

Wedding Guidelines

St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church

Wilmington, NC

“A great mystery is being celebrated. How is it a mystery? They come together, and the two are made one. They have not become the image of anything earthly, but of God Himself. They come in order to be made one body; behold the mystery of love!” (St. John Chrysostom, Homily 12 on Colossians)

Marriage is much more than a merely private transaction between two individuals; it is an event in which Jesus Christ Himself participates through the presence of the sacramental minister, the priest, and that of the praying community, the church. In view of this “ecclesial” dimension of marriage, therefore, a wedding must be performed within the context of the Orthodox Church in order for the Church to recognize and affirm the validity and authenticity of the marriage.

Here are the guidelines for scheduling a wedding at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church:

1. Setting the date – Fr. Matthew must approve the date and time of the wedding before it can be put on the church’s calendar.
 - a. Please note – Do not print or mail invitations or save-the-date cards before Fr. Matthew approves the date. St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church cannot guarantee any date unless Fr. Matthew has approved it.
 - b. Please note – Weddings cannot be scheduled on the following dates:
 - i. September 14 (Exaltation of the Holy Cross)
 - ii. December 13-25 (Nativity of Christ)
 - iii. January 5-6 (Theophany)
 - iv. Great Lent and Holy Week
 - v. Pascha (Easter)
 - vi. Pentecost
 - vii. August 1-15 (Dormition Fast and Feast)
 - viii. August 29 (Beheading of St. John the Baptist)
2. Orthodox Christians in good standing – One or both members of the engaged couple must be an Orthodox Christian in good standing with St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church. He or she must be an active steward of the church

and must be current with financial obligations. More importantly, he or she must be living the liturgical life of the church, including regular reception of Holy Communion and participation in the sacrament of Confession.

- a. Please note – Orthodox Christians are permitted to marry other Christians who have been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity. A copy of the baptismal certificate must be presented to Fr. Matthew prior to the confirmation of the wedding date.
 - b. Please note – Orthodox Christians not living in Wilmington, NC, are permitted to be married at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church. However, they must provide a written letter from their parish priest attesting to their status as Orthodox Christians in good standing.
3. Sponsors/Koumbaroi – Koumbaroi must be Orthodox Christians in good standing at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, or they must be Orthodox Christians in good standing at another Orthodox Church and are required to provide a letter stating such from their parish priest.
 - a. Please note – This letter must be received 4 weeks prior to the wedding.
 4. Pre-Marital Counseling – The Metropolis of Atlanta requires all couples to schedule pre-marital counseling prior to the wedding. These sessions must be scheduled with Fr. Matthew and need to be completed at least 4 weeks prior to the wedding.
 5. Ecclesiastical Marriage License – Forms for the application of the Ecclesiastical (church) marriage license must be completed at least 4 weeks prior to the wedding. Fr. Matthew will oversee this process and will collect all the necessary forms required by the Metropolis of Atlanta.
 6. Couples who are currently living together – The Orthodox Church does not condone cohabitation by couples who are not married. Not only is there no question from a biblical standpoint that any sexual relationship outside of marriage is inappropriate, but the statistics gathered by secular professionals clearly show that there is a 50% HIGHER divorce rate among couples who have lived together prior to their weddings than those who have not. The Church must make every attempt to give couples a healthy, appropriate start. Therefore, couples wishing to be married at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church who currently cohabitating must do everything they can to separate until their wedding date; this decision is made in a loving spirit of concern for the health and stability of the future marriage.

