

We're getting married

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT CATHOLIC MARRIAGE



Getting married?

If you and your future husband/wife want to marry in the Catholic Church you should contact the Catholic parish where the bride has her home (domicile), and ask for marriage preparation. The addresses and telephone numbers of all the Catholic parishes in Sweden can be found on www.katolskakyrkan.se.

You can begin your marriage preparation by reading this booklet. You must then meet the person who will preside at the wedding for further preparation with him.

There may also be group meetings that you can take part in and you can find out about them when you contact the parish. The usual procedure in the Catholic Church is that a priest or deacon officiates at the wedding and prepares the couple.

This booklet does not cover every question you may have, but during marriage preparation you can receive answers to anything you might be wondering about.



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WHAT DOES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH SAY ABOUT MARRIAGE?

The Catholic Church values marriage very highly. There are many Church documents dealing with marriage; for instance in the Catechism of the Catholic Church we read:

“God who created man and woman out of love also calls them to love – the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For men and women are created in the image and likeness of God who is himself love. Since God created them man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves all men and women. It is good, very good, in the Creator’s eyes. And this love which God blesses is intended to be fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation.”¹

And the law book of the Catholic Church, the Code of Canon Law, describes marriage as:

“The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life”. This “is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring.”²



1 The Catechism of the Catholic Church, CCC 1604

2 Codex Iuris Canonici, CIC 1055§1

WHAT DOES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH SAY ABOUT MAN AND WOMAN?

The Catholic Church considers that human beings exist to give and receive love. Individual people are not self-sufficient nor perfect in themselves, but can only achieve proper self-knowledge and fullness of life in union with others. Such a union leads one to go beyond oneself and give oneself to others. Love is therefore not primarily a feeling, but rather choosing and doing good to one another. A human being must never be treated as an instrument to satisfy someone else. They must be accepted and respected for their own sake, i.e. must be met with love.

The human being's longing for fullness is expressed especially clearly in the relationship between a man and a woman. Since man and woman are different they can perfect each other in a special way. Together and in their relationship with each other a man and a woman can thus express the perfection of the human being.



WHAT DOES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH SAY ABOUT THE FAMILY?

The family is born of the love of the spouses. Through it children can come into existence and develop. In the family they can become aware of their dignity as persons, and that they are loved for their own sakes. Marriage creates a special stability in the relationship between members of the family, with clear bonds of affiliation and a mutual dependence and responsibility.

Marriage is the basis of the family which in turn is the basic unit of society. The spouses carry out a task that is of decisive importance for the survival of the human race and of society, by producing a new generation of human beings and transmitting ethical, social and cultural values to the new generation. Consequently the dignity of marriage is not only related to the spouses themselves and to their children, but marriage also has an important social dimension on account of the significance of the family for society.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN WHEN WE SAY THAT MARRIAGE IS A SACRAMENT?

When two baptised persons [whatever denomination they belong to], are united in marriage, this covenant is raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.³ When a person is baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, they receive the Holy Spirit as a gift. The Church regards a marriage where one (or both) of the parties is not baptised as a natural and good union and as a divine gift, but not as a sacrament.

The fact that marriage is a sacrament means that it is an effective sign of the indissoluble covenant of love that Christ has established with the Church. The sacrament of matrimony manifests the grace of Christ and transmits it to the spouses. This special gift of grace is destined to perfect the love of the spouses for each other and to strengthen their indissoluble union. Through their matrimonial love the spouses can also cooperate with the love of God by transmitting and taking care of new human life. The indissolubility, unity and fruitfulness of marriage are thereby given a new and more profound significance by virtue of the sacrament.

The indispensable constituent element in marriage is the mutual and complete exchange of consent that the bride and the bridegroom give to each other. This takes place when the spouses in the marriage ceremony express their consent to give themselves to each other, and this consent finds its fulfilment in the two becoming “one flesh”. The priest or deacon who officiates at the wedding receives the consent of the couple in the name of the Church and gives the blessing of the Church.

³ Cf. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, CCC 1601





ARE THERE ANY CONDITIONS ATTACHED TO A CATHOLIC MARRIAGE?

As with every other sacrament marriage is also a loving invitation from God. It must therefore be contracted with free will, freely and consciously. A valid marriage presupposes that the spouses are free to marry, and are aware of the properties and the ends of marriage. The man and the woman shall belong completely to each other and be absolutely faithful to each other. In the course of their married life they should live in such a way that their love for each other grows deeper and deeper, and they should be willing to receive children according to the will of God and the teaching of the Church.⁴



⁴ Cf. *Att älska livet* (Loving life) – Pastoral letter of the Nordic bishops on marriage and the family 2005, 3.2.1

‘WHY DOES ONE HAVE TO COME TO SEVERAL SESSIONS FOR INSTRUCTION BEFORE ONE CAN GET MARRIED?’

