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Building a Liturgical Library (Fr. John Whiteford)

[Ξένες γλώσσες](#) / [In English](#)

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The follow tips assume that you have a limited budget, and so cannot afford to buy everything at once. If this is not true in your case, there are some books you could skip, but they are good to have on hand in any case.

The most basic liturgical text every Orthodox Christian should have is a good prayer book. You can read about several suggested texts in the following article:

Recommended Prayer Books

These prayer books can be ordered from, [Holy Ascension Monastery](#), [Light and Life Publishing](#), or from [St. Nectarios Press](#). Of the prayer books in that article, the one I would recommend the most is [the Jordanville Prayer book](#). Another very useful text mentioned in that article that I would especially recommend is [the Book of Akathists, Volume 1](#) and [Volume 2](#), published by Jordanville. You can also find a number of [Akathists and canons online](#).

[Note, all of the hyperlinks that follow, will take you to the web page of an Orthodox Bookstore that sells the text, or to a free online version when indicated]

After a prayer book the most basic liturgical texts are the Horologion and the Psalter.

For an Horologion, there are three choices:

1. [The Unabbreviated Horologion](#) published by Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York. In my opinion this is the best one available, and certainly those following Russian practice would be advised to use this one.
2. [The Great Horologion](#) published by Holy Transfiguration Monastery. For those following Byzantine practice, this is an option. Also, even those following Russian practice will find it a useful reference, since it contains Synaxarion readings for each day of the year, and also the troparia and kontakia appointed for each day.
3. [The Liturgikon](#), by Bishop Basil of the Antiochian Archdiocese is also often used as an Horologion, and also follows Byzantine practice. The text is primarily designed for use by clergy.

Another thing to consider here is the price. You will find that the Jordanville Horologion is quite a bit less expensive, but it also contains much less material. It has all of the Horologion texts, and some extra material – but the Great Horologion has quite a bit more.

Two other texts which contain Horologion material, but which are presented in a easier to use format (structured for use for normal Sunday services are [The All-Night Vigil for Choir and Laity](#), and [the Divine Liturgy for Choir and Laity](#), both published by Jordanville.

For a Liturgical Psalter, there is currently only one text that I would recommend (and this happens to be the text that most every other liturgical text recommended on this page uses for the Psalter – including both Horologions, and the Liturgikon):

[The Psalter According to the Seventy](#) published by Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston Mass. You can also [read this translation on-line](#).

You will also want to get a liturgical Gospel Book. At present, the only source I know of for one that uses the King James Version, is from [Holoviaks Church Supply](#). They do not list this in their online catalogue, but they have a relatively affordable hardback version, as well as several with fancy covers, that are not particularly cheap [Update: Their supply of King James Gospels is running out, and they do not currently plan on reprinting them. They are now using the New King James, and so if you want the King James text, you had better order soon, or else you will have to wait for some other supplier to publish a similar text, which could be years in the works]. You will want to have a liturgical Gospel for two reasons: you will want a Gospel to venerate, and you will want to know how to begin the readings properly... which you wouldn't know simply by looking up the text in a typical Bible.

A new option for those seeking a traditional English translation of the Gospels, is [the Gospel Lectionary published by the Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies](#). I have not personally seen it yet, but I would suspect that it has some of the same advantages and disadvantages as their Epistle Lectionary, which I comment on below. The feedback I have gotten from priests who have been using this Gospel has so far been all positive.

Likewise, you will need an Epistle Book (Apostol or Apostolos):

The best option available at present for those following the Slavonic Typikon is [the Apostol](#), published by St. Tikhon's Seminary Press. The translation used is neither King James, nor New King James, but a synthesis of the two. It retains the traditional pronouns (for the most part) and verb endings, but eliminates archaic words. At times one might have wished that they had kept more of the King James text than they did (though they do, thankfully, make the text more easily understandable in those instances in which the King James text is very obscure for contemporary readers), but there are currently no better options out there.

The best option available for those following Byzantine practice is [the Epistle Lectionary](#), published by the Center for Traditionalists Orthodox Studies. It is based on the King James text, and is arranged according the Byzantine Lectionary... which differs slightly from time to time from the Slavic lectionary. It's biggest draw back

is that it is published only in paper back at present. This has the advantage, however, of making it inexpensive enough for individuals to purchase a copy for home use (it is only \$25.00). Also, some of the “corrections” of the King James text in this edition are debatable. For example, in the KJV, 1st Corinthians 11:14 reads “Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?” The CTOS edition emends this to read “Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have flowing hair, it is a shame unto him?” I understand the point that they are trying to make, and the translations is not completely indefensible; but no other translation translates it this way, if one wanted to bring out the nuance that they are trying to highlight it would probably have been better to have translated it as “wear long hair” rather than “have long hair” or “have flowing hear”, and also this really gets us beyond translation into the realm of commentary... and that is what commentaries and footnotes are for. And although emendations are made to make theological points, many instances in which the text of the King James is no longer easily understood, and could be easily corrected by updating a word or two... those opportunities were passed by. Nevertheless, on the balance, this edition is a good option.



