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A. PURPOSE OF GUIDELINES

Matrimony is one of the seven Sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church. As such, the marriage ceremony must maintain the norms of good sacramental liturgy. The Sunday liturgy sets the tone and direction for the marriage liturgy.

The primary issue in deciding the elements of the wedding ceremony is being mindful that marriage is a Sacrament, an outward sign of inward grace, instituted by Christ for our sanctification. The bride and groom are the ministers of the Sacrament and should ascribe reverence and dignity to this sacred ceremony. The priest is the witness.

Parish ministers can provide aid and support to couples in planning a prayerful Liturgy. The focus should be on encouraging the community to participate, in song and in prayer, as witnesses to this human contract ratified by divine grace.

In order that Church norms are followed, the planning of the marriage Liturgy and the choosing of appropriate music should be a cooperative effort by the couple, the presider, and the parish music director. The following guidelines are presented to parish ministers who will assist in planning the Rite of Marriage.

B. INTRODUCTION

Marriage in the Catholic Church is a holy and spiritual event, to be celebrated by and with the entire community in attendance. These witnesses and invited guests have come to offer their prayers and support for the newlyweds, and do so by being full, active participants in the wedding Liturgy. The guests pray together and sing together in praise of God's love for us all in conjunction with the couple's love for one another.

1. The Sacrament of Marriage can be celebrated on its own, or within the context of the Mass. The marriage ceremony without a Mass consists of:
 1. Introductory Rite
 2. Liturgy of the Word
 3. Sacrament of Marriage
 4. Concluding Rite
2. The marriage ceremony within a Mass consists of:
 1. Introductory Rite
 2. Liturgy of the Word
 3. Sacrament of Marriage
 4. Liturgy of the Eucharist
 5. Concluding Rite

C. PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

1. DOCUMENTS NEEDED:

- A. A Baptismal Certificate issued within the previous six months by the Catholic party's parish of Baptism, with all notations. In the case that the notations do not include information relative to the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation, a separate Confirmation Certificate should be requested from the Catholic party's parish of Confirmation.
- B. In the case of a baptized non-Catholic, if the denomination keeps baptismal records and issues certificates of Baptism, either a copy of the original or a recently issued certificate should be placed in the prenuptial file.
- C. A completed Pre-Nuptial Investigation form, usually referred to as the MA and MB Forms (available at www.dwc.org).
- D. Proof of completion of some form of Sacramental Preparation for Marriage. Even if Marriage preparation was completed in the same Parish or by the same Priest, a written record should still be placed in the prenuptial file.
- E. A valid Marriage License granted by the clerk of the county in which the Marriage is to take place. The license is usually valid for 60 days from the date that it is granted.
- F. If the Catholic party is from another diocese, delegation to witness the Marriage and Testimonial letters from the diocese are necessary. Details concerning procedures when one or both parties are from another diocese are given on the MA form.
- G. When either party has been previously married:
 - If there has been a previous valid marriage, proof of the dissolution of the bond is required, such as a Death Certificate.
 - If there has been a previous invalid marriage, a Decree of Nullity from a competent ecclesiastical tribunal is required.
- H. If a marriage is being validated, a copy of the marriage certificate for the attempted marriage is to be obtained.

2. PRENUPTIAL FILE

- A. The above documents are to be retained in a prenuptial file.
- B. If the cleric who is preparing the couple for marriage has any concerns about the couple's readiness for marriage, he should make a written note of these concerns and place them in the prenuptial file, in addition to discussing these concerns with the couple.
- C. The prenuptial file is to be retained permanently.
- D. The prenuptial file is to be kept in the territorial parish, in which the place of marriage is located. The marriage must be recorded in the Sacramental Register of the same territorial parish, as well as the Baptismal Record of the parties.
- E. If the couple being prepared for marriage intend to contract marriage in the territory of another Diocese, the prenuptial file together with a covering letter stating the place and date of the intended marriage should be sent to:

The Tribunal
Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston
PO Box 230
Wheeling, WV 26003

If the couple was prepared for marriage in the territory of another Diocese, the prenuptial file should be sent to the parish through the mediation of the Diocesan Tribunal. If the parish receives the prenuptial file directly, it should be sent the Tribunal for a *nihil obstat*, after which it will be returned to the parish of marriage.

