

Planning a Wedding Liturgy during the COVID Pandemic

The COVID pandemic has affected all areas of our life; as a result, everyone across the world has needed to make changes and sacrifices. Much planning goes into a wedding on the part of the engaged couple, and it is often a highly stressful period due to the expectations that exist of having a “perfect wedding”. These suggestions were put together in an effort to assist diocesan clergy work with couples in the planning and execution of a wedding liturgically during this period.

It is highly suggested that you check in with all the couples scheduled for a wedding in your parish as soon as possible. It would be preferential for the officiant of the wedding to arrange for a time to meet and discuss how the pandemic will affect their wedding. This does not have to be in person, it can be scheduled via zoom. If a couple/priest/deacon wishes to meet in person, ensure that only the couple is present and that social distancing is maintained. Undoubtedly, plans that have been in place will need to change, and this can be delicate and upsetting for the couple, so empathy goes a long way.

THE ORDER OF CELEBRATING MATRIMONY WITHIN MASS

When two Catholics marry, it is presumed that they will celebrate The Order of Celebrating Matrimony within Mass unless there is a circumstance that would prevent this. It will be important to discuss all the changes that have been implemented at the parish due to the COVID pandemic and emphasis needs to be made that everything that has been put into place for the celebration of Mass will also apply to the celebration of a wedding Mass.

Environment & Decorations

Decorations should be kept to a minimum. Flowers are permitted, but anything would need to be disposed of after the service. It is suggested that any type of confetti, birdseed, etc. thrown at the couple upon leaving the church not be allowed (if this is something your parish permits).

If the parish has a policy regarding photographers, it would be important to revisit that and make revisions as needed. It is suggested that only one photographer is in attendance and that he/she follows the protocols of social distancing and wearing a mask.

All the protocols put in place for daily and weekend Masses Seating regarding seated and blocked off pews should be maintained.

Liturgical Ministers

It is appropriate to use the same parish standards in place for lay liturgical ministers. A general rule would be:

Altar Servers: No more than two.

Lectors: One is preferred.

Gift Bearers: None as there is no offertory procession.

Hospitality Ministers/Ushers: if possible, these should come from the parish, as they are familiar with the protocols in place. It will be important to have them facilitate people to their seats and prevent loitering/congregating of crowds.

Music Ministers: There should only be an organist or one person playing a musical instrument accompanied by a cantor. It is strongly suggested that the use of choirs or multiple musicians be discouraged.

The Wedding Mass

Prelude: Can be maintained and utilized as a way of insuring that everyone is in his or her appropriate seats/places and following social distancing.

Entrance Procession: It would be preferable to use form 1 for the wedding procession. Here the couple will follow the priest in the liturgical entrance procession. It is suggested that parents remain in their seats and that the wedding party be kept to a minimum of a best man and maid/matron of honor.

Opening Hymn: Have all music and the order of worship in a worship aid that will be **disposed** of at the end of the Mass. Do not use hymnals. Make sure to use copyright information correctly.

The Marriage Rite: It would be suggested to use the shorter options available in the text. It is highly suggested to omit the arras and/or lasso rituals, as they are optional and not an integral part of the rite. The Hymn or the Canticle of Praise at the end of the rite is also optional and can be omitted.

Offertory Procession: Omitted.

Nuptial Blessing: Option C is the shortest choice and would therefore be recommended.

Sign of Peace: Omitted

Holy Communion: No cup, maintain protocols in place for parish Masses.

Recessional: Only groom and bride leave at the end. No crowds to greet them should be allowed. Clergy go into the sacristy. Individuals should leave by pew, assisted by usher to ensure no unnecessary congregating and maintenance of social distancing.

THE ORDER OF CELEBRATING MATRIMONY WITHOUT MASS

The Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass is usually chosen when one of the couple is Catholic and the other is baptized in another Christian tradition. In dioceses where a priest shortage exists, Catholic couples may choose this rite as it includes an option for the reception of Holy Communion. Pastoral judgement may determine that this rite could be appropriate to use during this time instead of having the rite during Mass.

The same conditions and concerns as noted above would need to be followed.

THE ORDER OF CELEBRATING MATRIMONY BETWEEN A CATHOLIC AND A CATECHUMEN OR NON-CHRISTIAN

When a Catholic marries an unbaptized person (a Catechumen or Non-Christian), the third rite is used. This rite has greater pastoral sensitivity towards the unbaptized person and is meant to foster unity between the couple as well as their families. It is also much shorter and simpler than the other two rites and allows for the participation of the non-Catholic person's religious leader in the rite.

This wedding liturgy begins when the celebrant greets the bridal party. Within this rite, there are two options to choose from. The first option takes place after the completion of the wedding procession when the couple comes to the front of the church or other venue (think "regular wedding procession"). The second option has the celebrant greet the members of the bridal party at the door of the venue and join in the wedding procession. It would be suggested to omit/shorten any processions and greet the bridal party at the place where the vows will be

exchanged. All of this would need to be coordinated with the religious leader of the other faith tradition as well if that is applicable.

It would be appropriate to use the same recommendations given at the Order of Celebrating Matrimony within Mass for the parts that correspond in this rite as well.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

If the parish had been live streaming Mass, you might want to offer this option to the couple. If you do not, allow the couple to ask a guest to use their phone or device to live-stream for the guests that cannot attend.

The rehearsal should be simplified and open only to those who have an active role in the liturgy. This could also be a time for the couple to integrate a visit to the Marian side altar for prayer and the presentation of flowers.

Encourage the wedding party to leave the parish grounds as soon as possible. If pictures will be taken after the liturgy, only have those necessary in attendance and insure that instructions are given regarding specific parish guidelines that may apply.

It is encouraged that those in attendance wear masks. It would be the pastor's choice if this would extend to the wedding party. If this decision is made, make sure to point out the risks in not doing so.

Any worship aides or programs must be discarded after the liturgy is completed. Guests or members of the wedding party should take nothing out from the church. Suggest that the couple send copies of materials to those who may want one as a keepsake.