



Liturgical Guidelines for the Celebration of Marriage

Prepared by the
Office of Liturgy of the
Archdiocese of New York

The following guidelines provide a summary of the ecclesial documentation concerning the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*. They are also intended to serve as a pastoral aid to clergy and others who are involved in the planning and celebration of weddings within the Archdiocese of New York. It should be noted that these guidelines are primarily liturgical in scope, and they are not meant to address the many canonical and pastoral questions that can arise in the course of preparing a couple to celebrate the Sacrament of Marriage. Such questions may be directed to the appropriate Chancery Office.

Scripture proclaims that unconditional love is the foundation of the Christian life.¹ It is for this reason that, during his ministry, Christ reaffirmed the sacredness and permanence of the marriage covenant, established at the beginning of creation. At the same time, he also raised marriage to a sacrament of the Christian life so that this institution might serve as a symbol of his nuptial bond with the Church.

In our own time, the celebration of this sacrament demands adequate preparation so that the marriage liturgy may nourish, strengthen, and express the faith of the Church.² As well, the marriage rites themselves should be celebrated in such a way that they foster a spirit of prayer, reflection, and joy.

The Communal Nature of the Sacrament

All sacraments are actions of the Mystical Body of Christ which acts in union with its Head, Jesus Christ. As such, the Church's liturgies are communal by nature, and the full, active, and conscious participation of the faithful in these celebrations is to be fostered as a "right and duty" of the baptized.³ At the same time, every member of the Church should take his or her proper role within the celebration, so that the "polyphonic" nature of Christian worship may be fostered and expressed.⁴

The Assembly

The liturgical assembly is called to actively participate in the celebration of the marriage rite, and planning for this liturgy should carefully take this participation into account. The People of God are true participants in the liturgical action. They are called to pray, sing, celebrate the love of Christ, and become signs of Christian love for the couple who themselves are joined together as one in Christ.

The Bride and Groom

The bride and groom are the ministers of the Sacrament of Marriage to each other. When they publicly declare their commitment to one another, the bride and groom manifest the



¹ 1 Cor 13:13.

² *Sacrosanctum Concilium* [SC], 59.

³ SC, 14.

⁴ John Paul II, *Ad Limina* address to Bishops of the United States of America (October 9, 1988), 3.

unifying grace of Christ's love to one another, to those present at the celebration, and to the world.

The Ordained Minister

Within the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage, the priest or deacon is to lead the assembly and coordinate the various ministries and functions of those who are present. He is also called to witness and accept the vows of the couple in the name of the Church and encourage all those gathered to actively participate in the celebration of the wedding liturgy. In this way, the presiding minister plays a significant role in ensuring that the liturgical celebration of marriage is celebrated in a fruitful manner so that it signifies the "mystery of the unity and... love between Christ and the Church."⁵

Liturgical Ministers

The wedding liturgy should include the variety and number of ministers necessary in order to satisfy the liturgical and pastoral needs of the particular wedding being celebrated. Ministers may include deacons, lectors, cantors, choir and other musicians, ushers, and servers. Friends or family members of the couple may be invited to function in these ministries; however, these persons must have the requisite ability and experience to properly carry out these roles.

Official Witnesses

Two members of the assembly are designated as official witnesses to the marriage on behalf of the Church and the state. These witnesses may also escort the bride and groom. It is not required that the witnesses be Catholic.

Location and Time

Inasmuch as the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage is intended to be a manifestation of the mystery of unity and fruitful love between Christ and his Church,⁶ the wedding liturgy of two Catholics should take place in a parish church when celebrated in the Archdiocese of New York. There are a few occasions when a wedding may be celebrated in a chapel or other location which is not a parish church within the Archdiocese of New York (e.g., mixed marriages and disparity of cult marriages). The *Pastoral Handbook for the Archdiocese of New York* should be consulted for additional information.

Neither canon law nor liturgical law places any restriction on the time of day when a wedding liturgy may be celebrated. When a wedding is celebrated in the liturgical seasons of Advent, Lent, and Easter, or on other days of special liturgical significance, the distinctive character of these times should be taken into consideration when planning the wedding ceremony and decorating the church.