There needs to be an objective and intensive preparation for marriage. First of all the two who are in love with each other need to get to know each other thoroughly, examine the durability of their relationship and grow in their devotion to each other. At the same time they have to deepen their knowledge of the teaching of the Church and take part in the life of the Church. The preparation for the wedding has as its goal a Church feast, when the marriage is contracted, a feast which should also be a celebration for the parish.

The Church wants to make sure that the couple who are planning a Catholic wedding are mature persons, who know what they are doing and know what marriage involves. They need to prepare themselves both spiritually and practically, because a Catholic marriage is a life-long commitment and both parties have to agree that that is the way they want to live. A Catholic marriage is indissoluble. It is a great and holy gift one asks for when one plans to marry, and therefore the preparation is important. If both parties are Catholic the preparation should take place in the woman’s parish.

‘WHY DOES THE NON-CATHOLIC ALSO NEED TO TALK WITH THE PRIEST?’

What has been said above about preparation does not only apply to Catholics. The non-Catholic has to understand what a Catholic marriage involves. During the preparation there are opportunities to ask about those aspects which seem strange or hard to understand. It is therefore important that the future spouses take part in this preparation together.



WHAT DOCUMENTS DOES ONE NEED TO TAKE ALONG?

Hindersprövningsintyg (Certificate of exclusion of impediments) which can be obtained at the local tax office. The certificate must not be more than four (4) months old on the day of the wedding. After the wedding the certificate, signed by the priest, is sent by the parish office to the tax authorities for civil registration.

The Catholic party needs:

- » *Status liber* (freedom to marry), issued no more than six (6) months before the wedding, by the parish where he or she was baptised (or was received into full communion with the Catholic Church). This certificate shows that the person is free to marry, and it also indicates the date and place of confirmation.

The non-Catholic party needs

- » *Registerutdrag ur församlingsregistret* (A certificate of registration from the parish register): if you are a member of the Swedish Church, this can be obtained from the parish where you were baptised. If you do not belong to the Swedish Church you must request the certificate from the city archives, where church records are kept nowadays. The certificate shall state the date and place of baptism, and if possible the name of the minister who administered baptism. If you are not baptised you need permission from the Roman Catholic bishop to marry a Catholic.
- » *Personbild* (Certificate of registration from the civil population register. NB not "personbevis"!), issued by the Tax Office. This states clearly if you are or have been married and if you have any children. This certificate corresponds to the Church document *status liber*.





Remember that it may take time to obtain these papers, especially if the baptismal parish is in another country. At the meetings with the priest or deacon you will be helped to fill in the other forms necessary for the ceremony. If you are a Catholic you must be registered in the Catholic parish where you live in order to have a Catholic wedding.. If you are not already registered, it can be arranged during the time of preparation.

HOW FAR IN ADVANCE SHOULD ONE CONTACT THE PRIEST/PARISH?

The most important thing is that you should contact the parish first, before booking the celebrations and other arrangements for the wedding. You have to ensure that the church and that the priest or deacon celebrating the wedding are available on the desired day.

DOES A CATHOLIC WEDDING COST ANYTHING?

The marriage service itself is of course free of charge. The Church does not accept money for the administration of sacraments. There can however be a charge for the use of parish premises and for extra decorations. If you choose a priest from another parish, he will need to be reimbursed for his expenses. Church musicians decide themselves how much they will charge. Most Catholic parishes have limited financial resources and are grateful for contributions towards flowers in the church, and general maintenance costs (heating, lighting, etc).

CAN YOU HAVE A CATHOLIC WEDDING EVEN IF YOU HAVEN'T BEEN TO CHURCH FOR A LONG TIME?

If you have not been confirmed, you should speak with the priest or deacon about this. You are urged particularly to go to the sacrament of reconciliation (confession), and to receive the holy Eucharist.

CAN ONE HAVE A CATHOLIC WEDDING, BUT IN ANOTHER CHURCH BUILDING?

Most churches in Sweden belong to the Swedish Church, which often lends its churches for Catholic weddings, but if neither party belongs to that parish, they may be refused or they may have to pay a charge. This should be arranged in good time, but you should first speak with the Catholic priest.

CAN A PRIEST FROM ANOTHER DENOMINATION PARTICIPATE AT THE WEDDING?

Yes, but the consent of the spouses should be received by the Catholic priest or deacon.



CAN ONE ASK A PRIEST FROM ONE'S OWN COUNTRY TO COME HERE AND OFFICIATE?

