In our increasingly pluralistic society, the majority of marriages throughout the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America have brought together Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christians. The Orthodox Church sincerely respects other faith traditions and at the same time seeks to protect her own theological integrity. As studies have revealed a lack of awareness of the Orthodox Church's rules as they pertain to the sacrament of marriage, the following pastoral guidelines are offered as a guide for Greek Orthodox priests and for couples who are considering intermarriage or are presently intermarried. These guidelines flow out of a theological understanding of the sacrament of marriage and the desire to assist couples in their efforts to cultivate an Orthodox Christian environment in their homes.

The Orthodox Church permits the marriage of an Orthodox Christian and another Trinitarian Christian through the Orthodox concept of economia (a type of theological tolerance). The Church's concern is for each person's salvation, and therefore does not desire to place an insurmountable obstacle before her faithful by denying the Sacrament of Marriage to those who seek an inter-Christian marriage.

As the Sacrament of Marriage is a Christian ceremony, the Orthodox Church does not perform the Sacrament of Marriage for an Orthodox Christian and an un-baptized person. Non-Orthodox Christians wishing to be married in the Orthodox Church must have been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity. The marriage of two non-Orthodox Christians may not take place in the Orthodox Church. It is required that one individual be an Orthodox Christian in good standing¹ of his or her parish.

In order to remain in proper canonical and spiritual standing with the Orthodox Church, Orthodox

Christians must be married by an Orthodox priest, in an Orthodox Church, and in the manner prescribed by the priest's service book.

Couples marrying in the Orthodox Church must also commit themselves to baptizing and raising their children in the Orthodox Church. Orthodox Christians who choose to baptize their future children in their partner's church call into question their desire to truly live an Orthodox lifestyle. Such a decision also affects the Orthodox partner's standing with his or her Church.

Since only Orthodox Christians are permitted to participate in the Orthodox Church's sacraments, sponsors exchanging the wedding rings and crowns must be Orthodox Christians in good standing. The sponsor in an Orthodox Christian wedding is more than a legal witness. The sponsor serves as a spokesperson for the Orthodox congregation affirming the spiritual preparedness of the couple to enter into the community of marriage.

Orthodox partners should be aware that if their marriage is not solemnized by the Orthodox Church, they are no longer in good standing and are not permitted to receive the sacraments or participate in the sacraments as a sponsor² in the Orthodox Church. Marriage outside the Orthodox Church also precludes an Orthodox Christian burial.

Double performance of the wedding service in both the Orthodox Church and another Church is not encouraged. This guideline is relaxed when an Orthodox Christian has been married outside of the Orthodox Church and wishes to return to canonical and spiritual good standing in the Orthodox Church. In such a case, the Orthodox priest must first receive permission from his bishop.

Co-celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage by Orthodox and non-Orthodox clergy is not permitted. Non-Orthodox clergy may attend the Orthodox ceremony and offer a benediction to the couple as well as prayerful words of exhortation.

Inter-Christian couples who desire the presence of non-Orthodox clergy during the Sacrament of Marriage should inform their Orthodox pastor well in advance of the ceremony and before an invitation is extended to the non-Orthodox clergy. The Orthodox priest will then seek the local Bishop's permission to extend such an invitation.

Inter-Christian couples should also be made aware of the following additional procedures.

- The Orthodox priest will extend the invitation to the non-Orthodox clergyman. At that time, the Orthodox priest will respectfully state that a co-celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage is not permitted since the Orthodox Church does not permit non-Orthodox clergy to participate in the sacraments.
- The Orthodox priest will clearly advise the guest clergyman on matters of appropriate vesture and seating (which is generally, but not always, located in a prominent place on the Solea³). Additionally, he will also clearly indicate that the guest clergy will be properly acknowledged and permitted to give a benediction, and address the couple with some words, good wishes, and an exhortation at the conclusion of the Sacrament of Marriage.
- The couple should also be told that wedding invitations and newspaper announcements must clearly distinguish between the Orthodox celebrant and the guest clergy. Terms such as "assisted" or "participated" should be avoided. Optional descriptors such as "was present" or "was present and subsequently gave a blessing"

should be selected and utilized so as to clearly describe the non-Orthodox visiting cleric's role. In addition, Orthodox Priests who are invited to attend non-Orthodox wedding services may only attend as guests.

Inter-Christian couples are also respectfully informed that non-Orthodox Christians who marry in the Orthodox Church do not subsequently have sacramental privileges in the Orthodox Church. Because of the Orthodox Church's position on sacramental participation, only those who are in good standing canonically and spiritually have sacramental privileges. Similarly, intermarried couples should also be aware that only Orthodox Christians who are in good standing canonically and spiritually are: (a) permitted an Orthodox Funeral Service, (b) and allowed to serve on the Parish Council, (c) permitted to vote in parish elections, and (d) permitted to serve as godparents or sponsors at baptisms and weddings.

If you have questions or concerns, consult your parish priest or contact the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Center for Family Care (joanidesch@aol.com).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

INTERFAITH WEB SITE www.Interfaith.goarch.org

OUTREACH & EVANGELISM WEB SITE www.Outreach.goarch.org

PUBLICATIONS
When You Intermarry
By Charles Joanides, Ph.D, LMFT

Ministering to Intermarried Couples
By Charles Joanides ,Ph.D, LMFT

Attending to Your Marriage
By Charles Joanides, Ph.D, LMFT

OUTREACH & EVANGELISM:

Some Practical Steps

Department of Outreach & Evangelism



Pastoral Guidelines for Intermarriage



Icon by the hand of Athanasios Clark

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

¹ According to the Special Regulations and Uniform Parish Regulations of the GOA (Article VI, Section 1), "Any person, eighteen years of age or over, who has been baptized according to the rites of the Church, or was received into the Church through Chrismation, who lives according to the faith and canons of the Church, who has met his financial obligation to the Parish and abides by the regulations herein and the by-laws of the Parish, is a member in good standing of the Parish."

² The term sponsor is a generic term that refers to either the paranymphos or paranymphy who exchanges the rings and crowns during the Sacrament of Marriage or the godparent during the Sacrament of Baptism.

 $^{^3}$ This is the area directly in front of the Iconostasis (Icon Screen) in all Orthodox Churches