

Getting Married in the Catholic Church

Frequently Asked Questions



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE
BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR PASTORAL LIFE
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC MARRIAGE AND FAMILY COUNCIL

The Australian Catholic Marriage and Family Council has prepared this Question and Answer Booklet for the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

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INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church takes marriage very seriously because of its great importance to the couple, to the Christian community and to society as a whole. In the Catholic tradition marriage is protected by two thousand years of pastoral experience embodied in the practical wisdom of the Church's [canon law](#). The marriage of a man and a woman is revered by the Catholic Church as a vocation ordained by God. It is both a reflection of God's love, and a manifestation of God's love in the world.

For this reason, the Church understands marriage as a life-long partnership in which the couple co-operates with God in the creation of the human race. Marriage is a public event in which the couple professes an exclusive lifelong love for each other. Where the couple are both baptised Christians, marriage is a [sacrament](#) which bestows spiritual graces on the couple.

Because the Church upholds marriage in this way, it seeks to promote the moral and spiritual well-being and happiness of a couple. Much depends on how a couple marry and on the personal intentions in their minds and hearts at the time of marriage. The Church therefore encourages couples to take the time to prepare for it. This is also why the Church has carefully considered who can get married in the Catholic Church.

This booklet is designed to answer some commonly asked questions about getting married in the Catholic Church.

The Church's understanding of marriage in God's plan of creation is detailed in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) (CCC 1601-1666 and 2331-2400). The regulations regarding marriage in the Catholic Church are set out in the [Code of Canon Law](#) (Can. 1601-1666). Many of the questions in this booklet raise complex theological or pastoral issues. In such cases, the answers make reference to relevant clauses in the Code or the Catechism to assist those who seek deeper insight.¹ In addition, it is always wise to speak with your [parish](#) priest or local Tribunal Office as these are able to offer you expert advice.

Further references are set out at the end of the publication.

¹ The Catholic Church includes both the Latin or Western Catholic Church and the Eastern Catholic Churches. The Eastern Catholic Churches are in full communion of faith and of acceptance of authority of the Bishop of Rome, but retain their distinctive liturgical rites, laws and customs. Respecting these differences, the Western and the Eastern Churches are governed by their respective canon laws, the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches and the Code of Canon Law of the Latin Church. There are differences in the respective canon laws regarding marriage. As most Australian Catholics belong to the Latin Church, 'GETTING MARRIED IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH' is based on the Code of Canon Law of the Latin Church. For a marriage involving a member of one of the Eastern Catholic Churches, you should seek guidance as soon as possible regarding that Church's requirements.

FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES

WHY SHOULD WE BOTHER WITH A CATHOLIC WEDDING?

The best reason to get married in the Catholic Church is because you believe that Jesus Christ is God's love revealed in human flesh; and that today, Christ is embodied in the gathering of his friends—what we call the Church.

The Church believes that a marriage between two baptised Christians is a [sacramental marriage](#), provided it is entered into in accord with the teachings of the Church. Such a marriage has supernatural as well as natural dimensions. By celebrating marriage sacramentally, you are uniting yourselves not only with one another, but with Christ. You are enlivening your marriage with God's love, which never runs out (CCC 1641-1642). When you actively invite Christ into your marriage, he will always be there to renew and deepen the love between you and your spouse and to give you both the strength to confront the inevitable difficulties that life will bring.

Whilst a marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptised person is not sacramental, the Church still considers that such a marriage can be valid and good. St Paul wrote: “The unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. “ (1 Cor 7:14)

Some couples view marriage in the Church as unnecessary because they believe that God will be present at their wedding whether it is witnessed by the Church or not. It is true that wherever there is love, God is present. But just as you want those friends and family who love you to come to your wedding, God wants all those who love him to worship him together, united by their love for him—not as individuals separated from one another (CCC 781). Catholics believe that Christ gathered his friends together for this purpose; this gathering, or assembly, is the Church (CCC 764). Christ promised that he would be present in this gathering of believers (Matthew 18:20, 28:20). It is through the Church that God has chosen to love us in tangible ways. In the Church, we hear the words of Christ spoken through the proclamation of the Scriptures; we encounter Christ in one another through the common worship of the assembly; we even enter into communion with Christ through the Eucharist (CCC 1088).

In short, to have a Catholic wedding is to invite Christ to your wedding, just as that couple from Cana once did—with wonderful and unexpected results.

BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR MARRIAGE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Marriage is governed by both civil and Church law. Just because a marriage is [valid](#) in the eyes of the State does not make it valid in the eyes of the Church. Because the Church understands marriage to be such an important reality, it identifies various requirements in its [canon law](#), the law of the Catholic Church, which must be met for a [valid](#) Catholic marriage (a marriage between two Catholics, between a Catholic and a baptised Christian of another denomination or between a Catholic and an unbaptised person).

- A Catholic marrying a baptized non-Catholic needs Church permission (Can. 1124). A Catholic marrying a non-baptized person needs a [dispensation](#) for the marriage to be valid (Can. 1086).

- Unless [dispensation](#) has been granted, the wedding must be celebrated in the presence of a Catholic priest/deacon/bishop and two adult witnesses, normally in public and usually in a church (Can. 1108 §1)²; refer also to answer to questions 22-29.
- Both parties must be free to be married, that is neither person has a prior [valid marriage](#) (Can. 1085 §1);
- Both parties must understand and accept the nature of Catholic marriage, namely that it is a lifelong, faithful partnership which is open to the gift of children (Can. 1101 §2).
- Both parties must be emotionally and psychologically mature and capable of consenting to the marriage and they must freely express their [consent](#) to give and accept one another irrevocably in order to establish a Catholic marriage (Can. 1095-6).
- Both must be capable of sexual intercourse, that is, neither is incurably impotent (Can. 1084 §1).

In addition, local Church rules will normally recommend that the partners meet several times with the priest who will be witnessing their marriage and that they attend a marriage education program.

These requirements are important to ensure the validity of your marriage in the eyes of the Church. A marriage that doesn't follow the canon law requirements (for example, a civil marriage) is not a [valid marriage](#) in the eyes of the Church.

What is required for a "valid" marriage in the Catholic Church is addressed in more detail in a companion booklet: *Marriage in the Catholic Church - Frequently Asked Questions*.

SACRAMENTAL MARRIAGE

The Catholic Church understands marriage to be a sacred covenant between the couple entered into before God. Where the couple are both baptised Christians, the marriage is a [sacrament](#) which imparts special graces to the couple and which signifies a greater reality, the love between Christ and the Church. Not surprising, therefore, the Church has specific rules about the marriage ceremony. These rules are meant to ensure certainty that a valid [sacramental marriage](#) actually takes place.³

Basically, the marriage must follow the [Rite of Marriage](#), the official guidelines of the Catholic Church regarding the words and actions that comprise the [liturgy](#) for a Catholic wedding. Consequently, a Catholic wedding does not allow the same degree of customisation that is possible with a civil ceremony.

It needs to be emphasised, however, that the sacramental form of marriage does not refer to the religious liturgy or church celebration. The sacramental form is simply the valid exchange of [consent](#) between two baptised Christians: their unequivocal 'yes' to accepting one another as husband and wife, in mutual conjugal self-donation.

² In some countries civil law requires all marriages to be enacted before civil authorities. In such cases, for there to be a valid sacramental marriage, Catholic Church law requires a religious wedding in addition to the civil ceremony. This may be held before or after the civil ceremony. In Australia, the Catholic minister is recognised by the Federal law as a marriage celebrant. Accordingly, in Australia, a Catholic should have only the religious wedding ceremony in accordance with Church requirements.

³ Similarly, the Australian Federal Government has enacted legislation to ensure certainty that a valid civil marriage actually takes place, whether in a religious or civil ceremony.

Under special circumstances, your priest may ask your bishop to dispense with the requirement to celebrate the wedding according to the *Rite of Marriage*. This is most commonly the case when Catholics marry someone who is not Catholic and they wish to have a wedding ceremony which follows the religious practice of the other Christian tradition.

INITIAL STEPS TO GETTING MARRIED IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

THE FIRST STEP IS TO CONTACT YOUR LOCAL PARISH PRIEST.

You should contact the [priest](#) who is to celebrate the marriage, ideally about 12 months prior to the wedding. He will start a file that he will send to the [parish](#) where you will be married.

During this period you spend some time with the priest clarifying your understanding of marriage in the eyes of the Church; undertaking a marriage education program; booking the church where you wish to marry; planning the marriage ceremony and completing the 'Pre-Nuptial Inquiry'.

WHY DO WE HAVE TO DISCUSS OUR MARRIAGE WITH A PRIEST?

The [priest](#) who will celebrate the wedding and/or [parish](#) pastoral workers meet with couples to ensure that the requirements of both Commonwealth Government and Church law regarding the proposed marriage are met. They welcome and affirm the couple in their preparation for marriage, explore the [sacramental](#) nature of marriage and the meaning of the commitment the couple are to make, assist them in planning the wedding ceremony and assist with the government and Church documentation.

WHAT IS A 'PRE-NUPTIAL INQUIRY'?

As with most important things in life you need to get your paperwork in order before you can get married. Some of this information is required by Civil Law, the Commonwealth Marriage Act 1961, and some by the [Canon Law](#) of the Catholic Church, to determine your legal and Church status to get married.

