

In extreme cases, can a lay person conduct a wedding?

This is a very interesting question because we first must stop and consider what we mean by “conducting” a wedding. The sacrament of marriage is a unique sacrament because the man and woman being married are actually the ministers of the sacrament. They, in effect, confer the sacrament upon each other when they give their matrimonial consent; when they mutually give and accept one another. The bishop or priest or deacon is not the minister of the sacrament of marriage, he is only the official Church witness. It is said that he assists at the marriage ceremony.

Ordinarily, for a marriage to be valid, the Church requires that a bishop, priest, or deacon be present to assist along with two witnesses, normally the maid of honor and the best man. But there are exceptions. In extraordinary situations, for example in remote places where members of the clergy are not available, lay people can be delegated to assist at marriages as described in Canon Law. **Canon 1112: *Where there is a lack of priests and deacons, the diocesan bishop can delegate lay persons to assist at marriages, with the previous favorable vote of the conference of bishops and after he has obtained the permission of the Holy See. A suitable lay person is to be selected, who is capable of giving instruction to those preparing to be married and able to perform the matrimonial liturgy properly.***

In fact, in very extraordinary situations, sacramental marriage can actually take place without the presence of any official Church witness to assist according to the requirements and limitations set out in Canon 1116.

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