

“Marriage is a holy sacrament. Those baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus are married in his name also. Their love is a sharing in the love of God. He is its source. The marriages of Christian couples... are images on earth of the wonder of God, the loving, life-giving communion of Three Persons in one God, and of God's covenant in Christ, with the Church. Christian marriage is a sacrament of salvation. It is the pathway to holiness for all members of a family.” - Excerpt from Pope John Paul II, Pastoral Visit to England and Wales, October 1982

One of the most important times in the life of a family is the occasion of a wedding. This is true not only for the specific couple but also for the family that is the Church. In witnessing the love of a man and woman celebrated in the Sacrament of Matrimony, the community is once again reminded of the love of Christ for his bride, the Church.

The vocation of Catholic Marriage is a serious one, as is any vocation, and so the Church has an obligation to do all that it can to preserve the dignity of Marriage and offer guidance and support that will help prepare couples for married life on the wedding day and beyond.

In his exhortation regarding the role of the Christian family in the modern world, *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II writes that the liturgical celebration of Marriage, as a sacramental action of the Church, should involve the Christian community “with the full, active and responsible participation of all those present: the bride and bridegroom, the priest, the witnesses, the relatives and friends, and the other members of the faithful, all of them members of an assembly that manifests and lives the mystery of Christ and his Church” (67.4). It is hoped the following instructions will aid those entrusted with the important pastoral responsibilities of continually striving to help the faithful achieve the ideals of Christian Marriage. For the engaged couple looking ahead to the wedding day, these instructions can bring about an understanding of the importance the Church places on the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage and how that informs the shared life lived together those days and years following the ceremony.

“The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the Body of Christ, and finally, to give worship to God.” – Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 59

Marriage is a holy Sacrament

The celebration of Marriage is much more than just a religious ceremony or a validation of a relationship. In the Catholic Church, Marriage between two Christians is seen as a **sacrament**: an effective sign of God's grace, given to us by Christ, and entrusted to the Church for the purpose of sharing in the divine life. The celebration of the Church's seven sacraments is an action of Christ, which is the work of our redemption. The faithful participate in this action of Christ as the Church, the Body of Christ. It is not something they can do on their own, but only on the initiative of Christ. Therefore, the sacraments of the Church cannot belong to only one person or one particular couple, even in those times when it seems to be focused primarily on one person (as in an ordination or Anointing of the Sick) or a couple (as in Marriage). They are acts that

reflect the communion between God and his Church, and also the communion between the members of his Church.

The sacraments have been entrusted to the Church. Not only do the sacraments “manifest and communicate...the mystery of communion with the God who is love, One in three persons,” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1118), they help to pass on the living Tradition of the Church. Because of the importance of the sacraments in the life of the Church, they are each celebrated using a certain structure and form, words and actions, to ensure a faithful passing of the Tradition, of what the Church believes and holds dear. How the Church prays affects how the Church believes and lives.

This can be seen in the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage. In a particular way, the bride and the groom, in committing to a covenant relationship (symbolized in the exchange of consent, or vows), pledge their selfless love for each other before God and the Church. This selfless love models and makes present the love of Christ, who gave himself in love for his people. All present at a wedding can look at the bride and groom and see Jesus. More importantly, the bride and the groom look at each other and see Jesus’ love and a commitment to a life lived in service to that love.

Christ the Lord abundantly blessed this many-faceted love, welling up as it does from the fountain of divine love and structured as it is on the model of His union with His Church. For as God of old made Himself present to His people through a covenant of love and fidelity, so now the Savior of men and the Spouse of the Church comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony. – *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 48

Initial Steps

Setting the Date

Once the engagement has begun and the planning begins, the first contact that should be made is with the parish and the priest/deacon who will be assisting with the assessment process. While a tentative date for the wedding can and should be discussed at this time, the date should not be formalized until after the assessment process has been completed and the freedom of the couple to marry has been established. While it is also important to select the reception hall, invitations, etc., the assessment process is meant to help set the couple on the path to a healthy, loving and lasting Marriage.

Where to Marry

Ideally, weddings are celebrated in a Catholic church. For the Church, Marriage is a community and social sacrament, and should be celebrated where the community gathers to celebrate the sacraments. Traditionally, the wedding has taken place in the parish church of the bride, but it may also take place in the groom’s parish as well. Marriages may also be celebrated in another

Catholic church with the permission of the pastor of the church. Parishes may set up their own guidelines for the use of the church by parishioners and by non-parishioners.

