



Memo

Date: September 29, 2025
To: Clergy
From: Rev. Michael Onyekuru, MS, judicial vicar, Metropolitan Tribunal
Re: Pastoral guidance on marriages celebrated outside a church

Greetings in Christ,

The archbishop wishes to provide guidance to help priests faithfully assist couples requesting permission to celebrate their marriage in a place other than a church, while ensuring that the sacred nature of the sacrament of marriage is always preserved. **Requests must be submitted several months before the proposed wedding date.**

As canon 1118 §1 states, marriage may be celebrated in a “suitable place” other than a church, provided permission is granted by the ordinary. The archbishop relies on priests to make a careful pastoral assessment of the circumstances before requesting the archbishop’s permission.

Ordinarily, this permission **is not given for the marriage of two Catholics**, except in very unusual situations. For example, a parent or grandparent of one party may be in a serious medical condition that prevents traveling to a church.

Requests must include:

1. A **letter from you** describing the proposed venue. Include a photograph if possible.
2. Details on how the **religious character and sacredness of the marriage ceremony** will be preserved.
3. Assurance that **no inconvenience or financial burden** will fall on the officiating priest in order to celebrate the ceremony or provide coverage at his parish.

This policy applies to cases involving a dispensation from canonical form. The dispensation is only for the ceremony – it does not automatically include the venue itself. Greater flexibility exists when a Catholic is marrying a non-Christian, but even in such cases, the sacred character of marriage must be preserved.

Liturgical guidance:

- **GIRM 372–380** reminds us that on certain days, such as solemnities, Sundays in Advent or Lent or All Souls' Day, the **Mass and readings proper to that day must be celebrated**. This ensures the Church's liturgical calendar is respected.
- **Order of Celebrating Matrimony (OCM) no. 34** explains that on such days, the **nuptial Mass or special wedding texts may not be used**, but the marriage itself can still take place, either outside Mass or within the liturgy of the day.

The archbishop will personally review these requests. He values the pastoral judgment of priests and deacons who know the couple and the circumstances best, to help him respond in a way that is both pastoral and faithful to Church law.

Thank you for your careful attention to these guidelines and for your continued pastoral care of the faithful.