

Using This Booklet

Planning your wedding day can seem like a daunting task, involving (as it does) a large number of people and a seemingly endless array of details. Often, in the midst of making plans for the reception, flowers, dresses, tuxedos, photographs, travel arrangements, and on and on, the wedding liturgy itself can begin to feel like “just one more thing” you have to do. But your wedding ceremony is the central part of your big day. It is a sacred celebration meant to express your faith in God and your love for each other. It is, in fact, what makes you married—legally, publicly, and in the eyes of the Church.


When you exchange your vows you publicly proclaim your unending love for each other and your intention to remain together for life. By doing so, the love you received as a gift from God becomes a gift to the whole Church and to the world. When the Church says marriage is a sacrament, it means that your visible love and faithfulness to each other become a witness and an effective sign of God’s love and care for all people. Your marriage is a sacramental sign not just to each other, to family and friends, or to the Church, but also to the entire world.

With the help of *Together for Life*, we pray you will experience the planning of your wedding liturgy as a labor of love, one that draws the two of you together more deeply into the mystery of God’s love. In that way, your own faith in God and in each other will be expressed in the prayers, readings, and blessings you select, and your wedding liturgy will be a wonderful beginning to your married life.

In the following pages, you will find a list of frequently asked questions with brief answers; an outline of the three forms of celebrating matrimony in the Catholic Church; and step-by-step instructions for choosing from the prayers, scripture readings, and blessings available to you.

Begin by reading through the frequently asked questions and their brief answers on pages 3–9. Some questions will not pertain to you, but many will. These will help answer questions regarding issues such as which of the three forms for celebrating matrimony you should use and whether your best man and maid/matron of honor need to be Catholic.

Together for Life is laid out in a way that explains each section of the wedding liturgy, from your entrance into the church as bride and groom to your recessional as husband and wife. In various sections you are given

options from which to choose. This symbol  appears at the beginning of each of these sections so that you can easily see where you are asked to make a choice.

As you make each decision, record it on the selection form found at the back of this booklet or at **TogetherforLifeOnline.com**. As you work through the sections beginning with The Celebration of Matrimony on page 88, you will need to know which form of the rite you will use (see page 10).

Record each choice using both the letter-number code you see in the heading for each prayer, reading, or blessing and the page number on which your selection is found. Once you have completed your selection form, pass it on to the priest or deacon who will preside at your wedding.

There are three forms of celebrating matrimony: (1) Matrimony within Mass, (2) Matrimony without Mass, and (3) Matrimony between a Catholic and a Catechumen or a Non-Christian. The person helping you plan your wedding will guide you in choosing which form of the rite is most appropriate for your wedding. If you use either Form 2 or 3, you will not use pages 98–101 of this booklet, which pertain only to weddings celebrated within Mass (Form 1).

If you will be using Form 3 of the rite, you will be directed to move ahead so that you can make your selections for the concluding parts of your wedding ceremony. Look for the boxed notes like this one to guide you:



When using Form 3 of celebrating matrimony,
please turn to page 111.

The appendixes at the end of this booklet offer information on celebrating marriage between a Catholic and a person who is not Catholic and incorporating cultural and ethnic traditions into your wedding celebrations while respecting the integrity of the Church's liturgy. All of these topics and many more are also addressed at **TogetherforLifeOnline.com**. As you begin your married life, we urge you to visit this site and **JoinedbyGrace.com** for more information about building a strong Christian marriage.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Celebration of Catholic Weddings

My fiancé and I hear the wedding ceremony being called different things. Which is correct: *ceremony*, *liturgy*, or *liturgical celebration*?

Any of these terms is accurate. *Ceremony* has a more universal meaning and is used in reference to both civil and religious wedding celebrations. A *liturgy* or *liturgical celebration* is quite exclusively a religious event. The word *liturgy* comes from a Greek term meaning “the work of the people.” We use it in the Catholic Church to define our communal and regulated worship. By *regulated* we simply mean that Church laws and guidelines determine what can and should be done during these public times of worship.

You will also see the words *rite* and *order* used frequently in this booklet. These terms are used to define an established set of ritual words and actions that we use for particular liturgical celebrations. All of the sacraments, for example, are celebrated using specific rites or orders that have been written and formally approved for use in the Church.

