

# *Celebrating Your Marriage*

IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

A guide to preparing your wedding service



Fr Allen Morris



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## First of all, congratulations!

**C**ONGRATULATIONS if you are preparing for Marriage and married life. God calls all human kind to live lives of love and service. Yours will be the privilege of living out the call to love with your husband or wife. Together you will create a family of love. Please God, your family will prove a fruitful environment for receiving the gift of children and helping them to grow to maturity. Please God, your family also will be one of the building blocks for a healthy society, in which we will all flourish.

Congratulations if you are family or friends of those preparing for Marriage. Shortly they will declare their willingness to be husband/wife for each other, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death do them part. Your love and care has helped them commit themselves to all that lies ahead. Your love and care will continue to have an important part in their lives in the future too.

Congratulations, also, if you are an ordained minister of the Church, or a musician, or other liturgical minister, privileged to support the couple as they prepare for their Marriage ceremony and for married life.

Your encouragement and guidance will help them draw more deeply the riches of our Christian tradition, particularly on the Scriptures, learning to hear God's word and to more deeply participate in the Liturgy of the Church.

So, congratulations all round. However, it is probable that the most likely readers and users of this book will be those preparing for Marriage, so all that follows is addressed especially and most directly to you.

This book will help you with the preparation of your Marriage service.

Not every couple who chooses to marry is familiar with the Liturgy of the Church, still less with the Marriage liturgy. This book tries to help in two ways.

Firstly, it gives easy access to all of the alternative forms and texts provided in *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (the Church's Rite of Marriage), so that you, together with the Priest or Deacon who will assist at your Marriage, may make the most appropriate choices.

*The Order of Celebrating Matrimony* has recently been re-issued by the Church in a second edition which introduces some new options and expectations. This book incorporates all of these.

Secondly, it offers an explanation of the significance of the different parts of *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*. These explanations seek to help you understand something of the structure and intent of the Order, the better to pray it, and be sustained by the Liturgy, and by Christ who is there present to you and for you, come your wedding day.



# Exploring the contents of the book

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| <b>The forms of the Catholic Order of Matrimony</b><br>Four forms of the Order of Matrimony are presented.<br>Each meets the needs of people in different circumstances.  | 10   |
| <b>Making your choices</b><br>A section which offers a way through the process of preparing your choices from the various optional texts etc., ready for discussion with the Priest.  | 15   |
| <b>The Liturgy of the Word</b><br>In each form of the Order of Matrimony the proclamation of Scripture has a privileged place. A wide range of scripture readings are provided from which you can choose.<br><br>The readings speak of Marriage, and the life of love and mutual service to which husband and wife are called in matrimony. | 19   |
| <b>The Celebration of Marriage</b><br>The central rite of the Order of Matrimony allows for a number of choices regarding the Civil Declaration of Freedom, the Consent, the Reception of the Consent (by the Priest or Deacon <sup>1</sup> ), and the Blessing and Giving of Rings.  | 55   |
| <b>Beginnings</b><br>This section provides the available texts for the introductory part of your wedding service, including the Collect (the opening prayer of the Rite).   | 70   |
| <b>The Liturgy of the Eucharist</b><br>This section considers the Liturgy of the Eucharist, a part of the service when Mass is celebrated.  | 76   |



|  | Page       |
|--|------------|
| <b>Endings</b>   | <b>88</b>  |
| <p>This section provides the available texts for the concluding part of your wedding service, including the concluding Prayers and Blessing and, of particular importance, the great Nuptial Blessing.</p>   |            |
| <b>Music and Song</b>  | <b>99</b>  |
| <p>The songs (hymns/chants) to be used in the Liturgy<sup>2</sup> should be appropriate to a religious service. They should express the faith of the Church. Any additional instrumental music should be similarly suited to the Liturgy.</p> <p>A list of frequently used music is provided at page 101–104. Additional choices, assistance and guidance can be provided by the Priest and musicians.</p> |            |
| <b>Ministries at a celebration of Marriage</b>   | <b>107</b> |
| <p>At your wedding readings have to be read and music played. This section offers a guide to this, and a help with choosing who might assist.</p>  |            |
| <b>Finalising your choice of text and music using the Planning Grids</b>   | <b>108</b> |
| <p>A Planning Grid is provided for each form of the Catholic Order of Matrimony to record your preferences so that they can be easily and accurately shared with your Priest, and discussed with him.</p>  |            |
| <b>Preparing a service booklet</b>   | <b>119</b> |
| <p>Guidance is provided here on what is helpful to include in a service booklet and what is not helpful, and how to deal with copyright issues.</p>  |            |

1 Priests and Deacons are both able to assist in the celebration of Matrimony. Unless it is specified to the contrary presume that any reference to Priest also allows for the minister to be a Deacon.

