

THE WEDDING LITURGY

There are three types of wedding liturgies:

- 1) When two Catholics marry, the liturgy customarily includes the Eucharist.
- 2) When a Catholic marries a non-Catholic Christian, the liturgy usually does not include the Eucharist, since the sad divisions within Christianity prevent our Catholic Church from inviting non-Catholics to join us in the sacrament of unity which is the Eucharist. The minister of the non-Catholic party is invited to participate. Discuss the participation of the assisting minister with the priest. The portions of the Liturgy of the Eucharist that begin with the "Our Father" through the Sign of Peace **are** included in these celebrations.
- 3) When a Catholic marries a non-Christian, the liturgy is much like that of a Catholic marrying a non-Catholic Christian, with the texts of some prayers altered.

Each of the wedding liturgies can be divided into its basic components:

- 1) The Gathering Rite
- 2) The Liturgy of the Word
- 3) The Marriage Rite
- 4) The Liturgy of the Eucharist
- 5) The Dismissal Rite

A description of each is found below. Click on 1-5 above to jump to that component. [Place the "jump to" on 1-5 above].

The Gathering Rite

Be attentive to your use of words. Make them express the true meaning of marriage. The word "guest" denotes a non-participatory role, a spectator. There are no guests at a worship service. As people gather, ushers and other ministers of hospitality welcome and assist them. During this time, instrumental music and sometimes sacred vocal solos help to set a mood of hospitality.

There is another possibility when the baptismal font is visible to the assembly. Either before or after the procession, gather with your parents, godparents and wedding party around the font. Here the priest begins with the greeting and sprinkling rite recalling our baptism. This is a very appropriate place to begin the celebration, especially an interfaith marriage. For baptism is the sacrament by which we all become members of Christ's Body, whatever our tradition.

As host and hostess of this celebration it is your concern that everyone feel welcome and comfortable worshipping together. Ask your hospitality ministers to seat people close to one another. The old custom of "bride's side or groom's side" forces people to choose between you and discourages them from mixing. Seat them together. Click [here](#) [Add link for "FAQ"] for an explanation of the seating of the bride, groom, and wedding party.

You may ask your cantor/musician, priest or a parent to welcome the assembly before the liturgy. They could invite those gathered to introduce themselves to each other, just as you would in your home. This is also a good time to prepare the assembly for singing by going over a response or hymn that might be unfamiliar to them. In this way, they will

know that you expect them to participate fully and actively.

The procession is very important. It reflects your beliefs about church, marriage and relationships. It may be led by a banner (which may be used later in the day) or incense (symbolizing our prayers rising to the Father and the presence of God permeating the space.) The cross, symbol of our Christian faith, is next. The lector may carry in the book of Scriptures followed by servers, priest and the wedding party. Placing the couple last will show their importance because they are the chief ministers in the wedding liturgy. If a minister of another faith helps with the liturgy, he or she precedes the priest. During the procession all rise.

It has become customary for the attendants to enter as couples. For attendants, you might consider married couples who can model and support married life by their example. Before you ask people to be attendants, please note that St. Michael's limits the number to five. It would be fitting to ask your godparents or sponsoring couple to be the canonically required witnesses to your marriage, (best man and maid of honor.)

The traditional custom of the father "giving away" the bride derives from the time when the bride was the property of her father. The groom bought her at the time of the wedding. Please remember the bride is not property to be "given away"; the old custom of the father giving away the bride does not speak well here. You, the couple, enter this marriage of your own free will and bring with it a mutuality and equality upon which your marriage will be based. Your actions in your marriage ceremony should be clear expressions of God's love for us and your commitment to each other. Click [here](#) [Add link for "FAQ"] for a fuller explanation. Talking with the priest about certain traditions can help the bride, groom, and parents understand the contradictory meaning behind those practices.

Both sets of parents may accompany their son and daughter to the altar, or the bride and groom may enter as a couple. This part of the procession makes an important statement and is very adaptable to all family circumstances. Other members of the family may be involved here.

The processional can be an instrumental, a song with a refrain that everyone may sing, a sung "Gloria", or a gathering hymn. However, we have found that many assemblies do not sing well during this time if this is their first glimpse of the couple. Therefore an instrumental processional followed by a gathering song is to be recommended. The gathering song brings the many into the one body of Christ. It is wise to use a hymn that is common to both faith traditions if it is an interfaith marriage.

Liturgy of the Word

The first reading is from the Old Testament, or during the Easter Season, from the Acts of Apostles. After the first reading, and a period of shared silence, the assembly sings a biblical psalm from the Old Testament, led by the cantor with the whole assembly repeating the refrain. If the entire psalm or canticle cannot be sung, the verses may be spoken with music forming a bridge to the sung refrain. The second reading is selected from the New Testament Letters or Book of Revelation.

The Gospel Acclamation ("Alleluia!") follows a period of silence after the Second

Reading, in a manner similar to the responsorial psalm. The third reading is from one of the four Gospels and is always proclaimed by the deacon or priest.

You will choose people to proclaim the readings. These could be members of the wedding party or parents of the couple. The reader should be a person of faith capable of proclaiming well.

The Marriage Rite

In your wedding celebration you—the bride and groom—are the ministers of the sacrament. You are asking this assembly of God's people to witness, affirm and support your declaration. Two suggested arrangements for the exchange of vows are facing one another or facing the assembly. You should memorize your vows since they are the central element of the marriage rite. Memorizing them also encourages you to renew your vows every night as you pray together.

