly, restful, and prayerful. Consider moving any event poster or calendars to your parish hall.
- Make the narthex inviting by adorning tables with nice textiles, some potted plants, and using good-quality furniture. Antique stores or consignment shops are a great place to find accent tables and similar furniture that is high quality and beautiful at a good price.

- Do not use the narthex as a “holding zone” for legacy items (see Legacy Items, below). You may be used to seeing that old plaque or donated item, but, think of the impression it might make on a new visitor.
- Check all doors to make sure hinges and crashbars are oiled and working smoothly—it can be embarrassing to a visitor to enter through a “noisy” door and feel like they are drawing attention to themselves.
- If coat closets are visible, use wooden coat hangers instead of plastic for a warmer, more natural look. Periodically remove abandoned coats from coat closets and donate to charity. If you must keep visible storage such as totes or boxes on the shelves of your visible coat closet, use canvas or fabric storage totes or wooden boxes instead of plastic.
- Appoint one person to be your “narthex monitor” to facilitate a restful and welcoming entrance to your liturgical environment.

Clutter: some communities get used to papers, books, and other items left lying about the nave. Schedule a time every quarter to do a “clutter sweep” through your church and remove any unnecessary items. Appoint someone to remove bulletins and papers following each service (this can be an excellent job for a child).

Chanters and choirs areas: it is very easy for these spaces to be overwhelmed by three-ring binders, electrical cables for lighting, numerous music stands, bookshelves crammed with liturgical books, etc., all of which are necessary for beautiful music, but highly visually distracting to people in the nave. Make cleaning and organizing these spaces a high priority.

Sensory environment: Take time to evaluate your church’s entire sensory environment—Does your church **look** orderly and beautiful? Does the narthex, cry room, bathroom(s), and parish hall **smell** pleasant and clean? How do things **sound** in your building (see the Adjusting Acoustics section below)? By learning to notice all the senses in the liturgical environment, you will become more attuned to what your space needs in terms of beautification.

Adjusting acoustics: While many parishes use microphones, lapel mics, and various other sound systems, in most cases, they are completely unnecessary if the various surfaces of the church are modified to provide the proper acoustics. Whenever possible, flooring should be wood, marble, stone, or tile for resonance and carpets should then be used to dampen sound as needed (see Carpets, below). The loud noises from microphones make for unpleasant, jarring auditory “hot spots” which are in opposition to the prayerful environment we aim to create in the church building. If you do have microphones, try having one service without them and see if the difference meets your goals for beautification.

Textiles: textiles can help with sound absorption, provide beauty, and keep areas neat and clean by sending a visual message “this is a clean and orderly space”. Consider using small embroidered cloths or runners in your narthex as well as on auxiliary tables in the nave (holy water font tables, memorial tables, etc.). Machine embroidered cloths can be a very budget-friendly way to incorporate more textiles (check www.avlea.life) as they can be purchased in multi-colored designs which can be used year-round rather than having to change with the liturgical seasons. In addition, look over your liturgical textiles such as altar cloths, proskomedion table covers, etc. and make sure they are clean and in good repair. The view of the Holy Table is one of the highest impact viewpoints in the church, so use the best-quality Holy Table cloth you can afford.

Carpets: carpets are a wonderful way to bring more beauty into your space and create liturgical “zones.” They are especially important in non-standard spaces like storefront churches as they provide a lot of beauty for a relatively small price tag. And, they don’t have to be expensive heirlooms: check stores like Home Goods or your local Craigslist for wool rugs. Use rugs in the burgundy, blue, gold, green, beige color range (do not use rugs that are too bright of a color such as pink, baby blue, or intense greens). If you have a lot of young children, carpets are an excellent way to delineate a “kid-friendly” area of the nave and dampen their joyful noise at the same time.

Altar Areas: the altar should be clean and orderly, free from clutter and mess. If you need to cover the Holy Table altar cloth, use either a sheet of glass or a linen eilikon (never use plastic sheeting as it damages brocades and is very unsightly). Are your communion cloths in good order or do they need to be replaced due to excess staining and age? Is your brass polished? Are wax and censer stains dealt with immediately? Are your altar servers robes in good repair, or are they tired and worn and need replacing?

How to deal with “Legacy” items: these are the items that have been donated through the years but no longer function well in your liturgical environment. If you have a spare closet, you can turn it into a parish museum and store these items there. You can also donate unneeded items to missions in need (contact your local Dept of Missions). You can also take photos of the items and create a parish donation scrapbook. One of the greatest errors I see churches make is to hang onto things “just because” someone donated them—if the item is outdated, poor quality, unnecessary, or just plain ugly, find a way to remove it from your church environment. If you really need to hang onto certain items, consider installing a display case in an out-of-the-way area, such as a hallway or a corner of the parish hall.

Flowers and Greenery: adding flowers and greenery to the liturgical environment is a wonderful way to bring the beauty of Nature into the Kingdom of Heaven. I strongly recommend plant stands in front of the iconostasis with small square cloths on each plant stand (this is an extra textile adornment that is very inexpensive). Good plants for this are: peace lily, golden pothos, dragon tree, umbrella tree, and rubber plant.

Chrysanthemums also last a long time. A neutral green houseplant can be used for most services and then floral arrangements can be used on feastdays (see Contrast, below) or as the laity donates them. A green houseplant is also a welcome addition in the narthex. For the plant stands, try and find antique ones, or use metal ones in a basic design (you don't want distracting plant stands with lots of cheap metal work).

Contrast: in aesthetic terms, the idea of “contrast” is using two different styles or designs of things to create harmony, variety, visual depth, and interest and you want to use this principle to best effect when beautifying your church. For example, if your iconostasis has heavy, bold lines, then use textiles that feature delicate vinework or lacey patterns. Conversely, if your iconostasis is more open, consider using bold, early Byzantine-inspired textiles for contrast. If you have a nice, neutral green houseplant on your plant stands most of the time, switching out to a stunning floral arrangement for feastdays is a wonderful contrast. You want to monitor your liturgical environment to keep it from being too monotonous as that brings a dreary feel to the space rather than the vibrant energy that comes from making small changes periodically.

Beautification Committee: I recommend setting up a beautification committee, even if it's just two or three people. This group can commit to educating themselves about Orthodox Christian art and liturgy as well as review potential beautification purchases. They can educate the community that beautification is 1) traditional to the Orthodox Christian aesthetic expression, 2) positively impacts the liturgical environment and, in turn, everyone who participates in it, and 3) is a mighty evangelism tool.

Bulletin: if your bulletin is out of date, blurry, or you have no professional church logo or letterhead, I recommend hiring a graphic designer to make you a “graphics standard guide.” This is a short document with your logo, fonts, and colors and how best to use them to keep a unified look and feel (the cost is approx. \$180 for the guide and \$60 for a fillable PDF bulletin and letterhead). I recommend Kristen Stuart at Designs to Flourish (www.facebook.com/designstoflourish).