

PREPARATIONS

So what I want and want to give, more than the intimacy of words, is shared ritual, the sacraments. We are of the flesh, and we must turn with faith toward that truth. We need the companion on the march, the arms and lips and body against the dark of the night. Beneath all the words we must have this daily acknowledgement from the beloved, and we must give it too.

-Andre Dubus-

I. DOCUMENTS NEEDED BY THE CHURCH

Every Catholic wedding must be recorded in the records of the parish in which it occurs. This is true even when a wedding is not done in the parish church, e.g., when it is done in a university chapel or outside of a church. In order to record a wedding, the Presider or designate must submit to the parish documentation that the couple is free to marry, that they have been prepared, that all permissions and delegations have been attained, and that all civil paperwork has been properly filed. Thus, along with a happy couple, each wedding also produces a packet of paperwork – usually put together in an envelope provided by the diocese – which the Presider gathers before the actual celebration of the wedding.

All Catholic weddings must be registered with documents.

1. BAPTISMAL CERTIFICATES

Attained from the parish in which one was baptized, all Catholics must have a recent copy of their baptismal certificate (issued in the last 6 months). The reason for a *recent* copy – and not the one issued when you were baptized – is that every time a person receives a major sacrament, such as marriage, the event is recorded at your baptismal parish, and will be noted on the back of your baptismal certificate. Thus, a recently issued certificate can reveal any previous marriages – at least those done in the Church – as well as telling, for example, if one has been confirmed.

Baptismal certificates for Catholics.

A baptized Christian who is not Catholic must submit a baptismal certificate or equivalent from his/her church, as well. While this certificate does not have to be recent, its presence or absence demonstrates something more of the nature of the union and its relationship to Christ.

Baptismal certificates for all Christians.

When no baptismal certificate is available, a letter from a witness to the baptism (e.g., a parent or relative) may be accepted. In cases where a parish no longer exists, one should check with the relevant diocese.

When no certificates are available.

2. PRENUPTIAL INVESTIGATION FOR PARTIES

These interviews should be done by the Presider or wedding coordinator. They

A sample

are done in advance so as to discover any impediments – i.e., problems – that may need to be dealt with prior to the wedding, as well as to help the couple know into what they are entering and to insure that they are acting freely.

preuptial investigation may be found in Appendix B.

These forms usually follow a three-part structure, asking first for personal information; then about potential impediments which might prevent a couple from being free to marry in the Church (e.g., previous marriages, too-close familial connections, or inability to consummate the relationship); and finally about the freedom and understanding with which a couple enters into their marriage (i.e., is each party acting freely, or is something or someone coercing the marriage?).

1. *Personal history;*
2. *Impediments;*
3. *Freedom & understanding.*

It is the last of these, the Church's concern that parties act freely, which often makes Church officials look carefully when a couple who are pregnant ask for marriage. A truly sacramental marriage requires each party to choose the other not because of pressure or embarrassment, but because of love; thus, the Church hesitates when the bride is pregnant, because social pressure can often militate against freedom.

Marriage of couples who are pregnant.

Further, in mixed marriage, the Catholic party is asked to affirm his/her intention to remain part of the Catholic Church and to share that faith with the couple's children. At the same time, the person who is not Catholic is asked to affirm that she/he understands her/his spouse's intention. It is important that this promise not be made in a manner to exclude a non-Catholic spouse from the religious upbringing of the couple's children; rather, the promise is to share the Catholic tradition with the children, but the hope is that any other tradition would also be part of the life of the family.

Mixed marriages.

See more on mixed marriage, in Chapter Four, pages 137-138

3. PRENUPTIAL INVESTIGATION FOR WITNESSES

Like the investigation of the parties, these should be confidential and completed by personal interview.

Since the Catholic rite has no "Does anyone object" part, this form, like the one for the couple, helps identify problems early. Simpler than the couple's form, it seeks an outsider's view of the strength and propriety of the marriage. It also replaces the public banns once read before every marriage in the Church.

Why have these questions?

It works well if these witnesses are also best man and maid/matron of honor, though this is not required.

Who should be the witnesses?

