

Sacramental Guidelines: Marriage

Marriage, or Holy Matrimony, is one the Sacraments of the Orthodox Church. It unites both spiritually and physically a man and a woman into one cohesive unit that respects and proclaims each one's individual personality, while mystically drawing together man, woman, and the Holy Spirit into one family. Marriage is a gift from God that dates all the way back to the opening chapters of the Bible. In the Garden of Eden, God created male and female as equal and complementary beings. Then, they were blessed by God and given the commandment to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:27-28). The marriage between the first man and woman that was blessed by God has always been the paradigm for the Orthodox Christian sacrament of marriage. In the Orthodox Church, a man and a woman come before God and, through the ordained ministry of the priesthood, the Lord blesses the bride and groom and unites them in Holy Matrimony. This differs greatly from the Western Christian (Roman Catholic and Protestant) understanding of the sacrament. For them, the bride and groom exchange "vows" while the priest or minister stands only as a witness to their "legal contract" with each other.

Holy Matrimony has a certain expectation – that the bride and groom will be active members of the Church. In an Orthodox wedding, the bride and groom do a procession around the table on which is placed a cross. This procession is led by the priest who is holding the Bible. It symbolizes that their journey together is to be centered on the Cross, led by the Church, and guided by the Scriptures. A wedding is not merely an ethnic custom, nor is it an excuse for a party, or merely done to appease one's parents with a "church wedding." To seek an Orthodox Christian wedding with no intention by the couple to commend themselves, each other, and their whole lives unto Christ our God within the confines of the Orthodox Christian faith is intolerable.

If a couple wants to be married and they are not members of All Saints of North America Antiochian Orthodox Church, they may do so by following these recommended guidelines:

1. Meet with the parish priest in person and make known your desire to married in the Orthodox Christian church.
2. Begin attending All Saints of North America on a regular basis (i.e. Sundays and feast days).

3. Regularly partake of the sacraments of the Church (Communion, Confession, etc.).
4. If you like our parish family, the next step is to become a member by making a stewardship commitment to the Church.
5. After a period of 6 months (maybe more, maybe less) after your initial meeting with the priest, once you have demonstrated your commitment to the Orthodox faith and parish life, then you can be married.
6. Any variation on these guidelines will be considered after the priest has discussed the issue with the couple and with the local bishop.

For 1) parish members and 2) for those for whom the criteria for marriage have been met (as outlined above), we will obediently follow the guidelines for marriage put forth by our Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America. They are as follows:

Getting started:

- The couple intending to get married should contact the priest at least three months prior to the intended wedding date.
- The couple MUST receive some sort of pre-marital counseling from the priest. This will include assigned readings, discussions of the theology of marriage, a “dry run” of the marriage service (godparents/sponsors should attend this), etc.
- Like a baptism, the couple getting married will have sponsors or godparents.
 - at least one sponsor MUST be an Orthodox Christian in good standing with his/her church community.
 - other non-Orthodox Christians may stand as “witnesses” only, but not as sponsors/godparents.
- There are no “vows” in an Orthodox wedding.
- No songs are permitted to be sung during the service except those Orthodox hymns prescribed by the rubrics. Traditional processional/recessional music is permitted prior to and just after the sacrament; however, all other music is forbidden during the service.

Weddings are not permitted during these times (also remember that the liturgical day begins at sunset):

- Every Wednesday and Friday
- The eve of every Sunday (Sat. night) and of every Great Feast throughout the year
- The Feast of the Elevation of the Cross (Sept. 14)
- The Beheading of John the Baptist (August 29)
- The Christmas fast (Nov. 15 to Dec. 25)
- During Great Lent, including Cheese Week and Bright Week, i.e. from Meat Fare Sunday to Thomas Sunday.
- During the Dormition Fast (August 1 to 15)

Where can the marriage be performed?

- The Sacrament of Marriage **MUST** be administered in a church building and not a private home, botanical garden, cruise boat, etc.

Marriage prohibitions:

- Marriage is prohibited between ascending and descending blood relatives (i.e. between parents and children, or grandparents and grandchildren) in the direct line.
- Marriage is prohibited between collateral blood relatives to the sixth degree (i.e. first cousins).
- Marriage is prohibited between relatives by marriage to the fourth degree (i.e. between two brothers and two sisters, or a brother and his sister to a sister and her brother).
- Marriage is prohibited between spiritual relatives to the fourth degree (i.e. Godchildren with their baptismal sponsors/Godparents).
- Marriage between blood relatives in the collateral line may be permitted in the fifth and sixth degree, and marriage between relatives by marriage may be permitted in the third and fourth degree, and between spiritual relatives in the third and fourth degree in cases of extreme emergency. Such cases **MUST** be reported to the Metropolitan of this Archdiocese who may issue a written dispensation.

Concerning divorced/widowed persons:

- The priest must first petition the bishop in writing to receive approval for the marriage including the information
 - the history of the person desiring to be re-married
 - the conduct and character of the petitioner, his or her qualifications for the mercy of the Church, and the priest's opinion of his/her character
 - the duration of the first marriage, the reason for the divorce, and the causes for which the divorce was granted
 - a photocopy of the divorce papers (do not send originals)
 - a non-refundable processing fee of \$200 to cover administrative costs. Note, if both parties are divorced, the fee is $\$200 \times 2 = \400 .
- The regular marriage is celebrated when the persons are
 - both previously unmarried
 - one is previously unmarried and the other is widowed or divorced
- The second (penitential) rite of marriage is used when
 - both are previously divorced/widowed
- the Church permits the marriage of a person twice previously married, but forbids the marriage of those with three previous marriages.

Miscellaneous details:

- Before performing the marriage, the priest must ascertain that a valid and legal civil license has been issued to the couple, and the priest must comply with the civil regulations regarding marriage which are in force in his State/Province. *No marriage is permitted which does not meet the requirements of the official law of the local civil authorities.*
- The Betrothal and Marriage (Crowning) are one united Sacrament and must be celebrated at the same time. They can never be separated.
- In cases where both parties are Orthodox, they should plan to receive the sacraments of Confession and Communion prior to

getting married (even if only one is Orthodox, he/she should do the same).

- Clergy are not permitted to officiate at the marriage of multiple brides and grooms at the same time. One couple – One service.
- The Prayer for removal of the Crowns must be performed at the end of the Divine Liturgy following the couple's honeymoon.
- After the wedding the newlyweds and their sponsor(s) must fill out the marriage record and send it, and a \$10 processing fee, to the Archdiocese. The Archdiocese will then issue an official marriage certificate.