Yes, but he must receive express delegation from the parish priest (where the wedding takes place) and of Kammarkollegiet (The Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency) in order to be able to marry the couple. Such a wedding must therefore be prepared well in advance.

THE BRIDE/GROOM LIVES ABROAD, BUT THE WEDDING WILL TAKE PLACE IN SWEDEN? HOW DOES ONE GO ABOUT THIS?

From your own home country you need a

- » *Certificate of baptism and status liber*, issued no more than six (6) months before the wedding, from the parish where you were baptised. On the baptism certificate there is normally information about confirmation; if not, the parish where the confirmation took place should issue a certificate.

You should receive marriage preparation, privately or in the form of a course, in your own country, and present a certificate testifying to this.







IF YOU ARE PLANNING TO GET MARRIED IN ANOTHER COUNTRY – HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT IT?

Contact first the embassy or consulate of the country in question in order to obtain accurate information about marriage legislation in that country. The preparation for a wedding in another country should be made in Sweden, – if the couple live here – in the parish where the bride has her domicile. It takes a longer time to prepare the documents for a wedding abroad, so it should be planned well in advance.

ONE OF THE PARTIES HAS ALREADY BEEN MARRIED – CAN THEY HAVE A CATHOLIC WEDDING?

No, it's not possible to have a Catholic wedding. There may, however, be a possibility that the previous marriage was invalid. This should be investigated, and this investigation can take a long time. Talk with the priest or deacon about it. Naturally, if one of the spouses from a previous marriage has died, the other one is free to marry again.

THE COUPLE ALREADY HAVE CHILDREN TOGETHER

They can have a Catholic wedding even if they have children. As a Catholic one is obliged to baptise one's children in the Catholic Church, give them a Catholic upbringing and have them take part in catechism classes in the parish.

‘WHAT HAPPENS IF A COUPLE CANNOT HAVE ANY CHILDREN?’

It can be very painful for a couple to discover that they cannot have children together. It must still be stressed, however, that a childless marriage is a proper marriage. Such marriages make it clear that children are a gift, not a right. Since the spouses are willing to receive children – to be a father and a mother – their love for each other will still maintain its character of total self-giving. The Church reminds those who cannot have children, though they would like to, that they can practise parenthood in many ways, for example by adopting children.

‘WHAT HAPPENS IF ONE CHANGES ONE’S MIND? CAN ONE GET A DIVORCE?’

The Church presumes that those who ask for a Catholic wedding have already thought carefully about what it involves. A sacramental marriage that has been contracted and consummated cannot be dissolved by anyone, not even the Pope. If it is impossible to continue living together the Church allows the spouses to separate, but they are still married in the eyes of the Church.



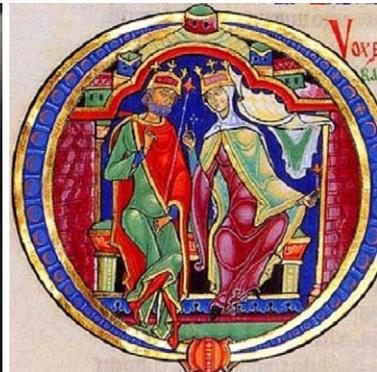
A man and a woman can only give themselves as persons to each other to the extent that they are unique and irreplaceable for each other...

IF THE COUPLE HAVE BEEN TOGETHER A LONG TIME, DOES IT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE IF THEY GET MARRIED?

By contracting marriage the couple say an unconditional Yes to each other. According to the teaching of the Church a sexual relationship has its proper place within marriage. Because the body expresses the whole human being, it is not only their bodies that the spouses mutually give and receive, but rather the sexual act embraces the whole of the man's and the woman's personal being. But a man and a woman can only give themselves as persons to each other to the extent that they are unique and irreplaceable for each other. Love has to be definitive and permanent. This characteristic of love can only be achieved within marriage.

THE BRIDE-TO-BE IS PREGNANT, CAN THE COUPLE GET MARRIED?

Yes, though not because they are expecting a child, but because they want to live the remainder of their lives together within a Catholic marriage. Getting married is a decision that has to be made without coercion or external pressure. Sometimes it can be more prudent to delay the wedding until after the child is born.



MAY ONE REMARRY IF ONE IS A WIDOW/WIDOWER?

Yes, because marriage lasts until the couple are separated by death.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH'S VIEW OF SEXUALITY AND CONTRACEPTION?

The purpose of the sexual life is to share one's love responsibly and affectionately with another person. As with love, sexuality affects the whole of a person's "self": body, soul, emotions – the capacity to love another person and to transmit new life. Sexuality should reflect divine love in the human being.