4. DISPENSATIONS & DELEGATION

The priest, deacon, or other person charged with preparing the couple should get these from the parish or diocese. Dispensations remove impediments blocking a valid Catholic wedding. Although some impediments cannot be dispensed (e.g., a man cannot marry his sister), most can be dealt with through the diocese or the

What is a dispensation for?

parish, though they must be done prior to the wedding.

If a Catholic is marrying a non-Catholic, or if there are other things that need to be dispensed, these papers need to be filed by the Presider. Some dispensations may be given by the pastor while others must come from the bishop's office.

How to get a dispensation.

The Presider must receive delegation (permission) to witness the wedding from the local pastor of the place where the wedding is held. A wedding is not valid in the Catholic Church unless such delegation is received prior to the ceremony.

Delegation required from the local pastor.

5. MARRIAGE LICENSE

In order for a Catholic wedding to be valid, it must also be filed with the proper civil authorities. A document, accompanying the marriage license, should be included in the documents filed with the Church.

Civil marriage required for Church registration.

Regions differ in procedure, but in King County, WA, much can be done on-line (www.metrokc.gov/lars/marriage). The marriage license must be purchased at least three and no more than sixty days before the ceremony.

6. MARRIAGE PREPARATION

As mentioned in Chapter One, preparation is a key requirement in Catholic marriage. While sometimes done by the priest or deacon, such preparation is often done by a counselor or through a program (e.g., Engaged Encounter). It is a good idea to include a letter or statement in the wedding packet to record how preparation was done.

Placing a letter or statement of completion in the packet.

II. PLANNING THE LITURGY STEP ONE: SELECTING PEOPLE & THINGS

Because the couple themselves are the primary ministers of the sacrament of marriage—i.e., marriage is something the couple does, not something that is done to them by another person—they should also have a primary role in the planning of the liturgy. Within guidelines and with the help of the priest, deacon, or church wedding coordinator, the Church calls upon the couple to make choices appropriate both to the communal celebration and to their particular relationship. Those assisting the couple should both respect and guide this important action of the couple in their role as ministers in and for the Church.

The couple are the primary ministers of the sacrament.

Some parts of the liturgical planning, with suggestions, are given here:

1. SELECTING READINGS

Perhaps the most significant aspect of liturgical planning for a couple is their selection of the readings to be proclaimed at their wedding.

Usually the readings consist of passage from the Hebrew scriptures (i.e., Old

Normal order of

Testament), followed by a Responsorial Psalm, a New Testament passage, and a Gospel. Ideally, the responsorial is sung by a lector and the community.

readings.

This ordering can be varied somewhat given particular circumstances; e.g., the couple may desire two Old Testament or two New Testament passages rather than one of each.

Variations to the normal order.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to replace one of the readings with a meaningful but non-scriptural passage (this may be especially appropriate in marriages of a Catholic to a non-Christian). Such passages should be selected carefully, and usually in consultation with the priest or deacon who will be assisting at the wedding. It is important that the passage be consistent with the values of a Catholic marriage, as well as respectful of the genuine intentions of the couple and the Christian community. *(This principle of consistency and respect applies equally in the selection of music, especially popular music, for use in the liturgy.)*

About readings not in the Bible.

A good resource for such alternative readings may be found in *Marriage, A Sourcebook*, published by Liturgical Training Publications, Chicago, IL.

In selecting the readings for their wedding, the bride and groom demonstrate the values that underlie their relationship and the hopes that they have for their future. What they choose to have proclaimed should say to all those at the wedding: *“This is who we are; or who we want to be.”* Hence, the choice of readings should not, ideally, simply be the choice of one or the other partner, but should be the result of their conversation and even prayer together. When done in this way, the selection process can be more than a chore that needs to be done, it can be a way for a couple to grow closer together and to learn, in a new way, what each of them sees as the root of their relationship.

What readings say about a couple.

While there are many ways to approach the readings, a suggested method that encourages both private reflection as well as discussion by the couple might go something like this:

The couple should choose together.

1 Taking some quiet time to pray and reflect on their relationship, each partner goes through the various readings, marking those that seem to speak with special power about their marriage. This first time through the readings should not be rushed, and does not need to be done all at once. Each partner should take his/her time, maybe reading just a few passages each day and re-reading those that seem appropriate.