3. REGULATIONS:

A. Age:

1. According to West Virginia Law:
a person over 18 may marry without parental consent;
a female who is 16 years old but not yet 18 years old may marry with parental consent.
2. *The Code of Canon Law* set a lower age limit for both genders; however, the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston urges its clergy to respect the State Law (while not establishing an invalidating law).
3. If either party is under 18, that individual's parents should be consulted. Exceptions to this general rule may be made according to the cleric's pastoral judgment.
4. In addition to concerns about chronological age, the pastor must be reasonably certain that the couple is psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually ready for marriage and able to fulfill the rights and responsibilities associated with marriage. This calls for a certain degree of maturity independent of the legal requirements of age.

B. Permissions:

1. Mixed Religion Marriage (cannons 1124-1129): this permission is required when a Catholic wishes to marry a baptized, non-Catholic.
2. For the purposes of Marriage, the Church recognizes as valid the baptism of non-Catholic Christians imparted by immersion, infusion, or sprinkling and the invocation of the Trinity. If baptism was administered in any other way or if the individual received baptism from a minister of one of the following ecclesial communities, a Dispensation from Disparity of Cult should be requested:
3. Special circumstances related to one or both parties to a marriage (canon 1071)

C. Dispensations:

1. Disparity of Cult
(Catholic and non-baptized person)
2. Dispensation from canonical form. For example, should the bride or groom be a member of any other faith, the couple might, for serious reasons, wish to be married in that party's church with the minister of that church as the official witness of their marriage. Special permission must be obtained for the Catholic party to marry in these circumstances in light of the serious reasons for this choice. In this case the minister of the church in question presides at a ceremony in his/her church just as the Catholic priest presides at a ceremony in the Catholic church. When possible, a Catholic priest is to be present. (A minister of the other church might be present at the wedding in the Catholic church.)
3. Dispensation from consanguinity affinity and crimen.
4. Occasionally other impediments may be present. Those assisting in the preparation of couples for marriage must be familiar with Canons 1073 to 1094 concerning impediments.

The above dispensations are obtained through the Chancery office and the detailed guidelines on the form for dispensation are to be studied carefully. If the Catholic party does not belong to the Latin Rite, the dispensation and delegation to marry the couple will have to be sought from the chancery office of the appropriate Rite. In general, the Rite of a person is determined by the Rite of the father and not by the church of Baptism.

D. Time:

Generally, marriage may be celebrated at any time of the year, on any day and at any time of the day. The following is of important note:

1. The former “closed seasons” for marriage are abolished. “When a marriage is celebrated during Advent or Lent or other days of penance, the parish priest should advise the couple to take into consideration the special nature of these times.” While the couple should be advised to avoid “undue solemnity” during penitential seasons, it would seem better to permit “solemnity” rather than alienate the wedding party.
2. In the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, a wedding with or without a Eucharistic Liturgy may take place in church any time the Eucharistic Liturgy is allowed, except during established hours for reconciliation, devotions or other services which are for the general welfare of the parish. No pastor should change such services to accommodate a wedding.
3. In the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, the present regulation of no weddings on Sunday is to be continued.
4. The priest/deacon is to advise parishioners not to set the wedding date until he deems the couple ready for marriage and until marriage preparation has begun.

E. Banns

1. The banns of marriage are to be published by the proper pastor of the parties three successive Sundays prior to the marriage. Banns may be published for mixed marriages in accordance with the provisions of Canon 1067. For dispensation from the banns of marriage concerning two Catholics, apply to the chancery.

F. Witnesses:

Who may be chosen:

Witnesses are to be sufficiently mature for this role. They may be Catholic or non-Catholic. If Catholic they are to be practicing Catholics and if the witnesses, Catholic or non-Catholic, are married they are to be validly married.

