

The Lenten Covenant

This year will be the 15th year we offer the program of the Lenten Covenant at St. John. Each year, those who participate say that they get a lot of out of this program. A “covenant” is a promise. God has made covenants with us. In the Old Testament, He makes the first Covenant with Abraham, to be the God of Abraham’s descendants. The sign of this Covenant is circumcision. In the New Testament, God replaces the Old Covenant with a New Covenant, which is baptism and Holy Communion. If you are baptized and have received Holy Communion, then you have a Covenant relationship with God—you are part of the Covenant between God and His people. The Lenten Covenant is a promise between us and God—it is a promise to do certain things during Lent so that one can grow spiritually during Lent, with a promise to change one thing after Lent has ended so that spiritual growth continues during the year. *The Lenten Covenant will help us in keeping the lifelong Covenant relationship we have with God by giving us a short-term covenant by which to evaluate our standing in the lifelong Covenant.*

How does the Lenten Covenant Work?

Below there is a form that lists a menu of plans to help in a Lenten Goal of growing closer to God this year. The menu includes fasting, prayer, worship, reading the Bible, reading a theology book, going to confession, changing one bad habit, and the one that is most important, a goal for once Pascha is over. The menu offer several levels of commitment for each area. Each area is important—it is important that you fast, pray, worship, read scriptures, go to confession, and change a bad habit if you are going to get something out of this Lent. But if you’ve never fasted before, the covenant offers different levels of difficulty. So if you’ve never fasted, perhaps you should check the easiest level. If you’ve mastered the first level, perhaps this year you challenge yourself with the second level. If you’ve never read the Bible, don’t commit to reading the whole Bible during Lent—that is a huge commitment. Commit rather to something smaller like reading a chapter a day, or perhaps reading the Gospels, something that is challenging but attainable. If you’ve never worshipped in church on a day that isn’t Sunday, don’t commit to every service during Lent, but commit to one service per week, or even commit to one of each of the Lenten services, which would be three extra services over the six weeks of Lent. Regarding confession, how many hours of your life have you spent alone with an Orthodox priest to talk about your salvation? If you are over age 20 and the answer is zero, perhaps you need to think about changing that this Lent. If you are over age 60 and the answer is zero, you’ve got even more incentive. Think about how many hours a year you spend watching television, or listening to music, going to movies, doing yardwork, gossiping on the phone—it adds up to hundreds of hours each year, thousands of hours over a lifetime. And then think about how many hours you’ve spent in your whole life talking about your salvation, about repentance, with an Orthodox priest. Sadly, for many people, the answer is zero. This could be the year you change that.

So, if you decide to do the Lenten Covenant, do the following:

1. Fill out the survey which follows.
2. Make two copies of it for each person in your household that is going to participate.
3. Put one copy in a place at home where you can see it, on the refrigerator, by your bedside, in your Bible.
4. Take the other copy of the covenant and place it in an envelope.
5. Seal the envelope and write your name and address on the envelope.
6. Bring the envelope to church on Sunday, March 14, and place it in a box that will be in front of the icon of the Virgin Mary on the solea of the church.
7. The box will be kept locked, the only person with the key will be Fr. Stavros
8. FATHER STAVROS WILL NOT OPEN THE ENVELOPES OR READ THEIR CONTENTS—these will remain private. Father Stavros will merely jot down the names on the envelopes to pray for these people throughout Lent, to pray that they will make good on their covenants. This is my commitment to you.
9. The box will remain in the church until the Resurrection Service on Easter as a reminder to you each time you come to church that you have a covenant or promise to God.
10. After Easter, your envelope will be mailed to you in your self-addressed envelope, as proof that the envelope was never opened, and as a way for you to see how you did.

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Check as many as apply under each topic. You should (but need not) answer every topic. This is a matter of your own conscience and areas where you want to grow spiritually.

1. Concerning my prayer life, each day I will commit to:
 One 5- minute period of un-interrupted prayer
 One five minute period every morning of un-interrupted prayer
 One five minute period every evening of un-interrupted prayer
 One five minute period each morning AND evening of un-interrupted prayer
Other: Write in here

2. Concerning Worship
 I'll commit to attending Divine Liturgy each Sunday
 I'll commit to attending ONE additional service each week during each week of Lent
 I'll commit to attending AT LEAST 1 Compline, 1 Pre-Sanctified Liturgy and 1 Salutations Service
 I'll commit to attending AT LEAST ONE Saturday of the Souls
 I'll commit to attending the Forgiveness Vespers March 14
 I'll commit to preparing and receiving Holy Communion at least once a week during Lent.

- Concerning Holy Week, I'll commit to:
 Every Service
 Every Evening Service
 One service each Day
 Specifically Holy Thursday—the Passion of Christ
 Other (write in here)

3. Concerning Fasting, I'll commit to:
 Level One Fast from meat on Wednesday and Fridays and during Holy Week
 Level Two Fast from meat and fish on Wednesdays and Friday and during Holy Week
 Level Three Fast from meat the entirety of Lent and Holy Week
 Level Four Fast from meat and fish the entirety of Lent and Holy Week
 Level Five Level Four and eliminate dairy products during Holy Week.
 Level Six Level Four and eliminate dairy products on Wednesdays and Fridays and during Holy Week
 Level Seven Level Four plus eliminate dairy products during all of Lent and Holy Week
 Level Eight Level Seven plus eliminate oil and wine during Holy Week
 Level Nine The Strict Fast-no meat, fish, dairy products, wine or oil during the entirety of Lent
 I can't fast from food for health reasons. I will give up the following: (Write answer here)

**Note-alcohol should be consumed at a very minimum during Lent, and abstained from totally if possible. Also, activities should be curtailed, socializing a little more sedate, no dancing and loud music. During Holy Week, all unnecessary activities aside from work and children should be curtailed, so that we can focus on the Holy Days of the Passion of Christ.

4. Concerning reading the Bible, I'll commit to:
 Reading one chapter a day from some book
 Reading the four Gospels
 Reading the Psalms
 Other (Write in)

5. Concerning confession,
 I'll commit to going once during this Lenten period either to Fr. Stavros or another Priest
 I've been recently to confession and don't feel the need to go at this time.
 I don't believe in going to confession
 I'll get more information on this sacrament and then make a decision.

6. Concerning Holy Communion, I will try to be prepared to receive
 Every Sunday
 Every Sunday and at Wednesday Pre-Sanctified
 At least every other Sunday

7. Concerning bad habits, here are one or two or a few bad habits I'll watch and change this Lent
 Gossip
 Self-aggrandizement
 impatience
 Greed
 Lust
 Disobedience
 Wasting time
 Self-pitying
 Not giving good effort at work/school/marriage/children
Others: Write in here

9. One spiritual goal I want to commit to once Pascha has passed is:

Prayer: Lord help me to be successful in this task I am about to undertake. May it be for the growth of my soul and the improvement of my spiritual life. Help me to keep all the commitments I have made. Amen.

_____ Sign your name

Make a copy for yourself, place your covenant in a sealed envelope, write your name and address on front of envelope. Bring covenant to church and place it in locked box on the solea