

## **DO YOU HAVE A “RELIGIOUS VOCATION”?**

Your first inclination is probably to say “no”! People with a “religious vocation” become priests or nuns because they have received a special calling to follow Jesus more closely, a special summons to make a gift of their lives to God. I want to get married, not become a priest or a nun!

Think again, not about becoming a priest or a nun, but about your religious vocation.

In virtue of your baptism you have received a unique and personal call from God to live in holiness as His adopted son or daughter. Your response to that vocation to a truly religious life, a life of holiness, involves your being attuned and attentive to the voice of God mediated to you by the people and events of your life. You, then, have a divine call, a vocation, to “enter the religious life,” in the sense that you have been called to be in a love relationship with God.

I bet you seldom thought of yourself as having a truly religious vocation, but your baptism into the dying and rising of Jesus Christ constitutes your basic, fundamental religious vocation. You are called to share in the very holiness of God through Christ Jesus. And your response to that vocational call to be holy will be lived out over a lifetime of promises made and promises kept, - promises to reject sin and selfishness in all of its many forms, - promises to live what we say we believe.

### **NOW THAT YOU KNOW YOU HAVE A “RELIGIOUS VOCATION” ...**

You are now in the process of discerning that – for you – marriage is precisely the path you will choose to follow as the manifestation of your religious vocation. You will answer the call to be holy by living out your baptismal promises within the sacrament of marriage. And over a lifetime of promises made and promises kept you will discover, as you grow in love with your spouse, that you become holy by following Jesus in totally self-giving love to your spouse.

### **... YOU ARE INTO THE HEART OF THE PASCHAL MYSTERY.**

But, you think, why are we even using the language of “paschal mystery” for an experience as joyous, as beautiful and tender as falling in love and getting married? “Paschal mystery” implies death and rising to a new way of being.

Simply stated, we use “paschal mystery” language because loving and dying are synonymous. Think about it.

Every loving is a dying to my own time, comfort, convenience, wants, needs, concerns, interests. Every loving is a dying to self-interest and self-aggrandizement in an act of generosity and self-giving. Every loving is a dying to egoism, a dying to “I” in order that two “I’s” become a “we”. Every loving implies acceptance of the other, single-heartedness, mutuality and giving and taking without keeping score – and all of it happens not just when one or the other feels like it but daily, and for all the days of one’s life.

We use the language of “paschal mystery” in speaking about the reality of married love – and about mutual and lasting fidelity as a witness to God’s constant steadfast love – because such realities need to be addressed to you and to all starry-eyed couples caught up in the romance of a relationship where life abounds and death in its many guises seems so very remote.

Until you face up to and embrace the real demands of your baptismal promises, until you choose to die as well as to love, your marriage has not yet become a sacrament, an encounter with Christ. And you must always remember that every sacrament and every sacramental celebration – including marriage – presupposes and demands faith.

Think about it: a wedding does not make a marriage. A wedding simply makes a marriage possible.

## **LISTEN CAREFULLY TO WEDDING LANGUAGE**

Some of the dimensions of the paschal mystery that you or any couple face are spelled out explicitly both in the promises and in the exchange of consent that are part of the wedding liturgy.

There are three questions asked at the beginning of the marriage rite, questions about freedom and faithfulness and children, and each of them is really an invitation to a kind of personal death for the sake of new life.

“Have you come here freely and without any reservation whatsoever to give yourselves totally to each other in marriage?” You are invited to state before everyone gathered in church that you choose freely to bind yourselves to one another without reserve.

“Will you love and honor each other for the rest of your lives?” In pledging faithfulness you accept the death involved in choosing this one person. That means foreclosure on all other choices. When you recognize that you are probably going to live into your 70’s, 80’s, or perhaps 90’s, you see the weight of such a solemn promise.

“Will you accept children lovingly from God?” You are asked to make a public promise in front of everyone that the world you share is radically open to others lest the death of the ego that becomes “we” simply becomes the closed world of the “ego squared”.

Your vows of consent also spell out a rhythm of dying and rising: better and worse, sickness and health, poverty and riches. Your exchange of consent names some of the ways in which the paschal mystery will touch your life as a couple, and the metaphors of health and prosperity and their loss are just that, metaphors for the rhythm of your days and your lives, . . . dishes and work schedules and children to be fed and cars that need servicing and elderly parents to be cared for and the thousand details of life, large and small, that constitute the keeping of promises made. And that says nothing of the crises, the moments of grief and loss, grave illness, financial woes, that form much larger challenges to keeping the promises you make.