2 'Liturgy' is the name of the official worship of the Church. The Order of Celebrating Matrimony is a part of the range of the Church's liturgical rites. In this book 'Liturgy', 'Order' or 'Rite' are used synonymously to refer to The Order of Celebrating Matrimony; 'service' is used to refer to the particular celebration of the Liturgy which will be your wedding service.

# The forms of the Catholic Order of Matrimony

**T**HE CATHOLIC CHURCH recognises Marriage between a man and a woman as something established by God. This Marriage is a sharing of life designed to be fitting and fruitful, for the couple's well-being, and for the conceiving and raising of children.

Marriage is a vocation: God calls, invites, the couple to make of their Marriage an intimate community of life and love. The possibility of Marriage is God's gift, and each couple is assisted by God's grace in the particular circumstances of their lives to fulfil the rich potential of their life together.

There is of course diversity amongst those who commit to Marriage, even among those who choose to marry in the Catholic Church, and according to her rites.

The rites of the Church provided for Marriage seek to respect that diversity, and provide a form of celebration fitting to the circumstances of each couple.

There are four basic forms of the Order of Matrimony.

All four forms have an introduction, a conclusion and at least two principal parts:

- 1. A Liturgy of the Word** (see page 19)
- 2. The Celebration of Marriage** (see page 55)

## THE FIRST FORM

See Planning  
Grid on page

### ‘The Order of Celebrating Matrimony within Mass’

108

**The first form is used when the couple are both Catholic and secure in their faith and the practice of their faith.**

In this first form the basic components of the Marriage Rite are complemented by the celebration of Mass. The couple make gift of themselves to each other in the Marriage vows, and their gift is complemented by the offering and sharing in Christ’s self-gift in the Eucharist.

In this form the two principal parts of a Liturgy of the Word and the Celebration of Marriage are followed by a third principal part, the Liturgy of the Eucharist. (page 76)

## THE SECOND FORM

See Planning  
Grid on page

### ‘The Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass’

111

**The second form is used when either the bride or groom is from a Christian tradition that is not Catholic, and not in communion with the Catholic Church. It might also be used where one or both of a couple, though Catholic, are not secure in their faith or its practice.**

In the former case, where the bride or groom is from a different Christian tradition, the discipline of the Catholic Church generally means that they are unable to receive Holy Communion at Mass.<sup>3</sup> This, a consequence of the divisions within the One Church, the Body of Christ, is a matter of

Continued ▷

<sup>3</sup> The guidance of the Church in the United Kingdom and Ireland with regard to sacramental sharing with Christians of other traditions is given in One Bread One Body, particularly in paragraphs 102 –115. Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of England & Wales, Ireland and Scotland 1998.

Continued from page 11

deep regret in the Catholic Church. However, the discipline is maintained because in its longing for unity of faith and life among all Christians, faithfulness to the truth is the Catholic Church's first duty and desire.<sup>4</sup>

'The Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass' allows a couple from different Christian traditions to celebrate their Marriage in a way that focuses on the Sacrament of Matrimony in which they 'are caught up into divine love', and enriched by the redeeming power of Christ and the saving activity of his Church.<sup>5</sup> The Order focuses on the Sacrament of Matrimony which unites them more deeply with each other and with Christ, rather than on the Eucharist, a Sacrament which would, in these circumstances, highlight the lack of unity in the Church, and be something which the couple cannot share.

In the latter case, of a Catholic couple who do not make Mass a regular part of their life, the couple is unlikely to wish to celebrate the Sacrament of the Eucharist on their wedding day, and the Order allows for this.

## THE THIRD FORM

See Planning  
Grid on page

116

### 'The Order of Celebrating Matrimony between a Catholic and a Catechumen or a Non-Christian'

**The third form is used when either the bride or the groom is not baptised.**

The non-baptised person may be a person of a different religious faith, or be drawn to the Christian faith and preparing for baptism (i.e. a Catechumen) or of no religious faith.

Continued ▷

<sup>4</sup> One Bread One Body, 1 ibid.

