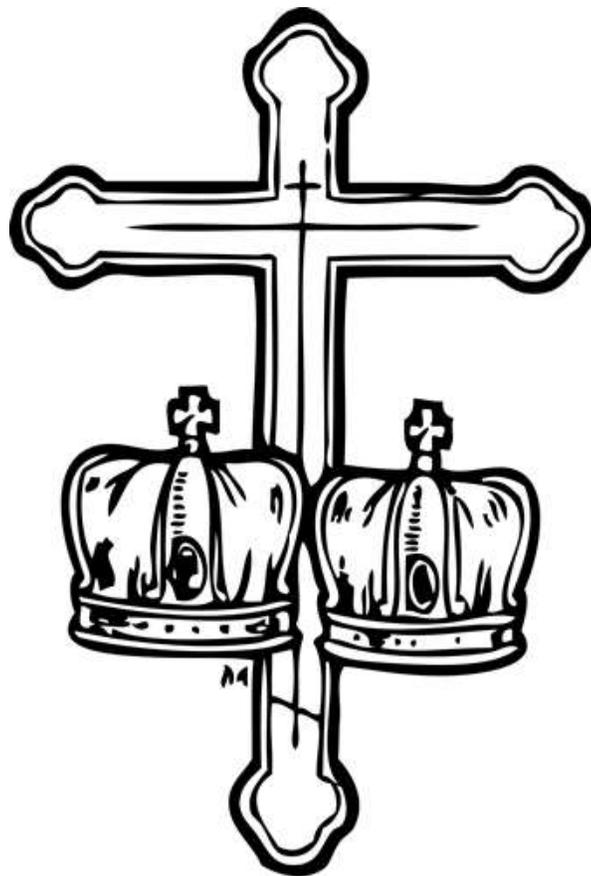


**A Manual of Preparation**  
**for a Wedding in the**  
**Greek Orthodox Church**



**St. Spyridon Greek Orthodox Cathedral**  
**102 Russell St. Worcester, MA 01609**

# **PLANNING YOUR WEDDING IN THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH**

Congratulations on your engagement! You have made a wonderful decision to be joined together by God, Himself, in the Sacrament of Marriage. The purpose of the information contained in this booklet is to acquaint you, the bride and groom, with the requirements of the Metropolis of Boston, the Cathedral of Saint Spyridon, and the State of Massachusetts. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call us. Everyone here at St. Spyridon will do their utmost to make your wedding day the most beautiful, spiritually meaningful and memorable day of your lives.

## **SETTING A DATE**

The date of the wedding should be set in advance by calling the Church Office (508)791-7326. When scheduling your wedding, please be aware that no marriages are permitted during the following periods:

- January 5-6 – The Epiphany of the Lord
- Great Lent, Holy Week and Easter
- Pentecost Sunday
- August 1-15 – The Dormition of the Holy Theotokos
- August 29 – The Beheading of St. John the Baptist
- December 13-24 – The 12 days prior to Christmas
- December 25 – Christmas Day
- The day before a feast day and all Holy Days of the Lord.

## **THE ENGAGEMENT PERIOD**

The Engagement Period is a special period in the lives of a couple preparing for marriage. This time affords the couple the continued opportunity to learn of one another's likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, habits, tastes, hobbies, etc. You also learn what you expect from one another as you clearly and openly communicate your needs, desires and feelings.

As you prepare for the sacred responsibilities you share for one another, please do so in a Christ-centered, chaste, respectful, and holy manner. Your spouse must be the most revered, respected, cherished, and important person in your life—this demands that you treat each other with dignity, awe, respect, and honesty. Sexual relations should be reserved for the sanctity of the holiness of your marriage. The Church sanctifies your marriage making your union holy and your complete sharing of life sacred and blessed.

### ENGAGEMENT PARTY

If an engagement party or dinner is given and a priest is invited to bless the rings, it must be understood that the prayers and good wishes recited by the priest at this party are not a betrothal ceremony and so are not regarded as binding by the Church. If you wish to have our priest come and offer the blessing during the engagement party, please contact the Church Office.