When Marriage takes place between a Catholic and a non-Catholic (baptized or unbaptized), it should also take place in a Catholic church. With the permission of the bishop, these weddings may also take place in another suitable place, such as the church of the non-Catholic. Permission will not be granted for weddings to be celebrated in public parks, reception halls, etc.

When deciding on the church for the Marriage, couples should avoid planning a church “destination wedding,” selecting a church based solely on aesthetics. While visual beauty is an essential piece of the Church’s liturgy, it should not be an end unto itself but rather point back to a life lived with and for God in the context of the celebration of the Marriage and beyond. Celebrating the wedding in the church one regularly attends or to which one has family connections can help avoid this tendency.

When to Marry

There is much flexibility as to when the wedding may be celebrated, but there are also a few limitations as well.

The only days when it is not permitted to celebrate any Marriage in or out of Mass would be Good Friday and Holy Saturday. While one could, in theory, celebrate a wedding outside of Mass on Holy Thursday, this does not seem to be advisable due to the intensity of Holy Week and the Easter Triduum on parishes.

Outside of the days mentioned above, the *Rite of Marriage* in or out of Mass may be celebrated any other day. Customarily, most weddings are celebrated on Saturdays, but couples are not limited to Saturdays only. However, when selecting the date, the couple and the parish should keep in mind the other liturgies and activities of the parish and people involved. It would not be advisable, for example, to ask to celebrate a Marriage on a Sunday afternoon if the priest has already celebrated two Masses on Saturday evening and three on Sunday morning. Priests and deacons should also be aware of their own time constraints while also accommodating the needs of the couple. Parishes may set their own guidelines as to when Marriages may be celebrated.

The Sacrament of Marriage in Mass may be celebrated as a ritual Mass (the “wedding Mass”) with the proper prayers and options for readings, or as the Mass of the day, using the set prayers and readings for the particular feast or season. Some days on the Church calendar do not allow for a ritual Mass, since the feast they commemorate takes precedence over other celebrations. For example:

- January 1 (Mary, Mother of God)
- December 25 (Christmas)
- Solemnities of Epiphany, Ascension, and Pentecost, Holy Trinity, Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi), Sacred Heart of Jesus, Christ the King
- Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter
- Ash Wednesday

- Weekdays of Holy Week
- Octave of Easter (the eight days following Easter Sunday)
- March 19 (Saint Joseph)
- March 25 (Annunciation)
- June 24 (Birth of John the Baptist)
- June 29 (Saints Peter and Paul)
- August 15 (Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary)
- November 1 (All Saints)
- November 2 (All Souls)
- December 8 (Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary)

Marriages celebrated within Mass these days would use the proper prayers and readings of the day along with the nuptial blessing. On these days, one of the readings may be changed to a selection from the Marriage ritual Mass (ordinarily the 2nd reading).

After consultation with the priest/deacon assisting with the preparation, the wedding may be celebrated at a regularly scheduled Sunday Mass (or an anticipated Mass on Saturday evening). If this is the case, it would be celebrated in the Mass of the day (with the assigned readings and prayers) as listed above.

On Sundays in Ordinary Time, the ritual Mass may be celebrated outside of the regular parish Mass times (for example, Sunday afternoon).

When choosing the date, the couple and priest/deacon must also take into consideration the liturgical season and how that will affect the celebration. For example, Marriages (in or out of Mass) celebrated in Advent or Lent should take into consideration the nature of seasons in the life of the Church, especially regarding the choices of music and decoration. The liturgical seasons of the Church are not only for the church building. They serve as particular reminders to the faithful of the life they are called to live, both in and out of the church.

Mass or No Mass?

There are three different forms the *Catholic Rite of Marriage* usually takes:

- Ordinarily, two Catholics celebrate marriage in the context of the Mass, called the “Rite for Celebrating Marriage during Mass.” The actual Marriage rite takes place after the homily, and then Mass continues in the usual way. As the celebrant of the Mass, the priest usually stands as the Church’s witness for the Sacrament of Marriage in Mass, but deacons may also fill this witness role in the Mass with the permission of the bishop.
- When a Catholic marries a baptized non-Catholic, the “Rite for Celebrating Marriage Outside Mass” would be used. It is a liturgy of the word similar to what is found at Mass, followed by the Marriage rite.
- When a Catholic wishes to marry an unbaptized person, the “Rite for Celebrating Marriage Between a Catholic and an Unbaptized Person” should be used. It is similar to the Marriage rite outside of Mass, but with some accommodations for the unbaptized party.

