

NOTES ON WEDDING LITURGY

Office of Worship – Diocese of Austin

DIOCESAN NORMS FOR WEDDING LITURGY

Introduction

Liturgy, the prayer of the Church, is by its very nature communal. A parish assembly's celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is the normal way of celebrating any sacrament or other liturgy. Catholic weddings, therefore, are celebrations of the whole Church as well as of individual couples. It is important that the parish and the couple recognize the relationship they share with one another. The engaged couple should be given catechesis on the rites, prayers and readings, in order that they might receive the greatest benefit possible from the celebration of the sacrament. (See the *Rite of Marriage*, #5)

Goals

- To encourage the participation of the assembly in the wedding liturgy
- To express the faith and commitment of the couple and of the assembly
- To pray as a faith community for the couple, thereby offering them promise of support in their married life

General Guidelines

In this diocese, Catholic weddings are to take place in Catholic churches. The general norms for liturgical celebration are to be followed at a wedding liturgy. The couple should be involved in the preparation of their wedding liturgy and may need guidance so that the celebration reflects the sacramental nature of their union. Several resources for preparing the wedding liturgy are available to guide them in the selection of scripture readings, prayers, blessings, and other options in the rite. Through prayer and reflection on these choices, the couple will be able to enrich the celebration with expressions of their faith.

Ministries of the Liturgy

Within each liturgical celebration there are a variety of ministries (readers, servers, Eucharistic minister, etc.). Some roles can only be filled by a Roman Catholic minister (e.g., Ordinary or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion); however other ministries, e.g. reader, can be done by qualified persons of other faith traditions. Care should be taken in the selection and preparation of persons to fill these various roles; they should have the skills and spiritual gifts necessary to fulfill the ministry, not just a social relationship to the couple. If suitably skilled persons cannot be found by the couple, the parish should offer assistance from among its ministers. In no circumstances should all of the ministries be assumed by just one person, such as the priest or deacon.

The ministry role of the assembly is to participate in the celebration to the fullest extent possible. The liturgy should be prepared so that community participation is encouraged.

The Rite

The Church provides three different rites for marriage:

- a. A sacramental rite during the Eucharist, which is the usual, but not mandatory, form when both parties are Catholic;
- b. A sacramental rite outside the Eucharist, which is the usual, but not mandatory, form when one party is baptized but not Roman Catholic; and
- c. A non-sacramental rite between a Catholic and an unbaptized person.

Entrance Rite

The procession may include liturgical ministers and the presider, as well as bride and groom, family members, and attendants. There are many ways to plan the entrance rite (e.g. liturgical procession followed by procession of the wedding party; attendants entering as couples rather than the bridesmaids alone; bride and groom accompanied by all parents or relatives in the procession; or the bride escorted by her father.)

Liturgy of the Word

Readings may be selected from the many options given in the lectionary for the Ritual Mass of Marriage or from other appropriate Scripture. Non-scriptural readings are not to be used. Both Psalm and the Gospel Acclamation are sung. The general intercessions should address the needs of the universal Church as well as those of the couple.

The Rite of Marriage

Since the exchange of vows by the bride and groom are the focus of the rite, they should be clearly visible to the entire assembly during this exchange of vows. Preferably they should face each other or the assembly so that their exchange of vows may be heard by all present. The rite provides optional forms for receiving the consent of the couple.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

It is not recommended that the wedding couple be Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion at the Wedding Mass. The couple should also remain in their places during the Eucharistic Prayer as members of the assembly. They are usually located in or near the sanctuary. Admission to Holy Communion at a Catholic wedding is not possible under the present circumstances for members of non-Catholic churches. It is recommended that the statement from the Bishop's Conference on reception of Holy Eucharist be inserted in the worship aid. Condensed versions can be used such as the following: We welcome everyone to this celebration of the Eucharist and the Marriage vows of N. and N. As fellow Christians we all long for the day on which we can all share in the Eucharist together. We cannot ignore, however, the differences that still exist among us as Christians. I would ask that as we Catholics now share in the Eucharist, the sign of our unity in faith, life and worship, that those of you from other Christian traditions will pray that this sad division will be healed, and that the unity prayed for by Jesus to the Father, "Father, may they all be one" will one day bring us to the joy of sharing the Eucharist together.

Music

When deciding what music fits into the liturgy, the general norm for liturgical music is to be followed, consultation with the parish music director and the use of the diocesan guidelines for wedding music. The music used before or during the liturgy must be clearly identifiable as prayer by all gathered. Secular music may not be used as prelude or postlude music or within the wedding liturgy.

Music Ministers

It is important that the music minister (or other pastoral minister) be able to present in a clear and kind manner the role of music in Catholic worship, as well as the parish policies for music at liturgy. The presence of a trained cantor should be encouraged at a wedding liturgy. The cantor's main role is to help the assembly participate in the singing.

Worship Aids

In order to encourage the participation of the assembly in the wedding liturgy, it is helpful to have a worship aid. This might be an available hymnal or a specially prepared order of worship containing the music to be sung. When preparing such a booklet, correct reprint permission is required to fulfill copyright law.

