

ST. KATHERINE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

Chandler, AZ

Wedding Requirements, Information Guidelines & Policies

The sacrament of Marriage is truly a “great mystery,” the mystery of the meeting of human love and divine love, the very sign and image of God’s presence with humanity. The mystery is two people becoming one flesh, a mystical and true union of persons. In view of this “ecclesial” dimension of marriage, all weddings must be performed in the Church for the union to be recognized and affirmed.

While there are many things involved when preparing for a wedding in the Orthodox Church, we want to offer a few important notes below, including a series of premarital counseling meetings. We anticipate that you will have some questions so feel free to contact the Church Office for more information.

I. Requirements Prior to the Wedding

Church Membership

One or both members of the engaged couple must be a member in good standing with St. Katherine Greek Orthodox Church. A member in good standing participates in the life of the Church sacramentally, attends the divine services, and offers their time and talents for the benefit of the mission of the Church. A member in good standing is also one who financially supports the Church so that it may continue in the good works of ministering to the faithful and provide outreach to those in need. As such, it is required that the couple submit a Stewardship Commitment Form with a minimum commitment of \$1,000, paid in full prior to the wedding. If this presents a financial hardship, please speak with the parish priest. This financial donation is not “payment” for the sacrament, but rather an expression of one’s gratitude for all they have received from God.

Preparing for a wedding can be a very hectic time for couples. For this reason, it's important to remember, as all the practical arrangements begin to mount, that you do not lose sight of the great mystery that you will receive of being "yoked" together by Christ, to become "one flesh." Marriage is your opportunity to begin a new life together as one in Christ and to move forward together as one. This is a lifelong commitment of actively living your Orthodox Christian faith together as you help one another prepare for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Previously Married Couples

If one of the spouses has been previously married and divorced, he/she must present a copy of the Civil Divorce Decree. If a previous marriage took place in the Orthodox Church, the divorced spouse must also have received a "Decree of Ecclesiastical Divorce" document and submit the original along with the Marriage Application. If an Ecclesiastical Divorce Decree has not been given by the Bishop, the wedding service cannot take place. Please be advised, the process of an Ecclesiastical Divorce can take a few months so make sure to speak with the parish priest about this process if applicable.

Interfaith Marriages

The Orthodox Church permits interfaith marriages under the following conditions:

- The non-Orthodox Bride/Groom must be a Christian who has been baptized by a recognized Christian denomination of the Greek Orthodox Church, and a copy of their baptismal certificate is required.
- The couple must also be willing to baptize their children in the Orthodox Church.

Choosing a Sponsor (Koumbaros/Koumbara)

In the wedding ceremony the Orthodox Church requires a Sponsor (Koumbaros – male, Koumbara – female). The Sponsor stands as a witness on behalf of the Orthodox Church during the ceremony.

The Role of the Sponsor

The Sponsor participates in the mystery of marriage by performing the “exchange of rings” and the “exchange of crowns” during the ceremony. If there are two Orthodox Christian Sponsors, one may exchange the rings and the other the crowns. By participating in the sacrament in this manner, the sponsor is making a pledge to be a guide and support to the marriage. Customarily, it is also the Sponsor who (if the couple agrees) becomes the godparent of the couple’s first child.

Requirements to Serve as a Sponsor:

- The koumbaros/koumbara must be an Orthodox Christian and a member in good standing of the Orthodox Church they attend; there are no exceptions to this rule.
- If he/she belongs to another Orthodox parish, the priest must receive a letter of their good standing from the person’s parish priest if they are not members of St. Katherine.
- If the koumbaros/koumbara is married, their marriage must have been performed in an Orthodox Church. If they have been divorced (after their marriage in the Orthodox Church) a copy of the ecclesiastical divorce decree must be provided.

Best Man & Maid of Honor

Couples may still designate a Best Man and/or Maid of Honor who are not members of the Orthodox Church. They may stand next to the groom or bride but do not assume the role of a koumbaros/koumbara, nor do they perform the exchange of rings or crowns.

Reserving and Setting a Wedding Date with the Church:

Reservations for Wedding dates are made during a scheduled appointment with the priest by the couple being married. Please do not reserve St. Katherine’s Community Center, or any other venue, or print invitations without confirming with the priest that the Church is available for your wedding. Due to the time required for *pre-marital preparation at least 3-4 months* are needed to complete all that is required in order to be married in the Church.

