

# The fine print

It's important to read the fine print before you sign on a dotted line and marriage in the Catholic Church is no different. Matrimony is more than just getting married in a church; in order to make a free and informed commitment on your wedding day, there are specific obligations of which you should be aware.

## 1. The freedom to marry -

**Free Consent:** Both you and your fiancé need to freely consent to be married in the Catholic Church. This includes being fully informed of the commitment you are making, psychologically mature enough to make it, and free of any sense of coercion or pressure to marry this person or to marry in the Church.

**Free from Previous Marriage:** If you or your fiancé were previously married in a union recognised by the Church, you cannot have a Catholic wedding unless it has been annulled. If you have not done so already, you should immediately speak to your priest or deacon about this.

## 2. The permanency of marriage -

The Sacrament of Matrimony witnesses to God's permanent love and endures until death. Although some Catholic marriages break down and legally divorce, the couple is still considered married in the eyes of the Church and of God. Such marriages may be 'annulled', which is a declaration, after investigation, that the marriage was invalid that is, from the beginning it didn't meet, or was missing, some critical requirement of a Sacramental bond.

## 3. Sexual intimacy -

Sexual intercourse, or lovemaking, is the sacred gesture that consummates a marriage and is an essential part of the Sacrament. Couples who wish to marry for companionate reasons only, or to facilitate the application of visa or residency permits for example, are not permitted to marry in the Catholic Church.

## 4. Sexual exclusivity fidelity -

Sexual exclusivity is foundational to Matrimony and the wedding rings are explicitly noted as "a sign of love and fidelity". Sexual exclusivity is more than avoiding sexual intimacy with other persons; it includes the rejection of pornography, masturbation, and anything that undermines the sacred nature of your sexual love.

## 5. Unconditional sharing-

After marrying in the Catholic Church, your material assets become shared property. Both husband and wife also share the responsibilities of a common life, like raising children and caring for each other in times of illness. Prenuptial agreements are consequently incompatible with Matrimony except in rare circumstances, such as when a widow or widower remarries and has children for whom they wish to preserve the family inheritance upon his or her own death.

## 6. Openness to children -

On your wedding day, you will be asked if you will “accept children lovingly from God”. Except in the case of mature couples past the age of childbearing, this presumes that couples are open to having children, will plan their families according to the principles of ‘conscious parenthood’ and reject the use of contraception, artificial reproductive technologies, sterilisation, and abortion

## 7. Raising children catholic -

Children from Catholic marriages are to be raised as Catholics. If you are not Catholic, you are not responsible for raising your children in the Catholic faith, but your Catholic spouse is, and it is important for your unity that you support them.

Not all couples in Catholic marriages fulfill all these elements perfectly; the Church has high ambitions for us, but she is always merciful when we fail. She holds out these foundations of Matrimony as an invitation to deeper faith, greater love, and more fulfilled living.

In choosing to marry in the Catholic Church you commit to striving to live your married life according to the vision of the Church. It's a vision that will extend you personally and will lead your marriage towards deeper intimacy and love. But it is a vision that you must freely choose for yourself.

If you have any questions about any of the obligations of Matrimony it is critically important that you explore them together and get appropriate advice from your priest or deacon as necessary.