If, for some reason, a priest was unavailable or unable to celebrate a Mass for two Catholics wishing to marry, they would simply have the rite outside of Mass. However, all attempts should be made to have it within the context of Mass.

At the discretion of the priest/deacon assisting with the preparation, a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic may celebrate the Rite of Marriage during Mass. However, Communion is not to be given to the non-Catholic party, nor to any of the non-Catholics in attendance (this would also be true at any Mass). “Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life, and worship,” reception of the sacrament cannot be extended to those who do not profess this faith. Careful consideration, therefore, should take place before a celebration like this occurs. Marriage between a Catholic and unbaptized person may never be celebrated during Mass.

Catholics and Other Faith Traditions

The Sacrament of Marriage is administered by the man and the woman exchanging vows. This is why both parties must be baptized Christians (not necessarily Catholics) for there to be a sacramental Marriage. When the two Christians spouses consent to one another and exchange their vows, a sacrament is bestowed. The priest/deacon who assists at Catholic Marriages does not administer the sacrament, but stands as the Church's official witness to the Marriage, seeing that it is administered by the consenting man and woman. The marriage of a baptized Christian with an unbaptized person cannot be a sacramental marriage, though it may be a perfectly valid and holy union.

When a Catholic wishes to marry a non-Catholic, a dispensation, or written permission, must be obtained from the bishop. The priest/deacon should be informed about the difference in religious practice at the first meeting so that additional attention can be given to this aspect of the relationship in Marriage preparation. The goal is to help the couple live a Christian Marriage together while helping the Catholic member to remain true to their faith.

In some cases a couple may have a good and just reason for not wanting to celebrate the wedding according to the Catholic form, such as a strong attachment to the non-Catholic's particular community or minister or concerns from the family about celebrating a Catholic service (for example). If during the course of the preparation and assessment the priest/deacon does not believe this to be an obstacle to the wedding, he may ask for what is called a “dispensation from canonical form.” This means the wedding can be celebrated and witnessed by the non-Catholic minister and still recognized as a valid Marriage. Again, this decision should come only with the consultation of the priest/deacon in the course of the assessment process.

Other Details in Preparation

Ideally, a Catholic should be fully initiated (received the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) before Marriage. If one has not been Confirmed or received First Communion, they may still get married. However, the priest/deacon should work in the assessment process to prepare the person to celebrate those sacraments before Marriage, if at all possible.

Another step in preparation for Catholics is the Sacrament of Reconciliation. One should plan on celebrating Reconciliation before the celebration of Marriage as a part of the personal preparation for the wedding and life beyond.

“Inasmuch as it is a sacramental action of the Church, the liturgical celebration of marriage should involve the Christian community, with the full, active and responsible participation of all those present, according to the place and task of each individual: the bride and bridegroom, the priest, the witnesses, the relatives, the friends, the other members of the faithful, all of them members of an assembly that manifests and lives the mystery of Christ and His Church.” – *Familiaris consortio* (exhortation of Pope John Paul II on role of Christian family in the modern world), 67.

The Catholic Marriage Liturgy

Once the freedom to marry has been established and the date and form have been set, it is time to look towards the preparation of and for the Marriage liturgy itself. This can serve as a very prayerful time for the couple, with an opportunity to reflect on the various options for readings, prayers, music and rituals found in the *Rite of Marriage*.

While in any liturgy of the Church the visual aspects, the beauty, and the decorations, are important, couples must work to avoid getting fixated on the externals of the celebration only. Priests, deacons, and parish staffs should work to help the couples celebrate a wedding that will be a “pathway to holiness,” not only for the couple but all who stand witness to the event.

Readings from Scripture

“In the hearing of God’s word the Church is built up and grows...”¹ Readings from Sacred Scripture are a key component of the celebration of the sacraments. The *Rite of Marriage* provides many options from which the couple may choose (see appendix A).