The two aspects – deepening in love and being co-creators of new life – cannot be separated from each other, for the sexual union would then lose its full value. The Catholic Church teaches that the proper place for a sexual relationship is in a marriage between a man and a woman, and that the spouses should be open to having children. Children are the supreme gift of marriage and they contribute greatly to the good of the parents. To transmit human life is the special task that the Creator has given to all married couples. The Church is against contraception, because she considers that both aspects of the sexual relationship – unconditional love for each other and openness for children – are equally important. One may not therefore use contraception to prevent the possibility of a child coming into existence. However, the Church does recognise that when the couple for just reasons such as the wish to space the births of their children, they may have recourse to periodic continence, or to "natural family planning". This is a scientific method which allows the woman to recognise the days in her cycle when she is fertile, and enables the couple to decide if they wish to avoid intercourse on those days.

If one would like to know more about natural family planning one can look up www.familjeplanering.se (a homepage which is independent of the different churches).



WHAT CAN ONE DO IN ONE'S MARRIAGE TO KEEP THE FLAME OF LOVE BURNING?

Let love be expressed in practical ways! One often speaks of “the five languages of love”:

- » to say positive and encouraging words to each other,
- » to find time to be together,
- » to give presents to each other,
- » to make acts of service for each other,
- » to have physical contact with each other.

Remember also: A human being's hunger for love and union is greater than what a husband/wife can satisfy. Only God can love unconditionally and completely. Human love can in the best of cases give an indication of the love with which God has loved us first.⁵

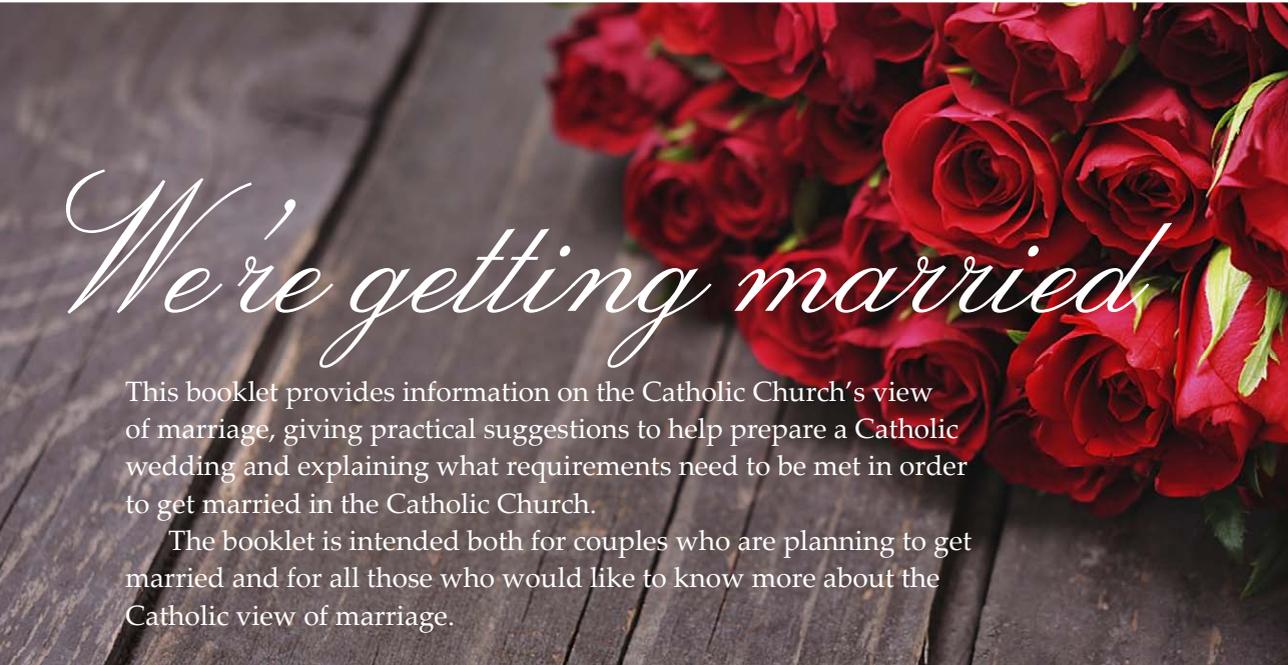


⁵ Cf. 1 John 4:19



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A bouquet of vibrant red roses is positioned on the right side of the page, resting on a dark, weathered wooden surface. The roses are in various stages of bloom, with some showing green leaves and stems. The background of the entire page is a solid, bright blue color.

We're getting married

This booklet provides information on the Catholic Church's view of marriage, giving practical suggestions to help prepare a Catholic wedding and explaining what requirements need to be met in order to get married in the Catholic Church.

The booklet is intended both for couples who are planning to get married and for all those who would like to know more about the Catholic view of marriage.

