
Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage



The Catholic Diocese of Helena, in the document Pastoral Preparation For Marriage, has established certain procedures to be followed in preparation for the celebration of Marriage throughout the Catholic Church in Western Montana.

AT LEAST SIX MONTHS prior to the date you expect to celebrate your wedding you are asked to contact the pastor. The six month notification is a *requirement* of the Diocese of Helena. *Blessed Trinity Catholic Community and Spirit of Christ Mission highly recommend that an eight month to one year notification be given in order to secure the date you wish and to facilitate the necessary time for the preparation process.*

BEFORE YOUR WEDDING DATE IS DETERMINED you (*as a couple*) visit with the pastor you have contacted (*wedding dates cannot be set over the telephone*). Diocese of Helena policy states that the "date of marriage should not be confirmed until the initial stages of the preparation process have been completed".

THE PREPARATION PROCESS

- An objective Pre-Marital Inventory: Various tools are used to facilitate the inventory. Generally it is an inventory of issues for helping you, as a couple, understand yourselves, each other, and your expectations for marriage. Results of the inventory are used in discussions between yourselves and the pastor or person or persons delegated by him to help clarify your similarities and differences; to provide a structure for counseling and teaching; and to help you define your own relationship rules and roles;
- Sharing and discussion with a parish Sponsoring Couple. These are married couples of Blessed Trinity Catholic Community & Spirit of Christ Mission who will share insights, stories and experiences of married life. They will also discuss particular issues, concerns or questions which you may have;
- Professional Counseling: When desired or necessary professional counseling with a Marriage and Family Therapist is available;
- Discussion regarding the meaning of the Sacrament of Marriage and the implications of marriage in the Catholic Church;
- Preparation of the Liturgy for your wedding day. In order to assist you and the priest/deacon with this preparation you will be provided two special books, Prayerbook for Engaged Couples and Celebrating Marriage: Preparing the Wedding Liturgy, as well as particular Parish liturgical guidelines (*Preparing the Wedding Liturgy; Music Principles for your Catholic Wedding; Liturgical Ministers Needed for your Wedding; and a series of short articles reflecting on the Sacrament of Marriage*).

- An integral part of the Marriage Preparation process in the Diocese of Helena and at Blessed Trinity Catholic Community & Spirit of Christ Mission is participation in an Engaged Encounter Weekend, or a Marriage Preparation Workshop, or a Pre-Cana Conference. These are scheduled regularly throughout the Diocese of Helena and the City of Missoula.

WHEN MARRIAGE PREPARATION TAKES PLACE IN ANOTHER PLACE

In some instances couples planning to be married at Blessed Trinity Catholic Community & Spirit of Christ Mission reside in another city or state. Most often such couples are previous members of the parish OR their parents are currently registered and active members of the parish. In such instances all of the above requirements for marriage must be met through their local parish church. *The couple themselves* must directly contact the Pastor of Blessed Trinity Catholic Community & Spirit of Christ Mission. The following information must be provided:

1. A letter from the couple's pastor indicating the following:
 - a. That one or both are registered and active members of the local parish;
 - b. That they are participating in a pre-marriage preparation process which fulfills the above requirements.
 - c. Proper canonical permissions and dispensations from the Diocese of residence.
When this information is received the marriage date is reserved;
2. A letter from their pastor indicating that the marriage preparation has been completed and that the diocesan and parish guidelines have been met as well as a recommendation regarding the couple's readiness for marriage in the Catholic Church.

LEGAL PROCEDURES

In the State of Montana, it is necessary that the woman have a blood test for rubella. This test must be taken no more than six months prior to application for the marriage license. When application is made for the marriage license applicants must have either a driver's license or birth certificate. There is a Fee for the marriage license. License is obtained at the Missoula County Courthouse, Clerk of Court office.

PREPARING THE MARRIAGE LITURGY

Preparing the MARRIAGE LITURGY is a very important task. It demands your best efforts, good quality time and sensitivity to the Catholic Rite of Marriage. To assist you with this task you will be provided a special book: *Celebrating Marriage: Preparing the Wedding Liturgy*. Read this book carefully, *together*.