Recall what St. Paul writes to the men and women of the Christian community at Corinth: “Love is patient, kind, forgiving, seeks no evil, etc.” No one - single or married - can live that way without embracing the paschal mystery as the foundation of holiness.

## **YOU BETTER LEARN HOW TO PRAY TOGETHER**

Unfortunately this is easier said than done. Two people who are planning to share life together often look at their prayer life as something very private and entirely separate from their shared common life together. And because so many couples have never prayed together they initially feel self-conscious or uncomfortable in sharing prayer with one another. The tendency is to think that one needs a lot of prayer formulae in order to pray!

### **HOW TO DO IT...**

Together read the beautiful prayers and blessings of the marriage ritual. Share with one another how you feel and think about the sentiments, concepts, and values expressed in those ritual prayers. You soon discover that you are saying thank you to God for one another and for all that God has given to both of you in the richness of your lives and love. After a while you won’t need the ritual prayers to get you started into shared prayer. You will be praying from your shared experiences of life together.

## **WRITE THE PASTOR A LETTER ...**

Very often I ask you, the couple, to write me a letter which both of you have a hand in composing and which both sign. I simply ask you to express to me your Christian faith. But first I remind you that you can easily get married by a Justice of the Peace without going through all the preparation required by the Catholic Church. So I ask you to write a letter and tell me why you want to be married in the Catholic Church. Almost without realizing it, the shared composition of the letter becomes a deep sharing of faith between the two of you. That's prayer! And it's shared prayer.

## **SOME PRELIMINARIES**

### **WEDDINGS CAN BE EXPENSIVE ...**

The expenses for a wedding can quickly add up, but the grand total is up to the couple and their families. In my experience I have never known there to be any direct relationship between the cost (high or low) of the wedding and the happiness of the couple.

I do suggest that couples who are mature enough to enter into marriage need to stop and think about a question that parents may be reluctant to bring up with you. Today most couples getting married both work. Often both drive relatively new automobiles. And they live the good life. I think there has to be a very good reason why the bride and groom, if both work, should not bear the major costs of their own wedding. Why don't you bring this question up with your respective parents?

### **EXTRAVAGANCE IS NOT GOOD TASTE**

There is every reason why the values of a Christian couple should be evident in their good tastes - rooted in simple beauty - and not in a vulgar display of extravagance which characterizes far too many weddings in our contemporary culture. Rented tuxedos and color-coded attendants' dresses (which, most likely, they'll never wear again) are not essential to a wedding. Nor are limousines or overly expensive floral displays. You can have a beautiful wedding without assuming outrageous costs by seeing real beauty in simplicity.

## **CAVEAT EMPTOR!**

"Let the buyer beware!" said the ancient Romans. Couples planning to get married should also beware.

As you begin to talk with florists, printers, photographers, bridal consultants, caterers, dressmakers, and other business people, don't be naive. These good people are in honest legitimate business, and the business is to get as much money out of your pockets into their pockets as is possible. The marriage business is a \$6+ billion dollar industry in our country.

Much of what is presented to you as "proper" or "traditional" or "necessary" by legitimate and honest business people in the wedding industry can equal a lot of unnecessary financial and time expense for the whole wedding party.

Your display of good taste, honest faith, and genuine hospitality should be extravagant. All else is secondary.

### **YOUR WEDDING GIFT TO OTHERS**

Your marriage in the Church is a liturgical and ritual and public way of saying to everyone that your love for one another is firmly rooted in your fundamental religious vocation to be holy, and in Christ's love for all people, especially those who are hurting. And today's society certainly has an overabundance of people who are hurting for food, shelter, medicine, and clothing.

I strongly recommend that the very first act of any newly married Christian couple is to make a wedding gift to others by reaching out with their love to the poor, the hungry, the homeless. In very practical language I ask the couple to total up the costs for their wedding. Then I suggest that they take between 5% and 10% (a tithe) of that total cost as their wedding gift in Christ's name to the poor. And that's easily done with a check to any church's social ministry program.

How does that make you feel? The first act of the newly wedded couple is to share with those who are less fortunate. There's something very holy in that!

### **MORE HELPFUL HINTS ...**

#### **CLERGY**

Priests from other parishes and/or from other dioceses are more than welcome to preside at weddings here. Don't hesitate to honor a priest relative or ordained good friend (priest or deacon) by asking him to witness your vows of marriage.

