



Sacramental Guidelines of the Nebraska Exarchate

Marriages

For the sacramental union of a man and a woman to be proper in the eyes of the church, the marriage must be performed in the Orthodox Church. For such a marriage to be valid, the following must be in place:

1. No impediment to the marriage may exist, or the necessary dispensations must be obtained beforehand from the hierarch of the diocese.
2. A civil marriage license must be obtained from appropriate civil authorities.
3. The sacrament of marriage should be performed by an Orthodox priest in the church of the bride's parish in accordance with the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church.
4. The pastor must receive necessary dispensations (from his bishop), if they are required for the marriage.
5. Before proceeding with arrangements for a marriage ceremony, the pastor must verify:
 - a. That the parties in question are not already married either in this country or elsewhere.
 - b. Those desiring marriage must be members in good standing both from a spiritual and temporal perspective in the parish for at least one year prior to the marriage date.
 - c. If either or both parties are widowed, they must present the death certificate of the deceased spouse.
 - d. If either or both of the parties have been civilly divorced and have civilly remarried, determination is made that civil marriages bear no validity.
6. No more than a total of three valid (i.e. Orthodox) marriages are permitted by the Church.
7. When one or both parties is divorced, they must obtain a decree of annulment of their former marriage from the bishop.
8. In the case of mixed marriage, the non-Orthodox party must be a Christian who is baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity. A marriage cannot be solemnized between an Orthodox Christian and a non-baptized person.
9. In the case of a mixed marriage between an Orthodox Christian and a non-Orthodox Christian, the marriage must be celebrated by an Orthodox priest in the Orthodox Church according to Orthodox liturgical tradition. The parties must promise solemnly and in writing that any children born of the marriage will be reared and raised in the Orthodox Church.

10. Mixed marriages can be celebrated only in the Orthodox Church. Double ceremonies are not permitted to believers, since the Orthodox ceremony is alone sufficient for sacramental grace. In cases where dual ceremonies are planned, the marriage cannot take place in the Orthodox Church.
11. Since two witnesses are required by law, ideally they should both be Orthodox. However, for the validity of the sacrament, only one is necessary. This witness must be a practicing Orthodox Christian. A person who does not belong to an Orthodox parish, does not receive the sacraments regularly, or who, if married, is not married in an Orthodox Church, cannot enjoy the dignity of a marriage witness. Non-Orthodox members may comprise the remainder of the wedding party since they serve no spiritual or religious purpose.
12. The couple contemplating marriage cannot compose their own marriage ceremony. The Service of Holy Matrimony in the Service book is to be used. No music, other than that which is part of our sacred musical tradition, is permitted to be sung.
13. If the couple requests the special presence of a priest of another canonical Orthodox diocese, the invitation must be extended to him through the officiating priest. If the couple requests the special presence of a priest of the Roman Catholic Church, the invitation must be extended to him through the officiating priest. Since no priesthood exists in the Protestant tradition, and no sacrament is acknowledged in contracting the marriage, participation by a Protestant minister would be a moot point.

Days When Marriage Ceremonies Are Not Permitted

- Nativity Fast (Orthodox Advent)
- Great Lent and Holy Week
- Feast of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist
- Feast of the Elevation of the Cross
- Dormition Fast
- On Wednesday and Friday

Marriages may be performed on these days if absolutely necessary and for reasons of urgent importance only with special dispensation from the diocesan hierarchy.

Mixed Marriages

It is a fact that more things which the proposed couple have in common, particularly their common faith and spiritual life, the more likely it will be that they live their married life in sacramental grace, peace and harmony. Shared faith and traditions spare newlyweds and their children many serious problems and strengthen the bond between them. However, Orthodoxy does solemnize mixed marriages under the following conditions:

1. Necessary dispensations must be secured by the pastor regarding permission for an Orthodox Christian to marry a non-Orthodox Christian.
2. The non-Orthodox party must have been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity.

3. The couple must be willing and able to baptize their children in the Orthodox Church and nurture them in accordance with the Orthodox faith.