The Pre-Nuptial Inquiry Forms require the following:

- proof of identity (similar to what you need to open a bank account)
 - If you have changed your name by Deed Poll, Change of Name Deed or by Statutory Declaration these documents will need to be produced.
- Baptism Certificate
 - A recent copy of a [Baptismal Certificate](#) is to be provided by the Catholic party. This needs to be less than six months old⁴ and can be obtained upon request by contacting the [parish](#) office where you were baptised. Members of other denominations are encouraged to provide a Certificate of Baptism, or at least the name of the Church and the date of the baptism.
- proof of freedom to marry

⁴ The reason for this is that Catholic marriages are recorded on the Baptismal register. A recent Baptismal Certificate, as well as demonstrating one's initiation into the Church, is a partial check regarding previous marriages.

- If the Catholic party is not a resident in the parish where you are getting married (and hence presumably known to the priest), you will need to obtain a 'Freedom to Marry' letter or form from your local parish. This involves contacting the parish in which you live, explaining your intention to marry at a different church.
- If either partner is under the legal age of consent, the agreement of your parents or guardians is required. If the parents are divorced, you may need to produce the court order that gives custody to one of them.
- marriage education certification (depending on local diocesan rules).
- permissions and [dispensations](#) where applicable.
- if either party has been previously married, it is essential that freedom to marry in the Catholic Church be established before any marriage arrangements are confirmed.
 - Evidence of death of spouse or the record of Church annulment and civil divorce papers will be required.

In Australia, the Catholic priest or deacon acts not only as a minister of the Church but also as a registered marriage celebrant for the state. He will help you fill out both the civil and church papers before the wedding. The civil (Australian Government) *Notice of Intended Marriage* must be signed at least one month before the wedding.

WILL THE CHURCH LET US HAVE A CATHOLIC WEDDING?

1. WE'RE LIVING TOGETHER. MAY WE STILL BE MARRIED IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

Cohabitation is not a canonical impediment to marriage, so a couple may not be refused marriage solely on the basis of cohabitation. Marriage education and a valid wedding in a Catholic Church may proceed even if the couple continue to live together.

Nevertheless, sexual intercourse outside of marriage is contrary to the clear teachings of the Bible (Ex. 20:14; Dt 5:18; Mt 15:19; 19:18; Rom 13:9; Eph 5:3) and of the Christian tradition throughout the ages. After discussion with a cohabiting couple, the priest should encourage them to separate, or at least live chastely, for the remainder of the period leading up to the wedding. This is not due to a negative attitude of the Church to sexual intercourse, but reflects the Church's belief that sexual love is a total gift of self which can only be made within the commitment of the marriage vows: "it cannot be an arrangement 'until further notice' " (CCC 1646). The couple are urged to use the period leading to their wedding as a time of building mutual respect, deepening their emotional intimacy. This time frees the couple to reflect on their decision to marry and to develop their appreciation of the full meaning of the commitment upon which they are embarking.

2. I AM A CATHOLIC, BUT I'M PREGNANT. MAY I HAVE A CATHOLIC WEDDING?

Pregnancy is not a canonical impediment to marriage, so a couple may not be refused marriage solely because the woman is pregnant.

In a culture which all too often disposes of human life through the tragedy of abortion, a couple who have chosen to respect life and accept God's gift of human life should be commended for their courage and their respect for human life.

The priest will want to be certain, however, that both partners are freely making their commitment to a lifelong relationship together and that the marriage is not simply to avoid scandal or due to pressure from parents or partner. In some situations it may be for the long term good of both partners and the child to postpone the wedding until after the birth of the child or even to decide not to proceed to marriage.

3. I WAS BAPTISED A CATHOLIC, BUT I DON'T GO TO CHURCH. MAY WE STILL HAVE A CATHOLIC WEDDING?

Couples seeking marriage in the Church are encouraged to participate regularly in [Mass](#) and the [sacraments](#), but they may not be refused marriage in the Church solely because they have not been active Catholics. Nevertheless, both partners will be encouraged to attend pre-marriage education where the Catholic understanding of sacramental marriage is explained.

Since the essence of the Sacrament of Matrimony is the mutual [consent](#) to be married that the bride and the groom exchange in the wedding vows, it is essential that both persons understand and intend what that exchange of consent means. The question your priest will have to answer is whether your reasons for not participating in the Mass affect your ability to consent to sacramental marriage.

If neither partner can accept the fundamentals of Church teaching on marriage, it would be hypocritical to have a Catholic wedding. Indeed, in his encyclical letter on *Families in the Modern World*, Pope John-Paul II wrote: "... when in spite of all efforts, engaged couples show that they reject explicitly and formally what the Church intends to do when the marriage of baptised persons is celebrated, the pastor of souls cannot admit them to the celebration of marriage... it is not the Church that is placing an obstacle in the way of the celebration that they are asking for, but themselves."⁵

4. I'VE HAD A VASECTOMY/TUBAL LIGATION. CAN I HAVE A VALID CHURCH MARRIAGE?

Catholic teaching regards any form of contraception or sterilisation, including vasectomies and tubal ligations, as morally wrong. In this case the sterilisation is in the past. Provided it has been sincerely repented of in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the sterility due to the operation is not a barrier to a sacramental marriage in the Catholic Church.

5. I'VE HAD AN ABORTION. I DEEPLY REGRET THIS. I NOW WISH TO MARRY. CAN WE HAVE A CHURCH MARRIAGE?

Church teaching (CCC 2272) and Church law (Can. 1398) provide that a Catholic who, *knowingly* and *willingly* performs an abortion, has an abortion, or cooperates in the procuring of an abortion automatically places themselves outside the Church. (Of course, only God knows the human heart and the degree of culpability in such matters.) Sincere repentance in the Sacrament of Reconciliation results both in God's forgiveness of the sin

⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, para. 68.

and in the removal of the excommunication. Assuming there are no other impediments, there would then be no barrier to a [valid Church marriage](#).

6. MY CHILD HAS A SERIOUS INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY, CAN HE/SHE GET MARRIED IN THE CHURCH?

Disability in itself is no bar to marriage if the physical, emotional and psychological capacity to enter into a permanent union is present. The fundamental question is whether both partners are capable of giving genuine [consent](#) to marriage as the Catholic Church understands it, because consent is at the heart of a sacramental marriage.

Persons wishing to marry need to be free of any grave lack of discretion that might affect their ability to make valid judgements about the rights and duties they are to commit themselves to in marriage. Also, emotional maturity and the ability to relate to others is an important basis for the permanent loving relationship of Christian marriage. In the case of someone with intellectual disability, the medical, intellectual and/or psychiatric issues relating to the capacity for marriage should be examined with the help of experts in the field and wise counsellors. However, if the requirements for a [valid marriage](#) are present, then people with disabilities are not to be treated differently from anyone else.

7. MY FIANCÉ AND I HAVE DECIDED WE WILL NOT HAVE CHILDREN. IS THAT A PROBLEM FOR A VALID CHURCH MARRIAGE?

For a marriage to be valid in the eyes of the Catholic Church, there must be an openness on the part of both partners to have children. The timing and the number of children is, however, a matter for their individual [consciences](#), properly formed in Catholic moral teaching, and their mutual decision.

8. I'M CATHOLIC, BUT I HAVEN'T BEEN CONFIRMED YET. MAY I GET MARRIED IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

Catholics who have not yet received the Sacrament of Confirmation should receive it before they are admitted to marriage, if it can be done without grave inconvenience. (Can. 1065 §1) This can usually be arranged with the celebrating priest.

9. MY FIANCÉ BELONGS TO THE UKRAINIAN (EASTERN) CATHOLIC CHURCH. CAN WE GET MARRIED IN MY LOCAL CATHOLIC CHURCH?

The marriage of Catholics canonically enrolled in any of the Eastern Catholic Churches is governed by the prescriptions of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*. For example, the *Code* directs that such marriages are to be celebrated in the Church of the groom unless a just cause excuses. There are a variety of other differences in rules regarding marriage and in the wedding ceremony itself. You should discuss these differences with your respective [parish priests](#).

10. I'M A CATHOLIC BUT MY FIANCÉE IS A NON-CATHOLIC. WHAT IS THE PROCEDURE FOR US TO GET MARRIED IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

During the Pre-Nuptial Inquiry, your local priest or pastoral assistant will prepare a written request is also prepared in which the Catholic seeks the permission of the bishop to proceed with a marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic, an inter-Church marriage, popularly known as a "mixed marriage". In most cases this request is readily granted. As part of the request, the Catholic party promises to do his or her best to raise the children as Catholics.

In a few cases of marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic, the bishop may also authorise a non-Catholic minister rather than a priest to act as the official witness to that marriage, for example if one partner is the daughter or son of a clergyman. This marriage still remains within the law and pastoral care of the Catholic Church.

11. I'M CATHOLIC BUT MY FIANCÉ, WHO IS A NON CATHOLIC, IS DIVORCED. HIS DIVORCED IS RECOGNISED BY HIS CHURCH. CAN WE GET MARRIED IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

The marriage of a Catholic to a divorced person is not valid in the eyes of the Catholic Church if that original marriage met all the requirements for a [valid Church marriage](#). However, there are situations where a Church Marriage Tribunal may declare that the original marriage was not a valid marriage according to the laws of the Church. This is called a 'Declaration of Nullity', popularly termed an 'annulment'. In such a case a Catholic could marry a divorced person, Catholic or non-Catholic. Such situations require advice, assistance and guidance from a priest.