⁵ *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* [OCM], 14.

⁶ Eph 5:25.

Actions and Gestures

The following ritual actions and gestures are unique to the marriage rite. A brief explanation of their significance may appropriately be included in a program or worship aid prepared for the celebration.



Exchange of Rings

The exchange of wedding rings is a visible sign of the love and fidelity of the couple expressed in the exchange of mutual consent. In the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, several options are given for the prayer of blessing over the rings.⁷

Affirmation of the Couple by the Community

The gathered community witnesses the marriage of the couple and is called upon to affirm them in their marital commitment. This affirmation and sign of the community's love and support is manifested in a number of ways throughout the wedding liturgy. For example, the community is asked to respond "Amen" after the exchange of consent and acclaim "Thanks be to God" following the celebrant's reception of the couple's consent. After the blessing and exchange of rings, a hymn or canticle of praise may also be sung by the community. As well, it is customary that the congregation expresses its congratulations and happiness for the couple at the conclusion of the ceremony with applause.

Cultural and Ethnic Customs

The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* includes optional rites that may be celebrated within the wedding liturgy when these customs and rituals are a part of the culture of one or both of the spouses. Following the blessing of the rings, the rite gives the option to celebrate the blessing and giving of the *arras* ("coins"). The word *arras* means, "pledge." Typically, the *arras* consists of a cask containing thirteen coins symbolizing prosperity. The formula which both the bride and groom say to each other during the exchange of the *arras* speaks of their promise to share all the goods they will receive during their married life.

The *lazo* is a lasso or yoke used to symbolize the marriage union. Its usual form is a double-looped rosary, wherein one loop goes over the groom's shoulders and the other over the bride's, with the cross hanging between them. The use of the *lazo* symbolizes that the newly-married couple have become "one flesh."

⁷ OCM, 66, 194-195.

The veil has its origins as a symbol of protection from danger. When the woman wears the veil, it is often placed over the shoulders of the man, and sometimes the *lazo* helps to hold it in place. This rite is usually celebrated just before the nuptial blessing, bearing in mind that the intended effect of this blessing is an expression of the veil's symbolic meaning; namely, it functions as a “protection” of the newly-formed marriage bond, a grace which the Lord bestows upon the newly married couple through his Church.

Placing Flowers Before an Image of Our Lady

Before the dismissal, some couples wish to place flowers before an image of Mary as a sign of their devotion to the Mother of God. The couple will usually remain at the statue for a moment of prayer before returning to the sanctuary for the final blessing. If a hymn is sung during this movement (e.g., "Ave Maria"), the couple should remain before the image of Our Lady for the duration of the song.

"Unity Candle" and "Unity Sand"

Neither the lighting of a "unity candle" nor the pouring of "unity sand" is foreseen by the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*. If a couple wishes to include these customs in their wedding celebrations, it would be most appropriate to do so prior to the start of the wedding liturgy on a table apart from the altar. Alternatively, a couple might wish to incorporate these customs into the wedding reception as part of the "Grace before Meals."

Decorations

Flowers and other forms of decoration may be used to enhance and reflect the joyful spirit of the celebration. The use of decoration should, however, be limited during the season of Lent.⁸ Flowers should be situated in such a way that they do not impede the movement within, or a view of, the sanctuary. Flowers should not be placed on the altar. If candles or lanterns are used in the nave of the church, there should be enough light provided for the congregation to make use of programs or worship aids.

Photography and Videography

Parishes should develop clear policies for photographers and videographers so that the actions of these individuals do not become a distraction during the celebration of the liturgy. In general, all photography and videography should occur in a place outside of the sanctuary and in a manner that does not impede the congregation's view of the liturgical action in the sanctuary. Parishes should also take into consideration the particular layout and lighting of the church building when developing a local policy. It is important that parish guidelines be shared with the wedding couple during the time of preparation leading up to the wedding. Photographers and videographers should also receive a copy of the parish policy and meet with the presider prior to the liturgy to discuss any questions or concerns.

⁸ OCM, 32.