All readings at a Marriage liturgy must be from sacred Scripture as found in an approved *Lectionary*. For weddings celebrated in the context of the Mass of the day (see “When to Marry”), the designated readings of the day are used (with the option to change one reading). For other Masses and for weddings celebrated outside of Mass, the list of readings in the appendix can be used. One may select two readings and a psalm (Old/New Testament, Psalm and Gospel) or three readings and a psalm (Old Testament, Psalm, New Testament, Gospel). Ideally, the Responsorial Psalm should be sung (see “Music”). The priest/deacon or other parish staff member should help the couple in the selection of the readings and other texts of the liturgy.

Music

Music is often a very influential and important part of people’s lives both in and out of worship, which can make it a contentious subject in terms of planning. While the music for the Marriage liturgy is one of the places that afford the most options, at the same time there are some guidelines that need to be followed in selecting liturgical music.

A good description of the intention of music can be found in the recent U.S. bishops’ document on liturgical music:

¹ *Lectionary for Mass: Introduction*, 7.

“The role of music is to serve the needs of the Liturgy and not to dominate it, seek to entertain, or draw attention to itself or the musicians. However, there are instances when the praise and adoration of God leads to music taking on a far greater dimension. At other times, simplicity is the most appropriate response. The primary role of music in the Liturgy is to help the members of the gathered assembly to join themselves with the action of Christ and to give voice to the gift of faith.”²

The music used before or during the liturgy should be clearly identifiable as prayer by all present. In general, when deciding what music to use, here are some questions to consider:

- Is it a well-written, quality piece of music?
- Are the text and music in keeping with the nature and needs of the liturgy?
- Can the music be used to help the assembly to pray?
- Does it draw the assembly closer to the mysteries of Christ being celebrated?
- Is this particular piece of music appropriate for this use in this particular liturgy?

The music must express a Catholic view of love and Marriage. Many current popular songs on the radio may sing about love and romance, but this is often contrary to what the Church holds as true and beautiful regarding the love between a man and a woman. Secular love songs and “pop” ballads that have personal meaning to the couple are best played or sung at the reception.

Many “traditional” wedding songs have no foundation in the Catholic Marriage liturgy. For example, the traditional wedding march (“Here Comes the Bride”) has its origins in the opera. The scene in which this piece is used takes place not during the wedding processional but in the bridal chamber. This is the difficulty in using music not originally composed for use in the liturgy.

The music must also serve its proper purpose in its place in the liturgy. There is room for both a well-done musical solo and for full congregational pieces in the liturgy. However, solos should never take the place of those parts of the liturgy intended for the full assembly. The music must also be in accord with the liturgical season, as well as its placement in the liturgy.

The music may be led by a solitary cantor or by a full choir. More importantly, it should be done well. Often a couple would like to have a relative/friend sing or play as a way of having more participation. While the sentiment is well intentioned, poorly executed (or selected) music can often be more distracting to liturgy than no music at all. Please allow those responsible for liturgical music at the parish to be of service throughout the whole process and celebration.

The music should also be done live. There is no place for recorded music in the Catholic Marriage liturgy. Just as one would not think of having the priest play a recording of his homily or the readings proclaimed via CD, the role of the live, present human person is of the utmost importance in liturgical music. Liturgical ministry presumes two people – a person doing the ministering, and someone to whom they minister. CDs and mp3s are not ministers.

² *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, 125.

In short, the music for the Marriage liturgy in or out of Mass should follow the same guidelines for the music found in a parish's weekend Masses. To assemble an exhaustive list of appropriate music for the Marriage liturgy would be a monumental task. Either the priest/deacon assisting with the preparation or someone on the parish staff responsible for liturgical music should help the couple in making appropriate choices. Parishes should feel free to set their own guidelines and lists of suggested music to help guide couples.

Here is an outline of the places in the Marriage liturgies which may call for music:

