

# Prosphora – Communion Bread Recipes

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## Uniontown Prosphora (from Sr. Carol OSBM)

1 loaf: 3 ½ cups flour, 1 cup lukewarm water and a little pinch of yeast. Knead at least 25 minutes (makes the dough firm) let set 1 hr and bake 1 hr at 350\* (Can be made into smaller loaves - bake ½ hr.)

*To make several loaves:* 10 lbs flour, 8 ½ cup lukewarm water and a little less than 1/8 teaspoon of yeast. This is best done in a large mixer with a hook attachment. Knead in bowl for ½ hr. Form loaves - let set 1 hour and bake at 350\* for 1 and ½ hr.

*Sr. Carol*

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### Regular recipes

### St. Vladimir's Seminary Prosphora Recipe (Russian Style)

Note: I observed a seminarian at St. Vladimir's shaping some of the best loaves I have ever seen. Jeff Goudreau learned this recipe as part of his obedience at the seminary. It was originally imparted by a Russian Hieromonk to a seminarian who then passed the recipe to Jeff. It makes for an exceptionally dense bread, which the priests find extremely pleasant to work with.

This recipe can be modified to suite any style of loaves.

The most important feature of this recipe is the use of boiling water, which cooks the flour before it is baked. This has the effect of breaking down the gluten structures and traumatizing the proteins in such a way that it becomes very dense.

### Ingredients

- High-gluten or regular bleached flour - 20 lbs
- boiling water - 1 gallon
- Active Dry Yeast - 5 Tbsp.
- Seal and two "cookie cutters" (one larger than the other)
- Baker's pan liners (industrial strength wax paper)

## Instructions

1. Place the yeast in a bowl with several cups of water and a cup of flour to create a "sponge" or active colony.
2. Boil the water.
3. Pour the flour into a large bowl, then stir in the boiling water until the dough becomes the consistency of mashed potatoes.
4. Set the dough aside and allow to cool until it can be handled with comfort. Make sure you carefully test the center of the dough before you begin working it. If burns don't scare you, remember that super-high temperatures will kill the yeast.
5. Once the dough has cooled, add the "sponge" and additional flour until the dough reaches a workable consistency. Push your finger into the lump: if the dough does not stick to your finger at all, add more water; if the dough sticks to both the end and sides of your finger, add more flour; if the dough sticks to the end of your finger but not the sides; it is OK. You should be able to work the dough without it sticking to the bowl on immediate contact or to your hands unless you press very hard.
6. Knead the dough for 10-15 minutes.
7. Allow the dough to rise long enough to double in size.
8. Set your oven for 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Set your rack in the lower section of the oven.
9. Take the bowl and uncover the dough. Grabbing the sides of the ball where it is sticking to the bowl, pull it away from the sides and punch it down in the center. Keep doing this until the dough is roughly the same size it was before it began to rise. Bust air bubbles as they surface and

knead for a few minutes. You may want to run a skewer (this is what Jeff used) or a chop stick through the ball. With very dense dough like this, you have to work harder to get the air bubbles out.

10. Cut the ball into however many pieces you need for loaves with some extra dough.
11. Cut 1/3 off the first dough ball and set aside. This piece will form the seal portion of the loaf.
12. The remaining piece is worked until you are confident that there are virtually no air bubbles left in it. Use a rolling pin to squish the dough out to 1"-1 1/2" thick (depending on the size of the loaves you are shaping), popping bubbles as you see them. This gets rid of most of the bubbles, and a toothpick, skewer or chop stick does the rest.
13. Using the larger of the two cutters, press down and remove excess dough. Pierce the top of the loaf repeatedly to get at and bubbles in the center. Wet the top of the loaf (make sure not to wet it so the water dribbles down the side), then set on a cookie sheet lined wax paper.
14. Now, shape the top portion in roughly the same manner, but make it half the thickness of the larger piece and use a small cutter. Flour and press in the seal. Pierce the seal in a tasteful manner.
15. Wet the bottom of the seal portion, then set on top of the main loaf.
16. Continue to shape loaves.
17. Before placing in the oven, each loaf should set out for at least 10 minutes. It is especially important to have good adhesion between the two pieces. This setting time is critical for that as well as proofing.

