



Guidelines for Marriage

Congratulations on your decision to marry in the Catholic Church. Your marriage is an important chapter of your life, and your faith will strongly support you in this journey. The following information is intended to help you understand the requirements and guidelines for marriage in the Archdiocese of Vancouver.

Process

Please contact your parish priest at the beginning of your engagement or at least **six months** prior to your anticipated wedding date. The process begins with the initial interview with your priest, and addresses your faith experience, your relationship as a couple, and your understanding of marriage in the Church so that you can enter into this commitment to God and to each other well prepared.

Special Circumstances

Please discuss with your priest if:

- either or both of you have been married before
- either of you are or were in a “common-law” union
- are civilly married to each other and wish to have your marriage convalidated in the Catholic Church
- you are presently living together
- either you or your fiancé/e is a teenager
- a pregnancy is involved
- one of you practices another faith tradition or does not follow any particular religious faith
- you are Catholic but not Confirmed.

Place of the Wedding

The celebration of marriage is an act of worship and a Sacrament for two baptized Christians. Hence, a church, the house of God, is the proper place for weddings; gardens, beaches, secular “wedding chapels” or other settings are for this reason deemed inappropriate.

- The wedding of two Catholics is a sacramental liturgy and takes place in the parish of either the bride or groom.
- To be married in another parish, permission must be granted from the parish in which you wish to be married, as well as from the parishes where you are registered.
- A wedding in which only one of you is Catholic would take place in the parish of the Catholic party.
- The Episcopal Vicar for Marriage may permit you to celebrate your wedding in the place of worship of the non-Catholic party when a special pastoral reason suggests it.

If the celebrant is a visiting priest:

- You should discuss your choice of celebrant with your parish priest at the beginning of your preparation.

- A visiting priest must have permission of the pastor and of the Archbishop, in addition to a license from the BC government.

Sacraments

- The Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist will prepare you for a more meaningful experience of your wedding liturgy.
- Every Catholic should complete his or her initiation into the Faith by receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation. If you have not been confirmed, the time of your preparation for marriage is an opportunity to prepare for Confirmation as well.

Planning the wedding liturgy

- Your parish priest will help you plan your wedding liturgy. You may refer to the resource provided at the marriage prep course for suggested readings, music guidelines and a wedding mass planning sheet. He will also inform you of any additional requirements that are particular to that parish.

Documentation:

Your priest will assist in the completion of the required documentation.

1. **Dispensation:** For a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized Christian of another communion/a member of a non-Christian world religion/a member of no religion, permission is required from the local bishop.
2. **Baptismal Certificate:** If you are a Catholic, you must have a new baptismal certificate issued within the six months prior to your wedding. If you have been baptized in another Christian denomination, you may supply either your original certificate or a copy.
3. **Marriage License:** please apply for a B.C. marriage license (valid for 90 days). This is not required for a convalidation ceremony.
4. **Marriage Form I:** Under oath and individually with the priest or deacon, each fiancé(e) answers a series of questions about his or her freedom to marry.
5. **Marriage Form II:** Each fiancé(e) needs outside testimonial of freedom to marry. Normally one parent or sibling does this by completing the form with the priest. Otherwise, you will need two witnesses. They must have known you throughout your marriageable years (Church law: 14 for bride, 16 for groom).
6. **Testimonial Letter:** If the Catholic fiancé(e) lives outside this Archdiocese and there is no one available to do a Form II, his or her bishop has to write a testimonial letter.
7. **Marriage Preparation Course Completion Report:** The completion report will be sent upon completion of all requirements of the archdiocesan course to the priest who is doing your paperwork.
8. **Letter of Consent:** If your fiancé/fiancée is under 19, there is provincial requirement that a letter of consent from his/her parents is provided to the priest, who will also interview the couple and make an assessment.

Please note that if you are getting married in a church outside the Archdiocese of Vancouver, a local priest must complete some of the above paperwork. Please factor in additional time for the paperwork to be sent to the other diocese.