

How do I get married in the Catholic Church?



You and your fiancé(e) should go and see your parish priest as soon as you have decided to get married. Make sure that both he and the church are available to you before confirming your venue for the wedding reception, etc. If you intend to invite someone else to officiate at the ceremony (such as a relative or family friend who is a Catholic priest or deacon) then you must obtain permission for this also. Normally at least six months notice is required.

Your parish priest will take down your details and explain to you the documents that you need to obtain. For a Catholic these are: a recent copy of your baptismal certificate (not the original one); evidence of confirmation; and evidence of freedom to marry in the form of either a parish letter of freedom or a Statutory Declaration of Freedom.

A baptised member of another denomination must provide a copy of their baptismal certificate and similar evidence of freedom to marry. A non-baptised person must obtain a Statutory Declaration of Freedom.

Your priest will also help you arrange some form of preparation for marriage. Marriage preparation courses vary from parish to parish and certainly within different areas (deaneries) of dioceses. Some can be a whole day (usually a Saturday) some a whole weekend such as Engaged Encounter www.wwme.org.uk. Others offer a chance over several weekday evenings with an experienced married couple(s) to discuss relevant issues. There are also courses run by Marriage Care www.marriagecare.org.uk which includes the FOCCUS questionnaire which provides a unique personalised profile of what is needed in your pre-marriage programme. There are many good and useful resources for marriage preparation via the internet too such as www.catholicmarriagepreonline.com but none of these should substitute parish-based formation where it is available. Your local diocesan coordinator for marriage and family life should be able to help. The contact for the Clifton Diocese is Anne-Marie Sparrow, 305 Nore Road, Portishead, North Somerset BS20 8EN Tel: 07871106992 | Email: annemarie.sparrow@cliftondiocese.com

Any Catholic, practising or not, has a right to get married in their parish Church provided they are free to marry and are not obviously too immature to marry or intending marriage in a sense contrary to Catholic teaching, such as denying its permanence or excluding the possibility of having children if they are of an age to do so. If you wish to marry in a Church other than your parish Church, this will be entirely at the discretion of the parish priest of that Church, and preparation should still normally be undertaken by your own parish priest.

If you wish to marry abroad, you should first obtain the agreement of the priest who will be marrying you and the parish where you will marry, and then proceed as above by contacting the parish priest where you live. He will forward the necessary papers himself and help you participate in some form of marriage preparation.

If you are not confirmed, you are strongly encouraged to take this step before marrying, though it is not absolutely essential in England and Wales. As preparing for marriage in the Catholic Church is a life-changing decision, this provides you with a unique opportunity to discern how you feel about your personal relationship with God. Perhaps you would like to deepen it? What could you do to enrich it and for it to be more meaningful? Seeking the Sacrament of Confirmation [not to mention the marriage preparation] could provide you with the opportunity to explore these questions so it's worth considering seriously. You will not have to attend Confirmation classes with young teenagers! – your parish priest will make special arrangements for you.

What if my fiancé(e) is not a Catholic / Christian?

You are free to marry a Christian of another denomination, but should bear in mind that you will be asked to undertake to bring your children up as Catholics. Your fiancé(e) would not be put under any obligation to assist with this, but should at least consent to your doing so.

If you are marrying a non-baptised person or someone from another religion, a dispensation is required from the bishop's office, but this is normally granted on the parish priest's recommendation.

“In the Catholic Parish of St. Lawrence and St. Paul, Chipping Sodbury and Yate, you should contact either, our Parish Priest, Father Jim Williams or, our Parish Deacon, Deacon Vincent Calder for more information. You will find their contact details in the Contacts Section of the Parish Web Site.”