

4. Finally, Joe is counseled to have a private conversation with his mother and respectfully inform her that her opinions and expectations are valued, but that he and Maria will make the decision about their baby's baptism based on what they believe to be best for their child. While Joe's mother wasn't initially enamored with the couple's decision, she eventually accepted it.

### Concluding Observations

Deciding when and where your children will be baptized isn't always easy for parents who come from different religious and cultural backgrounds. However, as difficult as it might be, discussions prior to marriage can help. Further, if you first consider the well-being of the children and secondarily the preferences of the extended family, you are better positioned to make healthy, holy decisions. Finally, if you find yourselves gridlocked, getting outside help can be helpful.

During the decision-making process one or both partners may become angry, frustrated and resentful. However, if the strategies outlined above are prayerfully applied, then the Holy Spirit will facilitate repentance and forgiveness when appropriate, as well as healing, oneness, and meaningful, mutually satisfying decisions.

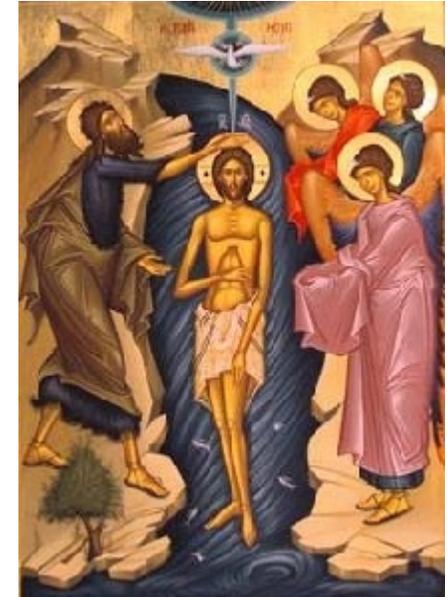
*A complete version of this article is located on the Interfaith Marriage Web site ([www.interfaith.goarch.org](http://www.interfaith.goarch.org)). My thanks to Pres. Kerry Pappas, M.A., LAMFT for the editing work she did on this abridged version.*

## Part II

### Where Will Our Children Be Baptized and Raised?

*Rev. Fr. Charles Joanides, Ph.D.,  
LMFT*

#### Successful Strategies:



#### \*Talk Before Marriage

Couples who talk about the baptisms of their future children before marriage generally find these discussions to be profitable. They maintain that open, respectful and prayerful discussion works best. This approach proves especially useful when both partners have strong religious convictions, as indicated by the following statement of a non-Orthodox partner:

*"It was a good thing we engaged in some discussion. . . . We're both committed to our*

#### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

INTERFAITH WEB SITE  
[www.Interfaith.goarch.org](http://www.Interfaith.goarch.org)

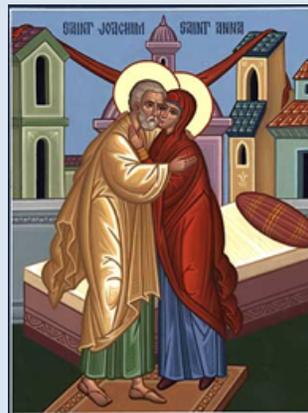
Center for Family Care  
[www.family.goarch.org](http://www.family.goarch.org)

OUTREACH & EVANGELISM WEB SITE  
[www.Outreach.goarch.org](http://www.Outreach.goarch.org)

#### PUBLICATIONS

By Charles Joanides, Ph.D., LMFT

*When You Intermarry  
Ministering to Intermarried Couples  
Attending to Your Marriage*



Marriage and Family

Department of Marriage and Family



Produced by the Department of  
Marriage and Family  
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

*churches and would have had lots of problems if we hadn't done some thinking and talking about this before marriage . . . . It was hard stuff to discuss, but we settled most of our issues before the wedding. . . . I think [these discussions] made us a stronger couple and family after marriage. I also have no doubt that our children benefited."*

### **\*Seek Outside Help**

What if you and your fiancée can't agree on when and where to baptize your future children? If such a conversation will create more problems than it will solve, it may be beneficial to get outside help.

In most cases, it is best to begin with your respective pastors. If this isn't possible, then the next best option is to consult a professional who is comfortable working with couples and religious populations. You can expect the counseling to last between two to four months. If this sounds like too much time and effort, then perhaps the following exchange from a couple who ignored this issue before marriage will help you to reconsider.

*Wife:* "I knew we had problems. I just didn't know how bad they were. Anyway, I decided to get married, believing we'd figure things out after marriage. Boy was I wrong."

*Husband:* Like my wife, I thought we could iron out our differences after marriage, but we didn't. Matters only got worse. If you know of any engaged couples with serious issues surrounding the baptism

and religious training of their future children, tell them to figure things out before they get married, or postpone the marriage until they work through the issues.

*Wife:* "This issue was almost a deal breaker for us after we got married. We're lucky to have found someone who could help. . . . If you never talked about this before marriage, and now you're married and can't figure things out, get some help."

### **\*Consider the Well-Being of the Children First**

My research indicates that couples who make their children's religious and spiritual well-being primary and their personal expectations and preferences secondary are more likely to avoid or break a deadlock, as indicated by the following remark:

*"We were going in circles on this issue until I decided that my stay-at-home wife would likely be the one to assume responsibility for our children's religious training, so I gave in for the sake of the children, our family and our marriage. . . . this wasn't easy, and I still sometimes second guess myself and wonder if I made the right choice, especially when I think about things from a selfish perspective, but . . . I'm at peace with my decision. . . . I don't think God wanted us to continue arguing over this issue."*

### **Extended Family Intrusions**

Extended family intrusions can also complicate matters when couples are trying to make a decision about the baptisms of their children. The following scenario illustrates this point, while also outlining some strategies that can help couples get past extended family intrusions.

Maria informs Joe that she is pregnant. A few minutes later, his mother calls. Without thinking, Joe shares the good news. Almost immediately she begins making plans to consult their pastor. Joe doesn't know what to do, so he listens politely without comment. However, when he informs his wife, she becomes upset; they argue and go to bed angry. The next day they decide to consult Joe's pastor for help. He listens to them and offers the following guidelines:

1. He counsels the couple to find a mutually acceptable resolution apart from their parents.
2. After agreeing on a resolution to the dilemma, he counsels them to meet with each set of parents to respectfully listen to their suggestions and needs, and to clearly indicate that their decisions will be, first and foremost, predicated on what they as parents think is best for their children.
3. He further counsels them that ideally they should both be present when these boundaries are drawn. However, if one or both partners believe it is best if each partner approaches his/her parents privately, both partners need to agree on the boundaries and decisions they will convey to their parents.