

# Weddings

---

*"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 a "mystery" that involves human love and divine love, the very sign and image of God's presence with humanity. In the Old Testament, Israel was referred to as God's "spouse," while in the New Testament, the Church is referred to as the "bride" of Christ.

Marriage is an event in which Jesus Christ Himself participates through the presence of the priest, and that of the praying community, the church. In view of this "ecclesial" dimension of marriage, therefore, a wedding must be performed within the context of the Orthodox Church in order for the Church to recognize and affirm the validity and authenticity of the marriage.

## **Pre-Wedding Day Preparations:**

### **1. Membership**

One or both members of the engaged couple must be a member in good standing of Holy Trinity; he/she must be a pledging member for at least two years and must be up to date on his/her pledged financial commitment. If one of the spouses has been previously married and divorced, he/she must present a copy of the civil divorce decree. Furthermore, if a previous marriage took place in the Orthodox Church, the divorced spouse must also have received an ecclesiastical divorce. Please be advised, this process can take a few months.

### **2. Membership for Koumbaroi**

The koumbaros/koumbara is the one who stands as witness on behalf of the Orthodox Church during the ceremony. Hence, it is imperative that this person be an Orthodox Christian; there are no exceptions to this rule. The koumbaros/koumbara must also be a members of Holy Trinity Church and in good standing of the Orthodox Church. If he/she belongs to another Orthodox parish, the priest must receive a letter of introduction from the parish priest. As stated above, membership in good standing is a broad term: 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.

### **3. Invitations**

No invitations should be printed until the date has been cleared by the church office.

### **4. Pre-Marital Counseling**

In order to provide the engaged couple with every opportunity to enjoy all the blessings of married life, a program of pre-marital counseling is provided by the

priest prior to the wedding. Please note that these sessions are not optional as they involve the teachings of Orthodoxy in relation to the marriage.

#### **5. Ecclesiastical Marriage License**

At least four weeks prior to the wedding, the bride and groom are required to schedule an appointment to meet with the priest in order to apply for the ecclesiastical marriage license. At this time, the following must be presented:

1. Their baptismal certificates
2. If the bride and/or groom have come from Greece or some other foreign country after their 18th birthday, he and/or she must present a "Certificate of Eligibility for Marriage" from the bishop of their original town and state.
3. If the Bride or Groom is from an Orthodox parish in some other city, he/she must present a letter from his/her priest attesting to eligibility for marriage and, showing the Archdiocese Number.
4. If the Bride is under 18 years of age and/or if the groom is under 21 years of age, a letter of consent from the parents must be presented.
5. If the Bride or Groom was married before in a civil service, a CERTIFIED civil divorce must be presented.
6. If the Bride or Groom was married before in the Orthodox Church, that marriage must have been officially dissolved by an Orthodox Church Court. The original document attesting to the Church Divorce must be presented.
7. If the Bride, or Groom is a member of some other Christian Church, a letter from their clergyman stating that he/she has been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity and that he/she is eligible to marry must be presented.
8. If the Bride or Groom are widowed, a death certificate of the deceased spouse must be presented.

#### **6. Civil Marriage License**

Couple must procure a civil marriage licence four weeks prior to the wedding.

#### **7. Living together**

The goal of the Orthodox Church is to give each married couple the best opportunity for a blessed and fulfilling marriage; hence, the Church can never condone living together prior to the marriage. Not only is there no question from a biblical standpoint that any sexual relationship outside of marriage is inappropriate, but statistics gathered by secular professionals clearly show that there is a 50% HIGHER divorce rate among couples who have lived together prior to their weddings than those who have not! The Church must make every attempt to give couples a healthy, appropriate start. Therefore, any couple wishing to be married at Holy Trinity that is currently cohabitating must separate until their wedding date; this decision is made in a loving spirit of concern for the health and stability of the future marriage.

#### **8. Location of the Wedding Sacrament**

The appropriate place for a sacrament of the Orthodox Church is the Holy Sanctuary. It is not customary to perform sacraments outside the Church such as in a home, backyard, or local park. On extremely rare and unique occasions, exceptions have been made, but these are usually due to other exceptional or extenuating circumstances.

## 9. **Sacramental preparation**

The bride and/or groom who are of the Orthodox Faith are encouraged to participate in the sacraments of Holy Confession and Holy Communion the week before the wedding.

### **Wedding Day Preparations:**

#### 1. **Items necessary for the wedding day:**

1. Stephana (Crowns).
2. Rings for both the bride and the groom.
3. Two white candles.
4. Civil marriage license.
5. If desired, a platter with white Jordan almonds (koupheta) are traditionally prepared for the wedding.

