

# Wedding Ceremony Guidelines



## **St. Thomas Aquinas**

~The Catholic Center at Purdue~

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# **Guidelines For Planning the Marriage Liturgy**

Dear Couple:

Now that you have made the big decision to get married, you no doubt have already started planning your wedding ceremony. You have probably even started to look around for different ideas to make your wedding something really special. And, as you have looked, you probably found more than enough resources for planning a wedding.

The options are endless. It seems that the florists, photographers, even fashion magazine editors are putting out many different guides to wedding planning these days. While all of those are fine in their own way, it seems appropriate that the Church should offer both some guidelines and some support in planning a wedding that is truly an experience of faith and worship.

The following pages are to help you approach your wedding, not from the standpoint of flowers and clothing (as important as they may be), but rather from the basic understanding that a Catholic ceremony is a liturgical celebration of the faith community.

Read these guidelines well and become familiar with the thoughts and ideas expressed. They will be important to you in your preparation for the meaningful celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

~St. Thomas Aquinas Staff

# **Marriage: A Sacrament**

The marriage liturgy in the Catholic Church signifies and deepens a two-fold commitment on the part of the couple – to each other and to faith. This is made manifest through:

the proclamation and the hearing of the Word of God,

the exchange of vows,

the suitable use of symbol and music,

and the prayerful participation and witness of the assembly, including the sharing of Eucharist whenever appropriate.



# Ministers and Congregation

What are the primary roles of different persons involved in the wedding liturgy? These roles, as well as their implications in your planning of the liturgy, are given below.

1. **The Couple** themselves are the ministers of the Sacrament of Matrimony to each other through the living out of their marriage vows.

Therefore –

in planning the marriage liturgy the couple expresses their faith by taking the primary role; and the couple must remain faithful to the Catholic understanding of marriage and worship.

2. **The Priest** calls the assembly and the couple into the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony by leading the community in prayer, preaching the Word of God, witnessing the vows, and presiding at the Eucharist when celebrated.

Therefore –

the plans made by the couple must meet with the final approval of the priest who is working with the couple. (Exception: musical selections must meet with the final approval of the parish Music Director or that person's delegate).

3. **The Assembly**, either the parish community or the interfaith congregation, signifies its prayerful support for the couple's marital commitment, not only by witnessing the vows of the couple, but by participating fully in the liturgy.

Therefore –

In planning the marriage liturgy, the couple should keep as a priority the participation of the assembly. The couple is encouraged to make use of the talents and resources available within St. Thomas Aquinas parish community.

4. **The Witnesses** (best man and maid/matron of honor) serve as official representatives of the assembly in its witness and support.
5. **The liturgical or musical minister** (lector, pianist, vocalist, ushers, servers, Eucharistic Ministers, etc.) each in the function of his/her own role, is to enhance the assembly's participation in the marriage liturgy.

Therefore —

This person, in whatever role, must approach that role as a service to the assembly, rather than a performance. It is necessary that this person be competent in his/her liturgical role.

# I. Wedding Liturgy

## A. Ministers

Note: Since the Sacrament of Marriage is true worship, a variety of liturgical ministers should be incorporated. This reflects in the best way the nature of the Church. Although it is good to select friends and relatives for these various roles, it is paramount that they be quite familiar with the rite and have the ability to minister well to the assembly. Qualified members of the parish, who are not necessarily friends or relatives of the bride or groom, should be considered. (If planning a marriage ceremony outside of Mass, refer only to the items marked with an asterisk).

- \*1. **Priest** A priest or deacon from the parish will ordinarily officiate. However, a friend or relative who is an ordained minister may also be the officiant. If this option is exercised, please notify the person who is preparing you.
- \*2. **Lector (reader)** The lector must have the ability to read publicly, and the faith to believe what they are reading.
3. **Eucharistic Ministers of Holy Communion**  
It is our practice to distribute Communion under both species at all Masses at St. Thomas Aquinas. Please choose as many approved Eucharistic Ministers as needed.

\*4. **Musicians**

Cantor: leads the congregation in common song and responsorial singing.

Accompanist: needs to be familiar with Roman Catholic liturgy, and able to accompany cantor and congregation, along with being familiar with the supplementary music (solos, etc.).

