

WEDDING INSTRUCTION FORM

Congratulations on your engagement! We, at St. George, want to wish you all of God's blessings as you begin to prepare for your wedding day. As you know, there are many things that you'll need to decide and prepare for the wedding ceremony as well as for the reception that will follow. Below is a list of things to consider for your marriage ceremony at St. George Cathedral.

Marriage Preparation Seminars

For more than 30 years, the Metropolis (Diocese) of Boston has required that all couples getting married attend a seminar that is designed to increase the discussion and communication between the members of the couple and between the couple and the priest. Couples should, upon confirming their wedding date with the church, inquire as to when these seminars are taking place. Attending them as much as one year in advance is not too early. Whenever possible, we prefer that they occur with multiple couples present so as to learn and grow from each other's experiences and questions.

Couples that are not from St. George but attend the seminars here should be sure to speak with their own priest as soon as possible to confirm their date and all other relevant requirements from their particular parish.

In 2018, the seminars are on March 10 (note the date change), May 5 and October 6 (all at St. George in Springfield). Please call to confirm during the week prior to the seminar in case any changes may occur. There is no need to register in advance. Please allow about six hours for the seminar as it runs from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Choosing a Sponsor

The official sponsor (in Greek, *koumbaro* or *koumbara*) that you choose for your wedding is a person who represents the Church community and who exemplifies Christian character. It is preferable that this person not be related to you at all because becoming a sponsor, in the view of the Church, creates a spiritual relationship. Your relatives are already related to you. The Church prefers that you reach outside of your family and expand your spiritual family. This is a blessing that will last a lifetime for you and the sponsor.

Technically speaking, there is only one sponsor to a marriage as only one person can sign the marriage papers. However, a husband and wife may also act as the sponsor since they are one by virtue of their marriage.

Since many non-Orthodox Christians are married in the Orthodox Church, we understand that they may want to have someone special to them who is not Orthodox participate in the ceremony in some way. This may be done by honoring them as an usher/bridesmaid or as a best man/maid of honor. This is perfectly acceptable, however, the position of primacy should go to the person who is actually sponsoring the wedding.

Whoever you choose must be a baptized or chrismated Orthodox Christian who is canonically in good standing with the Church. If married, the sponsor must have been married in the Orthodox Church.

If the sponsor is from another parish, a letter must be obtained from the parish priest stating their canonical and financial good standing in that parish.

It should be emphasized that weddings cannot be performed until both the sponsor and the new couple have joined their local community and fulfilled all their responsibilities before the wedding date.

Please remember also that a wedding cannot be performed without a civil marriage license.

Joining the Church

All couples who have not been members of the Church prior to their wedding should make an appointment with Fr. Chris to discuss their stewardship, which is their contribution of time, talents and treasure to their local church. Being a supporting member of our local community is a sacred responsibility given us by our Lord Jesus Christ and should not be seen as a fee or a necessary evil in order to be married. It is the couple's responsibility to make an appointment to discuss these things.

While some may feel their financial contribution to the Church is sufficient, our faith stresses the importance of worship, of participating in the liturgical assembly where grace is bestowed, where hearts are purified and where souls are saved. Couples who plan to get married in the Orthodox Church should begin a regular schedule of attendance on Sunday mornings.

Fee Schedule

Along with your stewardship, there are some other fees that couples should consider:

There is a \$100 fee for the Marriage Preparation Seminars held prior to your wedding. This covers the cost of the materials and the processing of your ecclesiastical license. This fee is made payable to the *Metropolis of Boston* at the time when the ecclesiastical license is completed, not at the time of the seminar. Please note that a copy of your civil license is required for the processing of your ecclesiastical license. If there are any questions pertaining to this, please contact Fr. Chris as soon as possible.

There is also a \$150 fee for the use of the Cathedral. This covers the cost of the cantor and sexton who are present as well as the cost of heating or air conditioning, not for the sacrament per se. This fee should be made payable to: *St. George Cathedral* and should be submitted at least one month before your wedding date.

If you desire to have our organist play, he also charges a fee for his attendance at the rehearsal and at the wedding itself. Couples should contact Mr. Jim Evangeliou directly at 413-998-3231 to discuss fees, songs and any special requests you may have.

