

Convalidation



Getting Your Marriage “Blessed in the Church”

What is a Convalidation, and why might I need it?

In short, a *convalidation* is a brief ceremony whereby the Catholic Church blesses and recognizes a civil marriage which took place without the Church’s authorization and blessing.

The Catholic Church requires Catholics to observe a certain ritual of marriage, namely that the marriage be authorized and blessed by the Church. Normally this happens in a Catholic church with a bishop, priest, or deacon presiding, whether the wedding take place in a Mass, or in a ceremony apart from a Mass (as in the case of a Catholic marrying a non-Catholic). For good reasons, the Church can dispense from this norm, and authorize and bless a Catholic and non-Catholic to be married elsewhere (in a Protestant church, Jewish synagogue, or civil court, for example). Marriages in which one or both persons are Catholic, but which never obtained the proper permissions or dispensations of the Catholic Church are considered invalid in the eyes of the Church.

There are various reasons that couples (in which at least one party is Catholic) do not marry in the Catholic Church: The couple might have felt that it was more convenient to marry civilly; the couple might not have been very committed to their faith, and therefore might not have felt that it was important at the time to get “married in the Church”; the couple might have mistakenly thought that they could not get married in the Church if one party was not Catholic; or there might have been a previous marriage, in which case the couple might not have wanted to go through the time and process of getting the proper annulments necessary to get their present relationship blessed in the Church.

Whatever the reason, couples are urged to make an appointment with a priest or deacon in order to align themselves and their relationships with the mind of Christ and the Church, and to see if their present relationship can be blessed in the Church. If annulments are necessary and possible, the priest or deacon can guide the couple through the process of applying for whatever annulments are necessary as a preliminary step to get their present relationship blessed in the Church.

If there were no previous marriages for either party (and therefore no annulments required), a convalidation is easy to arrange. The couple will need to meet with the priest or deacon for a canonical interview, present updated sacramental records and an official record of their civil marriage, and arrange with the priest or deacon for a simple ceremony with two witnesses in which they would exchange their vows and so have their present relationship officially blessed and authorized in the Church.

Before the convalidation—because the present relationship is not recognized by the Church—the couple should refrain from receiving Holy Communion, unless they are willing and able to live as “brother and sister” until the convalidation, which they are encouraged to do anyways. They also would need to arrange to go to confession before their convalidation.

A convalidation is a great grace for the couple and opens a new chapter in their relationship. By seeking convalidation, couples celebrate their exchange of vows and seek to align their civil marriage to the will of Jesus and the Church. And, Jesus abundantly blesses this with His love and grace. Please contact us right away at 202-554-7863 if you need to get your marriage blessed in the Church.