

A note on Frequency of Confession, Absolution, and Communion

In the Orthodox Catholic Church we are governed first and foremost by the law and commandments of Our Lord Jesus Christ. However, in the Theanthropic Body of the Church, we have also been given “canons” which govern us according to the local “treatment” plan of the bishops and ruling Archbishops. Often these canons are collected into what is called “The Rudder,” a canonical book assembled and collected by St. Nikodemus of the Holy Mountain. Why is this book called “The Rudder?” Because the rudder is means by which the Ark is steered and guided in its journey, and we are all members of the Great Ark of Christ.

The standard of the Orthodox Christian life is to confess every single day and to attempt to be ready at any moment to stand before the judgement seat of Christ. This standard, however, has historically been prescribed only to monastic communities. When we consider our policy on confession in the world, we ought to examine the Holy Father Saint Basil the Great. Saint Basil comments that in his day a person could be considered an Orthodox Christian in pious “good-standing” if they confessed at least once every 30-40 days. Consider that in the time of St. Basil, travel and access to the clergy was often more difficult than in our present time. The Greek and Antiochian Churches have stayed with this general principal of “monthly confession” as a baseline for a normative Orthodox life. (More rigor with confession is always encouraged). Confession once a month allows for a person to commune weekly, provided they continue to confess any additional sins that occur during that time period that are particularly grievous. This is different from the modern Russian tradition which requires weekly confession or confession before every partaking of the eucharist. Both traditions, Greek/Antiochian and Russian, are blessed and God-given. Following the general pastoral model of the Antiochian Bishops of our Holy Catholic and Apostolic Patriarchate, I will share the following:

1. If a person desires to commune weekly, they should confess at least every 30 days.
(Additional confessions if needed if we fall into grave sin).
2. If a person wishes to grow in the spiritual life, they should confess at least once every 2 weeks.
3. If a person wishes to grow even more in the faith and in ascetism, confession should be had every Saturday night after Great Vespers.
4. If a person desires to commune on a Great Feast Day, they should have confessed that same week regardless of their last confession.
5. You do not need to exclusively confess to the pastor, just let the pastor know if you are confessing somewhere else.

I do not think it is appropriate in the parish setting to track everyone’s confession and to be continuously asking everyone if they have “checked the boxes” above. And, in fact, box checking is explicitly contrary to the ethos of confession. Therefore, I humbly ask all of you to consider this

pastoral message and to do your best to keep close to the guidelines I have set forth. Do know that if you do commune after neglecting the confessional, it may very well harm you, as the eucharist is a hot coal, and all-consuming fire that either burns us up along with the sins we will not confess, or it bedews us and allows us to grow into Cedar's of holiness.

These are not concrete rules, and frequency of confession can be made less or more strict for each individual depending on need. However, a person must be in dialogue with a confessor to find out which is better for them.