

Guidelines for Weddings within the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

(Source: Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Yearbook)

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 Archbishop or Metropolitan.
2. Before requesting permission from the Archbishop or his Metropolitan to perform the marriage, a 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.
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 or on the feasts of the Church as indicated: September 14 (Exaltation of the Holy Cross), December 13-25 (Nativity), January 5 and 6 (Theophany), Great Lent and Holy Week, Pascha (Easter), Pentecost, August 1-15 (Dormition Fast and Feast), and August 29 (Beheading of St. John the Baptist). Any exceptions are made only with the permission of the respective hierarchy.

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.