

Church: The Hospital and the Ark, and Why We Need to Support It

The Church Fathers like to use the metaphor of Noah's Ark to represent the Church, as we see in the icon over the choir. This is not just a nice little story that actually happened; it illustrates how God and Man work together in tandem toward a vital and life-giving goal.



By becoming good stewards of the Ark, we help improve our broken relationship with God so that we may ultimately live with Him in the Kingdom of heaven for all eternity. Interestingly, God **requires** Noah to build the instrument of his salvation. In the same way, we too are **required** by God to maintain the Church, the instrument of our salvation. This is done through our donation of time, ability, or money, as the Holy Spirit guides us.

When we consider our stewardship pledge, we should not give because we are being made to feel guilty or compelled to do so. Rather, it's important for us to give willingly, with love and trust in God. Then, our will is better aligned with God's Will, just as Noah trusted in God and willingly built the Ark, which saved his family and himself from perishing in the flood.

Another point to remember is that when we give to the church, we're not just giving the money to God. It is His to begin with. Paradoxically, through alms giving, we ourselves gain by giving. We learn to trust in God rather than ourselves. There are countless examples from modern times, when people, with love and trust in God, gave away their last loaf of bread to someone hungry, only to miraculously find more than they had given on the kitchen table the next day. We need to support the church for our own spiritual benefit not only in this short life but in the next.

As we decide what to give, It's crucial to know how the church helps us and why we're here, from an Orthodox perspective. We are not here because of fellowship and, gee, what a nice group of church friends we have! We are not here because we like the choir or our priest or the iconography. We are not here to become morally, ethically, and socially upright citizens of society. These are all good and well. But the main purpose of the Church, according to the



Holy Fathers, is this. Christ established the Church as a hospital for our souls (and bodies to some extent). We're here to be healed of our broken relationship with God - to learn to love Him, ourselves, and our neighbor, for we cannot claim to love one and not the other. We're here to start living every moment in God's heavenly presence in this life and forever with Him in the next. At an earthly hospital, we are healed temporarily. Here, our healing lasts forever, unto the "ages of ages" as we say.

But what is the medicine, the treatment, you ask? It's God's grace through partaking of the Holy Sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation, Unction, Marriage or Priesthood for some. Regularly, we receive the medicine of Confession, and Communion, after careful preparation, of course. Through this life-giving, healing, the Church carries us to our eternal salvation as the Ark carried Noah and his family safely away from certain death.

In these difficult economic times, our faith is being tested more than ever. For many of us, food, fuel, and clothing costs have risen sharply while income has stayed the same, not kept up, or even been cut. It's very tempting to think of cutting back our support of the church.

Let us each examine our conscience with much prayer and consultation with our spiritual father. Let us take the leap of faith and as Christ himself told us, "...seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Let us imitate Noah's life-saving faith and love for God, and work together with God's Holy Will toward our own salvation, by supporting our own ark here at St. Philip's, so this healing hospital will be here for generations to come.