

PART II • UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE WALKING INTO

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What you will NOT have to do

This is the chapter I most wish someone had handed me on day one, so I'm keeping the format ruthless: myth, verdict, truth. Read it once now for relief, and again before family gatherings, because at least three of these myths will be repeated to you by a well-meaning relative before the wedding.

One framing note: everything below describes the Church's actual requirements. Individual families sometimes have expectations that exceed them; a grandmother's hopes are not canon law. This chapter arms you with the difference, and Sheet I in the Workbook ("Requirement or folklore?") gives you a one-page tool for sorting every new claim that arrives after it.

Myth 1: "You'll have to convert."

You will not. Not now, not at the wedding, not as an unwritten condition later. Conversion is never a requirement for marrying a Catholic, full stop. The Church explicitly leaves the non-Catholic partner's conscience free; that freedom isn't a loophole, it's the stated design. If anyone (including, rarely, an overzealous parish volunteer) implies otherwise, they are wrong about their own Church's rules.

What exists is an open door: the Church's process for adults who choose to become Catholic, called RCIA or OCIA. You'll hear the acronym eventually, and knowing what it is means you won't be rattled when someone mentions it. It is an invitation that you may decline forever, politely, without consequence to your marriage.

Myth 2: "You'll have to get baptized."

You will not. If you were never baptized, you can remain never baptized. As Chapter 3 explained, your baptism status changes which permission the priest files. That's all it changes. Nobody will maneuver you toward a font.

Myth 3: "You have to promise to raise the children Catholic."

You do not — your partner does. This deserves its short version here even though Chapter 5 treats it fully: the promise belongs to the Catholic partner, is qualified by "all in their power," and your only formal role is to be informed of it. You will not be asked to promise, sign, or swear anything about your children's religion. The Church deliberately does not ask, because it deliberately does not want promises made against conscience.

Myth 4: "You'll have to take communion — or it'll be humiliating when you can't."

Neither. You won't take communion, because the Church reserves it to Catholics, and far from being a humiliation, abstaining is the respectful and expected norm. At any Nuptial Mass, a good share of the congregation stays seated at communion; at your wedding, with your guest list, possibly half the church. And if you choose a ceremony without Mass (the option priests themselves often recommend for mixed couples), the moment simply never arises. Chapter 7 covers that choice; Chapter 13 choreographs the moment if you do face it.

Myth 5: "You'll have to recite prayers and creeds you don't believe."

You will not. The words that are genuinely yours in the ceremony are the ones you'd want anyway: your consent to marry, your vows, the words at the rings. Promises about your marriage, containing nothing you don't mean. The congregation's prayers and responses happen around you, and your participation in them is entirely optional. No one hands the non-Catholic partner a creed and a microphone.

Myth 6: "You'll have to kneel, cross yourself, take holy water, do the whole choreography."

You will not. The physical vocabulary of Catholic worship (genuflecting, the sign of the cross, kneeling) is not expected of non-Catholics, and this is widely understood inside the church walls. The universal fallback posture is fully sufficient, even for the groom or bride: stand when they stand, sit when they sit, remain respectfully still for the rest. Chapter 14 turns this into a two-minute etiquette guide.

Myth 7: "You'll have to confess to a priest / be interrogated about your beliefs."

You will not. Confession is a sacrament for Catholics; nobody sends the non-Catholic partner into the booth. And your meeting with the priest is not an interrogation of your worldview. It's closer to an unusually thoughtful administrative interview: are you free to marry, do you understand what marriage means, has anyone pressured you. A priest may ask about your beliefs out of genuine and professional curiosity; "I'm not a believer, and I take her faith seriously" is a complete and well-received answer. Chapter 9 preps the whole meeting.

Myth 8: "The Church won't really recognize your marriage anyway."

The opposite. This myth somehow coexists with all the others, so let it die here: once married with the proper permission, you are, in the Church's eyes, fully, permanently, actually married. Not blessed-but-lesser. Not tolerated. Married, with the same weight the Church gives any marriage at its altars. (Chapter 3 explains why this follows from the Church's own logic.)

Myth 9: "You'll have to pay your way in."

No one sells weddings. Parishes customarily receive an offering, and there may be practical costs (the musician, the flowers), but there is no admission price for the non-Catholic, no fee attached to the dispensation that resembles a toll on you personally. Amounts and customs vary so much by country and parish that the only correct guidance is: ask at the first meeting, plainly. It's a normal question. (Sheet D includes it.)

Myth 10: "Sign here and you're committing to Mass every Sunday for life."

You are committing to a marriage, not a membership. Nothing in this process obligates the non-Catholic partner to future attendance, practice, or participation. What Sundays look like in your household is a decision the two of you will make together, and remake over the years; that's Worksheet C2 territory, not canon law territory.

What you WILL have to do

Fairness demands the other list, and its brevity is the best news in the book:

Show up honestly. One or more meetings with the priest, answering direct questions about your freedom to marry and your understanding of what you're entering. Honesty is the entire assignment; the process is built for a truthful non-believer, not a performing one.

Do the preparation. The marriage prep course (Chapter 8) is required. It costs you a weekend or a few evenings, most of it about communication and money rather than doctrine.

Handle a thin stack of paperwork. Your baptismal record if one exists, a declaration that you're free to marry, documentation of any previous marriage. That's the pile. (Sheet B.)

Be informed of the promise. Someone will make sure you know what your partner has declared. You listen. That's the whole of it.

Learn one hour of choreography. When to stand, what you'll say, what happens next: a rehearsal and a cheat sheet's worth of knowledge (Chapters 13–14, Sheet F).

Read that list again when the anxiety comes back at 2 a.m. Five items, none of which costs you your integrity. The institution across the table has had five hundred years to decide what it requires of someone in your exact seat, and this modest list is its considered answer. The monsters were never real; the homework is a weekend and some forms.

The real work of this season isn't between you and the Church at all. It's between you and your partner, and that's where we go next.

Part III begins with the conversation that matters more than every form combined: the promise about children, and what it means for the two of you.