We are blessed at St. George to have one of the finest choirs in the area. If you desire their participation in your ceremony, the fee is just \$150. You may contact the choir director, Mrs. Joan Marcil, at 413-786-8481 for further information.

Supplies Needed for Your Ceremony

On your wedding day, there are a few things that you will need. Most obvious is the need for *two wedding rings* but, in addition, you will need to purchase *two wedding crowns* tied together with a ribbon, *two white candles* about 2 ft. in length that are also tied together with a ribbon, *a silver tray* and *some candy almonds*. We have a gift shop right in our facilities here that should be able to help you with all your needs.

Many couples will distribute a program at their wedding including a description of the ceremony. Since many people from other religious traditions are not familiar with the Orthodox wedding, it assists them greatly in understanding why we do or do not do certain things that are common to Roman Catholic, Protestant and civil ceremonies. Below are two versions, the first one being shorter than the second. If you desire, you may insert your own names into the text, thereby personalizing it a little more.

Lastly, we look forward to your wedding and hope that you will contact us with any concerns or questions you may have. May God strengthen your relationship as you seek His blessing for your marriage and your life together.

The Sacrament of Marriage

The wedding ceremony of the Greek Orthodox Church is an ancient and meaningful service that has been celebrated in its present form for more than ten centuries. Its contents however, are from long before that. The service is abundant with symbols that reflect truth of marriage: love, mutual respect, equality and sacrifice.

The ceremony consists of two separate parts which are united to each other: The Service of the Betrothal and the Sacrament of Marriage itself, called a mystery by St. Paul. Everything in the ceremony has a special meaning and significance, especially the repetition of each act three times to symbolize and to invoke the mystical presence of the Holy Trinity. The Wedding begins as the white candles are handed to the Bride and the Groom. These candles symbolize the spiritual light that burns within them and harkens back to the candle lit for them when they were baptized.

The Betrothal Service

Petitions are chanted for the spiritual welfare of the couple. The highlight during this service is the exchange of the rings. The priest blesses the rings. He holds them in his right hand and, making the sign of the cross over their heads, he essentially engages them officially and invokes God's blessings upon the imminent union. The rings are then placed on their right hands, not the left, for it was always the right hand of God that acted in the Scriptures to save His people. God's right hand enabled Moses to cross the Red Sea, Christ ascended the right hand of God the Father, and it is also to the right hand of Christ that the righteous will ascend in glory at the end of time.

The koumbaro (religious sponsor) then exchanges the rings three times. The exchange signifies that in married life, the weakness of one partner will be compensated by the strength of the other, the imperfections of one, by the perfection of the other. By themselves, the newly betrothed are incomplete, but together they are made perfect. The rite of the betrothal ends with the priest praying for true faith, concord and perfect love.

The Marriage Service

This service begins at the raising of the gospel. It consists of petitions, prayers, the crowning, readings from the New Testament, the offering of the common cup, the circling of the ceremonial table and the benediction. Not long into the service, the priest joins the right hands of The Bride and The Groom. The hands are kept joined until the end of the service to symbolize the union and the oneness of the couple.

The Crowning

This is the focal point of the marriage ceremony. The crowns are signs of the glory and honor with which God crowns them during the sacrament. The wedding crowns are joined by a ribbon which again symbolizes the unity of the couple and the presence of Christ who blesses and joins the couple and establishes them as the King and Queen of their home, which they will rule with wisdom, justice and integrity. The priest takes the two crowns and blesses The Bride and The Groom, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit and then places the crowns on them. The koumbaro then steps behind The Bride and The Groom and interchanges the crowns three times as a witness to the sealing of the union.

The Common Cup

The rite of crowning is followed by the reading of the Epistle and the Gospel. The Gospel reading describes the marriage at Cana of Galilee which was attended and blessed by Christ and for which He reserved His first miracle. There He changed the water into wine and gave it to the newlyweds. In remembrance of this blessing, wine is given to the couple. This is the "common cup" of life denoting the mutual sharing of joy and sorrow. The drinking of wine from the common cup serves to impress upon the couple that from that moment on they will share everything in life, joys as well as sorrows, and that they are to "bear one another's burdens." Their joys will be doubled and their sorrows halved because they will be shared.

