



Father Charles,

*My fiancé is Jewish and I am Greek Orthodox. We are of the understanding that we cannot be married in an Orthodox Church, because of her religion. I love this woman with all my heart, we're soul mates to an extent. What should I do? Is there anybody that could marry us and have a ceremony that is Greek Orthodox, even outside of a church? Also, I want to know if there is any way that I can remain in good standing with the church if I marry her and she does not convert. And finally, given the increased numbers of interreligious marriages that Orthodox faithful are entering, I heard that some theologians have called for a reexamination of the Orthodox Church's pastoral guidelines for marriages! Has anything happened to this date?*

*An E-mail Respondent*

*Dear Friend in Christ,*

*I pray that this information will help you better understand the Orthodox Church's position regarding interreligious marriages. Should you have additional questions or observations, please write back.*

## **MARRIAGE FROM AN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE**

From an Orthodox perspective, marriage is a lifestyle that facilitates both partners' religious and spiritual journey. It also serves to cultivate their future children's religious and spiritual development. For these reasons, for centuries Orthodox Canon Law discouraged intermarriage of any type. Moreover, Orthodox faithful who chose to intermarry forfeited their sacramental privileges.

### **INTER-CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES**

With the increase of inter-Christian marriages around the world in the late 19th century, a large part of the Orthodox Church (which includes the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America) determined to modify its position regarding these types of marriages. As long as a couple was willing to meet the following conditions, Orthodox Christians could remain in good standing with their Church.

1. Their wedding needed to take place in an Orthodox Church.
2. The non-Orthodox Christian partner needed to be baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity and in water.
3. The couple needed to agree to try and raise their children in the Orthodox Church.

Finally, even though the Orthodox Church believed that these couples would encounter many additional challenges, it decided to modify its position because it also believed that inter-Christian partner's belief systems are sufficiently compatible to permit individual, couple and family religious and spiritual growth.

## **INTERRELIGIOUS MARRIAGES**

Conversely, the Orthodox Church continues to hold to a more jaundiced view of interreligious marriage. It believes that the differences between both partners' belief systems preclude individual, couple and family religious and spiritual development. As a result, it continues to discourage its faithful from entering interreligious marriages. Orthodox Christians who decide to enter an interreligious marriage (a) will be unable to wed in the Orthodox Church, and (b) lose their sacramental privileges.

In light of the growing numbers of interreligious marriages that Orthodox faithful are entering, some Orthodox theologians have called for a reexamination of the Church's position regarding this issue. To date, nothing substantive has been done to address this subject. However, if the numbers of interreligious marriages continue to grow, I suspect this issue will command more of the Church's attention in the future.

### **SPOUSE'S & COUPLE'S RESPONSE**

When interreligious engaged spouses and couples have obtained the above information, here are some of their typical reactions.

Many have reported experiencing some initial confusion, distress and anger. These emotions have compelled a substantial number to seek more information. While many will ultimately disagree with what they find, their efforts will assist them in obtaining a clearer understanding of the consequences of their choices.

A few couples have postponed their wedding date in an effort to reexamine their decision to enter an interreligious marriage. In these cases, some non-Orthodox partner's have chosen to consider conversion.



Some Orthodox Christian partners have determined to attend the Divine Liturgy without participating in the sacraments. Many of these individuals have also determined to baptize their children in the Orthodox Church.

Others have left the Church. Many of these individuals continue to identify with their ethnic background, but no longer actively practice their Orthodox faith.

A few have chosen to write their Bishop for additional clarification and guidance. You shall remain in my prayers.

God bless you,  
Fr. Charles

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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

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

**PUBLICATIONS**  
*When You Intermarry*  
By Charles Joanides PhD, LMFT

*Ministering to Intermarried Couples*  
By Charles Joanides PhD, LMFT

*Attending to Your Marriage*  
By Charles Joanides PhD, LMFT

**OUTREACH & EVANGELISM:**  
*Some Practical Steps*  
Department of Outreach & Evangelism



# INTER-RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE and the ORTHODOX CHURCH



Icon by the hand of Athanasios Clark

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