

Dear parishioners,

Several people have come to me recently asking if they can attend the wedding of a Catholic who is getting married by a Justice of the Peace or in a non-Catholic church. This is a very difficult situation especially when it is a close friend or relative who is the one getting married. All Catholics are to follow the teachings of the Church when getting married. This means that Catholics are to get married in the Catholic Church with a priest or deacon presiding at the wedding and follow the Rite of Marriage according to the Catholic Church. A Catholic may get married in a non-Catholic church, when they are marrying a non-Catholic, if there is a good reason to do so and they have received a dispensation from the bishop of the diocese. The couple is still required to fulfill the Catholic Church's requirements for marriage preparation. If a Catholic gets married by a JP or in a non-Catholic church without this dispensation, then they are breaking Church law and committing a grave sin. Such persons automatically separate themselves from the Church and can no longer receive Holy Communion in a Catholic Church and their marriage is not valid. They may still attend Mass and participate, but they may not receive Holy Communion. They can eventually have their marriage blessed by the Catholic Church and return to being Catholics in good standing.

Now, back to the question that was presented. Can Catholics attend the wedding of a Catholic who is getting married by a Justice of the Peace or in a non-Catholic church (with the couple not having received a dispensation from the bishop)?

It is only common sense that we should not attend. For Catholics marrying non-Catholics a dispensation is needed from the bishop. See the following:

Canon Law #1124 - Without the express permission of the competent authority, marriage is forbidden between two baptized persons, one of whom was baptized in the Catholic Church or received into it after baptism and has not left it by a formal act, and the other of whom is a member of a church or ecclesial community which is not in full communion with the Catholic Church.

Canon Law #1125 - The local ordinary (Bishop) can grant this permission if there is just and reasonable cause; Catholics marrying non-Catholics is very common in today's world. Receiving permission for such marriages is very simple and usually granted. The Catholic party also signs a statement that they will do everything possible to baptize the children in the Catholic Church and to rear the children as Catholic. If the couple is getting married in a non-Catholic church you should ask the couple or the couple's parents if permission was received from the bishop to have the wedding in a non-Catholic church. If they did not seek permission for such a marriage then the Church considers the marriage invalid. Usually the wedding invitation will state if a priest or deacon will be co-officiating with the non-Catholic minister.

"has not left by a formal act" - "formal act" is when someone writes a letter stating they are denouncing the teachings of the Catholic Church and leaving to join another denomination. This is a very serious matter. If someone leaves by a formal act or by a non-formal act and goes to get married in another church without permission it is also a serious matter and it would be better if we did not participate in such an event. Anytime someone decides just to ignore the teachings of the Church, and therefore ignoring the teachings of Jesus, and do their own thing, it is a serious matter.

"forbidden" - we should never participate in something that is forbidden. A forbidden act is one in which the Catholic party ignores the laws of the Church and the person does not seek to receive permission or a dispensation from the Church to be married to the non-Catholic and/or in another church.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) #1868 states: Sin is a personal act. Moreover, we have a responsibility for the sins committed by others when *we cooperate in them*:

- by participating directly and voluntarily in them;
- by ordering, advising, praising, or approving them;
- by not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so;
- by protecting evil-doers.

CCC #1869: Thus sin makes men accomplices of one another and causes concupiscence, violence, and injustice to reign among them.

By attending weddings, where the couple is blatantly ignoring the teachings of the Church and doing their own thing, we are giving our support and approval to the **sin** of the couple and we are also committing sin "by participating directly and voluntarily in them".

I think this speaks enough about the above question. Many people, especially parents, go through much emotional anguish and turmoil when this situation arises within their family. My heart goes out to them. Being faithful to what Jesus has taught us and given us in Scripture and in His Church is, at times, not easy. He said it would not be easy. Try your best to be faithful to Jesus and to His Church in all things.