

Information to support couples not married in the Catholic Church who are requesting the baptism of their child(ren)

There are two types of marriage that effect the Catholic Church in Australia:

1. A civil marriage under the Commonwealth Marriage Act or equivalent overseas civil marriage authority, and;
2. The sacrament of Matrimony according to the rites of the universal Catholic Church.

In Australia, Catholic clergy fulfil both the civil and the Church requirements for conducting a lawful marriage.

The Catholic Church recognises a civil marriage as lawful but does not recognise the marriage as a sacrament. "Married outside the Church" is the language often used in such cases. Couples marry "outside the Church" for many and varied reasons and in each case that decision is personal to the couple and should be respected by the Church. For example: one or both Catholic parties may have been married before and that marriage may have ended in a divorce, or, the marriage of a Catholic may have taken place outside the Catholic Church on a beach, in a garden or even in another church without the Catholic party getting permission to do so.

Being "Married outside the Church" would normally exclude a Catholic from receiving the Eucharist (Holy Communion).

Catholic clergy do however have a responsibility to offer every couple the opportunity to be sacramentally married within the Church. At the time of a Baptism request it often becomes apparent that couples are either not aware of this possibility or are in fact not aware that their marriage is not recognised by the Church as a sacrament. A couple may even not be civilly married at this stage.

For this reason the clergy ask about the couple's marital status. The conversation opens up possibilities to support couples in getting married or having their marriage sacramentalised, and thereby remain in full communion with the Church. This conversation would not normally effect the Baptism request. The sacramental marriage can even take place at the time of your child's baptism.

In most cases the process is very simple for couples who have not been married before or would now like their marriage sacramentalised. All that would be required is:

- a. **Couples not civilly married:** They must discuss their decision to marry with their clergy because of the government and Church requirements. Individual birth and baptism certificate/s will need to be produced beforehand.
- b. **Couples civilly married:** As this is a Catholic Church issue only, they must express their desire for their marriage to be sacramentalised - this is like renewing their wedding vows in the church, with a priest or deacon in front of two witnesses. Proof of the civil marriage and proof of baptism(s) will also be requested beforehand.

If you would like to confidentially discuss your situation further, please speak with the Catholic clergy who is conducting your child's baptism.