

Marriage & Catholics



A guide to getting married within The Catholic Church

MARRIAGE care



SECTION ONE



Marrying in a Catholic Church

This basic guide is designed to answer some of the key questions asked by couples wanting to get married within the Catholic Church. It is intended as a first step only; you will also need to discuss any plans and ideas you may have about your wedding with a parish priest before coming to any firm decisions.

1. Who is this Guide for?

The information which follows is for all couples wishing to marry within the Catholic Church, including those at the start of their life together and those who will have been together for some time.

Although this guide is written from the point of view of those marrying in a Catholic Church, it also has relevance to those occasions when a Catholic may be marrying in another Christian Church, or another place. To do this requires an application for a 'Dispensation' for the Catholic and this is explained later in this guide.

2. Who gets married within the Catholic Church?

- Practising Catholics and also those who have not been to church for a while.
- Catholics marrying Christians of another denomination or someone who belongs to a non-Christian faith or religion.
- Catholics whose partner does not belong to any particular faith or group.

All these couples can marry within the Catholic Church.

3. What are the basic requirements for marrying within the Catholic Church?

The following basic requirements apply:

(i) Notification

It is now a general rule across the country that at least six months notice of the date on which you hope to marry, must be given to the priest of the parish. The reason for this is to allow sufficient time for all the formalities and preparations that are required. It is highly advisable to delay setting the date for any other arrangements until you have agreed the date for the ceremony in the church where you hope to marry.

(ii) Catholic Baptism

One partner at least must be a baptised member of the Roman Catholic Church

(iii) Documentation

The priest who will be involved in your marriage will also advise you about exactly which papers will be required by the Church and Civil registrars. In general, you will be asked to produce:

- Written evidence that you are free to marry: this means, first and foremost, that neither partner has been married previously. If either or both partners have been married before, it is of primary importance that the couple raise the matter with the priest at the first meeting with him. He will be able to advise you in relation to your own particular situation. If there is difficulty in providing the information about freedom to marry, you can go to a Solicitor or Commissioner for Oaths and swear an affidavit to that effect and this will be acceptable.
- Baptism certificate: for the Catholic partner, a recently issued copy (i.e. within the previous six months) from the church where you were baptised; for Christians of other Churches, the original or copy of the original.
- Confirmation certificate: normally it is expected that the Catholic will have been confirmed or is prepared to be confirmed, though this is not an absolute requirement.

(iv) Marriage Preparation

All Christian Churches now invite couples to take part in some form of preparation for married life, in addition to planning the wedding ceremony. Marriage Care runs Marriage Preparation Courses regularly in England and Wales, as well as providing an inventory system to help couples prepare.

4. Some other questions people ask

Q. If one of us is not a Catholic, do we need permission?

A. Yes: it is called a 'dispensation' or 'permission' and is arranged for you by the Priest.

Q. What if we are living together and maybe have children?

A. Many couples today are in this situation. The fact that one of you at least is a member of the Catholic Church by baptism means that you are able to marry within the Catholic Church. The Church welcomes all couples who feel ready to make a public commitment to each other.

Q. Are those who are not Roman Catholics required to become Roman Catholics?

A. No: the Church believes that becoming a member of a Church is a separate commitment, to be chosen freely. The decision to become a Catholic can be made at any time.

Q. Do we have to make any promises?

A. If one partner is not a Catholic, the the Catholic partner is asked to make the following declaration as part of the preparation: "I declare that I am ready to uphold my Catholic faith and to avoid all dangers of falling away from it. Moreover, I sincerely undertake that I will do all I can, within the unity of our partnership, to have all children of our marriage baptised and brought up in the Catholic Church.

The priest will ask the Catholic either to sign the declaration or make it verbally, after discussing with his or her partner that statement and its meaning.

As can be seen from the wording above, the Church accepts that this commitment should not threaten the unity of the marriage. Rather, it is to emphasise the supporting role of a living faith in a couple's life together.

Q. What about the Church's view on birth control?

A. The Church states positively that one purpose of the gift of sexuality is for a couple's love-making to be open to having children. The Church also recognises that couples want to make responsible decisions. Some further information for making decisions on family planning is offered in Section Three of this guide under the heading, 'Catholics and Sex'.

