

The minister of the non-Catholic partner may be invited to participate in the celebration of the marriage in a Catholic church, for example, by reading from the Scriptures, leading a prayer, or blessing the couple.

Sometimes a Catholic will want to get married in another Christian church or outside a church. When there is sufficient reason, such a marriage for a Catholic may be recognised by the Catholic Church. This is a possibility you should discuss with your parish priest.

### **The Catholic Wedding Ceremony**

The Catholic rite of marriage is structured as follows:

#### 1. INTRODUCTORY RITES

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

#### 2. LITURGY OF THE WORD

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

#### 3. LITURGY OF MARRIAGE

After an introduction and some questions addressed to the couple, they 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.

#### 4. 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.

#### 5. CONCLUDING RITES

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

For committed Catholics it is desirable for marriages to be celebrated during Mass because it is such a powerful expression of our love for one another in Christ. However, if one of the families or a large number of those attending the wedding are not in communion with the Catholic Church, it is best to choose the rite of marriage outside Mass.

Within the structure of the ceremony, you are able to choose readings, prayers and music to make your marriage a special celebration. There are also decisions to be made about how you enter the church in the entrance procession, where you stand, how your family and friends will be involved in the celebration, and so on.

A small book, *When We Marry*, contains all the options available in the Catholic marriage rite and is invaluable in preparing your marriage liturgy. It is available from The Liturgical Commission, GPO Box 282, Brisbane 4001. Telephone: (07) 3336 9444. Fax: (07) 3221 1705. E-mail: [orders@litcom.net.au](mailto:orders@litcom.net.au). Send \$8.25 with your order or use a credit card.

Many couples prepare their own wedding booklet to help those present participate in the ceremony. The booklet should give the outline of the service showing the component parts, those texts which the whole assembly will sing or say, a brief explanation of the meaning of the rites, and some directions to help the people participate (*stand, sit, etc.*). You do not need to print the full text of the readings or the prayers said by the celebrant.

Liturgical texts, scripture translations and hymns are covered by copyright. You will need to seek permission to print words or music and the copyright owners must be acknowledged in the booklet. The celebrant will be able to assist you in preparing your wedding booklet and should be shown a copy before it is printed.

It is possible to arrange with the celebrant to have a wedding practice in the church a day or two before the ceremony.

Enjoy your wedding in a Catholic church and may God richly bless your married life!



### **The Liturgical Commission**

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## **Celebrating Marriage in a Catholic Church**

So, you've decided to get married! Congratulations. And you're thinking of celebrating it in a Catholic church? Welcome.

There are many things you will want to plan for the celebration of your marriage. This pamphlet will help you plan your wedding in a Catholic church and will answer your questions about church and civil requirements for marriage.

The priest or deacon who celebrates your wedding with you will help you

- prepare for your marriage,
- complete the necessary documentation,
- prepare the wedding ceremony.

### **Why Marry in a Catholic Church?**

The question of where you will hold your wedding is an important one which you will need to talk about together. A Catholic Church is a good choice for those who have a connection with the Church and who share Catholic beliefs about marriage.

The Catholic Church believes that the marriage bond is sacred and permanent. In the wedding ceremony the bride and groom administer the sacrament to each other by their declaration of consent. In this awesome and holy act, they are filled with the Holy Spirit who strengthens them for their life together. This is the blessing couples seek by coming to the Church for their marriage.

Sometimes couples want to be married in a church because of social pressure or family tradition. These are not sufficient reasons in themselves for choosing a church wedding. A church is the appropriate venue for the marriage of those who believe in Christ and who wish to celebrate publicly God's blessing of their union.

### **What Do We Need To Do?**

If you decide to marry in a Catholic church, the first step is to contact the parish priest in the area where you live or, at least, where one of you lives. A Catholic wedding normally takes place in your own parish church. If for some reason you would like to celebrate the wedding in another church, it is wise to discuss it openly with your parish priest first. Couples have sometimes booked a favoured church only to find that the priest of that parish is only able to marry people who live in the parish and their own parish priest is unable or unwilling to officiate at a wedding in another church in the diocese. It is then often very difficult to find a priest who can undertake the preparation and celebration of your marriage with you. These contacts should take place as early as possible, normally at least six months before the wedding date.

So you make an appointment to see the celebrant and book the church for the wedding. The celebrant has a duty to assist you to prepare adequately, not just for the wedding ceremony itself, but for the life-time commitment which you are undertaking in marriage.

You will need to provide:

- Birth Certificate (It is obtainable from the Registrar General - Births, Deaths and Marriages)
- Baptismal Certificate (You need a copy less than six months old, obtainable from the parish where you were baptised. Send a stamped, self-addressed envelope with your full name, date of birth and parents' names.)
- Evidence of Death or Annulment if you have been married before.

If other documents are required, the celebrant will inform you.

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 *Notice of Intended Marriage* must be signed at least one month before the wedding - this takes the place of the 'marriage licence' you see in the movies! Of course, you will want to take more time than a month to prepare with the celebrant for your wedding and your marriage.

The priest or deacon does not charge to officiate at a wedding, but it is usual to offer him suitable remuneration. The celebrant will also provide you with information on charges for the use of the church and on local arrangements for music, flowers and photos at the wedding ceremony.

It is a good idea to draw up a time-line and checklist for these details to help your planning go as smoothly as possible.

### **How Do We Prepare for Marriage?**

There is a danger in all the work that is involved in preparing for the wedding and reception - events which last a few hours - that a couple might lose sight of the importance of preparing for their marriage - a lifelong relationship.

Before a wedding in a Catholic church all couples will be asked to reflect on their commitment to each other and to prepare for married life by undertaking some form of marriage education and spiritual preparation.

It is best to begin this marriage preparation at least six months prior to your wedding. It will help you recognise the strengths of your relationship, identify and discuss any weaknesses, and give you new skills to help build a satisfying marriage.

Marriage preparation can take place in a variety of ways:

- You may have a series of discussions with the priest or deacon.
- You may attend a marriage preparation course. In Brisbane, these courses are offered by Centacare, Morgan Street, Fortitude Valley 4006. Telephone: (07) 3252 4371. Fax: (07) 3854 1246. E-mail: cfcs@centacarebrisbane.net.au
- You may attend a live-in weekend such as Engaged Encounter.
- You may use a pre-marriage inventory such as *Prepare or Foccus*. They are questionnaires with follow-up sessions.
- You may use a workbook for engaged couples such as *Before We Say Forever* (\$16.50 for a set of two books - 'his/hers'). It is published by The Liturgical Commission, GPO Box 282, Brisbane 4001. Telephone: (07) 3336 9444. Fax: (07) 3221 1705. E-mail: orders@litcom.net.au

The priest or deacon celebrating your marriage will work out with you a form of marriage preparation to suit your circumstances.

### **What if a Catholic is Marrying a Person Who is Not a Catholic?**

At weddings in a Catholic church, a Catholic will often marry a Christian from another Church or a non-Christian. In such cases, the celebrant is required to complete an application for 'permission for a mixed marriage'. Catholic partners are asked to reaffirm their faith in Jesus Christ and their intention to live that faith in the Catholic Church. They promise to do all in their power to share that faith with their children by having them baptised and brought up in the Catholic Church. The Catholic party must inform the other partner of this promise and sign the declaration. No promise is required of the other partner.