

So You're Planning a Wedding

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garratt
PUBLISHING

Published in Australia by
Garratt Publishing
32 Glenvale Crescent
Mulgrave, Vic. 3170

www.garrattpublishing.com.au

Design by Lynne Muir
Cover image and internal images Thinkstock.com except for p26,
p31 Lynne Muir
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Print and quality control in China by Tingleman

Cataloguing-in-publication information for this title is available
from the National Library of Australia.
www.nla.gov.au

ISBN 9781921946271

Acknowledgements

Scripture readings are taken from the Jerusalem Bible © 1985
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The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World #
29 is taken from <http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html>.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church Sacrament of Matrimony
numbers 1660, 1661 and 1666 are taken from <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c37.htm>.

The Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church # 345
is taken from <http://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html>.

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The quotation by Chief Seattle is taken from <<http://www.barefootsworld.net/seattle.html>>.

'A blessing' by John O'Donohue is taken from *Eternal Echoes:
Exploring Our Hunger to Belong* (London: Transworld Publishers/
Bantam Books, 1998) and is used with the permission of the
Random House Group, UK.

Special thanks to the Biviano and Loughane/Meyers families.

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The book is designed to help you appreciate the different parts of the Marriage Ceremony and to prepare an Order of Service.

It will give you examples of some of the biblical readings and prayers which can be used in the ceremony. (There is a useful form to fill in when you make your selections on page 36.)

There are 'Twenty-five questions' (on page 24) which might help as a basis for conversation with your future spouse about your future life together.

There are simple stories and articles designed to help you refresh your own Catholic faith about issues such as the Mass, the importance of forgiveness and the meaning of Catholic sacramental life. Your approaching marriage is a good time to talk over these issues with your partner.



CONGRATULATIONS!

You are in love and plan to marry.

You are about to stand before the people who love you most – your family and friends – and commit your future for life in the vows of your wedding.

You want your marriage to work. In fact, you want it to deepen your life and enrich the person you are. You know there will be good times and bad times. No life is free from the thick and the thin, but each of you is a unique individual and your marriage will be a unique partnership.

This little book has been written as a simple guide to anyone marrying in a Catholic church. Often that will be when each partner is Catholic, sometimes one of the parties is not a Catholic.

After a few suggestions about the preparation for the ceremony of your marriage the book sets out to explain some of the things Catholics most value in their beliefs.



There are chapters about the meaning of Mass, about the place of prayer in our busy lives, about the importance of justice in our faith and, as we believe that marriage is a sacrament, about what we mean when we use the word 'sacrament'. Why not read it together and, if it is necessary, explain the less familiar sections to your partner.

Catholics are not very different from anyone else in the community but we do hold certain beliefs which affect the way we think about ourselves, about other people and about the world around us.

For example, here are nine things Catholics believe:

- ☛ Catholic belief begins with the Bible; we call it 'the Word of God'.
- ☛ The four gospels are the high point of the Bible.
- ☛ Catholic life centres upon Sunday Mass.
- ☛ Special moments in our life (birth, coming of age, marriage) are celebrated by what we call sacraments.
- ☛ We believe we live in a tough world – that evil and sin exist. But we also believe all people are holy and made in the image of God.
- ☛ We strongly believe in forgiveness and healing.
- ☛ Prayer is important. We pray when we are grateful; we pray when we are sad; we pray to make sense of life.
- ☛ Catholics believe that there is more to reality than things that can be seen and heard or weighed or measured.
- ☛ We believe that marriage is a sacrament which unites a man and a woman in a lifelong union in which they give each other the grace to carry out the mystery of married life in faithfulness and enduring love.



PREPARING TO MARRY the first steps

A story

'Why are we attracted to one person and not another? How is it we feel completely comfortable with someone and entirely uneasy with someone else. Ever thought about it? What is really going on? Let me assure you the questions are not easy ones to unravel.'

The priest, with a little smile, settles back in his chair and pauses to invite an answer.

It is Tuesday night in the presbytery. Marriage preparation night. And they are sitting in the priest's study – a young bright-eyed woman and her promised-for-life but slightly uneasy male companion. They are here to take the first steps towards their approaching marriage – fill out the papers, talk about



the ceremony and check out the priest.

For the couple it is uncharted water.

'There are seven billion people bouncing around on this planet earth,' the priest continues, warning to the subject, 'and you are choosing this man, and he is choosing you – for life.'

'Given the number of people to choose from, if you were gamblers, the odds about meeting, falling in love, agreeing to marry would be astonishing, would you not agree? Thrilling, but astronomical, when you look at the numbers.' The couple shift in their seats.

'So how does it happen? Let me tell you a story.'

In a certain small African tribe, when a woman is about to give birth to a child, the women of her village take her out into the wilderness and together they pray and meditate and listen intently until they hear the song of the unborn child.

This unsophisticated, remote African tribe holds the belief that the genius of every soul is its own vibration which expresses its own mysterious identity.

Indeed each soul has its own song. We all have our own song. When the women tune in to the song, they sing it out loud. Then they return to the tribe and teach it to everyone else.

When the child is born, the village gathers and sings the child's song.

