

How should we handle weddings to which we are invited if the couple is not getting married in the Catholic Church (and one or both parties were baptized/raised Catholic)? Not to go to the ceremony? Not to go the reception?

I have heard many differing opinions on this subject from people I respect. I will offer my *personal* perspectives for consideration and suggest that each case must be treated individually.

Your Motivations: What is your intention for skipping the ceremony or reception?

- **Changing the situation:** Are you trying to encourage the couple to change their plans and get married in the Church? A threat of skipping the wedding will probably only change the plans of the couple if made by a parent, grandparent, or someone very close to one of the parties.
- **Preventing scandal:** Is your intent to prevent scandal to the Church? Unless those getting married are public figures, or active in the Church, we must consider how much real chance there is for scandal. I knew a Catholic music minister who got married on a beach while waiting for her fiancé's annulment to be decided. For me, as a deacon, to attend that wedding would have been a cause of scandal.
- **Teaching the couple:** Do you hope to correct and teach the couple? Pray for them and talk to them gently and with love, not with threats. You may be the only one they know with strong Catholic values. When the Holy Spirit makes them ready to return to the Church, you may be their only link; try not to alienate them. The Pharisees accused Jesus of scandal when He ate with tax collectors and sinners. He said: "Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners." (Lk. 5:31-32)
- **Teaching others:** Do you hope to teach nieces and nephews and other young people that this is not correct behavior? This is a very realistic and admirable goal, but will not be accomplished simply by staying away. You must follow-up with these young people to explain to them the reason for your absence, otherwise they will assume some negative reasons, or they might not even notice. You need to assess whether this is a teaching moment for you.

The Couple's Motivation: Why is the couple getting married outside the Church? Are they intentionally flaunting the Church's rules for convenience or out of disrespect? Or, are they simply non-practicing and oblivious to the rules? This may have a bearing on whether you should attend the wedding.

Catholic Status: Just because someone was baptized or raised as a Catholic does not mean that they are still a Catholic. If the person formally defects from the Church, they are no longer bound by Canon Law. (ref. Can. 1124) Even if the person has drifted away, but not formally left the Church, there is a question about the culpability of their actions. For a mortal sin to occur it must be "committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent." (CCC #1857) Additionally, they are not likely to come and receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist and compound any sinfulness. Remaining close to the couple, to make long term catechesis possible, may be more productive than skipping their wedding.

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