G. The Ministers:

1. Properly speaking, the bride and groom are the ministers of the sacrament of marriage. However, an ordained minister of the church is required for a valid marriage. He is to ask and receive the consent of the couple. The usual minister for this is either a priest or a deacon.
2. It is not permitted to have two religious marriage services or to have a single service in which both the Catholic marriage ritual and a non-Catholic marriage ritual are celebrated jointly or successively. The officiating minister alone must receive the exchange of marriage vows from the couple and he/she alone signs the license.
3. A minister of another church may be invited to participate in the Catholic marriage service by giving additional prayers, blessings, or words of greeting or exhortation. The minister may also be invited to read a lesson and/or to preach if the marriage takes place outside of the Eucharist Liturgy.

4. In the case where there has been a dispensation from the Catholic canonical form and the priest has been invited to participate in the marriage service, he may do so by giving additional prayers, blessings, or words of greeting or exhortation. The priest, if invited, may also read a lesson and/or preach.
5. West Virginia civil law requires that all ministers be registered (bonded) to perform marriage in the state. The bond is valid for the lifetime of the minister.

H. Place:

1. The general rule is that the place of marriage should be a religious edifice, even when a dispensation from the canonical form has been granted. Permission of the chancery is needed for any exception to the rule.
2. The ordinary place of marriage is the parish church of either the bride or the groom.
3. The celebration of marriage in chapels of convents, religious houses, and seminaries is forbidden by the general law of the church. Consult the chancery concerning local exceptions.
4. Only under very special and extraordinary circumstances with the Ordinary's permission is a marriage to take place in a private home.
5. A dispensation from canonical form is granted with the understanding that the marriage service is to be celebrated in a religious edifice.
6. A campus ministry chaplain may witness the sacrament of marriage in the campus chapel for the members of the campus catholic community of a student or of a graduate within a month following graduation. The chaplain must follow the same canonical procedures as would apply in the usual parish situation. He must be sure that he is properly delegated.
7. On occasion, a priest or deacon may be requested to witness a mixed marriage in a Protestant church. The following requirements for mixed marriages by a priest or deacon are to be observed:
 - a. All Canonical requirements as well as the usual Pre-nuptial Investigation must be fulfilled. The appropriate dispensation permission for a mixed marriage is to be obtained.
 - b. The priest officiating at marriage must have delegation from the local Catholic pastor, if the church is located outside of the celebrant's parish limits. He alone must receive the exchange of marriage vows from the couple. He cannot co-witness the marriage with another minister.
 - c. The minister of another faith must be in agreement with the arrangement and give full cooperation. He may assist at the marriage in the same way, in which he is permitted to assist at a mixed marriage in a Catholic church. (cf D, II, D, 3, b.)
 - d. The pre-marriage file should be kept in the territorial parish, in which the church of marriage is located and the marriage must be recorded in that territorial parish, as well as in the church books where the marriage was celebrated.
 - e. Notification of the marriage to the civil authorities, as well as to the church where the Catholic party was baptized is the responsibility of the priest officiating.

D. MUSIC AND THE MARRIAGE LITURGY

Music is an integral part of the celebration of marriage and can greatly enhance the Liturgy. In pastoral practice, however, tensions often arise when deciding what selections are to be included in the wedding ceremony.

The goal in all the music chosen for a wedding Liturgy is an experience of communal prayer. The singing of the assembly is preferred, even though a vocal soloist or choir may be appropriate at certain times before and during the Liturgy. Solo or instrumental pieces should draw the assembly to prayer and unity, rather than provide entertainment.

A song that may have personal meaning for the bride and groom is only appropriate if it also expresses a Christian view of love and worship. Texts should affirm a relationship with God. Secular music has no place in a church setting.

1. Primary Reference for Liturgical Music

In 2008, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, which replaces *Music in Catholic Worship* and *Liturgical Music Today*. Every parish should have a copy of *Sing to the Lord* (STL) at hand when planning any Liturgy that includes music:

It is helpful for a diocese or parish to have a definitive but flexible policy that provides clear guidance and also allows for pastoral sensitivity regarding wedding music. This policy should be communicated early to couples as a normal part of their preparation in order to avoid last-minute crises and misunderstandings (STL, 219).

The Church clearly affirms the role within worship of the entire liturgical assembly, and urges all members to participate fully. This goal is to be considered before all else. Besides the internal participation of listening to raise our minds to God, participation must also be external, reinforced by singing acclamations, responses, and songs of praise for the honor and glory of the Most Blessed Trinity (STL, 10-14).

