

Wedding Information and Procedure Checklist

THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

We are pleased you have chosen to participate in the sacrament of Marriage at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church. We as a parish rejoice in the love that you, as a couple, share for one another and the commitment that has been made to bring you to this day in preparation for your marriage.

Your decision to be married in the Church is an indication that the Christian faith and the sacramental life of the Church are important to you. In the eyes of the Church, marriage is the sacramental union between a man and a woman that is used in the Bible as the image of God's faithful love for ancient Israel (Isaiah 54; Jeremiah 3; Ezekiel 16) and Christ's sacrificial relationship to the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33).

Jesus Himself, together with His mother the Theotokos and the disciples attended and blessed the wedding in Cana of Galilee, performing His first miracle, which assisted in the celebration of that event (John 2:1-11). When we say that Christian marriage is a sacrament, we use that word to convey the depths of the bond you are about to enter into: a sacramentum in the ancient Roman Empire was the oath of loyalty unto death that a Roman soldier took to the emperor when entering the military.

As Christians, the sacrament of marriage is your oath of loyalty unto death to each other and – as a couple your oath of loyalty unto death to our Lord Jesus Christ. Christian marriage is intended to be a sign of God's presence and love in this fallen and broken world. Please carefully read the following information about the Marriage procedures.

COORDINATING YOUR WEDDING

Our administrative assistant Dimitra will assist you with the necessary forms (**Affidavit for License to Marry**). It can be completed at the office or by email. Once it is completed, we will send it to the Archdiocese 15 to 20 days prior to the wedding. The priest will work with you in all matters pertaining to your wedding, including setting the date, scheduling meetings, preparing the necessary church documents. Please feel free to ask the priest any questions you may have regarding your marriage here at Holy Cross Church.

SETTING THE DATE

A couple should first contact the church office to schedule an appointment with the Parish Priest at least six months prior to the desired date. According to the official policies of our Archdiocese of Canada, weddings may not be celebrated during fasting seasons or Great feast days of the Lord. Please be acquainted with the date's weddings cannot be performed:

1. December 13th up to and including Christmas Day
2. January 5th and 6th (Epiphany)
3. February 2 (The Presentation of the Lord to the Temple)
4. Great Lent from Clean Monday up to and including Easter Sunday (usually mid-February, the entire month of March and part of April)
5. August 1st up to and including August 15th. (The fast of the Theotokos)
6. August 29th (The beheading of John the Baptist)
7. September 14th (the Exaltation of the Cross)
8. The Ascension Pentecost

SACRAMENTAL PRESUPPOSITION

Your decision to be married in the Church is an indication that the Christian faith and the sacramental life of the Church are important to you. Weddings cannot be celebrated in a spiritual vacuum. Therefore, this presupposes that:

1. At least one of the couples to be married is an Orthodox Christian, baptized and /or Chrismated in the Church, committed to Christ and His Church and a steward/member of his or her parish for at least a year prior to the date of the wedding; and
2. The intended spouse, if not Orthodox, be a Christian baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as commanded by the Lord (Matthew 28:19). * Because of the sacramental nature of the marriage bond (in which a couple not only pledge their love for each other but also their love for Christ) a wedding between an Orthodox Christian and a non-Christian may not be celebrated in the Church. If you are unsure about your non-Orthodox fiancé's Christian denomination, please consult with the parish priest.

*****NECESSARY PAPERS AND DOCUMENTS*****

The following documentation is needed to ensure that your wedding will meet the criteria established by the Church and local civil authorities:

1. **Verification of the baptism and stewardship/membership** commitment of the Orthodox spouse(s).
2. **Verification of the baptism of the non-Orthodox spouse** in a Christian community that baptizes in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and that they are members of a religious group whose baptism is recognized by the Orthodox Church (for example, the Roman Catholic and, traditionally, mainline Protestant churches such as the Lutheran and Episcopalian communities).
3. **A civil marriage license.** Please note that because of the separation of Church and state, two marriage licenses are necessary, one for the Church and one for the province. **Also, please note that because a civil license carries a time limit of 90 days in Ontario, your civil license should be secured less than three months prior to the desired date of the wedding.**
4. **An ecclesiastical marriage license** (once all the necessary documents have been processed) under His Eminence Metropolitan Archbishop Sotirios' judgement.

IN CASE OF PRIOR MARRIAGES

If either of the parties have been previously married, the death certificate of the deceased spouse or the civil divorce decree issued by the province must be presented to the parish priest. If the prior marriage was celebrated in the Orthodox Church and ended in divorce, then an ecclesiastical divorce decree must also be presented.

