

Policies of the Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

Policy # 120.30

Celebrating Matrimony

Approved By: Most Reverend James V. Johnston, DD
Effective: November 25, 2024

Weddings

I. Overview

The diocesan policy on weddings is based on the 2016 English and Spanish editions of the Catholic Church's *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*. All of the numbers below refer back to that order of service, presume its usage, and clarify some points for local celebrations. Previous editions of the Order may not be used in the United States.

II. Introduction

15. "Sufficient time is required for a suitable preparation for Marriage."

- Parishes should make public the amount of time that they require for suitable marriage preparation.
- The Diocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life asks couples to contact the parish 9 months in advance of the desired date for the wedding. Pastors, in consultation with Chancellor or Judicial Vicar, may prudently judge special requests for shorter time.

18. "Catholics who have not yet received the Sacrament of Confirmation are to receive it to complete their Christian Initiation before they are admitted to Marriage if this can be done without grave inconvenience."

- Unconfirmed, engaged Catholics are to make every effort to prepare for and receive the sacrament of confirmation before the wedding. Parishes are to offer appropriate formation. Ordinarily the bishop confirms adult Catholics of the diocese once a year at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception on the first or second Wednesday of June; however, if prepared fully they may receive Confirmation before the Bishop at other times.
- Unconfirmed, engaged Catholics who find the preparation and celebration of confirmation a grave inconvenience may still be married in the Church, but they should prepare for and present themselves for confirmation as soon as possible after the wedding.
- If an unconfirmed Catholic has entered a marriage not recognized by the Church, the marriage must be convalidated before the reception of confirmation.

27. "The Marriage is to be celebrated in the parish of one or other of the engaged persons, or elsewhere with the permission of the proper Ordinary or pastor."

- Weddings are to be conducted in Catholic Church buildings. Exceptions are only permitted by the Bishop for a serious reason, on a case by case basis, in writing. Requests for exceptions must be provided in writing with reasons delineated in a letter

addressed to the Bishop and signed by the engaged couple or at least the Catholic party several months prior to the desired celebration of the marriage.

29. Attention should be given “to local customs, which may be observed if appropriate.” (See also 41. 7).

- The Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph encourages openness to cultural diversity as well as sensitivity to the various traditions pertaining to marriage. It permits customs such as the unity candle and the presentation of flowers to an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The pastor may judge the appropriateness of family traditions and other requests on the basis of “local customs.” As with music (see 30 below), he should permit these customs only if they “express the faith of the Church.”
- Certain versions of the entrance procession may also be considered local custom.
- Additional “godparents” are common in some traditions, such as Hispanic and Filipino cultures. These may be included in the ceremony; for example, by presenting the *arras* or the *lazo*.

30. Music sung at weddings “should express the faith of the Church, with attention paid to the importance of the Responsorial Psalm within the Liturgy of the Word. What is said concerning the chants applies also to the selection of other musical works.”

- All music for weddings should be suited to the sacredness of the ceremony, including the preludes, which prepare the assembly for worship.
- The person who supervises liturgical music for the parish also oversees the selection of music and choice of musicians for weddings.
- Congregational music is to be included as much as possible. As congregations sing on Sundays, so they should be invited to sing at weddings.
- The acclamation after the reception of the consent (e.g., 65) is an opportunity for congregational singing.
- Classical music is usually acceptable as sacred music, which potentially could include the two traditional instrumental marches for the organ. However, the pastor may determine the suitability of such music for weddings in his parish.
- Suggestions for wedding music from the local chapters of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians are posted on the website of the diocesan Office for Divine Worship.
- According to the USCCB’s *Sing to the Lord*, “Recorded music... should not, as a general norm, be used within the Liturgy” (93).

31. “The festive character of the celebration of Marriage should be suitably expressed even in the manner of decorating the church.”

- Those preparing the decorations for the wedding should respect the seasonal decorations that the church already has in place.
- The pastor may establish written, even seasonal, limitations on decorations in the parish church.

32. “If a Marriage is celebrated on a day having a penitential character, especially during Lent, the pastor is to counsel the spouses to take into account the special nature of that day.”

- Weddings are permissible during Lent. The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* even includes a special gospel acclamation for weddings in Lent (56).
- GIRM 305 permits flowers during Lent on *Lætare* Sunday, Solemnities and Feasts. Diocesan policy considers weddings within that ‘feast’ category and permits flowers for their celebration during Lent.