Choices and placement of wedding music within the Liturgy should be based on all of the three judgments used to determine the appropriateness of the musical selections:

- a. **The Liturgical Judgment:** *Is this composition capable of meeting the structural and textual requirements set forth by the liturgical books for this particular rite* (STL, 127)?
Balance should be sought so that elements of less importance in the Liturgy do not overshadow the more important ones. The text of the music should support the liturgical text and convey meaning faithful to the teaching of the Church (STL, 128).
- b. **The Pastoral Judgment:** Does this composition open the hearts of this assembly, and draw them closer, to the holy mysteries being celebrated? Does it express the faith that God has planted in their hearts (STL, 130)?
- c. **The Musical Judgment:** Is this composition technically, aesthetically, and expressively worthy of the mysteries being celebrated (STL, 134)?

Secular music is inappropriate for the Liturgy and is best used at the wedding reception, the rehearsal dinner, or other wedding and engagement festivities.

Recorded Music: Recorded music lacks the authenticity provided by a living liturgical assembly gathered for the Sacred Liturgy. It should never become a substitute for the community's singing (STL, 93-94).

Copyright: It is encouraged that printed music be included in wedding programs as worship aids. Couples should be made aware that published music is protected by copyright laws. Most parishes have purchased licenses to reproduce music for the use of liturgical assemblies. Assistance and advice should be offered to the couple to see that composers and publishers are justly compensated for use of their works, if not covered under the parish's license (see STL, 105-109).

Communication: A critical pastoral step in the selection of appropriate sacred wedding music is an early encounter between the parish music director and the engaged couple. At that time, the director, or the musician involved, can explain these basic principles and suggest or demonstrate music that may be less familiar to the couple, but nevertheless beautiful. Parishes that do not have a regular music director should designate someone to meet with couples preparing for their wedding. Even in the smallest of parishes, the three judgments apply.

SELECTING MUSIC

Most couples seem to be more interested in personal "wedding songs" than with music intended for liturgies. Often they will leave the choice of the "regular" liturgical music to the parish musician, or depend heavily on him/her for guidance. Couples should be directed toward selecting liturgical music and songs that engage the community and focus on God's love.

It is important for the Music Director to communicate to the couple the reasons why specific music is not appropriate for the liturgy. (*See Appendix A for suggested song selections*)

Special wedding music, often vocal solos, fits into the Liturgy only during prelude music, the Preparation of Gifts, and Communion Meditation. The selection of this music must also meet the standards of the three judgments: Liturgical, Pastoral, and Musical.

Basic Criteria for Selecting Special Music for Weddings

- a. Will this music enable the couple and the assembly to worship God?
- b. Does this music express the faith of the couple and the Church, praise God for the gifts of life, tell of His love, or ask for God's blessing on this marriage?
- c. Can the sentiments expressed in the music be shared by the whole assembly?
- d. Is the music sufficiently beautiful as to be worthy of the Sacrament of Matrimony?
- e. Can the music be sung and played well by the persons involved?
- f. Inappropriate music includes Wagner's "Bridal Chorus" (Here Comes the Bride), which accompanies an illicit ceremony, a bedroom fiasco, and betrayal in the opera "Lohengrin." Likewise, Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" accompanies a farcical wedding in "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Such sentimental pieces and secular songs associated with the theater or entertainment fail to enhance the mystery and reverence of sacramental worship.

THE MUSICIANS

The parish music director has the primary responsibility for overseeing all the liturgical music. Guest musicians should know that they are to accompany and enable the singing and prayer of the assembly. Soloists should be made aware of their ministerial role, and should not draw attention to themselves. A well-trained cantor facilitates the participation of the assembly. Guest musicians must follow parish policies.

E. ORDER OF SERVICE

1. Prelude: While the congregation is gathering, music may be performed by instrumentalists, choir, or vocal soloists. The function of this prelude music is to unite the thoughts of all present toward the Sacred Liturgy and to prepare them for the marriage celebration. The three judgments—Liturgical, Pastoral, and Musical—should be considered when choosing this music. Secular music that cannot be used during the ceremony is likewise not appropriate at this time.

