

Preparing for the Sacrament of Marriage

Guidelines for the Diocese of Dodge City promulgated March 19, 1998 (Revised February 1, 2009)

These guidelines are intended to assist engaged couples in preparing for marriage in the Catholic Church. The Scriptures continually remind us that the love and unity between husband and wife are sacred and beautiful—an image of the unity of Christ with His Church. Mindful that most couples preparing for marriage have never done this before, we offer these guidelines in the hope that the sacredness and beauty of the Sacrament of Marriage will be ever more apparent, that hearts will be touched by God’s love, and that the grace of God will be manifest as these guidelines are followed.

Elements of Marriage Preparation are three: an instrument, an event and sessions with a priest or pastoral minister.

1. Instrument – Completing the FOCCUS survey and subsequent discussions of the results.
2. Event – Attendance at an Engaged Encounter or couple-to-couple group session.
3. Sessions – Other meetings with the priest or pastoral minister who is to be particularly concerned to help the couple develop an understanding and appreciation of the sacrament, especially the liturgical and spiritual aspects of marriage.
4. If, in a particular circumstance, participation in the above-prescribed marriage preparation program is impossible or extremely inconvenient (e.g., because of military service or because a student is away at college), the couple, in cooperation with the priest who will witness the marriage, may take part in any marriage preparation program approved for use in another diocese. In such a case, the couple is to present to the priest verification of their participation in the other diocese’s preparation program.

If this involves a couple with other circumstances (one or both having a previous marriage, senior couples, couples that have been civilly married for some time, etc.), the elements of the preparation include sessions with a priest or pastoral minister, as well as an instrument and event that seems best suited to the needs of the couple.

Steps toward the Rite of Marriage

Contact the priest of the parish. A minimum of four months preparation is required. An appointment will be made with the couple to discuss their marriage plans. At this time a TENTATIVE date for the wedding may be set and the other details that need attention before the wedding date can be confirmed. Among these details are:

- a. participation in an event, such as Engaged Encounter or a couple-to-couple group session
- b. completion of an instrument, such as FOCCUS
The Engaged Encounter and FOCCUS instrument are both designed to help the couple take a better look at their relationship and to discover areas where growth may be needed.
- c. sessions with the priest or pastoral minister. During these meetings the data from the FOCCUS instrument will be discussed and the information needed for parish records will be obtained. This will also be a time that the details of wedding ceremony can be discussed. A booklet is available which provides options for choosing prayers and readings to be used in the wedding liturgy.
- d. gathering documents: a recently issued copy (dated within six months) of the Catholic party’s baptism certificate with other sacramental notations included, and a copy of the baptized non-Catholic’s baptism certificate (if it can be obtained) or some other copy of the record of baptism.

Dysfunctional Behavior or Background

If either party has an alcohol or drug problem, or if either party comes from a dysfunctional family of origin, a professional evaluation or assessment is recommended.

Cohabitation

If the couple is cohabiting, this issue must be address during the preparation. Cohabitation, however, is not an impediment for the couple to enter marriage.

Marriage of Minors

Effective 1 July 2006 in the State of Kansas no one under the age of 18 may get married without the approval of parents or a judge. The couple is to be evaluated by a counselor at Catholic Social Service whose task will be to evaluate the affective maturity and capacity of the couple to fulfill the obligations of marriage. The couple must sign a release of confidentiality so that the counselor may communicate his or her assessment to the priest or pastoral minister working with the couple. The cost is the responsibility of the couple.

Setting the Wedding Date

The date you request for your wedding is tentative until your marriage preparation is complete. The date of the wedding shall be confirmed only after the assessment has been made of the couple's readiness for marriage. Therefore, do not have invitations printed until the priest or deacon presiding at the wedding has confirmed the date.

Appropriate Dates

Weddings are appropriate during the regularly scheduled Sunday liturgies for couples in which both parties are practicing Catholics. Weddings may not be celebrated on Ash Wednesday or during the Easter Triduum. Weddings during the Season of Lent are discouraged due to the penitential nature of the Lenten season.

Place to Celebrate Marriage

A marriage between two Catholics or between a Catholic party and a baptized non-Catholic party is to be celebrated in a parish church. It can be celebrated in another Catholic Church with the permission of the local ordinary or pastor of the Catholic party. A marriage between a Catholic and an unbaptized person can be celebrated in a church or in another suitable place.

At least one of the parties must be a registered member of the parish; or, the parents of the bride or the groom must be registered in the parish. Only by exception would a wedding be celebrated in another church, and then with the permission of the pastor of the Catholic party.

Role of a Priest in a non-Catholic Church

With the previous authorization of the bishop and if invited to do so, a priest or deacon may attend or participate in some way in the celebration of mixed marriage situations where the dispensation from canonical form has been granted. In this case there may be only one ceremony in which the presiding minister receives the marriage vows from both parties. At the invitation of the minister, the priest or deacon may offer appropriate prayers, read from scripture, give a brief exhortation and bless the couple.

Reconciliation

Catholics are encouraged to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to the marriage ceremony. Arrangement may be made with any priest.