HOW TO SELECT READINGS:

❖ *Make first selections on your own.*

2 After each of the partners has gone through the readings, they should sit down together and compare their lists. Again, this should not be a rushed or task-centered time, but a chance to talk together about why particular readings were chosen or not chosen, and what those that both partners chose mean to each. In this way, it is hoped, the couple may narrow the list to several readings that, as a couple, they find reflective of their love and commitment.

❖ *Compare lists and reasons.*

3 Taking the list they have generated, each partner should now repeat the process outlined at number 1, using not just his/her own feelings, but what

was said in the couple's conversation together.

4 Having listened to their own heart and to one another, the couple can come together again and finally choose which readings they would like proclaimed at their wedding.

❖ *Repeat step 1.*

5 Finally, together or individually, the couple might write briefly on what the readings mean to them, and give that to the homilist. In this way, the homilist can better know what the readings say to the couple and what the couple means to one another.

❖ *Compare and choose together.*

This manner of choosing the readings does more than simply provide a piece of the liturgy, it forms part of a couple's marriage preparation. To break open Scripture together, to share their sense of what their marriage means and how it might be expressed in their wedding, unites the couple and helps make the wedding what it should be: an icon of the life-long relationship into which they are entering.

❖ *Write briefly for the homilist.*

For a list of passages from Scripture, see Chapter Three.

2. SELECTING THE GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

(i.e., the Prayers of the Faithful)

Though not technically one of the readings, the General Intercessions are another moment of proclamation in which the community – having just heard the vows of the couple – calls upon God to pour out goodness upon the couple and others. Though, ordinarily, such intercessory prayers begin with the “big picture” and move inward, towards a specific community (e.g., they begin with a prayer for the Church and end with a prayer for the sick of the particular parish), at a wedding, it seems appropriate to reverse the usual order of the General Intercessions.

Following the vows, these prayers complete the rite.

Because we hope that the love of the couple, pledged in our presence, will flow outward to this community, to those far away, and to the whole world, it is more appropriate to begin the General Intercessions with a prayer for the couple and move outward to include, at last, a prayer for a need of the whole world.

Weddings should reverse the normal order for Intercessions.

These prayers should be written – or at least selected by – the couple, and read either by one friend or perhaps by a couple – *this latter is a particularly nice symbol if the couple chosen is recently married or soon to be married, or if they have been married for many years and offer an example.*

Selection and proclamation.

Normally, there would be about 5-6 prayers with at least one reaching out beyond the immediate event to include a blessing for the world.

For samples, see Chapter Three.

3. SELECTING MINISTERS FOR THE LITURGY

As with the selection of readings, the selection of who will participate in

ministerial roles in the liturgy demonstrates the couple's sense of who shares with them the ministry of their marriage. Who fills what roles for the liturgy should be decided by the couple in conjunction with the priest or deacon who will be assisting at the wedding.

Ministers, like members of the wedding party, should be selected by the couple.

Beyond the traditional roles of the wedding party (e.g., Best Man, Maid/Matron of Honor), other roles needed for the full celebration of the liturgy may include:

- ❖ Readers for each of the readings and the General Intercessions.
- ❖ Eucharistic ministers (when a Nuptial Mass is celebrated).
- ❖ Gift bearers (again, when a Nuptial Mass is celebrated).
- ❖ Acolytes/servers.

Some roles that are needed.

The number of persons in each role is not fixed, nor do all have to be used (e.g., a Rite of Marriage rarely needs acolytes). One can expand or contract most roles according to the size and style of the wedding planned, (though one should always have readers for the various proclamations); however, the couple should consider the various roles and who will fill them as part of planning any liturgy. By distributing ministries, the couple again shows the communal nature of their union.

Ministers ought to be matched to the need.

4. SELECTING MUSIC FOR THE LITURGY

Music provides an important part of any liturgical celebration and should be considered carefully in planning a marriage ceremony. Most parishes have their own guidelines for musical selection, but two principles should always be considered: (1) music should not simply be performance, but should enhance the overall celebration and prayer of the community; and (2) music should be appropriate to the liturgical season and the religious character of the wedding.

