

Guidelines for Marriage

Church of the Archangels

January, 2015

Setting the date

Before setting a date and securing a reception hall, the couple should contact the parish office and set up an appointment with a priest for a one-hour consultation.

The Orthodox Church has specific guidelines for weddings. The following are dates when they are not permitted: Great Feast days on Dec. 25, Jan. 5-6, Feb. 1-2, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost; Fasting days such as every Wednesday & Friday, Aug. 29, Sep. 14; or Fasting periods such as Great Lent, Holy Week, Aug. 1-15, and Dec. 13-24.

In addition, careful planning in advance will avoid any conflict with the parish's own calendar of events. Make sure that you meet as a couple with Fr. Harry before anything else is planned.

Eligibility to Marry

A wedding can be celebrated in the Orthodox Church when one of the partners is an Orthodox Christian and the other, if not a member of the Orthodox Church, is a Christian baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity. There must not be any impediments to their relationship (by blood, marriage, or spiritual relation).

Currently there is no provision for the wedding of an Orthodox Christian and a non-Christian.

Membership

Orthodox Christians are members by virtue of their baptism. However, anyone 18 years of age or older and financially self-supporting should also be a steward in good standing of an Orthodox parish, including regular attendance at worship services, participation in the life of the parish, and consistent financial support. Member packets include a copy of the monthly bulletin (*The Herald*), and Stewardship documents – explanation, pledge cards for Time & Talents, and Treasures.

Documents

1. An Orthodox Christian who is not a member of our parish must show his/her baptismal certificate and provide a letter from his/her parish priest attesting to his/her good standing. If he or she is from another country and entered the U.S. after the age of 18, then a certificate of eligibility to marry may also be needed.

2. A non-Orthodox Christian must show his/her original baptismal certificate. If this cannot be found, the parish must write a letter certifying the date, place, and minister, and that the baptism was in the name of the Holy Trinity.

3. The couple must complete a "Request for Marriage" form that is sent to the Archbishop in New York about one month before the wedding

4. A civil license from the County Clerk's office of any county in the state of Connecticut is needed by the day of the wedding. This can be secured at any time.

Prior Marriage(s)

If either partner has been previously married, then either a death certificate or civil divorce decree must be presented. If the prior marriage involved an Orthodox Christian in the Orthodox Church, then an ecclesiastical divorce decree must also be presented.

Pre-Marital Preparation

1. The couple takes a pre-marital inventory called *Prepare* (about 1-1½ hours) and then typically attends 6 feedback sessions (1½ hour each) with a certified facilitator. This inventory covers personality traits, family background, and all facets of marriage – such as communication, conflict resolution, marital expectation, leisure, finances, and sexuality. There is a nominal cost for processing. My top recommendation is that my wife, Presvytera Kerry, serve as the facilitator. She has a Master's degree in theology from our Seminary, and is a licensed Marriage & Family Therapist, with years of experience working with couples. She can be reached by e-mail (pappaskk@msn.com) or phone (914-874-6146) in order to initiate the inventory that can be taken on-line.

2. The couple attends two 2-½ -hour group marital classes in which I teach about: Love, Sexuality, Marriage, Raising a Family in the Bible and the Life of the Church, and the Wedding Service (copies of the full text are available). Dates are set up periodically during the year.

3. The couple is urged to prepare for and come to the Sacrament of Confession. The clergy offer advice on proper preparation. Christians from other traditions are urged to seek out this Sacrament, or its equivalent, in their own community of faith, although I offer it to all, even if they are not members of the Orthodox Church.

Sponsor

The couple must have a member of the Orthodox Church to serve as sponsor (Greek: *koumbaro* or *koumbara*) at the wedding. In order to serve in this role, he or she must be in good standing by: baptism and/or chrismation in the Orthodox Church; active membership in an Orthodox parish (including stewardship); be 18 years of age or older; if married, in the Orthodox Church; if divorced, reception of an ecclesiastical divorce in addition to the civil divorce. If the sponsor is from another Orthodox parish, he or she must present a letter signed by their parish priest attesting to their good standing.

While this person is usually a member of the bridal party (such as best man or maid/matron of honor), he or she need not be. In any case, they will exchange the rings and crowns, and serve as spiritual support to the couple in their married life.

Bridal Party

It is customary in the U.S. for couples to have a bridal party, although this is not required in the Orthodox Church. Couples may be married without having a bridal party since only the sponsor is required.

