

# FAQs on Convalidation

## How is Catholic Marriage Different?

Catholic Marriage is unique among other marital relationships because it is a sacrament that makes Christ present in our world. The relationship between husband and wife mirrors the relationship of Jesus Christ for his people. In the Catholic tradition, husband and wife accept a role in God's plan for humanity. They are ambassadors of God's love, and they collaborate with God to keep humanity alive.

The vows exchanged by the couple are a sacred pact through which the spouses embrace each other, and, together, embrace Jesus as their partner. Through their union with Christ they participate in the unbreakable pact between God and humanity: the covenant that was sealed in the death and resurrection of Christ.

## What are the Benefits of Catholic Marriage?

One of the many benefits of a sacramental marriage is the power of God's grace, which helps couples keep their commitment and find happiness together. Social scientists are finding that couples who recognize God's presence in their relationship experience more satisfaction and are more likely to achieve lifelong marriage.

All in all, couples who choose to bring their marriage into the Church receive many gifts – peace of heart, oneness with the Church, the fullness of the sacraments, and God's special blessing upon their marriage.

## What if there is a Prior Marriage?

In the simplest terms, if a Catholic wishes to marry in the Church when there has been a previous marriage for either party, the partner in the earlier union must have died or the Church must have issued a declaration of nullity (frequently called an annulment) of the previous marriage.

The Catholic Church views all true marriages with respect. It presumes that they are valid. Thus, it considers the marriage of two Protestant, Jewish or even non-believing persons, any of whom marry according to their own tradition, to be binding in the eyes of God. Consequently, a tribunal process is required to establish that an essential ingredient in the relationship was missing from the start of the previous marriage.

For Catholics with a prior marriage outside the Church, the declaration of nullity is based on what is called a "lack of canonical form." For Catholics with a prior "valid" marriage, the tribunal process is termed a "formal case." This link to our diocesan website has more information on decrees of nullity and how to get started, if needed, in this process. [Divorce and Remarriage - Roman Catholic Diocese of Harrisburg \(hbgdiocese.org\)](http://hbgdiocese.org)