If the visiting priest or deacon is from out of State, you should inform him that he must comply with Virginia law in regard to registering at the Circuit Court in order to be able to officiate at marriages in Virginia. And a written confirmation from the visiting priest or deacon must be sent to this parish to make sure of clear communications and expectations.

#### **LICENSE**

The civil marriage license is obtained from the Clerk of the Circuit Court in the City in which either the bride or the groom has a legal residence. The license is good for 60 days after the date it is issued.

Normally it is the duty of the groom's witness (a.k.a. "the best man") to personally hand the civil license to the presiding priest or deacon before the liturgy. It may be given to the presiding priest or deacon by the couple at one of their appointments with him prior to the wedding.

Under no circumstances whatsoever may the presiding priest or deacon witness your wedding before he has possession of the civil license.

#### **TIMES OF WEDDINGS**

A marriage may be celebrated at a regularly scheduled Saturday evening or Sunday morning parish liturgy (except during Lent and Holy Week), or any day of the week.

Because of all of the other uses of the worship center on Saturdays, weddings may not be scheduled later than 2:00 P.M. on any Saturday (unless the wedding is at the 5:30 P.M. parish liturgy).

#### **WEDDING CONSULTANTS**

Wedding consultants and/or "mistresses of ceremonies" have roles to play which may be useful in regard to festivities outside of the Church's wedding liturgy. Wedding consultants have no role inside the Church or in the planning and direction of the Liturgy of Marriage.

#### **PHOTOGRAPHY**

Photographers and videotape operators are certainly welcome at the wedding liturgy. No flash photography is permitted during the liturgy, but the newer high speed films and digital cameras and sophisticated camcorders seldom make this a problem.

Please make sure that your photographer understands that he is not to move all around the church during the liturgy, stand on a chair seat, or use a flash. Likewise your invited guests should be asked not to take flash pictures during the liturgy.

Posed photographs of the wedding party may be taken immediately after the liturgy, but is limited to 30 minutes.

## **FLOWERS AND FLORAL ARRANGEMENTS**

Usually a floral arrangement in front of the lectern and a second arrangement on one of the church's oak flower stands positioned between the two upright pillars immediately behind the altar are sufficient. When the couple makes an arrangement with the florist, make sure that the florist understands that the arrangement must be of sufficient size for such a large space.

If the worship area is already decorated with special Christmas or Easter decorations, these may not be removed for a wedding. But then, they provide the floral decoration for the wedding!

One way to let the parish community know that a joyful wedding took place in the church is to leave the floral arrangements in place for the parish liturgies. It is questionable taste to see flowers yanked out of the church to be rushed to the reception site. When that is done, what sign is left for the parish community to announce and signify that a special sacrament was celebrated in this space earlier in the day?

## **WEDDING REHEARSAL**

The wedding rehearsal will be conducted by one of the parishioners trained to offer this service to you. And since marriage is a sacrament, the liturgical norms of the Church take precedence over any other social or family custom.

Because of people's schedules and the scheduled use of the parish buildings, it is expected that those who are to be present for the rehearsal will be on time. One hour is the maximum allotted for a wedding rehearsal.

Please keep in mind that Friday evening traffic creates a problem in the area around the church. If everyone who has a role in the liturgy is available in the early or late afternoon, consider scheduling the rehearsal then. Your evening will not be as hectic and rushed if you can arrange such a schedule.

Only those who have an active role in the wedding liturgy (bridal party, lectors, gift-bearers, cross-bearer) need be present at the rehearsal. When friends, family, and guests who are not involved in the liturgy come to the rehearsal at church, distractions abound for everyone.

In some cases a rehearsal will have to begin without individuals who should be present. In that case it is the responsibility of others in the bridal party to inform the late or absent person of what is expected.

## **MUSIC**

It is imperative that the couple contact Teresa Yoder well in advance of the tentative wedding date. These two music ministers will identify good liturgical music that will support your choice of scripture readings and prayers.

Both the song-leader and the accompanist depend on the honorarium as part of their livelihood. Each should be given \$125.00 immediately before or immediately after the wedding liturgy. Ordinarily the groom's witness presents an envelope to each. Like the photographers and florists and caterers, the music ministers deserve remuneration for the time and services they give for your benefit.