We live in separate cities. Is it okay if one of us makes all the arrangements?

While it makes sense to divide up responsibilities for many of the details that go into your wedding day, it is important that you plan your wedding liturgy together as much as possible. Try to work together in choosing the readings, prayers, form of marriage vows, blessings, and music together. You will also want to talk about and decide the form of your entrance processional and recessional in conversation with parish personnel.

Can our wedding take place outdoors, in my parent’s home, or at a restaurant?

Catholics are required to celebrate their wedding in a Catholic Church, before a priest and two witnesses. If the bride or groom is not Catholic and you wish for the wedding to take place in his or her church, or at some other

location, that is possible with special permission of your home diocesan bishop. It is important to work through your local parish so that the requirements for the Catholic person are fulfilled.

Only one of us is Catholic. Can we still have Mass?

Yes, but it is worth thinking carefully about this. If you want to have Mass, you will need permission from your bishop to do so. The Church says that when either the bride or groom is not Catholic, the second or third form of the celebration (see page 10) should be used unless pastoral concerns suggest otherwise. The wedding ceremony should be as inclusive as possible, and if one of you cannot receive Communion or if you will have a large number of non-Catholic guests, it is preferable to use one of the forms without Mass.

For more information on marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic, please see appendix A (pages 114–116).

Is the wedding still a sacrament if there is no Mass?

The free exchange of consent (vows) between a baptized man and a baptized woman makes the marriage a sacrament, not the act of doing so within the context of a Mass. The Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass is just as valid a celebration of the sacrament as the Order of Celebrating Matrimony within Mass. However, if both bride and groom are Catholic, the normal form of celebrating matrimony is within Mass.

I know that we can be validly married in the Catholic Church, even though my fiancé has never been baptized. What will be different about our wedding ceremony?

The Order of Celebrating Matrimony between a Catholic and a Catechumen or a Non-Christian is similar to the other two forms of the marriage rite, but it will not contain language that pertains to sacrament, since only someone who is baptized receives sacraments. There will be prayers, readings, a blessing, and—most importantly—the exchange of consent or vows. You will not celebrate the Liturgy of the Eucharist or have Communion. As you work through this booklet, you will see notes directing you to the appropriate pages if you will be using this form of the celebration.

For more information on marriage between a Catholic and a non-Christian, please see appendix A (pages 114–116).

Will our non-Catholic family and friends be able to receive Communion if we do have Mass?

The Catholic Church understands the reception of Holy Communion to be the preeminent sign of unity among Christians. Sadly, divisions still exist within the church, and as a result of these divisions, inter-communion is not permitted. If one of you is not Catholic and if you will have a large number of non-Catholics guests, it is suggested that you do not have a Mass so that the issue of who may receive Communion and who may not does not become a source of disunity at your celebration.

For more information on this question, please see “A Pastoral Note on Inter-communion” on page 115.

Can the ordained minister from my fiancé’s church have a role at our wedding?

Yes, with some restrictions. Take up the question with the priest or deacon who will preside at your wedding. In short, you must have *one* person who officially witnesses your marriage or receives your consent (vows), for legal reasons of both state and Church. In other words, your priest and your fiancé’s minister or pastor cannot “co-officiate” using the Catholic rite, nor can they each celebrate their own ritual at your wedding. In certain circumstances, a minister from another church may proclaim a scripture reading, give an exhortation, or pray a blessing at a Catholic wedding so long as he or she has been invited to do so by the pastor of the Catholic parish.

Do our best man and maid/matron of honor both have to be Catholic?

No. According to the Canon Law of the Church, you need two witnesses in addition to the presider. You do not specifically need one man and one woman, and the witnesses do not need to be baptized. They do need to understand what is going on and so must have reached the age of reason and be in full control of their reason. For example, if one or both of your witnesses are intoxicated or otherwise impaired, they may not fill this role.

How many people should be involved in our wedding liturgy?