The Ceremonial Walk

The priest then leads The Bride and The Groom in a circle around the table on which is placed a Cross, a symbol of our redemption by Jesus. The Bride and The Groom are taking their first steps as a married couple, and the Church, in the person of the priest who holds the Gospel, leads them in the way they must walk, following Christ's Word. During this ceremonial walk around the table a hymn is sung to the Holy Martyrs reminding the newly married couple of the sacrificial love they are to have for each other in marriage - a love that seeks not its own but is willing to sacrifice its all for the one loved.

The Removal of the Crowns

At the conclusion of the Ceremonial Walk, the priest removes the crowns from The Bride and The Groom and beseeches God to grant to the newlyweds a long, happy and fruitful life together. He then lifts up the Gospel and separates their joined hands with it, reminding them that only God can separate the couple from one another.

THE MARRIAGE RITE IN THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH: AN EXPLANATION

“O Lord, our God, crown them with glory and honor.”
(Hebrews 2:7)

From the very beginning of Christianity, the Orthodox Church has stressed the value and importance of the holy institution of marriage by according to its exceptional place in its ritual and by classifying it as one of the God-established Sacraments. Through marriage, two people, a man and a woman, are indissolubly bound together as husband and wife to maintain a Christian home, to rear a Christian family, to make their home a “little Church,” to have the love and peace and grace of God and the Holy Trinity flow into their home and between them.

The wedding ceremony, as it is performed by the Orthodox Church, consists of inspiring and symbolic ritual which is a series of actions, accompanied by beautiful and meaningful hymns and prayers. They express the sanctity and purity of marriage, the favorable position that it occupies in the eyes of God, as well as the responsibilities that it incurs. It confers on the couple God’s bountiful grace and mercy for spiritual and material blessings, fair children, concord of soul and body, harmony of heart and mind. The Orthodox Wedding ceremony is divided into two parts.

The Betrothal

The “Betrothal” or “Engagement” sometimes called “The Double Ring Ceremony” is the first part of the Orthodox Christian wedding ceremony. In this service two wedding bands, lying on the Book of Gospels in front of the couple, are blessed by the priest who then blesses the bride and the groom with the rings. The celebrant does this three times in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, first from the groom to the bride, and then from the bride to the groom. The back and forth movement can be interpreted that the man and woman are making their commitment to each other and thus entwining their lives from this time forth.



The rings are placed on the couple’s respective right hands (because the Scriptures make reference to God’s mighty right hand) and are exchanged three times on the fingers of the groom and the bride by the *paranymphos* (koumbaro) or *paranymphy* (koumbara), which is the Best Man or Maid/Matron of Honor respectively, as a further expression that the pledge being given is a solemn one. The Groom and the Bride, through this exchange of their rings express their agreement to become husband and wife. The *paranymphos* or *paranymphy* (Best Man or Maid of Honor) serves as a witness on behalf of the whole congregation to this commitment being made.

The prayer that seals this pledge refers to instances of the Old and New Testaments when rings were exchanged between nations or two people as a sign of an agreement, a contract, a covenant, a treaty, and where they invest in the other the right to act with authority on their behalf. The second part of the ceremony is the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. It is highlighted by six impressive and significant points.

The Candles

The Wedding Sacrament begins immediately following the Betrothal Service. The groom and bride are handed candles, which they hold throughout the service. The candles are symbolic of the Light of Christ, which the couple willingly receives into their lives to bless them and guide them. As He was present at their Baptism when they initially held the lighted candle, Christ is to serve as their beacon in their marriage.

The Joining of Right Hands

Following the offering of petitions for all people, and especially for the couple, three prayers are offered by the celebrant who ascribes to God the institution of marriage and the preservation and perpetuation of God's people down through the ages. These prayers invoke the blessings of God and the prayers of the parents. These prayers portray humanity as one continuous interwoven fabric into which the couple today is taking their place as husband and wife. This is done by the third prayer that is offered when the right hands of the couples are joined by the priest who calls upon God to join their souls and temperaments with the same ease and facility that He joined their hands. As the prayers are offered they are recited in the third person recognizing the fact that the priest is but an instrument and it is God who is joining the couple as husband and wife.

