



**LITURGICAL NORMS FOR THE  
CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE**  
**DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG**  
*Office of Worship*  
Effective March 1, 2009

## **GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

1. This document is normative in the Diocese of Harrisburg and is offered to help couples celebrate their marriage in an authentic, Christian way. These norms especially try to channel the joy and happiness of the moment into a celebration worthy of our belief that human love is founded in the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit shared with us.
2. These norms complement the 1969 *Rite of Marriage*, and the 1983 Revised *Code of Canon Law*. While these norms give some directives, they are intended to be no more restrictive than necessary and are offered in a spirit of Christian joy and celebration.

### **PLANNING THE CATHOLIC MARRIAGE CEREMONY**

3. Planning the wedding liturgy should be a very prayerful and pleasant experience. The bride and groom will quite naturally want to assure the full, active and conscious participation of those who have gathered in celebration at the wedding ceremony. These norms are designed to help plan a beautiful and appropriate ceremony in conjunction with the guidance received from the parish clergy and staff.
4. It is necessary for the couple to speak with the priest or deacon coordinating the couple's marriage preparation and celebration before any liturgical plans are made. In addition, the couple will need to meet with the parish's music director (organist) regarding the selection of music for the wedding. Couples should be advised of the diocesan and parish music policies as soon as they begin to make marriage preparations.

### **MARRIAGE IS A SACRAMENT**

5. Marriage is one of the seven Sacraments of the Church. It is within the Church that marriage is first celebrated and then lived out until death. While many see the marriage ceremony as "the bride's day" or "the groom's day," Catholics see the wedding day as "our day." On the wedding day, the newly married couple is sent forth by Christ, within his Church, to be witnesses of God's love to the world in a special manner. By the action of their love, they are to mirror the ever faithful, lifelong, and creative love God has for the world. They become partners with the Church as they witness their love and God's love to the world in their vocation to marriage.

## CHOICE OF CEREMONY

6. The *Rite of Marriage* provides three forms for celebrating marriage in the Roman Catholic Church:

- I. *The Rite for Celebrating Marriage During Mass* is normally used when two Catholics marry.
- II. *The Rite for Celebrating Marriage Outside Mass* is normally used when a Catholic marries a baptized person from another Christian church or ecclesial community. (RM 8)
- III. *The Rite for Celebrating Marriage Between a Catholic and an Unbaptized Person* must be used when a Catholic marries someone who is not a baptized Christian. Mass is **prohibited** in this situation. (RM 8)

7. The decision regarding which form of celebration of the *Rite of Marriage* is made in consultation with the priest or deacon who is preparing the couple for marriage. For Mixed Marriages, please refer to the *Guidelines for Mixed Marriage Celebration and Preparation Between Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics in Central Pennsylvania* [Appendix A] and also the *1993 Directory for Ecumenism*.

8. The *Rite of Marriage* is a public, sacred, and official liturgical celebration of the Church. It must be celebrated with reverence following the approved ritual of the Roman Catholic Church. All ceremonies are to reflect the distinctive quality of Christian faith, with special attention given To the couple promising to live together in loving trust and fidelity, and the nuptial blessing over them.

## SPECIAL NEEDS

9. The needs of persons with disabilities should be taken into consideration, whether the persons are in the wedding party, participants in the liturgy or in the congregation.

## ELEMENTS OF THE MARRIAGE RITE

### ENTRANCE PROCESSION

10. The *Rite of Marriage* (RM 19-20) envisions the entrance procession to be similar to what takes place at Sunday Mass. The procession would include the celebrant and servers carrying the cross (and candles). Even the lector(s) may be part of the procession. Those in the procession may go to the door of the church where the celebrant welcomes the couple and leads them to their place at the altar. The servers go first in the procession, followed by (the lector,) the celebrant and then the bride and bridegroom. The couple may be escorted by their parents and preceded in the procession by two canonical witnesses (the best man and maid of honor) and other attendants.

