

GUIDELINES FOR MARRIAGE

In the

GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH



St. John the Baptist

Greek Orthodox Church

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This booklet contains general guidelines for marriage in the Orthodox Church, It should provide answers to many of the questions you may have as you prepare for your wedding. Please, read it thoroughly and address any questions you may have with Fr. Stavros.

Eligibility

There are some requirements in order to be married in the Orthodox Church. One of those requirements is that one person of the couple be Orthodox and the other, if not Orthodox, must have been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity. Another requirement if a person was married in the Orthodox church and subsequently divorced, they must obtain an ecclesiastical divorce before being remarried. There have been instances in the past, where a couple has set a wedding date and they are ineligible to marry, based on one of these requirements. Either they have not received an ecclesiastical divorce, or one of the parties is not baptized.

Who may Marry

A marriage in the Orthodox Church is performed only for Christians, one of whom must be an Orthodox Christian. The other party must have been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity. A marriage between an Orthodox Christian and a non-Christian or an individual not baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity cannot be celebrated in the Orthodox Church.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Fr. Stavros will not schedule a wedding for a couple where one of them is not Christian, until the non-Christian person is baptized. All too often, the situation arises where a couple asks for a wedding date to be set and one of them isn't baptized. They promise to come to church, take the Orthodoxy 101 class and then don't. This presents a dilemma and forces a priest essentially to do a "shot-gun" baptism, in order to satisfy a requirement so that the wedding may take place. So as not to put our priest in the awkward position to do a baptism for someone who hasn't prepared whatsoever, versus cancelling a wedding and dealing with that fallout, the wedding simply will not be scheduled until both parties present evidence that they are baptized (with at least one being Orthodox).

Prior Marriages

If either of the parties has been married previously, the death certificate of the deceased spouse or civil divorce decree must be presented to the parish priest. If the marriage ceremony was in the Orthodox Church, then an Ecclesiastical Divorce Decree (the original) must be presented. If the divorced party has not obtained an Ecclesiastical Divorce, Fr. Stavros must be notified as soon as possible, so that the process of securing one may begin immediately, as it often takes **several months** to complete the procedure. If you are not an Orthodox Christian, it is recommended that you check with your church to determine what you may need to do to assure your good standing as you prepare for the sacrament of marriage.

Membership in the Church

All persons who are baptized in the Orthodox Church are members of the Orthodox Church. Every Orthodox Christian over the age of 18 should support financially the work of God. The Uniform Parish Regulations of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese specify that a marriage cannot be performed unless those desiring to be married provide evidence of such financial support; it applies to both the Bride and the Groom, as well as the Koumbaro/Sponsor. Unless you are a student, you are expected to have pledged to the church and be in good standing. In order to pay the "Stewards" Church Fee, one must have been a fully paid steward for 2 years.

Setting A Date

The couple getting married must schedule their own wedding, not their parents, cousins, or any extended family or friend. If you are old enough to get married, you are old enough to call the church and schedule it.

No wedding will be put in ink on the schedule until at least one party of the couple has come in to meet with Fr. Stavros to discuss wedding guidelines. This is so that the couple is aware of the requirements and expectations to get married in the Orthodox Church.

Careful planning is needed when setting the date for your wedding, because the Church has set aside certain times and dates when marriages cannot be performed. Also, it is important to contact Fr. Stavros as soon as possible to ensure that there are no conflicts on the parish calendar. The Church has designated the following days when marriage cannot be performed:

December 24 and 25 (Christmas)

January 5 and 6 (Epiphany)

February 1 and 2 (the Presentation of Christ to the Temple)

August 29 (the Beheading of St. John the Baptist)

September 14 (the Exaltation of the Holy Cross)

A wedding can only be done on a Friday (when Friday is a fast day) with the permission of the Metropolitan.

Marriages are also not performed during the moveable Feasts of Easter, Ascension and Pentecost or on the day before these feasts. Marriages are not performed during the forty days of the Great Lent, Holy Week, the Lent and Feast of the Virgin Mary Theotokos (August 1-15) and the Christmas Feast (December 13-25). The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony can be performed on the above days only in extreme emergency and by dispensation of the Metropolis.

