

I am a Protestant Christian who grew up in a nondenominational church where my parents worked as the arts and music directors. Today, I am a member of a weekly house church that belongs to Christian Ministries. On Sunday, November 10th, I joined my class to visit Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church in Lorain.

As I was pulling up to the street, I immediately spotted the church by its towering three domes in teal. Perhaps the color, blue, evokes thoughts of God and heaven and the three domes represent the Trinity. As I walked into the doorway, I found myself transported to another world, centuries before cell phones or the Internet. The beautiful gilded icons of the saints and angels on the walls and the mural of Jesus on the dome ceiling caught my eye. Some of the saints were Peter, Paul, Raphael, Nicodemus, and Jacob of Alaska. I noticed that the icons of Christ and some saints had their right hands positioned in the same way. The church's website Q&A reported that the icons' fingers spell IC XC, the initials of 'Jesus' and 'Christ' in Greek. Some other important symbols were a cross with three horizontal bars and the gold leaves on the clergymen's full-length robes. In addition, a large portrait of Mary and baby Jesus hung in the center of a tall screen, the Royal Doors, which separated the congregation from the inner sanctum. At times during the service, I could not see inside the inner sanctum, from where the priests, deacons, altar boys, and a bishop were leading the congregation. The choir was seated behind the congregation in a loft.

The service began at 9:30 AM and lasted for two hours. About 150 to 200 people attended the event celebrating the 100th anniversary of the church. I noticed that most of the congregation arrived early for the event and sat in traditional rows of pews facing the Royal Doors. The congregation seemed to have even numbers of women and men,

who were mostly middle-aged and older. I saw about six teenagers and four children in the audience. The entire congregation dressed in business casual clothing with women wearing very modest, conservative skirts or pants and men wearing suits or dress shirts. No women led the meeting as part of the clergy. I counted only two women who wore headscarves, but a common trait to older men was a full beard.

The church service started when the most important priest, the Bishop, arrived from Chicago. The Bishop appeared to be in his sixties, sported a full gray beard, and immigrated from Romania hence his thick, but intelligible accent. Like the other clergymen, the Bishop was dressed in a full-length, ceremonial, gold robe decorated with leaves, angels, and an icon of Jesus or Mary over his heart. Only the Bishop had the honor of wearing a tall hat that perfectly matched his robe. He also exchanged a red lapel for a three-bar cross around his neck during the service. The Bishop seemed to lead the other clergymen and the congregation. A procession of priests and deacons waited on him, dressed him, and followed him around carrying incense and candles. The Bishop read the most important parts of *Divine Liturgy*. He also blessed the congregation by waving a chandelier of electric candles and incense at the congregation who responded by bowing.

Because the service celebrated the 100th anniversary of the church, the Bishop or the priest did not give a sermon. Instead, the local pastor, Very Rev. Father Basil Stoyka, chose to speak about the history of the church service and the Bishop prayed for the congregation. During most of the Eucharist service, the clergymen took turns reading the part of the priest in *Divine Liturgy* with the choir and a few members of the congregation singing the responses. A few times, the Bishop followed by the clergy

disappeared behind the Royal Doors and continued reading *Divine Liturgy* from there. I could not see exactly what they were doing. Different members of the clergy also took turns blessing the congregation with incense and candles, but the congregation did not seem to react to being blessed by anyone less than Father Stoyka or the Bishop. Towards the end, the clergy invited members of the congregation to take communion. As the congregation formed a line on the platform, the priests spoon-fed the wine to each person and placed a wafer of bread in each mouth. Then, Father Stoyka handed out awards to women of the congregation, including his wife. The service ended when all the clergymen exited the doors to take pictures together on the church's steps.