In the Orthodox Church, the betrothal (*engagement*) ceremony is part of the wedding sacrament and is always performed at the beginning of the marriage service.

### REQUIREMENTS

In order to have the Sacrament of Marriage celebrated in the Greek Orthodox Church, the following requirements must be met:

**State Marriage License:** A marriage license issued by the State of Massachusetts must be obtained for the solemnization of the marriage by the Church. The license may be obtained in any town or city in the State of Massachusetts and may be used anywhere in the state. The license may not be used until 24 hours after its issuance and is valid for 90 days. Anyone under 18 years of age requires the consent of parents to obtain a marriage license. **This should be delivered to the Church 45 days before the wedding.**

**Ecclesiastical Marriage License:** After receiving their State license, the Bride and Groom must make an appointment to meet with the priest to prepare the application for the Ecclesiastical Marriage License. When possible, the application for the Ecclesiastical marriage may be filled out at the Pre-Marital Seminar. **If not, this must be done at least four weeks before the wedding date.**

**Proof of Baptism:** Both parties must be Christians baptized in the Name of the Holy Trinity. One of the parties must be of the Orthodox Christian Faith. Both parties must

present to the priest their baptismal certificates when they set up the wedding date. The baptismal certificates may be originals or photocopies. If originals, we will photocopy them and return them to you.

**Certificate of No Marital Impediment:**

Members of other parishes: If either party is from another parish, he/she must present a letter from his/her priest stating that there is no existing impediment to marriage and that he/she is free to marry in our Church.

Foreign Citizens: If one or both of the Greek Orthodox parties are not American citizens, a certificate must be obtained from the Metropolis of their origin, attesting to the fact that they are free of any marital impediment and may contract a marriage in the United States. If difficulties are encountered in procuring such documents, the priest should be contacted for further assistance.

**Parish Membership:** All Greek Orthodox Communicants, male and female, 18 years of age or older must have met their Stewardship obligation to their Church for the current year. In the case of an inter-faith marriage, only the Orthodox party need be a contributing member. Membership must be established before scheduling the wedding date.

**Pre-Marital Counseling:** All couples must attend the pre-marital counseling classes. During the class, we will discuss the Orthodox understanding of the sacrament of marriage, as well as contemporary issues that all married couples face. These classes are offered regionally throughout the Metropolis of Boston. Please call the office for more information.

**Holy Communion:** The Sunday before the wedding, it is recommended that the couple attend the Divine Liturgy and (those who are Orthodox) receive Holy Communion.

**WEDDING REHEARSAL**

The wedding rehearsal can be planned as early as the booking of the wedding. Please call Fr. Dimitrios to schedule the rehearsal (631-742-3790). The wedding rehearsal is for the purpose of acquainting the bridal party with the order of procession, recession, and their places in front of the Altar, and the order of the service.

## **INTER-FAITH MARRIAGES**

In the event of an Inter-Faith marriage (when one of the parties is not of the Orthodox faith) the non-Orthodox partner must be a baptized member of one of the Christian faiths. In other words, he/she must have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and does not need to convert to Orthodoxy.

Marriage in the Orthodox Church, however, does not render the non-Orthodox partner a communicant of the Orthodox Church; he/she may not receive any other sacraments of the Church.

A non-Orthodox partner, having voluntarily sought the blessings of the Orthodox Church should make the concession of permitting the children from the marriage to be baptized and raised in the Orthodox faith. However, if a non-Orthodox Christian wishes to become a member of the Orthodox Faith, he/she may do so through the Sacrament of Holy Confirmation. A person wishing to be confirmed must make the request of his/her own free will and must attend special catechism classes. Likewise, a non-Christian may marry in the Orthodox Church by first being baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity.

A ceremony in a church of another faith, which takes place after the Greek Orthodox Sacrament, is not permitted.

## **FOR THOSE MARRIED OUTSIDE THE CHURCH**

Those members of the Orthodox Church who have been married outside the Orthodox Church are urged to have their marriage blessed with the Orthodox Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. Otherwise, they are not entitled to participate in any other sacrament – may not receive Holy Communion (the Precious Blood and Body of our Savior), may not become sponsors at baptisms and weddings, or receive a funeral in the Church.

