

WHY DOES THE CHURCH REQUIRE ME TO BE MARRIED IN A CHURCH AND NOT IN A PLACE OF MY CHOOSING?

You are asking a question that more and more couples find confusing. This can be a very sensitive issue. Many brides (and grooms!) have dreamt of their wedding day for years. To then have the Church say “no” to any of your plans can feel like it is coming from out of nowhere. It can feel like the Church imposing some arbitrary rule on your big day. I’ve known individuals who have actually used this issue as a reason to leave the Church, and so I hope that this response will help anyone who has been confused and hurt by this teaching.

The Catholic church believes that marriage is a Sacrament and a vocation. Because marriage is a Sacrament, it is also a Church act. It happens in a church building because we are in danger of forgetting this fact. Since Matrimony is a Sacrament, it would seem to follow that the Church gets to have something to say about how it is celebrated. If I am seeking out a Sacrament, why would I resent the Church giving me instruction on how this Sacrament is celebrated? The only reason I can think of is that the couple doesn’t really desire the “Sacrament” of Matrimony; they simply “want to get married”. That is not a condemnation, it is simply a description of what the couple is really looking for. This is a question of identity: do I really see myself as Catholic?

Marriage is a vocation. Vocation literally means “call”; it is a call from God lived in the context of the Church. For the Christian, it is the call to be a part of God’s Kingdom in a specific way. A vocation is never a private thing. It is deeply personal, but not private in the sense that it is simply about the couple’s life together. It is their call to live in Christ in a new way. This has everything to do with the Church. We can never separate the call to belong to Christ and the call to belong to His Church without doing violence to Christ’s unity.

If we understand marriage as a vocation, we begin to understand that it is not really about “me”...at least it is not ALL about me. Many couples who are disturbed by this teaching haven’t yet experienced the Church as a meaningful community. The church wants to form this community around you to acknowledge and support your vocation of marriage.

The short answer to this question of getting married outside of the Catholic church comes back to the degree to which a couple considers themselves to be Catholic. If I am Catholic, then it simply makes sense that I would desire to get married in a Catholic wedding. Catholic weddings happen in Catholic churches. Circular reasoning? Possibly.

Last thing. From the Catholic Church’s Code of Canon Law: #874 and #893 □
To perform the role of godparent at baptism and/or sponsor at Confirmation it is necessary that a person not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared; This means that if the intended sponsor is married, this marriage must be a recognized valid marriage in the Catholic Church. Catholics who are either civilly married, married by common law or living together are not in a valid Church marriage, and thus, by law, have a canonical penalty imposed upon them. The penalty is that the person may not participate in the full sacramental life of the Church. Specifically, they may not receive communion, nor may they act as a godparent at Baptism or as a sponsor at Confirmation. Therefore, if you are married outside of the Catholic Church, you do not meet the requirements for being admitted to the role of a Godparent at Baptism or a Confirmation Sponsor.]