INFORMATION FOR MARRIAGE

St. John the Merciful Orthodox Church

> “A great mystery is being celebrated. How is it a mystery? They come together, and the two are made one. They have not become the image of anything earthly, but of God Himself. They come in order to be made one body; behold the mystery of love!”
> — St. John Chrysostom, Homily 12 on Colossians

Marriage is truly a “great mystery”—the meeting of human love and divine love, and the very sign of God’s presence in the life of His people. In the Scriptures, the relationship between God and His people is described in the language of marriage: Israel as the Bride of God, and the Church as the Bride of Christ.

Because of this, marriage is not simply a private arrangement between two individuals. It is an ecclesial act—something that takes place within the life of the Church, with Christ Himself present, and with the blessing of the priest and the prayers of the community.

A. Church Life and Participation

At least one member of the couple must be an Orthodox Christian in good standing—meaning someone who is actively participating in the life of the Church.

This includes:

- Regular attendance at services
- Participation in Holy Confession
- Reception of Holy Communion
- A life oriented toward prayer, fasting, and charity

Marriage is not an entry point into the Church, but a continuation of a life already being lived in Christ. If this has not yet been established, that is not a barrier—but it does mean there is work to be done before the wedding.

B. Sponsors (Best Man / Maid or Matron of Honor)

The sponsor (koumbaros/koumbara) is not simply a ceremonial role. They stand as a witness on behalf of the Orthodox Church and serve as advisors and helpers for the husband and wife especially with their spiritual development as a couple.

For this reason:

- The sponsor for an Orthodox spouse must be an Orthodox Christian in good standing
- If one spouse is not Orthodox, the sponsor must at minimum be a baptized Christian

This role carries spiritual responsibility, not just social significance.

C. Invitations

No invitations should be printed until the date and time has been confirmed by the priest.

D. Pre-Marital Counseling

In order to give each couple the best possible foundation for a strong and enduring marriage, pre-marital preparation is required.

This includes a series of conversations with the priest. These are not optional. They are an essential part of preparing not just for a wedding day, but for a life together in Christ.

E. Paperwork

Prior to the wedding, the following documents must be provided:

1. Copies of baptismal certificates
   (or their baptismal record)

2. If either person belongs to another Orthodox parish:
   A letter from their priest confirming that they are eligible for marriage
3. If either person has been previously married:
   A civil divorce decree. Please speak with the priest directly regarding your situation
4. If either person belongs to another Christian church:
   A letter confirming baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity and eligibility for marriage
5. A valid civil marriage license
   (required before the wedding can be celebrated)

F. Living Together

The goal of the Orthodox Church is not simply to “perform weddings,” but to give each couple the best possible foundation for a blessed, stable, and enduring marriage.

For that reason, the Church cannot, in a spirit of love, bless cohabitation prior to marriage.

From a Biblical standpoint, sexual relations outside of marriage fall short of the life we are called to in Christ. This is not a matter of opinion or changing cultural standards—it is part of the consistent teaching of the Church.

Even from a purely practical standpoint, secular studies have repeatedly shown that couples who live together before marriage have a significantly higher rate of divorce—often cited as approximately 50% higher—than those who do not. The Church does not ignore this. She takes seriously her responsibility to help couples begin well.

For these reasons, any couple seeking to be married in the Orthodox Church who is currently living together is expected to separate and to live chastely until the wedding.

This is not a punishment, nor is it meant to shame anyone. It is a pastoral directive, given in love, for the sake of the long-term health, stability, and spiritual integrity of the marriage.

The Church’s desire is not simply that you be married—but that your marriage be strong, life-giving, and rooted in Christ from the very beginning.

G. Location of the Wedding Sacrament

The proper place for the celebration of the sacrament of marriage is the Orthodox Church.

It is not our custom to perform weddings in homes, outdoor venues, or other locations outside the Church.

If you would like to be married at another area Orthodox Church, you must speak with the rector when submitting this paperwork. This will require additional coordination and cannot be assumed without prior discussion and approval.

H. Sacramental Preparation

Orthodox Christians are expected to prepare themselves spiritually for the wedding by:

- Going to Holy Confession
- Receiving Holy Communion

This preparation should take place especially in the days leading up to the wedding.

I. Items Necessary for the Wedding

The following are required:

- Crowns (provided by the church or purchased by the couple)
- Rings for both bride and groom
- Two candles
- Civil marriage license

J. Additional Guidelines

Modest Dress

A sense of modesty should be maintained in the Church, especially in the presence of the icons and the sacred space of the sanctuary.

Music

Only the human voice is used in Orthodox worship. Instruments are not permitted.

Promptness

The wedding should begin on time. Delays affect the life of the parish and may require adjustments to the schedule.

K. Inter-Christian Marriages

Marriage between an Orthodox Christian and a baptized Christian is permitted under the following conditions:

- The non-Orthodox spouse is baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity
- The couple agrees to raise their children in the Orthodox Church
- The marriage takes place in the Orthodox Church
- The Orthodox priest is the sole celebrant

L. Days When Marriages Are Not Permitted

The Church does not celebrate marriages at certain times set aside for fasting, repentance, and preparation:

Weekly and Feast Restrictions

- Saturdays after 2:00 PM
- Eves of the Twelve Great Feasts

Fasting Periods

- Great Lent *(variable)*
- Apostles' Fast *(variable)*
- Dormition Fast *(August 1–15)*
- Nativity Fast *(November 15 – December 24)*

Specific Days and Periods

- Beheading of St. John the Baptist *(August 29)*
- Elevation of the Cross *(September 14)*
- Nativity through Theophany *(December 25 – January 7)*
- Bright Week *(the week following Pascha)*

Pastoral Note

Sunday is the preferred day for a wedding.

Saturday weddings require approval and may not take place after 2:00 PM, as Saturday evening is set aside for preparation for the Divine Liturgy.