- Prelude – Any music taking place before the start of the liturgy, be it merely prelude or accompanying specific movements (seating of the mothers, for example), should also stay away from the secular or popular music. The prayer is already beginning.
- Entrance Procession – This may take the form of a song, the sung antiphon for the day/celebration, or an appropriate instrumental piece. The instrumental piece may be followed by a song once all are in their places.
- Penitential Rite – The priest/deacon may wish to sing this to a simple tone. When celebrating with a diverse group, one must be selective with their options. At the same time, it is important to not sell the assembly short or think them unable to participate.
- *Gloria* – Depending on the day, the *Gloria* may be sung. If it is used, it is preferably sung.
- Responsorial Psalm – This is preferably sung.
- Gospel Acclamation and Greeting – The acclamation is preferably sung with an appropriate verse, but the whole acclamation may be omitted if not sung. The dialog greeting at the opening of the Gospel could be sung using a simple tone.
- Preparation of the Gifts – A song by the assembly, the choir, or a solo piece may be appropriate here. Instrumental music would also work, as would silence. Never underestimate the power of silence.
- Eucharistic Prayer – The opening dialog of the Prayer may be sung or said. The people's parts in the Prayer (Holy, Holy, Holy; Memorial Acclamation, Amen) are also preferably sung. The priest may sing the Eucharistic Prayer according to his own abilities.
- Lord's Prayer – This may be sung by the people, or it could be recited.
- Fraction Rite – The "Lamb of God" is ordinarily sung during the breaking of the consecrated bread. If it is not sung, it should be recited.
- Communion Procession – A congregational song or a mix of choir and assembly should accompany the Communion procession. Another song or reflective silence may follow Communion.
- Recessional – Instrumental music, a hymn or silence may accompany this procession.

Other Roles in the Liturgy

When the Church gathers to celebrate the liturgy, the different members fill the various roles and ministries needed. The same goes for a Marriage liturgy. At the same time, one should not make up roles for people to play in the liturgy in order to involve as many people as possible. Most of the roles and ministries found in the Marriage liturgy are the same as those at Sunday Mass.

Greeters – The extension of hospitality as people come into the church, for those both familiar and unfamiliar with the place or event, should help to bring people into the spirit of prayer that the Marriage liturgy is about. Customarily in this area members of the wedding party are designated to assist with passing out of programs, getting people to their seats, and the like.

Readers – As mentioned before, the proclamation of Scripture is a main piece of the Marriage liturgy in or out of Mass. There should be only one reader per reading, or one person may do all of the readings. The Gospel, as the climax of the liturgy of the word, is always read by a priest or deacon. The Prayer of the Faithful may be led by a deacon or reader.

When selecting readers, it would seem beneficial to ask someone who has had experience with reading at Mass or other public speaking. Readers for Mass must be Catholic, and permission of the bishop is needed for someone else to read. For a Marriage outside of Mass, anyone may read.

Gift Bearers – At Mass, the procession with the bread and the wine help to represent the people's own participation and offering. This should not be forsaken in order to simplify or shorten the Mass. If the couple would like to take up a collection for the needs of the poor or another meaningful charity, this may also be a part of the procession.

Communion Ministers – It is acceptable that at most weddings within Mass that both the Body and Blood will be offered at Communion. Priests and deacons stand as the ordinary ministers of Communion for any liturgy, and should fulfill this role at the Mass. Since often the only priest or deacon present at the Mass is the celebrant and deacon of the Mass, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may be called upon to help distribute Communion. These ministers need to be fully-initiated Catholics, and it would seem advisable that they at least be familiar with the role beforehand. They may be regular Communion ministers at their home parishes, or they may be commissioned specifically for this event.

Servers – Even at a Marriage liturgy outside of Mass, it would be appropriate and helpful to have at least one server to assist the priest/deacon. The server may carry the crucifix in procession, help with the book and at the altar, and generally take some of the burden off the priest/deacon to do everything. At the discretion of the priest/deacon, servers may be boys or girls, children or adults, Catholic and familiar with serving at Masses (and weddings).

Music – For more information on music and musicians, see “Music” above. In general, be they a full choir or a lone cantor and musician, the music ministry should be able to do their role well and lead people more deeply into the prayer.

Witnesses – While the priest/deacon stands as the Church's official witness, two other witnesses are also needed. Customarily, this is the “best man” and “maid/matron of honor.” The only requirements the Church places on these witnesses is that they be able to comprehend what is going on (perhaps seven years old, or the age of reason) and they be two in number. They need not be of the opposite sex, or even Catholic. However, if an adult were unable to comprehend what was happening at the liturgy due to some impairment (intoxication, for example), they would not be able to stand as a witness.

Other Roles – While not an official liturgical role, many couples ask important friends and relatives to serve as attendants. Although there is no set limit on the number of “bridesmaids” and “groomsmen,” there should not be so many as to overwhelm the primary symbol of the bride and groom, or the space of the church and sanctuary.