Sometimes the couple will be offered the vocal or instrumental talents of a well-meaning friend or relative to sing or play an instrument at the wedding. Such talent can easily be incorporated into the reception after the wedding, or for 15 or 20 minutes before the liturgy begins. The actual music for the wedding liturgy will be presented only by the ministers of liturgical music for the parish.

### **PRINTED LITURGICAL PROGRAM**

If you so desire the parish secretary will type and print the worship bulletin for you. It is similar to what is used for the weekend parish liturgies. If you choose to order program covers from one of the catalogue suppliers, then you must meet with the parish secretary at least two months prior to the wedding date.

If you choose to purchase the bulletin covers from a local vendor, then you must meet with the parish secretary one month prior to the wedding so that text and lay-out may be reviewed for printing.

If you choose to compose and print the worship program yourself, you must first have it approved by the pastor.

### **SHOULD YOU HAVE A WEDDING MASS?**

This requires a lot of prayerful reflection and a lot of basic honesty.

If both the bride and groom are Catholic, then - of course - they celebrate their marriage at a Nuptial Mass.

But the decision to celebrate an ecumenical or “mixed” marriage (where one party is Catholic and the other is a practicing non-Roman Christian or non-baptized) with the Nuptial Mass has to take into consideration those from other denominations who would not be familiar with the Catholic Mass and who would not be able to receive holy communion. Or, in another case, if the majority of those who will attend are unchurched or attend church very rarely, the celebration of the eucharistic liturgy is meaningless to them. In such instances that which should be a powerful sign of unity around the one table can unintentionally highlight the pain of division that exists in the Christian community.

The option to celebrate a marriage with a Nuptial Mass is never absolutely denied simply because one party is not a Catholic. But ecumenical marriages are generally celebrated without the Nuptial Mass. It’s a delicate question to wrestle with, and that’s why it demands a lot of prayerful reflection, basic honesty, and an abundance of charity and sensitivity.

### **TAKE MY WORD FOR IT!**

Little children are cute. But they can and do and will disrupt a wedding which is primarily an expression of adult faith and prayer in a public liturgy. Think long and hard before you ask to have the cute little one paraded into a formal assembly of adults!

Out of respect for all of your guests you might think of hiring a babysitter who can then use the parish nursery to care for the little ones who come with their parents to your wedding. Such forethought can save everyone a lot of grief and embarrassment!

### **THIS HAS TO BE SAID RIGHT UP FRONT**

Often the friends that a couple ask to be in their wedding party and many of their invited friends are not Catholic. Unfortunately, at too many weddings the lack of respect for what Catholics hold sacred is much in evidence. Our Catholic belief is that a marriage liturgy is a very sacred moment wherein we all encounter Christ in Word and in Sacrament.

You know your friends and guests, or they wouldn't be at your wedding. Please, if necessary, remind them that males do not wear hats or caps in a Catholic church, - that no lady or gentleman chews gum or engages in horseplay in any church building, - that no parent feeds a toddler dry cereal during a wedding or allows an infant to cry its lungs out during the reading of sacred scripture.

If the majority of your guests are either not Catholic or are not accustomed to being in a church, you have the responsibility of setting expectations for their participation and behavior.

Unfortunately some guests at weddings stuff used Kleenex, gum wrappers, empty film boxes, candy wrappers, and the used wedding programs into the hymn-book holders, or toss such trash on the floor where it mingles with the piles of dry cereal. So too some bridal parties leave floral boxes and wrapping paper, gift boxes, and assorted debris scattered in the restrooms and changing rooms.

I must now request from each couple a deposit of \$100.00 paid prior to the rehearsal to insure that the worship space and parish facilities are cleaned before the next parish liturgy. If the parish spaces are thoroughly policed of trash by your ushers and left as presentable as when you arrived, your deposit will be returned.

If our regular ushers or our maintenance staff has to remove trash left from the wedding, you will not have your deposit returned to you.

### **DON'T FORGET TO SAY "THANK YOU"**

Members of the parish give considerable time and effort in helping you prepare for a wonderful celebration of your wedding liturgy. They rearrange their personal schedules and their normal workloads to accommodate you with the printed programs, a clean and comfortable church environment, the wedding rehearsal, and liturgical music.

For a multitude of reasons young couples are increasingly forgetful to say "Thank You" or to extend common courtesies to those who contribute to their marriage celebration. Don't you forget.