Anyone, whether a member of the Orthodox Church or not, can serve in the bridal party as best man, maid/matron of honor, bridesmaid, groomsman, ring bearer, flower girl, usher, etc.

Care must be taken regarding proper attire at the wedding. The bridal dress and the bridesmaid's gowns should be dignified and modest. If the bride has a head covering, it should not interfere with the crown that will be worn during the wedding service.

Rehearsal

If you plan to have a bridal party, you should schedule a rehearsal with the office. If you do not plan to have a bridal party, a rehearsal may not be necessary.

Wedding Service

The Orthodox Church sets the text of the wedding service -- prayers, petitions, readings, liturgical actions, hymns, and responses. As a solemn Sacrament, the wedding must always be celebrated in an Orthodox temple. [The only exception is when one is not within a reasonable distance. Then the Archbishop may give permission for the service to be held in a nearby Christian church of similar tradition (e.g., Roman Catholic or Episcopalian).]

Just prior to beginning, a priest steps forward to ask a few questions of the couple, constituting a type of vow.

The priest works with the couple to determine the appropriate language for the wedding service, based upon those who will be attending.

The service lasts about 50 minutes, including a brief sermon at the end. This does not include time for the processional, recessional, or receiving line.

Music & Fees

Our parish is blessed to have a chanter (Demetri Makrides or Presvytera Kerry) who can sing the responses and hymns during the wedding service. In addition, we have an organist (Dr. Tom Moulketis) who will approve and play either Orthodox or traditional Christian music before and after the service.

Standard compensation: \$250 for use of the Church; \$175 for organist; \$150 for chanter.

The presiding priest should clear anyone else who is invited to chant during the service, or sing or play the organ in advance.

Visiting Clergy

Guest clergy from an Orthodox Church in communion with our Archdiocese are welcome to participate in the wedding. The presiding priest of our parish should extend an invitation in advance to them. They will need proper ecclesiastical clearance from their own bishop as well as our Archbishop.

Christian clergy from other traditions are also welcome to attend, even though they cannot co-celebrate. They are provided a place of honor on the solea or in the first pew. When the wedding is concluded, they are recognized and invited to step forward, pray over the couple, and offer brief words of exhortation.

Rings, Crowns, Candles, Common Cup

The rings are placed upon the ring finger of the *right* hand during the wedding service. You can leave them on this hand permanently (the traditional practice), or switch them to the left hand *after* the service is concluded.

The couple should provide a pair of white crowns attached with a ribbon, along with a pair of candles (which may be decorated).

Our parish has an elegant cup for use during the service, but the couple may elect to provide their own which can be retained for posterity.

You can make your own crowns or consult the office for recommendations, such as “Two Greek Women” here in Stamford (www.twogreekwomen.com).

Photography

Flash photography before or after the wedding service is permitted, but once the service begins, it is usually permitted only at the time of the crowning. The photographer should be discrete and stand only on the sides (without obstructing the congregation) or in the balcony. Non-flash photography during the service is permitted.

Videotaping is permitted with discretion. If a camera is set up in the left corner of the icon screen, it should only be operated by remote control. Otherwise the camera operator should be either in the balcony or on the sides of the church.

All professional photographers should meet and consult with the presiding priest prior to the beginning of the service.

Decoration

The church may be decorated with flowers as fully as the couple likes, as long as movements, icons, and tables are not obstructed.

Our parish does not have a white runner. If you wish to have one, you must provide it.

Receiving Line

After the conclusion of the wedding service, the couple may elect to have a receiving line in the narthex, in the parish hall, or at the place of their reception. The priest can announce this to the congregation before the recessional begins.

Exiting the Church

Our parish discourages the throwing of rice as the couple leaves the church building, since this is harmful to wildlife. Instead, we encourage the use of birdseed or other physical expressions of joy that will not harm the environment (e.g., the release of butterflies or bubbles).

A Note to the non-Orthodox

A wedding in the Orthodox Church does not mean that a non-Orthodox spouse automatically becomes a member of the Orthodox Church. Even though Orthodox Christians alone are permitted to receive the Sacraments, we welcome anyone to worship and fellowship with us.

No one should feel compelled to join the Orthodox Church because of either explicit or implicit pressure from one’s partner, their family, or others.

However, if someone freely desires to learn more about the Orthodox Church and/or wishes to join, he or she should consult with a priest. Everyone joining should do so with freedom and for his/her own salvation, not merely to please someone else or for the purpose of convenience.