18. Bake each loaf until golden brown.

19. When cool, seal in ziplock bags to soften the crusts. Jeff assures that these loaves freeze very well.

## **Technical Notes**

### **Preventing Oversized Bubbles**

Note: I am indebted to two main sources for this page: On Food and Cooking by Harold McGee and Secrets of a Jewish Baker by (I can't find the book right now, so a complete citation will have to wait).

### **Kneading**

Bread has to be kneaded, and kneaded well. To prevent bubbles, plenty of kneading is necessary. Not only does it break down the protein structures to form a smoother consistency, but also distributes active yeast throughout the dough.

Kneading should take at least 20 minutes on the first mixing. Another 10 minutes before shaping also helps redistribute yeast as well as eliminate the old gases which could suffocate the microphytes at work. Another benefit is aeration: those yeast plants need fresh air!

Kneading should be done with the arms as straight as possible to avoid injuries. It should not consist of pushing down on the loaf, but rather pushing and stretching the ball out on a lightly floured surface. Use the heels of your palms by sinking them into the center of the ball, clench some dough with your fingers and push down and away from you. Eventually, you'll develop a rhythm. Stretch and slam the dough as much as possible. This helpful hint comes from the Jewish baker. It accelerates the straightening of the protein chains in the dough, heals breaks in the dough and creates tiny air pockets for the yeast to feed off of. After you've been kneading a ball for a few minutes, slam it around. Notice how the texture becomes almost fluffy. That's all the oxygen you're getting in there.

The ideal way to knead dough to the right consistency is to start overly damp and dry up the dough by adding flour. The perfect consistency should be sticky enough so that two pieces of dough will heal together with medium pressure, yet not so sticky as to adhere to a lightly floured surface.

**Test:** push your finger into the ball of dough and pull it out. If the dough sticks to the end of your finger but not the sides, you've probably got it right. If the

dough is too dry, the yeast will not have enough moisture to thrive, and the starch in the dough will crystallize. If it is too damp, it will take too long to bake, not to mention being a mess to deal with in the first place!

## Oven Temperature

The best temperature for the type of dough used in prosphora is 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Why? Simple: it bakes slow enough not to harden the crust before the inside of the bread has hit the temperature necessary to kill the yeast. In simple terms: so the loaf won't blow up like a kernel of popcorn!

If the crust hardens before the yeast in the center of the loaf die, the gases produced by the yeast will be trapped. This splits the crust or results in what I call the "pita effect" like pocket bread with a large bubble in the center.

As the temperature at the center of the loaf increases, the yeast becomes more and more active. Bakers refer to this a "springing" in the oven, since the loaf will grow dramatically during the first minutes of baking before the yeast is killed by the heat. This is important to remember when dealing with bubbles: if the dough does not have a proper bubble and protein structure before baking, the heat of the oven will excite the yeast to produce gasses which will end up in all the wrong places.

If the oven temperature is too low, the yeast won't be killed quickly enough. This causes excessive "springing," yielding not only massive bubbles but also stretching out the seal so that it is unrecognizable.

The loaf should be baked (in the case of Byzantine loaves) until golden on the outside. Don't worry about a crust forming too hard for the priest to work with (unless it gets dark brown). The golden color indicates the center has reached temperature. If the dough is not golden but still tan, you've probably still got a lot of uncooked dough in the center. Russian loaves don't need to reach this color because of their size. If you make them golden, chances are they will be rock hard from loosing all their moisture.

If you're not sure if the center is done, flip the loaf over and tap the bottom with your finger. If it feels hollow, the loaf is done. If it feels solid, then there is still moisture that needs to get baked out of the center.

## Piercing

This is one technique for preventing large bubbles from forming. Piercing does a number of things to the loaf. First, it traumatizes large bubbles you may have missed during the punch-down. Second, the holes provide a chimney for gases

to escape early in the baking process. Third, it forms a hardened area around the pierce which anchors the layers of dough together.

### **Moderate Amounts of Salt**

Salt retards the growth of yeast. A little salt can keep the yeast from going nuts if it's an extremely active culture, thereby preventing over-rising.