34. “Whenever Marriage is celebrated within Mass, the Ritual Mass ‘The Celebration of Marriage’ is used with sacred vestments of the color white or of a festive color. On those days listed in nos. 1-4 of the Table of Liturgical Days, however, the Mass of the day is used with its own readings, with inclusion of the Nuptial Blessing and, if appropriate the proper formula for the final blessing.”

- Weddings may be celebrated on any day except Good Friday and Holy Saturday—this prohibition includes the non-celebration of marriages and convalidations of RCIA participants on Holy Saturday (32).
- Any weddings without Mass include readings drawn from the lectionary’s Ritual Mass “The Celebration of Marriage.”
- Those preparing the liturgy are to consult the Table of Liturgical Days for the sake of weddings that take place within Mass.
- For example, a wedding Mass on a Saturday evening in Ordinary Time may use the complete Ritual Mass with its readings and presidential prayers.
- However, a wedding Mass on a Saturday evening in Advent, Lent, or Easter Time requires the readings and presidential prayers of the pertinent Sunday liturgy.
- The two local parish solemnities—the anniversary of the dedication of the church and the day associated with the title of the church—outrank the Ritual Mass and determine the readings and presidential prayers at any wedding celebrated on those days.
- The music for a wedding taking place on a day listed in nos. 1-4 of the Table of Liturgical Days fittingly takes account of the celebration.

36. “with regard to admission of the non-Catholic party to Eucharistic Communion, the norms issued for various cases are to be observed.”

- Ordinarily the marriage between a Catholic and a validly baptized non-Catholic takes place in a wedding outside of Mass and without Holy Communion. The bishop permits pastors to grant an exception if circumstances favor the celebration of Mass at such weddings.
- The norms for non-Catholic Christians participating in the Eucharist are found in the Vatican’s *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 129 and 130. The guidelines envision a person’s chronic need for Holy Communion, not a special event such as a wedding; they also require permission from the diocesan bishop.

Chapter I: The Order of Celebrating Matrimony within Mass

45. “The Priest... receives the bridal party, and warmly greets them, showing that the Church shares in their joy.” (cf., 49)

- The expression “the bridal party” implies the entire wedding party, including the groom and groomsmen, etc.

- In this conversation, intended only for the bridal party, the priest should welcome the couple sincerely and helps them feel welcome.

46. “the Entrance Chant takes place.” (cf., 50)

- It is praiseworthy for the entrance procession to include the ministers of a typical Sunday Mass: those who carry cross, candles, and the Book of the Gospels, for example. In this case, the attendants and the couple may follow the presider.
- All may sing an entrance hymn during the procession, a practice that is more common in the Hispanic than in English speaking parishes.
- The tradition of instrumental music during the entrance procession may be maintained.
- The music may change at the entrance of the bride according to local custom, but this is not required. A single piece of music helps unify the purpose of the procession and the liturgy.
- GIRM 48 gives several options for the Entrance Chant. The priest, cantor, reader or everyone may read the antiphon together after all have assembled and before the Sign of the Cross. Or the priest may incorporate into his introductory comments. OCM 53 is an example of this.
- A congregational hymn after the instrumental procession may take place either before the Sign of the Cross or after the greeting in keeping with the options of GIRM 48.
- The Entrance Chant may be replaced in these ways, but not omitted.

49. “When the couple have arrived at their place, the Priest receives them.” (cf., 46)

- The rubrics avoid describing an order of procession, but advise instead “the customary manner” (46). This gives flexibility to parishes and couples. The order of procession may be considered one of the local customs (29).
- In contemporary history, the bride customarily enters with her father at the end of the procession. However, the groom and the bride may each enter with their own parents. Or the groom and the bride may enter together side by side, without parents. This may be especially appropriate at weddings for individuals entering a second marriage.

53. “The *Gloria in excelsis* (Glory to God in the highest) is said according to the rubric of the Roman Missal, Ritual Masses, V. For the Celebration of Marriage.”

- The Gloria is recited or sung.
- The Gloria is not a substitute for the Entrance Chant.
- Note that the Gloria pertains to those days when the Ritual Mass is celebrated. On certain days, therefore, it is omitted even at Mass. For example, if a wedding Mass takes place on a Saturday evening during Advent and Lent, the Mass of that Sunday is celebrated with its readings and presidential prayers, not the Ritual Mass For the Celebration of Marriage; the Gloria is therefore omitted.
- If the wedding takes place on a weekday in Advent or Lent when the Ritual Mass is permitted, then the Gloria is included.

55. “The Liturgy of the Word is celebrated in the usual manner.”

- Guests may serve as readers, but the couple is advised to invite only experienced readers to proclaim the readings.
- Readers should rehearse at the church prior to the wedding.

