

# **Table of Contents**

## **Section I**

2

Time line and Couple Responsibilities

3

Introduction - The Celebration of Marriage in the Catholic Church

6

Planning your Ceremony - General Guidelines

7

Planning the Details of your Wedding

10

Other Considerations

13

Rehearsal / Wedding Day Etiquette

## **Section II**

Selection of Readings

Prayers of the Faithful - Samples

## **Section III**

Schedule/Registration for Marriage Preparation Days - Diocese of Madison

State of Wisconsin - Requirements for Marriage License

Other readings for your reflection

# Timeline for Wedding Preparation

Please check-off when each is completed.

- \_\_\_ 1. Contact the Pastor for an appointment *no less than six months* prior to a wedding date and time. Note: If either the bride or groom have been previously married, a wedding date cannot be set until church documents [annulment] have been completed. This could take up to 12 months.
- \_\_\_ 2. At your initial meeting you will receive this time line with a booklet: “The Celebration of Marriage in the Catholic Church”. Read it carefully. If you have questions, call the Parish Office.
- \_\_\_ 3. Catholics must obtain a **recently issued** copy of your baptismal certificate. Those baptized in non-Catholic churches may bring a copy of your baptismal certificate.
- \_\_\_ 4. Meet with your assigned **FOCCUS** Couple [2-3 meetings] This should be completed about 4 months prior to the wedding.
- \_\_\_ 5. The Diocese of Madison offers two opportunities for retreat. They differ in format and focus. The first: Real Life, Real Love is a sort of a practicum day, a day of dialogue and reflection. The second: “God’s Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage is a compelling vision meant to shine a light on God’s awesome plan for love and marriage.  
  
Neither day is mandatory, but you are **encouraged** to participate in both. The schedule and registration information is included in this packet or can be found online at [www.madisondiocese.org](http://www.madisondiocese.org). Go to the **Ministry** tab, then **Marriage and Family**, then **Marriage Prep**. Bring certificates of participation to your pastor.
- \_\_\_ 6. Meet with the **Director of Music** to begin the preparation of the Liturgy no less than four months prior to the wedding.
- \_\_\_ 7. **Finalize** liturgy planning and the necessary documents with the priest no less than one month prior to the wedding date. You will need two appointments (after completion of FOCCUS and Marriage Preparation Days). Please allow ample time in your schedule to do this.
- \_\_\_ 8. Set a date and time for wedding rehearsal.
- \_\_\_ 9. Obtain Marriage License for the State of Wisconsin. [see regulations enclosed]
- \_\_\_ 10. Go on a date and celebrate!!!!

# The Celebration of Marriage in the Catholic Church

Congratulations on your decision to be married. We are pleased that you chose your faith community of Our Lady of the Assumption as the place for your celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage. As your planning progresses you will have many questions about the various aspects of your wedding. We hope this packet will answer some of those questions in advance. We encourage you to read this packet carefully before making any decisions and to talk over your plans with the priest who will be celebrating your marriage and the Director of Liturgy and Music early in the planning process. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask. We are here to help you produce a great day of celebration of faith and love.

On the previous page is a checklist of things that must be completed and a time line that should give both a comfortable schedule of requirements as well as assure a stress-free planning of your wedding. Please follow it closely.

## SETTING THE DATE

Customarily, weddings are held on Saturdays for the convenience of all those attending. Other days can be accommodated and, in some situations, a regular weekend parish Mass may be your best choice. **Be sure to approve the date with the parish before making reception and other arrangements** as dates are sometimes booked up to 18 months in advance. Every attempt will be made to provide your choice of dates but, we are a church of many members so you may be sharing your wedding day with other celebrating families or other services.

It is also important to consider the liturgical calendar when setting your date. Lent and Advent are periods of preparation in the church and decorations and activities are more subdued. Although not forbidden, weddings held during these seasons are by necessity somewhat reserved. Weddings cannot take place during Holy Week or the Sacred Triduum. These dates are different each year but generally fall in late March or April.

## **THE MARRIAGE LICENSE**

It is the couple's responsibility to get the marriage license. You must apply for the license at the County Clerk's office in Rock County -or- the county in which you reside in the state of Wisconsin. The church is responsible for filing the license with the Register of Deeds after the wedding.