11. What is often referred to as the “traditional procession” may be used in the Diocese of Harrisburg according to long-standing and legitimate custom. In fact, it can easily be incorporated into the liturgical procession envisioned by the *Rite of Marriage*. For example, the bride may be escorted by her father. A suggested procession in this case would be the ministers followed by the celebrant followed by the groomsmen followed by the groom followed by the bridesmaids followed by the bride and her father. In this situation, intervals in the procession are possible (e.g. after the celebrant reaches the altar, after the groom reaches the front of the church). It would also be possible for the groomsmen and bridesmaids to process together as pairs. During the procession, music may be played or the entrance song is sung (see below).

### **OPENING HYMN**

12. The *Rite of Marriage* (RM 20) envisions the congregation singing an entrance song. This hymn opens the celebration and unifies the people who have gathered. This song may be sung during the procession or begun once everyone in the procession reaches the altar. An option is to chant one of the proper entrance antiphons from the Ritual Mass for Marriage as found in the *Roman Missal*. The singing at this time is done either alternately by the choir and the people or in a similar way by the cantor and the people, or entirely by the people, or by the choir alone. (GIRM 48).

### **PLACING OF THE WEDDING PARTY**

13. The couple should be given a place of honor in a visible, prominent location. Chairs should be provided for the couple to be seated during appropriate times. The couple may choose to have the two canonical witnesses (the maid/matron of honor and best man) seated near them. The bride and groom (and maid of honor and best man) should assume the posture of the rest of the community during the Liturgy. If the Rite for Celebrating Marriage takes place during Mass, kneelers should be provided for the bride and groom (and the maid/matron of honor and best man). All other members of the wedding party should have places in the assembly in the front pews of the nave.

### **LITURGY OF THE WORD**

14. The Liturgy of the Word is one of the principal parts of the celebration. There may be one or two scripture texts in addition to a sung responsorial psalm, a sung Gospel acclamation and the Gospel itself. Only selections from Scripture may be used. The *Conferral of the Sacrament of Marriage* section of the *Lectionary for Ritual Masses* supplies many options. The parish should provide the couple with scripture readings from which they may select. It is expected that the readings will be read directly from the *Lectionary* during the *Rite of Marriage*.

15. When a wedding is celebrated on a Solemnity of the Liturgical Year, the Mass of the day is to be used. One reading from the *Conferral of the Sacrament of Marriage* section of the *Lectionary for Ritual Masses* may be substituted. Consult the *Rite of Marriage*, paragraph #11 for details.

16. The lector should be well prepared and comfortable with speaking (reading) before a group. If the *Rite of Marriage* takes place during Mass, the lector should be a practicing Catholic. On exceptional occasions and for a just cause, the bishop of the diocese may permit a member of another Christian church or ecclesial community to take on the task of reader during a wedding Mass. For more information, see the 1993 Vatican *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* paragraphs 133 and 135.

17. The Gospel is proclaimed only by a Catholic deacon or priest. Following the Gospel, the priest or deacon gives a homily.

### **EXCHANGE OF CONSENT**

18. Because this is the central element in the *Rite of Marriage*, the couple should move to a prominent place before the assembly and face each other for an exchange of their vows. The form of the vows must be from among those given in the *Rite of Marriage*. Therefore, the couple may not compose their own vows and adaptation is not allowed. The couple exchanges consent in one of the three ways listed in the *Rite of Marriage* #25. The Catholic priest or deacon receiving the vows should stand near the couple.

### **GENERAL INTERCESSIONS**

19. The General Intercessions follow the consent and the blessing/exchange of rings. The person chosen to read the General Intercessions should be capable and rehearsed.

20. The couple may compose the petitions, which are to include the following prayers:

- for the whole Church
- for civil concerns
- for those oppressed by any need
- for the newly married couple and/or all newly married couples (and for their families)
- for the assembled congregation.