Other vocal or instrumental musicians: these ministers are not performers. They should enhance the spirit of worship.

A member of the St. Thomas Aquinas Music Ministry will be present during your wedding liturgy.

5. **Gift Bearers** These persons bring the bread and wine to the altar for the Preparation of the Gifts. They may be parents of the couple, witnesses, friends, godparents, etc. If the family members bring the gifts to the altar, it is also effective to have the Bride and Groom receive the bread and wine from them and take them directly to the altar, presenting them to the priest.

- \*6. **Reader for the Prayers of the Faithful** This person is not the same person who reads the Scripture readings, although the same qualifications apply. The cantor may read these prayers.

The couple is encouraged to compose the Prayers of the Faithful using personal needs of the families.

## **B. Order of Worship**

### **During Mass**

Sign of the Cross and Greeting  
Penitential Rite  
(Glory to God)  
Opening Prayer  
LITURGY OF THE WORD  
First Reading  
Responsorial Psalm  
Second Reading  
Gospel Acclamation  
Gospel  
Homily  
RITE OF MARRIAGE  
Introduction  
Statement of Intentions  
Exchange of Consent  
Blessing of Rings  
Exchange of Rings  
(Creed)  
Prayers of the Faithful  
LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST  
Presentation of the Gifts  
Prayer over the Gifts  
Eucharistic Prayer  
Our Father and Nuptial Blessing  
Sign of Peace  
Lamb of God/Breaking of the  
Bread  
Communion Rite  
Prayer after Communion  
Blessing of Assembly and  
Dismissal

### **Outside Mass**

Sign of the Cross and Greeting  
Opening Prayer  
LITURGY OF THE WORD  
First Reading  
Responsorial Psalm  
Second Reading  
Gospel Acclamation  
Gospel  
Homily  
RITE OF MARRIAGE  
Introduction  
Statement of Intentions  
Exchange of Consent  
Blessings of Rings  
Exchange of Rings  
Prayers of the Faithful  
Our Father  
Nuptial Blessing  
Blessing of Assembly and  
Dismissal

## II. MUSICAL EXPECTATIONS

(fees and arrangements made with the Musical Director)

### A. Selecting the Wedding Music

The music you choose for your wedding celebration should always enhance the flow of the ritual. It must never disrupt the rhythm or the purpose of the rite. To insure this, three judgments need to be made:

1. **Musical:** the music should be technically, aesthetically and expressively good.
2. **Liturgical:** the music and especially the words should be appropriate to a service of worship and should fit the moment in the ritual in which it is used.
3. **Pastoral:** the music should enable people to gather for this occasion to express their faith through active participation in this celebration.

Careful application of the three judgments leads to the conclusion that some songs (even songs that have been widely and regularly performed at weddings in recent times) are unsuitable. These might be lovely tunes or popular romantic ballads with nostalgic sentiments, but they are inappropriate when weighed against the liturgical and pastoral judgments. When texts are limited to a personal dialogue between two lovers, they in effect negate the communal dimension of worship. In addition, they neglect and ignore the fundamental nature of Christian

marriage, the celebration of God's love, and the love that a man and a woman share. Finally the texts violate the form of liturgical language and they neither represent God's speaking to human beings or human beings addressing God. In short, texts of this type just don't say enough!

While the songs themselves ought to be as musically attractive as possible, it is the text which matters most. At least, implicitly, each and every text ought to be identifiable as prayer. If it cannot, then it is out of place in a liturgical context. Thus, a song which highlights the Christian dimension of human love, always deserves priority:

- a. A song which speaks directly of the divine/religious dimensions of love is most suitable at a marriage liturgy, e.g., "Beloved, Let Us Love"

--Beloved let us love: for love is God; in God alone love has its true abode.

--Beloved, let us love: only thus shall we see God, the Lord, who first loved us.

--Bonar, c. GIA, 1986.

- b. A song which does not speak directly of the divine/religious dimension of love, but which implies this dimension, is suitable at a marriage liturgy, e.g., "Come and Journey":

--Come to the song, come to the dance.

Bring all you are, bring all you can be.  
Come with your voice, come with your  
heart. Come and journey with me.

--Haas, c. GIA, 1985.