## **PHOTOGRAPHS & VIDEOS**

Many couples desire to commemorate their wedding through photographs and/or video. We want to be supportive of that, but need to balance it with our primary purpose for gathering which is to honor and praise God through our prayer. For this reason we ask the following of anyone taking photographs or video at the wedding:

- Those taking photos/videos should take great care not to detract from the liturgy and prayer through their movement and actions.
- Once the procession is completed all pictures should be taken from behind the 1<sup>st</sup> set of columns in the church.
- A stationary video/photography position may be helpful. Check with the priest or music director for such placement.
- Under no circumstances should anyone taking pictures or videos go into the sanctuary. (You may want to mention this to family & friends in particular as they are often the ones who go into this space to try and get a better shot.)
- Do not use the Blessed Sacrament Chapel as a photography studio. We honor the Blessed Sacrament in this space and for this reason need to keep it as a special area of prayer and reverence.
- Please be sensitive as well to the fact that the church cannot serve as a photographic studio. While every effort is made to offer a place for pictures to be taken, the first priority of schedule is for the liturgy of the church. This is especially important for weddings that fall before or after the 5:00 PM Mass on Saturdays.
  - Pictures must be finished by 4:30 PM.
  - If a wedding takes place after the 5:00 Mass the church would be available at 6:15 PM.
  - If more than one wedding is scheduled during a day, we ask that participating photographers contact each other to determine a mutually acceptable timetable.

Please share these guidelines with your photographer/videographer so all may enter the prayer as completely as possible while providing a fitting remembrance of this portion of your wedding day.

## PHOTOGRAPHS & VIDEOS

Many couples desire to commemorate their wedding through photographs and/or video. We want to be supportive of that, but need to balance it with our primary purpose for gathering which is to honor and praise God through our prayer. For this reason we ask the following of anyone taking photographs or video at the wedding:

- Those taking photos/videos should take great care not to detract from the liturgy and prayer through their movement and actions.
- Once the procession is completed all pictures should be taken from behind the 1<sup>st</sup> set of columns in the church.
- A stationary video/photography position may be helpful. Check with the priest or music director for such placement.
- Under no circumstances should anyone taking pictures or videos go into the sanctuary. (You may want to mention this to family & friends in particular as they are often the ones who go into this space to try and get a better shot.)
- Do not use the Blessed Sacrament Chapel as a photography studio. We honor the Blessed Sacrament in this space and for this reason need to keep it as a special area of prayer and reverence.
- Please be sensitive as well to the fact that the church cannot serve as a photographic studio. While every effort is made to offer a place for pictures to be taken, the first priority of schedule is for the liturgy of the church. This is especially important for weddings that fall before or after the 5:00 PM Mass on Saturdays.
  - Pictures must be finished by 4:30 PM.
  - If a wedding takes place after the 5:00 Mass the church would be available at 6:15 PM.
  - If more than one wedding is scheduled during a day, we ask that participating photographers contact each other to determine a mutually acceptable timetable.

Please share these guidelines with your photographer/videographer so all may enter the prayer as completely as possible while providing a fitting remembrance of this portion of your wedding day.

Our Lady of the Assumption  
2222 Shopiere Road  
Beloit, WI 53511

608-362-9066

**Please give this copy to your photographer.**

## **FEES**

### **PARISH**

Our Lady of Assumption Parish is a community of faith dedicated to good stewardship. Many people have sacrificed a great deal to provide the space, staff and spirit to make worship here a prayerful and hospitable experience. We are glad to provide the opportunity for you to celebrate your wedding here at OLA.

In the spirit of good stewardship, we ask you to consider the following guidelines:

1. If you are an active and contributing member of OLA, we would like to provide the use of the church for your rehearsal and wedding at no cost.
2. If your parents and family are active and contributing members, but you personally are not, please consider making a donation to the parish for this special occasion.
3. If you have not been an active and contributing member of OLA, we ask that you make a donation to the parish. A suggested amount would be between \$200 and \$500 dollars.

Obviously we do not wish to make the cost of a wedding a burden; simply keep in mind the level of spending you are considering in other areas of your celebration and give respectfully.

Stipends to the Priest and to musicians are separate from these donations. Checks may be made out to Our Lady of the Assumption Parish and, as a donation, are tax deductible.

### **PRIEST**

While a stipend for the presiding priest is never mandatory, a customary stipend of \$100-\$150 is appreciated. If any fees or financial obligations are problematic, please talk it over with the Pastor.

### **MUSICIANS**

When the Director of Liturgy & Music obtains the musicians for the wedding, the customary fees are \$150 for the accompanist and \$100 for the cantor. Individual requests of the couple for musicians can be addressed at your meeting with the Director.

# PLANNING YOUR WEDDING CEREMONY

## General Guidelines

### WHAT TYPE OF LITURGY SHOULD WE HAVE?

A **wedding with Mass** is the customary liturgy when both parties are practicing Catholics. Sharing Eucharist (Communion) is the primary source of unity of our faith and thus a wonderful context in which to celebrate your marriage.