*Principles for musical use:
(1) serves the worshiping community &
(2) fits the liturgy into the Church.*

In regards to the first of these principles, all who plan the wedding should be careful to have the music serve the liturgy, rather than interrupt it. Often, for example, when a piece such as *Ave Maria* comes in the middle of the liturgy, everything stops while the community listens. If such a piece is used, therefore, it is more appropriate to have it coincide with some action – e.g., the seating of the honored guests or communion. In this way, the music serves the needs of the liturgy and so becomes part of the overall flow of worship.

Avoiding performance.

The same principle applies when a couple wants to include popular music in the rite. While some contemporary music may be appropriate to liturgy, often pop songs are suspect because they risk turning liturgy into a pop event – guided more by fashion than meaning. Yet, if the lyrics and tune seem consistent with marriage values, popular music should not be rejected out of hand for use at a wedding, so long as the person(s) performing the music let it to serve the overall structure. (Often, a liturgy coordinator determines appropriateness, so raise the issue early for a

Use of pop music in the liturgy.

reasoned and sensitive decision).

As to the second principle, couples must recall that, though they are the ministers of the sacrament of marriage, they minister within the context of a larger community. In other words, the liturgy of marriage is a liturgy of the Church and should be part of the Church year and consistent with the norms of Catholic ritual. Thus, for example, if a wedding is held during Lent – and many parishes allow this only in exceptional circumstances – the *alleluia* should nowhere be read or sung, as it is inappropriate to the season. Also, if possible, when music is being used, the responses – especially the *gospel alleluia*, the *holy*, the *acclamation of faith*, and the *great amen* – should also be sung.

Music should fit the Church year.

5. SETTING THE ENVIRONMENT

As with music, so too decoration should be appropriate to the liturgy and to the Catholic guidelines on environment and art. Thus, couples, while claiming their place in sacred space, should not clutter or disfigure the central architectural items used in worship simply to *prettify* the church. For example, those preparing for marriage should always treat the altar of sacrifice with the respect it is due, never placing such things as unity candles or bouquets directly atop the altar.

Respect the altar and other central pieces.

Likewise, flowers and candles should enhance, not overwhelm, the place of worship. Especially in a Nuptial Mass, flowers and candelabra should be carefully placed so as not to block people's view of the altar, the ambo (lectern), or other people who make up the assembly.

Flowers & candles should enhance, not overwhelm.

Some basic principles in all church decoration apply in this circumstance as well: *keep the central symbols central*; avoid the fake, the plastic, and the artificial. It is better to use a few simple items of high quality, than many things of significantly lower quality.

Simplicity and genuineness are to be preferred.

III. PLANNING THE LITURGY STEP TWO: SELECTING PEOPLE & THINGS

In a Catholic wedding ceremony, much of the order is determined by the tradition, but within that structure, variations and adaptations for particular circumstances are still possible. Thus, anyone planning a wedding should carefully examine the way in which the order will proclaim correctly the commitment and hopes of the couple and the Church.

The Roman Rite: structured choice.

As in Step One, some suggestions for ordering the flow and structure of the liturgy are provided here:

1. PROCESSION OF THE WEDDING PARTY

The rite of marriage, as a liturgical event, calls for an inclusive procession, composed of the various persons who are active or honored in the liturgy. This procession may be ordered variously, but it needs to demonstrate symbolically the nature of the union into which the couple enters. A basic model is here presented with some variations:

➤ **PRELUDE** (*one piece of music*)

Lighting of the Candles

Seating of the Grandparents or other honored guests (e.g., step-parents, ushers, other close relatives, etc).