### **Don't Over-press the Seal**

I've noticed in inspecting the cross-sections of loaves, pushing down too hard on the loaf with the seal can cause a pocket. How? By compacting the dough under the seal, the yeast seems to have a harder time forming its network of bubbles during the proofing. When the loaf goes into the oven and the temperature goes up, the yeast starts to crank out gases which have nowhere to go. This forms the pocket in the center once the adhesion between to layers of dough gives out. Even if the loaf is proofed, it may not have enough time for the yeast to fight against the tightly compacted area under the seal. It is recommended that you follow Subdeacon George's technique for getting a clear seal without this over-pressing.

### **Subdeacon George's Prosphora Recipe (Byzantine Style)**

Note: This recipe has been compiled from numerous sources and various experiments. As I have the time to write, I will explain in further articles some of the principles involved in these instructions. For the time being, this will have to suffice for the curious as heart and the adventuresome in spirit!

This recipe makes four Byzantine style loaves.

#### **Ingredients**

- High-gluten or regular bleached flour - 14 cups
- Hot (~100 degrees) water - 4 cups
- Active Dry Yeast - 1 1/2 Tbsp.
- Salt - 2 Tsp.
- Nothing else! I'll comment later on why.

## Instructions

20. Place 12 cups of flour, salt and yeast in a large mixing bowl. Using a sturdy wooden spoon, mix the dry ingredients until blended.
21. Mix in all of the water, stirring with the spoon until the dough begins to clump up. When you can't use the spoon any longer, begin to knead the dough with your hands. Mash the clumps of dough into a single ball.
22. Here's where you need to stop and look at your workplace. To avoid kneading injuries, you need to be able to work the dough with straight arms.  
If you are short, like me, I suggest you keep the bread in the bowl and do your kneading on the floor in a kneeling position. Otherwise, put the ball on a floured board on your sink and start to work it.
23. Knead the dough with the heel of your palms, both pressing down and pushing the ball away from you. You shouldn't just press the dough, but stretch it out. The reason for this will be covered elsewhere.  
Knead the dough for **20 minutes**. As you knead, stretch and slam the dough frequently. This is also covered elsewhere.
24. The consistency you are trying to achieve is crucial. I suggest the following: **first**, add more rather than less water right off the bat, then add flour to achieve the right consistency. Adding water to dry dough is messy, whereas adding flour to wet dough is a bit easier and faster. **Second**, the proper consistency is judged by pushing the well-mixed dough ball with a finger up to the second knuckle. If the dough sticks to the end of your finger but not the sides, you have the proper consistency. The dough, if folded over and pushed, should "heal" and not remain two pieces. Yet, it shouldn't stick to lightly floured, smooth surfaces. Add flour as you knead until you get the right consistency. *This takes practice!*

25. After 20 minutes have passed (or you collapse from exhaustion, wondering how all those old ladies from church could do this every day!), cover the dough with plastic wrap in a bowl with enough room for the dough to grow. Leave a little gap or two for air to escape, but not enough for real circulation to occur and harden the surface of the ball. Place this in a warm place, like the oven before use. The heat from the pilot usually makes the oven ideal for rising (~80 degrees is sufficient).
26. Allow the dough to rise long enough to double in size (usually no more than 90 minutes).
27. Set your oven for 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Set your rack in the lower section of the oven.
28. Take the bowl and uncover the dough. Grabbing the sides of the ball where it is sticking to the bowl, pull it away from the sides and punch it down in the center. Keep doing this until the dough is roughly the same size it was before it began to rise. Bust air bubbles as they surface and knead for a few minutes.
29. Cut the ball into four equal pieces. Work three of them into separate balls, place them back in the bowl and cover again. The piece left over will be your first loaf. Place it on a floured board.
30. Cut 1/4 off this dough ball and set aside. This piece will form the seal portion of the loaf.
31. The remaining piece is worked until you are confident that there are virtually no air bubbles left in it. I use a rolling pin to squish the dough out to 1/16". This gets rid of most of the bubbles, and a toothpick does the rest. Form it into a ball, then flatten this out until it is around 1/4" thick and about 8-9" wide.