Time of Service

Generally, weddings are conducted between 11:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. If the wedding is on Sunday, the earliest the service may begin is 3:00 p.m. because of Liturgy in the morning. A good rule of thumb is that it is four hours between the starting time of the ceremony and what time you eat dinner. It is important to discuss with Fr. Stavros the time the wedding service will begin in relation to expectations for the reception, i.e. – if you are planning on serving dinner at a certain time, you may work backwards to allow time for photographs, time in the receiving line and one hour for the sacrament; this will establish the starting time for the wedding ceremony. **It is important that the wedding starts on time and church photos be done efficiently after the ceremony (one-half hour maximum) as there are often more than one sacrament scheduled in a day.**

Pre-marital Counseling

Pre-marital counseling is offered by Fr. Stavros to assist you in preparation for a successful marriage. Typically, two sessions are conducted privately with Fr. Stavros which last 1.5-2 hours each. You are to do your pre-marital counseling **at least three months prior to your wedding.**

During the sessions, the religious, social, emotional and moral issues of marriage are examined, as well as what marriage means to Orthodox Christians. This is done through open dialogue between Fr. Stavros and the couple. Marriage, as many things in life are, is a learning experience. Learning how to give, how to love, how to share; how to make mutual decisions with your spouse, so as to become one in thought, one in action, one in flesh. Holy Matrimony is not only a sacrament on the day of your wedding, but throughout your entire life.

In addition to pre-marital counseling sessions with Fr. Stavros, it is a requirement from the Metropolis of Atlanta that every couple married within the Metropolis of Atlanta participate in “The Journey of Marriage” seminar for engaged couples. The seminar has been held via zoom and in person, and registering for a seminar can be done through the metropolis website (<https://atlmopolis.org/pre-marital-seminars-journey-of-marriage>). It is an all day seminar usually held on a Saturday. A certificate will be given to each couple at the end of the seminar and the certificate is required for a wedding license to be issued in the Metropolis of Atlanta.

The Bridal Party

Every couple that is being married in the Orthodox Church must have a Koumbaro/Sponsor, who must be a member in good standing of the Orthodox Church. The individual must be very carefully chosen for he/she is important. In the strict interpretation of the Church, the Koumbaro/Sponsor is not the same as the best man/maid of honor, although they can be the same individual in a wedding. You may have in your wedding party of both a Koumbaros and a best man/maid of honor, or they may be the same person.

If the Koumbaro/Sponsor is from another parish, he/she must bring a **Certificate of Good Standing**, signed by his/her Priest. This needs to be sent to Fr. Stavros at least **one month prior** to the wedding. A person who is not Orthodox or who is Orthodox but not in good sacramental standing cannot serve as the Koumbaro/Sponsor.

There is no restriction as to the age of the participants in the bridal party. If you have a ring bearer, he is not to carry the real rings. Typically, children under age 10 are not allowed to stand up on the solea for the wedding as it is usually too difficult for them to stand for the entire service.

The Bridal Dress and Attendants’ Gowns

Care must be taken in selecting the bride’s dress. Since the crowns are an integral part of the wedding ceremony, hats cannot be worn, and headpieces must not interfere with the proper placing of the crowns on the head of the bride. **The bridal dress and attendants’ gowns should also exercise a decorum befitting a Church ceremony.**

We have asked that shoulders be covered, i.e. no strapless dresses for bridesmaids. A shawl or throw can be worn in the church and ditched for the wedding reception. *Because this has been an issue at several weddings, we require the bridesmaids' dresses to be approved by Fr. Stavros. A picture of someone wearing the dress will be sufficient. Should this continue to be a problem, we will look into buying something appropriate that can be placed over dresses that are inappropriate for church.*

The bride may have a strapless dress provide there is a veil that covers her shoulders from the back. For the attendants, if it is a strapless dress, or has less than a three inch width shoulder, a throw shawl or wrap should be worn over the dress, so that the shoulders are covered. There should be no exposed shoulders or cleavage.

Items used during the Wedding Ceremony

The following items are needed for the wedding ceremony (Items 1, 2, 3, and 4 are oftentimes provided by the Koumbaro/Koumbara) :

- 1.Silver tray with koufeta (White Jordan Almonds) on it.
- 2.Stefana or Crowns
- 3.Two white candles for the couple to hold.
- 4.Rings
- 5.Civil wedding license (to be brought to the wedding rehearsal)

ALL OF THESE ITEMS MUST BE BROUGHT TO THE WEDDING REHEARSAL

Crowns/Stefana, Wedding Wreaths and Candles

“Crowns”, “Stefana” and “wedding wreaths” are words that are used interchangeably; they are placed on your heads. They may be purchased or you may wish to make them yourself; they are to be joined by a white ribbon. Consult with Fr. Stavros for the dimensions of the ribbon and other questions you may have. White candles are also necessary for the ceremony, and should be brought with the stefana to the wedding rehearsal. They need not to be large or be connected with a white ribbon.

Photographs/Videos

Photographs and video recordings of your wedding ceremony are permitted as long as they do not impede or distract from the Sacrament. The photographer should be inconspicuous about what he/she is doing. The photographer and videographer must consult with Fr. Stavros prior to the ceremony, and he will inform them of the procedures to be followed. No photographer or videographer may interfere with the ceremony or stand in a place where they are either noticeable or in the way.