Music

The music that is played and sung during the marriage rite should be appropriate and should clearly express the faith of the Church.⁹ As such, “the texts intended to be sung [at the liturgy]... should be drawn chiefly from Holy Scripture and from liturgical sources.”¹⁰

No matter what style of music is selected for the celebration of the Church’s wedding

liturgy, it is "necessary... to emphasize that music destined for sacred rites must have holiness as its reference point."¹¹ That is, such music should: be intimately linked to the liturgical action; promote the active participation of the faithful in the liturgy; and, possess the qualities of prayer, dignity, and beauty.

Popular Music

Engaged couples sometimes wish to include secular songs or instrumental works within the wedding liturgy. Even when such works have special meaning to the couple, they still may be inappropriate for use in liturgical celebrations when thoughtfully and carefully considered in light of the focus of the Church’s wedding liturgies on the sacramental nature of marriage. This is not to say that secular musical works, whether they are secular in musical style or in language, do not have a place in the wedding festivities. To the contrary, many such songs are entirely appropriate at the wedding reception, at which other dimensions of marriage (*e.g.*, romantic love, general, non-religious sentiments of optimism or inspiration) are celebrated. However, it is usually not appropriate to include these types of songs within the context of the wedding liturgy.

The minister who prepares the couple for marriage and the parish music director should give the necessary assistance to a couple in helping them to select music that will reflect the prayerful setting of the wedding liturgy. Very often, this will take the form of a pre-selected grouping of songs from which a couple may choose. Some parishes also make recordings of these songs available to the engaged couple. Sample lists of appropriate music for weddings may be obtained from the archdiocesan Office of Liturgy.

⁹ *OCM*, 30.

¹⁰ *SC*, 121.

¹¹ John Paul II, Chirograph for the Centenary of the *Motu Proprio* "Tra Le Sollecitudini" On Sacred Music, 4.

Pre-recorded Music

The bishops of the United States have indicated that pre-recorded music “lacks the authenticity provided by the living liturgical assembly gathered for the Sacred Liturgy.”¹² It is not pre-recorded music, but rather, the “lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work [which are to be] united with those of Christ and so acquire a new value”¹³ through the celebration of the liturgy. For this reason, pre-recorded music should not, as a general rule, be used within the Church’s wedding rites.

Musical Instruments

Instruments which are used to accompany the singing of the congregation or to provide instrumental accompaniment to liturgical actions should be suitable for sacred use. For the Church, the pipe organ “is the traditional musical instrument” because it can “most effectively elevate people’s spirits to God and things above.”¹⁴ However, other wind, string, or percussion instruments may be used, “provided they are truly suitable for sacred use or can be made suitable.”¹⁵

Copyright/Licensing

Prior copyright permission is required for the reproduction of music (both notation and text). If a bride and groom plan to prepare a worship aid or program, they should be reminded of the need to obtain permission to reproduce words and music. The parish music director should assist the couple in obtaining the necessary licensing.



¹² USCCB, *Sing to the Lord*, 93. See also the commentary of the Sacred Congregation for Sacraments and Divine Worship in: *Notitiae* 13 (1977), 94, no. 1.

¹³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1368.

¹⁴ SC, 120.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

The Rites of Marriage

The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* presents three rites for the celebration of the wedding liturgy:

The Order of Celebrating Matrimony within Mass

The Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass

The Order of Celebrating Matrimony between a Catholic and a Catechumen or a Non-Christian

Each of these rites follows the general structure of sacramental liturgies in the Roman Rite:

- Introductory Rites
- Liturgy of the Word
- Celebration of the Sacrament
- Concluding Rites

Marriage Between Two Catholics

Since the Eucharist is the center of Christian life, marriages between Catholics are generally celebrated within Mass. However, the pastor may, with pastoral sensitivity, propose to the couple that their marriage be celebrated outside of Mass, taking into consideration the "necessities of pastoral care... and the way in which the prospective spouses and those present participate in the life of the Church."¹⁶

Within the liturgy, the Sacrament of Marriage is celebrated after the homily and before the Universal Prayer. The blessing of the Lord is invoked over the newly-married couple following the Lord's Prayer. A Catholic couple will also ordinarily receive Communion, by which "their charity is nurtured and they are raised up to communion with the Lord and with their neighbor."¹⁷

Marriage Between a Catholic and a Baptized Person of Another Faith

In marriages involving a Catholic and a baptized person of another faith, the wedding ceremony should take place outside of Mass.¹⁸ In the Archdiocese of New York, it is permissible, with the consent of the Archbishop or his representative, for a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized person of another faith to be celebrated at the Eucharist if this is

¹⁶ OCM, 29.

