

Parish Wedding Ceremony Links Day with Life of Faith

Kathy Kuczka

Soon after a couple is engaged, the planning for the wedding begins. Often, first on the to-do list is securing the place for the wedding ceremony and a venue for the reception. Couples who have envisioned marrying in their parish will call their church office many months, and perhaps a year or more, in advance.

Some couples may want to be married within the Church but not necessarily in a church. At least two US dioceses—the Diocese of Helena, Montana, and the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Maryland—allow some weddings, generally those celebrated without a Mass, in a variety of venues, including outdoors. Other dioceses may also grant couples permission to wed outside a parish church on a case-by-case basis, but most will require them to marry in a church.

WHAT DOES THE RITE SAY?

The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (OCM) presumes that couples will marry in the parish of the bride or the groom. Citing canon 1115 of the *Code of Canon Law*, the OCM states:

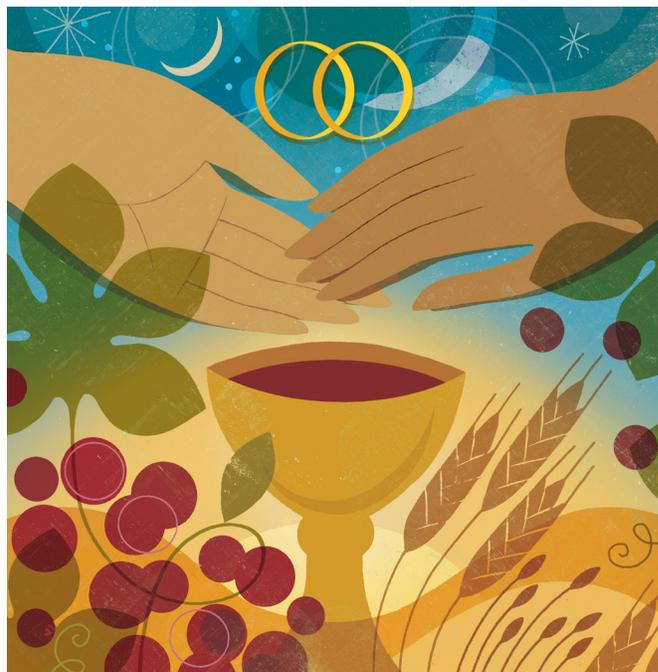
The Marriage is to be celebrated in the parish of one or other of the engaged persons, or elsewhere with the permission of the proper Ordinary or pastor. (27)

Canon 1118 of the *Code of Canon Law* specifies that marriage between Catholics or a Catholic and a non-Catholic “is to be celebrated in a parish church. It can be celebrated in another church or oratory with the permission of the local ordinary or pastor.” Sections two and three of that canon go on to state that “the local ordinary can permit a marriage to be celebrated in another suitable place” (2); and “a marriage between a Catholic party and a non-baptized party can be celebrated in a church or other suitable place” (3).

WHY CELEBRATE A WEDDING IN A CHURCH?

The church building is the sacred space where the faithful encounter God most profoundly in God’s Word, in the sacraments, and in one another. The church is the place where the most sacred moments of life are experienced.

A church wedding can be a tool for evangelization. A wedding in a church, celebrated well, can touch the hearts of



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visitors or potential newcomers, inspiring them to deepen their faith or to consider becoming a part of the community.

Marriage involves more than the couple who exchange vows. Marriage celebrates a new union, a new family unit, a new domestic church. Marriage in a church, especially in a parish church where one or both spouses has worshiped, and perhaps were baptized or reared, celebrates the faith that was strengthened and nurtured by the parish family prior to the wedding. It also celebrates and strengthens the faith that will grow in the lives of the couple after the wedding, a faith that will in turn deepen and nurture the faith of the local parish community.

A wedding lasts a day, a marriage lasts a lifetime. Being married in the setting where the parish community worships week after week bears witness to the support that the couple can expect from that community, in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, for richer and for poorer, all the days of their lives.

Text by Kathy Kuczka, author of *Connecting the Liturgy with Our Lives: Print and Digital Resources for Faith Formation* (LTP, 2019). Art by Tracy Walker.
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