➤ **PROCESSION** (*one piece of music*)

Processional Cross/Paschal Candle (*optional*)

Acolytes/Servers (*optional*)

Readers

Presider

Groom and his parents

Bridesmaids with Groomsmen

Maid/Matron of Honor with Best Man

Ring Bearer with Flower Girl (*optional*)

➤ **ENTRANCE OF THE BRIDE** (*new music or variation*)

Bride with her parents

Possible Variations

1. In some churches, e.g. St. James Cathedral in Seattle, it is the custom for the groom and his parents to immediately precede the bride and her parents (or the flower girl and ring bearer if present). In this way, all may meet for a moment of thanks at the front of the aisle.
2. If the parents of the bride or groom are divorced, they may be seated in alternative rows; e.g., the mother may be seated in the front row and the father immediately behind her in the second. In such a case, their respective spouses (if present) may be seated in the same row during the Prelude.
3. Rooted in a model of property transfer – where a woman is passed from one man (her father) to another (her husband) – the bride entering with her father

THE PRELUDE

(Optional activities, begun after the guests have been seated.)

THE LITURGICAL PROCESSION

The Bride & Groom enter with their parents to emphasize the union of families.

Before the bride enters, the assembly is called to stand.

The meeting of the families.

Divorced and/or remarried parents.

alone is dissuaded by the Church. However, many women and their parents continue to desire this more traditional structure, despite its historical roots. If, after considering the symbol and the wishes of all concerned, the bride decides to enter only her father, her mother should be seated with honor, consistent with her role in the life of her daughter.

Seating the mother of the bride separately:

- ❖ **FOR EXAMPLE:** A son, if present, or the best man may escort the mother of the bride, entering either immediately before the bride or immediately after the groom and his parents. In either case, the mother of the bride and the parents of the groom should have the entire aisle to themselves, as a sign of honor.

❖ *Before the bride;*

❖ *After the groom & his parents.*

4. In cases where a parent or close relative is deceased, it is sometimes appropriate for someone – e.g., a special friend or even one of the attendants – to bring in and place in a location of honor (not on the altar) a lit candle. The reason for the candle should be noted in the Order of Worship given to the assembly.

Remembrance of one who has died.

These are a few variations on the procession, but they emphasize the need to personalize the rite and fit it to what the couple intends to say.

It should be noted that none of these variations encourages abandonment of the liturgical procession by such actions as the groom appearing from behind the altar. This custom, which came into Europe through the Moors, makes the groom the host and receiver of the bride and thus loses the unitive elements of the sacrament. Both bride and groom come to God together, to receive and be joined in this sacrament, and coming as ministers, they process as ministers do.

Why all members of the wedding ought to process.

2. GREETING AND OPENING PRAYER

In his own words, the priest or deacon assisting at the wedding welcomes the community, reminding them of their role as witnesses and participants in the liturgy, and then calling them to prayer for the couple. A key here is to make all people, from whatever background or tradition, feel welcomed and part of the ceremony.

Calling the community to prayer.

This prayer, like the closing prayer and other presidential prayers, is most often selected by the priest or deacon assisting at the wedding.

For samples, see Appendix A.

3. READINGS

The community, including the couple, sit down to listen to the readings that the bride and groom have chosen.

Although in some situations and locations, the bride and groom may need to kneel or even stand for the readings, it is usually better to have the attendants sit. The posture of sitting allows attentiveness to the readings, both for the members of the wedding and for the rest of the assembly, who are not then distracted by the presence (and often the shuffling) of the attendants. *(For more on the selection and*

All sit, if possible, for the readings.

structure of the readings, see above, pages 8-10. For suggested readings, see Chapter Three.)

Readings should be proclaimed clearly and with the spirit appropriate to the particular message. Readers should be given copies of the reading at least by the rehearsal, so that they may feel comfortable with the texts. If possible, the readers should also come to the rehearsal to practice, especially if an unfamiliar sound system is to be used.

Preparing the reader.

4. HOMILY

The homily is usually given by the presiding priest or deacon, though, in some cases—e.g., a mixed marriage when another minister is present—it may be appropriate for someone other than the person receiving the vows to speak to the couple on behalf of the community.

Who gives the homily?

The homily is most properly addressed to the couple and should use the readings as a way of telling the couple what the community of faith hopes and prays for them in their marriage together. The homily is not a time to tell “*funny stories*” about the couple, nor is it, primarily, a time to teach. Like all homilies, a wedding homily is part of the overall prayer of the sacrament; therefore, it should begin with a sense of the community (in this case, the couple, as well as their family and friends), and, enriched by the knowledge and experience of the homilist, reflect upon the readings in the service of that community.

