



Frequently Asked Questions About Marriage Validation

Q. What is required for Catholics to have their marriage recognized by the Church?

A. If at least one of the parties is Catholic, it is required that the couple exchange their marital consent before a qualified priest or deacon and two witnesses.

Q. Are there any exceptions to this requirement?

A. Yes. If one of the parties is not Catholic, they may get special permission (called a “dispensation”) to exchange their consent before another officiant.

Q. What if I did not observe this requirement and did not have a dispensation?

A. The Church is here to help you make things right. The process for doing so is called a “validation” or making your situation valid in the eyes of the Church.

Q. Is this process complicated?

A. It is not. You will meet with the parish priest, deacon or trained parish staff member. They can help review your situation and determine what steps are necessary. There will be a discussion to ensure that both of you understand the Church’s teaching on marriage and are willing to take on the responsibilities that come with it. There will be some paperwork to complete and some preparation for you as a couple. The process is very similar for every couple with some adaptations based on each couple’s particular circumstances.

Q. Will we have another wedding?

A. You will exchange your marriage consent before a qualified priest or deacon and two witnesses. The validation ceremony can be as simple as you wish to make it. If you want others present for the ceremony, you may certainly do so.

Q. Do we need the same witnesses we had at our original ceremony?

A. No. Any two people capable of witnessing your marriage consent can serve in that role.

Q. What if my partner or I had a previous marriage?

A. Again, you can meet with your parish priest, deacon or trained parish staff member to review your situation and decide what process might be necessary for you to be declared free to marry. In some cases, it will be a simple review of documents. In others, it might require a fuller Tribunal process. All of that can be discussed when you meet.

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Q. What if we are both free to marry in the view of the Church but my partner is unwilling to participate in a validation ceremony?

A. Once again, the Church is here to help you. Through another fairly simple process, your union can be healed without a ceremony. Your parish priest, deacon or parish staff member can walk you through this process.

Q. What happens after our validation?

A. Your marriage will be recorded in the parish register and you can return to the reception of the sacraments.

Last updated: June 22, 2026