



*Episcopia Ortodoxă Română
din America*

The Orthodox Church in America

THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX EPISCOPATE OF AMERICA

2522 GREY TOWER ROAD

JACKSON, MICHIGAN 48201, U.S.A.

TELEPHONE: (517) 522-4500

RT. REV. VALERIAN D. TRIFA
BISHOP

July 26, 1978

TO: All Parish Priests

RE: Dispensations for Marriages

Dear Reverend Father:

There is no need to tell you that among the marriages you perform there are quite a few that need special dispensations.

To comply with canonical requirements, we have established many years ago the Office of the Referee on Matrimonial Affairs. However, we have noticed that the holder of this office had to cope with a series of problems, be it because requests for dispensations were not forwarded properly to him or because some of you did not even bother to advise the prospective bride and groom of the necessity for dispensation. This created some difficulty insofar as our people have reached the conclusion that the laws of the Church apply to some parishes and not to others.

You and I are aware that marriages are quite complex and often we are requested to do what we should not do if we want to uphold the Church's requirements. The Referee for Matrimonial Affairs has been instructed to be as lenient as possible but we cannot dispense from requiring the interested persons to notice that the Church has rules, otherwise the notion would prevail that the Romanian Diocese can be used by everyone who wants a marriage which cannot be performed in another church.

Using the occasion of the change in the Office of the Referee on Matrimonial Affairs, I have drawn up unified guidelines referring to all matrimonial matters. They are hereby enclosed and have been edited both for your orientation and for the information of the bride and groom. You may distribute them, you may publish them in the parish bulletin, and/or, display them at the parish office and the bulletin board.

To assist the petitioners and to simplify the procedures, we are attaching hereby also three forms:

- a) Petition for Marriage Dispensations which has to be signed by the bride and groom.
- b) A statement in the case of mixed marriages which the petitioners may voluntarily mark in the proper rubrics.
- c) A recommendation for dispensation which has to be filled out and signed by the parish priest.

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According to the guidelines by the Holy Synod, the parish priest is considered the most competent person to know if a dispensation is to be granted or not. While the last decision remains with the Bishop, in most cases the Referee on Matrimonial Affairs will be guided by your recommendations.

In the form for petition you will note that in the future every petition should be accompanied with a \$10.00 fee to cover the secretarial, telephone and postal expenses. The two previous Referees on Matrimonial Affairs had to use their own money or to rely on the parish to cover such expenses. We cannot continue that way. You should also know that in all Orthodox jurisdictions there is quite a stiff fee for such petitions. The Chancellor of the Orthodox Church in America charges \$75.00 while the Greeks go into hundreds of dollars.

In concluding, I would like to call to your attention the well known principle that we cannot expect our parishioners to observe the rules and regulations if the priests do otherwise. I inform you that it is mandatory to request a dispensation when the case calls for one, otherwise you will not be permitted to officiate the Holy Sacrament.

I trust, however, your sense of duty and hope that admonitions will not be necessary.

With blessings and best wishes.


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+VALERIAN
Bishop

V:jnt



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BISHOP

GUIDELINES ON MATRIMONIAL MATTERS

In the Orthodox Church, marriage, or Holy Matrimony, is a sacrament. Its meaning is that the Church identifies itself with those who intend to get married and reinforces their decision with the supernatural binding grace of God. Considering this, marriage is not simply a private affair, but an event which concerns the whole Church. For this reason, the Church has set certain requirements for the marriage of its sons and daughters.

A resume of those requirements follows:

1. When a couple intends to get married, the first requirement is that they immediately contact their parish priest so that the arrangements for marriage can be made in accordance with the rules and practices of the Church.
2. Regarding the time of the ceremony, the Church prescribes that it should take place on Sunday, but in certain countries and on special occasions, permission may be granted for weddings at other times, except at night.
3. The Church is bound to comply with the legal requirements regarding the age of the partners, the marriage license and the pre-marital health examinations. The couple should, therefore, comply with the local laws before the religious ceremony.
4. At each wedding ceremony, two sponsors are required, a man and a woman, over eighteen years of age and of the Orthodox faith. Since the sponsors are witnesses and guarantors for the pledges made by the couple, they become spiritually related with the newlyweds and it is therefore required that they not be close blood relatives. Honorary sponsors may be admitted to take part in the ceremony if the couple so desires.
5. Marriages between close blood and spiritual relations, such as brother and sister, cousins, godparents, etc., are not permitted by the Church.

6. Mixed marriages, between an Orthodox and another Christian who is baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity but is not of the Orthodox faith, are permitted only according to the principle of *economia* with special dispensation from the Bishop. The Church's understanding and tolerance of mixed marriages does not extend to marriages which include a non-Christian partner.

7. Since Holy Matrimony is a sacrament and the Orthodox Church is the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, concelebration with non-Orthodox clergy is not permitted. Nor is the concelebration of Orthodox clergy permitted in non-Orthodox rites. If a couple gets married according to the rites of another Church, they cannot be married also in the Orthodox Church.

8. Because weddings are associated with dancing and other worldly affairs, they are not permitted on those days and periods the Church has set aside for fasting and penance. They are: Wednesdays and Fridays; the four Lents (Christmas, Easter, Sts. Peter and Paul and the Dormition of the Birthgiver of God); the Feast of the Beheading of St. John on August 29; and Holy Cross Day on September 14. Weddings are also avoided on Christmas Day and the following days until January 7, inclusive, and Easter Day and the following week because at those times private rejoicing should be subordinated to that of the Church, celebrating our Saviour's feasts.

9. The Orthodox Church emphasizes the indissolubility of Marriage following Christ's own command: "Therefore, those whom God has united, let no man separate." However, as in the case of mixed marriages, the principle of *economia* is applied in certain cases of divorce as a condescension for human weakness and the Church permits her sinful member to enter a new marriage union. This is done with special dispensation from the ecclesiastical authorities. Those widowed by death may remarry without any restrictions. However, the Church does not permit more than three marriages for anyone.

10. The Orthodox ceremonial for weddings includes singing by a choir or by specially trained cantors. The content and melodies of the hymns to be sung should be drawn from the liturgical music of the Orthodox Church. Non-Orthodox, secular songs and melodies or instrumental music are not permitted in the church.

11. If the union in marriage needs a special dispensation on the basis of *economia* in cases of mixed marriages, second or third marriages, weddings on prohibited days, divorces, etc., the couple should request for dispensation in writing and present it to the parish priest, including the appropriate motivation and documentation. (divorce decrees, birth or death certificates, etc.).

12. Dispensation of marriages are issued only in writing and are addressed to the respective parish priest, permitting him to officiate the marriage.