32. Flour your pizza stone or baking sheet (this will be a topic of future discussion), then lay the dough in it.
33. Using a conventional teaspoon, take some water (about 1/2 tsp.) and pour it on the surface of the dough, rubbing it around with the bottom of the spoon. This dampens the top of the dough, making it sticky and allowing the seal portion to adhere without a bubble. *Do not allow the water to run off the top, otherwise it will cause the loaf to glue itself to the baking surface! Very bad!*
34. Now, roll out the remaining 1/4 portion of the dough with extra flour. Get every bubble you can out of this piece, and add at least two tablespoons of flour to this piece, so it loses most of its stickiness. Shape this into a pancake the same size as your seal.
35. Lay your *floured* seal on the table face up. Place the pancake on top of the seal and mash it into the seal with your palm. Show no mercy! Force the dough into all the details of your seal. The added flour will keep the pancake from sticking.
36. Carefully holding the edges of the dough around the seal, turn this over onto the damp surface of the loaf. Now, push hard so that all the air is forced out and the seal portion is well nested into the loaf. *This also takes practice!* Don't be surprised if your first few attempts end up with a double impression from the dough shifting during the flip. You'll get the hang of it with time.
37. Now, here's where you'll need a tool: in my case, I use a Korean chopstick. This stick tapers gently down to a sharp point from the top to the bottom. When it pierces, it starts with a small hole and opens it, versus a blunt stick which will pull a good portion of the surface down with it and traumatize the seal.
38. Pierce the loaf with the stick around the edges of the seal. Push all the way down to the bottom. This will allow the loaf to split down at the

bottom if the crust hardens too quickly (the loaf will rise on the sides, exposing the circle of punctures) as well as allow gases inside to escape more easily. Then, pierce the corners of the Lamb section. Using a toothpick, pierce the tops of each section of the seal 1/4" deep to prevent bubbling. You can then make decorative piercings along the perimeter of the loaf (I have seen some very elaborate ones).

39. Allow the loaf to sit out for 20 minutes and "proof." This is discussed in greater detail elsewhere .
40. Pop it into the oven. Set your timer for 15 minutes. When it goes off, form another loaf. By the time you're done, it will be ready to turn the loaf in the oven around to achieve even browning (if your oven is ancient like mine!). Set the timer for another 20 minutes, allowing for the proofing time for the second loaf and the finish of the first.
41. Repeat this until there's no more dough.

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### *Prosphora in an Electric Bread Machine*

#### **Prosphora - Communion Bread**

3 cups of all-purpose flour

1 cup of warm water

¼ tsp. Dry yeast

Settings: Use "Bread Rapid" and "Light Crust"

#### **Mirovanija**

5 cups of all-purpose flour

½ pack of dry yeast [OR] 1 tsp. dry yeast

1 and ½ cups of warm water

Settings: Use “Bread Rapid” and “Light Crust” if available

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## **The Gifted Pan**

### *Our Recipe\* Gifted Pan*

\* Directions for use with a KitchenAid mixer. If making without a mixer, knead for about 20 minutes, or until a smooth dough is formed.

### *Ingredients*

4 C all-purpose flour

1 tsp. salt

1 package dry yeast (2 ¼ tsp.)

1 ½ C very warm water (more or less, as needed)

Mix dry ingredients together. Add water slowly, mixing well until a dough is formed. Using your dough hook set on #2 speed, mix for about 8 minutes. Add flour or water as needed to form a soft dough. The consistency should be such that the dough does not stick to the sides of the bowl. Place the dough onto a floured surface, knead and form into a ball. Place in a bowl, cover with a clean cloth and let it rise until double in size ~ 30 minutes.

Once the dough has risen, punch down and let it rest for a few minutes. Pinch off ~ 1/3 of the dough. Knead, popping air bubbles with a toothpick, then form into a ball with a very smooth surface. Flatten with a rolling pin. Place the smooth side down into The Gifted Pan and press into the seal thoroughly in order to make a more distinct impression. Lightly moisten between the layers with water. Take the remaining dough, knead, pop air bubbles and flatten as above. Place into The Gifted Pan and press down for an even surface. Bake in a preheated oven at 350 degrees for ~ 1 hour. When it is done, immediately remove from the pan and let it cool on a rack.