THE WEDDING PARTY

The Sponsor (Koumparos or Koumpara) who will participate sacramentally in the service by exchanging the rings and the crowns must be an Orthodox Christian. The Sponsor must be "In Good" standing with the Church and only they can exchange the wedding rings and crowns. If they are not members of Holy Cross, they must provide a letter of good standing from their parish. 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 people may be members of the wedding party.

ITEMS NEEDED FOR THE WEDDING

The Sponsor(s) Koumparos or Koumpara are responsible for providing specific items on the day of the wedding. Among the items necessary to celebrate one's marriage in the Church are the following:

1. A pair of rings, for the betrothal.
2. A pair of "stefana" or wedding crowns - the crowns may be either Greek-style flower or pearl wreaths linked by a long, white ribbon (called stefana), or Russian-style jeweled metal crowns. Flower wreaths may be ordered from the florist with the other flowers (bouquets, corsages, reception-table centerpieces) or from a specialty supplier and maybe live or silk. If you are using metal crowns, make sure your parish has a set, and that they are in good condition.
3. A pair of white candles decorated. The candles are placed on each side of the sacrament table or altar.
4. A Silver tray. The wedding tray is a traditional and beautiful gift given to the bride and groom from their Koumparo/Koumpara (sponsor). The tray is used to showcase the crowns in an elegant fashion while they are brought to church. Sometimes the Koumparo/Koumpara will decorate the tray with white koufetta (jordan candies) and then place the stefana (crowns) on top of the koufetta.

THE BRIDAL DRESS AND ATTENDANTS' GOWNS

Care should be taken in selecting the bride's dress. The bridal gown and attendant's dresses should also exercise a decorum befitting a Church ceremony. Low cut dresses (either in front or back) should be avoided, or at the very least covered by a shawl.

MUSIC

Chanting is an integral part of the wedding service in the Greek Orthodox Church as the chanter responds to the prayers and chants the hymns of the Wedding Service.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOTAPING

Photographs of your wedding are permitted but should not in any way impede or distract from the celebration of the sacrament. Photographers should be quiet and respectful. The use of flying drones inside the Church is prohibited. If you are planning on professional photography and videography, please ask that your photographer arrives early at the Church so that guidelines can be laid out. Also, please ask guests to be respectful of the professional's space, for your benefit.

PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

In your meetings with the priest, he will discuss the sacramental nature of the marriage bond, the Christian understanding of marriage as it is expressed in the Scriptures and the marriage service itself. Marriage in Orthodoxy is a Sacrament instituted by God and not man. This is why the man and wife do not recite vows during the wedding sacrament, which is different from other faith traditions. In cases where one of the spouses is not Orthodox, the couple should plan to meet with the priest, to have any questions answered.

A NOTE TO THE BRIDE AND GROOM

To those spouses who are Orthodox: there is no substitute for Jesus Christ in maintaining the dignity and sanctity of the marriage bond. For the celebration of your marriage in the Church to be real, you must live out in subsequent years, the Christian commitment that you will make on the day of your wedding. To those spouses who are not Orthodox: you are always welcome here at Holy Cross Church. Keep in mind that your marriage in the Church does not automatically grant you membership in the Orthodox Church. If you desire to become an Orthodox Christian this must be your decision, made after much prayer and thought, in consultation with the parish priest, and never for the sake of convenience. The Lord and this parish are here for both of you, to help, support and sustain you in your marriage bond and the life of faith to which we are called as Christians. May the Lord grant you both many years together in peace and oneness of mind and heart.

THE ROLE OF THE SPONSOR

(Koumparo/Koumpara)

Usually, one Sponsor exchanges both the rings and the crowns. If there are two sponsors, one may exchange the rings and the other crowns. The role of the sponsor is to be the spiritual advisor of the family. Therefore, the sponsor(s) must be an Orthodox Christian in good standing with the Church.

REQUIREMENTS TO SERVE AS A SPONSOR

1. The Koumparos/Koumpara **must also be a member in good standing of the Orthodox Church.**
2. If he/she belongs to another Orthodox Parish, the priest must receive a letter of good standing from the parish priest.
3. If she/he is married, the marriage must have been blessed by the Orthodox Church; if divorced (after marriage in the Orthodox Church) an ecclesiastical divorce must already have been issued.

BEST MAN & MAID OF HONOUR

Couples may still designate a “Best Man” and “Maid of Honour” who are not members of the Orthodox Church. If this is the case, the Sponsor stands next to the Groom or Bride depending on their gender.

MIXED MARRIAGES

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. 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.
 - b. A non-Orthodox Christian who marries an Orthodox Christian does not thereby automatically 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 members’ religious and spiritual well-being.