¹⁷ OCM, 35.

¹⁸ OCM, 36.

desired by the couple. In such cases, the usual norms regarding the admission of a non-Catholic party to Communion should be observed.¹⁹

Marriage Between a Catholic and a Catechumen or Non-Baptized Person

Marriages between a Catholic and a catechumen or a non-baptized person should take place outside of Mass, using the rite given in Chapter III of the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*.

Norms Governing the Distribution of Communion when Mass is Not Celebrated

If a marriage is celebrated outside of Mass and Communion is to be distributed, the appropriate indications given in the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (108-117) are to be observed. Celebrants should note that, in this case, some elements of the liturgy are reordered in the following manner:

Without the distribution of Communion

- a. Consent
- b. Blessing and Exchange of Rings
- c. Universal Prayer
- d. Lord's Prayer
- e. Nuptial Blessing
- f. Final (simple) Blessing

With the distribution of Communion

- a. Consent
- b. Blessing and Exchange of Rings
- c. Universal Prayer
- d. Nuptial Blessing
- e. Lord's Prayer
- f. Distribution of Communion
- g. Post-Communion Prayer
- h. Final Blessing (optional Solemn Blessing)

Particular Elements of the Rite

Selection and Choice of Texts

The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* indicates that the following texts may be chosen by the engaged couple: the readings from Scripture, the form of mutual consent, the formula for the blessing of rings, the Nuptial Blessing, the intentions of the Universal Prayer, and the musical selections. Celebrants should guide a couple in their selection of these texts from the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, using this process as an opportunity to educate them in the liturgical principles of the Church and their role as ministers of the Sacrament of Marriage.

The *Roman Missal* provides three ritual Masses for the celebration of marriage. The prayers found in these Mass formulae may be used interchangeably. In determining whether a ritual Mass for the celebration of marriage may be used, the following indications from the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* should be observed:

¹⁹ CIC, 844.

Whenever marriage is celebrated within Mass, the Ritual Mass “The Celebration of Marriage” is used with sacred vestments of the color white or of a festive color. On those days listed in nos. 1-4 of the Table of Liturgical Days, however, the Mass of the day is used with its own readings, with inclusion of the Nuptial Blessing and, if appropriate, the proper formula for the final blessing.

If, however, during Christmas and Ordinary Time, the parish community participates in a Sunday Mass during which marriage is celebrated, the Mass of the Sunday is used.

Nevertheless, since a Liturgy of the Word adapted for the celebration of marriage has a great impact in the handing on of catechesis about the sacrament itself and about the duties of the spouses, when the Mass “For the Celebration of Marriage” is not celebrated, one of the readings may be taken from the texts provided for the celebration of marriage (*OCM*, 144-187).²⁰

Lastly, it should be noted that the precept of participating in Mass on Sundays is satisfied by assistance at a Mass which is celebrated anywhere in a Catholic rite either on the holy day or on the evening of the preceding day, even when the Mass texts and readings are those of a ritual Mass, such as at the celebration of marriage.²¹

Introductory Rites

The purpose of the introductory rites is to assist those who have assembled to become a community of worship and praise. Through these rites, the assembly is made ready to hear the Word of God and to celebrate the wedding liturgy and the Eucharist with attention and devotion.

Procession

The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* describes two forms for the entrance procession:

Form I: The priest or deacon goes with the servers to the door of the church, where he receives and greets the bridal party. The celebrant, servers, and bridal party then process to the sanctuary in the usual way as the entrance chant or song is sung.