It is the bridal couple's responsibility to inform the photographers that they must complete their photo session in the church within one-half hour after the ceremony. No inappropriate photo poses are permitted inside the church.

Flowers – PLEASE, READ VERY CAREFULLY!

Floral decorations are permitted in the church for your wedding. Please, consult with Father Stavros, so that the flowers may be placed in the church for the wedding so as not to interfere with the service. Arrange with Fr. Stavros a time for the delivery. **NO AISLE RUNNERS PERMITTED.** There are 15 pews on each side of the body of the church, each holding 6-7 persons. There are also 3 pews off to each side at the front of the church, each holding approximately 7 persons.

Absolutely no glitter decorations are permitted as part of the decorations, and no flower petals may be strewn on the aisle(s) of the church as part of the decorations. In the event that real or artificial floral petals are used by the flower girl during the processional, those petals must be collected after the ceremony along with any other decorations placed in the church; they may be removed by the wedding party or the church will do it (for a fee – see fee schedule)

During Christmas & Paschal seasons, it is common for our church to be adorned with flowers. Church flowers or decorations are not allowed to be moved.

Chanter

The chanter is the person who responds to the petitions and prayers offered by the priest. The chanter of St. John will participate in the service. Use of any other chanter must be approved by Fr. Stavros. The Chanter of St. John the Baptist will automatically come to the service. You don't have to personally ask for him to attend. The fee for the chanter is \$125.

Organist, Music and Musical Instruments

Although it is not essential to the Sacrament, organ music has become part of the wedding ceremony. The organist may play as the guests enter the church and as they depart. You must provide your own organist. You may contact Ruth Losovitz (727-688-2782), who is the church organist. You may wish to use someone else, **but arrangements with the organist are the responsibility of the couple.** The fee for the organist is arranged between the organist and the wedding couple. A soloist may sing songs/hymns prior to the wedding, (an example would be "Ave Maria", "Our Father", etc.) and all these arrangements must be approved by Fr. Stavros prior to the ceremony. The organ is the only instrument allowed to be played in the church. Any other instrument or music CD is not permitted.

Choice of Language to be used

English and Greek may be used interchangeably in the service. Fr. Stavros will do another language for the Rings and Crowns if you provide a phonetic text in that language. Just express your wishes to Fr. Stavros. Of course, if there is a party from another Orthodox jurisdiction that would like the use of another language, it is permitted.

Visiting Priests

Guest clergy may participate in a wedding in the Orthodox Church if invited by Fr. Stavros. Please, inform Fr. Stavros if you wish to invite any guest clergy. If they are Orthodox Christian clergy in communion with our Archdiocese there are no hindrances. If they are non-Orthodox clergymen, the following are to be observed:

They are not to take part in any of the prayers, readings or liturgical parts of the service. At the conclusion of the Sacrament, they may be acknowledged, they may read a suitable prayer, and address brief words of good wishes to the couple and guests.

Length of Service

The length of the wedding ceremony is approximately 45 minutes, depending on the length of the processional and recessional. You should plan for about one hour from beginning to end.

Throwing of Rice

The throwing of rice, almonds or confetti in any part of the church (inside or outside) is prohibited. Such behavior does not lend itself to the dignity of the ceremony, and detracts from the sacredness of the occasion. The only items that may be “thrown” or “used” outside the church for the exit of the bride & groom are rose petals and/or blowing bubbles.

Rehearsal

A rehearsal is usually held one or two days prior to the ceremony. It familiarizes everyone in the wedding party with the ceremony and with what is expected on the day of your wedding. The rehearsal should be planned with Fr. Stavros. **You must bring your civil wedding license to the rehearsal as well as the other required items.** The rehearsal usually lasts about an hour, and with people arriving late, you should allow 1.5 hours for the rehearsal, i.e. hold it two hours before the scheduled rehearsal dinner (if rehearsal dinner is at 7, do the rehearsal at 5). **It is not required for you to hire a wedding coordinator, but you should appoint someone who can “coordinate” getting everyone assembled and in position for the processional. This person should come to the wedding rehearsal as well as the wedding, and be someone who you trust who is not in the wedding party.**

Spiritual Preparation

You are urged, if you are an Orthodox Christian, to receive the Sacrament of Confession and the Sacrament of Holy Communion as preparation for your marriage. By doing so, you will bring a new vitality, a spirit and a bond to your marriage that will enhance and deepen your lives. If you are not an Orthodox Christian, you are urged to contact your parish and partake in a spiritual preparation, which will grant you a renewal, thus enabling you too to prepare for your wedding.