Later when the child goes to school, the village gathers and

chants the child's song.

When the child passes through the tribe's special rites of initiation to adulthood, the people gather to sing the song.



This tribe has a very interesting understanding of the meaning of human friendship. Why are we attracted to one person rather than another? Why does one

particular person fill our heart so that we are drawn to them by some unseen powerful force?

In this small, unsophisticated tribe, they believe that we are drawn irresistibly to those people whose song we hear. Friendship and love have much to do with recognising the beautiful song within the mystery of another's life. Just that. We hear the music.

This is so important that it becomes part of their Marriage Ceremony.

At the time of marriage the bridegroom sings the woman's song – the bride sings the man's.

'Before the wedding,' the priest concludes, 'I suggest you spend some time listening to each other's song, and put some work into practising your singing.'

Meeting a couple who plan to marry is a fascinating part of a priest's ministry. Inviting them to put into words, sometimes for the first time, some of the reasons behind their decision to enter into a lifetime commitment requires a light touch. But it is rarely dull.

To invite a couple, sometimes young, sometimes not so young, to consider in depth those promises to take one another for better or worse, faithfully, entirely, and without condition or qualification provides unusually privileged opportunities for rich discussion which is deeply human and deeply sacred.

If the meeting moves well, the realisation dawns on one or both of the people seated before the priest that they face as profound a choice as anything they have ever faced before in their lives. It is a choice that will lead them to understand more clearly how they will help each other to become what God meant each one to be – people who are seekers of God in their lives and communities, people who grow on the journey of married life, and people who discover more and more of their deepest, truest and best selves.

Today most Catholic Church dioceses provide pre-marriage education classes to address important issues such as the expectations each has about marriage, information about how we communicate with each other, different beliefs about the raising of children and approaches to the healthy management of conflict among other matters. Such pre-marriage education courses are strongly recommended.

Searching for the perfect partner – an ancient story

Nasreddin was asked whether he ever thought of marriage.

'I did think of marriage, but I resolved not to marry until I found the perfect wife.

I looked far and wide for her.

I travelled first to Damascus.

There I met a beautiful woman, but she was neither gracious, nor kind nor spiritual.

I travelled further to Istanbul and found a woman who was gracious, kind and spiritual but we could not communicate.'

'Finally, I went to Cairo, and there after much searching, I found her. She was spiritually deep, graceful and beautiful in every respect.

I felt I had found the perfect wife.'

Nasreddin's friend asked, 'Then why didn't you marry her?'

'It was a sad day,' he admitted.

'I had found the perfect wife,

But alas she was looking for the perfect husband.'

You cannot plant an acorn in the morning and expect that afternoon to sit in its shade.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

The conditions of Catholic marriage

A man and a woman

- have chosen to marry of their own accord with no external pressure
- intend to remain together for life
- intend to be faithful to each other
- intend to have children (if the bride is of child-bearing age).



CELEBRATING YOUR WEDDING the ceremony



A Nuptial Mass or a Nuptial Ceremony?

Catholic marriage can be celebrated within a Nuptial Mass or can be celebrated in a Nuptial Ceremony.

Briefly, the Nuptial Ceremony (which does not include a Mass or Holy Communion) consists of a welcome; an opening prayer; three readings from the Bible, of which one is from the Gospel; the sharing of vows; the Prayers of the Faithful and the marriage blessing.

The Nuptial Mass includes, in addition to all of the above-mentioned parts, the preparation of the bread and wine, the Prayer of the Eucharist, the Lord's Prayer and the reception of Holy Communion.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Catholics go to Mass on Sundays because they believe it is central to their lives as Christians.
- We believe Jesus is really present in the Eucharist.
- Catholics commit themselves to one another in marriage with a Nuptial Mass because it is a sacrament which represents Jesus' act of loving commitment to us at the Last Supper: a person receives the body and blood of Christ under the form of bread and wine. (At times, for practical reasons, Communion is simply shared under the form of bread.)

What is the difference?

The information below shows the difference between the two ceremonies. (The parts in brackets are the additional parts of a Nuptial Mass.)

Procession	an opportunity for music usually by the celebrant
Welcome	
Opening prayer	
First reading	usually by one of the wedding party can be sung or read
Biblical psalm	
Second reading	usually by one of the wedding party
Gospel reading	read by a priest or a deacon
Homily	the celebrant speaks about marriage
Marriage vows	the couple share their consent
Exchange of rings	
Prayers of the Faithful (Preparation of gifts)	prayers composed by the couple
(Prayer of the Eucharist) (Our Father) (Holy Communion)	bread and wine are brought to the altar
Marriage blessing	an opportunity for music
Signing the civil papers	an opportunity for music
Leaving the church	an opportunity for music

The wedding planning guide (on page 36) may help you design the ceremony.

The vows of marriage

I, (Name), take you, (Name), to be my husband/ wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honour you all the days of my life.

OR

I, (Name), take you, (Name), for my lawful wife/ husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.

The blessing and exchange of rings

May the Lord bless these rings which you give to one another as a sign of your love and fidelity.

(Name), take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity.
In the name of the Father.
And of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