Form II: The priest or deacon goes either to the place prepared for the couple in or near the sanctuary, or he proceeds directly to his chair. The bridal party and couple process down the aisle. Once the couple has arrived at their place, the celebrant receives and greets them. The entrance chant or song is then sung, during which time the celebrant reverences the altar. He then goes to the presidential chair.

²⁰ *OCM*, 34.

²¹ *CIC*, 1247-1248.

The order of procession for the bridal party is a matter of local custom. A common order that is often followed is:

- Mother of the groom with escort
- Mother of the bride with escort
- Bridesmaids (either with or without groomsmen)
- Flower girls/Ring bearer
- Maid/Matron of Honor
- Bride with escort (e.g., father of the bride)

Other Introductory Rites

Once the procession is complete, the celebrant makes the Sign of the Cross and greets the couple using one of the forms given in the *Roman Missal*. He then addresses the couple and those present using one of the texts provided in the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, or he may do so in his own words. The Penitential Act and *Kyrie* are omitted. The *Gloria* is then sung (or said) in ritual Masses for marriage. One of the provided opening collects (*OCM*, 188-193) follows.

Liturgy of the Word

The Scriptural readings for the Ritual Mass for Marriage may be chosen by the couple. The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* allows for the proclamation of two or three readings, depending on the preferences of the couple and minister or the liturgical nature of the day (e.g., solemnity, feast, etc.). At least one of the readings must explicitly speak of marriage; these readings are indicated by the use of an asterisk (*) in the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*. When the Ritual Mass for Marriage is not used, one of the readings provided in the *Lectionary* for the Ritual Mass may be used, except on days listed as nos. 1-4 in the Table of Liturgical Days.

In assisting the couple to select readings and in preparing the homily, the celebrant should bear in mind the advice given in the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*:

Although pastors are ministers of Christ's Gospel for all, they should, nonetheless, direct special attention to those, whether Catholics or non-Catholics, who never or rarely take part in the celebration of Marriage or the Eucharist. This pastoral norm applies in the first place to the spouses themselves.²²

First Reading

The first reading should be from the Old Testament, but, during the Easter Season, the reading should be taken from the Book of Revelation. Nine choices are provided in the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (*OCM*, 144-152).

²² *OCM*, 37.

Responsorial Psalm

Seven psalms with responses are provided in the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (OCM, 167-173). It is preferable that the psalm be sung, rather than recited. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* [GIRM] additionally indicates the following regarding the responsorial psalm:

Instead of the Psalm assigned in the Lectionary, there may be sung either the Responsorial Gradual from the *Graduale Romanum*, or the Responsorial Psalm or the Alleluia Psalm from the *Graduale Simplex*, as described in these books, or an antiphon and Psalm from another collection of Psalms and antiphons, including Psalms arranged in metrical form, providing that they have been approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop. Songs or hymns may not be used in place of the Responsorial Psalm."²³

Second Reading

Fourteen selections from the New Testament are provided (OCM, 153-166).

Gospel Acclamation

Four selections are given for the Alleluia verse (OCM, 174-177). During Lent, a refrain other than Alleluia is used.

Gospel Reading

Nine texts are given in the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* for the Gospel reading. Candles, incense, and a Gospel procession may be used to enhance the dignity of the proclamation of the Gospel.

Use of Other Readings or Poems

Readings or poems drawn from other religious or secular sources may not be used in place of the Scriptural selections in the Liturgy of the Word.²⁴ Non-scriptural readings, when appropriate for the setting of Christian prayer and the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage, may be used as an introduction to the ceremony before the entrance procession, as part of the homily, or as a statement or commentary at the time of dismissal.

Homily

After the Scriptural readings have been proclaimed, the celebrant then gives a homily, either at the ambo or from another suitable place.²⁵ In the homily, the celebrant should use the sacred text proclaimed to "expound the mystery of Christian Marriage, the dignity of conjugal

²³ GIRM, 61.

²⁴ GIRM, 57.