Parish Policies

Parish policies for wedding liturgies are helpful and to be encouraged and should always be presented in a positive, welcoming, hospitable tone. Samples of local parish policies are available from the Office of Family Life Ministry. Written parish policies or guidelines which state clearly what is allowed or not allowed

in the celebration can assist the couple in making initial preparations; such policies typically cover the areas of music, environment, and photography. A clear understanding at the beginning can help avoid the disappointment of having to change plans after they have already been made. Written policies also maintain consistency as the couple talks with various parish ministers (clergy, music ministers, environment

coordinators, etc.). While policies may be particular for each parish community, they cannot prohibit what

the general law of the Church allows. (For example, a parish cannot prohibit weddings during Lent since the Church itself does not prohibit them. However, a couple should be made aware of the penitential character of the season of Lent, informed of the environment that may be in the church at that time, and given assistance in planning their wedding accordingly.) Parish guidelines should be in conformity with these

diocesan guidelines.

Environment

The environment for the wedding should take into consideration the liturgical season. Quality and appropriateness are the two primary principles which govern the environment of worship. The arrangement of kneelers, flowers, candelabra, and other decorations should not obstruct the view of the assembly or inhibit their participation, nor should it restrict movement within the sanctuary.

GUIDELINES FOR MUSIC IN THE WEDDING LITURGY

PARTICIPATION

Since the family and friends come to witness and celebrate the commitment of the couple to each other, to pray with and for the couple, and to offer love and support, their involvement in the liturgy is essential to the celebration. Couples often plan their wedding with the assumption that all the singing will be done by a soloist. While a soloist may perform a worthwhile role, congregational singing of hymns, songs and acclamations reinforces the communal dimension of the sacrament.

CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

The use of processional and recessional marches does not preclude the use of congregational singing at the beginning and end of the wedding liturgy. It is possible, and often quite effective, to sing an opening hymn when the procession is in place or a closing hymn just before the procession leaves the sanctuary area. A song of praise after Communion is also suitable.

SUITABILITY OF TEXT

The suitability of texts sung at your wedding is an important consideration. The Christian concept of “love” is characterized by commitment and fidelity, and supported by the love of Christ. Popular love songs often stress the couple only and exclude God and the Church. While they may say good things, they often don’t say enough about the origin of love and God’s role in a Christian marriage. The following principles may be used to judge the appropriateness of any text.

Those texts are suitable which:

- speak explicitly of the Christian, religious dimension of love
 - express trust in, Thanksgiving to, or praise of God
 - support the action of the liturgy (e.g., a communion song at communion)
- Unsuitable texts are those that:
- a explicitly or implicitly deny the Christian dimension of love (e.g., texts that imply that “my life has no meaning without you” or “life isn’t worth living without you”) fail to mention God
 - b. Only faintly allude to the Christian dimension of love

These principles would exclude many popular love songs. They would more appropriately be performed at the wedding reception and should not be considered for use before, during, or after the wedding liturgy. Discuss with your parish musician how the assembly may best participate in your wedding liturgy as well as his or her suggestions for suitable music selections.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR MUSIC AND LITURGY PREPARATION

CELEBRATING MARRIAGE - Preparing the Wedding Liturgy: A Workbook for Engaged Couples by Paul Covino, 1994, Oregon Catholic Press – www.ocp.org This helpful resource contains suggestions for preparing the Liturgy for the Wedding, samples of music selections, sample prayers of intercession, suggested formats for Worship Aid, seating arrangement and much more.

Gift and Promise Don Y Promesa-Customs and Traditions in Hispanic Rites of Marriage prepared by the Instituto de Liturgi Hispana, 1997, Oregon Catholic Press www.ocp.org

Our Catholic Wedding-NHS-Video from Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, IL www.ltp.org

Planning the Catholic Wedding Ceremony, I Do and Beyond by Rev. Charles, M. Wible., 2003, Cathedral Foundation Press, P.O. Box 777, Baltimore, MD 21230

Together for Life: A Preparation for Marriage and for the Ceremony by Joseph M. Champlin, 1970, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556. This booklet contains Scripture readings, comments for Couples and the texts for the Marriage Rite.

Together for Life: A Preparation for Marriage and for the Ceremony - Special Edition for Marriage

Outside Mass by Joseph M. Champlin, 1970, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556. This booklet contains Scripture readings, comments for couples and the texts for the Marriage Rite.

United As One Volume I and II, 1993, Oregon Catholic Press.

Handbook of Church Music for Weddings, by Mary Beth Kunde-Anderson and David Anderson, 1992, LTP.

When Love is Found: A Wedding Liturgy Preparation Resource for Couples, Music Ministers and Pastors. By David Haas, 1993, GIA Publications, Inc.

Many of the Catholic Music Hymnals have suggestions for suitable songs for the Sacrament of Marriage. Ask the musician to play them for you. Read the texts yourselves and make decisions that will enhance the celebration of this sacrament for you and for all who participate.