The one liturgical text that still gives you the most material in one volume remains:

[Divine Prayers and Services of the Catholic Orthodox Church of Christ, by Fr. Seraphim Nassar](#)

This is one of the oldest English service books around, and the translation is at times awkward, however, with this text, one has enough material to serve Vespers and Liturgy (or Typika) for Sundays and important feast days (though on most Sundays there would be lacking the material from the Menaion, but at least one would have the material from the Octoechos, Triodion, and Pentecostarion for Sundays. Even though, at this point, I have a relatively complete liturgical library, I still find myself referring to this text to help fill in those gaps that remain, or simply to compare its texts and rubrics with other texts. One advantage to this text, for those who do not have a liturgical Gospel or Epistle book is that it has the readings

for Sundays and Feasts throughout the year (albeit in a sometimes less than ideal translation).

The General Menaion, is the next text that one should acquire, however, at present there is no edition currently in print. One might be able to get their hands on a copy of one published some years back from a monastery in England, which to date is the best edition in English that has been printed. There is an on-line version of the General Menaion, and at present it seems to be the only available option:

[The General Menaion](#)

The General Menaion contains sort of a fill in the blank service for different types of saints and feasts. If you don't have the appointed Menaion service... or if you are doing a service for a saint that has not had a service written for them, then the General Menaion is what is used.

The Octoechos forms the core of most Sunday services, and so this is certainly a text one would want to get early on. There are two basic choices at present:

1. [The Complete Octoechos](#) published by St. John of Kronstadt Press. This contains both the Sunday Octoechos and the Weekday Octoechos in 4 volumes.
2. [The Sunday Octoechos, translated by the Monastery of the Veil](#), has been around longer, and consequently has been used more widely.

[The Festal Menaion by Bishop Kallistos \(Ware\)](#), gives you the complete texts for the Great Feasts of the Church (outside of the Triodion/Pentecostarion cycles). If you can't afford the entire Menaion at once, this is a must have... and in any case it is a good text to have around both for the texts of the services themselves and also for the introduction which discusses in detail the structure of the services.

[The Lenten Triodion](#) published by Bishop Kallistos is currently the best options available in English that is in print. For the Triodion, you will eventually also want to get the [Lenten Triodion Supplementary Texts](#), which contains much of the weekday material from the Triodion that is not found in the first volume.

[The Pentecostarion](#) published by Holy Transfiguration Monastery is a complete translation of the Greek version of the Pentecostarion, but that text is currently out of print, and it is not clear how soon it will be reprinted. [The Sundays and Feasts of the Pentecostarion](#) (Soft cover) published by the Monastery of the Veil is not a complete translation of the Pentecostarion, but has everything a typical parish

would need. [St. John of Kronstadt Press has published a translation of the complete Slavonic Version of the Pentecostarion](#) (currently soft cover, but with plans to eventually publish a hard cover edition).

The biggest ticket item on this list is [The Menaion](#). To purchase the Menaion from St. John of Kronstadt Press (which I recommend), you have some options. You can buy it all at once, in either loose-leaf versions, or in hardback. You can also buy loose-leaf versions as you need them (for example, you could make an annual order of all the texts you would need that year... or you could do this quarterly) this is the most painless way, in terms of coming up with the money all at once. You can also buy the hardback version, one or two volumes at a time, as you have the money – if you do that, keep in mind that unless you do a lot of weekday services, February, March, April, and May will probably not be the ones you will want to get first, since on most Sundays during these months, the texts of the services will be taken from the Octoechos and from the Pentecostarion or the Triodion.

[Holy Transfiguration Monastery has now published a new translation of the Menaion](#). It follows Greek practice, and is slashed according to Byzantine Meter. For those using Byzantine Chant, this is a good thing. For those using any other style of chant, these slashes become a headache that is avoided by the St. John of Kronstadt Menaion. The text is nicely printed, and a good font size.

Another text that is still very useful, is [The Service Book of the Orthodox Church, translated by Isabel Hapgood](#). Aside from the Scriptures themselves, this is the oldest Orthodox text published in English, and even today it remains a popular text, and is used especially when it comes to services from the Trebnik (or Euchologion), such as baptisms, weddings, etc.

You can find translations of a small portion of the services of [the Trebnik online](#).

There is now a complete translation of the Trebnik available from St. Tikhon's Press, available in 4 volumes:

[Volume 1: The Holy Mysteries](#)

[Volume 2: The Sanctification of the Church, and Other Ecclesiastical and Liturgical Blessings](#)

[Volume 3: Occasional Services / Funeral Services](#)

[Volume 4: Services of Supplication \(Moliebens\)](#)

An even more complete Trebnik will be available in the future from [St. John of Kronstadt Press](#). However, these texts are more than most laymen or choir directors would probably ever want or need. For them, the Hapgood Service book is still the best way to go.

Along with these texts, a good liturgical Calendar, is also a must have. The best option in English is the one from St. John of Kronstadt, however, to use it right, you will also need [The Order of Divine Services](#), which they also publish. The Order of Divine Services is an indispensable guide for putting the services together.

Posted on the St. Jonah Orthodox Church website. This article can be found here:
<http://www.saintjonah.org/articles/library.htm>

By Fr. John Whiteford

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