

St Michael's Orthodox Church

A Visitor's Guide



Welcome to St. Michael's Orthodox Church!

If you have never visited an Orthodox Church before, then you might find St. Michael's church a bit different to other churches that you have been to. To make your visit easier, we would like to explain a bit about what goes on in our church so that you can make the most of your time with us

St. Michael's Orthodox Church, Wereton Road, Audley,
Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire

What is an 'Orthodox Church'?

Most people have heard of an Anglican, Methodist or Catholic Church. So what about an Orthodox one? The Orthodox Church is one of the biggest groups of Christians in the world, bigger, for example, than Anglicans or Methodists. It is also the oldest, with a 2000 year unbroken history. In this country however, there are much fewer of us. Most Orthodox Christians come from countries in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. That doesn't mean that only people from other countries can be Orthodox Christians. In St. Michael's you will meet people from all over the world, including America, Greece, Cyprus, Romania, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, and even Staffordshire!

The Orthodox Church believes that she has preserved the original Christian tradition. This means that even in England, if you trace back to the first years of Christianity in this country it would be something close to what the Orthodox Church believes today.

What do you do in your services?

People who come for the first time often are a bit puzzled about what goes on when they walk through the doors. After all, where are the pews, the hymn books? What am I supposed to do or say? Sometimes, the service seems to have already started before I arrive. Should I have come earlier?

Well in this regard, our service is very easy. You do not need to do anything in particular. We believe that the most important thing that people can do is to prepare themselves to meet God. It is not important that you know all the words to the service or know what gestures to make.

It is custom for Orthodox Christians to stand during the service. To make this easier, we don't have rows of pews. People are allowed to move round quite freely within the main part of the church. Of course if you need to sit down, there are seats around the edge of the church. Please feel free to do so.

And about arriving on time? Well that is where we are a bit different again. Prayers start at 9:30 in the morning and the service finishes about 12:15. You should arrive by the start of the Divine Liturgy at 11.00.

You will notice people doing certain gestures during the service which we will explain briefly.

When people come into church, they usually make the sign of the cross on themselves. They then kiss some of the Icons, the painted pictures that you see round the church. During the prayers, people will be making the sign of the cross from time to time. This is either when the prayers are said “in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit”, when the Virgin Mary (called Theotokos which is Greek for ‘the one who gave birth to God’) is mentioned or that a prayer is said for some need.

I am from another church. How can I take part in the service?

People of all religions and none are welcome to attend our services and we certainly welcome believers of sincere faith from other churches in the area. All who come are encouraged to join us in spirit in our common worship.

Sadly, however, Christians in the world today are divided about their beliefs. This means that if you have not been received into the Orthodox Church, you will not be allowed to share in the Body and Blood of Christ given at Communion. If you wish to become part of the Church, please speak to the Parish Priest, who will be able to explain what you need to do. At the end of the service, the priest will offer what is called Antidoron, which is bread that has been blessed by the priest, part of which was used for Communion. We normally encourage visitors to share this with us. People will move round the church to kiss the cross that the priest is holding and then receive a piece of bread. It is a custom that Orthodox Christians will also take some home for family members who could not make it to church.

What about refreshments and toilets?

If you need to come and go during the service, either because you need the toilet or to feed children, there is a kitchen and toilet at the back of the church. Please don't hesitate to ask for help.

I would like to know more...

If you would like to know more about our beliefs, please do not hesitate to ask. We would be more than willing to try and answer your questions to the best of our ability. Also if you prefer to read books about our faith, we can recommend titles that might be of interest; we sell a range of books through the Church although these might not be on display. We should say, however, that no religion can be learnt completely from books. The Orthodox way of doing things is to learn from experience.

If you have more specific needs such as arranging a baptism, wedding, memorial, funeral or house blessing, please contact the Parish Priest

FOR MORE INFORMATION

There are services at the Church most Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings. For more information, please contact Father Samuel on (01782) 351-044.

Our website is www.stmichaels-audley.org.uk