Interfaith Marriage – Promise of the Catholic Party

The Catholic party in an interfaith marriage is required to make a solemn promise to God which states: *“As a Catholic wishing to enter into marriage with a non-Catholic, I take this occasion to re-affirm my Faith in Jesus Christ and, with God’s help, I intend to continue living that Faith in the Catholic Church. I am aware of my serious obligations regarding the Faith, and I promise to do all in my power to share the Faith I have received with our children by having them baptized and reared as Catholics.”*

The Worship Space

Flowers

Ideally, only real, natural flowers, plants and/or greenery may be used in the decoration of the church. The size of the arrangement should be scaled to the size of the space. Consult the pastor before considering decorations for the ends of pews or other furnishings.

Altar

No decorations may be placed on the altar, and no church furniture may be moved without permission.

Seasonal Decorations

Flowers and/or decorations are not allowed during the Lenten season. Special seasonal decorations in the worship space may not be changed.

Candles

Consult the pastor regarding the use of candles/candelabra. In the Catholic tradition, the lighting of candles is the duty of altar servers. It is the couple's responsibility to clean any wax drippings on the floor.

Clean Up

Please designate someone to be responsible for removing decorations and cleaning up the church immediately following the wedding ceremony.

Rice, etc.

Ordinarily, rice, wheat, birdseed, confetti, silly string, balloons, etc. may not be thrown or released on church property. Individual parishes may permit these in the social hall or outdoor space, if it is judged to be in the best interest of all concerned.

Guest Book

Guest books and receiving lines are not permitted at the church; however, they may be appropriate at the reception.

Rehearsal and Photography

Scheduling

All parties need to be at the rehearsal on time. This is especially important if other functions are scheduled in the church. The couple is to bring the marriage license to the rehearsal and give it to the priest or deacon at that time. Normally only those in the wedding ceremony are present for the rehearsal.

Pictures

It is recommended that pictures be taken prior to the ceremony so the couple may enjoy the celebration with guests. Pictures, whether taken by a photographer or by guests, are not recommended during the ceremony. Videos may or may not be permitted during the ceremony, depending upon the architecture and arrangement of the worship space and the judgment of the pastor. Please remind the photographer that the church (particularly the altar area) is a sacred place and not just a photographic background. No photographic backdrops may be set up. No church furnishings may be moved for picture taking or placement of video cameras. Please discuss this matter with the presiding priest or deacon as he may have some helpful suggestions.

No food or drinks are allowed in the church

The Wedding Ceremony

Planning

The presiding priest or deacon at the wedding will assist the couple in planning the ceremony according to the *Rite of Marriage*.

Forms of Liturgy

Marriage of two baptized Catholics normally takes place during the celebration of a Nuptial Mass. The bishop has granted permission for the wedding of a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic, or a Catholic and an unbaptized person to be celebrated within Mass if a just cause exists. However, liturgical norms concerning reception of the Eucharist by non-Catholics must be observed. In an interfaith situation, however, a wedding liturgy outside of Mass may be more appropriate and more familiar to non-Catholic families and guests.

The Procession

The procession of the wedding party at the beginning of a wedding is optional. If there is to be a procession, the following serves as a guide.

According to *The Rite of Marriage* #20, “If there is a procession to the altar, the ministers go first, followed by the priest, and then the bride and the bridegroom. According to local custom, they may be escorted by at least their parents and the two witnesses. Meanwhile, the entrance song is sung.”

Role of a non-Catholic Minister in the Catholic Church

Upon the request of the couple, the local ordinary may permit the priest to invite the minister of the non-Catholic party to participate in the celebration of the marriage, offer prayers, read from scripture, give a brief exhortation and bless the couple. In this case there may be only one ceremony in which the priest receives the marriage vows from both parties.

Other Ministries

The couple may be asked to provide various liturgical ministers (lectors, altar servers, musicians, gift bearers, Eucharistic ministers, etc.). These persons should be Catholic and chosen primarily for their ability to assist in the ceremony. It is best to choose people who are already exercising these ministries. Those chosen need to be old enough to perform their role without difficulty. Maturity is an important consideration when choosing a ring bearer and flower girl.

Worship Aids

The purpose of a worship aid (a paper or booklet to guide the assembly through the service) is to facilitate the active participation of the people. Worship aids must follow all necessary copyright laws and are printed at the couple’s expense. Aids are to be reviewed by the priest or deacon prior to printing.

Unity Candle

The Unity Candle is not an element of the *Rite of Marriage* and need not be used. If the Unity Candle is important to the couple, they might want to use it at the reception.

Cultural Customs

Customs such as *arras* (coins), *lazo*, presentation of flowers to Mary, etc. should be discussed with the priest or deacon as to their appropriate inclusion in the celebration.

Music

The following quote from the United States Bishop’s document *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* © 2007 provides helpful guidance: “Particular decisions about choice and placement of wedding music should be based on three judgments...the liturgical judgment, the pastoral judgment and the musical judgment. All three of these judgments must be taken into account, since they are aspects of a single judgment. ... Secular music, even though it may emphasize the love of the spouses for one another, is not appropriate for the Sacred Liturgy. Songs that are chosen for the Liturgy should be appropriate for the celebration and express the faith of the Church.” (#220)

If a song has special meaning for the couple but is not suitable for use in the church, consideration may be given to using it in a creative way at the wedding reception where it is appropriate and may be enjoyed.

Solos

If solos are used, they are most appropriate as preludes (before the ceremony begins), although instrumental music is preferable. The Lord’s Prayer is never appropriate as a solo during the Eucharistic liturgy in the Church.

Recorded music is not appropriate on its own or as an accompaniment.