

Some explanatory notes
concerning the wedding of
Boris Johnson and Carrie Symonds

Following the wedding of the Prime Minister Boris Johnson to Carrie Symonds, Westminster Cathedral issued the following statement:

'On Saturday 29th May, the wedding of Carrie Symonds and Boris Johnson took place in Westminster Cathedral. The bride and groom are both members of the Westminster Cathedral parish and baptized Catholic. All necessary steps were taken, in both Church and civil law, and all formalities completed before the wedding.'

However, as seen in both social and broadcast media reports, people were left confused. One such report left viewers with the impression that anyone who had never married in a Catholic Church was entitled to a Catholic Church wedding because marriages outside the Church are not recognized. Nothing could be further from the truth!

To understand why this marriage took place in a Catholic Church the following points should be noted:

- Marriage is governed by divine and natural law. Where marriage takes place between Catholics, ecclesiastical laws, known as Canon Law also apply. (canon.1059) This only applies to Catholics because laws which are merely ecclesiastical do not bind non-Catholics (canon.6). Boris Johnson is a baptised Catholic and Carrie Symonds is also a Catholic.
- In this particular case Boris Johnson was baptised a Catholic and, his reception of Anglican confirmation as a child at school notwithstanding, he remains a Catholic, and is subject to our Canon (Church) Law, and was bound by that same law when he contracted his two previous marriages. Because he received no dispensation to marry elsewhere, while the marriages were valid from a civil point of view, it is their validity from the Catholic perspective that was deficient
- This is not an attempt to ignore the devastating effects of family break-up in our society today. Nor is this explanation, or indeed the Johnson/Symonds wedding, any attempt by the Catholic Church to pass judgment on, or wipe away, what may have happened in previous relationships.
- This explanation may also be painful for Catholics who did marry in the Catholic Church or who sought the dispensation as they were required to do if marrying in a non-Catholic Church, and who now live with the effects of family breakdown and civil divorce.
- We can only try to imagine the hurt and frustration that some may feel. It was most likely that this is part of the reason the Johnson/Symonds wedding went ahead so discreetly.
- The legitimacy of Boris Johnson's older children from the former marriages is not called into question.
- Boris Johnson and Carrie Symonds are now married in the eyes of God with all that involves. Marriage is lifelong, and involves fidelity, for the purposes of the well-being of the spouses and the procreation and upbringing of children. In this case, too, they have celebrated a Sacrament.

If you are a Catholic and are seeking to remarry in a Catholic Church, it is important to understand what must be taken into consideration. Speak to your own priest before going ahead with arrangements, because examples like the Johnson/Symonds wedding, while perfectly legitimate, are not a template. Do not jump to conclusions from this but seek for the answer from those who know what is or is not possible.