If one of the parties is not Catholic (or if both are Catholic but not practicing their faith) a **wedding apart from Mass** is recommended. This liturgy will be predominantly the same but without sharing Communion. This prayer preserves the sacredness of the Sacrament of Marriage while avoiding any confusion or conflict that can arise around the sharing of Eucharist.

Active participation in the prayers and music of the wedding is encouraged. This includes the two of you and all of your guests. The day will be filled with many activities. Our hope is that the liturgy will be the foundation from which all other celebration may flow.

### MUSIC

As mentioned earlier, the most important consideration at the marriage liturgy is the participation of all those present. This leads us to re-think what we may be accustomed to in regard to music at weddings.

We have music to serve the assembly; to assist them in expressing and sharing their faith. It should help draw those present into good, comfortable prayer, making us more aware of God's presence. For this reason we recommend the use of a cantor rather than a "soloist." They are professionally trained in the liturgy of the Church and can provide encouragement and leadership for congregational singing.

Does that mean you cannot have a friend or relative sing at your wedding? Not at all! There are times before and during the liturgy that a solo piece could be done or, if they are familiar with the Catholic Rite of Marriage and our liturgical space we would welcome them as cantor for your wedding. Our Pastoral Musician will be happy to assist others or to serve as cantor.

The music you select for your wedding should be liturgically, pastorally and musically appropriate. Contact the Director of Music at the parish as soon as possible to assist you in the planning of the liturgy and selection of the music. He/she will also assist you in securing a pianist/organist or other musicians for the wedding.

### YOUR WEDDING REHEARSAL

The purpose of the rehearsal is to familiarize and put at ease those you have invited to participate in your wedding ceremony. Who should be at the rehearsal?

- Parents
- Members of your wedding party
- Scripture readers and the person(s) doing the prayer of the faithful
- Gift presenters and Eucharistic ministers are also welcomed but not necessary
- It is best if the musicians rehearse at another time

# PLANNING THE DETAILS OF YOUR WEDDING CEREMONY

You will meet with both the Director of Music and the Priest in planning your ceremony. Before you do so, please read through the following section. Many choices are available to you. Thinking about those choices beforehand will allow for more creative use of your time.

## *The People in Your Wedding Liturgy*

### **The Assembly**

As at any liturgy, the fundamental ministry within the wedding liturgy is that of the assembly of people who gather to celebrate. The assembly celebrates the liturgy; individual members of this assembly fulfill various special ministries within the liturgy. You may have been to weddings where this point was more or less overlooked, with the result that the majority of people at the wedding were treated like an audience at a show. When this happens, people refrain from participating in the liturgy, and the whole experience can end up being about as engaging as watching someone else's home movies. The goal of your preparation is to encourage the full and active participation of all who gather to celebrate your marriage.

### **The Couple**

The two of you are the ministers of the sacrament of marriage in the Roman Catholic wedding liturgy. You give yourselves to one another in marriage. The priest or deacon serves as the church's official witness, but he does not "pronounce you man and wife." Since a great deal of attention is focused on you during the wedding, you also set the tone for the assembly by your own attitudes and behavior.

### **The Presider**

In most cases, a priest will preside, or officiate, at the wedding liturgy. Priests or deacons from outside the parish may preside at weddings with the permission of the local Pastor. As marriages between Catholics and non-Catholics become increasingly common, it is not unusual for the couple to invite a minister from the non-Catholic parish to be involved in the wedding liturgy. This minister may, for example, lead one of the prayers or blessings. Certain parts of the wedding liturgy, such as the questions concerning the consent and exchange of vows, are reserved to the Catholic priest, however. Speak with the priest before extending an invitation to another minister, and discuss the logistics of who will do and say what well in advance of the rehearsal. If planned and carried out well, this can be a beautiful and significant sign of the ecumenical dimension of your marriage.

### **The Witnesses**

Every member of the assembly at your wedding is a witness to your exchange of vows. At the same time, three particular witnesses have a special role to play in the liturgy and for church records. First, the church's "official witness" is the priest or deacon who asks for and receives your consent. He does this by asking you the three questions in the statement of intentions and by receiving your consent in the exchange of vows. The other two witnesses stand by you during the marriage rite. They need not be Catholic or even baptized; their primary duty is to attest to the fact that the marriage took place. While it is customary to have one male ("the best man") and one female ("the maid of honor"), it is possible to have two males or two females.

