

INFORMATION *for* MARRIAGE

in the Orthodox Christian Church

“A great mystery is being celebrated. How is it a mystery? They come together, and the two are made one. They have not become the image of anything earthly, but of God Himself. They come in order to be made one body; behold the mystery of love!” (*St. John Chrysostom, Homily 12 on Colossians*)

Marriage is truly a “great mystery,” the mystery of the meeting of human love and Divine Love, the very sign and image of God’s presence with humanity. In the Old Testament, Israel was referred to as God’s “spouse,” while in the New Testament, the Church is referred to as the “bride” of Christ. These images attempt to convey in human categories what the Church Fathers refer to as the “frenzied love” of God for His people. Marriage is much more than a merely private transaction between two individuals; it is an event in which Jesus Christ Himself participates through the presence of the sacramental minister, the Priest, and that of the praying community, the Church. In view of this “ecclesial” dimension of marriage, therefore, a wedding must be performed within the context of the Orthodox Church in order for the Church to recognize and affirm the validity and authenticity of the marriage.

A. Church life and Participation

One or both members of the engaged couple must be a member in good standing. (*i.e. a participant in the life of the Orthodox Church*); he/she should also be a contributing member of the church (*through their time, talents, and tithe/financial offerings*).

Most importantly, the we should ask ourselves:

- Do I attend worship and receive Holy Communion regularly?
- Have I been to Holy Confession?
- Am I “in tune” with the spiritual life of my Faith (*fasting, prayer, charity*); and ultimately with Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

If not, no worries, we can work on it!

If one of the spouses has been previously married and divorced, he/she is asked to present a copy of the civil divorce decree. Furthermore, if a previous marriage took place in the Orthodox Church, the divorced spouse should present any official divorce decrees issued by church authorities.

B. Selecting a Best Man and Maid/Matron of Honor

The best man and maid or matron of honors (aka sponsors) are the ones who stand as witness on behalf of the Orthodox Church during the ceremony. Hence, it is imperative that the sponsor of the Orthodox spouse(s), be Orthodox Christians in good standing with the Church. If one of the spouses *is not* Orthodox, the sponsor ***need to be a Baptized Christian***.

C. Invitations

No invitations should be printed until the date has been cleared by the Priest.

D. Pre-Marital Counseling

In order to provide the engaged couple with every opportunity to enjoy all the blessings of married life, a four session program of pre-marital counseling is provided by the Priest prior to the wedding. ***Please note that these sessions are not optional***. If the engaged couple so chooses, they may also seek professional pre-marriage counseling with a qualified therapist; in this case, the couple should inform the priest of their intent.

E. Paperwork

Prior to the wedding, the bride and groom should provide the following paperwork:

1. *Copies of baptismal certificates.*
2. If the Bride or Groom is from an Orthodox parish in some other city - *a letter from his/her Priest attesting to eligibility for marriage.*
3. If the Bride or Groom was married before - *a civil divorce decree.*
4. If the Bride or Groom was married before in the Orthodox Church, if that marriage was "officially dissolved" by an Orthodox Church Court - *the original document attesting to the Church Divorce must be presented.*
5. If the Bride, or Groom are a member of another Christian Church - *please present a letter from your church/pastor stating that you have been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity and that they are eligible to marry.*
6. *Civil Marriage License (from local township/ municipality). NOTE: Under law, we cannot perform the marriage without this license.*

F. Living together

The goal of the Orthodox Church is to give each married couple the best opportunity for a blessed and fulfilling marriage; hence, the Church cannot, in a spirit of love, bless cohabitation (living together) prior to the marriage. Not only is there no question from a Biblical standpoint that any sexual relationship outside of marriage “misses the mark”; *in addition*, statistics gathered by secular professionals clearly show that there is a 50% HIGHER divorce rate among couples who have lived together prior to their weddings than those who have not. The Church must make every attempt to give couples a healthy, appropriate start. Any couple wishing to be married at Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church that is currently cohabitating, ought to separate and strive for chastity until their wedding date; this “prescription” is offered in a loving spirit of concern for the health and stability of the future marriage, and in keeping with Christian teaching.

G. Location of the Wedding Sacrament

The location for a sacrament of the Orthodox Church is the Holy Sanctuary. It is not our custom to perform sacraments outside the Church building (*i.e. in a home, back yard, or local park.*)

H. Sacramental preparation

The bride and/or groom who are of the Orthodox Faith should participate in the Sacraments of Holy Confession and Holy Communion, especially the week before the wedding.

