

Diocese of Dallas



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"GETTING MARRIED IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH"

WHERE DO I GET MARRIED?

Under normal circumstances, a Catholic gets married in the Church of the parish in which he or she lives. Depending on the diocese and the parish, parish registration might apply instead of residence. If both intended spouses are Catholic, then the parish of either one can be used.

CAN I GET MARRIED IN A CHURCH OTHER THAN MY OWN?

The wedding can be celebrated in another Catholic church with the approval of the Catholic's pastor. If one of the spouses-to-be is a non-Catholic, it is possible to arrange for the wedding to take place in his/her church through the approval of the diocese.

WHOM DO I SEE ABOUT GETTING MARRIED?

The pastor is responsible for your preparation for marriage. Many parishes have someone specifically assigned to orchestrate marriage arrangements, so you may be asked to work with the parochial vicar or a deacon or a lay minister.

WHO WILL CELEBRATE MY WEDDING?

The answer to this one will depend on a lot of things going on in the parish. Obviously, the pastor or the parochial vicar can celebrate the wedding if he is available. In some parishes, a deacon may be assigned. Depending on the policy of the particular parish, a priest or deacon from some place else can be delegated to officiate at the wedding. Such arrangements must be worked out ahead of time with the pastor or parochial vicar.

CAN I GET MARRIED IN ANOTHER CHURCH?

As mentioned earlier, a marriage can be celebrated elsewhere with the permission of your pastor or the one designated to handle marriage matters in the parish. Permission for a wedding in another Catholic Church or chapel usually is given. In weddings of a Catholic and a person of another faith expression, the permission would come from your diocesan bishop for the wedding to be celebrated in a church or chapel of a different faith or denomination. Permission for a wedding to be celebrated in a non-religious use building rarely is given by the diocesan bishop.

MY FIANCÉE (FIANCÉ) IS NOT A CATHOLIC, SO CAN WE GET MARRIED IN HER/HIS CHURCH?

It is possible. The diocesan bishop can dispense the requirement of a Catholic and a person of another faith expression from marrying before a priest/deacon and two witnesses to allow the parties to marry before a minister or a civil official and two witnesses. This permission is called a "dispensation from canonical form." It is possible for this permission to be extended to a wedding in another diocese but only after clearing it with the bishop of that diocese.

WELL, NOW THAT I KNOW THAT, I'M READY TO GET MARRIED, RIGHT?

So far, we know where and before whom the wedding can take place. But a person must be prepared for marriage. People get married all the time; that's true, but there is much more to marriage than a ceremony.

There are two phases in preparing for marriage: the immediate preparation for leading an enriched married life and the establishment that both parties are free to enter marriage.

HOW IS THE PREPARATION DONE?

Marriage preparation is a part of the pastoral office of the church and is not like a class in school or college. This preparation opens to each spouse-to-be the sanctity of Christian marriage and introduces the methods for living out a future life together to their mutual benefit and happiness as well as to that of any children born to the couple.

In the Diocese of Dallas, the office of Marriage Ministries provides Engaged Encounter Weekends.

Some parishes in the Diocese of Dallas provide Sponsor Couples for individualized preparation and/or provide their own version of the diocesan-sponsored programs.

Of course, marriage preparation programs offered in other dioceses satisfy this need. Some Christian churches or denominations now offer comparable marriage preparation programs, which could benefit a couple with different religious heritages.

ISN'T THERE SOME PAPERWORK?

In practical terms, establishing your freedom to marry will seem more complicated than your marriage preparation. Before a wedding can take place in the Catholic Church, it must be established that each party is not restricted in marrying by past events or his/her current situation.

Through the centuries, certain personal situations were set down by the Church as "impediments" to marriage. Such an impediment renders a person incapable of contracting marriage validly in the Catholic Church. In other words, the marriage is invalid from the beginning. Currently, in the Roman Catholic Church there are twelve impediments.

A dispensation may be obtained for some impediments. A dispensation is a relaxation of a Church law or an exception made for the spiritual good of the parties. For a fuller explanation of impediments contact 214-379-2840

If either party, whether Catholic or not, has been married previously, a wedding cannot be scheduled until that past situation has been resolved. Even if a declaration of invalidity already has been given, the decree or notice from the Church court must be reviewed in case any stipulations were set by the court.

If one of the parties is a widow or widower, a death certificate is required.

For Catholics, a recently issued baptismal certificate/record is required, because it is supposed to note significant church celebrations affecting a person's status in the Church (like being confirmed, ordained, married, etc.). An affidavit of "freedom to marry" is required from your parent(s) or older relative who has known you since early adolescence.

THAT'S A LOT MORE THAN I EXPECTED IN GETTING MARRIED IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH!

Yes. For that reason, you should approach your parish priest, deacon or minister in plenty of time not only to make arrangements for the wedding but also to begin a marriage preparation program and to take care of the paperwork.

Married couples participate in God's plan of creation and God's plan of salvation. The Catholic Church tries to assist couples in having a nice, memorable wedding and to support their life together so that they can receive God's grace and blessings.