It is a simple matter to have a Church marriage. You must obtain a duplicate license from your local town or city office for the religious ceremony. If the civil ceremony was performed in another state, a license must be issued by the State of Massachusetts for an Orthodox Church Wedding.

## **FOR THOSE WHO WISH TO MARRY A SECOND TIME**

Those marrying for a second time must, in addition to the requirements above, also produce the following:

- In the event that any of the interested parties were previously married in the Orthodox Church and subsequently separated by a Civil Divorce they must obtain an Ecclesiastical Divorce. This can be done through your priest. The process usually takes 3 months, therefore please plan in advance.
- Those who were married outside the Church must present their original Civil Divorce papers.

### DEGREE OF KINSHIP

Our Church does not permit the marriage of persons of close kinship, either by blood or marriage. This kinship is computed along two lines:

- 1) Direct lineal kinships - Our Church forbids marriage prior to the sixth degree of kinship. *This means 1<sup>st</sup> cousins cannot be married to each other.*
- 2) Indirect kinship - (through in-laws) Our Church forbids marriage prior to the fourth degree of kinship.

To trace the degree of kinship, it is easiest to find the common point of kinship and to count the number of births after it to the contemplated marriage. For instance, if the couple has a common great-grandfather, the number of births are counted as follows:

- 1 - Groom's grandfather, 2 - Bride's grandfather
- 3 - Groom's father, 6 - Bride's father,
- 7 - Groom, 8 - Bride

Thus we find that there are six births from the point of kinship and that this contemplated marriage is permitted by the Orthodox Church.

In the indirect kinship, a brother (or sister) cannot marry a sister-in-law (or brother-in-law) because our Church considers them as brother and sister, but otherwise a kinship of the fourth degree or more does not preclude a marriage.

### PROHIBITED MARRIAGES

**First Group:** Parents with their own children, their own grandchildren, their own Great-grandchildren.

**Second Group:** Brothers-in-law with sisters-in-law.

**Third Group:** Uncles and aunts with nieces and nephews.

**Fourth Group:** First cousins.

**Fifth Group:** Foster parents with foster children, foster children with children of foster parents.

**Sixth Group:** Godfather with godchild, godfather with mother of godchild, or vice versa, godmother and godson, etc.

### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE KOUMBARO/KOUMBARA**

- The Koumbaro/Koumbara must be an Orthodox Christian actively living his/her faith. He/she must be contributing member of his/her parish. If married, they must have been married in the Orthodox Church. If civilly divorced, they must have received an ecclesiastical divorce.
- The Koumbaro/Koumbara is responsible for providing: two crowns connected by a ribbon, decorated candles, traditional silver tray, and white Jordan almonds (κουφέτα).
- On the day of the wedding, the Koumbaro/Koumbara must check in with the officiating priest at least 15 minutes prior to the service in order to:
  - Present his/her church membership card and letter from his/her priest.
  - Present the crowns, etc. to the sexton to be prepared.
- The Koumbaro/Koumbara is responsible to present the rings to the officiating Priest.
- At the end of the Sacrament, the Koumbaro/Koumbara must sign the Civil and Church license.

### **WEDDING ATTIRE**

The bride in selecting her gown and the gowns of her bridesmaids must keep in mind that the gowns should not be too revealing. Please respect the holiness of the Church.

### **DECORATIONS, MUSIC & PHOTOGRAPHS**

Floral decorations in the Church are permitted. Also candlesticks or candelabras are permitted in front of the Altar where they lend an effect of beauty and dignity.

The Wedding ceremony is a religious sacrament; therefore, hymns other than Church hymns are not permitted before, during, or after the Sacrament.

Photographs and videos are permitted to be taken. In both cases, the photographer/videographer must introduce themselves to the officiating Priest for further instructions

Names of organists can be given to you by calling the Church Office. Please note that most organists will charge about \$250.00 for their one hour of playing

### **ITEMS TO BRING**

Coordinate with Koumbaro/Koumbara to buy supplies for the wedding: crowns, rings, silver tray, almonds, 2 small decorated hand candles, 2 large decorated candles.