- c. A song which negates either explicitly or implicitly the divine/religious dimension of love is unsuitable at a marriage liturgy, e.g., “Endless Love”

--“My love, there’s only you in my life,  
the only thing that’s right.”

--Richie, c. PGP Music, 1981

Couples must be challenged to honestly ask the question: “Will this song help us and the rest of the assembly to lift our hearts in prayer on our wedding day?”

Certain wedding marches are discouraged because their liturgical suitability is doubtful. Check with the Music Director.

## **B. Music in the Wedding Liturgy**

In creating the combination of gesture, text, and music for the wedding liturgy, the role of the assembly must be carefully considered. They have assembled to prayerfully support the marriage commitment which the couple is publicly professing. Every effort should be made to engage them in the spoken response and songs of the service. They should be aware that this is a worship service calling for their participation just as in any Catholic liturgy. Perhaps a program of worship would be helpful to the assembly. Check with St. Thomas Aquinas Music Director when you meet.

The following outline of the wedding ritual offers guidelines for creating the gestures, texts, and music at a marriage celebrated within the Eucharistic liturgy. (If planning a marriage ceremony outside of Mass, refer only to the items marked with an asterisk).

- \*1. **The Prelude** can be a combination of instrumental, choral and solo music. It is more effective to alternate instrumental and sung music. The purpose of the prelude music is to set the atmosphere for the sacred celebration. It should lead the assembly into the joy of the prayer for that day.
- \*2. **The Wedding Procession** can be accompanied by instrumental music or by congregational singing. The piano and/or other instruments may be used. Congregational singing may also take place after the procession.
- \*3. **The Responsorial Psalm** is most effectively done with music.
- \*4. **The Gospel Acclamation** is best done with any appropriate and well-known Alleluia. If this acclamation is not sung, it should be omitted. If there is only one reading preceding the Gospel, silence followed by the Alleluia can be effective.
5. **The Preparation of Gifts.** After the activities of the Liturgy of the Word and Rite of Marriage, this may be a time for quiet, instrumental, choral, or solo music.
6. **The Communion Hymn** is best done as a congregational hymn encouraging full participation on the part of all.

- \*7. **The Recessional Song** may be instrumental or vocal; if vocal, a congregational hymn should be used.

**C. Employing Musicians**

Whether employing the services of the local parish musicians or musicians from outside the parish, utmost care should be given to make arrangements well in advance.

Fees should be courteously paid in advance. While amounts vary among musicians (most professionals have a set fee), one can expect to spend between \$75 and \$150. Remember that you are employing professional people who are anxious to provide their best service for a joyous event. The parish Music Director can be of help in finding musicians to play or sing for your wedding.

Wedding music workshops are scheduled periodically throughout the year. These workshops are provided to assist with the music selection for your wedding.

\*All couples being married at St. Thomas Aquinas must attend the wedding music workshop OR schedule a meeting with the parish Music Director.

Please contact the Music Director at St. Thomas Aquinas for **ANY** wedding to be held at St. Thomas Aquinas.

# **Guidelines for the Use of St. Thomas Aquinas Center**

1. **Do not throw** rice or bird seed, which make for hazardous footing on the steps and sidewalk. No balloons are to be used in the church.
2. **Flowers.** Floral arrangements may be used in the sanctuary. They must never obstruct the view or movement in the sanctuary or other parts of the church, and **MAY NOT BE PLACED ON THE ALTAR.** All decorations must be removed immediately after the ceremony and cannot be stored anywhere in the church. Also, flowers may not be hung with duct tape; this tends to leave marks on pews, etc. **ST. THOMAS AQUINAS ASSUMES NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR LOST, STOLEN, OR THROWN AWAY ITEMS** e.g., flowers, vases, candles and stands, aisle runners, etc. Be sure florists are well aware of this. The florist may charge you for items not accounted for.
3. **Sanctuary Furniture.** For the comfort of the wedding party and the dignity of the liturgy (especially the Liturgy of the Word), seats will be placed in the sanctuary for the wedding party. Kneelers will also be made available if desired. Please consider this when buying the wedding dress and making other such arrangements.
4. **There will be** seasonal decorations (Banners, candles, etc.) in the church. Please make your floral plans around these decorations. **THEY WILL NOT BE MOVED OR REMOVED FOR YOUR WEDDING.** You may want to consider this when making your color selections.
5. **Receiving or Registration** lines at the church are not encouraged because of time constraints.

