

# Understanding the Sacrament of Marriage

*Can a practicing Catholic officiate  
at a marriage ceremony?*

# “ASK A PRIEST: CAN I BECOME AN ONLINE MINISTER TO PRESIDE AT A WEDDING?”

Q: I am a practicing Catholic, and my son and fiancée would like me to perform the wedding ceremony for them, by becoming a minister over one of these online deals. It says I can legally do this. What does the Church think? – J.

A: The Church requires every baptized Catholic who wants to wed to be married with Church approval. This usually means a Church wedding (Learn more with [“Three Hearts: A Retreat Guide on the Sacrament of Marriage”](#)).

- If your son is Catholic, his marriage would be recognized only if it is approved by the Church.
- A civil ceremony would not be recognized as valid by the Church. And for you to “officiate” at his wedding could give scandal, since you would be participating directly in encouraging an invalid marriage. That means you would be helping to lead your son into an irregular union that is not blessed by God. Objectively it would be gravely sinful for him and his friend to live as husband and wife in this case.
- Moreover, your being “ordained” for the purpose of the ceremony could be construed by observers as a formal break with the Catholic Church.
- So the short answer is, if you want to do the right thing, you should consider avoiding this whole plan.
- You might, instead, encourage your son to speak with a priest. It seems that your son might not have a proper understanding of marriage and its place within God’s plans.
- Marriage is a sacrament which, properly received, can help a couple grow in holiness. And that is what marriage is really about: helping the spouses give glory to God, grow in holiness, and get to heaven.
- Perhaps you can take all this to prayer and see how the Holy Spirit wants you to show a truly fatherly concern for your son’s spiritual well-being.

[https://rcspirituality.org/ask\\_a\\_priest/ask-priest-can-become-online-minister-preside-wedding/](https://rcspirituality.org/ask_a_priest/ask-priest-can-become-online-minister-preside-wedding/)

# QUESTION OF FAITH: MAY A CATHOLIC BE “ORDAINED” TO OFFICIATE AT A WEDDING OUTSIDE THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

- In the age of the internet, it is possible to be “ordained” a minister in a matter of minutes. The virtual churches that offer online ordinations do not require any education or training. They style themselves as “multi-denominational” or “nondenominational,” and do not ask for assent to a specific Creed or system of beliefs.
- Most Catholics, given their understanding of ordained ministry, would not consider the possibility of “ordination” through an internet church, but increasingly ordination is sought out for a one-time occasion: to legally witness a wedding. As marriages increasingly take place outside of churches, it is not unusual for an engaged couple to ask a friend or family member to officiate at their wedding. In other cases, applying for virtual ordination might be done, in jest or on a whim.
- A Catholic who seeks out online ordination might not be aware of the gravity of his or her choice. The Church holds to the sacredness of Holy Orders and the belief that God (not the individual) calls a person to specific roles of service, such as priesthood and the diaconate. It is the Church that discerns that call to ministry, as no one is seen to have a right to ordination. As the Catechism relates, “Anyone who thinks he recognizes the signs of God’s call to the ordained ministry must humbly submit his desire to the authority of the Church, who has the responsibility and right to call someone to receive orders” (1578). Accordingly, only bishops as successors to the apostles can validly ordain and should confer Holy Orders solely upon those men who have shown the qualities and virtues of an ordained minister and have been suitably prepared for his vocation (usually at least five years of discernment and formation).
- Seeking ordination outside the Catholic Church denies the Church’s teaching on valid ordination and by extension rejects the Church’s teaching on the sacrament since they are closely connected and often directly rely on the priest or deacon’s ministry. Because of the significance of Holy Orders in the Catholic faith, a Catholic may not seek out ordination in another church (even solely to officiate at a wedding).
- Since every Catholic is bound to the laws of the Church and required to maintain union with the Church “in its visible structure by the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments, and ecclesiastical governance” (Code of Canon Law, 205), receiving “ordination” in another church or faith community (however loose or unofficial the community) would necessarily involve entering into some degree of communion with another church or religious society – and to break communion with the Catholic Church. Though this is a serious matter, if a Catholic has sought out ordination or officiated at a wedding outside the Church without understanding the gravity, it is possible to be reconciled. One should approach the sacrament of reconciliation as soon as possible with a desire to return to communion in the Church.
- Living in a society that increasingly does not value the importance of religious traditions, the increase of internet ordinations is not surprising. Virtual “ordination,” however, does not take the discernment and preparation necessary for ordained service seriously and may serve to imitate (or even mock) legitimately-conferred Holy Orders. Catholics are called to witness to the life-giving graces of the sacraments as instituted by Christ and conferred by the Church and should decline a request to be “ordained.”