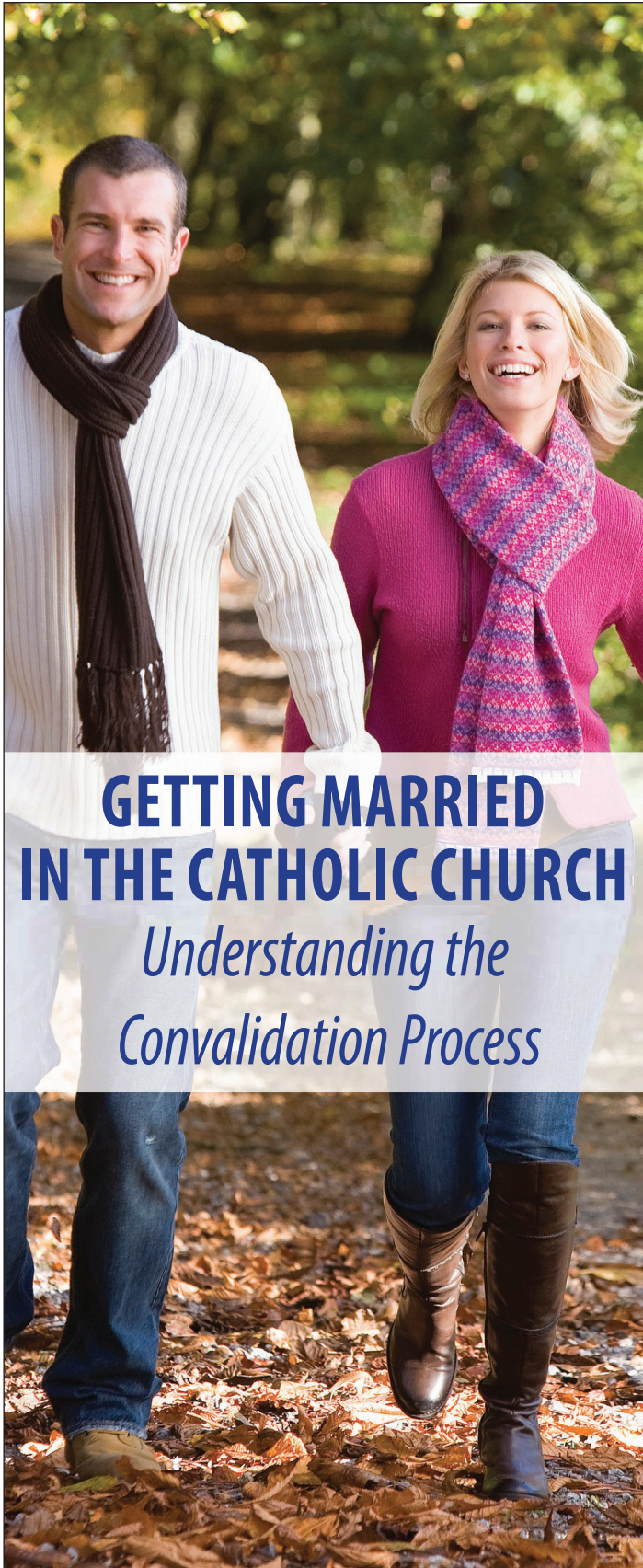




**GETTING MARRIED
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**
*Understanding the
Convalidation Process*



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Is my 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.

Regardless of what happened in the past, the Catholic Church invites you to bring new meaning to your lives by embracing the vocation of marriage and dedicating your family’s mission to sharing God’s love.

Why Marry Catholic?

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 as co-creators of new life.

The vows exchanged by the couple are a sacred pact through which the spouses embrace each other, and, together, embrace Jesus as their partner.

Through their union with Christ they participate in the unbreakable union between God and humanity: the covenant that was sealed in the death and resurrection of Christ.

“It is the presence of the Lord, who reveals Himself and the gift of His grace, that will render your marriage full and profoundly true.”

— Pope Francis



Benefits of Catholic Marriage

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, full participation in the sacramental life of the Church, 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.

Previous non-sacramental marriage: Those wishing to marry in the Church who were in a previous non-sacramental marriage (a good and natural marriage) need to have their previous marriage investigated by the Church through a Church tribunal. A good and natural marriage occurs between two unbaptized persons or between a baptized person and unbaptized person. The Church teaches that both Christian marriages (sacramental) and good and natural marriages (non-sacramental) are one and indissoluble by the natural law. The Church presumes the validity of these “good and natural” unions and, therefore, requires a process of investigation to see if an essential ingredient in the relationship was missing from the start of the previous marriage.

For Catholics with a prior marriage outside the Church, the declaration of nullity is based on what is called a “lack of canonical form.” For Catholics with a prior “valid” marriage, the tribunal process is termed a “formal case.”

Catholics and those seeking entrance into the Church as a member, should consult with their pastor or contact the Tribunal Office of the Diocese to see if a declaration of nullity is required in their situation.

Three Things that Make Marriage Valid in the Church

Three things need to be in place for a true (valid) marriage: capacity, consent, and canonical form. A valid Catholic marriage comes into existence when a man and woman who are capable, give consent to a true marriage, including all the essential properties of marriage, and exchange this consent in the proper form for Catholic weddings.

Convalidation is **not** simply a “blessing” of an existing union. It requires that a new, free act of consent be made.

Capacity

- Psychological capacity (emotional maturity and stability)
- Physical capacity
- Freedom from impediments (e.g. a prior marriage, vows in a religious order, etc.)

Consent

- To a lifelong marriage
- To an exclusive marriage
- To a marriage that is open to children

Canonical Form

- To be married in the presence of a Catholic bishop, or a priest or deacon delegated by either the pastor or bishop, and two witnesses according to the Order of Celebrating Matrimony.

NOTE: Special permission is required for Catholics to marry in a place other than their parish church.

Basic steps toward GETTING MARRIED IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

It is important for you not set a date ahead of time or reserve a reception venue until after discussing arrangements with the parish.

The first and most important step in this process is to contact your local parish for an appointment with your pastor or his delegate to discuss the situation and determine what must be done.

In this meeting the priest or deacon will describe the process to you. They will help you to obtain a new copy of the baptismal certificate for the Catholic party (or parties) from the person's Church of baptism. They will also help you to gather the necessary paperwork for the Pre-Nuptial Investigation. You will work with the parish to determine the date.

You will also discuss the most suitable type of ceremony. For two Catholics, a nuptial Mass is suggested so that the first meal shared by the couple is the Eucharist, the source and summit of our faith. Plan a joyful reception that will follow the liturgical service to celebrate the Church's recognition of your marriage.

We ask that you participate in parish-based formation program to prepare you for sacramental marriage. If there is a prior marriage for either party, seek a Church declaration of nullity. Also, as part of your formational sessions, you may be asked to complete a marital inventory to identify strengths and areas for growth in the relationship.

Finally, celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation and become actively involved together in your parish community.



Additional Resources

www.catholicidaho.org - official website for the Diocese of Boise.

www.foryourmarriage.org - a full-service website for all Catholic married couples, sponsored by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

www.catholicweddinghelp.com - a website for planning your Catholic wedding.

Special Thanks:

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