<sup>5</sup> One Bread One Body, 79 ibid.

Continued

The Church is cautious about the implications of this difference in religious belief and practice between a couple, but also respectful for the dignity and needs of the non-Catholic groom or bride.

When a Catholic seeks to marry someone who is not Catholic, they must obtain a dispensation from the Bishop. This dispensation is regularly granted when the Catholic promises to remove dangers of their own defecting from the faith and to do all in their power to have children of the Marriage baptised and brought up in the Catholic Church.<sup>6</sup>

The Church in her turn offers this third form of the Order of Matrimony, an authentic rite of the Church, to avoid the non-Christian groom or bride having to say or do anything which is likely to offend against their faith or conscience.

## THE FOURTH FORM

See Planning  
Grid on page

118

### ‘Order of Celebrating Marriage: form for use at Convalidation’

**This is the form which is used to regularise the Marriage of a Catholic man or woman who is free to marry their spouse in the Catholic Church but who has either:**

- contracted a civil marriage without dispensation from canonical form
- or contracted a marriage according to the rite of another Church without dispensation.

Before arrangements for a Convalidation are put in place, it is necessary to establish the freedom of the couple to proceed to convalidation of their marriage. The Priest assisting with the wedding will be able to help in the process of obtaining a dispensation to proceed to convalidation from the Bishop of the Diocese where the couple are resident.

Continued ▷

<sup>6</sup> Code of Canon Law 1125, 1.

Continued from page 13

Once authorised by the Bishop the celebration follows the pattern of any of the three first forms, according to the circumstances of the couple. There are however, two changes to the Celebration of Marriage:

- **the Civil Declaration of Freedom is omitted,<sup>7</sup>**
- **a single form of the Consent is authorised, in which the couple use only their Christian names.<sup>8</sup>**

At such celebrations it may often be appropriate for the liturgy to be less ceremonious than that envisaged in the first three forms of The Order of Celebrating Matrimony. However, it should also be celebrated in a spirit of joy and thanksgiving.

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7 The Civil Declaration of Freedom is omitted as the couple will already have entered a legal marriage in the eyes of the State. The Church's rite establishes the validity of the marriage in the eyes of the Church.

8 The use of a couple's full names, as printed on the civil Marriage Certificate which gives civil authorisation for the Marriage to be celebrated in a Catholic Church, is a legal requirement in other forms of the Order of Celebrating Matrimony.

# Making your choices and the Planning Grids

## Before you begin

**B**EFORE BEGINNING to make any choices from the available texts the couple should meet with their parish Priest, or the Priest who will be conducting the service. At this meeting you will be able to ask all sorts of questions, and also learn about any local customs or expectations with regard to celebrations of Marriage in that particular parish church or diocese.

In particular you will be able to clarify with the Priest:

- **which form of the Order of Matrimony will be used at your Marriage.**
- **if your wedding is being celebrated using ‘The Order of Celebrating Matrimony within Mass’, whether the service will be taking place on one of the days of the Church’s Year when you are restricted with regard to the choice of readings, prayers etc. These days are relatively few and can be seen on page 105.**

That done, it will be much clearer to you what choices may be considered as you begin to prepare your wedding service.

## The Planning Grids

To assist with these choices this book provides a Planning Grid for each of the forms of the Order of Matrimony (108–118).

- ▷ **The left hand column** gives the structure of the Liturgy, and is useful to include in any Marriage booklet that you may decide to prepare. Guidance on the preparation of a booklet is given on page 119.
- ▷ **The middle column** indicates where to find the variable texts you have to choose from.
- ▷ **The right hand column** is blank for you to enter your choices.
- ▷ **When a box is ‘blocked-out’**: this simply indicates that there is only one approved text for this element of the liturgy. However, if you chose to sing the approved text you may enter your music selection in the right hand column.

Once the choices have been made make a copy of the completed Planning Grid, and send it to the Priest who is to assist at your wedding. Also arrange a further time to meet with him again. This meeting will give you a chance to discuss together the choices proposed and to finalise the decisions. It will also be very helpful to him in understanding the choices made and the significance they have to you.

It is important you bear in mind that the Priest has two responsibilities.

- **One is to help you celebrate your wedding ceremony in a way which allows you to pray it, and find spiritual nourishment in it.**
- **The other is to ensure that the celebration is according to the norms of the Church.**

If you carefully follow the guidance offered in this book there should be no difficulty: your Priest will be happy, and you will have a wedding service that is personal to you, and an authentic celebration of the Church’s Liturgy.