For more information regarding annulments refer to the companion publication: "Divorce and the Catholic Church – Frequently Asked Questions", available free of charge from:

http://www.catholic.org.au/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=24&Itemid=183&limitstart=10

12. I'M WAITING FOR AN ANNULMENT. IT'S ALMOST CERTAIN. CAN WE GET MARRIED IN ANTICIPATION?

The Church regards a marriage as so important that all marriages are presumed to be [valid](#), whether they are celebrated in or outside the Catholic church in any place, until a decree of nullity is definitively promulgated. Even if your previous marriage is eventually found to be invalid, it is not permitted under Church law to enter into another marriage before an annulment has been formally ratified by the appropriate Church Tribunal. (Can. 1085 §2)

For more information regarding annulments refer to the companion publication: "Divorce and the Catholic Church – Frequently Asked Questions", available free of charge from:

http://www.catholic.org.au/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=24&Itemid=183&limitstart=15 .

13. MY SPOUSE AND I ARE BOTH BAPTISED CATHOLICS BUT WE WERE MARRIED IN A CIVIL CEREMONY. WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO TO GET OUR MARRIAGE RECOGNISED BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

Even though your civil marriage is recognised by the State, the Church requires that, to be sacramentally [valid](#), the marriage of a Catholic must take place according to the laws of the Church. Assuming the criteria for a valid Catholic marriage are met, you would get your civil ceremony *convalidated*. [Convalidation](#) is a true wedding ceremony, the Sacrament of Matrimony, but is a simple ritual, including the reading of scripture and exchange of vows. Rings can be either exchanged or the original rings blessed, according to the desire of the couple. You should speak to your local priest about this.

Depending on the circumstances, another way a marriage can recognised as a valid Catholic marriage is through [Retroactive Validation](#) (Can. 1161 §1). This does not require a new formal exchange of consent although the couple must, of course, continue in their consent to be married. In this case, the couple, or the Catholic partner, would ask the priest to seek to have their marriage validated in the eyes of the Church. They present the necessary papers –

the marriage certificate of their original marriage, baptismal certificates, etc – and the priest will forward these to the diocesan bishop, who, if satisfied that the criteria for a valid Catholic marriage are met, issues the validation. When it is granted, the couple are considered to have been married validly in the eyes of the Church from the date of their original invalid marriage.

14. I'M A BAPTISED CATHOLIC AND MY SPOUSE IS A NON-CATHOLIC. WE WERE MARRIED BY THE MINISTER FROM HER CHURCH WITHOUT SEEKING APPROVAL FROM THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO TO GET OUR MARRIAGE RECOGNISED BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

Even though your civil marriage is recognised by the State, the Church requires that, to be sacramentally [valid](#), that all the conditions set out in [canon law](#) be followed, including getting [dispensations](#) such as marriage in a non-Catholic church or before a minister of a non-Catholic denomination. However, provided you are both free to marry according to the laws of the Catholic church, you can approach a priest, and seek [retroactive validation](#). This form of validation can be granted even if one of the parties, e.g. the non-Catholic, is unaware of it.

15. I'M CATHOLIC BUT MY FIANCÉ ISN'T. DOES HE HAVE TO BECOME A CATHOLIC TO BE MARRIED IN THE CHURCH?

The Catholic Church honours the conscience of the non-Catholic party, respecting his/her religious convictions. In other words, there will be no pressure placed on the non-Catholic to “convert” to the Catholic tradition. However, assuming the criteria for a [valid Catholic marriage](#) are met, the Catholic must still seek permission from the local bishop to marry a non-Catholic. You should discuss this with your [parish priest](#).

16. I'M A CATHOLIC BUT MY FIANCÉE IS MUSLIM. CAN A CATHOLIC MARRY AN UNBAPTISED PERSON?

The Church respects the natural right of every person to marry. However, assuming the criteria for a [valid Catholic marriage](#) are met, the Catholic must still seek permission from the local bishop to marry a non-baptised person. You should discuss this with your [parish priest](#). There are some slight variations in the marriage ceremony.

17. NEITHER OF US IS CATHOLIC, BUT MY FIANCÉ IS PREPARING TO BECOME ONE. MAY WE HAVE A CATHOLIC MARRIAGE CEREMONY?

A Catholic wedding must include at least one partner who is a baptised Catholic.

If both of you are baptised Christians, and you decide to go ahead and get married according to the norms of your particular denomination(s) before he is received into the Catholic Church, the Catholic Church regards your marriage as a valid [sacramental marriage](#), assuming that the conditions for a [valid marriage](#) are met.

If, prior to your fiancé being received into the Catholic Church, you have a civil wedding, this is also recognised as valid by the Church, but not necessarily as sacramental. In this case, after your spouse is received into the Church, you can approach a priest, and seek [retroactive validation](#), as discussed in a previous question.

18. MY FIANCÉ AND I ARE BOTH NON-CATHOLIC BUT WOULD LIKE TO USE THE LOCAL CATHOLIC CHAPEL FOR OUR WEDDING. IS THIS PERMITTED?

Catholic churches are consecrated or blessed buildings which have an important significance for the Catholic community. They are therefore generally reserved for Catholic worship.

However, if ministers of a non-Catholic community do not have a place for celebrating worthily their religious ceremonies, the diocesan bishop may allow them the use of a church or a Catholic building. (1993 Directory of Ecumenism, par. 137).

19. WE ARE UNABLE TO HAVE CHILDREN. MAY WE STILL GET MARRIED IN THE CHURCH?

Inability to have children, whether due to age or infertility, is no bar to marriage. The [Code of Canon Law](#) affirms, “Sterility neither prohibits nor invalidates marriage” (Can. 1084 §3).

Appreciating the suffering of an infertile couple, the Catechism states, “Spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality, and of sacrifice” (CCC. 1654).

20. CAN A PARAPLEGIC WHO IS TOTALLY IMPOTENT BE MARRIED IN THE CHURCH?

This is a complex canonical and medical issue and any particular case should be referred to competent authorities in the field.

Sexual intercourse is an integral dimension of [sacramental marriage](#), the “one flesh” union of a man and a woman. In Catholic theology, whilst [consent](#) is central to the [sacrament of marriage](#), it is consummation, the act of sexual intercourse, that constitutes marriage as indissoluble. Accordingly, pre-existing and permanent impotence prior to a marriage, that is, the permanent inability to complete sexual intercourse, whether on the part of the man or the woman, by its very nature invalidates marriage (Can. 1084 §1).

However, establishing that impotence is permanent is not always so easy, especially with advances in the medical and pharmacological sciences. In this regard, Can. 1084 §2 is an important qualifier. “If the impediment of impotence is doubtful, whether the doubt be one of law or one of fact, the marriage is not to be prevented nor, while the doubt persists, is it to be declared null.”

It is emphasised that impotence that arises after marriage does not invalidate the marriage.

21. MY HOMOSEXUAL PARTNER AND I WANT OUR UNION TO LAST FOREVER. MAY WE HAVE A CEREMONY IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

The Catholic Church does not recognise a same-sex union as equivalent to a marriage.

The natural structure of human sexuality makes man and woman complementary partners for the transmission of human life. Only a union of male and female can express the sexual complementarity willed by God for marriage. The permanent and exclusive commitment of marriage is the necessary context for the expression of sexual love intended by God both to serve the transmission of human life and to build up the bond between husband and wife (CCC, 1639-1640).

In marriage, husband and wife give themselves totally to each other in their masculinity and femininity (CCC 1643). They are equal as human beings but different as man and woman, fulfilling each other through this natural difference. This unique complementarity makes possible the conjugal bond that is the core of marriage.

On several counts a same-sex union contradicts the nature of marriage. For example, same-sex union is not based on the natural complementarity of male and female; it cannot

cooperate with God to create new life; and the natural purpose of sexual union, the conception of a child, cannot be achieved.

MARRIAGE CELEBRANTS

22. WHAT DOES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH REQUIRE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE?

The Church lays down some simple conditions concerning the way a marriage is to be celebrated. The couple must make their mutual consent before a priest and two adult witnesses, normally in public, usually in a church. Through [baptism](#), they are the ministers of the [sacrament of marriage](#) as they make their mutual free consent. Therefore the marriage of a Catholic to another Catholic, or the marriage of a Catholic to a non-Catholic, is not [valid](#) unless it is celebrated before a priest and other witnesses. In some circumstances, the local bishop can give approval for a minister from another Christian Church to be the celebrant. (Refer later questions.)

23. WHY DO WE HAVE TO HAVE A CATHOLIC PRIEST AS OUR CELEBRANT?

The presence of the Church's minister visibly expresses the fact that marriage is sacramental reality of the Church. The priest (or deacon) who assists at the celebration of a marriage receives the consent of the spouses in the name of the Church and gives the blessing of the Church. This is the reason why the Church normally requires that baptised Catholics contract marriage according to the norms of the Church. Several reasons converge to explain this requirement (CCC 1630-1631):

- Sacramental marriage is a liturgical act of the Church which involves the Church as a body. It is therefore appropriate that it should be celebrated in the public [liturgy](#) of the Church presided over by the Church's minister;
- Marriage introduces the couple into an ecclesial order, and creates rights and duties in the Church between the spouses and towards their children;
- Since marriage is a state of life in the Church, certainty about its validity is necessary (hence the obligation to have witnesses);
- The public character of the consent protects the "I do" once given and helps the spouses remain faithful to it.