7. **Candles may be used** in the sanctuary (but not on the altar or where they obstruct movement). Scented candles may NOT be used at all! (Allergies may cause problems for vocalists). All candles used need followers (tops) to prevent candle wax from dripping. St. Thomas Aquinas does not supply candelabras.
8. **The Altar**, the holy table, is a symbol of the Lord and the common table of the assembly. It is not a resting place for papers, flowers, candles, cameras, etc., before, during, or after the wedding. Likewise, the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, located in the back section of the church, is a place of private prayer not a waiting room or storage area. Please exercise respect for the altar, ambo, and Blessed Sacrament Chapel when placing flowers, taking pictures, holding rehearsals, etc.
9. **The use of a “Unity Candle”** is permissible during the wedding ceremony, but not required. Other symbols of unity such as the marriage vows, the wedding rings, or the Eucharist itself are already present. When a unity candle is used it may not be placed on the altar.
10. **Photographs** may be taken in the church before, during, and after the wedding, but please follow these time limits closely: PHOTO SESSIONS MAY BEGIN 1 1/2 HOURS BEFORE THE WEDDING, AND MUST STOP ONE HALF HOUR BEFORE THE WEDDING. Photos may continue during and after the wedding until one half hour after the end of the ceremony. A flash attachment may be used. Photographers and videographers are asked not to enter the sanctuary , and to otherwise exercise good judgment. These camera persons must check with the priest for camera positioning approval prior to the wedding.
11. **Fees (see page 19)**

12. *The ushers will be asked to assist in returning the furniture to its original place, cleaning up the church, etc. The rooms in which the wedding party dress should be cleaned up before the ceremony or immediately afterwards.*
13. St. Thomas Aquinas Center is available for use by registered parishioners (student and resident) and alumni. Weddings may be scheduled 18 months in advance. The fee is due at the time of reservation. The total amount will be returned if the wedding is cancelled.
14. Weddings are scheduled generally on Saturdays at the following times: 10:30 a.m., 3:00 p.m., and 7:30 p.m.
15. As a general rule, only two weddings will be scheduled on a given weekend.
16. Fee for the church:  
Registered Parishioners and Students and Alumni: **\$500 (see page 19)**
17. The church and the bride dressing areas are available one hour before the ceremony and one-half hour after the ceremony. Due to the number of people using the facilities, we are unable to deviate from this schedule. All items must be removed from the dressing rooms before the ceremony so that the rooms can be available for another group.
18. Please do not leave anything valuable (purses, gifts, cameras, etc.) unattended at any time. St. Thomas Aquinas does not assume responsibility for lost articles.
19. Alcohol consumption is prohibited before the wedding. Smoking is prohibited on church premises.

## Helpful Information

1. Weddings will be scheduled on a first-come, first-serve basis. Be sure to reserve the church early.
2. You will also need to reserve rehearsal time.
3. Aisle runners are not allowed
4. There are no full-length mirrors in the dressing areas, so you may want to bring your own mirror. There are full-length mirrors in the women's restrooms.
5. It is highly suggested that purses and other valuables be properly locked up. Unfortunately, St. Thomas Aquinas is not immune from theft. Again, we are not responsible for lost or stolen items.
6. Flowers, boxes, petals, candles, etc., must be removed immediately after the wedding and may not be stored anywhere in the church. Inform the florist to retrieve their property at once.

# Facilities Use Agreement

We have read the guidelines for the use of the St. Thomas Aquinas Center for the celebration of our marriage.

We the undersigned:

1. Know that the celebration of marriage in the Catholic Church is a celebration within the context of a liturgy celebrated by the community gathered.
2. Have read and agree to abide by the guidelines for use of the St. Thomas Aquinas Center as set forth in this book.
3. Know that there may be other fees depending on where we do our marriage preparation and the different choices for fulfilling those obligations.

Bride to be \_\_\_\_\_

Groom to be \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Wedding Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Presider \_\_\_\_\_





**St. Thomas Aquinas**  
**The Catholic Center at Purdue**  
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