

Instructions for Weddings, Divorces, Baptisms, Funerals, and Memorials

WEDDINGS

For the union of a man and woman to be recognized as sacramentally valid by the Orthodox Church, the following conditions must be met:

1. The Sacrament of Matrimony must be celebrated by an Orthodox Priest of a canonical Orthodox jurisdiction, according to the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church, in a canonical Orthodox Church, and with the authorization of the diocesan Bishop.
2. Before requesting permission from his Bishop to perform the marriage, the Priest must verify that:
 - a. neither of the parties in question are already married to other persons, either in this country or elsewhere;
 - b. the parties in question are not related to each other to a degree that would constitute an impediment;
 - c. if either or both parties are widowed, they have presented the death certificate(s) of the deceased spouse(s);
 - d. if either or both of the parties have been previously married in the Orthodox Church, they have obtained ecclesiastical as well as civil divorce(s);
 - e. the party or parties who are members of a parish other than the one in which the marriage is to be performed have provided a certificate declaring them to be members in good standing with that parish for the current year; and
 - f. a civil marriage license has been obtained from civil authorities.
3. No person may marry more than three times in the Church, with permission for a third marriage granted only with extreme *oikonomia* (dispensation).
4. In cases involving the marriage of Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christians, the latter must have been baptized, in water, in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Church cannot bless the marriage of an Orthodox Christian to a non-Christian.
5. The Sponsor (*koumbaros* or *koumbara*) must provide a current certificate of membership proving him or her to be an Orthodox Christian in good standing with the Church. A person who does not belong to a parish, or who belongs to a parish under the jurisdiction of a bishop who is not in

communion with the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, or who, if married, has not had his or her marriage blessed by the Orthodox Church, or, if divorced, has not received an ecclesiastical divorce, cannot be a sponsor. Non-Orthodox persons may be members of the wedding party, but may not exchange the rings or crowns.

Days When Marriage is Not Permitted

Marriages are not performed on fast days or during fasting seasons; these include the Great Lent and Holy Week, August 1-15, August 29 (Beheading of St. John the Baptist), September 14 (Exaltation of the Holy Cross), and December 13-25. Nor are marriages celebrated on the day before and the day of a Great Feast of the Lord, including Theophany (January 5 and 6), Pascha, Pentecost, and Christmas (December 24 and 25). Marriages may be performed on these days only by permission of the diocesan Bishop.

Inter-Christian Marriages

It is a fact that, the more a couple has in common, the more likely they are to live together in peace and concord. Shared faith and traditions spare couples and their children, as well as their extended families, many serious problems, and help to strengthen the bonds between them. Even so, the Orthodox Church will bless marriages between Orthodox and non-Orthodox partners, provided that:

1. The non-Orthodox partner is a Christian who has been baptized, in water, in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; and
2. The couple should be willing to baptize their children in the Orthodox Church and raise and nurture them in accordance with the Orthodox Faith.

A baptized Orthodox Christian whose wedding has not been blessed by the Orthodox Church is no longer in good standing with the Church, and may not receive the Sacraments of the Church, including Holy Communion, or become a Sponsor of an Orthodox Marriage, Baptism or Chrismation. A non-Orthodox Christian who marries an Orthodox Christian does not thereby become a member of the Orthodox Church, and may not receive the Sacraments, including Holy Communion, or be buried by the Church, serve on the Parish Council, or vote in parish assemblies or elections. To participate in the Church's life, one must be received into the Church by the Sacrament of Baptism or, in the case of persons

baptized with water in the Holy Trinity, following a period of instruction, by Chrismation.

Inter-religious Marriages

Canonical and theological reasons preclude the Orthodox Church from performing the Sacrament of Marriage for couples where one partner is Orthodox and the other partner is a non-Christian. As such, Orthodox Christians choosing to enter such marriages fall out of good standing with their Church and are unable to actively participate in the life of the Church. While this stance may seem confusing and rigid, it is guided by the Orthodox Church's love and concern for its member's religious and spiritual well-being.