21. Many marriage preparation booklets provide examples of these prayers. The celebrant introduces and concludes the intercessions. The priest or deacon celebrating the *Rite of Marriage* must approve intercessions composed by the couple.

### **PRESENTATION OF THE GIFTS**

22. When the marriage is celebrated during Mass, the bread and wine to be consecrated are brought in procession to the priest by members of the congregation. Those who are to participate in the presentation of the bread and wine should be properly informed of what will be expected of them. Gifts to meet the needs of the poor may also be brought forward in the procession.

23. No other gifts or symbols may be presented in the procession.

## NUPTIAL BLESSING

24. When the marriage is celebrated during Mass, the nuptial blessing takes place after the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is a prayer of the community and should be said or sung by all. When marriage is celebrated outside Mass, the nuptial blessing replaces the concluding prayer of the general intercessions.

## SIGN OF PEACE

25. For marriages celebrated during Mass, the Sign of Peace may be exchanged by the whole assembly. The couple may go to their families and to the other members of the wedding party. This greeting, however, should not unduly delay the liturgy.

## HOLY COMMUNION

26. Properly mandated Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may assist with the distribution of Holy Communion when needed during Mass. They are to be vested in albs.

27. When marriage is celebrated during Mass, the *Guidelines for Receiving Communion*, from the Bishop's Committee on the Liturgy, (or a simpler but clear and accurate form) should be included in the printed program, especially if the invited guests will include members of other faith traditions.

28. At his own discretion, the priest may wish to make an announcement either at the beginning of the Mass or immediately after his own reception of Holy Communion. This announcement should be short and succinct. The following example might be used.

*Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ and that our sharing in the Eucharist is the sign of our oneness and unity in the Catholic Church. We invite Catholics who are prepared and properly disposed to receive Holy Communion today to come forward at this time. Others present not receiving Holy Communion today are invited to join with us in prayer and song.*

## LITURGICAL MUSIC

29. Music brings a sense of unity and a quality of joy that cannot be gained in any other way. Hence, music is integral to the marriage celebration and must be chosen carefully.

30. All the music chosen for the wedding liturgy (both sung and instrumental) must be sacred in nature and purpose.

31. There is an abundance of beautiful and appropriate music (old and new) available to help the couple celebrate the presence of God in their lives and reflect the special Christian significance of their wedding.

32. The couple should meet with the parish music director (organist) well in advance of the wedding date and before choosing music for the wedding. At this meeting the parish musician should demonstrate the wide range of sacred music acceptable for the celebration.

33. Keep in mind that the parish musicians may have the right to provide music for every ceremony that takes place within the parish church. The parish may have a well-defined policy regarding this. All contracts between the parish and parish musicians are honored by the Diocese of Harrisburg.

34. The musical selections made for the wedding liturgy should be, liturgically, pastorally, and aesthetically appropriate.

35. The lyrics should accurately articulate the Catholic faith and express the Sacrament of Marriage's participation in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ.

36. Every song selected should be judged with these points in mind:

- Do the words express a Christian view of love?
- Does the music in the celebration enable the people to accurately express their faith?
- Does a particular selection enhance that part of the ritual where it occurs?
- Does the music promote and further the progress of the ceremony without causing a delay?
- Is the music technically good and appropriate for the Sacred Liturgy?

37. Any music associated with situations and activities that contradict Christian values is obviously not permitted because it would offend the Christian community gathered around the couple in faith.

38. The following music and related types of music are not permitted at weddings in the Diocese of Harrisburg:

- Songs from Broadway musicals, movies, or television shows whose associations are secular rather than sacred.
- The traditional Wedding March, "Here Comes the Bride," because it is associated with an illegal and illicit ceremony in the opera *Lohengrin* (Wagner); Mendelssohn's "Wedding March", because of its association to a farcical wedding in the opera *Midsummer Night's Dream*;
- Any "classical" pieces that were composed for secular and not liturgical purposes.
- Any music that refers only to the secular nature of love and bears no reference to the Christian concept of love and/or marriage.