Homily speaks to the couple from the community.

For more on basic homiletic construction, see *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, published by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United States Catholic Conference.

5. THE RITE OF MARRIAGE

➤ INTRODUCTION

The couple, with attendants, stand facing the assembly (showing that they are ministers of this sacrament), and answer these questions:

Couple faces the assembly.

“Have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?”

A. We have.

The questions of freedom and choice.

“Will you love and honor each other as husband and wife for the rest of your lives?”

A. We will.

“Will you accept children lovingly from God and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?”

A. We will.

Beyond childbearing years.

❖ *In situations where the couple is beyond childbearing age, this last question may be omitted.*

❖ *In situations where the bride or the groom has a young child, the couple may include a commitment to this child during this time.*

For example, if the bride has a son:

“____, will you continue in the love you have for your son, _____, and share with him the love you have found in _____(groom)?”

A. I will.

Variations for couples with children already.

“_____(groom), will you support _____ (bride) in her love of _____, and hold him in your heart, as well?”

A. I will.

❖ *Likewise, in cases of **convalidation**, the first question may appropriately be changed from “to give yourselves to each other in marriage” to “to consecrate the marriage into which you have entered.”*

See more on convalidation, pages 142-143.

➤ CONSENT

Hands joined, facing each other, they follow the assisting minister:

Couple faces each other.

**I, _____, take you, _____,
to be my wife/husband.**

**I promise to be true to you
in good times and in bad,
in sickness and in health.**

I will love you and honor you.

All the days of my life.

The vow formula.

❖ *In some cases, the couple may opt to respond simply “**I do**” to the vows, but the lack of active involvement makes it a less than ideal alternative.*

A less active alternative.

❖ *Likewise, some couples choose to write their own vows, though this can be tricky –*

Writing your own vows.

becoming too particular (e.g., “**I promise to affirm you in your basket-weaving**”), or simply rewording the traditional vows.

Advantage of the traditional formula.

The simple elegance of the traditional vows show that the couple enters into a community of spouses who have likewise pledged themselves; it shows the way this couple’s vow transcends them even as it joins them.

Vows for convalidation.

❖ *As in the introduction, these vows may be changed for convalidation; e.g., “I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wife/husband” might become “I, _____, confirm my choice of you, _____, to be my wife/husband.”*

➤ EXCHANGE OF RINGS

Who holds the rings?

If not held by a ring bearer (who is often too young), rings may be held either by the Maid/Matron of Honor and the Best Man (which offers a nice sense of equality) or by the Best Man alone.

Blessing the rings.

Whoever has the rings steps forward and holds them out (not in the box) for the Presider to bless. The Bride’s ring is then handed to the Groom, who places it on the Bride’s left hand, third finger. The Bride then does the same with the Groom’s ring.

As each puts the ring on the other, they again repeat after the Presider:

The exchange of rings.

“ _____, take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

The exchange in marriage to a non-Christian.

❖ *When one or the other of the parties is non-Christian, this formula may be changed so as to be authentic to both party’s beliefs:*

“ _____, take this ring as a sign of my love and a pledge of my fidelity.”

A small kiss.

Often a small kiss is appropriate following the exchange of rings, since the couple has completed their statements of commitment.

Convalidation.

❖ *In cases of convalidation, the rings may be kept on the hands of the couple and blessed there. The words might then be changed from “take this ring” to “wear this ring.”*

➤ OPTIONS: Unity Candles, Flowers to Mary, etc.

Although “unity candles,” bouquets to the statue of Mary, and all related actions are not part of the Roman rite – which is why some parishes do not allow their use – couples still often desire them; and if they are done well, with proper consideration for the meaning and flow of the liturgy, they may be effective symbols of the couple’s commitment. In such cases, the time for these activities is usually after the exchange of rings.

Not part of the Roman rite.

When a unity candle is to be used, there should be only a single candle, which the couple lights from the altar candles using two small tapers. Customs such as having the mothers light two smaller candles, which the couple then uses to light the unity candle, are usually awkward, and takes the unity candle out of the overall flow of the liturgy. By using the altar candles, the singularity of the unity candle is maintained and the motion of the liturgy is far smoother.

