

## DIVORCE

*"What God has joined, let not man separate."*  
**(Mt. 19:6)**

The Orthodox Church firmly believes in the sanctity of the marriage bond. St. Paul refers to marriage as a "great mystery", likening the relationship of husband and wife to that of Christ and the Church. Our Lord defended the sanctity of marriage, justifying divorce only on the grounds of unchastity. For this reason the Church is deeply concerned about each marriage and seeks to reconcile differences arising between husband and wife in the normal course of life.

The Church also realistically recognizes that some marriages may become completely unworkable, causing more damage than good, and thus does allow for divorce. Whenever serious difficulties arise threatening the dissolution of the marriage, the troubled couple should seek help from the Church first by contacting the priest rather than come to the Church when things are so bad that nothing can be done. Only when the marriage is seen by the Church to be completely unsalvageable is consideration given to divorce.

Although a civil decree of divorce legally dissolves a marriage in the eyes of the civil authorities, it does not dissolve a marriage in the eyes of the Church if the marriage was blessed in the Orthodox Church. The Church is under no obligation to grant a divorce just because a civil court granted a civil divorce.

In accordance with Church Canon Law, an Ecclesiastical Divorce is granted only under certain circumstances. In accordance with the 21 November 1973 encyclical of His Eminence, Archbishop Iakovos, a divorce is given and considered valid, when:

1. ... a marriage is entered into by force, blackmail or false reasons.
2. ... one or both parties is guilty of adultery.
3. ... one party is proven to be mad, insane or suffers from a social disease which was not disclosed to the spouse prior to the marriage.
4. ... one party has conspired against the life of the spouse.
5. ... one party is imprisoned for more than seven years.
6. ... one party abandons the other for more than three years without approval.
7. ... one partner should be absent from home without the other's approval, except in instances when the latter is assured that such absence is due to psycho-neurotic illness.
8. ... one partner forces the other to engage in illicit affairs with others.
9. ... one partner does not fulfill the responsibilities of marriage, or when it is medically proven that one party is physically impotent or as the result of a social venereal disease.
10. ... one partner is an addict, thereby creating undue economic hardship.

If such grounds exist, after one year of the issuance of the civil decree of divorce, a petition may be filed with the priest for the ecclesiastical dissolution of the marriage. At that time, the petitioner, who must be current with his/her Stewardship Pledge, must submit all of the following:

1. The Church Marriage Certificate
2. A certified copy of the civil decree of divorce
3. A signed petition to the Ecclesiastical Court stating the grounds of divorce
4. A money order or cashier check in the amount of \$150 made out to the "Metropolis of San Francisco" for the processing of the Ecclesiastical Divorce.

The four items, along with the priest's report as to the results of his efforts to reconcile the couple, are then submitted to the Bishop. The Bishop reviews the file, and if there are grounds

for an Ecclesiastical Divorce a date is set for the Ecclesiastical Court to be held. If the Ecclesiastical Court finds sufficient grounds for divorce, the Bishop will issue the official decree.

For more information concerning Ecclesiastical Divorce, you should contact the priest.