²⁵ GIRM, 136.

love, the grace of the Sacrament, and the responsibilities of married people, keeping in mind, however, the various circumstances of individuals."²⁶

Rite of Marriage

Brief introduction/exhortation - The text provided in the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (OCM, 59, 93) may be used, or the celebrant may address the couple in words similar to those given in the rite.

Questioning of the couple - These questions concern self-giving, the permanence of the bond, and the responsibilities of accepting children lovingly from God (if appropriate).

Exchange of consent - The sacramental sign of marriage is the exchange of consent by the couple. This same expression of self-giving images the union of Christ and the Church. Inasmuch as the consent is central to the marriage rite, it is desirable that a microphone be used so that this exchange may be clearly heard. As well, the couple should face each other so that the congregation can easily view the joining of their hands and the exchange of rings.

Blessing and exchange of rings - The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* provides three blessings for the rings (OCM, 66, 194-195).

Optional rites - The exchange of coins (*arras*) symbolizes the mutual sharing of life and love of the newly-married couple. When a *lazo* or veil is used, it is typically placed over the head of the bride and the shoulders of the groom, symbolizing the bond that unites them as husband and wife. The *lazo* or the veil is usually held in place by two family members or friends during this blessing. These optional rites may be celebrated where it is part of the cultural customs of one or both partners.

Nuptial Blessing - The Nuptial Blessing is invoked upon the couple to strengthen their newly-formed bond and to call attention to marriage as a symbol of the love between Christ and his Church. The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* includes three different texts for the Nuptial Blessing, in which the option of making reference to the couple's reception of Communion and the possibility of their having children is given. Either or both of these inserts may be omitted according to pastoral circumstances. The Nuptial Blessing is said or sung by the celebrant with his hands extended over the bride and groom.

Nuptial Blessing A is the longest of the three texts and emphasizes God's plan in creating humanity male and female. It also associates this act of creation with the relationship between Christ and his Church. It asks, on behalf of the couple, for the gifts of holiness, faithfulness, and fruitfulness.

²⁶ OCM, 57.

Nuptial Blessing B speaks to the creative union of the couple and associates this aspect of married life with the Eucharistic covenant. The text asks that the couple's home be a place where the Gospel is proclaimed and lived out. As well, a blessing is invoked on the couple so that they will be powerful witnesses of Christ to all who come to know them.

Nuptial Blessing C begins with a description of the Father's creation of humanity in his likeness and his establishing of the marriage covenant. The text asks the Lord that the couple's marriage be fruitful and faithful, and that the couple be a witness to love in the Church and before the world.

Universal Prayer - The couple should be encouraged to prepare the intercessions with the assistance of the celebrant. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* gives the following sequence for the intentions:

- The needs of the Church
- Public authorities and the salvation of the world
- Those oppressed by any need
- The needs of the local community.²⁷

For wedding liturgies, additional intentions may be added, when appropriate. Sample Universal Prayers may be found in Appendix I of the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Presentation of the Gifts

The couple, their families, attendants, or members of the congregation may be chosen to bring up the gifts of bread and wine. Gifts for the poor or the Church may also be presented during the gifts procession.

Eucharistic Prayer

The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* provides three prefaces from which to choose. The choice of Eucharistic Prayer may be made in consultation with the couple, bearing in mind the pastoral needs of the gathered community. A commemoration of the couple should be made within the Eucharistic Prayer (*OCM*, 202-204).

The *Sanctus*, Memorial Acclamation, and Amen should be sung, or optionally recited, by the entirety of the gathered faithful. The choice of musical settings for these parts of the Mass should take the vocal participation of the congregation into consideration.

²⁷ *GIRM*, 70.

Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer should be sung or recited by all.

Sign of Peace

The Exchange of a Sign of Peace is an appropriate moment for the celebrant to approach the couple and wish them the Lord's blessings. At this time, the bride and groom may also wish to exchange their first kiss as husband and wife, as well as share an expression of God's blessing with their parents and attendants through the offering of a sign of peace.