The Order of Celebrating Matrimony requires the bride and groom, a priest or deacon, and two witnesses (usually your best man and maid/matron of

honor) be present. In addition to those essential participants, you will likely want to have one or more readers and a cantor and/or a musician to lead singing. You may also include others such as groomsmen and bridesmaids. You do not need a flower girl or ring bearer, but they may also be included, provided they are old enough to undertake the role you are giving them. Sometimes ushers are used to help seat your guests when they arrive at the church, and if you are celebrating with Mass, you may need people to bring the bread and wine forward and others to serve as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.

Do we have to sing?

It is customary to sing during Catholic worship, so check with the person helping you plan your wedding liturgy about the diocesan and parish expectations with regard to music and singing. He or she can assist you in choosing what will help and not hinder your celebration.

Can we choose any songs we want for our wedding?

The music chosen for your wedding must be commonly understood as sacred music. The Church has a rich tradition of beautiful hymns and other music from which you can choose what pieces you wish to use at your wedding with the guidance of your parish contact.

Where do we find musicians for the ceremony?

Check with the parish where your wedding will take place. If the parish staff does not include music ministers, they will often help you contact musicians and perhaps provide guidance on hiring them.

We've seen a variety of entrance processions at weddings. Is there a particular way we have to do this? What about the recessional?

The Order of Celebrating Matrimony calls for the bride and groom to be welcomed by the presiding priest or deacon at the doors of the church, similar to how we begin a baptism or the Rite of Welcome with those who want to join the Catholic Church. When this occurs, some couples choose to greet guests at the church entrance as a simple act of hospitality. The entrance procession then begins.

A second option is for the priest or deacon to go to the place where the bride and groom will be seated or he goes to his chair. When they have arrived at their place, he warmly greets the couple.

Various forms of the entrance procession are permissible as long as they conform to local guidelines. One option is to have a formal liturgical procession precede the wedding party, including cross and candle bearers, the reader, and the priest or deacon who will preside. Another option is to have the bridesmaids and groomsmen come in as couples with the bride and groom also processing as a couple and their parents preceding them. Or the bride can be accompanied by her parents and the groom by his. A father walking his daughter down the aisle to be given away is also a common element of the procession. While this was a fitting custom long ago, it may or may not be desirable for the two of you. Your parish contact can tell you what is permissible and help you determine what is most appropriate for your wedding.

May we use readings that are not in the Bible?

The Order of Celebrating Matrimony calls for the use of particular scripture readings as the primary way that God speaks to us about the nature and meaning of the sacrament. The options available for you to use at your Catholic wedding are presented in this booklet along with brief commentaries beginning on page 14. Poems and other readings not found in the Bible may not be used for your wedding liturgy, but consider using them as part of your rehearsal dinner or wedding reception.

May non-Catholics proclaim the readings during the liturgy?

If you choose to use the second or third form of the celebration, which do not include Mass, then yes. However, if you are having Mass, then a Catholic should proclaim the readings. In either situation, the readers should be trained in the ministry, well coached ahead of time in the church, and given time to practice with the microphone that will be used on your wedding day.

Who can be extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion?

The distribution of Holy Communion is a sacred moment in the liturgy. The local parish may have its own policy for extraordinary ministers, but if you are permitted to select extraordinary ministers of Communion, it is essential that they have already been trained.

Do we have to memorize our vows? Can we write our own vows?

While your vows are deeply personal, they are not private. Rather, they are public expressions of your love, faithfulness, and commitment. Couples are

not free to write their own vows but may choose from options found on pages 90–92. Some priests or deacons suggest that couples memorize the vows while others do not.

Do we have to write our own intercessions?

You do not; depending on the liturgical norms of your parish and diocese, it is possible to write your own intercessions or use one of the forms given in this book. This is a question to which the priest or deacon who will preside at your wedding can best respond. Many couples start with one of the intercessions provided in this booklet and add names of deceased family members or friends to it. You may also add particular intentions that might be appropriate given your individual circumstances or a particular season of the year. Guidelines for composing your own intercessions—should you be free to do so—can be found at TogetherforLifeOnline.com.

Can we have a blessing of *arras*? Blessing and placing of the *lazo*?