I. Items necessary for the wedding day:

- Crowns (*the couple may purchase their own or they may use the churches*)
- Rings for both the bride and the groom
- Two candles
- Civil marriage license

J. Flowers

Flowers are permitted in the church. The Sanctuary of an Orthodox Church is beautiful in its own right, and does not require further “decoration”. Placement of the flowers must be approved by the parish Priest (*to ensure they are not in an area that would interfere with the service*) and done in good taste.

K. Modest Dress

Regardless of fashion and societal custom a sense of modesty ought to be maintained in the Sanctuary. Every wedding takes place in front of an icon of the ever-virgin Theotokos, whose humility and modesty requires a corresponding sense of decorum.

L. Music in the Sanctuary

In the Orthodox Church, the Scripture readings, hymns and music for the service are determined by Holy Tradition. The only instrument used in the church is the human voice. No instruments (*string, brass, organ, etc.*) are used in the Sanctuary.

M. Promptness

In some circles it is “fashionable” to be late. But every effort should be made to be prompt on your wedding day. You must be aware, if the wedding is delayed for any length of time, the Priest might have to adjust the schedule accordingly; and in extremely rare circumstances it may have to be re-scheduled.

N. Inter-Christian faith Marriages

Our local Orthodox Church permits inter-Christian faith marriages under the following circumstances:

- The non-Orthodox Bride/Groom must be a Christian who has been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity.
- The couple should agree to Baptize their children in the Orthodox Christian Church.
- The marriage must take place in the Orthodox Church according to the prescribed form of the Service Book, the Orthodox Priest being the sole celebrant.
- Non-Orthodox persons may act as ushers or bridesmaids at the Orthodox Marriage, but the sponsor for the Orthodox spouse(s) must be an Orthodox Christian, as stated earlier.

NOTE:

Should the presence of a non-Orthodox clergyman be requested, the following must be clarified:

- The Orthodox Priest, after receiving permission from his Bishop, will issue an invitation to the clergyman.
- The Orthodox wedding ceremony does not permit the active participation of non-Orthodox clergy, this being made explicit to all concerned.

- At the conclusion of the Orthodox ceremony, the guest clergyman, advised as to appropriate vesture, and as agreed previously, will be properly acknowledged and may give his good wishes to the couple.

An Orthodox Christian whose marriage has not been blessed by the Orthodox Church is no longer in “good standing” with the Orthodox Church and consequently is not eligible to participate in the Sacraments of the Orthodox Church, including receiving Holy Communion, or acting as a sponsor at an Orthodox wedding.

A non-Orthodox Christian who marries an Orthodox Christian does not “automatically” become a member of the Orthodox Church, and is therefore not permitted to receive Holy Communion or the other Sacraments of the Orthodox Church. **Of course, they are encouraged to learn about the Orthodox Faith, and we would rejoice if they embrace the Faith of their own free will.**

Days When Marriages Are Not Permitted

- Saturdays after 2pm.
- Eves of the Twelve Great Feasts.
- During all Fasting Periods:
 - Great Lent (*variable*)
 - Apostles Fast (*variable*)
 - Dormition Fast (*Aug 1—15*)
 - Nativity Fast (*Nov 15 - Dec 24*)
- Beheading of St. John the Baptist (*Aug 28 & 29*)
- Elevation of the Cross (*Sept 13 & 14*)
- Nativity of Christ—Synaxis of St. John (*Dec 25 - Jan 7*)
- Bright Week (*variable*)

SPECIAL NOTE: The preferred day for a wedding is ***Sunday***. In the event that a Saturday wedding is requested, it must be approved by the Diocesan Bishop and cannot take place later than 2pm. The reason being, Saturday is a day of preparation for the Lord’s Day (Sunday). The eve of Sunday is reserved amongst Orthodox Christians for the celebration of the Vespers/Vigil service and preparation for the Eucharist.

Simply put: A Saturday wedding, in fact, discourages preparation for, and

participation in, the Sunday morning Divine Liturgy.

Prohibited Marriages

- Parents with their own children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren.
- Brothers-in-law with sisters-in-law.
Uncles and aunts with nieces and nephews.
- First cousins with each other.
- Foster parents with foster children or foster children with the children of foster parents.
- Godparents with Godchildren or Godparents with the parents of Godchildren.
- Between those of the same sex/gender