The placing of a unity candle.

In lighting the candle, the couple should take a position so that the community can see the action (ideally standing behind the table where the candle is or to the right and left of the candle itself). *In keeping with respect for the altar, the unity candle should not be placed on the altar itself, but on a separate table.*

Make the symbol visible.

When a unity candle is used – or sometimes as an alternative to such a candle – it is a nice idea for the couple to take flowers to their parents and thank them for the support and love which brought the couple to this marriage. These flowers would be on the table with the unity candle, or on another table if the unity candle is not used.

Flowers to the parents.

The couple should go together to each set of parents and ask them to stand. Then, giving the flower and embracing their parents, the bride and the groom offer thanks and love to their parents. If one or more of their parents is deceased, they might place a flower where that parent would sit, or lay it beside the altar in memorial. Such gestures as these emphasize that the love of the couple comes from somewhere, as a gift for which they give thanks. *(This gesture can gain poignancy if the couple's parents do not know that it is to be done.)*

When a parent is deceased.

A final tradition, not found in the rite but still desired by some couples, is to place a bouquet before the statue of the Blessed Mother. This custom calls upon Mary, the model of fidelity and familial love, to bless the couple in their life together. As music plays, the bride and groom go together to the statue of Mary. The bride places a bouquet and both pray for a few moments – about the length of a *Hail, Mary* – for their life together. They then return to their original positions at the altar.

Flowers to the Blessed Mother.

All of these actions work especially well if there is a song during this time, since what one wants to avoid is the bridal party simply standing there during a performance.

Avoid music without action.

6. GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

A friend/family member is invited to read the Intercessions, written or selected by the couple. In a **Rite of Marriage** (as opposed to **Nuptial Mass**) these prayers work well if they conclude with the Lord's Prayer.

For more on Intercessions see page 10, for samples see pages 134-137.

❖ *This is a slight deviation from the **Rite of Marriage Outside a Mass** as officially promulgated, where the General Intercessions end with a blessing for the couple.*

Outside of a mass, end Intercessions

However, this change prevents having the couple blessed twice – after the intercessions and then at the Nuptial Blessing following the Lord’s Prayer – thus creating a smoother flow for the ritual.

with the Lord’s Prayer.

7. PREPARATION OF THE TABLE

(Nuptial Mass Only)

The community, including attendants, sit. Friends or family members are invited to bring forward the bread and wine for the Eucharist. These gifts may be received appropriately by the couple, who bring them to the altar and then stand together beside the priest throughout the Eucharistic Prayer.

Gifts brought from the assembly to the couple to the altar.

- ❖ *If there are more than two gift bearers, other items used in the Eucharist – e.g., the chalice, the water, the purificator and corporal – may be brought forward, as well.*
- ❖ *In some cases, it will not be possible for the couple to stand easily beside the priest. In these cases, they should stand or kneel as close as possible.*

8. EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

(Nuptial Mass Only)

During this prayer, the central prayer of the mass, the couple should stand or kneel near the priest who is presiding. Respecting the custom of the community in which the celebration occurs, members of the congregation are invited either to remain standing or to kneel, or to sit, if necessary.

Inviting the community to a shared posture.

- ❖ *In places where the kneeling or standing custom is unclear or flexible, it is preferable liturgically for the community – including the couple – to remain standing, as this is a posture of thanks and praise, rather than the more penitential posture of kneeling. What is most important is that the community share a single posture, as a sign of unity.*
- ❖ *Which Eucharistic Prayer to use and how much, if any, to sing is usually left to the Presider, unless the couple has a clear preference. Consideration should be given to the flow of the liturgy, and the make-up of the assembly (e.g., if many are not Catholic). Every reasonable effort ought to be made for as full participation as possible, especially in responses.*

A single posture should be the norm.

For a suggested Eucharistic Prayer, see Appendix A.

9. THE LORD’S PRAYER & SIGN OF PEACE

The entire community recites or sings the Lord’s Prayer. Given the diversity of most congregations, the use of the extended version of the prayer (i.e., including “for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.”) should be seriously considered.