If these conditions are not met, the pastor is not free to solemnize the marriage. If the Orthodox party enters an attempted marriage in a non-Orthodox setting, the marriage is not valid in the eyes of the Church. The Orthodox party must then bear in mind that a married Orthodox Christian, whose marriage has not been solemnized in the Orthodox Church, is no longer in good standing with the Church and consequently does not have the right to receive the Sacraments of the Church or to be eligible to become a witness or sponsor at another marriage, baptism or Chrismation. They are also excluded from Orthodox burial unless they repent and return to the unity of the Church. An Orthodox Christian who has attempted marriage outside of Orthodoxy and wishes to be reconciled with the Church is encouraged to request such from the local Orthodox priest so that the necessary remedies might be applied and integration into the salutary life of the Church take place.

A non-Orthodox Christian who marries an Orthodox Christian does not automatically become a member of the Church and is therefore not admitted to the sacraments, particularly the Holy Eucharist.

Prohibited Marriages Among Believers

1. First Group: Parents with their own children, grandparents or great-grandchildren.
2. Second Group: Brothers-in-law with sisters-in-law.
3. Third Group: Uncles and aunts with nieces and nephews.
4. Fourth Group: First cousins with each other and second cousins with each other.
5. Fifth Group: Foster parents with foster children or foster children with other children of common foster parents.
6. Sixth Group: Godparents with godchildren or godparents with the parents of godchildren.

Marriage Celebration Outside The Parish Church

Heterodox chapels, seminary chapels, college chapels – all need the express approval of the diocesan hierarch to be used as a location for a marriage celebration. Circumstances will be taken into consideration before a blessing is bestowed. It should also be remembered that the holy temple (Orthodox church building) is the normal location for the wedding. The Sacrament of Marriage cannot be celebrated in a garden, poolside, parks, in vehicles of public transportation, etc.

Divorce, Annulment Of Marriage

An ecclesiastical annulment (or *Decree of Spiritual Death*) may be granted only after a civil decree has been obtained. However, the spiritual father or parish pastor must exert every effort to reconcile the couple and avert a divorce, if this is spiritually and humanly possible. Should the pastor fail to effect reconciliation, he will undergo the necessary direction and assist the party or parties in seeking an ecclesiastical annulment of the marriage. Full particulars may be obtained by writing to the diocesan Chancellery Office.

No priest is free to solemnize a marriage, even if a need is apparent, before the necessary decrees are issued by the bishop. No date of a proposed marriage may be set until such decree is obtained.

Baptisms

Both sponsors for a baptized Orthodox child should be Orthodox. Though it is difficult to imagine why faithful Orthodox parents would think of asking a non-Orthodox party to sponsor their child for this sacrament, our pluralistic society makes many demands upon us. However, at least one of the sponsors at Baptism and Chrismation must be Orthodox. A person who has been excommunicated or anathematized by the Church; or who, if married, has married outside the Orthodox Church, may not become a godparent. People living together in a common law relationship may not serve as godparents.

Sponsors In Non-Orthodox Churches

Roman Catholic and Byzantine Catholic Churches require at least one sponsor at Baptism who is of their faith. Many times our faithful are asked to sponsor a child in their church. We cannot encourage our faithful to become sponsors for other communions, because of the theological variance, which exists between our churches. Orthodox believers should simply respond when called upon that our Orthodox Church does not permit our participation in the faith practices of other churches.

Funerals

Requiem Liturgy and Funeral Services are permitted any day of the year, except on Sundays, unless it is most urgent and absolutely necessary while specific permission is secured from the bishop.

Memorial Services

Requiem Services may not be held on the following days:

1. From Lazarus Saturday (day before Palm Sunday) through the Sunday of St. Thomas (Sunday after Pascha)
2. Nativity (Christmas) and the Feast of the Resurrection (Pascha).
3. Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos

It is highly recommended that Orthodox Christians offer and request memorials and liturgies for the souls of their beloved departed and participate in the universal remembrance of departed souls on the five Soul Saturdays.