Q. Why do Catholics believe that marriage is for life?

A. Ask any couple about to get married what they want most out of life and almost all of them will tell you that it is, 'to be happy together for always', which implies an unconditional commitment to life-long faithfulness to each other.

Christians believe that we should have the courage to say and to promise what we feel in our hearts, and to resolve to work to keep that love and support alive "till death do us part".



SECTION TWO



How do we go about Getting Married?

1. There are a number of practical issues that need dealing with, especially if one of the partners is not a Catholic.
 - A. Catholics are required to get married according to the Catholic Rite of Marriage and witnessed by a Catholic priest or deacon. Catholics can get permission to marry in the Church of a partner who is not a Catholic if there are good reasons for doing so, for example, where a partner is an active member of his or her church community. In such a case, the Catholic partner will require a 'Dispensation' which the priest will apply for. It is not usual to marry in other venues, such as hotels, for example since the local bishop only licenses so many venues, most usually Churches and some chapels.

If your plans are not covered by this, you should refer to a priest for guidance.

- A. It is usual to get married in the church of the parish where the Catholic – or, by custom, the bride, if both are Catholics – is resident. Sometimes, one of you will have a lot of personal contact with the parish to which you belong. 'Belonging' can be by residence in the parish or by attending worship regularly.

If you are marrying overseas, it is probable that you will need to prepare documentation in the UK for it to be sent on in advance. Even if one of you is resident abroad where you intend to marry, it is important to allow sufficient time for the papers to be completed.

- A. Your marriage must be recorded according to civil law, and this is done by giving prior notice of the wedding at the register office of the district where each partner is resident. This ensures that you will have a Registrar's certificate which is necessary for a wedding in a Catholic church.

The Registrar requires a minimum notice of 21 full days between the day you give notice and the day of the wedding.

Q. Who is involved in your preparation for marriage?

A. The couple will usually see not only the priest but also other members of the parish who are trained to help couples prepare for marriage. Alternatively, Marriage Care and other organisations run courses and provide certificates of attendance.

Q. What is the role of the priest?

A. The priest's role essentially is to support, help and guide you through the process of preparation, and to discuss with you any particular questions you may have about the Church and marriage.

The priest therefore:

- Welcomes you and discusses your plans with you.
- Will set out what needs to be prepared, including:
 1. The documentation
 2. Personal preparation for married life
 3. The wedding ceremony

These three items are the main tasks involved in getting ready for marriage.

There is, then, a lot to be done and to be organised for your wedding, and even more to be appreciated about a life together. The local priest is your resource to be called on when you need some explanation, help or guidance, even if the wedding is to take place elsewhere.

The remainder of this section looks at the above three tasks in more detail.

Task One: Documentation

1. Church requirements: in Section One, the paragraph relating to 'basic requirements', explains the paperwork you will need to provide as evidence of your freedom to marry (both of you) and your baptism details (one or both of you).

The priest will make clear exactly what papers you will need to present.

2. Civil formalities: as mentioned previously, a Catholic priest has to refer you to the register office in order to fulfil both civil and legal conditions. He will tell you whether a Registrar will need to attend the church or if one of the parish members is authorised to take care of the registers. Such an authorised person is due a fee, set by the General Registrar.

Task Two: Helping You Prepare for Married Life

1. The Church believes that it is vital to offer preparation not only for the wedding day but also for a happy and fulfilling life together. This is the reason for referring you to some form of marriage preparation.
2. Help and support is offered in various ways depending on how it is organised in your parish. In some places, the priest will discuss all the issues with you. It is becoming normal practice, however, for a married couple or a small team of people to offer sessions which will help you to consider how your love and life as a couple might grow. Alternatively, Marriage Care offers courses around England and Wales and you can find a course near to you by phoning the telephone number at the end of this brochure.

The idea is to give you both time and space to consider the important step that you are about to take.

3. These are the sort of things that marriage preparation courses deal with:
 - Understanding how your relationship works
 - How much you know about your partner and yourself
 - How to deal with major questions
 - How to sort out differences and difficulties
 - The importance of how to listen and how to express yourself
 - Help with the wedding ceremony
 - Understanding the meaning of your marriage vows

Task Three: The Marriage Ceremony

Your discussion with the priest will cover the following:

1. Whether the priest of the parish or another priest will be leading the ceremony and if another priest or minister from another Church will have some part in the ceremony.
2. The form of the ceremony: the choice is between a Nuptial Mass and a full ceremony but without Mass and Holy Communion. The choice of ceremony belongs primarily to the couple and the priest can bring the benefit of other couples' experience.
3. Particular choices of style and action in the ceremony. For example, whether you enter the church as a couple or in the traditional way; whether you face the congregation or the altar.

