

GUIDELINES FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE WEDDING LITURGY

Diocese of Covington, Kentucky

Introduction

1. The diocesan guidelines are used by priests, deacons, and musicians in assisting couples plan the celebration of their wedding liturgy. Each parish is required to have guidelines for the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage in a parish church. Parish guidelines can be more specific, but parish guidelines must be in conformity with the diocesan guidelines.

Basic Requirements

2. The desired date of the marriage ceremony can not be confirmed until the engaged couple has an initial meeting with the priest or deacon who will witness the marriage. At this meeting the priest or deacon will explain the diocesan requirements (below) as well as the parish guidelines to the engaged couple. The Pastor of the parish where the wedding will take place should also meet with the engaged couple to review the diocesan and parish wedding guidelines. The engaged couple must:

- a) Contact the parish priest at least nine (9) to twelve (12) months before the wedding to set an initial appointment to begin the marriage preparations.

At this first meeting the priest or deacon will explain the Preuptial Investigation Paperwork. The priest or deacon who will witness the marriage must establish that the bride and groom are free to marry in the Catholic Church. **Their freedom to marry using the Preuptial Investigation Paperwork must be established before a date for the marriage ceremony is selected.**

- b) Attend one of the three listed marriage preparation programs (Engaged Encounter *or* Living Marriage as a Sacrament *or* Evenings for the Engaged) prior to the date of the wedding ceremony.
- c) Attend a certified Natural Family Planning course prior to the date of the wedding ceremony.

3. Additional requirements may be determined by the priest or deacon who prepares the engaged couple for marriage.

The Rite of Marriage

4. Within the Rite of Marriage there are three different rites that may be chosen.

Marriage between two Catholic Persons

5. Normally the celebration of marriage between a Catholic man and a Catholic woman takes place within the Mass using the *Rite for Celebrating Marriage During Mass*. However, for various reasons a catholic couple or the priest/ deacon may choose to use the *Rite for Celebrating*

Marriage Outside of Mass for the ceremony. A reason could be that one of the parties is a convert to the faith and his/her family is non-Catholic, or when the majority of the assembly will be non-Catholic.

Marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic

6. In a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized person who is not Catholic, the *Rite for Celebrating Marriage Outside of Mass* should be used. The Catholic party must request permission to marry a baptized non-Catholic person from the Bishop or the Vicar General of the Diocese of Covington. All priests and deacons assisting the couple in preparing for marriage can assist them in obtaining this permission. Additionally, the proper pastor of the Catholic party can also grant this permission if he is a priest of the Diocese of Covington; however, no other priest may grant this permission.

Marriage between a Catholic and a Person who is not Baptized

7. In a marriage between a Catholic and one who is not baptized, the *Rite for Celebrating Marriage Between a Catholic and an Unbaptized Person* must be used. A Catholic must receive a dispensation from the diriment impediment of disparity of worship when he/she wishes to marry an unbaptized person. The one preparing the couple to marry can assist the Catholic party in obtaining that dispensation from the Bishop or the Vicar General of the Diocese of Covington. No other priest may grant this dispensation.

Planning the Celebration

8. The proper place for the celebration of the Mass and other liturgical celebrations is the church building. This is true for the Catholic Wedding Mass as well as the liturgy that celebrates the Rite of Marriage outside of Mass. In the Diocese of Covington it is not permitted to celebrate a wedding ceremony outside of a church or chapel. An outdoor wedding ceremony is prohibited.

9. For a wedding Mass that occurs on a Saturday evening (after the anticipatory Mass) or a Sunday afternoon the wedding Mass (with the proper prayers) may be used without change (see *Rite of Marriage*, no. 11).

10. The sacrament of marriage may be celebrated during a regularly scheduled parish Mass. In this case, “if the marriage is celebrated on a Sunday or solemnity, the Mass of the day (including the proper prayers and at least the first reading and Gospel reading of the day) is used with the nuptial blessing and, where appropriate, the special final blessing” (no. 11). The second reading may be chosen from the readings *For the Conferral of the Sacrament of Marriage* (Lectionary for Ritual Masses).

Liturgical Ministers

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

11. If extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are needed to assist the priest in the distribution of Holy Communion at the wedding Mass, the person(s) chosen must have been appointed by the Bishop of Covington for service in a particular parish of the Diocese.

12. An extraordinary minister of Holy Communion who has been appointed to serve in another Diocese may serve in this ministry in the Diocese of Covington for the one time occasion of a wedding Mass with the approval of the local pastor where the wedding occurs.

Lectors

13. The person(s) who proclaim the word of God during the celebration of the sacrament of marriage must be Catholic and must have completed a diocesan education for lectors and been commissioned by their pastor. A commissioned lector should be asked to proclaim the word of God during the wedding liturgy. On the rare occasion when a commissioned lector, either from the parish or the family of the bride and groom is not available, a Catholic member of the parish or of the family may be asked to proclaim the readings.

14. A lector who has been commissioned to serve in another Diocese may serve in this ministry in the Diocese of Covington for the one time occasion of a wedding Mass with the approval of the local pastor where the wedding occurs.

The Witnesses

15. The witnesses, of which there must be two (c. 1108), observe the exchange of marital consent by the bride and groom so that, if needed, those witnesses can testify to the manner, place and persons of that very exchange of marital consent.

16. Having a large number of persons in the wedding party can detract from the sacred nature of the ceremony. Limiting the size of the wedding party can be a difficult decision, but must be considered carefully.