The Order of Celebrating Matrimony contains two optional blessings: one for the *arras* and another for the *lazo*. The adaptations of these traditions—important for Hispanic and Filipino cultures—have already been approved for use in the United States in Spanish since 2010. Making them available in English translation is intended for occasions when one (or both) of the spouses has this cultural background and the couple wishes to celebrate their wedding in English.

For more information on these traditions visit TogetherforLifeOnline.com, Catholic Weddings, Catholic Wedding Traditions.

May we light a unity candle?

The unity candle is not part of the Catholic celebration of matrimony. The symbolism of “two becoming one” that the unity candle is meant to signify is already present with your exchange of vows and the blessing and exchange of rings. Many parishes ask that if you desire a unity candle, it be used at the rehearsal dinner or reception instead. As is the case with all customs that are not part of the official rite, it is best to speak about this with the priest or deacon who is presiding at your wedding.

For more information on including customs and traditions not part of the official rite, please see appendix B (pages 116–118).

Can we light a candle or do something in memory of a deceased parent?

Honoring those you love who cannot be present at your wedding is a fitting thing to do. For those who have a deceased parent or loved one, a candle lit in their memory or a special flower placed in the church is appropriate. It is also common to include a special remembrance of deceased loved ones in the Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful).

Talk over your options for a memorial during the ceremony with the priest or deacon who will preside at your wedding.

Should we take flowers to a statue of Mary?

Although this custom is not part of *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, many couples who have a devotion to Mary want to take a moment at the conclusion of the liturgy to offer prayers to Mary as they begin their married life together. Mary is a wonderful model of how we are to live out our faith and trust in God. Couples will often bring flowers to the statue of Mary in the church and offer prayers asking for her intercession. This ritual usually takes place at the end of the ceremony. You may also be able to choose a Marian hymn such as the “Ave Maria” to be sung during this time.

Do we need a program or worship aid?

While it is not necessary, a program or worship aid will help your guests by providing musical refrains, prayer and reading responses, and an outline of the order of the ceremony. A handout will be especially helpful for those in attendance who are not familiar with Catholic liturgy. For information about reprinting the scripture readings visit uscgb.org/bible/permissions.

Do we have to go to confession before our wedding?

One of the best ways for Catholics to prepare spiritually for their wedding day is to celebrate the sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation (i.e., go to confession). This may be a big step, especially if you have not been to confession in some time, but it is well worth talking this possibility over with the priest, deacon, sponsor couple, or other marriage preparation contact at the parish. Making time to examine your Christian commitments in confession prior to accepting your new role in the Church as a married person is a wonderful way to experience the healing, forgiveness, and grace Christ offers you.

Three Forms of Celebrating Matrimony

1. Within Mass	2. Without Mass	3. Between a Catholic and a Catechumen or a Non-Christian
<i>Introductory Rites</i>	<i>Introductory Rites</i>	<i>Rite of Reception</i>
Welcome	Welcome	Welcome
Procession	Procession	Procession
Gloria	Collect	
Collect		
<i>Liturgy of the Word</i>	<i>Liturgy of the Word</i>	<i>Liturgy of the Word</i>
Old Testament	Old Testament	One or two readings *at least
Responsorial Psalm	Responsorial Psalm	one must explicitly speak of
New Testament	New Testament	marriage
Gospel	Gospel	Homily
Homily	Homily	
<i>Celebration of Matrimony</i>	<i>Celebration of Matrimony</i>	<i>Celebration of Matrimony</i>
Introduction	Introduction	Introduction
Questions before Consent	Questions before Consent	Questions before Consent
Consent	Consent	Consent
Reception of Consent	Reception of Consent	Reception of Consent
Blessing and Giving of Rings [and Arras]	Blessing and Giving of Rings [and Arras]	Blessing and Giving of Rings [and Arras]
Universal Prayer/Prayer of the Faithful	Universal Prayer/Prayer of the Faithful [Lord's Prayer]	Universal Prayer/ Prayer of the Faithful
	[Blessing and Placing of the <i>Lazo</i> or Veil]	[Blessing and Placing of the <i>Lazo</i> or Veil]
	Nuptial Blessing	Nuptial Blessing
<i>Liturgy of the Eucharist</i>		
Preparation of the Altar	[Holy Communion]	
Eucharistic Prayer	Lord's Prayer	
Lord's Prayer	Sign of Peace	
[Blessing and Placing of the <i>Lazo</i> or Veil]	Communion	
Nuptial Blessing		
Sign of Peace		
Communion		
Prayer after Communion		
<i>Conclusion of the Celebration</i>	<i>Conclusion of the Celebration</i>	<i>Conclusion of the Celebration</i>
Solemn Blessing	Blessing	Blessing
Recessional	Recessional	Recessional