Many couples like to have children participate as miniature brides and grooms, flower girls, or ring bearers. The only guidance to provide for these situations is to be sure that the children selected for these roles can do them, and that they do not become a distraction or a hindrance to the rest of the celebration. The parish may issue more details guidelines on the matters of attendants, flower girls, ring bearers, etc.

Decorations

Just as the readings, prayers and music of the liturgy are guided by the specific liturgical season, so should the decorations used (or not used) for the Marriage liturgy respect this as well. Any flowers, plants, candles, etc. used should enhance the prayer and never distract or disrupt the liturgy.

Some points to keep in mind:

- Decorations must respect the liturgical season. Therefore, in penitential seasons such as Advent and Lent, the use of flowers and other decorations should be in simple moderation (for Advent) or not at all (for Lent).
- It is a good idea to use the seasonal decorations already used in the church when they are in season, such as the Christmas trees after Christmas or the lilies of Easter. However, one should not use these out of season, especially in Advent or Lent.
- Any and all decoration should not take away from or obstruct the primary focal points used in the Marriage liturgy, such as the altar and other areas of the sanctuary. Nothing may be placed on the altar except that which is needed for Mass (book, vessels, candles, etc.). Decorations, like music, are at the service of the liturgy and not vice versa.

Parishes may (and should) set their own guidelines for decorations.

Unity Candle and Other Cultural Symbols

While it has grown in popularity, the unity candle is actually not a part of the Catholic Marriage liturgy. Its lighting as a sign of the commitment of the couple stands as a redundant symbol of the union already expressed by the exchange of consent and rings. Do not feel obligated to include this as a part of the liturgy.

If, in order to keep peace, it must be included, it must not be placed on the altar or in a place where it would hinder the regular movements of the liturgy. The lighting of said candle is normally a very short ritual, so any musical accompaniment should take that into consideration.

Another custom is the bride/groom taking flowers to a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, asking for her protection and intercession on behalf of the new Marriage. Actions such as this would be

best placed after the Prayer After Communion but before the Blessing (the usual place for announcements) during Mass, or after the intercessions and blessing outside of Mass.

Other legitimate and appropriate cultural customs the couple wishes to include should be discussed with the priest/deacon. Once again, anything of this nature should not distract from the primary action of the couple's commitment or the rest of the liturgy. Parishes may have their own guidelines regarding the use of the unity candle and other additions.

Father, you have made the union of man and wife so holy a mystery that it symbolizes the marriage of Christ and his Church...

- Rite of Marriage: Nuptial Blessing

Details of the Liturgy

The Procession

For the couple looking to do something different and original with their processional, a good place to look would be at how the *Rite of Marriage* envisions it. It is markedly different from what ordinarily has been seen in movies and on television and is more reflective of the Catholic theology of the Marriage liturgy.

The first piece is an optional "Rite of Welcoming." The priest/deacon meets the couple at the door of the church (or at the altar) and greets them as a sign of the Church sharing in their joy this day.

After this welcoming comes the formal procession. In comparison, it is more like the procession one would see at their Sunday Mass than what has typically been done at weddings. As with any liturgical entrance procession, the ministers would make their way to the altar. They can be led by the processional crucifix with candles, and even incense if desired. The readers may take a place in this procession along with the altar servers, deacons assisting in the liturgy, and any priest concelebrants (if Mass). Then comes the presiding priest/deacon.

As the ministers of the Sacrament of Marriage, the bride and groom come at the end of this procession. They may walk together or separately. They may be escorted with one or both parents, by one or more of the attendants, or by no one. The bride is not "given away," but rather accompanied in procession the same way she has been accompanied by her parents, family and friends throughout her life to this point.

Meanwhile, the entrance song is sung (see "Music"). This would ideally be done like one finds at a Sunday Mass, but an alternative would be to process to instrumental music and then sing a hymn once all are in place. Then the liturgy would begin in the way most people are accustomed: "In the name of the Father..."

There is some room for accommodation in how this entrance takes place, allowing for some of the other processional elements people have grown accustomed to seeing in other weddings. The

procession as it is proposed in the *Rite*, however, should be the ideal from which one starts. The priest/deacon or person in charge of rehearsals should work with the couple to organize this procession.

Where to Sit?