#### 2. **Flowers in the church**

The sanctuary at Holy Trinity is magnificent in its own right, and does not require elaborate "decoration". Flowers are permitted and the couple's plan should be discussed well in advance with the priest.

#### 3. **Bridesmaids' dresses**

Regardless of fashion and societal custom a sense of modesty and chastity must be maintained in the Sanctuary. Every wedding takes place in front of an icon of the ever-virgin Theotokos, whose humility and modesty requires a corresponding sense of decorum; bridesmaids must therefore have their shoulders covered in Church. If the bridesmaids' dresses have bare shoulders, a wrap or jacket for use in the church must be provided. At the reception, the bridesmaids may of course wear whatever they wish.

#### 4. **Music in the Sanctuary**

If an organist is desired either to play prior to and after the wedding service, or to play the wedding march plus recessional, arrangements must be made through the Church office. No additional instrumental music is permitted to be performed in the sanctuary. Please discuss the musical selections with the parish priest.

#### 5. **Invitations to the Reception**

If you wish to have the priest attend your reception, please send an invitation to him and his presbytera in advance. Many people simply assume that the priest will come and then casually mention it following the service. Due to the large size of the Holy Trinity community, it is very difficult for the priest to attend every reception.

#### **Promptness**

In some circles it is "fashionable" to be late. But in a parish with so many families, this wreaks havoc with schedules. Frequently, two or even three weddings or baptisms are scheduled for the same day. Other parishioners should not be punished due to one person's tardiness; every effort should be made to be prompt on your wedding day. You must be aware, if the wedding is delayed for any length of time, the priest might have to adjust the schedule accordingly. Please have the entire wedding party arrive no less than 30 minutes prior to the wedding.

## **Interfaith Marriages**

The Orthodox Christian Faith blesses interfaith marriages under the following conditions:

1. The non-Orthodox Bride/Groom must be a Christian who has been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity.
2. The couple should be willing to baptize their children in the Orthodox Church.
3. The marriage must take place in the Orthodox Church according to the prescribed form of the Service Book, the Orthodox priest being the sole celebrant.
4. Should the presence of a non-Orthodox clergyman be requested, the following must be clarified:
  1. The Orthodox priest, after receiving permission from the bishop, will issue an invitation to the clergyman.
  2. The Orthodox wedding ceremony does not permit the active participation of non-Orthodox clergy, this being made explicit to all concerned.
  3. At the conclusion of the Orthodox ceremony, the guest clergyman, advised as to appropriate vesture and as agreed previously, will be properly acknowledged and may give his benediction and good wishes to the couple.
5. The following regulations concerning interfaith marriages must be observed:
  1. An Orthodox priest, if invited, may attend the marriage ceremony in a non-Orthodox church, but only as a guest. He may not participate in the service nor offer any prayer.
  2. Non-Orthodox persons may act as ushers or bridesmaids at the Orthodox Marriage, but the koumbaros/ koumbara must be an Orthodox Christian, as stated earlier.
  3. Orthodox Christians may act as ushers or bridesmaids at marriages properly solemnized in other religious communions, but they may not serve as the Best Man.
  4. An Orthodox Christian whose marriage has not been blessed by the Orthodox Church is no longer in good standing with the Orthodox Church and consequently is not eligible to participate in the sacraments of the Orthodox Church, including receiving Holy Communion, acting as a sponsor at an Orthodox wedding, baptism or chrismation (confirmation), or to receive an Orthodox funeral.
  5. A non-Orthodox Christian who marries an Orthodox Christian does not automatically become a member of the Orthodox Church, and is therefore not permitted to receive Holy Communion or the other Sacraments of the Orthodox Church nor an Orthodox funeral.

### **Days when marriages are not permitted:**

1. January 5 and 6
2. Great Lent and Holy Week
3. August 1 - 15
4. August 29
5. September 14

6. December 13 - 25
7. All Holy Days of our Lord (Despotikai Eortai: Christmas, Epiphany, Pascha, etc.)
8. The eve of Christmas, Epiphany, or Pentecost.

### **Prohibited Marriages:**

1. Parents with their own children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren.
2. Brothers-in-law with sisters-in-law.
3. Uncles and aunts with nieces and nephews.
4. First cousins with each other.
5. Foster parents with foster children or foster children with the children of foster parents.
6. Godparents with Godchildren or Godparents with the parents of Godchildren.

### **Wedding Reception**

Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Community of London & Vicinity has a wonderful large hall that is available for catered wedding receptions. Please see the Hellenic Community Center website: <http://helleniccentre.ca/> or contact our Facility Manager by email at [info@helleniccentre.ca](mailto:info@helleniccentre.ca) or by phone at 519-686-8466.