Diocesan Centre for
Marriage, Life and Family

Frequently Asked Questions

1. We are recently engaged. What should we do to get married in the Catholic Church?

Congratulations! Whether you plan to get married in Montreal or elsewhere, the first step is to reach out to your parish and make an appointment to meet with your parish priest. He will guide you in the process and answer all your questions. This can be the parish of either the bride or the groom.

2. How do I know what parish I belong to?

Your parish is most often the nearest Catholic Church to your place of residence. You can use the parish locator map on the Diocese of Montreal's website to help you identify your parish. The Catholic Church in Montreal is divided into geographic areas called parishes. Each parish is responsible for the Catholics that live in its geographic area. This is why the first step to prepare for your marriage in the Church is to introduce yourself to your parish priest.

3. How early should I reach out to my parish to begin planning the wedding?

We recommend that you contact your parish 6 to 12 months before the date you would like to be married. This may seem a long time but this will give you the time needed to meet with the priest, to put together your marriage file (if you are getting married outside of Montreal, please refer to question 6), to take your marriage preparation program, and to plan your wedding.

4. I am Catholic but my future spouse is not. Can we be married in the Church? Does my future spouse have to be baptized first?

The simple answer is that only one of you needs to be baptized Catholic to be married in the Catholic Church. To receive the sacrament of marriage, however, both parties need to be baptized Christians. The priest who prepares your marriage file can answer any questions you may have about the celebration of marriage in the Catholic Church between a baptized Catholic and a non-baptized spouse.

5. I am baptized but not confirmed. Can I be married in the Catholic Church?

If you have not yet received the sacrament of Confirmation, it is the norm in the Diocese of Montreal that you begin preparing for Confirmation in the months before the wedding (Canon 1065). Please speak to the priest about the possibility when you meet with him 6 to 12 months before your wedding. He can introduce you to the sacrament of Confirmation, answer your questions and refer you to people who can accompany you on your journey of faith. Please note that it is not necessary to be confirmed before your wedding but that you have begun your journey towards Confirmation.

In Confirmation, you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit which strengthens your faith. This gift will be a great help for you to live the joys and challenges of married life and in the task of educating your future children in the faith.

6. What documents are required to get married in the Catholic Church?

When you contact your parish, they will tell you what documents are needed to open your “marriage file.” This is the paperwork required for you to be married in the Catholic Church. You will need to provide

certain documents (listed below), while most of the others will be completed by your parish priest.
The necessary documents that the bride and groom need to provide make up their marriage file may be slightly different depending on the situation of each person:

For a Roman Catholic:

i. A recent certificate of Baptism issued at most six months before the first meeting with the priest responsible for your marriage file.
ii. A copy of your civil birth certificate.
iii. A certificate of participation in a recognized marriage preparation program or a letter from a priest attesting that he has prepared you for marriage (refer to question 8).
iv. Other documents will be provided by your parish priest, and they will be completed by both you and the parish priest together.

If one of you is baptized as a non-Catholic (e.g. Orthodox or Protestant):

i. A certificate of Baptism.
ii. A copy of your civil birth certificate.
iii. A certificate of participation in a recognized marriage preparation program or a letter from a priest attesting that he has prepared you for marriage (refer to question 8).
iv. Other documents will be provided by your parish priest and they will be completed by both you and the parish priest together.

If one of you is not baptized:

i. A copy of your civil birth certificate.
ii. A certificate of participation in a recognized marriage preparation program or a letter from a priest attesting that he has prepared you for marriage (refer to question 8).

iii. Other documents will be provided by your parish priest and they will be completed by both you and the parish priest together.

7. I live in Montreal but I am getting married in another diocese or in another country. What steps do I take to get married in a Catholic Church in another diocese or country?

The procedure to get married in the Catholic Church in another diocese or country is similar to getting married locally (refer to questions 1 and 2). However, as your marriage file will have to be exchanged between dioceses, it is important to prepare the paperwork early. We recommend opening your marriage file with your parish 12 months before your wedding.
Your completed marriage file will be sent to the Chancery (an office in the Diocese) in Montreal by your parish priest where it will be reviewed and validated. It is then 'transferred' by the Chancery to the parish where you will be married in the other diocese via the Chancery office of the respective diocese.
Please note that it is not possible to rush the paperwork at the last minute. If you are preparing for an international wedding, that will require the transfer of documents between different countries, please prepare ahead of time.

8. I do not live in Montreal but I would like to be married there. Is it possible? What steps do I need to take?

Yes, it is possible to be married in Montreal if your main residence is outside of the Diocese of Montreal. Similar to the question above (refer to question 7) about getting married abroad, the first step is to open your marriage file in your local parish where you reside (refer to question 2). Your marriage file will be transferred by your priest to the Chancery office in your home Diocese who will send it to the parish where you will marry in Montreal via the Chancery office in

Montreal. We recommend that you begin this process 6 to 12 months in advance of your wedding date.