### **THE WEDDING DAY**

The bridal party should arrive at the Church at least 15 minutes before the appointed time. The candles and crowns to be used in the sacrament are given to the sexton.

It is the duty of the ushers to seat the guests; for this reason, they should arrive at the Church at least 30 minutes before the Wedding.

The conduct of the ushers should be dignified and quiet. They escort the bride's family and friends to be seated on the left and the groom's on the right.

At the proper time, the groom's mother is escorted down the middle aisle by the head usher and takes her place in the second pew on the right. The groom's father follows alone and takes his place beside her.

The head usher returns and escorts the bride's mother to the second pew on the left. He then returns to take his place in the procession.

At the sound of the processional music, the groom and the koumbaro take their place at the front and right of the aisle. The procession advances as follows:

1. The ushers will enter one by one,
2. Ring Bearer,
3. Groomsmen w/ bridesmaids,
4. Maid of Honor,
5. Flower Girl,

6. Bride escorted by her father.

When the bride and her father reach the front of the steps, she turns towards her father, he lifts her veil and kisses her, and then he takes his place next to his wife in the second pew on the left. A respectful tradition is for the groom to kiss the right hand of his father-in-law-to-be as he receives his bride from him.

The Betrothal Service and the Marriage take place. After the groom and bride are congratulated by the Priest at the end of the service, the recessional begins.

Please note that rice and candy are not allowed to be thrown at the couple during their grand exit out of the church. Instead of rice, we suggest that bubbles, flower petals, or confetti be thrown.

### SUMMARY

**Step One:** The couple must contact the church office prior to setting the date and booking a reception hall.

**Step Two:** Attend the Pre-Marital seminar. The application for marriage is completed at this event.

**Step Three:** Coordinate with Koumbaro/Koumbara to buy supplies for the wedding: crowns, rings, silver tray, almonds, 2 small decorated hand candles, 2 large decorated candles.

**Step Four:** *ONE MONTH BEFORE THE WEDDING:* The State license is presented to the Priest and the Application for the Church License is completed and signed. Arrangements for the rehearsal should be made at this time. This can be done by calling the organist and making the final arrangements.

**Step Five:** The Bride and Groom should make an appointment for Holy Confession.

**Step Six:** The Sunday before the wedding, prepare for and receive Holy Communion.

**Step Seven:** *WEDDING DAY:* Arrive at the Church at least 15 minutes before the service is scheduled to begin. *PLEASE BE ON TIME!*

**Step Eight:** If any parent of the Bride or Groom is deceased, please give the name to the priest to be remembered.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### *What is the attitude of the Orthodox Church towards contraception?*

No universal disciplinary decision on this question has ever been taken by the Orthodox Church, as the Church never possessed the tendency to regulate all areas of human life according to one single pattern. The practical attitude of Orthodox Christians must therefore be determined by the general doctrine of the Church concerning marriage.

It should be noted that the Church definitely teaches that marriage implies childbirth. The woman, says St. Paul, “will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty” (1 Timothy 2:15). However, nowhere in the Scripture is it said that childbirth is the only aim of marriage. In cases where a couple may have limitations on being able to bear children, this cannot apply. Marriage is essentially an inseparable union, both spiritual and physical, between a husband and wife. St. Paul teaches: “For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement or a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer, but then come together again.” (1 Cor. 7:4-5).

Orthodox Christian couples should, therefore, consult their own conscience, and even better, their Spiritual Father at those times when they are considering measures of contraception. Then they may decide whether these measures are justified, or whether they would not simply indicate a lack of confidence in God and faith in His help.

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**As you prepare for your sacred union, we again congratulate you. It is our prayer that your life together be filled with all God’s blessings for a meaningful, productive and spiritually edifying life as husband and wife.**

APPROVED BY PARISH COUNCIL  
ST. SPYRIDON CATHEDRAL  
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