2. Introductory Rite: The purpose of the entrance music is to open the celebration as a first act of worship, deepen the unity of those gathered, introduce them to the mystery of the season or feast, and accompany the procession. *The Rite of Marriage* (20) recommends that:

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.

The procession may be accompanied by instrumental music, which should be followed by an entrance song. The assembly is invited to sing the entrance song either during or after the procession to help them be participants rather than spectators. The selected song should be familiar and express joy.

3. Liturgy of the Word: The two musical moments during the Liturgy of the Word are the **Psalm** and **Gospel Acclamation**. The psalm should be sung. The responsorial style is preferred: a cantor sings the simple refrain, invites the assembly to repeat it, then sings the verses and indicates when the assembly responds with the refrain. The Gospel Acclamation is also to be sung. If not sung, it is to be omitted.

4. Rite of Marriage: There is no designated place for music in the Rite of Marriage. A brief hymn or acclamation may be sung by the whole community at the conclusion of the rite to show support and affirmation. While this is acceptable, it is not necessary.

5. Unity Candle: Clergy and liturgists question the practice of lighting a Unity Candle because there is no clear understanding of this gesture and it has no real history or tradition behind it. It appears as a duplication of what has already been said and symbolized by the rings. For this reason, its use is not recommended and no suggestions are made for music.

6. Liturgy of the Eucharist

a. Preparation Rite: *The procession is accompanied by an Offertory chant or song which continues at least until the gifts have been placed on the altar. . . Instrumental music is also appropriate (STL, 173-174 [GIRM 68-69]).*

b. Eucharistic Acclamations: The Eucharistic Prayer is the prayer of the entire community. The Eucharistic Acclamations (Holy Holy, Memorial Acclamation, and Amen) should be sung in settings familiar to the congregation. The cantor or choir should lead the assembly in these sung acclamations. Solos at this time are not appropriate.

The singing of the acclamations is preferred. But, if musical settings would keep the majority of people from participating in the acclamations, it would be better not to sing them, but to recite them together. The words should be printed in the worship aid. These acclamations belong to all the people and their participation is important.

c. Communion Rite: The “Our Father” is to be chanted or recited by the assembly. A vocal solo or a musical setting not familiar to most of those gathered is inappropriate.

d. Sign of Peace: The brief period of time needed to exchange the Sign of Peace should not be protracted by the singing of a song (SL 187).

e. Fraction Rite (Breaking of Bread): The Lamb of God is sung during the Fraction Rite. The singing of the litany should last as long as the time it takes for the presider to divide up the hosts.

f. Communion Song: The communion song accompanies the procession and expresses our unity in the Body and Blood of Christ. It begins while the priest is receiving the Sacrament and continues until the procession has ended. It is preferred that one Communion song be used for the entire communion procession. A song with a simple refrain that can be sung by the people as they process is desirable. Verses may be sung by the cantor or choir. *The singing of the people should be preeminent* (STL, 189).

g. Communion Meditation: When the distribution of Communion is finished, a psalm or other canticle or hymn of praise may be sung. This song *should never draw undue attention to the choir or other musicians* (STL, 196). Silence is also appropriate.

Ethnic customs: There are a number of practices that are incorporated into the approved rites of various cultural or ethnic groups. Examples include the *arras* (coins), *lazo*, and *mantilla* (veil). To gain more insight into Hispanic wedding rituals, the bilingual book, *Gift and Promise, Don y Promesa* published by Oregon Catholic Press, is recommended.

Other inappropriate ceremonies: There are some ceremonies that have developed within the liturgy that are not appropriate, such as the “sand” ceremony, where couples mix together different colored sand. If any question arises concerning a special ceremony, please contact the Office of Worship and Sacraments.

7. Concluding Rite: The dismissal is followed immediately by strong, joyous recessional music, which may be a hymn sung by the assembly or choir, or an instrumental selection. This conclusion creates a bridge between the celebration of the marriage Liturgy and the remaining events after the Liturgy.

F. CONCLUSION

Good weekly liturgical celebrations serve as teaching models and will greatly assist in the preparation of the Rite of Marriage.

These guidelines should not be considered as restrictions, but as tools to help parishes develop policy that will protect the integrity of the Rite of Marriage

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