24. ARE CATHOLIC PRIESTS AUTHORISED MARRIAGE CELEBRANTS?

Most catholic bishops, priests and deacons are normally authorised marriage celebrants in Australia and its Territories under the Commonwealth Marriage Act 1961 and as such are legally authorised to solemnise marriages in accordance with Australian law. Note that each country has its own laws with regard to civil marriage requirements.

25. MY BEST FRIEND IS A MARRIAGE CELEBRANT. CAN SHE MARRY US IN A CATHOLIC WEDDING?

For a marriage to be [valid](#) in the eyes of the Church, the celebrant, that is the person who asks for and receives the consent of the parties seeking marriage and who receives their vows, must be a Catholic bishop, priest or deacon or, in special circumstances where approved by the local bishop, a minister of another Christian denomination. (Can. 1108 §1; also 1127 §§2-3). In the particular circumstance where no priest or deacon is available the

bishop may, subject to the prior approval of the Episcopal Conference and the Holy See, delegate a lay person to officiate at the wedding (Can. 1112 §1).

Assuming the normal situation where a priest is available, your friend could not officiate. She could, instead, take the role of one of the required witnesses.

26. MY FUTURE FATHER-IN-LAW IS AN ANGLICAN PRIEST. CAN HE BE A JOINT CELEBRANT OF OUR WEDDING WITH OUR PARISH PRIEST?

Under both Church and Australian law, only one celebrant may receive the marriage vows. This would normally be the Catholic bishop/[priest](#)/deacon. However, the bishop has the authority to permit a minister of another Christian denomination to officiate at the wedding of a Catholic and a non-Catholic.

In either case, approval could be given for other clergy to participate in the celebration of the marriage in other roles, for instance, by reading from the Scriptures, offering prayers or blessing the couple.⁶

27. DOES A CATHOLIC WEDDING HAVE TO BE IN A CATHOLIC CHURCH?

For Catholics, marriage is not just a social or family event, but an event of significance for the Christian community which witnesses and welcomes this new ‘domestic church’, the family. For this reason, the Church prefers that marriages between two Catholics, or between a Catholic and a Christian of another denomination, be celebrated in the [parish church](#) of one of the parties.

Usually, the [parish priest](#) can give permission for the wedding to be celebrated in a Catholic church other than the local [parish](#), although in some dioceses permission must be sought from the bishop.

The local bishop has authority to permit a Catholic marriage to be celebrated other than in a Catholic Church. For example, if you are marrying a non-Catholic Christian the bishop may permit the wedding to take place in the church of your fiancé. (See also next question.) For special reasons, the bishop may permit the wedding to take place in a building or outdoor location which respects the dignity of the occasion. However, permission will not normally be given for a Catholic marriage to be conducted in ‘novelty’ locations (for example a McDonald’s restaurant).

If you are marrying a non-baptised person (for example a Muslim or Buddhist, or someone with no religious background or belief), the bishop may permit the wedding to take place in another suitable place which reflects the dignity of the occasion.

28. MY FIANCÉE’S FATHER IS A PASTOR IN THE BAPTIST CHURCH. IS IT POSSIBLE TO GET PERMISSION TO GET MARRIED IN THE BAPTIST CHURCH?

The local bishop can permit a wedding to take place in a non-Catholic church, or in another suitable place, for a sufficient reason. In these circumstances, the bishop may permit the couple to marry in your fiancée’s church. The permission in these instances is called a “[dispensation](#) from [canonical form](#)”.

⁶ Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism 1993, para 158

In such cases, with the prior authorization of the local bishop, a Catholic priest may attend or participate in some way in the celebration of the marriage.

You and your fiancée should go to your local Catholic [parish](#) and ask the [parish priest](#) for the forms for “permission for a mixed marriage” and “[dispensation](#) from [canonical form](#)”. Do this as soon as possible.

29. A PRIEST FROM A DIFFERENT PARISH IS A CLOSE FAMILY FRIEND. CAN HE OFFICIATE AT THE WEDDING IN OUR LOCAL PARISH CHURCH?

Both the local bishop and the [parish priest](#) have the authority under [canon law](#) to delegate another priest or deacon to officiate at a Catholic wedding (Can. 1108, 1111). You should raise this issue with your parish priest as early as possible so that arrangements can be made.

PROMISES AND COMMITMENTS IN THE WEDDING CEREMONY

30. WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF THE LITURGY OF MARRIAGE

In the Latin Catholic tradition, the spouses are the ministers of the [Sacrament of Marriage](#). The central part of the wedding ceremony is the ‘[Liturgy of Marriage](#)’, the exchange of wedding vows where the bride and groom express their consent to marriage and make their commitment to a lifelong, unique partnership open to children.

The liturgy of marriage is divided in three parts: the statement of intentions, the solemn consent, and the blessing and exchange of rings.

1. The statement of intentions addresses the critical elements of sacramental marriage. The priest asks the bride and groom:
 - “Have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?”
 - “Will you love and honour each other as husband and wife for the rest of your lives?”
 - “Will you accept children lovingly from God and bring them up according to the law of Christ and His Church?” (The words ‘and His Church’ may be omitted. Also, the question may be excluded completely for a couple beyond childbearing age.)
2. For the solemn [consent](#), the priest asks the couple to join hands and declare their consent before God and the Church. The couple then exchange their wedding vows in the form approved by the Church. Perhaps the most commonly used form is:

“I, N., take you, N., to be my husband/wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honour you all the days of my life.”

After the vows the priest blesses the couple and acknowledges them as man and wife.

3. If the couple choose to have wedding rings, the priest then blesses the wedding rings as symbols of deep faith and peace, and the bride and groom exchange them with a promise of unconditional love and fidelity.
4. After the vows the priest blesses the couple, acknowledges them as man and wife and invites the community to pray for them.

31. DO OUR VOWS HAVE TO INCLUDE THE COMMITMENT TO “LOVE, HONOUR AND OBEY”?

There are several forms for the wording of the vows from which the couple can select. The formula “love, honour and obey” is not included in the Catholic [liturgy](#). However, the couple may include these words if they wish.

32. CAN WE DEVISE OUR OWN VOWS?

While the Church offers several alternative forms of the wedding vows, it does not permit personal adaptation, for several reasons.

Because the mutual [consent](#) is the very sacramental sign of marriage – that is, what makes the marriage a sacrament – it is important for everyone to be clear that the bride and groom have actually declared their mutual consent (CCC 1623, 1626, 1639 - 1640). If the vows aren’t clear about that—or if they contain wording that might be interpreted as placing conditions or limits on the marriage—then the validity of the marriage becomes questionable (Can.1101, 1102, 1119).

One of the ways that the Church expresses the unity of all believers is through the unity of the [liturgy](#) (in this case, the wedding), especially in its essential parts (CCC 813, 815). In other words, it would become hard to recognize the unity of the Church if everyone started using different words for the most important parts of the liturgy. By using the vows provided by the Church, the couple is acknowledging that they are part of something larger than themselves. The wedding unites them not only with one another, but with the whole Body of Christ, the Church.

It should be noted that Federal law also places constraints on ‘creative wording’ of the wedding vows to ensure that there is “no mistake as to the meaning of the vows”⁷.

There are, however, a number of places in the wedding ceremony where the couple can add individual prayers that reflect their unique relationship.

33. WE WANT OUR MARRIAGE TO LAST FOREVER BUT WE ARE SIGNING A LEGAL AGREEMENT CONCERNING OUR PROPERTY JUST IN CASE IT DOESN’T. IS THIS OK?

Marriage is a covenant relationship based on an enduring committed love: a partnership for the whole of life. Whole of life is understood in two ways. Firstly, it is a lifelong partnership, “*as long as we both shall live*”, as expressed in the wedding ceremony. Secondly, it presupposes a comprehensive sharing of both spiritual and temporal goods.

A pre-nuptial agreement, as commonly understood, is an agreement made prior to marriage on settlement terms for the division of property in the event of a divorce. Such a pre-nuptial agreement waters down the life-long commitment of covenant love.

⁷ Attorney Generals Department, “Explanatory Material on the Marriage Act 1961 for Marriage Celebrants”, Australian Government, 2008, p.31.

The Code of [Canon Law](#) provides: “A marriage subject to a condition about the future cannot be contracted validly” (Can. 1102). This would seem to preclude a “pre-nuptial agreement” with that specific intent.

There are, of course, many forms of pre-nuptial agreements. What is crucial is the intent of the individual. For example, there is no canonical bar to one or both partners establishing wills relating to the disposition of assets owned prior to marriage and setting up legal structures to protect this in the event of their deaths. Nor would there be a problem with setting up a family trust to protect the respective ownership interests in, for example, an extended family farming enterprise.

