

## **THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE**

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.

## **COORDINATING YOUR WEDDING**

Our administrative staff will assist you with the necessary forms. They will work with you in all matters pertaining to your wedding, including setting the date, scheduling meetings with our Parish Priest, preparing the necessary church documents and collecting all fees. Please feel free to ask him any questions you may have regarding your marriage here at the Church.

## **SETTING THE DATE**

A couple desiring to be married should first contact the church office to schedule an appointment with the parish priest. It is preferable to schedule both your wedding date and meetings with the parish priest at least six months prior to the desired date so that scheduling conflicts can be avoided. According to the official policies of our Archdiocese, 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.*

## **THE COUPLE TO BE MARRIED: SACRAMENTAL PRESUPPOSITIONS**

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

1. 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
2. The intended spouse, if not Orthodox, be a Christian baptized by triple immersion 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 insure 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 (for example, the Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant churches such as the Lutheran and Episcopalian communities, etc, etc);
3. An ecclesiastical marriage license; and
4. 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 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.*

### **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 obtained/presented.

### **THE WEDDING PARTY**

The "koumbaro" or "koumbara" - the sponsor who will participate sacramentally in the service by exchanging the rings and the crowns (an integral part of the marriage rite) - must be an Orthodox Christian "In Good Standing" and a steward/member of his/her parish. "In Good Standing" means that they may not have gotten married outside of the church or participated in any foreign sacraments, as this would excommunicate them from the Orthodox Church. The "koumbaro" or koumbara", if from another Orthodox parish, must provide proof from his/her parish priest certifying his/her good standing in the Church. Other members of the wedding party need not be Orthodox.

### **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.

### **ITEMS NEEDED FOR THE WEDDING**

For Orthodox Christian betrothal and crowning services, several items are used liturgically:

1. Two decorated candles;
2. Rings for both the bride and groom, for the betrothal;
3. 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 centrepieces) or from a specialty supplier, and may be live or silk. If you are using metal crowns, make sure your parish has a set, and that they are in good condition;

## **MUSIC**

Although it is not essential to the celebration of this sacrament, organ music has become a customary part of the wedding service in Canada. 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 honour 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. Please consult our priest if you have any questions concerning the organist or particular music selections.

There may be fees for the services of the organist, which are your responsibility. The fee for the chanter is included in the sacrament fees.

## **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 a flash is allowed. The use of flying video drones inside the Church is prohibited. If you are planning on professional photography and videography, please ask that your photographer arrive 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.

## **VISITING CLERGY**

Guest clergy, in Communion with the Orthodox Church, may participate in the wedding. Canonically, it is the responsibility of the priest where the wedding is taking place to extend an invitation to any and all visiting clergy.

Non-Orthodox clergymen from other Christian communities may not take part in the celebration of the sacrament of marriage per se. 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 (platform in front of altar) where they may offer a prayer and briefly address the couple.

## **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. 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 our Church. 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.

## **The ROLE OF THE SPONSOR (Koumbaro/a)**

Usually one Sponsor exchanges both the rings and the crowns. If there are two sponsors, one may exchange the rings and the other the crowns. The role of the sponsor is to be the spiritual advisor to the family. This is different from the western understanding of a "Best Man" or "Maid

of Honour.” Therefore, the sponsor(s) must be and Orthodox Christian in good standing with the Church.

### **REQUIREMENTS TO SERVE AS A SPONSOR**

- The koumbaros/koumbara must also be a member in good standing of the Orthodox Church.
- If he/she belongs to another Orthodox parish, the priest must receive a letter of good standing from the parish priest.
- If he/she 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 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 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 member's religious and spiritual well-being.