

## **To Schedule a Wedding at St. Mary of Egypt Orthodox Church**

1. At least one of the partners must be an active member of St. Mary of Egypt Orthodox Church, attending on Sundays and feast days and making confession and receiving Holy Communion regularly, supporting the work of the church by donating time and effort and making regular financial contributions.
2. The couple must be striving to follow the life in Christ, and may under no circumstances be “living together” as if married.
3. Be willing to meet with a priest for as many sessions as necessary to prepare for the wedding and for Christian married life.
4. Schedule the date for the wedding **only** with the blessing of the priest.
5. Read and be ready to follow the following *Guidelines* completely.

## **Guidelines for a Wedding at St. Mary of Egypt Orthodox Church**

Marriage is instituted by God for the salvation of the souls of a man and a woman, the children that God may give them, and those around them who will be touched by their love and their life of holiness. It is the union of a man and woman in Jesus Christ in such a way that they are no longer two but “one flesh.” Because it is a way of salvation, it must be prepared for very carefully. This brochure will outline the preparations required in order to have the Holy Mystery of Matrimony at St. Mary of Egypt Church.

When through prayer and Christian living a person decides he wishes to marry, the first step, as with any major decision in life, is to get the blessing from his spiritual father to pursue the married life. Only then should a man or woman begin trying to find a spouse. The proper place to look for the one to marry is within the Orthodox Church. Marriage in the Church is between Orthodox men and women. Marriage to one who is not Orthodox is a concession made reluctantly by the Church to try to keep a person from abandoning the Christian life altogether. In order for the mystery to be given by the Church, the non-Orthodox person must at least have received heterodox baptism “in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” in one of the mainline heterodox churches and must believe in the Holy Trinity. The couple must agree to raise any children God gives them in the Orthodox Faith.

When a couple has determined to be married, they should then come to the priest and request a blessing to pursue the preparation for marriage. At least one must be an active member of the church, coming regularly to confession and Holy Communion and supporting the church through efforts and regular financial contributions. They may not be “living together” as if married. If they do not meet these requirements, the priest will give them a period of time to start living a Christian life, which they must follow until the time that the priest will crown (marry) them.

There will be up to seven sessions with the priest for instruction in the precepts of Christian married life and for learning about the service itself. The couple must make these sessions a priority and not allow worldly obligations to interfere unnecessarily. The successful completion of these sessions is required before the wedding can be scheduled. The wedding can be scheduled only with the blessing of the priest. Generally, at St. Mary of Egypt Church we have weddings only on the Sundays outside any fasting season. Other criteria may also apply for selecting an appropriate date for the wedding.

If either of the partners had been married before, that partner must bring a copy of the civil divorce decree(s) ending the former marriage(s). If any former marriage was solemnized in the Orthodox Church, an ecclesiastical dissolution for that marriage must also be obtained before another marriage can be solemnized. This may well take up to a year to obtain. Under no circumstances can there be a fourth marriage, even if other marriages ended with the death of a partner.

Before the wedding the couple must obtain a civil marriage license from their county of residence (or the county of residence of one of the partners). This must be shown to the priest before he can perform the marriage ceremony. In some cases, the priest is the one who fills in the date and place of the marriage and sends the license back to the county office.

The couple may have non-Orthodox attendants, but if crowns are to be held over their heads, the attendants holding the crowns must be Orthodox. The two witnesses who will be named on the Church marriage certificate must be Orthodox. No heterodox clergy may participate in the ceremony.

If the couple wishes to have the choir sing the responses at their wedding, it is their responsibility to contact one of the choir directors and make the proper arrangements for the choir to sing. In this case, they should also invite the choir to the reception.

The reception should be in keeping with the life in Christ. If there is dancing, be aware that the clergy are required to leave the reception as soon as any dancing begins. Any comments by a master of ceremonies at the reception must be consistent with the Christian way of life.

The couple must prepare to make confession and to receive Holy Communion at least the Saturday or Sunday before the wedding. Ideally, they should commune together on the Sunday of the wedding itself. (In the case of marriage to a non-Orthodox person, only the Orthodox partner would confess and commune.)

During the marriage ceremony, after the betrothal and before the crowning, the couple must answer the following questions. They must commit the proper responses (in bold letters) to memory.

*The priest asketh the Bridegroom:*

Hast thou, *N.*, a good, free, and unconstrained will, and a firm intention to take unto thyself to wife this woman, *N.*, whom thou seest here before thee?

*And the Bridegroom answereth, saying: I have, reverend father.*

*Priest:* Thou hast not promised thyself to any other bride?

*Bridegroom: I have not promised myself, reverend father.*

*And immediately the priest, looking at the Bride, shall inquire of her, saying:*

Hast thou, *N.*, a good, free, and unconstrained will, and firm intention to take unto thyself to husband this man, *N.*, whom thou seest here before thee?

*And the Bride answereth saying: I have, reverend father.*

*Priest:* Thou hast not promised thyself to any other man?

*Bride: I have not promised myself, reverend father.*

It is our joy to participate in the uniting of a couple in Christian marriage, but it is our sacred obligation to do all we can to make sure that this holy mystery is held in the greatest of honor with joy. When a man and a woman accept the most precious gift of the grace of this holy mystery, they commit themselves to this marriage for the rest of their earthly lives. While in the Kingdom of God “they are neither married nor given in marriage,” as the Lord has said, the love that they build here grows more and more there, so that they will be together in Christ forever.