- When a wedding takes place at Mass, the readers are to be Catholics. The *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* 133 says, “The reading of Scripture during a Eucharistic celebration in the Catholic Church is to be done by members of that Church. On exceptional occasions and for a just cause, the Bishop of the diocese may permit a member of another Church or ecclesial Community to take on the task of reader.”
- Those who wish to have a non-Catholic reader during a wedding Mass are therefore to request permission from the bishop.

59. “With all standing, including the couple and the witnesses, who are positioned near them, the Priest addresses the couple.”

- Note that the congregation stands as the Celebration of Matrimony begins. The priest or a deacon would fittingly gesture for all to rise.
- Note that the two main witnesses are to stand near the couple. Customarily they stand in the center of the sanctuary where they can be seen by all.
- It is praiseworthy and pastorally sensitive to provide microphones for the couple when possible so that the community can hear the words of consent and vows.
- The rubrics do not tell the priest where to stand, and the decision may depend on the arrangement and size of the sanctuary. The priest may stand just in front of the altar with the couple in front of him. He may remain at the chair. Or he may take a place near the first pews with the people, facing the couple in the sanctuary, because of his role as witness.

62. The Consent

- The rubrics provide two options for giving the consent. The couple may declare their consent directly to each other, or they may answer the questions that the priest poses.
- Often, the priest reads the consent a few words at a time, and the groom and bride repeat after him. This practice may continue in the diocese although that option does not exist in the ritual. The couple may read their consent from the ritual book, from a specially prepared card, or even from memory. This underscores that they and not the priest are the ministers of the sacrament of Matrimony.
- This is not an occasion for previously married couples to renew their consent aloud. Appendix III provides a ceremony for a separate occasion celebrating a couple’s anniversary.

65. “The Priest invites those present to praise God.”

- After the couple’s consent, the people are invited to make an acclamation, such as “Thanks be to God” to the presider’s “Let us bless the Lord” invitation.
- The people may repeat the acclamation after the cantor sings it.
- These words may be replaced with another acclamation or refrain, either spoken or sung.
- Even an “Amen,” “Alleluia,” or the refrain taken from the responsorial psalm may provide ways for the people to express their praise.

66-67B. The Blessing and Giving of Rings, The Blessing and Giving of the Arras

- The same speaking options for the couple’s consent (62) apply to the words at the giving of the rings and the *arras* in 67A and B.

- Some couples in the Hispanic community have one set of *padrinos* (“godparents”) who present the rings and different *padrinos* who present the *arras*. These customs are respectfully honored.
- A unity candle is permitted in the diocese. However, nothing should overshadow the primary symbols of the consent and the rings. If the couple wish to light a unity candle, they may do so, preferably after the exchange of rings, or after the *arras* if these are part of the ceremony.

70. “If appropriate, at the Preparation of the Gifts the bride and bridegroom may bring the bread and wine to the altar.”

- The couple may also encourage gifts for the poor. They may invite the guests to make a contribution, or they may personally make some gift as a sign of their self-offering to God.

71B. The Blessing and Placing of the *Lazo* or the Veil

- The moment within the wedding for the observance these customs varies according to different traditions.
- In the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph it is recommended that the *padrinos* (“godparents”) place the *lazo* or veil over the couple after the Lord’s Prayer and before the priest introduces the nuptial blessing with his words to the people.
- It is recommended that the *padrinos* remove the *lazo* or veil immediately after the nuptial blessing.

73. “After the ‘Our Father,’ the prayer ‘Deliver us’ is omitted.”

- The priest is reminded that he moves directly from the Our Father to the introduction to the nuptial blessing.
- The priest is reminded that the nuptial blessing is never omitted.

75. “Then the bride and bridegroom and all present offer one another a sign that expresses peace and charity.”

- The Catholic wedding ritual does not call for a ceremonial kiss after the consent. The bride and groom express their peace and charity to each other during the sign of peace of the Mass.
- Note that the sign of peace is not optional at a nuptial Mass. The Order of Mass 128 says that the sign of peace is given at a typical Mass “if appropriate,” but that qualifier is missing from OCM 75. The sign of peace is appropriate and therefore expected at a wedding Mass.
- GIRM 82 notes, “However, it is appropriate that each person, in a sober manner, offer the sign of peace only to those who are nearest.”
- GIRM 154 notes that the priest at a wedding may give the sign of peace “to a small number of the faithful near the sanctuary.”

77. The Conclusion of the Celebration

- The OCM makes no provision for bringing flowers to an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, but this tradition may be honored throughout the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph. The bride may process to the image alone or together with the groom. It is recommended that this take place when the distribution of communion comes to an end and before the priest says the prayer after communion.

