



**Diocese of Rockford**  
**Catholic**  
**Wedding**  
**Guidelines**

**April 2002**

*Jesus said:*

*“But from the beginning of creation,*

*God made them male and female.*

*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother*

*and be joined to his wife,*

*and the two shall become one.*

*So they are no longer two but one.*

*What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”*

Mark 10:6-9

Dear Friends in Christ,

One of the most important times in the life of a family is the occasion of a wedding. This is true not only for the individual family but also for the family of the Church. In witnessing the love of a man and woman in the Sacrament of Matrimony the community is reminded of the love of Christ for his bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:22).

Parishes today face many situations with regard to the dignity of the Sacrament of Matrimony. Some couples have not had a good example of marriage in their own families. Some couples may not worship regularly or even be fully catechized in their faith and have drifted away from the Church in high school or college. Their ideas of marriage may be more influenced by television and the movies than by our Catholic tradition, one of their partners may not be Catholic or even a Christian. Today’s modern society, with its cultural emphasis on excessive individualism, and preoccupation with self-fulfillment, creates many obstacles to a successful marriage.

The vocation of Catholic marriage is a serious one and so the Church has an obligation to do all that she can to preserve the dignity of marriage and offer guidance and support that will help prepare couples for married life. Over the years our Diocese has developed and improved various norms and guidelines which are to be observed by all those responsible for marriage preparation.

The wedding liturgy is an official act of worship of the Church and, as such, the Church has an obligation to exercise her teaching to lead and guide all the faithful to a truly Catholic understanding of marriage as a Sacrament, that is, a public,

communal celebration of the Church.

In view of various circumstances, it is appropriate to publish norms for the proper celebration of a Catholic marriage. For the benefit of the faithful to receive what the Church intends in her rites of marriage, it is necessary that the Pastors, Parochial Vicars, Deacons, and those laity involved in the preparation and celebration of the Catholic *Rite of Marriage* in the Diocese of Rockford, all observe a consistent application of the liturgical laws and norms as set down in the approved liturgical books. This consistent observance of norms applies to those particular norms which are deemed necessary for the Diocese of Rockford.

With this in mind, I publish the following for observance throughout the Diocese of Rockford:

1. The celebration of a Catholic marriage is not a private observance, but is a celebration which takes place in the midst of the local parish community. The rite of marriage, therefore, is to be celebrated with appropriate choices of liturgical music, Scripture readings, gestures and environmental decorations which are consistent with a Catholic understanding of marriage, and which are approved by the Church and contained in the approved liturgical books.

2. It is the responsibility of the parish priest to direct and prepare any lay faithful who are to assist him in the celebration of the rites of marriage by following the directives in the *Rite of Marriage*.

The Pastor of a parish is the one who is to determine, under proper law, what should and should not be done in the celebration

of the marriage rite and who is, by Church regulation, the proper director of all marriage arrangements.

3. While it is the practice and preference of the Church that a wedding of two Catholics take place during the celebration of the Mass, pastoral attention and sensitivity to the other rites for marriage between a Catholic and a baptized Christian, or a Catholic and a non-baptized person, are to be observed.

4. Competent judgements have to be made with regard to the liturgical, musical and pastoral appropriateness of the music to be used in the ceremony. No secular music is allowed before, during or after the celebration of a Catholic marriage.

5. With consideration of the self-serving attitude of the current culture, it is important that due attention be given to creating and maintaining the proper attitude of reverence in the church, before, during and after a marriage.

With this letter I include several directives for the proper liturgical celebration of the rites of marriage in the Diocese of Rockford. Further directives, with their proper applications and clarifications regarding the correct understanding and celebration of the rites of marriage, will be developed, as needed, through the Office for Divine Worship.

In his exhortation regarding the role of the Christian family in the modern world, *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II writes that the liturgical celebration of marriage, as a sacramental action of the Church, should involve the Christian community “with the full, active and responsible participation of all those present: the bride and bridegroom, the priest, the witnesses, the relatives and

friends, and the other members of the faithful, all of them members of an assembly that manifests and lives the mystery of Christ and his Church.” (67.4)

May all those entrusted with pastoral responsibility continually strive to help the faithful achieve the ideals of Christian marriage.

<signed>

**Bishop Thomas G. Doran, D.D., J.C.D.**

Palm Sunday  
24 March, 2002

## **I. General Principles and Norms**

1. In the Diocese of Rockford the *Rite of Marriage*, 1990, is to be used as the normative liturgical ritual for the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

2. The three principal rites for the celebration of marriage are:

(1) Rite for celebrating marriage during Mass:

- The *Rite of Marriage* for two Catholics may take place at Mass. This presumes that the couple regularly participates at Sunday Mass and are active in their faith.

(2) Rite for celebrating marriage outside of Mass:

- In a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic, it is expected that the Rite of Marriage Outside of Mass will be used.

- The Eucharist is a symbol of Christian unity. Celebrating such a marriage at Mass may make the celebration awkward for both parties by highlighting their differences in faith. This awkwardness is further accentuated in cases where non-Catholic clergy are invited to participate in a marriage celebrated at Mass.

- If circumstances justify it and the non-Catholic party agrees to having a Mass, “the rite for celebrating marriage within Mass may be used,

except that according to the general law, communion is not given to the non-Catholic.”

- In the Diocese of Rockford, the distribution of Holy Communion shall not be included in marriage ceremonies celebrated outside of Mass.

(3) Rite for celebrating marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person:

- Marriages involving a non-Christian (after reception of a dispensation from disparity of cult), shall be celebrated at a liturgy of the Word and not at the Eucharistic liturgy.

The *Introduction* to the entire ritual, and the *Introductions* to the various ritual forms, set forth guiding principles for the proper liturgical celebration of each of these rites.