34. MY FIANCÉ IS NOT A CATHOLIC; DOES HE HAVE TO PROMISE TO RAISE OUR CHILDREN AS CATHOLIC BEFORE WE MAY GET MARRIED?

The non-Catholic partner is not obliged to make any such promise. However, [canon law](#) provides (Can. 1125) that the local bishop is not to grant a [dispensation](#) for an inter-church marriage in the Catholic church unless the following conditions are fulfilled:

- the Catholic party makes a sincere promise to do all in his or her power in order that all the children be baptised and brought up in the Catholic faith;
- the other party is informed in good time of these promises to be made by the Catholic party, so that it is certain that he or she is aware of the promise and of the obligation of the Catholic party

FINANCIAL QUESTIONS

35. WHAT DOES IT COST TO GET MARRIED IN A CATHOLIC CHURCH?

As with civil celebrants, costs are incurred in Church weddings. The level of charges will vary significantly from place to place and over time, and will also depend on the number of services contracted. However, no Catholic would be refused marriage in a Catholic Church because of inability to meet costs. You should contact your [parish priest](#) for details.

The fees (which in 2010 ranged in total from around \$500 to \$1500 or so depending on the location and the services provided) are designed to meet costs incurred by the [parish](#) as well as to reimburse the priest and other church workers for their time. There is often also a refundable bond relating to the non-use of confetti (which can be time-consuming to clean). To put such fees in perspective, the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that the *average* cost of getting married in Australia in 2010 (rings, bridal outfits and suit hire, civil celebrant or church minister, photographers, cars, reception, , cars, and so forth) was over \$30,000.

36. CAN WE DISPENSE WITH FLOWERS, ORGANISTS AND ALL THE FRILLS TO KEEP COSTS DOWN?

In contrast to the cultural trend for bigger and more lavish weddings, the Church encourages couples to focus their wedding day on the essence of the marriage ceremony and on their wedding vows. A couple do not have to postpone the celebration of the [Sacrament of Marriage](#) because they cannot afford such trappings. If you have significant financial hardship you should discuss this with your [parish priest](#).

MARRIAGE EDUCATION

37. IS THERE A WAITING PERIOD TO GET MARRIED? I'VE HEARD YOU HAVE TO WAIT SIX MONTHS.

One month's notice of marriage is obligatory under Australian law. A longer notice is requested by the Church, however, to allow for a calm and serious preparation for marriage. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has recommended that [dioceses](#) require couples to give early notification of weddings, ideally 12 months prior to marriage, but at least 6 months beforehand. You should consult your local [parish priest](#) to find the local requirements.

38. CAN THE CHURCH SHORTEN THE WAITING PERIOD? I WANT TO MAKE OUR RELATIONSHIP 'LEGAL' BEFORE WE VISIT MY PARTNER'S FAMILY OVERSEAS.

Practice varies between [dioceses](#). Subject to the obligations of Australian law, the local bishop may give a [dispensation](#) of early notification for exceptional circumstances, for example if a parent of one of the partners is dying.

39. SHOULD I RECEIVE THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION BEFORE I GET MARRIED?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church notes (CCC. 1622), "It is ... appropriate for the bride and groom to prepare themselves for the celebration of their marriage by receiving the sacrament of penance". Many priests will offer this at the rehearsal for the couple and for Catholic members of the wedding party who may desire it.

40. WHAT MARRIAGE EDUCATION IS REQUIRED / RECOMMENDED?

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference 'Common Marriage Policy' recommends that each [diocese](#) require all couples to participate in an approved marriage education program at least six months prior to marriage

Couples are counselled by the priest before marriage and are also urged to attend marriage education courses.

The Catholic Society for Marriage Education (CSME) aims to promote and support marriage and family life in the Catholic vision by encouraging marriage and relationship education for couples considering marriage and for married couples. Their website (www.csme.catholic.org.au) links to all the organisations that are members of CSME who provide pre-marriage education through Catholic agencies in Australia.

Options include programs with other couples and/or a pre-marital inventory to identify issues for further discussion.

41. HOW COME WE HAVE TO GO TO A MARRIAGE EDUCATION COURSE BEFORE WE CAN GET MARRIED, WHAT ARE THEY ALL ABOUT, AND HOW LONG DO THEY LAST?

The Church believes in the sacredness of marriage and urges couples to prepare well for this special day and for their married life together. The fact that a high percentage of marriages end in divorce emphasises the need for effective preparation.

Quite apart from that, substantial academic research demonstrates the value of marriage education to the success of marriages. For this reason, marriage education is promoted by Australian law⁸ and the Federal Government subsidises such courses.

Marriage education offers couples the opportunity to develop a better understanding of Christian marriage; to evaluate and deepen their readiness to live married life; and to gain insights into themselves as individuals and as a couple. It is especially effective in helping couples to deal with the challenges of the early years of marriage.

The aims of marriage education courses are several: to provide you with insights on skills on how to have a successful marriage; to help you to examine the level of commitment that is required for married life; to assist you in understanding your vision for marriage and the vocation to married life; and to explain the Church's teaching on sexuality. In addition, the courses provide an opportunity to prepare for your marriage ceremony.

Programs vary from one 3 hour session to weekly sessions over 3 months or more. A typical program, for example, addresses topics such as:

- What makes a good relationship
- Roles and expectations
- Family influences
- Communication skills
- Problem solving ideas
- Conflict resolution methods
- Respecting & responding to differences
- Intimacy
- Sexuality & Family Planning
- Spirituality & Christian Marriage

42. DO THE MARRIAGE EDUCATION COURSES INCLUDE RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION FOR A PARTNER WHO IS NOT CATHOLIC?

The Catholic Church fully respects the conscientious beliefs of the non-Catholic partner.

Marriage education courses are not religious instruction classes. Because religious and cultural differences can become a source of disunity in marriage, the purpose of such courses is to assist the mutual understanding and communication between the Catholic and non-Catholic partner. Accordingly, they address the Church's teaching on the [Sacrament of Marriage](#), the vocation to married life and the Church's teaching on sexuality. There is no intent to try to convert the non-Catholic partner but rather to facilitate communication between the partners on such intimate matters.

⁸ Under Australian Law, every authorized celebrant, including Catholic clergy, must “as soon as practicable” after receiving notice of intention to marry, “give to the parties a document in the prescribed form outlining the obligations and consequences of marriage and indicating the availability of marriage education and counselling”.

43. HOW MUCH DO CATHOLIC MARRIAGE EDUCATION COURSES COST?

Costs vary according to course duration, whether or not it is live-in and whether it is individual, small group or large group. Typical costs in Australia in 2010 are in the range of \$100 to \$300. Courses run by approved agencies are subsidised by the Federal Government.

PREPARING FOR THE WEDDING NUPTIAL MASS & WEDDING CEREMONIES

44. WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF WEDDING CEREMONY IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

There are three forms of wedding ceremonies (rites for marriage) that are approved by the Catholic Church in relation to a sacramental marriage.

- [Nuptial Mass](#), where the wedding ceremony is an integral part of the Mass;
- A wedding ceremony celebrated during an ordinary 'Mass of the day';
- A wedding ceremony where no Mass is celebrated.

45. WHAT IS A NUPTIAL MASS AND WHEN CAN A COUPLE HAVE ONE?

A [Nuptial Mass](#) is a marriage celebrated in the context of the Catholic Mass. The readings from Scripture and the celebration of the [Eucharist](#) are woven around the wedding ceremony. The [Sacrament of Marriage](#) between two baptised practising Catholics should normally be celebrated within the Mass because the Eucharist, which is the Sacrament of Unity, provides particular graces for the couple and both symbolises and is a source of their mutual unity in Christ. The spouses and guests who are Catholic are invited to receive the Eucharist – the body of Christ present in sacramental form.

“The celebration of marriage between two Catholic faithful normally takes place during Holy Mass, because of the connection of all the sacraments with the Paschal mystery of Christ. In the Eucharist the memorial of the New Covenant is realized, the New Covenant in which Christ has united himself forever to the Church, his beloved bride for whom he gave himself up. It is therefore fitting that the spouses should seal their consent to give themselves to each other through the offering of their own lives by uniting it to the offering of Christ for his Church made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice, and by receiving the Eucharist so that, communicating in the same Body and the same Blood of Christ, they may form but 'one body' in Christ” (CCC 1621).

Provided the local bishop gives permission, a Nuptial Mass may be celebrated for a marriage between a Catholic and a baptised person who is not a Catholic.

46. MY FIANCÉ IS ANGLICAN. CAN HE RECEIVE THE EUCHARIST AT OUR NUPTIAL MASS? CAN HIS FRIENDS AND RELATIVES?

In the Catholic tradition, the reception of the [Eucharist](#) is not simply an act of individual devotion, but is the sacramental sign of the Church community's unity in faith, worship and community life. For this reason, 'Eucharistic sharing', which is common in some non-Catholic denominations, is generally not permitted. In exceptional circumstances, and subject to

specific conditions⁹, the local bishop may give approval for the non-Catholic partner to receive the Eucharist at a [Nuptial Mass](#). Non-Catholic friends and relatives, however, would not normally be given approval to receive the Eucharist.

To avoid embarrassment, the priest would normally explain the Catholic tradition and invite non-Catholics to come forward during the distribution of the Eucharist, with their arms crossed, to receive a blessing.