### **YOU SHOULD KNOW SOME OF THE BACKGROUND CUSTOMS - TRADITIONS - SUPERSTITIONS**

Many of the practices that are popularly considered "traditional" to a wedding are actually carryovers from other cultures and other times when marriage was understood in a radically different way than we see it today.

For example, there was a time (*in some countries this still goes on*) when marriage was seen as a financial contract worked out between both sets of parents or between the groom and the father of the bride. In the latter instance the groom actually purchased his bride from his father-in-law-to-be.

The groom never saw his bride before the wedding, and he would pay for her during the actual wedding. So, the groom would get to see his bride for the first time only after he had made the payment - in money, in animals, in land, in whatever.

The way in which the wedding ceremony took place in those days reflected this understanding of marriage. It was considered bad luck for the groom to see the bride before the wedding, and bad luck for the bride and her father if the groom didn't like what he saw when the bride's veil was lifted!

Today we rightly presume that the bride and groom each knows what the other looks like - for better or for worse - so there is no reason for the bride to hide in a church closet pretending her appearance is going to be a big surprise to the groom or to the assembled community. The surprise would be if someone other than all are expecting presented herself as the bride!

Until rather recently in history, the bride was escorted down the aisle and presented by her father or the dominant male of her family (*remember, females were 2nd class beings*) to the groom who was waiting at the end of the aisle.

The groom would hand over his payment to the bride's father, and the bride's father would then unveil her and "give her away".

In our liturgical celebrations we care very much what our actions and body language symbolize because they are meant to convey our beliefs. So, for example, in keeping with the bride's baptismal dignity as an adopted daughter of God our Father, the Church will not allow her to be treated as "property" and "given away" by the dominant male in her family. We believe that the bride and the groom are giving themselves to one another in a freely made decision and that this self-giving is their religious vocation. To have the bride "given away" by her father would say we believe something entirely different. Isn't it amazing that we human beings are the only animals who can lie through our symbols and rituals?

We also believe that both the mother and the father of the bride and of the groom were the first teachers in their respective families. They were the first who nurtured their children with Christ's love and taught them how to love as baptized, confirmed, and eucharistized Catholics. That's why the bride and the groom are escorted into the midst of the faith community on their wedding day by both sets of parents. Through the marriage of this bride and this groom, two families are united as a new family is formed in the bond of Christ's love.

The Catholic marriage rite strongly emphasizes the unity of the bride and groom by consistently presenting them as a couple. This begins even at the entrance rite into the church. This is a definite change from putting all the emphasis on the bride and none on the groom.

You know, of course, that throwing rice is a way of wishing rich fertility on the couple. Today it's not allowed because rice on walkways or floors is as treacherous as ice and dangerous to people. Some try to substitute confetti. That, too, is forbidden because it creates an enormous clean-up problem for days afterward.

The reason all the bridesmaids are "color coded" in the same type of dresses stems from pagan superstition. If all the women look alike, it's easier for the bride to avoid and escape having the evil eye put upon her! And on and on it goes!

If you really want to get into the origin and real meaning of the many superstitions with which we have surrounded weddings get yourself a copy of *Curious Customs* by Tad Tuleja (1987, Crown Publishers).

But a sacramental people must know how to distinguish between social custom, popular fad, personal taste, private religious devotion, pagan superstition, and the principles of good liturgy. Unfortunately too many couples show up at the parish office with their wedding planned by reception hall managers, caterers, costumers, mother's nostalgia, daddy's check book, Barbie Bride dolls, soap operas, Amy Vanderbilt, and unchurched friends.

It's understandable how young couples get into this predicament. The Catholic Church changed its wedding liturgy on March 19, 1969, as a result of Vatican Council II. And this liturgy was revised in 1975. Most couples getting married today were not even born when all this happened! It's only when they themselves begin preparing for marriage that it all begins to fall into place for them, and it can be a very confusing place!

Even though the Catholic has been participating at Mass for years it seldom dawned on him/her that the regular parish Sunday liturgy is the norm for celebrating a Catholic wedding. The Church has been remiss in teaching this. But when so many young people took an extended sabbatical from religious education in late adolescence and tested their wings of freedom during college, there really were not too many interested students for the Church to teach!