Note: The Catholic Church and other Churches are currently revising the form of wedding ceremonies

4. Particular choices of texts. For example:

Do they all have to be from the Bible? In addition to the two or three passages you choose from the Bible, it is possible to ask to include a suitable non-Bible passage. Whatever you choose, do try to select people who are good at reading in public.

Whether to have hymns or not? You need to take in account whether hymns are well-known and whether your families and friends will sing!

Generally, the church will have the services of an organist or pianist who may also be available for advice on what to choose.

5. It is best to discuss with the priest what books are available for choosing these and other texts, such as prayers and blessings. There are publications to help you plan the ceremony; there is even a resource on the internet where you will find poems and prayers. Some references are given at the end of this guide.
6. Flowers and Photographs: Again, do check with the priest about booking key people and, with regards to photos and videos, about what is allowed in the church. Don't forget to ask about whether your guests can throw confetti.
7. Rehearsal: Make sure that you arrange a rehearsal in good time, so that you can really enjoy your big day.



SECTION THREE



Why a Christian Marriage?

Marriage is a public statement of a deeply personal relationship, a relationship of shared love and commitment to each other. It is a sharing not only of present experience, but one that anticipates sharing the future together. The promise of lifelong faithfulness is fundamental to this commitment.

There are three key differences between getting married in a purely civil wedding and holding your ceremony in church. Essentially they are to do with the fact that you are making your promises before God; within the Community of the Church; and that you are taking God with you.

Before God

Christians believe that God gives the fullest meaning to their lives. It is natural for them to make their commitment to each other in the presence of God. It demonstrates how important their partner is to them and how seriously they take their promises. Christians believe that God is always present with us in the most everyday actions of our lives. As well as this, there are special times in a person's life when they want to celebrate God's active presence and love particularly clearly. These celebrations are called 'sacraments'. For Catholics, Christian marriage is one of these sacraments.

The Community of the Church

For Christians, the Church exists primarily, not as a set of buildings or as an institution, but as a living and caring body of people all trying to follow the path that Jesus has shown us. This Community of the Church is there to offer hospitality, encouragement, help and advice. Like your own family, and your network of friends, the family of the Church is there for you as your mutual relationship grows and deepens.

Taking God with You

Christians believe that God is alive, real and active in the love of a husband and wife both when the marriage ceremony takes place and throughout their lives together. Living together, growing together and building a deep and rewarding relationship will have its difficult moments as well as its wonderful times. Christians believe that God cares about us throughout our everyday lives, in our loving, our triumphs, our problems and in our sorrows. We sincerely believe that being open to God at all times will help us to grow in love for each other as a couple and for our family and the world about us.

Catholics and Sex

Marriage is something that people feel is important and wish to experience. This is not surprising since some of the greatest joys and pleasures of life are to be found within such a loving relationship and one of these is, of course, our sexual joy.

The Church believes that sexual intercourse is indeed a wonderful pleasure and gift from God. It is not something for Christians to be embarrassed about. A good sexual relationship is an important and vital ingredient in a healthy marriage. Naturally, at times the sexual relationship can become problematic and help and advice should be sought if problems arise.

Christians not only believe that sexual enjoyment strengthens a couple's relationship but also that it is a gift for sharing in God's ability to create new life. In the wedding ceremony, you will be asked to be faithful to each other in love and also to be ready to accept children as a gift from God. Equally you have the freedom to make responsible decisions about when to have children so as to be able to give them the love, care and attention they deserve.

What are Married Partners trying to Achieve?

Dr Jack Dominian, a leading writer in marriage today, gives three aims which couples should have in their marriage.