You will also be given particular Parish Liturgical Guidelines which provide a step by step guide through the marriage liturgy as celebrated at Blessed Trinity Catholic Community & Spirit of Christ Mission. THE MARRIAGE LITURGY IS PREPARED WITH THE PRIEST/DEACON AND THE BLESSED TRINITY/SPIRIT OF CHRIST MUSIC/LITURGY DIRECTOR.

PREPARING FOR THE WEDDING DAY

Most couples begin thinking about their "wedding day" long before the actual celebration.

As you prepare for this important day, it is helpful to remember that it centers on prayer and worship. It is in the presence of God and in the community of the Church that you promise your love all the days of your life. The following principles help keep this focus. More detailed assistance will also be provided.

Church Environment

"The experience of mystery which liturgy offers is found in its God-consciousness and God-centeredness... A simple and attractive beauty in everything that is used or done in liturgy is the most effective invitation to this kind of experience. One

should be able to sense something special (and nothing trivial) in everything that is seen and heard, touched and smelled, and tasted in the liturgy". (Environment and Art in Catholic Worship, #12).

In planning your decorations for the wedding please keep the following principles in mind:

1. FLOWERS (*genuine, of course*), when used, should be arranged tastefully and not overdone. Flowers can be placed at the church entrances; in front of the ambo/lectern; under the Cross; and in various other places in the sanctuary and church. Flowers or other decorations must never block the view of the altar, ambo or the Bride and Groom.

Care must be taken to assure that flowers do not minimize or hinder movement.

"Decorations" for the liturgy follow normal parish practice.

Parish Liturgy Team members are available to assist you.

Special note: Flowers or other decorations are neither required nor expected by the parish.

2. CANDLES. The use of additional candles is *strongly discouraged*.

3. THE ALTAR. Flowers, candles or other items are NOT placed on the altar or in front of the altar at any time during the marriage liturgy.

4. THE SEASON OF THE YEAR. Always keep in mind the liturgical season in which you plan to be married. Note the decorations already in the church (colors, plants, wall hangings, etc.). In most instances the church environment is not significantly altered. Weddings are *discouraged* during the Season of Lent.

LITURGICAL MINISTERS

1. *The Catholic Rite of Marriage* identifies the bride and groom as the ministers of the Sacrament of Marriage. Your ministry as "Bride and Groom" is most important. Therefore you do not take on any other liturgical ministry (such as reader, minister of communion, etc.).

2. The priest/deacon witnesses the marriage for the whole church and is normally the pastor or deacon of Blessed Trinity Catholic Community & Spirit of Christ Mission. After consultation with the pastor, another priest/deacon whom you request may witness your marriage at Blessed Trinity Catholic Community & Spirit of Christ Mission. In such cases all policies, requirements and procedures of the Diocese of Helena and the parish are followed. ALL LITURGICAL PREPARATIONS ARE DONE THROUGH THE PARISH STAFF.

3. OTHER LITURGICAL MINISTERS. Readers, ministers of communion, and acolytes (servers) are adult active Catholics. They are carefully chosen and well prepared. They must be capable of such ministerial roles and they must be ACTIVE members of the Catholic Church (in interfaith, ecumenical marriages, special consideration is given to persons of other Christian faith traditions to serve as reader).

Ministers of Holy Communion and readers of the Parish could be invited to serve at your wedding.

WOMEN AND MEN SERVE IN THESE MINISTERIAL ROLES.

4. THE ASSEMBLY. Those who have gathered to witness your marriage gather primarily for worship. They are actively involved in the liturgy. They are not mere spectators but participants in the worship of God. The full, active and conscious participation of all in the assembly is both a goal and an expectation.

THE MARRIAGE LITURGY MUSIC

"As for any worship service, the music is chosen with care according to sound liturgical principles... Music in the Catholic Marriage Rite must express the worship of God for the mystery of love he created and transforms in this sacrament."