And the parish Sunday liturgy usually looks so smooth: Greeters who greet, Ushers who know how to usher, Lectors who proclaim the scriptures with ability and faith, Song-leaders and musicians who lead the community with self-confidence and

honed talent, Gift-bearers who know how and when to present the bread and wine, Eucharistic Ministers who offer communion with reverence, hundreds of individuals who become a real community bonded in faith, and a Presider who actually presides over all the roles and actions in the name of the entire assembly. Although the congregation appreciates good liturgy, few within it realize the amount of time and energy and prayer that goes into the planning of each liturgy.

The bride and the groom now plan their own wedding liturgy with members of the parish staff. At first hearing that might sound terribly intimidating to the couple. But don't worry. You have a lot of help at your disposal in the members of the parish staff who will work with you. But the final result will be a wedding liturgy that reflects your faith in a loving God and your reflection of God's love to one another and to the gathered community. Your wedding liturgy will show everyone how you accept your religious vocation to holiness within the community.

And the norm for planning your wedding liturgy will be the regular Saturday evening or Sunday morning liturgy of the parish.

### **BUT FIRST LET'S ANSWER A QUESTION**

And the question does come up, frequently. "It's our wedding; why can't we have it the way we want?"

This is really oversimplifying and condensing a long answer into a few words. But the reason is because both the Church and the State say that every wedding is a public act with consequences for the entire community of believers and citizens.

Marriage is recognized by, witnessed to, affirmed within, supported by, and lived out within the community. And every sacrament is a celebration of the entire faith community - the Church - and the Church has carefully, not arbitrarily, established the liturgical norms for the celebration of marriage.

Our present cultural embrace of exaggerated individualism and personal rights sometimes causes problems in understanding the above. Be that as it may, it does not negate the norms established by the State in civil law and by the Church in liturgical practices.

### **LET'S GET ON WITH PLANNING THE LITURGY**

#### **PRE-LITURGICAL OPENING RITES**

What happens before the entrance procession even comes down the aisle sets the tone for the entire wedding liturgy. Participation by the assembled friends and guests can be significantly enhanced by paying attention to the basic liturgical principles of gathering an assembly of men and women for worship.

For example, there is no good reason why the bride and groom, adult and mature enough to enter into marriage, cannot be at the door of the church with their parents to greet their guests as they arrive and to thank them for the gift of their presence. This simple act of hospitality lets the guests know that the couple is sincerely happy that these guests think so affectionately of them and their families that they come to the wedding.

This is far different from the superstitious custom of hiding the bride and groom from one another and from everyone else!

The members of the wedding party, both male and female, distribute the printed wedding programs to the arriving guests. But they do it with a smile. How different this is from having ushers in a huddle, all looking equally uncomfortable in their formal attire. How different this is from having bridesmaids nervously fuss with corsages, pretending they don't see who's entering the church.

These may seem like minor points to you, but they encourage a sense of hospitality and community among the various people who come to the wedding, many of whom do not know one another. Without hospitality as the foundation, you

cannot have a good liturgy.

## **THE ENTRANCE PROCESSION**

**You, the couple, choose from one of the following options:**

1. Father of the bride + Bride + Mother of the bride  
Father of the groom + Groom + Mother of the groom
2. Bride + Groom  
Bride's two parents  
Groom's two parents
3. Bride + Groom

Everybody else in the entrance procession lines up ahead of whichever arrangement you have selected from option 1, 2, or 3.

Some couples choose to invite their grandparents to be in the wedding procession. This might be a small matter to the couple, but to the grandparents this becomes the highlight of your wedding. You thought enough of them to ask them to accompany you with your parents as you entered the church on your wedding day!

After the procession has entered and all are in their appointed places, the Presider will pray the opening prayer selected by the couple.

## **THE LITURGY OF THE WORD**

The couple selects the scriptures to be read at their wedding. Usually there are three readings: one from the Old Testament, another from one of the New Testament epistles, and a Gospel reading. The parish staff will help you, and the workbook provided to you will have the more common scripture passages used at weddings.

## **THE MARRIAGE RITE**

After the scripture readings and the homily, the couple comes before the gathered community for the marriage rite. Again, you will have different options to select from in how you speak your marriage vows.

The presider will ask the three questions about freedom, intent, and children, and then the vows will be spoken. Promises made; promises to be kept through a lifetime.

After the exchange of vows there is the blessing and the exchange of rings between the bride and groom.

Some couples choose to light the unity candle, others do not. It is entirely optional.

After the exchange of rings or after the lighting of the unity candle (if such is used) the presider will invite the community to exchange the Greeting of Peace just as we do on Sunday mornings.