7. Location of the Wedding – The appropriate place for a wedding of the Orthodox Church is the Holy Sanctuary. It is not customary to perform sacraments outside the Church...for example, in a home, backyard, or local park.
8. Non-Orthodox Clergy/Pastors – The Orthodox wedding ceremony does not permit the active participation of non-Orthodox clergy/pastors during the ceremony.
 - a. Please note - other Orthodox priests are permitted to participate in the wedding ceremony. Please let Fr. Matthew know if you would like to have another Orthodox priest participate so he can invite him to do so.
9. Fees – Parishioners who are currently in good standing at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church will need to pay a \$100 cleaning fee so that the facilities can be cleaned after the wedding. If the Hellenic Center is reserved for a reception, an additional \$50 cleaning fee will be added.
 - a. Parishioners who are not currently in good standing need to fulfill any past stewardship obligations they have and also need to complete a stewardship card for the current year. A separate cleaning fee of \$100 will need to be paid so that the facilities can be cleaned after the wedding. If the Hellenic Center is reserved for a reception, an additional \$50 cleaning fee will be added.
 - b. Orthodox Christians who are not parishioners at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church will need to pay a \$450 usage and cleaning fee. Checks can be made payable to St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church. If the Hellenic Center is reserved for a reception, an additional \$50 cleaning fee will be added.
 - i. New parishioners must be active in our community and contributing financially for a minimum of 3 months to be considered a parishioner at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church.
 - ii. Please note that the cleaning/usage fee is for the facilities only and is not an honorarium for the priest, chanter, or neokoros.

A separate honorarium is traditionally offered to these individuals.

Here are the guidelines for all wedding ceremonies at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church.

1. Items necessary for the wedding (all items must be received by the wedding rehearsal):
 - a. Stephana (Crowns)
 - b. Rings for both the bride and the groom
 - c. Two white candles
 - d. Civil marriage license
 - e. Wine goblet
 - f. If desired, a platter with white Jordan almonds (Koufeta) is traditional for Orthodox weddings.
2. Flowers – The use of flowers is permitted in the sanctuary. The florist must the church office prior to the wedding to discuss the appropriate placement of floral decorations.
 - a. Please note – Flowers are not permitted on the Iconostasis (Icon Screen) or other functional areas of the solea (i.e. pulpit, bishop’s throne, and chanter’s stand).
3. Photographers/Videographers – Photographs and video recordings of your wedding are permitted as long as they do not impede or distract from the sacrament. Photographers and Videographers are required to meet with Fr. Matthew prior to the wedding to discuss all necessary restrictions.
4. Bridal Dress and Attendants’ Gowns – Every attempt to preserve modesty must be made since the sacrament of marriage takes place inside the church. Since the crowns are an integral part of the wedding ceremony, hats should not be worn and headpieces should not interfere with the proper placing of the crowns on the head of the bride.
5. Dressing rooms – St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church has a number of classrooms that may be used by the bride or groom as dressing rooms. The consumption of alcohol in these rooms is strictly prohibited, and the wedding party is responsible for returning the rooms to their original condition immediately after the wedding.
6. Music in the Sanctuary – For the Sacrament of Marriage, the Orthodox Church prefers to emphasize the human voice in offering praise and glory to God. When the prelude music is offered before the service, it should never include pop/rock/Broadway show tunes or other secular songs. Instead we should offer Orthodox hymns such as *Axion Estin*, *Communion Hymns*, *Tin Oreotita*, and *the Lord’s Prayer*. The only non-Orthodox hymn that can be sung prior to the service is *Ave Maria*. Traditional classical music (without words) can be

- played by an organist before the service as well as for processions and recessions with the permission of the parish priest. Please note that the organ is the only instrument approved for weddings. All other instruments (e.g. harps, trumpets, flutes, guitars, violins/stringed instruments, drums, etc.) are not permitted to be played in the Orthodox Church.
7. Byzantine chanting during the service – Traditional Byzantine music is chanted during an Orthodox wedding. If you have a friend or family member who is a chanter, he needs to contact Fr. Matthew so he can receive his blessing prior to the wedding. If you do not know a chanter, then St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church will provide you with the contact information of our chanter. It is the responsibility of the couple to contact the chanter.
 8. Promptness – It is necessary that the wedding start on time. All care must be taken to ensure promptness.
 9. Throwing items during the service – The practice of throwing rice, rose petals, Jordan Almonds (koufeta), or glitter during any part of the wedding service is not permitted. This practice is not conducive to the sanctity of the wedding service.
 - a. Please note – Rice or rose petals may be thrown outside of the church as the couple exits the sanctuary.
 10. Invitations to the Reception – If you wish for Fr. Matthew and his family to attend the reception, please mail an invitation to the church office prior to the wedding. If no invitation is received, it will be understood that his services will not be needed at the reception.