(Marriage, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops)

Music is an essential component in the celebration of the marriage liturgy. The participation of the assembly in the sung acclamations and other musical elements is presumed and expected.

THE CHOICE OF MUSIC must relate to the place in the liturgy it is used and *it must be music that is appropriate to the demands of Catholic worship*. The norms for music in Catholic worship, as outlined by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in the document *Sing To the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, are followed. Most popular songs are NOT appropriate for the Catholic Marriage Liturgy (simply because they were not written for worship) and are therefore not acceptable.

THE MUSIC FOR YOUR MARRIAGE is selected and prepared with the Parish Director of Liturgical Music.

MUSICIANS AND LEADERS OF SONG

Blessed Trinity Catholic Community & Spirit of Christ Mission have a wide variety of competent liturgical musicians, cantors and leaders of song.

IT IS THE NORM that the Parish liturgical music ministers lead the music for weddings. These persons serve under the leadership and direction of the parish director of liturgical music. Other musicians may serve ONLY AFTER CONSULTATION WITH AND THE APPROVAL of the director.

All musicians and leaders of song adhere to the policies and guidelines of the Parish.

THE INTERFAITH/ECUMENICAL MARRIAGE

As a general practice the Eucharist (Mass) is celebrated when both the bride and groom are *active, practicing Catholics*. When this is not the case or when a Catholic marries a person of another faith tradition, The Rite for Celebrating Marriage outside Mass is the preferred form. Great care must be taken to respect the integrity and faith of both persons in interfaith marriages. Ministers of other churches are welcome to participate in both the marriage preparation and in the Catholic marriage liturgy in a manner appropriate to both faith traditions.

OTHER ITEMS OF CONCERN

1. Offering to the Church

For active, registered members of Blessed Trinity Catholic Community & Spirit of Christ Mission there is no set offering to the church. There are specific charges for music and other particular items (a list of these charges will be provided). All such charges are payable two weeks prior to the wedding.

Couples usually choose to make a special offering to the parish *consistent with other expenses of the wedding (a good guideline is 5% of the total wedding costs)*. This offering helps to support the various ministries and services the parishes provide. Such an offering reflects the couple's commitment to the life and ministry of the church as well as demonstrating their willingness to be a part of the church's ministry of service.

For non-registered, and/or non-practicing persons, who for special reasons may celebrate marriage at Blessed Trinity Catholic Community & Spirit of Christ Mission there are specific fees for the use of the parish facilities, parish staff time, and other particular items. A detailed list of these fees and charges will be provided. *All fees are payable two weeks prior to the wedding.*

2. The Use of Rice

The use of rice (bird seed, confetti, etc.) is NOT permitted either within the church building or outside on church property. It does not seem fitting to throw food about when so many people are dying of hunger and malnutrition throughout the world.

3. Photography

The use of photography in the marriage liturgy is to be handled *very carefully* and with great sensitivity to the environment of worship and prayer. *The Marriage Liturgy can never be viewed as a "show" to be recorded on film for posterity.* Photographs that are taken discreetly and that do not interrupt the flow of the liturgy are not offensive. Professional photographers should pride themselves on their ability to be unobtrusive. The use of flash attachments, flood lights, etc, during the wedding liturgy is not permitted. For the most part, photographers are to remain stationary and may not interrupt the flow of the liturgy, the movement of the ministers or the entrance and closing processions. The same principles apply to television or video-tape photographers. As a general rule church furniture may not be moved in order to facilitate photographs (AT NO TIME, FOR ANY REASON, may the altar be moved nor may items be placed upon the altar).

All photography scheduled in the Church before the wedding must be completed at least forty minutes prior to the beginning of the liturgy. Members of the assembly photographing the liturgy are to be discouraged. Special Guidelines for Photographers and Videographers are provided.



Blessed Trinity Catholic Community & Spirit of Christ Mission

1475 Eaton Street ~ Missoula, MT 59801 ~ 406-721-2405

Web Site: blessedtrinitymissoula.org