Papers, Documents, Certificates

There are certain documents needed to ensure that your marriage will meet the criteria of both the Church and Civil authorities. The following documentation is needed as it applies to your particular situation:

1. A certificate of baptism from your parish, (if you are from a Community other than that where the ceremony will take place). If you are not an Orthodox Christian, your Baptismal Certificate will verify that you were baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity. This needs to be sent to Fr. Stavros at least one month prior to the wedding date. If you do not have your baptism certificate, please contact the church where you were baptized and ask for a “Transcription of Baptism”, which is a letter certifying that you were baptized in that church.
2. Verification that you are a member in good standing with your local parish. Verification that the Koumbaro (Koumbara) is a member in good standing with an Orthodox Church. If the Koumbaro/Sponsor is not a member of good standing with any parish, they will be required to pay a \$500 fee 30 days before the wedding to St. John the Baptist in Tampa.

3. If you were born outside the United States and came to this country after your 18th birthday, a certificate verifying that you are single and eligible to marry should be obtained from your home parish priest, signed by the Bishop of the Diocese.

4. A civil license must be obtained. Since a civil license has a time limit of 60 days, please make sure that it is dated properly. For a wedding at St. John the Baptist, a civil license may be obtained in Hillsborough County through the Clerk of the Court. Call 813-276-8100 for the location of a clerk's office closest to you. You will need (if you are over 18) a birth certificate and driver's license and there is a fee; the Clerk's office will be able to tell you the fee. The civil wedding license may be brought (not Mailed) to Fr. Stavros at any time after it is issued and must be brought at the latest to the wedding rehearsal, because you must have it in order that he may perform the wedding. NO LICENSE, NO WEDDING. Fr. Stavros will also register both the civil and ecclesiastical licenses following the wedding.

5. An Ecclesiastical License, which gives the Parish Priest Episcopal Authority to conduct the marriage in a Greek Orthodox Church, is also required. It is obtained through the Parish Priest from the Metropolitan.

A Note to the Non-Orthodox

Conversion to the Orthodox faith is not a requirement. If you desire to become an Orthodox Christian, this matter needs to be addressed separately and apart from the wedding. It should not be a conversion for the sake of convenience, nor should it be "to make someone happy". The decision should be made following thought and prayer. You should also know that your marriage in the Orthodox Christian Church does not automatically grant you membership in the Church. You are always welcome to attend services with your Orthodox mate, but you are not permitted to partake of the Sacraments. Since you are being married in the Orthodox Christian Church, you are encouraged to baptize and raise your children in the Orthodox Christian Faith. This should be discussed with your Parish Priest.

Explanation of Fees

Full payment must be received at the Church Office one month prior to the date of the Sacrament. Once payment has been made, we will submit the required documents to the Metropolis of Atlanta for the issuance of the Ecclesiastical Permit for the Marriage. If you have not submitted a pledge form for the current year and the year prior, you will have to pay the Non-Steward Fee. Payment to Priest and Chanter are due the day of the wedding rehearsal.

Damage/Church Property-Security Deposit.....\$300.00*

If no damage occurs and no clean up of the church is needed following the ceremony, the entire deposit will be refunded. However, in the event that cleaning of the church property is required, a portion or all of the deposit will be used, depending on the extent of the clean up required.

First time steward at St. John

Church Use Fee - Make check payable to St. John the Baptist.....	\$700.00
Priest – Make check payable to Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis.....	\$200.00
Chanter – Make check payable to name of chanter or to church.....	\$125.00
Total:	\$1025.00

Members of Good Standing at another Orthodox Church

Church Use Fee - Make check payable to St. John the Baptist.....	\$100.00
Priest – Make check payable to Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis.....	\$200.00
Chanter – Make check payable to name of chanter or to church.....	\$125.00
Total:	\$425.00

****Stewards of the St. John The Baptist Church**

Church Use Fee - Make check payable to St. John the Baptist.....	\$100.00
Priest.....	\$0.00
<i>(There is no fee for the priest if you are a member. If you elect to offer an honorarium, please make check payable to Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis)</i>	
Chanter – Make check payable to name of chanter or to church.....	\$125.00
Total:	\$225.00

Becoming a Steward of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is the responsibility of the Bride and/or Groom. For a Stewardship Form, please contact the church office at office@stjohntpa.org

Organist fee schedule to be negotiated directly with the organist.

*Security Deposit is due 3 months before the day of the wedding.

If you claim to be a Steward of St. John the Baptist but have not submitted a pledge form for the current and prior year, **you will have to pay the First Time Steward Fee of \$500.00.

THE WEDDING OF CANA

JOHN 2:1-11

At that time, there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with His disciples. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine". And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever He tells you." Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now." This, the first of His signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested His glory; and his disciples believed in Him.