- Some priests like to invite an acclamation of the people at the end of the ceremony. In the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, it is permitted for the priest, following the words of dismissal, to say cordial words such as, “Congratulations, Mr. and Mrs. N. and N.” in order to elicit the applause of the people.

Chapter II: The Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass

80. “The Priest [or a Deacon]... receives the bridal party, and warmly greets them, showing that the Church shares in their joy.” (See 45, 49 and 84.)

81. “the Entrance Chant takes place.” (See 46, 50.)

- In the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, music is encouraged for a wedding without Mass at such times as the entrance, the responsorial psalm, the gospel acclamation, the acclamation of the people (99), and after the giving of the rings and—if applicable—the *arras* (102). See the USCCB’s *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, 223.
- When the priest or deacon celebrates a convalidation, he often follows this chapter of the OCM. If very few people are present, then the music may be simplified.

84. “When the couple have arrived at their place, the minister receives them.” (See 46, 49, and 81.)

90. “The Liturgy of the Word follows in the usual manner.” (See 55.)

- Because this is not a Mass, those who are not Catholic may be permitted to proclaim the scriptures. See 55 above.
- The minister of the non-Catholic party may be invited to participate at the request of the couple and with permission of the bishop. The *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* says, “Upon request of the couple, the local Ordinary may permit the Catholic priest to invite the minister of the party of the other Church or ecclesial Community to participate in the celebration of the marriage, to read from the Scriptures, give a brief exhortation and bless the couple” (158). It also notes, “Where there is a common agreement among the participants, those who have a function in the ceremony may use the dress proper to their ecclesiastical rank and to the nature of the celebration” (113).
- The exhortation by a non-Catholic minister would fittingly take place before or after a reading.

93. “With all standing, including the couple and the witnesses, who are positioned near them, the minister addresses the couple.” (See 59.)

95. The Consent (See 62.)

99. “The minister invites those present to praise God.” (See 65.)

100-101B. The Blessing and Giving of Rings, The Blessing and Giving of the Arras (See 66-67B.)

103B. The Blessing and Placing of the Lazo or the Veil (See 71B.)

104. The Nuptial Blessing

- The priest or deacon is reminded that the nuptial blessing is never omitted.
- The blessing of a non-Catholic minister would fitting take place before or after the Nuptial Blessing. See 90 above.

108. Holy Communion

- In the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, the distribution of Holy Communion at weddings without Mass is discouraged. The Church permits the distribution of communion at this ceremony, but it pertains better to situations where the Catholics in attendance do not otherwise have access to the Eucharist.

110. “Then the bride and bridegroom and all present offer one another a sign that expresses peace and charity.” (See 75.)

116. The Conclusion of the Celebration (See 77.)

- The OCM makes no provision for bringing flowers to an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, but this tradition may be honored throughout the diocese. The bride may process to the image alone or together with the groom. It is recommended that this take place before the priest gives the final blessing.

Other locations

- In the unusual circumstance when the wedding does not take place in the Catholic parish church but in a space sacred to the non-Catholic, the Catholic priest or deacon whom the couple invites may participate after securing the bishop’s permission in accordance with the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*: “With the previous authorization of the local Ordinary, and if invited to do so, a Catholic priest or deacon may attend or participate in some way in the celebration of mixed marriages, in situations where the dispensation from canonical form has been granted. In these cases, there may be only one ceremony in which the presiding person receives the marriage vows. At the invitation of this celebrant, the Catholic priest or deacon may offer other appropriate prayers, read from the Scriptures, give a brief exhortation and bless the couple” (157).
- When the dispensation from canonical form has been granted, no Catholic priest or deacon is required to be present. Nonetheless, his presence may provide solace and spiritual assistance for the family and friends of the Catholic party.
- When a marriage is celebrated in a location other than a parish church (e.g., an approved chapel, an approved Christian church because of assembly size), the proper parish for the marriage record is the territorial church in which that location stands. The only exception is with a dispensation from the Catholic form: in that situation, the proper parish for the marriage record is the parish of the Catholic party. See *Sacramental Records Handbook* (Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph: Office of Diocesan Archives, 2018), “Marriage Registers,” p. 46.

Chapter III: The Order of Celebrating Matrimony Between a Catholic and a Catechumen or a Non-Christian

118. “the celebration takes place in a church or in another suitable place.”

- In the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, even weddings between a Catholic and an unbaptized person should take place in sacred space. However, “a marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized party can be celebrated in a church or another suitable place” (canon 1118).
- The wedding between a Catholic and an unbaptized person takes place without Mass. Appeals for an alternative may be made to the Office of the Bishop.