The Introductory Rites

The wedding liturgy begins with a welcome by the priest or deacon at the door of the church, followed by the entrance procession. Alternatively the greeting occurs after the bride and groom have entered and arrived at the places prepared for them. After all arrive in their places, they make the sign of the cross. The priest or deacon greets everyone at this point if this did not happen at the doors of the church. When Mass is celebrated the Gloria is said or sung. Then the Collect (cól-lect) is prayed. Please refer to the FAQs on pages 3–9 for more information about choosing a form of procession.

Collect



The Collect serves to gather the assembled community together in prayer. It helps unite all present in a bond of spiritual friendship and focuses their attention on the liturgical activity about to take place.

Please choose one of the following prayers and record it on your selection form, using the letter-number coding that appears as the heading of each prayer.

A1

The prayer A1 may not be used if the first Nuptial Blessing (M1) is selected.

**O God, who consecrated the bond of Marriage
by so great a mystery
that in the wedding covenant you foreshadow
the Sacrament of Christ and his Church,
grant, we pray, to these your servants,
that what they receive in faith
they may live out in deeds.**

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

A2

O God, who in creating the human race
willed that man and wife should be one,
join, we pray, in a bond of inseparable love
these your servants who are to be united in the covenant of
Marriage,
so that, as you make their love fruitful,
they may become, by your grace, witnesses to charity itself.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

A3

Be attentive to our prayers, O Lord,
and in your kindness
pour out your grace on these your servants (N. and N.),
that, coming together before your altar,
they may be confirmed in love for one another.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

A4

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that these your servants,
now to be joined by the Sacrament of Matrimony,
may grow in the faith they profess
and enrich your Church with faithful offspring.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

A5

Be attentive to our prayers, O Lord,
and in your kindness uphold
what you have established for the increase of the human race,
so that the union you have created
may be kept safe by your assistance.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

A6

O God, who since the beginning of the world
have blessed the increase of offspring,
show favor to our supplications
and pour forth the help of your blessing
on these your servants N. and N.,
so that in the union of Marriage
they may be bound together
in mutual affection,
in likeness of mind,
and in shared holiness.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

The Liturgy of the Word

In the scripture readings proclaimed during Catholic weddings, we hear of God's steadfast love for his people and of our call to make the whole of our lives a response to that love. It is a love story that began at creation and culminated in the death and resurrection of Jesus, God's only beloved Son. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the love of God poured out for us is made visible in the world. It is a love to which you will bear witness through the love you share as husband and wife.

After the scripture readings are proclaimed, the priest or deacon will deliver a homily based on the readings and on the Church's theology of marriage. The purpose of the homily is to help everyone present better understand the Word of God in the context of the celebration of marriage.

Choosing Your Readings



If you use the first or second form of the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, you will choose one reading from the Old Testament, a Responsorial Psalm, a reading from the New Testament, and a reading from one of the gospels. If you use the third form, you will choose one, two, or three readings. At least one reading must speak explicitly about marriage. These are marked with an asterisk after the letter-number combination.

Before the Gospel, an Alleluia or Gospel Verse is sung. For this and the Responsorial Psalm, you will work with the parish music director to learn which settings are available to you. Each scripture passage is followed in this booklet by a brief commentary called "The Word Brought Home" to help you in your selections.

Read through the readings and commentaries and choose which you want used for your wedding. Write your choices on the selection form, using the letter-number combination that appears in the heading for the reading. Also record the page number.

The number you see in parentheses is the lectionary number for that reading. The lectionary is the book of scripture readings we use for liturgical celebrations. This number will help your presider or his delegate mark the lectionary for your rehearsal and wedding.