3. It is the responsibility of the Pastor of each parish to ensure that these liturgical principles are respected, understood, and used with pastoral sensitivity by those priests, deacons, and lay persons who participate in the preparation and planning of weddings in the parish.

4. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the Pastor both to inform the parish of the proper order and liturgical expression of the rites for marriage, as set forth in the *Rite of Marriage*, and to ensure that they are followed according to the mind of the Church.

5. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy states that the full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations “is called for by the very nature of the liturgy and is the aim to be considered before all else.” (no. 14). Everyone involved in the wedding liturgy needs to understand this foundational principle and promote it in planning the liturgy for the Sacrament of Matrimony.

6. The normative regulations of Canon Law and Diocesan Law which guide the preparation of individuals for the Sacrament of Matrimony are to be followed, without exception.

## **II. Special Pastoral Concerns**

### **1. The Entrance Procession**

For the Entrance Rite, it is stated in the *Rite of Marriage*: “If there is a procession to the altar, the ministers go first, followed by the priest, and then the bride and bridegroom. According to local custom, they may be escorted by at least their parents and the two witnesses. Meanwhile, the entrance song is sung.” (no. 20)

✚ The proper liturgical procession for a Catholic marriage begins with the processional crucifix followed by the ministers, the priest and the couple with their parents and witnesses.

✚ In the *Catholic* procession, the faith of the Church holds that the bride and groom as ministers of the Sacrament of Matrimony, enter marriage mutually and as complementary, equal partners. That theological point also explains why the tune “Here

Comes the Bride” is not permitted for the entrance procession; its focus on the bride alone contradicts the Church’s emphasis on the couple.

## **2. The Liturgy of the Word**

✦ The Scripture readings for the *Conferral of the Sacrament of Marriage* are found in the Lectionary for Ritual Masses, Volume IV, [801-805], 2002.

✦ Non-scriptural or secular readings may never be substituted for the Scripture readings which are given in the Lectionary for Ritual Masses.

✦ Because of the nature of the liturgy, it is preferred that the liturgical role of the lector should be given only to those Catholics who practice their faith. By exception, the role may be exercised by a person who shares the Christian faith. Those selected for the role of lector are to be well-trained for the proper proclamation of the Scriptures.

✦ The Responsorial Psalm is to be sung or recited. It is not permitted to substitute other songs, hymns, or poetry in its place.

## **3. Liturgical Music for the Sacrament of Matrimony**

Music is an integral part of the liturgy of the Sacrament of Matrimony. Provision should be made that all the people are involved at the important moments of the celebration and that the same general principles of planning worship and judging music

are employed as at other liturgies, and that the liturgy is a prayer for all present.

The selection of music used in weddings is to reflect the understanding that this ritual is an action of the assembly which, like all Catholic ritual, expresses and forms the faith of those gathered to celebrate.

Therefore, in the Diocese of Rockford the following norms are to be observed:

✦ Music is integral to the celebration of Liturgy. The choice of music should follow the musical, liturgical and pastoral norms as set forth in *Music in Catholic Worship*.

✦ Non-liturgical or secular music selections, in any form of musical presentation, are not allowed before a wedding as preludes, at any place during the celebration of marriage, or after the ceremony as postludes.

✦ The choices of liturgical music should be such that they enable the gathered assembly to participate fully in the rite. No part of the liturgical ritual of the Sacrament of Matrimony which is communal in nature is to be given to a soloist to perform.

✦ The Pastor is to approve and authorize the use of proper liturgical music for all weddings, whether he or another priest or deacon functions as the witness of the marriage.

## **4. Environment for the Wedding Liturgy**

✦ In the celebration of weddings the requirements of the

Liturgical Year are to be observed, particularly during the Seasons of Advent and Lent.

✦ Both out of respect for the presence of the Blessed Sacrament and the purpose of the church, proper decorum in the church is to be observed.

✦ Each Pastor is to establish guidelines for the proper use of photography and videography in his church. As a basic norm photographic equipment, in any of its modern forms, is not to be allowed in the sanctuary.

✦ The placement of flowers in the church should be done in harmony with the Liturgical Year and with respect to their use for the enhancement of the environment as the liturgy requires.

✦ Seating arrangements are a social function.

## 5. Pastoral Care

The following suggestions are offered both as an instruction for the parish and for the forms of the celebration of marriage throughout the year.

✦ The Book of Blessings contains the *Orders for the Blessing of Families and Members of Families* (nos. 40-175). In Chapter 1, Section III, nos. 90-134, are the *Orders for the Blessing of a Married Couple* and, in section VI, the *Order for the Blessing of an Engaged Couple*, nos. 195-214.

✦ Timely and regular inserts in the parish bulletin with regard to the requirements for marriage and its proper liturgical celebration.

✦ A liturgical aide for participation in a wedding which would include guidelines for what is expected, liturgical music selections, and guidelines for the reception of Holy Communion.

✦ A yearly celebration of Wedding Anniversaries in the parish. It would be appropriate to place a monthly list of upcoming anniversaries in the bulletin.

## 6. Non-liturgical Customs

✦ With regard for the Church's requirement that only two witnesses are necessary for a marriage, the number of groomsmen and bridesmaids should be reasonable and not an excessive display.

✦ The so-called unity candle is best used at the reception and incorporated into the blessing before the meal.

✦ Established and liturgically proper ethnic marriage customs are to be respected.

✦ Pastors should be aware of cultural attempts to over-personalize weddings as the "bride's day" or "my wedding" and guide the couple to a proper understanding of the expectations of the Church. Good liturgical planning does not happen automatically. The Pastor has the responsibility to help the couples, most of whom have little experience in this area, make good decisions about how to celebrate their wedding.