II. Items Needed for Your Wedding Day

The couple will need to decide which of the following items are to be provided by the Sponsor or themselves:

- Two Wedding Rings (always provided by the spouses).
- The Crowns (*Stephana*) are typically provided by the Koumbaros/Koumbara.
- Two decorated candles (usually come with the *Stephana*).
- A silver wedding tray is typically filled with sweet (white) candy coated almonds (*koufeta*). The Church can provide a tray if needed.

III. Prepare & Enrich Pre-Marital Requirement

In order to provide the engaged couple with every opportunity to enjoy all the blessings of married life, participation in the Prepare/Enrich Premarital Program is required by the Metropolis of San Francisco.

PREPARE/ENRICH is a customized couples assessment completed online that identifies a couple's strength and growth areas. Based on a couple's assessment results, the parish clergy will provide 4 one hour (or) 2 two hour feedback sessions. In order to take this Premarital Inventory, you will need to speak with the priest who will help with setting this up for you.

IV. Documents Needed for the Church License to Marry

At your first meeting with the priest you will apply for the Church license to marry by filling out the Marriage Affidavit form. The following information is required to complete the application to be married in the Church.

- Baptismal certificates/dates for both the Bride and the Groom.
- If the Bride or Groom was previously married and subsequently divorced, a copy of the civil divorce decree must be presented.
- If the Bride and Groom are already civilly married, a copy of the Certificate of Marriage must be presented.
- If the Bride or Groom was married before in the Orthodox Church, they must present the original Church divorce certificate.

V. Civil Marriage License (Arizona Only)

Couples are required by law to obtain a Civil Marriage License from the city in order for the priest to marry them in the Church. Once you have obtained the license please submit it to the Church office by _____. The License will be signed at the conclusion of the Wedding ceremony by the priest, the Bride and Groom, and two witnesses. You may be required to provide a driver's license as proof of age. Please note that both parties must be present to obtain a marriage license. Civil Marriage Licenses can be obtained from the Northeast Regional Court Center (602) 506 - 3360. It is located at 18380 N. 40th Street, Suite 120, Phoenix, AZ, 85032. They are open Monday - Friday, 8:00 AM - 4:30 PM. A fee is required payable in the form of check or money order to: "The Clerk of the Superior Court."

VI. Preparation for the Mystery of Marriage

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. Ideally, the couple is participating in these holy mysteries throughout the year as part of their life in the Church and relationship with Christ.

VII. Sexual Relations Prior to Marriage

Marriage in the Orthodox Church is a holy mystery where the couple come seeking Christ's blessing for their union and life together. As with any mystery of the Church, the person's life reflects their love for God and their desire to live according to the life-giving teachings and commandments of God, which includes sexual abstinence before marriage.

The union of two people must be blessed by Christ first before a couple joins themselves together physically. If a couple is engaging in sexual relations already, they should agree to abstain, confess to their spiritual father and cease engaging in sexual relations until after Christ has united them. Sexual abstinence is a spiritual discipline that married couples use to deepen their faith in Christ by dedicating themselves to a life in Christ.

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 does not condone a couple living together prior to the marriage. Statistics show a higher divorce rate among couples who have lived together prior to their weddings than those who have not. "Trying out" the married life by living together does not yield good results. Following the way of abstinence and faithfulness to God, however, is a more proven path as God blesses our faith and commitment to Him.

VII. Frequently Asked Questions

Invitations to the Reception

Invitations should not be printed until the date and time for the wedding have been confirmed with the parish priest.

Church Fees

If at least one member of the couple is a member in good standing in the Orthodox Church, there are no fees. See above: (Requirements Prior to the Wedding / Church Membership). Providing an honorarium to the priest and/or the wedding assistant is at your own discretion.

Parishioners who are not active stewards of St. Katherine's or are from another Orthodox Metropolis, Jurisdiction, or from Canada, need to provide \$1,000 to St. Katherine Greek Orthodox Church and submit a letter of good standing from their home parish. This payment is due in full at the signing of the wedding papers and in order to reserve the Church.