47. WE JUST WANT A SIMPLE CEREMONY, WITHOUT A MASS. IS THAT POSSIBLE WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

You can have a wedding ceremony within a celebration of God's Word. The ceremony includes prayers for the couple, some appropriate readings from Scripture, the marriage ceremony itself and the nuptial blessing. This ceremony does not include [Mass](#) or the Eucharist and is common for couples of different Christian traditions or mixed faith.

48. IF A CATHOLIC MARRIES SOMEONE FROM ANOTHER FAITH, MAY THEY HAVE MASS WITH THE CEREMONY?

Whilst a marriage between a Catholic and a person of a non-Christian faith may be celebrated in a church, the wedding ceremony would not normally include [Mass](#). If there is a compelling reason, the local bishop has authority to approve a Nuptial Mass.

49. IS THE WEDDING STILL A SACRAMENT IF THERE IS NO MASS?

Provided that the Church requirements for a [valid marriage](#) are met, the marriage between two baptised Christians is sacramental whether or not it is solemnised at a [Mass](#).

50. MAY WE GET MARRIED ON ANY DAY OR AT ANY TIME OF THE YEAR, FOR EXAMPLE DURING LENT?

Catholic weddings are not held on Holy Thursday, Good Friday or Holy Saturday. Also, for practical reasons, a [parish](#) may limit the times and days when they will allow a wedding. For instance, many parishes will not allow weddings to be scheduled late on Saturday afternoons, to avoid conflict with the Saturday evening [Mass](#), or on Sundays when there are competing parish commitments such as Confirmations or First Communion.

In addition, there are other occasions, for example on Sundays and some special feast days, when a [Nuptial Mass](#) may not be celebrated. The issue on these days is, more accurately, what readings may be used when a wedding is celebrated during Mass. We may still celebrate a wedding during Mass on these days, but the readings and liturgical practices must be those assigned for that day. On the days when a Nuptial Mass is not allowed, a wedding may be celebrated outside of Mass using the approved readings for weddings.

Early consultation with your parish regarding dates and times is advised.

THE WEDDING CEREMONY

51. WHAT IS A CATHOLIC WEDDING LITURGY?

Marriage in the Church is not a private affair where the couple can design their own [liturgy](#), their own vows, and their own songs. It is an official public [rite](#) of the Church -- a celebration

⁹ Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism 1993, para 131.

of the couple, who are the ministers of the Sacrament, but at the same time a celebration of the whole Church.

As such, Catholic weddings follow the general norms for liturgical celebrations. However, there are a number of options available for you to choose that will enable you to enrich the celebration with expressions of your own faith. The priest will assist you in understanding the nature of the liturgy, and the various options available regarding music, readings, and the ritual. Reflecting prayerfully on these together can be an important part of your spiritual preparation for the sacrament.

The wedding liturgy should be planned to encourage the participation of the congregation through song and prayer. It should express both your faith and commitment and that of the gathered community. It provides an opportunity for the community to pray for you, and to promise you their support in your married life.

Your [parish](#) may provide you with a workbook for planning the liturgy. Alternatively, the following internet Web sites provide a detailed planning guide.

<http://www.catholicaustralia.com.au/page.php?pg=sacraments-wedding1>

<http://www.litcom.net.au/publications/prepmaterials/celebratingmarriage.php>

52. WHAT ROLES OR MINISTRIES OF THE LITURGY ARE THERE FOR MY FRIENDS OR RELATIVES TO PARTICIPATE IN?

There are a variety of ministries in each [liturgical celebration](#). Some roles can only be filled by a Catholic (for example, an [Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion](#)); other ministries, like that of reader, may be done by qualified persons of other faith traditions. You should discuss this with your [parish priest](#). You should keep in mind that the [Sacrament of Marriage](#) is a sacred [rite](#) of the Church and so take care in selecting and preparing people to fill these roles, making sure they have the skills and gifts necessary.

STRUCTURE OF THE CATHOLIC RITE OF MARRIAGE

INTRODUCTORY [Rites](#)

After the entrance procession, the priest greets and welcomes the people and prays the opening prayer.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

A reading from scripture is followed by the reading or singing of a psalm and the reading of the gospel. An extra reading from scripture may be included before the Gospel. Then, in the homily, the priest or deacon speaks regarding the sacrament of marriage.

LITURGY OF MARRIAGE

After an introduction and some questions addressed to the couple by the presiding minister, the couple declare their consent to marry. This is followed by the blessing and exchange of rings, and prayers of intercession. If the Liturgy of the Eucharist is not included, the Nuptial Blessing and Lord's Prayer follow.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

If the marriage is celebrated during Mass, the Liturgy of the Eucharist follows. It incorporates the Lord's Prayer and Nuptial Blessing.

CONCLUDING Rites

The marriage register is signed and the priest then blesses the couple and the people.

PLANNING THE WEDDING CEREMONY

53. WHAT PARTS OF THE WEDDING CEREMONY CAN WE TAILOR TO OUR SITUATION?

The Entrance Procession may include the liturgical ministers and priest, as well as the bride and groom, family members and attendants. There are many ways to plan it. For example, a liturgical procession followed by procession of the wedding party; attendants entering as couples rather than the bridesmaids alone; bride and groom on their own or accompanied by all parents or relatives in the procession; or the bride escorted by her father or mother.

The Liturgy of the Word follows the format as at any Mass. The readings may be selected from the many options given in the lectionary, or may be other appropriate readings from Scripture. Non-scriptural readings may not be used. The psalm is preferably sung, as is the gospel acclamation. The general intercessions can be crafted by the couple, but should follow a standard format and should address the needs of the world and the universal Church as well as the needs of the couple.

For the Rite of Marriage, the couple should be clearly visible to the entire assembly as they exchange vows, because they are the focus of the rite. There are various options provided for the wording of the vows.

54. WHERE CAN I GET SOME HELP IN PREPARING A BOOKLET FOR OUR MARRIAGE CEREMONY?

There is a book - *When We Marry* - that is available at any Catholic bookshop. It contains all the readings and prayers of the ceremony. It is also available from The Liturgical Commission, GPO Box 282, Brisbane 4000 or by email order: orders@litcom.net.au.

55. CAN WE HAVE SONGS WHICH HAVE A DEEP PERSONAL MEANING FOR US?

Music in the Church during liturgies is simply another form of prayer giving praise and worship to God. The music used before or during the liturgy should be clearly identifiable as prayer by all present. Secular love songs and ballads that have personal meaning to the couple are not appropriate in the Church and would be more suitable for the reception. You should consult the local priest regarding suitable music.

56. THE WEDDING REHEARSAL

This may be conducted by the priest witnessing the marriage, or by a parish wedding rehearsal coordinator. This is part of the preparation process, and offers an excellent opportunity for the wedding party to join together in prayer.

57. DO I HAVE TO HAVE THE SCRIPTURE READING ABOUT "WIVES BE SUBJECT TO YOUR HUSBAND"?

This text from St Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which includes the injunction that "wives be subject to ...", is not about male domination or superiority but about the mutual gift and mutual submission of husband to wife and wife to husband. However, there are many other suitable Scripture readings to choose from. Refer to the booklet *When We Marry*, or ask your parish priest for suggestions.

58. MAY WE INCLUDE SOME READINGS THAT ARE NOT FROM THE BIBLE?

Non-scriptural readings are not used in the Catholic wedding ceremonies.

59. DO I HAVE TO WEAR A WHITE WEDDING DRESS?

There is no stipulation on what the bride and groom, or the members of the bridal party, should wear. Wedding fashions have changed over the centuries, however, the style of clothing should be in accord with the dignity of the occasion and be respectful of those present.

60. WHAT RULES ARE THERE ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHY?

Photos and videos are important for friends and relatives – and for future children and grand-children. However, the photographer and the photographing should not detract from the dignity of the occasion. The photographer should be discrete in moving around, and everyone should avoid the use of flash lights during the solemn parts of the Mass. There may be specific local rules which you should check with the [parish priest](#).

61. CHILDREN ARE ALREADY INVOLVED IN OUR RELATIONSHIP. MAY THEY HAVE A ROLE IN THE WEDDING?

Depending on their age and ability, your children may be witnesses, attendants or readers. If they are communicating members of the Catholic Church they may also be [Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion](#) if the presiding [parish priest](#) considers this warranted (in particular, that without an ‘extraordinary minister’ Mass would be unduly prolonged). If there are several younger children, they could each read one of the ‘Prayers of the Faithful’. You should discuss the possibilities with the parish priest.

62. WHAT MINISTERIAL ROLES COULD MY PARTNER AND I PLAY? MAY WE BE EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION AT THE WEDDING?

Your primary ministerial role during the wedding is to administer the Sacrament of Matrimony to each other. Any secondary ministerial role detracts from this focus and is discouraged.

63. DO THE BEST MAN AND MAID OF HONOUR HAVE TO BE CATHOLIC? CAN THEY STILL BE OFFICIAL WITNESSES IF THEY ARE NOT CATHOLIC?

Because the witnesses are representing the worshipping community, the Church prefers that both Best Man and Maid of Honour be Catholic, but it is not mandatory. The other attendants also need not be Catholic. However, it is important that all be instructed in the required courtesies and reverences to avoid disrupting the dignity of the occasion.