- **To sustain each other**

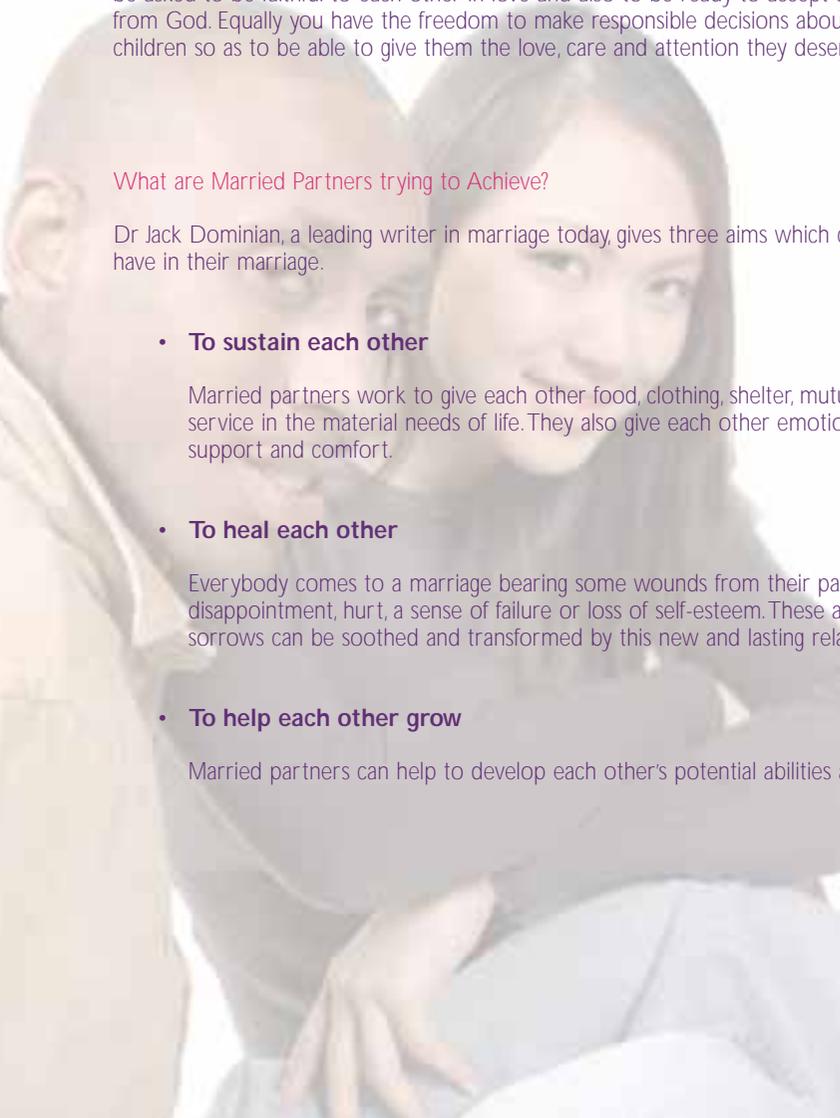
Married partners work to give each other food, clothing, shelter, mutual help and service in the material needs of life. They also give each other emotional and spiritual support and comfort.

- **To heal each other**

Everybody comes to a marriage bearing some wounds from their past life – disappointment, hurt, a sense of failure or loss of self-esteem. These and many other sorrows can be soothed and transformed by this new and lasting relationship.

- **To help each other grow**

Married partners can help to develop each other's potential abilities and talents.





A husband and wife who successfully sustain each other's hurts and help each other to grow will have a loving and successful relationship from which to give generously to their children and to those around them.

In Conclusion

It should be noted that the information given in this guide is general. First, it would be very difficult to cover all the circumstances of couples' marriages; a more detailed booklet would run the risk of losing its first aim of being easy to use. Secondly, this guide is meant to help you in your discussion with the priest or deacon, and with others who will plan with you the next steps towards your marriage.

A further reason is that other publications cover aspects, which can only be referred to here. You will find some helpful references below.

The hope for this guide is to relieve you of some of the worries and answer some of the questions which come up at this time. No decision can be more important than the one to marry; may the guide help you to be prepared and ready to make it.

Further Titles

'Your Wedding' (£3.25 ref no. 1029) and 'How to Survive being Married to a Catholic' (£6.95 ref no. 1027). Both published by Redemptorist Publications, Alphonsus House, Chawton, Alton, Hampshire GU34 3HQ

'Together for Life' (£2.95) (Readings and Texts) by Joseph M. Champlin, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana: stocked here by Pauline Books & Media

'Growing Together' by Andrew Body.

'Complete Rite of Marriage' (£2.95) (ref no D507) published by Catholic Truth Society. Tel: 020 7640 0042.



This guide has been produced by
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