9. Are marriage preparation programs mandatory? How do I obtain information on these programs?

In the Diocese of Montreal, it is mandatory that you have been adequately prepared for marriage in the Catholic Church. The accepted way to meet this requirement is to complete one of our recognized marriage preparation programs. To obtain information about the approved marriage preparation programs offered in the Diocese, we invite you to reach out to the *Diocesan Centre for Marriage, Life and Family at* 514-925- 4300 extension 206 or centreDMVF@diocesemontreal.org. The list of suggested programs and information regarding registration can also be found on the website of the Diocese of Montreal, under the Marriage Preparation section.

10. I am a Catholic, I was married civilly and am now civilly divorced. Can I be married in the Catholic Church?

Yes, it is possible. When you first meet your parish priest to prepare your marriage file, share with him your situation. He will explain to you why “a decree of freedom” is necessary to marry and how to obtain it from the Chancery of the Catholic Archdiocese of Montreal.

11. I am a Catholic who was married in a Catholic church but obtained a civil divorce from this marriage. Can I be married again in the Catholic Church?

Each situation is unique. The first step to take is to meet with your parish priest to share with him about your situation. If you believe there may be serious reasons why your first marriage in the Catholic Church is what we call “invalid”, your parish priest will refer you to the Marriage (Ecclesiastical) Tribunal office of the Archdiocese of Montreal. They will help you along the process of discerning if your

first marriage can be declared “null” (or non-existent) in the eyes of the Church (this is called “a petition for declaration of the nullity” of your Catholic marriage.)
This process may take at least a year or more between the beginning of the process and the declaration of nullity, if it is granted to you, depending on the complexity of the situation. There is also a cost which will be discussed with you when you begin the process. If your spouse in your first marriage has since passed away, you are free to marry again in the Catholic Church. If your first marriage in the Catholic Church does not receive a declaration of nullity, you will not be able to marry again in the Catholic Church.

12. In Montreal, are the civil and religious ceremonies celebrated at the same time or do we need to be married civilly at a different moment than the religious ceremony?

In the Catholic Church in Canada, the civil and religious ceremonies are celebrated at the same time. The priest is licensed by the government of Quebec to perform the civil ceremony at the same time as the religious one.

13. I want my friend to be a witness at my wedding but they are not Catholic. Can they be a witness?

Yes, they can be a witness. They do not need to be baptized or confirmed. A witness at a marriage must be aged 16 years or older, must have the full use of his/her reason and be present during the celebration. As marriage is a public celebration, the main role of the witness is to testify that the marriage did take place which they will do by signing your wedding license (form DEC-50).

14. Can we celebrate our Catholic wedding somewhere other than in a Church?

A Catholic wedding is always celebrated in a Catholic parish. This is the ordinary place for the celebration of marriage of two baptized Catholics or a Catholic and a baptized Christian.
Since the marriage of two baptized persons is a sacrament, it is not merely a private celebration but a celebration of the whole Church community. The spouses declare their consent to marry before God and the Church, so the location of the parish church is the most fitting place for this.
However, if one of the two members of the couple is not a Roman Catholic, it may be possible to obtain from the Diocese permission to marry in a non-Catholic church or in a temple of another religious tradition. If this is your situation, please discuss this possibility with the priest responsible for your marriage file when you meet with him.

15. We are Catholic but do not want to be married in a church. Can we ask a priest to come and simply bless our wedding in a park?

For the same reasons as discussed in question 14, it is not possible for a priest to simply bless the wedding of a Roman Catholic that takes place outside of a Catholic church. If you would like more information about why the Church understands that marriages between baptized Catholics are a sacrament and why it is important to be married in a sacred space that reflects this, please reach out to your parish priest or the team at the Diocesan Centre for Marriage, Life and Family. They would be happy to speak with you.

16. Can we celebrate our wedding on a Sunday?

In the Catholic tradition, weddings can be celebrated from Monday to Saturday afternoon inclusively. Weddings are never celebrated on Sunday as it is the day devoted to the celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus when Catholic communities around the world gather for Mass.

17. We have a priest who is a family friend living outside of Montreal. Can he celebrate our wedding?

It may be possible. However, any priest who comes to celebrate mass within the Catholic Archdiocese of Montreal from another diocese needs to receive special permission from the Chancery office of the Diocese of Montreal. Please refer the priest to the Chancery to begin this process many months in advance, and also speak to the priest who is responsible for your marriage file.