Children in the Wedding Party

17. The inclusion of young members of families of the bride and groom in the wedding as junior attendants or flower girl / ring bearer is possible. Very young children are sometimes quite overwhelmed at the ceremonial element of the wedding liturgy. Children age seven (7) and above are permitted to participate in the wedding party. Younger children may participate with the approval of the Pastor. Children may be placed with an adult during procession, and remain seated during the ceremony.

Music Guidelines for the Wedding Celebration

18. The primary purpose of music for the wedding Liturgy is to help those in attendance to pray. Congregational singing, therefore, is encouraged, even though a vocal soloist or choir may be appropriate at certain times before and during the liturgy.

19. The parish organist, cantor and even choir are the best choice to insure that things go smoothly. The parish musician (or his or her delegate) should serve as Organist and/or principal musician at weddings, and must oversee selection and planning of the music for the wedding Liturgy.

20. In the Diocese of Covington, sung music is chosen from the vast repertory of sacred and liturgical music. The text of the music must be religious and liturgical. Popular songs that

happen to mention God in an incidental manner do not qualify as sacred music. Secular or popular songs are not considered appropriate before, during, or after the ceremony. Those songs would be better served at a different time. This applies also if the songs would be played as instrumental music.

21. The Pastor or his delegate, normally the parish musician or music director must approve all music chosen for the wedding liturgy. Further and more detailed guidelines and information may be obtained from the parish.

Liturgical Elements and Other Items

The Procession

22. The groom and his parent(s) as well as the bride and her parent(s) may be part of the entrance procession, along with the other ministers of the liturgy (*Rite of Marriage*, no. 20). An opening hymn may be sung by all as a fitting way to gather the assembly for the celebration.

Prayer of the Faithful

23. Intercessions are ordinarily composed by the priest/deacon in accordance with the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* which states, “As a rule, the series of intentions is to be; a) for the needs of the Church; b) for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world; c) for those burdened by any kind of difficulty; d) for the local community” (no. 70). Intercessions for the newly married and other intercessions may be added to this list. If another person composes the intercessions they must be approved by the priest/deacon.

24. “It is the deacon himself who normally announces the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful from the ambo” (*GIRM* no. 177). If there is no deacon present at the celebration then “the cantor, the lector, or another person announces the intentions from the ambo” (*GIRM* no. 138).

Presentation and Preparation of the Gifts

25. If the wedding celebration occurs during Mass, bread and wine as well as money or other gifts for the poor may be brought up in the presentation of the gifts. The purpose of this procession is to present gifts that will be offered in sacrifice to God.

The Altar

26. As the symbol of Jesus Christ, the altar stands alone and is used only for the celebration of the Eucharist. Therefore, nothing may be placed on top of the altar, including flowers or extra candles.

The Sanctuary

27. The sanctuary of the church is the place where the sacred mysteries are celebrated, including the proclamation of the Word of God from the ambo and the Eucharistic sacrifice on the altar. Nothing may be added or removed from the sanctuary area without the permission of the pastor where the wedding liturgy is celebrated.

Marian Devotion

28. It is to be hoped and encouraged that a couple has a spiritual devotion to the Blessed Mother as part of their married life together. The practice of bringing flowers to the Marian shrine, however, is not part of the Catholic wedding liturgy. It is more than just placing flowers by the

statue of the Blessed Mother. It should involve the couple praying to the Blessed Mother to intercede for them and for their marriage. If the Marian devotion is included in the ceremony, it takes place either before or after the Post Communion Prayer.

Unity Candle & Other Symbols of Unity

29. Neither the unity candle nor other symbols of unity are a part of the Catholic wedding liturgy. The exchange of marital consent between the bride and the groom brings marriage into being (c. 1057, §1). Other symbols, like the unity candle, distract from this. Therefore, use of the unity candle and other secular symbols of unity during the wedding liturgy are discouraged. If one desires to use these symbols, one might consider making them a part of the wedding reception along with other cultural rituals, like the throwing of the bouquet. If these symbols are included in the ceremony, they can be used either before or after the Post Communion Prayer.

Decorations

30. Since the wedding ceremony is sacred, the liturgy must take precedence over any decorations. Therefore, they should enhance participation (by not blocking the view or movement), be genuine, and not overwhelming. Decorations to be used must be approved by the pastor or his delegate. To avoid any hazard to safety and to minimize custodial work, the throwing or dropping of rice, birdseed, confetti, or flower petals is not allowed inside or outside the church.

31. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states that, “During Advent the floral decoration of the altar should be marked by a moderation suited to the character of this season, without expressing prematurely the full joy of the Nativity of the Lord. During Lent it is forbidden for the altar to be decorated with flowers...Floral decorations should always be done with moderation and placed around the altar rather than on its *mensa*” (no. 305).

32. When a marriage is celebrated during the Christmas or Easter season, existing decorations should remain in the church. Ordinarily during these seasons new flowers or decorations should not be added for the purposes of the marriage ceremony.

Photography and Videography

33. The use of flash photography at any time during the ceremony is prohibited. Flash photography interrupts the solemnity of the occasion. No additional lighting may be brought into the church.

34. Photographers and videographers may not enter the sanctuary at any time. Their equipment must also be clear of the sanctuary space and all other places of movement, such as the aisle ways, at Communion. Photographers, videographers, and their equipment must remain discrete and unobtrusive. Posed photographs before or after the ceremony are permitted in church assuming that all members of the bridal party and photographers maintain a respectful atmosphere in the sacred space.