Where the bride and groom sit is up to them and the priest/deacon. It would be appropriate, as the ministers of the Sacrament of Marriage, for the couple to be seated in the sanctuary. They may also sit anywhere that allows them to fulfill their roles in the liturgy. It does not seem appropriate for the couple to sit in the celebrant's chair. While they are the ministers of Marriage, the celebrant/presider of the rest of the liturgy is the priest/deacon. They should keep their customary seat. Attendants should sit so that they are not a distraction or clutter up the sanctuary. How this plays out will be different in each parish.

The Vows

The exchange of consent, or vows, is the climax of the Sacrament of Marriage. It is when the couple verbalizes "before God and his Church" the covenant relationship to which they are committing.

As with any sacrament, there is a certain form that is followed in their celebration. Part of this form in the Sacrament of Marriage are the vows. The vows express the Catholic understanding of what is happening in the sacrament, and are essential to the celebration. It is for this reason that couples must use the vows given in the *Rite of Marriage* and not be allowed to compose their own consent.

There is some flexibility, however, as to how this exchange of consent does take place. There are actually two different forms of the vows. Couples are free to choose either one. The vows may be repeated back after the priest/deacon, or they may be recited by the couple from memory or from the written text.

Other Details

Pastoral Care

The prayer and care for couples preparing for Marriage should not begin and end with the Marriage liturgy. There are many opportunities available for the parish to help engaged and married couples through their prayer and support.

The following suggestions are offered:

- Prayers for the couple - The Book of Blessings contains the *Orders for the Blessing of Families and Members of Families* (nos. 40-175). In Chapter 1, Section III, nos. 90-134, are the *Orders for the Blessing of a Married Couple* and, in section VI, the *Order for the Blessing of an Engaged Couple*, nos. 195-214.
- Banns of Marriage – the custom of publishing the names of those to be married as a way of investigating their freedom to marry is no longer required. However, this may be a

good method of letting the assembly know who is preparing for Marriage and as a way to encourage their prayers for the couple.

- The Diocese of Evansville annually celebrates the “Golden Jubilee” Mass and Reception honoring those in the diocese married 50 years or longer. Parishes could encourage their jubilee couples to attend, assist them in attending if need be, and hold up their example of commitment to the community.

For More Information on the Marriage Liturgy Policy (Bibliography)

Code of Canon Law (1983) – canons 1055-1140 on the Sacrament of Marriage

Faculties and Policies for the Administration of Sacraments: Diocese of Evansville (1994) – VI: Marriage.

General Instruction of the Roman Missal (2003) – Chapter VII: The Choice of the Mass and Its Parts

Rite of Marriage (1970)

Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship (2007) – Chapter II: The Church at Prayer; Chapter III: The Music of Catholic Worship; Chapter V: The Musical Structure of Catholic Worship (Music and the Other Sacraments)

Appendix A

Readings for the Rite of Marriage

Old Testament

Genesis 1:26-28, 31a
Genesis 2:18-24
Genesis 24:48-51, 58-67
Tobit 7:6-14
Tobit 8:4b-8
Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31
Song of Songs 2:8-10, 14, 16a; 8:6-7a
Sirach 26:1-4, 13-16
Jeremiah 31:31-32a, 33-34a

Psalms

Psalms 33:12 and 18, 20-21, 22
Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9
Psalm 103:1-2, 8 and 13, 17-18a
Psalm 112:1bc-2, 3-4, 5-7a, 7b-8, 9
Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5
Psalm 145:8-9, 10 and 15, 17-18
Psalm 148:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-13a, 13c-14a

New Testament

Romans 8:31b-35, 37-39
Romans 12:1-2, 9-18 or 12:1-2, 9-13
Romans 15:1b-3a, 5-7, 13
1 Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20
1 Corinthians 12:31-13:8a
Ephesians 5:2a, 21-33 or 5:2a, 25-32
Philippians 4:4-9
Colossians 3:12-17
Hebrews 13:1-4a, 5-6b
1 Peter 3:1-9
1 John 3:18-24
1 John 4:7-12
Revelation 19:1, 5-9a

Gospels

Matthew 5:1-12a
Matthew 5:13-16
Matthew 7:21, 24-29 or 7:21, 24-25
Matthew 19:3-6
Matthew 22:35-40
Mark 10:6-9
John 2:1-11
John 15:9-12
John 15:12-16
John 17:20-26 or 17:20-23