## **Ushers and Bridesmaids**

The members of your wedding party can be of tremendous help. Ask them to cordially greet people arriving at the church, give them the printed program for the wedding, and even lead them to a seat near other worshipers. The men and women in your wedding party can assist with this form of hospitality. There is no reason to limit the role to men.

## ***The Procession***

All of the participants and witnesses are customarily a part of the procession. This includes the priest, wedding party, bride and groom. It can also include those who will be proclaiming the readings. Since this is a liturgical procession, only one song is played or sung. It is becoming a common practice for the bride's and the groom's parents to accompany them down the aisle. In the past, the aisle runner was used to keep the hem of the wedding gown clean. Today, the runner is another ornamental expense. It slips, and people slip on it. It is recommended that you do not use an aisle runner. We discourage the use of an aisle runner. They are unnecessary and become a real hazard.

## ***The Readings***

The readings are a central part of the wedding liturgy. *It is up to you to determine the readings for your service.* The readings you choose form the foundation for all your other choices. Read and reflect on each one, individually and as a couple. Ask yourselves what God may be saying to both of you about your relationship, about matrimony. Choose the readings that speak most meaningfully to you about the sacrament of matrimony that you are entering.

You may select three Scripture readings. The first and second reading may be from either the Old Testament or the New Testament. The first reading is followed by the responsorial psalm. The responsorial psalm is always sung. Great care should be taken in not only choosing the readings, but who proclaims them. As a general rule, experienced proclaimers should be invited to do the readings. You will also select a Gospel which the priest will proclaim. Suggested readings are provided later in this booklet.

Some couples ask about the possibility of using readings from sources other than the scriptures in the wedding liturgy. While such readings may reflect valuable insights into marriage, they are best used outside of the liturgy, for example at the rehearsal dinner or as part of a prayer or blessing before the meal at the reception. The readings in the wedding liturgy are limited to those that the church holds to be the Word of God, that is, the scriptures.

## ***Your Vows***

The exchange of vows and rings takes place after the readings and homily. Decide what marriage vows you want to use.

The vows may be repeated after the minister, or memorized by the couple. The groom begins, and then the bride follows:

### **Form A**

I, N., take you, N., to be my wife (husband). I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.

**Or**

### **Form B**

I, N., take you N., for my lawful wife (husband), to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.

## ***Prayers of the Faithful***

We encourage you to compose or select Prayers of the Faithful and someone to read them. Examples are available later in this booklet.

## ***The Lord's Prayer***

This is one of our greatest prayers to demonstrate Christian unity. We will always speak it together in its normal place.

## ***Communion (only with a Mass)***

We celebrate communion under the form of bread and wine. We will need 2 or more people to assist with distribution of communion depending on the size of the congregation. These people should be practicing Catholics familiar with being ministers of communion at OLA or in their own parishes.

## ***Flowers to Mary***

While honoring Mary in some fashion during the wedding ceremony or Mass has been a custom in some places by some people, the practice is not part of the Rite of Marriage and is not required. Unless you have a particular devotion to Mary, you probably would not want to include this in your ceremony.

## **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS AND THOUGHTS**

### **Greeting Guests**

A good celebration begins with good hospitality. Many of your guests may be unfamiliar with our parish, so we encourage you and your parents to greet them as they enter. Hospitality makes the celebration more alive from the very beginning. What a wonderful way to promote a sense of unity!

Catholics do not believe in superstition, yet a wedding is one place superstition has been allowed to continue. For example, one superstition is that it is bad luck for the groom to see the bride in her wedding gown prior to the procession. Let's take a look at that.

People are coming to this parish church because you invited them. It would be most impolite for you to invite people to your home and not greet them upon arrival. Your parish is your faith home. It makes sense to welcome your guests at the church door when they arrive! Of course, that means everyone-including the groom-is going to see the bride in her gown. Some traditions and superstitions are hard to end.

Receiving your guests as they arrive at the church for the wedding celebration will do a number of things. It helps eliminate some of the tension that understandably builds up leading to the big moment. It's also a polite social use of time while everyone is waiting for the celebration to begin. More importantly, greeting your guests gives you the opportunity to thank them for coming and to invite them to participate as fully as possible in the celebration. This adds a lot of warmth that deepens participation in your ceremony: It also lessens the amount of time you will spend away from your guests for pictures.

Greeting guests before the ceremony can also eliminate the need for a receiving line. If you do decide to have a receiving line, the best place for it may be at the reception. We also ask that you do not use rice or birdseed on parish property. It creates a mess and can be hazardous.