64. DO THE BEST MAN AND MAID OF HONOUR HAVE TO BE THE WITNESSES

For a valid [sacramental marriage](#) in the eyes of the Church there must be two witnesses in addition to the ‘Official Church Witness’ (usually the priest or deacon). [Canon law](#) makes no prescription regarding the witnesses. State law requires that the witnesses be 18 years of age or over.

65. DOES THE SCRIPTURE READER HAVE TO BE CATHOLIC?

The reading of Scripture during a Eucharistic celebration in the Catholic Church is normally done by members of that Church. On exceptional occasions and for a just cause, the bishop

of the [diocese](#) may permit a member of another Church or ecclesial Community to take on the task of reader.¹⁰

66. WILL THE PRIEST ASK, “WHO GIVES THIS WOMAN TO THIS MAN”?

This is not part of the Catholic ceremony, but could be included if requested.

67. WILL THE PRIEST ASK IF ANYONE OBJECTS TO THE WEDDING TO “SPEAK NOW OR FOREVER HOLD YOUR PEACE?”

This is not part of the Catholic ceremony.

68. CAN I WALK UP THE AISLE WITH MY FIANCÉ, OR DOES MY FATHER HAVE TO ‘GIVE ME AWAY’?

The Catholic ‘Rite of Marriage during Mass’ assumes that the couple would normally proceed to the altar together. This is more in keeping with the Catholic understanding that the couple are the ministers of the Sacrament to each other. However, it is a common custom in Australia for the father or mother of the bride, or both, to escort the bride to the altar.

69. MAY WE INCORPORATE OUR FILIPINO [OR OTHER ETHNIC] TRADITIONS IN THE WEDDING?

The Church allows cultural adaptations within the ceremony as long as they are in keeping with the nature and spirit of the liturgy. Such adaptations should not be overpowering, and need to be approved by the presiding priest.

70. DO WE HAVE TO HAVE RINGS?

It is now a common custom in Australia for husband and wife to exchange rings. This, however, is a matter of custom not Church law.

71. WHAT IS THE NUPTIAL BLESSING?

The Nuptial Blessing is special prayer for the bride and groom invoking God’s blessing for their married life together. At a [Nuptial Mass](#) it is given just before the Eucharist is distributed. At weddings where there is no Mass, the Nuptial Blessing is given towards the end of the ceremony. You may choose from three approved forms of the Blessing. Because this is a solemn prayer of the Church invoking God’s blessing on the couple the Church does not permit personal adaptations of the wording.

72. MAY WE HAVE COMMUNION UNDER BOTH KINDS AT THE WEDDING MASS?

Where both bride and groom are Catholic, [Communion](#) under both kinds is permitted for the couple.

73. MAY PEOPLE THROW RICE/CONFETTI / PETALS AFTER THE CEREMONY?

Because of the effort involved in cleaning up after the use of confetti, rice or flower petals, most [parishes](#) ban their use. Often parishes apply a refundable ‘confetti bond’ to cover the cost of cleaning up if guests do throw confetti or other material. You should discuss this with the [parish priest](#).

¹⁰ Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism 133.

74. DOES THE BRIDE HAVE TO CHANGE HER NAME AFTER A CATHOLIC WEDDING?

This is a matter of culture and custom not Church law.

AFTER THE HONEYMOON

75. DOES THE CHURCH OFFER ANY PROGRAMS TO HELP COUPLES TO IMPROVE THEIR MARRIAGE?

Peer ministry for married couples is widespread. Many couples meet in small groups organised by the [parish](#) or by one of the various marriage or family organisations within the Church. Marriage enrichment weekends and seminars are offered in many [dioceses](#). Some parishes sponsor a retreat day or evening of reflection for married couples. Others offer a mentoring system that matches older couples with younger ones.

OTHER REFERENCES

Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Hypertext version: The Celebration of the Christian Mystery – The Sacrament of Matrimony

Download from link: <http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/p2s2c3a7.htm>

Code of Canon Law

Download from link: http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P3V.HTM

The Christian Family in the Modern World (Familiaris Consortio)

DOWNLOAD FROM LINK:

HTTP://WWW.VATICAN.VA/HOLY_FATHER/JOHN_PAUL_II/APOST_EXHORTATIONS/DOCUMENTS/HF_JP-II_EXH_19811122_FAMILIARIS-CONSORTIO_EN.HTML

Divorce & the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions

Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life. Canberra, 2006.

Download from link: [Divorce & the Catholic Church](#)

Marriage in the Catholic Church – Frequently Asked Questions

Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life, 2006.

Download from link: [Marriage in the Catholic Church](#)

God's Gift of Life & Love: A Pastoral Letter to Catholics on Natural Fertility Methods

Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life, 2009.

Download from link: [God's gift of life and love](#)

The Sacramentality of Marriage. Grace for Marriage and Family Life

Bishop Peter Elliott, 2001.

Download from link:

<http://www.kwl.com.au/httpdocs/Articals/The%20Sacramentality%20of%20Marriage.%20Grace%20for%20Marriage%20and%20Family%20Life.htm>

The Sacrament of Marriage

Includes discussion of marriage preparation, details of the wedding ceremony and FAQs on marriage in the Catholic Church

<http://www.catholicaustralia.com.au/page.php?pg=sacraments-marriage>

Catholic Society for Marriage Education

Download from link: <http://www.csme.catholic.org.au/>

Catholic Inquiry Centre

Download from link: <http://www.catholicenquiry.com/>

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CANON LAW:

The Canon Law of the Catholic Church is a fully developed legal system, with all the necessary elements: courts, lawyers, judges, a fully articulated legal code and principles of legal interpretation. The Code of Canon Law 1983, referred to in this document, is the body of Church Law promulgated by Pope John Paul II on 25 January, 1983. It is binding on all baptised members of the Latin (or Roman) Catholic Church.

Canon law regarding marriage in the Catholic Church prescribes certain rules, give discretion on some rules to the local bishop and give discretion in other areas to the local priest. Apart from these, neither the bishop nor priests may impose restrictions or requirements beyond those already defined by canon law.

Eastern Rite Churches which are in communion with the Pope have their own Code of Canon Law (Code of Canons of Oriental Churches, 1990) which governs their members. The laws regarding marriage for members of Eastern Rite Churches differ in some respects from those of the Latin Church.

The English edition of the Code of Canon Law is available at the Vatican web site:

<http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/INDEX.HTM>

CANONICAL FORM:

Canonical form refers to conditions required under the [Canon Law of the Catholic Church](#) for a valid marriage where one or both parties are Catholic. For the marriage of a Catholic to be valid, it would be celebrated in a Catholic Church, by the local bishop or the local [parish priest](#) (or a priest or deacon delegated by either of them) and before two adult witnesses. For a valid reason, a [dispensation](#) from the canonical form can be obtained, for example for the marriage ceremony to be in a different location than a Catholic Church, or for a minister of another Christian denomination to be the celebrant.

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (or CCC) is a statement of the Church's faith and of Catholic doctrine. Pope John Paul II declared it to be "a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion and a sure norm for teaching the faith".¹¹

The English edition of the Catechism is available from the Vatican web site:

<http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTM>

¹¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum* on the Publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Libreria Editrice Vaticana. 11/10/992.

CONSENT (CCC 1625-1632.)

In addition to being free to marry, both parties must intend marriage. In the Catholic Church, it is consent that creates marriage. Consent consists in a human act by which the partners mutually pledge themselves to each other. Consent must be a free act of the will of the consenting parties, free of any coercion or grave external fear. If freedom is lacking, the consent is invalid and the marriage is [invalid](#).

CONSCIENCE & THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Pope John Paul II taught that conscience is an "interior dialogue of man with himself" about right and wrong.¹² Conscience is a judgment of reason by which a person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act (CCC 1976). A person must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience (CCC1800). However, one's conscience can remain in ignorance or make erroneous judgments (CCC1801). Every person, therefore, has a lifelong obligation to form their conscience especially, in the case of Catholics, by seeking to understand the teaching of Scripture and of the Church (CCC 1794).

CONVALIDATION

There are many baptised Catholics whose marriages do not meet the legal requirements of the Church. A common situation is where the marriage took place in a civil ceremony or in a non-Catholic church without prior approval of the bishop. Such marriages may be valid in the eyes of the State but are invalid in the eyes of the Church.

Validation or convalidation of marriage is the process under Canon law (Canons 1156-1160) by which a couple can seek to have a valid sacramental marriage.

Provided that there are no impediments to a Catholic marriage, the convalidation ceremony, through the mutual consent of the couple before the priest and witnesses, confers the sacramental marriage.

The convalidation ceremony is a true marriage ceremony, but simpler than a normal wedding. However, through discussion with the [parish priest](#), it may be kept simple and discrete or incorporated into the liturgy of the Mass.

See also [RETROACTIVE VALIDATION](#) (also referred to as radical sanation)

DIOCESE

A Diocese is the district under the spiritual authority and pastoral care of a bishop. It is divided into [Parishes](#).

DISPENSATION

A dispensation is the relaxation, for good and valid reasons, of the Church's law in a particular case. It only relates to purely Church laws, for example the requirement that a Catholic marriage should take place in a Catholic Church. Dispensations cannot be given

¹² John Paul II. *Veritatis Splendor*, Encyclical Letter, Vatican, 1993. Para. 58.

from Church doctrine which has its origin in divine law, for example Jesus' teaching on divorce. Canon law specifies where dispensations may be granted and who has the authority.