Communion

The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* encourages the reception of Communion under both kinds, especially by the bride and groom, their parents, witnesses, and relatives. In accordance with canon law, Catholics who have received Communion at another Eucharistic celebration that day may receive again at the wedding Mass.²⁸ Those who are not Catholic are not permitted to receive the Eucharist, except in those cases foreseen by canon law.²⁹ It is customary for the celebrant to offer a brief invitation to those who may receive Communion in these or similar words: "At this time, we invite those Catholics who are spiritually prepared to receive Our Lord in Communion."

Concluding Rites

Final Blessing and Recessional

The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* provides several options for the Final Blessing at the celebration of marriage. The celebrant may wish to choose either a simple blessing or one of the solemn blessings given in the rite (*OCM*, 213-215).

It is customary for the gathered assembly to express their joy and appreciation of the couple by applauding during the recessional. For this reason, it may be appropriate to refrain from singing a final hymn at this time, and instead, to have an instrumental piece played during this movement.

Special Circumstances and Additional Considerations

Additional questions regarding the celebration of the marriage rite may be referred to the archdiocesan Office of Liturgy.

²⁸ *CIC*, 917.

²⁹ See: *CIC*, 844.

Appendix: Preparation and Rehearsal Liturgical Checklist

The following is a partial list of those liturgical items which should be discussed by the engaged couple and the celebrant. The first meeting with the celebrant should take place at least six months before the date of the wedding.

A. Choice of Date and Time of Marriage

Good planning suggests that the date and time of the ceremony should be arranged before the time and location of the reception is determined.

B. Necessary Church Documents

The priest or deacon should inform the couple of the documents which they must provide. This will normally include baptismal certificates for Catholics, reliable information regarding the place and date of baptism for non-Catholic Christians, proof of freedom to marry for non-Catholics and for those Catholics whose freedom is not otherwise known to the priest or deacon, and the certificate indicating the completion of the marriage preparation course.

C. Schedule for the Marriage Preparation Courses

The priest or deacon should provide information distributed from the Family Life/Respect Life Office regarding archdiocesan marriage preparation courses. He should describe the content and emphasis of each type of course and point out that early application is important in order to secure a place in the course of the couple's choice.

D. Marriage Preparation: Parish Responsibility

It should be noted that archdiocesan marriage preparation courses deal with more general concepts regarding the meaning of Christian marriage and the Church's teaching on human sexuality. They do not normally devote much discussion to the liturgy of the marriage rite, and so there is not usually much opportunity for dialogue with the couple about matters of individual concern. Hence, two important responsibilities devolve upon the parish: providing the opportunity for unhurried conversation about individual questions and problems and fostering a proper understanding of the wedding liturgy. Discussion of the liturgical aspects of the marriage ceremony can lead to a deeper appreciation of the meaning of Catholic liturgical worship. Thus, the priest or deacon should take care to ensure that sufficient time is allowed in order to take advantage of the pedagogical and pastoral opportunities offered by this important event.

E. Stipends/Fees

At their first meeting with the priest or deacon, the couple should be given information concerning the usual offering to the parish church and staff (*e.g.*, sacristan, servers), as well as the fees for the organist, cantor, and other musicians.

F. Wedding Rehearsal

Sufficient time should be set aside for an unhurried and thorough rehearsal in the days leading up to the wedding. The celebrant can use this occasion to establish a warm and friendly rapport with the members of the wedding party and share with those gathered the Church's belief in the sacramental nature of marriage and the nature of Christian liturgical worship. As well, a careful walkthrough of the ceremony can contribute to building up the couple's confidence and peace of mind so that the wedding liturgy may be celebrated in a prayerful and dignified manner.

The rehearsal is also an appropriate time for settling final details and points of procedure, including a last review of the readings and a rehearsal of the readers, finalizing the music and the songs, ensuring that gift bearers have been selected, and determining the arrangement for the Sign of Peace.

In the case of a celebration of a marriage within Mass or with the distribution of Communion, the celebrant is encouraged to recall for the group the guidelines for a worthy reception of Communion by Catholics and present Church discipline regarding inter-communion. The practicalities of arranging the wedding party to accommodate those who will not be receiving Communion should be addressed.

The rehearsal may also present an opportunity for brief prayer, the proclamation of an appropriate passage from Scripture, and the individual celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

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