

Making Your (Civil) Marriage Valid

In Catholicism, there are three things that make a marriage a valid sacrament: freedom, consent and form. Under **freedom**, there must not be an existing civil or common law marriage, any exterior or interior pressure to marriage, or any substance addiction or mental illness which would limit one's freedom. Under **consent**, both parties must exchange vows in which they acknowledge marriage is a life long and exclusive union for the good of the spouses, and for the procreation and raising of children. **Form** deals with how and where the marriage ceremony takes place. Unless the bishop gives a dispensation, Catholic marriages need to be celebrated in a Catholic church and witnessed by one's pastor or another delegated, ordained Catholic minister. *Under normal circumstances, Catholics who are married but missing any one of the three things that make a marriage a valid sacrament are asked to refrain from receiving Holy Communion and celebrating the other sacraments.* It is therefore important to address these issues if they affect you personally. No one should be judging the situation of another since no one has all the facts of another's circumstance.

An invalid marriage can be made valid. The Church calls this process "con-validation". There is much that can be done, give us a call.

What if I am divorced and remarried outside of the Church?

If there is a previous, existing marriage for either the husband or the wife, the parish has a trained Advocate who can assist you through the annulment process. This process looks at the previous bond to see what essential quality was missing from that bond that made it less than a true sacramental union. This does not deny any of the good that came from this union. This is a written process in which you basically do an autobiography, biography of the former spouse and history of the marriage. It is meant to be a healing process that results in a declaration in one's freedom to marry in the Church.

What if I am only married once, but the ceremony did not take place in the Catholic Church?

If there is no previous existing bond of marriage for either the husband or the wife, and only the *form* was lacking, the parish is able to help couples to con-validate marriage, the Catholic rite of marriage can be celebrated on the anniversary of your civil bond, or at another suitable time. Another way of bringing your marriage into the Church is to have the civil marriage formally recognized by the Church, a process called a "radical sanation." Give us a call to find out more about these possibilities. For more information please contact the parish office: (360) 215-3049