Pray the long version.

In a Nuptial Mass, the community should then be invited to the Sign of Peace. The couple should offer peace to one another, to their attendants, and to their immediate family, but ordinarily not to the entire congregation. During this time,

Sign of peace (in a mass).

they should stay together.

- ❖ *Although the rubrics for a Nuptial Mass call for the Nuptial Blessing to follow the Lord's Prayer, this structure is awkward, creating a dual blessing of the couple (one after the Lord's Prayer and one at the end of the liturgy). It is preferable to unify the blessing as the final act of the community for the couple.*

The Nuptial Blessing is moved to the end of mass.

10.COMMUNION *(Nuptial Mass Only)*

The couple should receive both the bread and the cup first. Ideally, a single piece of the Presider's host will be broken for them to receive together. Likewise, the cup should be handed to one in the couple and then, from that one, to his/her spouse. Thus, the sacrament they share becomes even more fully a sign of their unity of life in Christ.

The couple receives first.

Following their reception of the Eucharist, if they are capable and desirous, the couple may be asked to distribute the consecrated bread. In this way, they demonstrate, with one of their first actions as husband and wife, their desire to serve the community side by side. The priest and a eucharistic minister may distribute the cup.

The couple as eucharistic ministers.

If the couple does not distribute the Eucharist, they may be seated.

Ideally, all members of the community should be invited forward, to suggest the role of all in this celebration of unity. Those who do not share in the Eucharist may receive a blessing (usually indicated by having them place their hands over their hearts).

All invited forward.

11.NUPTIAL BLESSING

In the Nuptial Blessing, the Church – through the person of the priest or deacon assisting at the marriage – offers the couple our one best gift, as we call upon God to pour the Spirit upon them for the rest of their lives. The couple should either bow their heads or kneel, and the community should be called upon to pray silently for the bride and groom as the priest or deacon prays aloud.

*A communal blessing.
For suggested alternate blessing see Appendix A.*

- ❖ *The placement of the Nuptial Blessing at the end of the Nuptial Mass, rather than immediately after the Lord's Prayer, is a deviation from the form as promulgated. However, as with the dropping of the blessing following the General Intercessions in the Rite of Marriage, the combining of the Nuptial Blessing and the final blessing of the couple allows the liturgy to culminate in a final climactic moment.*

Placement of the blessing in the liturgy.

- ❖ *In some cultures – e.g., Filipino, Mexican, etc. – it is customary to do certain rituals such as the tying of the couple's hands, placing of a veil over their shoulders, or stringing a cord between them. Such customs, like the unity candle, are not part of the rite, but may – with sensitivity to meanings--be appropriately incorporated during the blessing. If the symbols of the bond are used, they should be placed prior to the blessing*

Cultural adaptations.

and removed before the dismissal.

12. BLESSING OF THE COMMUNITY

The priest or deacon then blesses the community in one of traditional formulae. The couple, if kneeling, should stand following this blessing and face the community.

13. DISMISSAL & INTRODUCTION

Following the liturgical dismissal (e.g., *“Let us go in peace . . .”*), the couple is introduced to the community as husband and wife. The couple is not *pronounced* husband and wife by the one assisting at the marriage, since it not through his act, but by a sacrament of God, ministered by the couple themselves, that they are united.

No *“pronouncing”*
of the marriage.

If the woman is changing her name following the marriage, the formula of introduction may include this name, but the couple *should never* be referred to either as *“man and wife”* – since the latter is a relational term and the former is not – nor as *“Mr. and Mrs.”* – since they do not give up their individual identity but find it more deeply in this relationship.

*“Husband and
wife”*

FOR EXAMPLE:

If the bride is changing her name, one might say:

“Let us welcome the newly married Homer and Marge Simpson.”

*Examples of
introductions.*

Or, if the bride is not changing her name, one might say:

“Let us welcome the newly married Homer and Marge.”

Applause is an appropriate response to the couple’s introduction.

Exit procession.

The couple leaves together to music, taking the whole aisle, followed by the wedding party, the parents, and then the Presider.