Following the Greeting of Peace the marriage rite is concluded with the General Intercessions or Prayers of the Faithful. These prayers of petition are composed by the couple and offer a way of raising up the prayers of the couple and their families while also remembering the more universal needs of the world and the church. Here, too, the staff and the workbook will be of assistance to you. If the eucharist is not celebrated, the wedding concludes now after the final blessing.

## **THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST**

If the eucharist is celebrated, then the liturgy continues as on Sunday with the presentation of the gifts, the eucharistic prayer, and the communion rite. Just after the Our Father is prayed the nuptial blessing is given to the couple. After the closing prayer there is the dismissal blessing which concludes the nuptial mass.

The wedding party exits from the church with the newly married husband and wife leading the way!

### **DON'T PANIC! HELP IS AVAILABLE ...**

You will be provided with a workbook for planning your wedding liturgy. The book will show you the various options you can choose from in each step of the planning. As you mark your choices on the paper provided to you, you will see the outline of your liturgy beginning to take shape. And you know that the parish staff is ready to assist you and guide you along at each step in the planning. So don't panic!

All you have to do right now is familiarize yourself with the materials provided for you. And when you have questions, which you will, write them down or mark them in the page of the workbook. We'll handle all of them for you.

And always remember that a Catholic wedding is first and foremost a celebration of faith. It presupposes faith, expresses faith, and is for a faith-filled people.

### **YOUR GOAL**

The goal of all of your preparation for your wedding liturgy is to invite, facilitate, and encourage the full and active participation of all who will gather with you to celebrate the wedding liturgy.

### **THE NORM FOR A WEDDING LITURGY**

The Sunday morning parish liturgy is the norm for your wedding liturgy. So, what is done on Sunday morning when the community gathers is what you do at a wedding liturgy.

### **DISTINGUISH & DON'T CONFUSE**

Distinguish between what is essential and what is not essential to the wedding liturgy, and don't confuse them. The purpose of public liturgy is that all the gathered people join in giving praise and thanksgiving to God. For this to happen at a wedding liturgy, you must distinguish between social custom, personal taste, and the principles of good liturgy.

### **KEEP THINGS IN FOCUS**

Plan your wedding day as a whole with the liturgy and the exchange of vows as the centerpiece. Don't isolate the religious event of your giving to each other the sacrament. And don't relegate the sacramental celebration as an interruption to a hectic morning of preparation or as a necessary interlude before the "real" celebration begins at the **reception**.

### **AND FINALLY**

There may be times when you will simply have to rearrange your schedule in order to meet with the parish priest, to meet with the liturgical musicians, to participate in the required pre-marriage sessions, or to obtain the civil license.

People will try to accommodate a most convenient time for you to meet, but that is not always possible to do. But, you've already experienced this part of real life with doctors, hairdressers, and airlines! It's part of life, so be flexible.

1. A Catholic who asks to celebrate a wedding in the Parish must be participating in the weekly liturgy of the Eucharist. If the Catholic is not practicing his/her Catholic faith, he/she must give evidence of his/her intention to participate regularly with the faith community.
2. Participation by the couple in the pre-marriage sessions offered by Catholic Family Services and/or in an Engaged Encounter Weekend is a prerequisite for marriage in the Church.
3. If either party, Catholic or not, has previously entered into a marriage, civil or religious, and the former spouse is still alive, no plans for another marriage may be done until a decision is reached on the validity or invalidity of the prior bond of marriage. Usually this process takes from seven months to one year, depending on the complexity of the case presented to the Diocesan Tribunal.
4. Each of you must obtain a copy of his/her own baptismal certificate. The certificate must be dated by the issuing church within six months prior to the date of the wedding.  
The copy of the baptismal certificate is requested from the church where the baptism took place.
5. Two people who know you individually and well, preferably your parents or a brother or sister, will be sent two forms by you. The forms are supplied by the parish. Each form is to be filled out by the individuals and signed in front of a Catholic priest or a notary public. The completed forms which attest to your freedom to marry must be returned to the parish where the marriage will be celebrated.
6. A civil license is an absolute necessity. No wedding will be celebrated unless the priest presider has the license in hand prior to the wedding.
7. To avoid disappointment, do not set a fixed date for a wedding until after you have met with the parish priest. It is always wise to have an optional date considered just in case your first preference cannot be accommodated.
8. A deposit of \$100.00 is required of you to assure that the parish facility is as clean after the wedding as it was before the wedding.