See page

23

## Where to begin?

### The Readings

Once you know what form your Marriage service will take (see page 10–14) you are ready to consider the various options which are available.

You might think to begin at the beginning of the service; however, only occasionally is that a good place to start!

A better place to start in preparing your service is with the Scripture readings.

There are several reasons.

**1** Hopefully you have allowed yourself plenty of time for this preparation, and maybe your wedding day is still several months away. Slowly reading your way through the selection of readings – all of which have something to say about love, Marriage, faith, life – is a fruitful way of spiritual preparation for Marriage, and not only for selecting the readings for your wedding day.

There are many alternative readings to consider, and each is Scripture, the living word of God. In the Scriptures God speaks and we have the opportunity as we listen to learn something more of his love and care.

Some of the readings are likely to be very familiar, and others perhaps are unlikely to be familiar. Some may be immediately attractive, and some quite challenging or even discouraging. Yet all of them have something to say to us, about love, faith, Marriage, life... Sometimes, if we give the reading time, and allow time to consider what we hear, and what it means to us – if we allow time for meditation and prayer – it maybe the reading that is not immediately attractive that proves to have the most to say and will be chosen.

**2** Taking time over the choice of Scripture readings is perhaps the most important way to ensure that the wedding service is prepared to ‘fit’ you and your circumstances. Choosing the readings carefully and well means that you will hear readings on your wedding day that are particular and personal to you. It will also ensure that the congregation is helped and guided as to how they might pray for you at the service, and what they may ask for you to receive on that day.

## Where to Begin – The Readings

**3** Once the choice has been made of the readings, you can make your other choices – of prayers, and songs etc. – bearing the readings in mind. That way the Liturgy as a whole can speak, as it were, with one voice: and that voice will be both God’s living word and the prayer of the Church; it will also be personal and particular to the circumstances of yourselves as a couple.



# The Celebration of Marriage

The pattern of the first part of the Celebration of Marriage is common to all forms of the Order of Matrimony.<sup>9</sup>

- Brief Address by the Priest
- The Questions before the Consent
- The Civil Declaration of Freedom
- The Consent
- The Reception of the Consent
- The Blessing and Giving of Rings
- The Universal Prayer  
(more commonly known as the Prayer of the Faithful or Bidding Prayers)

Each form of the Order of Matrimony also contains the following elements but their placement varies according to which form of Marriage is used.

- The Lord's Prayer
- The Nuptial Blessing

The texts and placing of these last two elements is made clear in the sections which follow, as well as in the Planning Grids provided at the back of this book.

<sup>9</sup> The Civil Declaration of Freedom is omitted in the Form for use at Convalidation.

## Brief address by the Priest

The following words are provided for the Priest for use at a Marriage between Christians within or without Mass. He may also prepare his own words.

Dearly beloved,  
you have come together into the house of the Church,  
so that in the presence of the Church's minister and the community  
your intention to enter into Marriage  
may be strengthened by the Lord with a sacred seal.  
Christ abundantly blesses the love that binds you.  
Through a special Sacrament,  
he enriches and strengthens  
those he has already consecrated by Holy Baptism,  
that they may be faithful to each other for ever  
and assume all the responsibilities of married life.  
And so, in the presence of the Church,  
I ask you to state your intentions.

The following words are provided for the Priest for use at a Marriage between a Catholic and someone who is not baptised. He may also prepare his own words.

*N.* and *N.*, the Church shares your joy  
and warmly welcomes you,  
together with your families and friends,  
as today you establish between yourselves  
a lifelong partnership.  
For believers God is the source of love and fidelity,  
because God is love.  
So let us listen attentively to his word,  
and let us humbly pray to him,  
that he may grant you your hearts' desire  
and fulfill every one of your prayers.

## THE FIRST FORM

## Planning Grid 1

### 'The Order of Celebrating Matrimony within Mass'

#### How to use the Planning Grid

**The left hand column** gives the structure of the Liturgy, and is useful to include in any Marriage booklet that you may decide to prepare. Guidance on the preparation of a booklet is given on page 119.

**The middle column** indicates where to find the variable texts you have to choose from.

**The right hand column** is blank for you to enter your choices.

When a box is **'blocked-out'**: this simply indicates that there is only one approved text for this element of the liturgy. However, if you chose to sing the approved text you may enter your music selection in the right hand column.

#### THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

|                      |  |  |
|----------------------|--|--|
| Entrance             | Page 70  |  |
|                      | Entrance music or song (suggestions are given on page 102) |  |
| Greeting             | Page 71  |  |
| Introductory address |  |  |
| Gloria               | Page 72  |  |
| Collect              | Page 73  |  |

#### THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

|                    |  |  |
|--------------------|--|--|
| First Reading      | Page 23  |  |
| Psalm              | Page 42  |  |
| Second reading     | Optional: Page 30  |  |
| Gospel Acclamation | Encouragement is given for this to be sung. Guidance as to appropriate settings can be provided by your musicians or Priest. Page 46 |  |
| Gospel             | Page 47  |  |
| Homily             |  |  |

### THE CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| The Questions before the Consent                                 |  |  |
| The Civil Declaration of Freedom                                 | Page 58  |  |
| The Consent  | Page 59  |  |
| The Reception of the Consent                                     | Page 60  |  |
| Acclamation  | An acclamation is to be said or sung (Page 61)   |  |
| The Blessing and Giving of Rings                                 |  |  |
| The Blessing   | Page 62  |  |
| The Giving of Rings  | Page 63  |  |
| Hymn of Praise   | Optional: Page 102.  |  |
| The Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful or Bidding Prayers) | Samples are provided which may be used as given, or alternatives suggested to the Priest/Deacon. Page 66 |  |
| CREED  | If required by the rubrics for instance on a Sunday or a Solemnity.                                      |  |

### THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

|   |         |  |
|---|---------|--|
| Prayer for the Preparation of the Gifts | Page 76 |  |
| Preface                                 | Page 78 |  |
| Eucharistic Prayer                      |         |  |

## THE THIRD FORM

## Planning Grid 4

### 'The Order of Celebrating Matrimony between a Catholic and a Catechumen or a Non-Christian'

#### How to use the Planning Grid

**The left hand column** gives the structure of the Liturgy, and is useful to include in any Marriage booklet that you may decide to prepare. Guidance on the preparation of a booklet is given on page 119.

**The middle column** indicates where to find the variable texts you have to choose from.

**The right hand column** is blank for you to enter your choices.

When a box is **'blocked-out'**: this simply indicates that there is only one approved text for this element of the liturgy. However, if you chose to sing the approved text you may enter your music selection in the right hand column.

#### THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

|                      |   |  |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Entrance             | NB in this Order it is presumed that the Priest will greet the couple together. |  |
|                      | Entrance music or song<br>Suggestions on page 102                               |  |
| Introductory address |   |  |

#### THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

|                    |  |  |
|--------------------|--|--|
| First Reading      | Optional Old Testament<br>OR New Testament:<br>pages 23–30 OR<br>pages 30–41   |  |
| Psalm              | Optional: Page 42  |  |
| Gospel Acclamation | Encouragement is given for this to be sung. Guidance as to appropriate settings can be provided by your musicians or Priest. Page 46 |  |
| Gospel             | Page 47  |  |
| Homily             |  |  |

### THE CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| The Questions before the Consent                                 |  |  |
| The Civil Declaration of Freedom                                 | Page 58  |  |
| The Consent  | Page 59  |  |
| The Reception of the Consent                                     | Page 60  |  |
| Acclamation  | An acclamation is to be said or sung. Page 61  |  |
| The Blessing and Giving of Rings                                 |  |  |
| The Blessing   | Page 62  |  |
| The Giving of Rings  | Page 64  |  |
| Hymn of Praise   | Optional: Page 102   |  |
| The Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful or Bidding Prayers) | Samples are provided which may be used as given, or alternatives suggested to the Priest/Deacon. Page 66 |  |
| The Lord's Prayer  |  |  |
| Nuptial Blessing   | In some circumstances this may be omitted in favour of the alternative prayer provided. (Page 94)        |  |

### THE CONCLUDING RITES

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| Blessing  | The Order gives only the simpler form of Blessing, see Page 97 |  |
|   | Final music or song. Page 104                                  |  |
| After the conclusion of the Mass the Register is signed | Music while the Register is signed.                            |  |
| Music for leaving the Church                            |  |  |



## NOTES

Priest's/Deacon's contact details:

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Organist's details:

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Choir details:

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Best man's details:

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