

CONCERNING MARRIAGE



DIOCESE OF NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

*Archpastoral Guidelines
Approved with the blessing of
His Eminence, the Most Reverend MICHAEL, Archbishop of New York
in consultation with
the Council of Presbyters of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey*

Updated August 30, 2016

Preamble

In 1976, the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America published a document in booklet form entitled *Marriage*. This booklet was one of a series prepared under the general heading, "Documents of the Orthodox Church in America." Other documents in this series include *Confession and Communion* and *Spiritual Life*. The intent of these documents is to provide authoritative norms for the whole Church in America.

Thus, Diocesan Guidelines concerning the Sacrament of Marriage presuppose the Holy Synod's document. Pastors and parishes are urged to make the booklet available to all the faithful and to present it to couples who are preparing for marriage.

The function of the Diocesan Guidelines presented below is:

- To implement the Holy Synod's document;
- To articulate in greater detail some of its specific points; and
- To add those guidelines that refer to particular issues and problems in the Diocese which were not addressed by the Holy Synod.

The following Guidelines are extrapolated from the Holy Synod's document and contain points articulated by the Council of Presbyters of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey. For the sake of brevity they are presented in terse form. Obviously, however, each guideline embodies a reason and explanation which are provided in a more complete manner in the document offered by the Holy Synod, in the variety of literature that is referred to in that document, and, of course, from the pastor himself.

I. Preparation for Marriage

Before setting a date, renting a hall, etc., a couple planning to marry must seek the blessing, guidance and advice of their priest.

II. Ecclesial Content of Marriage

A. Couples should plan their weddings for seasons, times, and days which are permitted by the Church for Marriage. The most appropriate day for weddings is Sunday.

1. Marriages are not to be celebrated:

- On the evenings before Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the year;
- On Saturday evenings throughout the year;
- On the eves of the Twelve Great Feasts or parish Patronal Feasts;
- During the course of all of the fasts (Great Lent, Apostles Fast, Dormition Fast, Advent Fast);
- During the course of Cheesefare Week (from the Sunday of Meatfare to the Sunday of Cheesefare);
- During the course of Holy Week, Holy Pascha, and Bright Week;
- From the Great Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord (December 25) through the Feast of the Synaxis of Saint John the Baptist (January 7);
- On the Eve and day of the Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross (September 14);
- On the Eve and day of the Feast of the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist (August 29).

2. Because marriages are normally not to be celebrated on Saturdays, requests for Saturday weddings require a petition in writing to the Diocesan Bishop, by the rector, for the Bishop's consent. (Clergy should see the Template for a Letter Requesting Dispensation for Crowning, issued by the Diocesan Chancery.) Those Saturday weddings that are permitted are to be celebrated early enough so that the reception will conclude well before the evening Vigil services.

- B. Marriages are to be celebrated in an Orthodox Church building, and not in halls, gardens, or other places. In certain exceptional situations, the Diocesan Bishop is to be consulted.

III. Mixed Marriages

- A. A mixed marriage is a marriage between an Orthodox communicant and a non-Orthodox Christian who has been baptized with water in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and who confesses the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- B. Mixed marriages are permitted under the following guidelines:
 - 1. A petition for all mixed marriages must be submitted to the Diocesan Bishop for his permission and blessing (clergy should see the Template for a Letter Requesting Dispensation for Crowning, issued by the Diocesan Chancery); and
 - 2. The non-Orthodox Christian partner is to be warmly welcomed by the Orthodox community, invited to explore the Orthodox Faith, and encouraged to consider adopting the Orthodox Faith and life. Unity in the Orthodox Faith provides a source of family unity and anticipates that the children of the marital union will be baptized and raised in the Orthodox Faith.
- C. Active participation of non-Orthodox clergy in the services and sacraments of the Orthodox Church is forbidden. Conversely, active participation of Orthodox clergy in non-Orthodox services and rites is forbidden.
- D. Marriage is not permitted between Orthodox Christians and the following:
 - 1. Non-Christians (i.e. Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, etc.); and
 - 2. Those not baptized with water in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (including, but not limited to, Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Unitarians, etc.).

IV. Second Marriages and Marriages Involving Divorced Persons

- A. The Orthodox norm is one marriage for each person. Toleration of a second, and possible third, marriage involving a divorced person is extended under the following guidelines:
 - 1. The Church recognizes that, because of human weaknesses and sin, marriages sometime disintegrate and are ended by civil decree

(divorce). In its mercy and wisdom, the Church may grant permission to remarry through the Diocesan Bishop. (Clergy should see the Template for a Letter Requesting Dispensation for Crowning, issued by the Diocesan Chancery.)

2. Second (or third) marriages, including previous marriages contracted outside the Orthodox Church or marriages involving a widowed or divorced person, require a petition seeking approval of the Diocesan Bishop. (Clergy should see the Template for a Letter Requesting Dispensation for Crowning, issued by the Diocesan Chancery.)
- B. The Order of the Service: In addition to the guidelines set forth in Section II, the following are to be observed:
1. If one party of the marriage is being married for the first time, even if that person is not an Orthodox Christian, the order for the first marriage is to be used;
 2. If both parties are divorced and/or widowed, the order for the second marriage is to be used.

V. Marriage Outside the Orthodox Church

- A. Orthodox Christians who marry outside the Orthodox Church exclude their marital life from the life of the Church. As such, they exclude themselves from participating in the Holy Eucharist and from full membership in the Orthodox Church.
1. Such persons, upon their request, may be restored to Eucharistic fellowship after a period of penance, upon the recommendation of the rector and with the approval of the Diocesan Bishop.
 2. Normally such acts of restoration also include, if possible, the restoration of the heterodox marriage through the celebration of a service approved by the Diocesan Bishop.