39. Music which appeals to the couple personally, and which is of a nonreligious nature, may be incorporated into another part of the day. (e.g., the wedding reception). To be very specific, non-religious music does not have a place before, after, or within the Church's wedding liturgy since it does not express the Church's faith - the reason for which the wedding is taking place.

40. The Christian community gathered around the couple should be allowed the opportunity to express themselves to God in song as they do at every other liturgy of the Church. For this reason, familiar arrangements used regularly at Sunday Mass are ideal. The following are times that the entire assembly should be participating in the music:

- During the opening song or chant.
- After the first reading, the cantor sings the psalm verses and all sing the response.
- The Gospel acclamation.
- If the *Rite of Marriage* is celebrated during Mass, the *Sanctus*, Memorial Acclamation, Great Amen, the *Agnus Dei*, and the communion song or chant.

41. Music for solo voice, for choir alone, or for instruments alone can embellish the celebration before and after the liturgy, as well as during the preparation of gifts.

42. As a general norm, recorded music should never be used within the Liturgy and should never replace the singing of the people (*Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* 94).

43. A cantor should be used for the wedding liturgy. The cantor aids the worshipping community and the movement of the ceremony by leading the congregation in the entrance song or chant, the responsorial psalm, and the Gospel acclamation. If the *Rite of Marriage* takes place during Mass, the cantor also leads the community in singing the Eucharistic acclamations, and the communion song or chant.

44. The importance of sacred silence in the wedding liturgy should be remembered. God is revealed both in the beauty of song and in the power of silence. The Sacred Liturgy has a rhythm of texts, actions, songs, and silence. Silence allows the community to reflect on what it has heard and experienced, and to open its heart to the mystery celebrated. (*Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* 118).

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45. If a wedding program is to be printed, all reprint permissions must be secured and the proper copyright information must be included in the program. All copyright fees must be paid. It is a serious legal and moral infringement to reproduce copyrighted material without proper permission.

## **SPECIFIC REGULATIONS OF THE DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG**

46. Marriages are not to be scheduled on Sundays [or holy days of obligation]. Marriages are not to take place after 4:00 p.m. on Saturdays. For a just cause, in individual cases, a dispensation from this norm can be sought from the diocesan bishop.

47. Canon 1118 of the *Code of Canon Law* requires that Catholics be married in a parish church unless some other provisions have been permitted by the bishop. Catholics may not be married outdoors in the Diocese of Harrisburg whether the wedding takes place within Mass or outside of Mass.

## ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS FOR CONSIDERATION

### PHOTOGRAPHS

48. The Diocese of Harrisburg respects the photo/video policies of individual parishes. If photographs are permitted before, during or after the marriage ceremony, the photographer is requested to keep in mind that the church is a sacred place. The sanctuary should not be made to serve as a photo studio. When photographs are taken after the ceremony, the wedding party is to be reminded that they are in a sacred place. Any type of posing that is contrary to the sacred nature of this place is prohibited.

49. Photographers and videographers are not to obstruct or interfere with the wedding liturgy. Their work should never intrude upon the solemnity of what is taking place. Photo and video related concerns must be discussed well in advance of the ceremony with the priest or deacon who will conduct the ceremony.

### STIPENDS

50. There is normally a fee for the parish organist and there may be fees for other personnel that take part in the wedding liturgy. Other stipends to be considered are for the priest or deacon conducting the ceremony, cantor, servers, use of the church, as well as a gift for the poor.

### AFTER THE CEREMONY

51. The Diocese of Harrisburg respects the policy of the parish regarding rice, birdseed, balloons, etc.

### PROPER DECORUM

52. Please be mindful that this is a sacred event and there is a proper manner of acting that is expected of the couple and wedding party at the rehearsal and on the day of the wedding. All members of the wedding party, including the bride and groom, must be dressed appropriately and modestly for the wedding liturgy.