### **Wedding Booklet**

A worship aid booklet is nice to have and can be a keepsake of your special day. These are especially nice for guests who are not familiar with the people involved in the ceremony, the music, and the prayers in which they are expected to participate. On the other hand, booklets are one more expense and not necessary.

Copyright permission must be granted for lyrics and for music printed in a booklet. Your musician should be able to assist you with booklet covers and content.

## **Reception**

Your reception celebration should be joyful and conducted with dignity, keeping in mind the sacredness of the sacrament just received.

## **Flowers and Candles**

Flowers for a wedding are usually a major expense and, yet, they are often placed in such a way that they have little visual effect or they become a real distraction or obstacle to visibility. If, for example, flowers are placed on the floor near the altar, they are often too low to be seen by the majority of the assembly, especially if the wedding party stands in front of them. In some cases, the flower arrangements are well done but placed on poorly designed stands or in ways which compete with the placement of the people in the sanctuary. Here it would be important to work with a florist who knows what is best for the particular church, rather than purchasing generic “one-size-fits-all” arrangements.

There are many alternatives to the customary floral arrangements seen at weddings. Some couples simply choose to gather flowers of the season from the gardens of family and friends. Other couples put their money into flowering or green plants that can provide a beautiful setting at the wedding and then can be planted or used in their home as a reminder of the wedding. Flowers can also be used in places other than the sanctuary, particularly at the entrance or gathering space of the church, thus making a gracious sign of welcome to people as they arrive. The impact of flowers at the entrance is often much greater than an arrangement lost in an already crowded sanctuary. It is a courtesy to leave the flowers at the church after the wedding for the whole parish to enjoy.

It is also important to remember that many parishes have a committee of people who work throughout the year at creating a worship environment which will reflect the unfolding of the various liturgical seasons. They might use banners or plants, flowers, found objects or empty spaces to express Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Advent or Christmas. These various seasonal decorations for the parish have priority over things brought in for weddings. It is a good idea to check with the local parish to see what, if any, decorations will be in place at the time of your wedding. Then, you can determine what flowers might be appropriate for the occasion. In some cases, the parish decorations are quite substantial and beautiful and you may not need any additional flowers.

If other weddings are scheduled in the church on the same day, you might consider getting together with the other couples and purchasing the flowers together. This can significantly reduce the cost for each couple. The parish can provide you with the names and phone numbers of other couples whose weddings are scheduled for the same day.

One of the consistent suggestions in this book has been to avoid adding ceremonies and prayers to the wedding liturgy and, instead, to prepare and celebrate the given options well. One such additional ceremony that you may have seen at weddings involves the lighting of a special “unity” or “marriage” candle after the exchange of vows and rings.

In order not to distract from the primary symbol of unity, the Eucharist, lighting a wedding candle at Mass is not allowed. If you decide to use the unity candle in a wedding apart from Mass, use only dripleless candles.

Because the altar is the “table of the Lord’s sacrifice”, we ask that you plan not to place flowers, candles or other items on the altar. Flowers may be placed anywhere else in the sanctuary area, provided they do not detract from the central symbols of the space: the altar and the ambo, or interfere with the movement of the attendants. Remember that many times during the year there are plants and flowers already present in the sanctuary. If candelabras are used they must have dripleless candles.

### **Other Traditions**

Some cultures have long-standing traditions associated with wedding ceremonies. We try to honor those traditions in consideration of liturgical practice and established norms.

## Rehearsal / Wedding Day Etiquette

Every effort will be made to make the wedding weekend a relaxed and celebrative occasion. A few thoughts to ensure this:

- 1.) Be on time for your rehearsal and make sure others are as well. One hour has been allotted which will give enough time for gathering and introductions. Be aware that other events may be scheduled in the church before or after your rehearsal.
- 2.) The primary function of the church is for liturgical celebrations. While every effort will be made to allow ample time for decorating and photography, do not assume! Please ask in regard to the availability of facilities for your rehearsal / wedding day.
- 3.) The parish serves as a campus for church activities, school and child care. Therefore, open alcoholic beverages and smoking are not allowed at any time or place on church property or in any building.
- 4.) We welcome you to bring in snacks or non-alcoholic beverages to consume before a wedding as well as any necessary toiletry or make-up material. Please collect all items (and trash) prior to leaving the facilities. Trash receptacles are available behind the gym.
- 5.) We recommend that you not leave valuables unattended on your wedding day. Please secure your valuables in a locked vehicle or have someone keep them for you.
- 6.) Please instruct your ushers (or designate someone) to check the church after the wedding for “left-behind” articles such as cameras or purses. It is easier to return them to your guests at the reception than for them to be recovered later.

These simple “rules of etiquette” will ensure a great celebration!