

## *Policy on the Place of Marriage*

### *Diocese of Stockton*

#### PREFACE

In the Catholic tradition, marriage has significance not only for the bride and groom and their families, but also for the entire Church. The union of husband and wife in marriage is hallowed by God (Genesis 2) and, when two baptized persons marry, was raised to the dignity of a sacrament by Jesus the Lord.

Church law requires Catholics and those persons they marry to exchange marital consent in the presence of a delegated priest or deacon and two witnesses for the validity of the marriage. While not required for validity, the place where the marriage is celebrated is also important to the Church. The significance of the place of marriage lies in the sacramental nature of the liturgy. While the bride and groom, baptized into the paschal mystery of Christ, symbolize the faithful and indissoluble union of Christ and his Church, the building itself serves as a sign of the entire Church. The church building is sacred space where the Church as people gathers in assembly. While family and friends who gather with the couple on that joyous day join them as the assembly of the praying Church, the building, in a real sacramental sense, symbolizes the presence of the larger Church—worldwide, diocesan, and parish. It is for this reason that the Church requires a Catholic—whether marrying another Catholic or a Christian—to be married in a parish church or oratory.

Church law, however, makes an exception to this rule when a Catholic chooses to marry a non-baptized person. For these non-sacramental marriages, canon law permits the marriage to be celebrated in a Catholic church or another suitable place, as determined by the local ordinary.

#### THE PLACE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE

##### **A) Marriage between two baptized persons**

1) Two Catholics. The proper place for the celebration of marriage is the parish church where either party lives. With the permission of the local ordinary or the pastor the wedding can be celebrated in another Catholic church or oratory.

2) Catholic Party and Baptized Non-Catholic Party. The proper place for the celebration is the parish church of the Catholic party. With the permission of the local ordinary or the pastor, the wedding can be celebrated in another Catholic church or oratory.

The local ordinary can permit marriage between two Catholics or a Catholic and baptized non-Catholic to be celebrated in some other suitable place.

In the Diocese of Stockton a suitable place would be:

- a) the church of the baptized non-Catholic (for ecumenical reasons)

b) a non-Catholic church or chapel (for pastoral reasons), e.g., Morris Chapel at the University of the Pacific.

c) a sacred or appropriate place judged by the local ordinary to be conducive to and enhancing of the sacramental nature of the marriage. Commercial venues and public parks are inappropriate places for the liturgical celebration of marriage.

**B) Marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person.**

A marriage between a Catholic party and a non-baptized party is a religious ceremony even though it is not a sacrament. Therefore, the preferred place for the celebration of marriage is a Catholic church. The marriage can be celebrated in some other suitable place that is in accord with Diocesan guidelines and approved by the priest or deacon presiding over the marriage.

A suitable place for the celebration should enhance the religious dimension of marriage and not distract from it. A suitable place would be:

a) a place in accord with the practice of the non-Christian faith of the non-baptized party

b) a sacred or appropriate place conducive to and enhancing of the religious nature of the marriage. Commercial venues and public parks are inappropriate places for the liturgical celebration of marriage.

**GENERAL GUIDELINES**

All preparations for marriage are to be completed in the parish of the Catholic party.

Catholic marriages celebrated outside a church or oratory are still to be celebrated according to all liturgical norms. The usual complement of liturgical ministers (reader(s), cantor, server(s), et al.) are to be used. Likewise, the required liturgical furnishings are to be employed: ambo, presider's chair, chairs for the bride and groom.

A dispensation from celebrating marriage according to the Catholic form is granted by the local ordinary only for serious and pastoral reasons.

**THE PROCESS FOR REQUESTING PERMISSION FOR TWO BAPTIZED CATHOLICS OR A CATHOLIC AND A BAPTIZED NON-CATHOLIC TO CELEBRATE MARRIAGE OUTSIDE A CATHOLIC CHURCH.**

At least six months before the anticipated wedding date, the Catholic party wishing to marry is to write a letter to the Bishop of Stockton requesting permission to celebrate his or her marriage outside a Catholic church or oratory. This letter must include the following information:

- Name, address, and baptismal status of the Catholic party.
- Name, address, and baptismal status (i.e., Catholic, non-Catholic Christian, non-baptized) of the intended spouse.

- Proposed place, date, and the time of the marriage.
- The reasons why the Catholic party wants to have the marriage at the proposed place.
- The name of the priest or pastoral minister who is preparing the couple for marriage.
- The name of the priest or deacon who will officiate at the wedding in the proposed place.

After receiving the petition, the local ordinary (or his delegate) will consult with the pastor of the parish where the proposed place is located as well as the pastoral minister preparing the couple for marriage.

If permission to celebrate the marriage in a suitable place outside a church is granted, the couple, the pastoral minister preparing them for marriage, and the officiating priest or deacon will be notified that permission has been granted.

Officiating priests and deacons are reminded to receive delegation if the marriage takes place outside their territory. They are also responsible for seeing that the marriage is recorded in the parish where the marriage was celebrated. The marriage paperwork is kept on file in the parish where the couple is prepared (if this was in the Diocese of Stockton, otherwise in the parish where the marriage took place).

This policy becomes effective on the First Sunday of Advent, December 2, 2001.

+ Stephen E. Blaire  
Bishop of Stockton

Barbara Thiella, S.N.D. de Namur  
Chancellor

Given at the Chancery  
of the Diocese of Stockton  
on this 19th day of November, 2001.