At this point in the liturgy, you are the focus as you exchange vows which include the elements of unity, faithfulness, permanency and the acceptance and nurturing of children. While it may be appropriate for married couples to recommit themselves to their spouse and Christ through the words proclaimed by the bride and groom, emphasis on this recommitment prior to the exchange of vows is not appropriate. The program may state at the time of vows: *"as a covenant people let us all renew our vows in the prayer of the bride and groom."*

The rite of marriage has three parts:

The first part deals with your intent of marriage. The priest will ask each of you of your freedom to enter into this marriage, your willingness to enter into a life-long commitment and the openness of you, the couple, to have children.

The priest will then invite you to declare your consent. During this second part, as you recite your vows, you will make public a promise to each other, before God and the Church.

The last part of the marriage rite consists in the blessing and exchange of rings. Rings are exchanged as a symbol, which will extend in time the promises just made. If your rings have a special meaning, explain the significance in a specially written blessing or in a note in your program. After the exchange of rings, a sung acclamation by the assembly would be most appropriate. This acclamation is a herald by the assembly proclaiming what has taken place. This is not a part of the marriage rite itself, but certainly mirrors what we do during the Eucharistic prayer and after someone is baptized. The priest can offer you suggestions.

Within any liturgical action there are certain options that are available and certain elements of rite that cannot be changed. The practice of lighting a unity candle has been a cultural adaptation which has never been part of the marriage rite. One principle in the planning of liturgical environment is not to duplicate symbols already present in the liturgy. Since the couple themselves and the rings they exchange are the primary symbols, expressing the image of God and God's unconditional love, the best option would be to light the unity candle when the families gather for the opening of wedding

gifts. It then gives us good ritual for the "domestic" church. It could also be done at the reception as part of the prayer of grace before the meal.

The General Intercessions follow the exchange of rings. The intercessions may be spoken by a parent, a friend, a relative, your sponsoring couple or someone in your wedding party. Try to involve someone who does not have another responsibility. Write your own or ask your family, wedding party, or priest to help. Models are available in the book of Suggested Readings. The intercessions pray that married love and commitment transform in holiness the church, the world, this community and the children born of this marriage. Ask for specific virtues, such as love, patience, communication, understanding and the wisdom to be good parents.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

At the preparation of the gifts, the bread and wine are brought forward by someone chosen by you, the married couple. Perhaps it is your sponsoring couple, your parents, or others who have helped to prepare you for this sacrament. The rite also asks that you bring a gift for the poor to symbolize marriage as a call to be bonded in service to others. As the closing blessing says: "may the afflicted and needy find in you generous friends." During this time, all present join in song, or, if desired, an instrumental solo can be played or a sacred song sung.

Before the preparation of the gifts, you and your spouse could arrange the altar linens on the table with the altar vessels. Of all the tables you will set in your married lives, how fitting it is that the first is the table of the Lord.

The Eucharistic acclamations are the most important in the entire liturgy and are to be sung. They are the "Holy, Holy," the Memorial Acclamation and the "Great Amen." These are high points in our Eucharistic liturgy and nothing must overshadow them. Your parish musician will know which settings are known to the people.

The Lord's Prayer is the common prayer of all baptized Christians and is the one prayer at inter-religious marriages which everyone knows. Therefore we recommend that it not be sung by the community unless all of your guests can sing the same version. It certainly should never be sung as a solo. In keeping with the principle of non-duplication, the Lord's Prayer should only occur once during the celebration.

The usual prayer after the Lord's Prayer ("Deliver us, O Lord") is omitted, and the Nuptial Blessing follows immediately. There are three alternatives. Study them closely, discuss them with the priest, and choose the one you prefer. Generally, when a Catholic marries a non-Christian, the third alternative is chosen.

Next, the community exchanges the Sign of Peace. At this time, it is appropriate for the newly married couples to exchange this peace with their wedding party and parents after exchanging with each other and the priest. This is the first liturgical act of the newly married couple. This is also a time when the couple could present flowers to their parents, if they desire. This is followed by the Lamb of God, which is generally sung.

All present who share the same Catholic tradition may receive Holy Communion. The entire assembly has a right to Communion under both forms of bread and wine. You are

welcome to choose Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion who could assist with distributing Communion. There are members of most communities who have been appointed to this ministry. Your liturgist will be able to direct you in this matter. Because of the sad divisions in Christianity, Catholics cannot extend a general invitation to receive Communion to other Christians who are not fully united with us. "Catholics believe that the Eucharist is an action of the celebrating community signifying a oneness in faith, life and worship of the community. Reception of the Eucharist by Christians not fully united with us would imply a oneness which does not yet exist, and for which we must all pray." (National Conference of Catholic Bishops statement on intercommunion, 1986). For this reason, it is preferable in an interfaith marriage to omit the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

During Communion all should sing the processional song. It is an important sign of the unity we experience in the Eucharist. It should have a short, simple, or familiar refrain which all can sing as they come forward. The verses are sung by the cantor or soloist. The Prayer after Communion follows a period of silence.

Dismissal Rite

The assembly should give a resounding "Amen" at the end of each section of the blessing by the priest. Because it is often difficult to tell when these endings come, it is helpful for someone (e.g., the cantor) to lead these responses over the microphone. If the final blessing is printed in your program, the assembly may say it with the priest. The final "May the almighty God bless you" is always said by the priest alone. The blessing is followed by the procession of the bride and groom, followed by their wedding party and parents, out of the church building, generally with instrumental music being played.