St. Katherine's Community Center

If you are considering the Community Center at St. Katherine's as a possible venue for your wedding reception, please contact: Vange Archuleta: 480-390-4230 or email: varchuleta@cox.net

Priest

Either the parish priest or wedding assistant will conduct the wedding rehearsals. It is the parish priest, however, who will conduct your premarital counseling session using the Prepare/Enrich Premarital Inventory (see above).

Chanter

All weddings require a chanter. Arrangements will be made through the priest conducting the wedding. It is customary to offer the chanter a \$100 honorarium for their services.

Organist

St. Katherine's does not have an organ. In lieu of an organ, classical wedding music can be played over the sound system for the procession and recession if so desired.

Music Options for your Wedding

Other options for music during wedding processional & recessional:

- A "string quartet"
- The Chanter can sing the traditional hymns for the wedding service

Purchasing Crowns & Candles for the Wedding

You can purchase Orthodox wedding crowns and candles through the internet. Here are some websites:

<https://www.dahliaweddingsandbaptisms.com/>

<https://www.crownstefana.com/>

<https://www.orthodoxweddingcrowns.com/>

<https://lotusflowerdesign.com/>

Location of the Wedding Sacrament

Weddings are not permitted to take place at any venue other than within an Orthodox Church (i.e. a home, resort, hotel or local park, etc.).

Flowers in the church

Floral decorations are allowed on the pew ends and/or in front of the sanctuary. The florist must contact the Church Office and make arrangements for the Church to be opened prior to the ceremony. One hour prior to the wedding is the usual time given. Flower girls are allowed to use ONLY silk rose petals in the Church. If real petals are used and professional cleaning services are needed the wedding party will be responsible for all related costs.

Runners

A runner may be used as long as it is removed at the conclusion of the ceremony.

Photographer

Flash photography is not permitted during the marriage ceremony but is allowed at all other times. Most professional do not need to use a flash at St. Katherine's since we have good natural light. A videographer is also allowed; however, they must not have bulky and oversized stands and equipment. It is advised that the photographer and/or videographer speak with the priest concerning restrictions just prior to the ceremony.

Bridesmaids' Dresses

A sense of modesty must be maintained in the Church. Every wedding takes place in God's holy house and requires a corresponding sense of decorum. Low cut dresses or bare shoulders are not permitted. If the style of the dresses have thin straps, the bridesmaids should wear a shawl or some other type of cover over the shoulders.

Groomsmen & Ushers

Non-Orthodox persons may act as ushers or bridesmaids at an Orthodox Wedding, but the koumbaros/koumbara must be an Orthodox Christian, as stated earlier.

Length of the Wedding Ceremony/Arrival Time

The wedding ceremony is approximately 40 minutes long. Weddings are scheduled for 2 1/2 hours apart. Each wedding party will have up to one hour prior to the scheduled wedding time for access to the Church. If more time is needed, please consult with the priest or the wedding assistant.

Non-Orthodox Clergy

- The Orthodox wedding ceremony does not permit the active participation of non-Orthodox clergy during the ceremony.
- If the non-Orthodox spouse would like to have their priest/pastor offer some words, they may do so at the time of the reception.

Vows

The first part of the wedding ceremony is the betrothal or the "Service of the Promise" in which the couple's commitment to each other is sealed with their commitment to Christ. Neither in the Betrothal or Wedding service are vows exchanged.

Non-Orthodox Spouses

A non-Orthodox Christian spouse who desires to marry an Orthodox Christian does not automatically become a member of the Orthodox Church. If they are considering becoming an Orthodox Christian, please have them speak with the parish priest.

Days When Marriages Are Not Permitted

There are several days when it is not permitted to celebrate weddings in the Orthodox Church. Please make sure to look at these dates when considering the date of your wedding.

Date:

Feast:

August 1 – 15	Fast of the Dormition of the Theotokos
August 6	Transfiguration of Christ
August 29	Beheading of John the Baptist
September 14	Exaltation of the Precious Cross
December 13 – 25	Christmas Fast
January 5 & 6	The Eve and Day of Theophany
February 2	Entrance into the Temple
Moveable Days	Pascha/Easter, Pentecost, Ascension
Great Lent & Holy Week	Dates vary from year to year