

PREPARING FOR YOUR SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE



AT SAINT GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
PISCATAWAY, NEW JERSEY

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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 a 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.

COORDINATING YOUR WEDDING

Our administrative staff will assist you everything necessary. They will work with you in all matters pertaining to your wedding, including setting the date, scheduling meetings with our Presiding Priest, Father Nektarios Cottros, preparing the necessary church documents and collecting all necessary fees. Please feel free to ask them any questions you may have regarding your marriage here at Saint George's.

SETTING THE DATE

A couple desiring to be married should first contact the church office to schedule an appointment with Father Nektarios. It is preferable to schedule both your wedding date and meetings with the Father Nektarios, at least six months prior to the desired date, so that scheduling conflicts can be avoided. According to the official policies of our Archdiocese and Metropolis, weddings may not be celebrated during the fasting seasons or the major feast days of our Church:

- December 13-25 (The Advent and Christmas season)
- January 5-6 (Epiphany)
- February 2 (the Presentation of the Lord to the Temple)

- Great Lent and Holy Week (usually mid-February, the entire month of March and part of April)
- August 1-15 (the fast of the Theotokos)
- August 29 (the beheading of John the Baptist)
- September 14 (the Exaltation of the Cross)
- The Ascension
- Pentecost

This is in keeping with our ancient way of celebrating the Christian mystery in worship and exceptions can be made only rarely, in extreme circumstances, with the permission of the bishop.

Because marriage is a sacrament, weddings cannot be celebrated in a spiritual vacuum. This presupposes that:

- at least one of the couple to be married is an Orthodox Christian, baptized and /or chrismated in the Church, committed to Christ and His Church and an active steward for at least a year prior to the date of the wedding; and
- 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.

NECESSARY PAPERS AND DOCUMENTS

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

- verification of the baptism and stewardship commitment of the Orthodox spouse;
- 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 (for example, the Roman Catholic and, traditionally, mainline Protestant churches such as the Lutheran and Episcopalian communities);
- an ecclesiastical marriage license; and
- 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 state. Also, please note that because a civil license usually carries a time limit of 90 days, your civil license should be secured less than three months prior to the desired date of the wedding.

IN CASE OF PRIOR MARRIAGES

If either of the parties has been previously married, the death certificate of the deceased spouse or the civil divorce decree issued by the state 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 “koumbaro” or “koumbara” – the sponsor who will participate sacramentally in the service by exchanging the rings and the crowns that form an integral part of the marriage rite – must be an Orthodox Christian and a steward of his/her parish. The koumbaro or koumbara, if from another Orthodox parish, must provide a letter of introduction from his/her parish priest certifying his/her active stewardship in the life of the Church, as well as baptismal and wedding transcripts. Other members of the wedding party need not be Orthodox Christians.

THE BRIDAL DRESS AND ATTENDANTS’ GOWNS

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

NECESSARY ITEMS FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE SERVICE

Among the items necessary to celebrate one’s marriage in the Church are the following:

- A pair of rings
- A pair of “stefana” or wedding crowns; and
- A pair of white candles.

Some couples also choose to provide a silver or gold chalice and tray. These latter items are optional for the couple as the parish can provide them if necessary.

MUSIC

Although it is not essential to the celebration of this sacrament, organ music has become a customary part of the wedding service in Greek Orthodox parishes in America. The organist may play as guests enter the Church, a processional for the wedding party and the bride and a recessional at the conclusion of the service. The music played must honor the Christian faith and be drawn from either the hymns of the Church and/or from that tradition of classical music composed for the Roman Catholic and Protestant communities. The church office has a list of musical selections that have been approved by our senior pastor.

The chanter, by tradition, is an integral part of the wedding service in the Greek Orthodox Church. St. George has a full time chanter. If you would like to invite a chanter from another Orthodox parish to participate in your wedding, please consult with the Presiding Priest, prior to extending the invitation.

A vocalist other than the chanter may sing prior to the beginning of the service, during or just before the processional. As with all music sung at the wedding service, it must clearly reflect our Christian heritage and must be drawn from the Scriptures or the hymns of the Church. Again, if there are any questions, please consult the Presiding Priest.

Fees for the services of the organist and chanter are your responsibility. Each vocalist establishes his or her own fee and you would pay him or her directly.

VISITING CLERGY

Guest clergy may participate in a wedding at St. George's. Canonically, it is the responsibility of the Presiding Priest, where the wedding is taking place, to extend an invitation to any and all visiting clergy. Orthodox Christian clergymen in communion with the Archdiocese are welcome to participate in the celebration of sacraments at St. George, with the blessings of our Presiding Hierarchy, His Eminence, Metropolitan Evangelos of New Jersey.

Non-Orthodox clergymen from other Christian communities may not take part in the celebration of the sacrament of marriage. It is the official policy of our Archdiocese that clergy from other Christian confessions may be acknowledged at the conclusion of the wedding service and invited forward to the solea where they may offer a prayer and briefly address the couple.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEO

Photographs of your wedding are permitted but should not in any way impede or distract from the celebration of the sacrament. Photographers should not be conspicuous and should not use a flash during the services. Please stress to the photographer(s) and videographer(s) to be dressed appropriately. Your wedding is taking place in a sacred space, not in a park, nor at a night club.

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.

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 Saint George's! Please note 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. To both of you: the Lord and this parish are here 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!