The Crowning Ceremony

The union is further completed by the Crowning Office. White crowns, which are the couples to preserve, are taken from the table in front of them, blessed and offered to the couple as the rings were. The crowns confirm God's blessing upon His children in the form of crowns for the new groom and bride to share as king and queen of their own household, crowned in much the same manner as the kings and queens of antiquity were honored. Thus, there is set up something that did not exist before, a new entity, a new household, a new "kingdom," a new settlement, a new "little Church." Pleased and elated that two people seek God's blessings so that their Marriage may be lasting, the Orthodox Christian Church awards them crowns, proudly chanting: "O Lord our God, crown them with glory and honor."

Two readings from the New Testament then take place: the first from St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians (5:22-33) describes the relations between the husband and the wife and is self-explanatory. The second is from the gospel of St. John and narrates the presence of Jesus at the wedding in Cana of Galilee where, after His mother asked Him, He performed His very first miracle, changing water into wine. This harks back to another "first": the action of God in paradise with Adam and Eve. As the first act of God for humans was to unite them as husband and wife, so too, the first act of Christ as He begins His public ministry was at the marriage in Cana showing His approval of the institution of Marriage. A further reading of the passage points out to us that the Mother of our Savior is always ready to point us to Christ and to take our prayers to Him for quick resolve.

The Common Cup

The "Drinking from the Common Cup" is the next point in the service in the whole series of actions that complement the whole rite of Marriage in the Orthodox Church. Following the reading of the Gospel and brief prayers, the Lord's Prayer is recited declaring our dependency on God asking at the same time for daily sustenance for the couple being joined in Holy Wedlock. Wine from the cup is given to the groom and the bride to drink symbolizing that throughout life the groom and the bride, as husband and wife, the father and mother of tomorrow, shall constantly drink from one cup in life, from one source-together, forever.

The Dance of Isaiah (The Wedding Walk)

The next event that takes place is truly a very human type of response. We say that we could dance with joy when something good happens to us. Such is the case for the Orthodox Church and the couple who are culminating the ritual of being joined together in Holy Matrimony: they literally "dance with joy." It denotes deep, heartfelt happiness and rejoicing. It is a religious dance not unlike that of Isaiah the Prophet, who, 900 years before Christ, was privileged to see, in a vision, the coming of the Messiah our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He rejoiced and was exceedingly glad. The experience he had is ascribed to be the greatest that any human soul could have. The Church, rejoicing and being glad when she unites two people in marriage, shows similar joy; as Isaiah ran around the city proclaiming his joy, so do we, the Church, the congregation (in the person of the *paranymphos* and the *paranymphy*) and the couple proclaims our happiness by forming a procession and making three circles around the couple's "personal" altar. They sing triumphant and joyous hymns referring to Isaiah's vision, the story of Christ, the beseeching intercessions of the triumphant Church in the people of the Holy Martyrs, all on behalf

of the newlyweds. Joyously exclaiming and recalling God's concern for our salvation, we sing and pray that the couple will be surrounded with similar joy all the days of their life. The priest leads the procession around the table carrying the Book of the Gospels, symbolic of the road that they will travel together and the life led by God's Word. At this point, the couple takes their first steps as husband and wife. The priest leads them giving them an indication in the way the couple should walk. Christ continually leading and yet, in the center of their life in all of their endeavors.

The Blessing

The couple escorted by the *paranymphos* and *paranymphy* return to their place and the priest, blessing the groom and bride, asks them to follow in the footsteps of couples who were faithful to God and their marriages. He also takes their crowns and places them on the altar to await there until the end of the ceremony when the crowns will be given back to them as faithful husband and wife in eternity. Thus marriage, in the final analysis, leads to salvation. The "little Church" on earth becomes a heavenly Church granting salvation to the husband and wife.

The final prayer asks God to bless them, Christ to strengthen them in this resolve, and the Holy Spirit to continually imbue their marriage with love, harmony, peace, fair children and all good things.