

GETTING MARRIED IN THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

In the Orthodox Church, the ritual of marriage is not just a service, but a sacrament. Marriage is therefore a channel for the conveyance of the grace of God upon a man and a woman who have freely asked for it, in order to bring about in them a permanent change by making "the two of them one flesh", and to enable them to attain the change that marriage has in view: the preservation and increase of the human race; the promotion of helpfulness; the restraint of passions and their submission to the moral law; and the Christian upbringing of children. From the very beginning, marriage was regarded in the Church as a sacred union of body and soul for the propagation of civil society and the kingdom of God, and for the exercise of virtue and the promotion of happiness.

Marriage has both ecclesiastical (Orthodox Church) and civil (Australian Government) prerequisites and requirements. Certain forms and procedures are needed before any marriage can take place in the Church. A couple wishing to marry in the Greek Orthodox Church must give at least one month's written notice to the Priest who it is intended will conduct the ceremony. They must check well before the intended date to ensure that the day and time are available.

Fees are payable to the Archdiocese and to the Parish for documents issued and for the ceremony. If the service is held away from the Parish area, then it is expected that a donation to cover travelling expenses will be offered.

It is usual for the Priest to perform the Church and legal marriage requirements simultaneously at the Church service. All those undergoing a civil (legal) marriage in Australia must complete a '*Notice of Intended Marriage*' Form 13. This form must be signed by the couple, witnessed by a specified official and received by the intended celebrant within the prescribed time limit.

In Australia, it is allowable for a couple to undergo a religious (Church) marriage service any time after their legal marriage ceremony. Those who are already legally married, or who *will* undergo a legal marriage service prior to their Orthodox marriage service, must show their legal Marriage Certificate and make the required written declaration to the Priest *before* the Orthodox Church marriage can take place.

The Australian Government leaflet '*Happily Ever ... Before & After*' Form 14A, must be provided to all those intending to legally marry in Australia. Where the Church marriage is also the legal marriage, this will be provided to the couple by the Priest. This leaflet mentions the availability of marriage counselling and marriage education. The Priest can also provide the couple with a list of approved organisations that can provide these services.

All Greek Orthodox Christians marrying in the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia

must apply for a '*Permission to Marry Certificate*' from the Priest of the Parish to which they belong. This certificate is usually valid up to three months after it is issued. This certificate must be signed by the candidate, the person's Parish Priest and by two adult Christian witnesses who know the person making the application, and are prepared to attest to his or her 'freedom to marry'. If the person belongs to another Orthodox jurisdiction that does not provide this certificate, then an official letter (on Church letterhead) stating the person's freedom to marry, signed by the Parish Priest or Diocesan official, will suffice.

Certain other official documents maybe required by the Church. These documents must be in the prescribed form. Photocopies will have to be certified in the required format by the appropriate authority

An official Government Birth Certificate from the country of birth is required for all those undergoing a legal marriage in Australia. In lieu of a Birth Certificate, other documentation may be accepted in exceptional circumstances. To ensure correct identification of candidates for marriage, driver's licences or other official forms of identification may also be required as specified by the Australian Government.

Acceptable Baptism Certificates must be provided by all those who are marrying in the Orthodox Church. Marriage in the Church between an Orthodox Christian and a member of another Christian Community is only allowed where the Baptism service of the other Christian Community is 'acceptable' to the Orthodox Church. These acceptable groups have a 'sacramental' understanding of Baptism as primarily an action of God upon the person being Baptised (infants and adults alike). Other prerequisites apply before a non-Orthodox Baptismal Certificate is acceptable.

A Church Marriage application will be completed by the Priest and signed by the couple intending to marry. This application must be witnessed by two adult persons. Where there is a non-Orthodox Christian bride or groom, the couple will also be asked to sign (and provide witnesses to sign) a declaration stating that any children born will be baptised, raised and educated in the Christian Orthodox faith.

Marriage in the Orthodox Church is intended to be a lifelong union. However, the Church acts in love and compassion when marriages break down. An Orthodox person who seeks to remarry must provide an explanation as to why a 'Church Release' should be granted for his or her previous marriage. This Church Release may be requested after the relevant payment is made. Once approved, the Release Certificate is included with the marriage paperwork so that the appropriate Church Marriage Licence can be issued. A '*Permission to Marry Certificate*' is not required for an Orthodox person when a release from any previous Church marriage has been received.