## OTHER PRACTICES

53. There are elements that have been added to the marriage ceremony, some of which are not formally part of the official *Rite of Marriage* as presented by the Church. While these practices have become popular during ceremonies of matrimony, the noble simplicity offered in the ritual of the Roman Catholic Church should always be respected. Please note that the Catholic *Rite of Marriage* does not require these additional elements. If these additions are used, the following norms should be observed.

## FLOWERS PRESENTED AT THE BVM STATUE OR IMAGE

54. Praying for the intercession of the Virgin Mary and honoring our Blessed Mother are important traditions in the Church. While prayer and taking flowers to the BVM statue or shrine of a church is a time-honored practice, it is not specifically part of the elements included in the *Rite of Marriage*. However, this pious practice, if desired by the bride and groom, certainly may take place once the official Rite of Marriage is completed. Flowers may be presented to the Blessed Virgin Mary following the Prayer After Communion and before the Final Blessing during a Wedding Mass and following the Nuptial Blessing and before the Final Blessing during a Wedding outside of Mass. The couple should be instructed to offer a prayer (e.g., Hail Mary, *Memorare*, etc.) at the shrine or image asking for the Blessed Mother's intercession. A hymn in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary (e.g., *Ave Maria*) may be sung at this time.

## UNITY CANDLE

55. The unity candle is not part of the official *Rite of Marriage* and is not permitted to be used at the church. If the couple wishes to incorporate the unity candle into the wedding day, they might consider incorporating it as part of the "Grace Before Meals" at the reception. A suggested format is attached [Appendix B].

## ARRAS, LAZO, AND VELACION

56. In November 2004, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved the ritual edition of the *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium*, under the title *Ritual del Matrimonio*. This ritual book, while based on the approved editions for Spain and Mexico, were adapted to utilize a vocabulary which is accessible to the faithful from Spanish speaking countries of diverse linguistic expressions in the dioceses of the United States of America. They incorporate rubrical and textual adaptations of the English language editions and are intended for eventual publication in Spanish and in bi-lingual editions. They contain additional rites for the *arras*, the *lasso* and a *velacion* as approved and confirmed for the edition developed by the Episcopal Conference of Spain. Having received the approval of two thirds of the Latin Church Bishops of the USCCB, the ritual texts were submitted to the Holy See for the requisite confirmation. As of August 2008, the *recognitio* had not yet been received.

### **The Arras**

The exchange of *arras*, or coins, in the Spanish-speaking community expresses mutual sharing and the couple's pledge to be good stewards in the new household.

### **The Lazo**

A *lazo* is generally a double looped rosary that rests on the shoulders of the couple as a sign of the unity in the vows they have professed.

### **The Velación**

The *velación* is a large veil or shawl placed completely over the bride and over the shoulders of the groom to symbolize that the bride is the center of the new home the couple is about to establish.

## ENGAGEMENT/ANNIVERSARIES

57. Ritual celebrations of the engagement or of significant anniversaries can strengthen the couple in their commitment to each other. These celebrations are also occasions to proclaim the Christian values of marriage. Appropriate prayers and rites are found in the *Book of Blessings* and the *Sacramentary*.

## CONVALIDATIONS AND MARRIAGES THAT FOLLOW A DECREE OF NULLITY

58. In cases of marriage convalidations and marriages that follow a declaration of nullity of a previous marriage of one or both spouses, more simple celebrations of the Rite of Marriage are encouraged.

## RITE OF PENANCE

59. The Catholic bride and/or groom should be invited to receive the Sacrament of Penance in preparation for the wedding so that the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage may be most fruitfully received.

## PARISH POLICIES

60. Pastors are encouraged to draw up policies for their own parishes as a companion piece to these diocesan norms and the *Rite of Marriage*.

*Questions regarding these norms should be addressed to:*

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