Prohibited Marriages

The following types of relationships constitute impediments to marriage:

1. Parents with their own children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren, or godchildren of the same godparents.
2. Brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law.
3. Uncles and aunts with nieces and nephews.
4. First cousins with each other.
5. Foster parents with foster children or foster children with the children of foster parents.
6. Godparents with godchildren or godparents with the parents of their godchildren.

DIVORCE

The parish priest must exert every effort to reconcile the couple and avert a divorce. However, should he fail to bring about a reconciliation after a civil divorce has been obtained, he will transmit the petition of the party seeking the ecclesiastical divorce, together with the decree of the civil divorce, to the Spiritual Court of the Diocese. The petition must include the names and surnames of the husband and wife, the wife's surname prior to marriage, their addresses, the name of the priest who performed the wedding, and the date and place of the wedding. The petitioner must be a member in good standing with the parish through which he or she is petitioning for divorce. Orthodox Christians of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese who have obtained a civil divorce but not an ecclesiastical divorce

may not participate in any sacraments of the Church or serve on the Parish Council, Diocesan Council or Archdiocesan Council until they have been granted a divorce by the Church.

BAPTISMS

A person who wishes to sponsor a candidate for Baptism or Chrismation must be an Orthodox Christian in good standing and a supporting member of an Orthodox parish. A person may not serve as a godparent if his or her marriage has not been blessed by the Church or, if civilly divorced, he or she has not been granted an ecclesiastical divorce, or for any other reason he or she is not in communion with the Orthodox Church.

Baptisms may not be performed from Christmas Day through the Feast of Theophany (December 25-January 6), during Holy Week, or on any of the Great Feast days of the Lord.

FUNERALS

Funeral services are permitted on any day of the year, except for Sundays and Holy Friday, unless permission is granted from the diocesan Bishop.

MEMORIALS

Memorial services may not be chanted from the Saturday of Lazarus through the Sunday of Thomas, on any Feast day of the Lord or any Feast day of the Theotokos.

FASTING

Just as there are times for feasting, there are also times set aside for fasting. During these periods, certain foods are prohibited. These are, in order of frequency of prohibition, meat (including poultry), dairy products, fish, olive oil and wine. Fruits, vegetables, grains and shellfish are permitted throughout the year. Of course, the Orthodox Church never reduces the practice of fasting to a legalistic observance of dietary rules. Fasting, that is not accompanied by intensified prayer and acts of charity, inevitably becomes a source of pride. The Church also recognizes that not everyone can fast to the same degree, and assumes that individual Christians will observe the fast prescribed for them by their spiritual fathers. The following are fasting days and seasons:

1. All Wednesdays and Fridays, except for those noted below;
2. The day before the Feast of Theophany (January 5);
3. Cheesefare Week (the last week before the Great Lent, during which meat and fish are prohibited, but dairy products are permitted even on Wednesday and Friday);
4. Great Lent (from Clean Monday through the Friday before Lazarus Saturday, olive oil and wine are permitted on weekends);
5. Great and Holy Week (note that Great and Holy Saturday is a day of strict fasting, during which the faithful abstain from olive oil and wine),
6. Holy Apostles' Fast (from the Monday after All Saints' Day through June 28, inclusive);
7. Fast for the Dormition of the Mother of God (August 1-14, excluding August 6, on which fish, wine and olive oil are permitted);
8. Beheading of St. John the Baptist (August 29),
9. Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14); and
10. Nativity Lent (November 15-December 24, although fish, wine and olive oil are permitted, except on Wednesdays and Fridays, until December 17).

The following are fasting days on which fish, wine and olive oil are permitted:

1. The Feast of the Annunciation (March 25, unless it falls outside the Great Lent, in which case all foods are permitted);
2. Palm Sunday;
3. The Feast of the Transfiguration (August 6); and
4. The Feast of the Entry into the Temple of the Mother of God (November 21).

On the following days, all foods are permitted:

1. The first week of the Triodion, from the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee through the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, including Wednesday and Friday;
2. Diakainisimos (or Bright) Week, following the Sunday of Pascha,
3. The week following Pentecost; and
4. From the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord (December 25) through January 4.

(<http://www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/outreach/resources/pastoralresources/pastoral>)