120. “the one who presides addresses them.”

- In the United States, the presider is always a priest or a deacon. The Latin edition of the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* uses the expression “the one who presides” for those circumstances especially in mission lands where the bishop has appointed a layperson to preside at weddings without Mass. In the United States, in this case, the expression means “the minister” as in Chapter II, namely a priest or a deacon.
- Note that the ceremony opens without the sign of the cross or the greeting, both of which presume the Christian faith of those participating. The opening address presumes that some in attendance are not Christian and greets them respectfully.
- In this spirit, those who select the music are to respect the beliefs of all who participate; however, music may not be used which is contrary to the faith.

121. “If, however, circumstances so suggest, the Rite of Reception is omitted and the celebration of Marriage begins with the Liturgy of the Word.”

- Note that the Liturgy of the Word always takes place. Even non-Christians are invited to hear from the sacred scriptures of the Bible.

122. “The Liturgy of the Word follows in the usual manner.”

- Because this is not Mass, one or more readings may be proclaimed by someone who is not a Catholic, even a minister. See 55 above.
- In the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, a non-Christian minister may be invited to participate at the request of the couple and with permission of the bishop. The Catholic Church does not offer explicit guidance for this circumstance as it does in the case of the wedding between a Catholic and validly baptized Christian of another denomination. See 90 above. However, the same permissions apply locally: The minister of the non-Christian party may participate in the celebration of the marriage, read from the Scriptures, give a brief exhortation and bless the couple. Where there is a common agreement among the participants, those who have a function in the ceremony may use the dress proper to their rank and to the nature of the celebration.
- At least one reading from the Bible is required. In the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, the ceremony may include a reading from literature considered sacred by the tradition of the non-Christian partner, but as part of the Rite of Reception (120) or after the homily (123).
- The exhortation by a non-Christian minister would fittingly take place before or after a reading.

- **124-129. The Questions, Consent and Reception of Consent**

- Note that the ritual offers no accommodation/option to consent variance and the rite is to be followed.

- **131-132. The Blessing and Giving of Rings**

- Note that only the Christian is expected to name the Trinity. Yet the giving of rings may be completely omitted.

- **133. The Blessing and Giving of the Arras (See 66-67B)**

- Note that the ritual offers no accommodation to the non-Christian if the couple decide to include this custom.

- **137. The Blessing and Placing of the Lazo or the Veil (See 71B)**

- Note that the ritual offers no accommodation to the non-Christian if the couple decide to include either of these customs.

- **138. The Nuptial Blessing**

- The blessing of a non-Christian minister would fittingly take place before or after the Nuptial Blessing. See 122 above.
- Note that, as circumstances permit, the prayer at 140 may replace the Nuptial Blessing.

- **Other locations**

- In the unusual circumstance when the wedding does not take place in the Catholic parish church but in a space sacred to the non-Christian, the Catholic priest or deacon whom the couple invites may participate after securing the bishop's permission, and where the dispensation from canonical form has been granted. In these cases, there may be only one ceremony in which the presiding person receives the marriage vows. At the invitation of this celebrant, the Catholic priest or deacon may offer other appropriate prayers, read from the Scriptures, give a brief exhortation and bless the couple.
- When the dispensation from canonical form has been granted, no Catholic priest or deacon is required to be present. Nonetheless, his presence may provide solace and spiritual assistance for the family and friends of the Catholic party.
- When a marriage is celebrated in a location other than a parish church (e.g., a non-Christian temple), the proper parish for the marriage record is the territorial church in which that location stands. The only exception is with a dispensation from the Catholic form: in that situation, the proper parish for the marriage record is the parish of the Catholic party. See *Sacramental Records Handbook* (Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph: Office of Diocesan Archives, 2018), "Marriage Registers," p. 46.

Appendix III: The Order of Blessing a Married Couple within Mass on the Anniversary of Marriage

- Note that this ceremony replaces the one from the Book of Blessings. On the anniversary of a marriage, this is the ceremony to be used.
- Note that there is no "renewal of promises." Instead, the couple offer a prayer of thanksgiving for their consent and their commitment. Unlike the renewal of vows in

religious orders, the consent of the couple is the formula of the sacrament and should not be repeated.

Additional Note: Convalidation

Convalidation is not simply the Church's blessing. Convalidation is "the" marriage – it requires a new act of consent by each party. There is no distinct liturgical rite as the same Order of Celebrating Matrimony is used. In theory the couple has access to all the options of the Order.