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER OF HOLY COMMUNION

An extraordinary minister of Holy Communion in the Catholic Church is, under the Code of Canon Law, an acolyte or other baptised Catholic deputed, in certain specified circumstances, to distribute Holy Communion (Can. 910). The term "extraordinary" distinguishes such a person from the ordinary (normal) minister of Holy Communion, namely a bishop, priest or deacon. "Extraordinary" also refers to the circumstances, namely that the priest is prevented from distributing Holy Communion due to injury, age or some other significant reason, or when the number of faithful coming to Communion is so great that the celebration of Mass would be unduly prolonged (*Redemptionis sacramentum*, 158).

Refer: *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, "On certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist" (2004).

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20040423_redemptionis-sacramentum_en.html

IMPEDIMENT

In the Canon Law of the Catholic Church, a canonical impediment is a legal obstacle that prevents a sacrament from being performed validly and/or licitly. Impediments are either from divine law, and so cannot be dispensed, or from Church law and, for a good and valid reason, may be dispensed by the competent Church authority (typically, the local bishop).

LITURGY / LITURGICAL ACT

A liturgy is the customary public worship done by a specific religious group, according to its particular traditions. In the Christian tradition it means the participation of the People of God in the Work of God. It refers to the celebration of divine worship and the proclamation of the Gospel, and in this it is participation in Christ's own prayer to the Father in the Holy Spirit. (CCC1069-1073.)

Of particular importance for liturgy is the action and full participation of the congregation as a body. The liturgical act is done by every individual, not as an isolated individual, but as a member of a body which is the "we" of the prayers. Its structure is different from that of any other collection of people meeting for a common purpose. In the liturgical act the celebrating individual becomes part of this body, the "Church", the body of Christ. (CCC1140.) This is true also with the liturgy of marriage. Whilst it is the couple who are the ministers, the celebration of the sacrament takes place amongst the community of Church; it is witnessed by the Church; and the Church as a whole prays for, rejoices with and welcomes the couple into a new ministry within the Church. (CCC 1630-1631.)

MASS

The Mass is the complex of prayers and ceremonies that make up the Eucharistic celebration in the liturgical rites of the Catholic Church.

A Nuptial Mass is a marriage celebrated in the context of the Catholic Mass. The readings from Scripture and the celebration of the Eucharist are woven around the wedding ceremony. (CCC1621-1622.)

PARISH

A parish is typically the territorial unit served by a parish church or local church. It also refers to the community of baptised Catholics who attend the local church and whose pastoral care, under the authority of the diocesan bishop, is entrusted to a parish priest.

PARISH PRIEST

The parish priest exercises the pastoral care of the Church community entrusted to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop, so that for this community he may carry out the offices of preaching the Gospel, administering the sacraments and ministering to those especially with spiritual needs.

RETROACTIVE VALIDATION (RADICAL SANATION)

The retroactive validation of an [invalid marriage](#) is its subsequent validation without the renewal of consent, granted by the competent authority (typically, the local bishop). It involves a dispensation from an [impediment](#) if there is one and from the [canonical form](#) if it had not been observed. (Can. 1161 §1).

RITE

A Christian rite comprises the manner of performing the diverse services for the worship of God, including formal prayers and blessings, the administration of the sacraments including the [Sacrament of Marriage](#), and the service of the Holy Eucharist, the Mass.

In a slightly different sense we call the whole complex of the services, or liturgical tradition, of any Church or group of Churches a rite. For example, we speak of the Latin or Roman Rite, the Byzantine Rite, and various Eastern rites. In this case it refers to the distinctive liturgical practices of the different Churches. (CCC 1200-1206.)

RITE OF MARRIAGE

The 'Rite of Marriage' is the official guidance of the Catholic Church regarding which details and wording are essential (for example in regard to the wedding vows, the words of 'consent'), where there may be choice (for example regarding which readings from scripture are used), and where there may be cultural variations in the ceremony (for example, the exchange of wedding rings). The *Rite of Marriage* specifies these details for:

- the order of a Catholic wedding ceremony during Mass;
- the order of a Catholic wedding ceremony outside of Mass; and
- the order of a wedding between a Catholic and an unbaptised person.

SACRAMENT

A sacrament is an outward sign, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which invisible grace, divine life, is communicated to the receiver. The outward visible rites by which a sacrament is celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to the sacrament. A sacrament bears fruit in those who receive it with the required dispositions.

The fruit of sacramental life is both personal and ecclesial. For every one of the faithful on the one hand, this fruit is life for God in Christ Jesus; for the Church, on the other, it is an increase in charity and in her mission of witness. (CCC 1131-1134.)

SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

The Sacrament of Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as children of God; we become members of the Body of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word." (CCC 1213-1274.)

A 'Baptismal Certificate' is a document, kept at the [parish](#) where a baptism took place, which certifies that a person has been baptised. Any subsequent marriage in the Catholic Church is also registered on the baptismal certificate.

SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION / EUCHARIST

The Sacrament of the Eucharist is the heart and the summit of the Church's life, for in it Christ associates his Church and all her members with his sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered once for all on the cross to his Father; by this sacrifice he pours out the graces of salvation on his Body which is the Church. The Eucharist is the memorial of the work of salvation accomplished by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. It is Christ himself who, acting through the ministry of the priests, offers the Eucharistic sacrifice. And it is the same Christ, really present under the species of bread and wine, who is the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice. (CCC 1322-1344.)

Communion with the Body and Blood of Christ increases the communicants' union with the Lord, forgives their venial sins, and preserves them from grave sins. Since receiving this sacrament strengthens the bonds of charity between communicants and Christ, it also reinforces the unity of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ.

Benedict XVI talks of a "profound bond" between the sacrament of the Eucharist and that of marriage, noting how "the liturgy places the celebration of the sacrament of marriage at the heart of the celebration of the Eucharist. [...] In their daily lives, couples must draw inspiration for their behaviour from the example of Christ who 'loved the Church and gave himself up for her.'"¹³

SACRAMENTAL MARRIAGE / SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE / MATRIMONY (CCC 1615, 1639-1642.)

The Catholic Church understands that Marriage is a sacrament instituted by Christ to provide special graces to the couple. Indeed, canon law is even more precise: "a valid marriage cannot exist between two baptized persons without it being by that very fact a sacrament" (Can. 1055 §2).

The consent by which the spouses mutually give and receive one another is sealed by God himself. The covenant between the spouses is integrated into God's covenant with man. In the words of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: "Authentic

married love is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ's redeeming power ... so that this love may lead the spouses to God with powerful effect and may aid and strengthen them in sublime office of being a father or a mother.”

This grace proper to the sacrament of Matrimony is intended to perfect the couple's love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. By this grace they: “increasingly advance the perfection of their own personalities, as well as their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God.”

Christ is the source of this grace. Christ dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another's burdens and to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love.

This means that when, for example, two Catholics, two Protestants, or a Catholic and a Protestant marry validly, their marriage is by definition a sacramental marriage. Ironically, not all Protestants agree with this! Lutherans, for example, do not believe that there are seven sacraments, for they accept only two, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. This means that when two baptized Lutherans marry validly in a Lutheran church, they themselves do not believe that their marriage is sacramental. Catholics, in contrast, will unhesitatingly assert that this Lutheran marriage is in fact a sacramental marriage. Simply put, the Catholic Church believes that it is impossible for two baptized people to validly marry without their marriage being a sacrament.

VALID/INVALID MARRIAGE:

Both the Church and State have legislation governing who may marry and the conditions required for marriage. If the conditions of Church law are not met (for example, if one of the parties had previously had a valid marriage and their spouse is still alive, or if the marriage is celebrated only in a civil ceremony) the Church considers that marriage to be invalid. In the eyes of the Catholic Church, if a marriage is judged to be invalid, it never existed and a decree of nullity (an annulment) can be issued to this effect. A couple may be validly married according to civil law, even though the marriage is invalid in Church law.

For a Catholic marriage to be a valid sacramental marriage.

- the wedding must be celebrated in the presence of a Catholic priest/deacon/bishop (unless a dispensation is given) and two adult witnesses, normally in public and usually in a church (Can. 1108 §1)¹⁴;
- both parties must be free to be married, that is neither person has a prior valid marriage (Can. (1085 §1);
- both must understand and accept the nature of Catholic marriage, namely that it is a lifelong, faithful partnership which is open to the gift of children (Can. 1101 §2);

¹⁴ In some countries civil law requires all marriages to be enacted before civil authorities. In such cases, for there to be a valid sacramental marriage, Catholic Church law requires a religious wedding in addition to the civil ceremony. This may be held before or after the civil ceremony. In Australia, the Catholic minister is recognised by the Federal law as a marriage celebrant. Accordingly, in Australia, a Catholic should have only the religious wedding ceremony in accordance with Church requirements.

- both must be emotionally and psychologically mature and capable of consenting to the marriage and they must freely express their [consent](#) to give and accept one another irrevocably in order to establish a Catholic marriage (Can. 1095-6); and
- both must be capable of sexual intercourse; that is, neither is incurably impotent at the time of the marriage (Can. 1084 §1).

