



Bringing Your Marriage Into the Church

Notes for Civilly Married Couples

Is my civil marriage recognized by the Church?

Like other couples in your parish or family, you may be wondering if your marriage is fully recognized by the Catholic Church. Catholic Church law ordinarily requires baptized Roman Catholics to marry before a priest or deacon. Unless they received a “dispensation from canonical form,” Catholics who exchange vows in the presence of ministers from other religious traditions or civil officials are not considered validly married in the eyes of the Catholic Church.

No matter what has taken place in the past, the Catholic Church invites you to bring new meaning to your lives by embracing the vocation of marriage and consider having your marriage convalidated, meaning that it will be valid in the eyes of the Catholic Church. This is sometimes colloquially referred to as “having a marriage blessed”.

What is convalidation or “having a marriage blessed”?

A convalidation, properly speaking, is not a “blessing.” It is not a renewal of the marriage vows. It is, in actuality, a type of marriage ceremony where a couple who has married outside of the Catholic Church has their marriage validated within the Catholic Church. Up to this point, they have only a civil union, which has no validity in the eyes of the Church.

The word convalidation comes from the Latin word meaning “to firm up” or “to strengthen.” A convalidation ceremony is a religious ceremony for a Catholic couple to be legally wed under Church law. A convalidation ceremony is not simply a renewal of the previous intention to marry, but the creation of a valid marriage in the sight of the Christian community and God. A convalidation ceremony is not that different from a traditional wedding ceremony.

Convalidation is for couples who have been previously married in a civil ceremony. They are now making a commitment in the sight of the Catholic Community, entering into a covenant relationship, not just with each other but also with God and God’s people, the Church. These couples have been married anywhere from a few months to many years and some already have children.

Why should I get married in the Catholic Church?

Catholic Marriage is unique among other marital relationships because it is a sacrament that makes Christ present in our world. The relationship between husband and wife mirrors the relationship of Jesus Christ for his people. In the Catholic tradition, husband and wife accept a role in God’s plan for humanity. They are ambassadors of God’s love, and they collaborate with God to keep humanity alive.

The vows exchanged by the couple are a sacred pact through which the spouses embrace each other and embrace Jesus as their partner. Through their union with Christ they participate in the unbreakable pact between God and humanity: the covenant that was sealed in the death and resurrection of Christ.

One of the many benefits of a sacramental marriage is the power of God’s grace, which helps couples keep their commitment and find happiness together. Social scientists are finding that couples who recognize God’s presence in their relationship experience more satisfaction and are more likely to achieve lifelong marriage.

All in all, couples who choose to bring their marriage into the Church receive many gifts – peace of heart, oneness with the Church, the fullness of the sacraments, and God’s special blessing upon their marriage.



What if there is a prior marriage?

In the simplest terms, if a Catholic wishes to marry in the Church when there has been a previous marriage for either party, the partner in the earlier union must have died or the Church must have issued a declaration of nullity (frequently called an annulment) of the previous marriage. Couples should speak to the parish priest or deacon in situations where previous marriages are involved.

Can I receive my sacraments if I am civilly married and living with my significant other?

If a baptized Catholic becomes civilly married, they are unable to receive their sacraments until they are married within the Church. This requires going through a process known as convalidation. Oftentimes it is referred to as having your marriage blessed by the Church.

Couples that are already civilly married and living together are asked to commit to abstaining from conjugal relations (e.g., live as brother and sister) until their marriage is convalidated.

Steps to Celebrating Marriage at St. Frances of Rome

1. **Speak to Your Spouse** - Discuss getting married in the Church with your spouse and make sure you are both on the same page. Please keep in mind that getting married in the Church does not mean you need to have a huge celebration or party. It can be kept very simple or as big as you so desire.
2. **Contact the Parish Office** - Speak with office staff regarding your desire to marry, potential dates and time you are interested in getting married. Weddings are normally scheduled on Saturdays at 12:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. Please note that you should contact the office 12 to 6 months prior to your anticipated wedding date to begin the preparation process. When meeting with the representative you will review and determine the most suitable type of ceremony, and review next steps.
3. **Obtain Recent Copies of Sacramental Certificates** - Make that request to the parish where the person received Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation. Once you have these certificates turn them in to the Parish Office. If the parish no longer exists or baptismal records are unavailable, contact the Parish Office for assistance.
4. **Attend a Marriage Preparation Retreat** - As part of your marriage preparation you are asked to attend a retreat designed for couples who are seeking the sacrament of marriage. Please note, this does have a separate cost associated with it and must be attended in the 6 month time frame before your wedding date.
5. **Marriage License** - As part of the Pre-Nuptial Investigation you will need to collect certain documents such as a marriage license from the county clerk's office. Please turn in this marriage license to the Parish office or to the wedding coordinator the day of the rehearsal. **Marriage licenses are valid for 90 days from the date of issuance**
6. **Scheduling a Meeting** - Call the Parish Office to meet with the pastor and/or his delegate to review the Pre-Nuptial Investigation, Witness Forms and to fill out any other documents.

More information regarding weddings can be found on our parish website www.sfrchurch.org