All persons (Orthodox and non-Orthodox) planning to re-marry must show relevant civil divorce papers that release them from their previous marriage. The marriage of a divorced person in Australia cannot take place until after the date that a '*decree absolute*' has been granted by the court. A person marrying in the Orthodox Church, who has been previously married (even those who have been widowed), must show appropriate evidence of the termination of the previous marriage. This may include a

Church Release Certificate for a person seeking an Orthodox Church remarriage, a civil divorce – ‘*decree absolute*’, evidence of civil annulment of a previous attempted marriage, or evidence of death of the previous spouse (a Government issued ‘*Death Certificate*’). In the case of a civil divorce being granted in another country, the divorce papers must be in the format that is legal in that country *and* must be acceptable under Australian law.

In the Greek Orthodox Church, it is the function of the Best Man (or Woman) to exchange the rings and crowns at the Church marriage ceremony and to sign the ‘*Church Marriage Register*’ as the chief witness at the ceremony. A person belonging to one of the non-Orthodox Christian groups that administer an ‘acceptable’ Baptism service (as mentioned below) would also be acceptable as the Best Man (or Woman) at the marriage service. The Best Man (or woman) must be prepared to provide a copy of his or her Baptism Certificate.

Witnesses are required for any marriage in Australia and certain official (Church and legal) forms must be witnessed in the prescribed way. Witnesses must be suitable to Church and Australian Government requirements as applicable.

It is both a legal and an Orthodox Church requirement that persons seeking to marry are not within a ‘prohibited relationship’. The Priest must ensure that allowable ‘*Degrees of Kinship*’ are not breached. For example, both Australian and Orthodox Church law forbids a brother and a sister from marrying. In the Orthodox Church, relationships are considered that are by blood (e.g. involving the attempted marriage of siblings), by marriage (e.g. a woman attempting to marry her previous brother-in-law) and by spiritual ties (e.g. godparents attempting to marry their godchildren). There are also age requirements for both the bride and the groom. The Priest can answer any questions relating to obstacles stemming from existing relationships or age.

Changes to the traditional Orthodox Marriage Service are not permitted. There are no additions or alterations permitted to the order and words of the Service. Recorded or live music, performances, speeches, video presentations and the like are not allowed. Musical instruments are not used during the Services of our Church. Hymns are sung unaccompanied by the Priest, the Chanters and the congregation as appropriate.

A Priest of the Orthodox Church will only perform a marriage between one man (the groom) and one woman (the bride). Other ‘gender diverse’ marriage services will not be celebrated by the Church.

All required Church and Government marriage forms can be obtained from the Priest. Essential information and documents required by the Church and Government are listed on the information forms provided. Answers to any other questions you may have, are also readily available.

The ‘Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia’ does not allow weddings during certain Lenten fasting days and periods, and on other particular times of the year. Greek Orthodox marriage services *cannot* be held from 13 to 25 December; on 5 January; from the beginning of Great Paschal (Easter) Lent until the Orthodox Holy

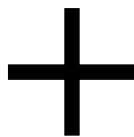
Pascha (these dates will differ each year); from 1 to 15 August, 29 August and on 14 September (all dates mentioned are inclusive). When outside the above dates, weddings may be held on Saturdays or Sundays. By special permission, weddings may also be held on certain weekdays.

Certain items are necessary for the celebration of a wedding in the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia. Some of these are usually provided by the couple seeking marriage. These include a pair of 'crowns' that are ceremoniously placed on the heads of the bride and groom during the service (in the Greek orthodox tradition, these crown are joined by a white ribbon). These crowns signify the importance of the bride and groom, their sacrifice and the intermingling of their lives as husband and wife. Both the bride and groom must have wedding rings that are placed on the ring finger of their right hands at the ceremony. It is also important for the couple to provide one or two large candles to be lit at the service. These candles symbolise the 'light of Christ' that enlightens their path both during the service and their steps throughout their lives together. Please discuss these requirements with the Priest long before the time of the service

The Australian Government has made a website available that contains useful information on getting married under Australian law:
(<https://www.ag.gov.au/FamiliesAndMarriage/Marriage/Pages/Getting-married.aspx>).

The '*Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia*' has a website that provides information on marriage in the Church and on the Orthodox Christian faith :

There are also useful leaflets and other material available from the Priest that can outline expectations and requirements concerning marriage in the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia. Many of the leaflets are available as booklets; please ask the Parish Priest.



***Please see your Parish Priest for more information or
or if you are unsure of your standing!***

*“On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee,
and the mother of Jesus was there;
Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples.”
(John 2:1-2)*

*“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.”
(Ephesians 5:21)*

*“... a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall
become one flesh.*

*This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church;
however, let each one of you love his wife as himself,
and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”
(Ephesians 5:31-33)*